

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

ROBERTS ORPHEUM THEATER DEBUTS WITH ALL-STAR LINEUP

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The Backstreet Boys are ... well, back, and the Roberts Orpheum Theater has them.

In case you hadn't heard, the tired old American Theatre downtown has been dusted off and given a multimillion-dollar face-lift courtesy of businessmen and brothers Michael and Steve Roberts.

And first up onstage is none other than the Backstreet Boys, who are warming up for a big summer tour with a club and theater tour this spring. Anthony Makes, talent buyer for Anschutz Entertainment Group / Concerts West (exclusive producer for shows at the venue), says the Backstreet Boys' April 10 concert is among the shows creating the most buzz on the Roberts Orpheum Theater's opening schedule, which will be officially announced Monday.

"This is the first time they've been back in quite a few years, and they're planning a major comeback," he says. "They're going to be pushing hard to make a comeback, and the perfect way to do that is to do a run of 10 to 15 theater dates and sell them out. That gets the buzz going again."

Other concerts that should attract attention include Mary Chapin Carpenter (April 26), Bill Maher (May 20), Joe Jackson and Todd Rundgren (May 7), Chris Isaak (Aug. 6) and Brian Wilson (Aug. 24). Wilson will perform his "Smile" CD in its entirety, followed by several of his classics.

As is clear from the opening lineup, the Roberts Orpheum Theater is aiming for diversity and a more adult-skewing demographic - the theater was previously known as somewhat of a rock palace.

"You won't be seeing ICP (Insane Clown Posse) and things like that here anymore, things that tear up the venue," says Makes. "We're not going to be doing stuff that would be too hard-core, too heavy, though we will be doing some rock stuff." Rob Thomas is expected on April 22, with tickets going on sale March 19. Some blues concerts are being worked on as well.

"We're going for as much diversity as possible, hitting all aspects of music within reason," he says. The venue will also be available for rent for corporate and private events.

As for the renovations, the managers promise that the 1,400-seat venue will be upscale and beautiful, with new seats (all seats will be reserved), carpeting, paint, lounge area, bathrooms and marquee.

"We're trying to get away from it being known as 'formerly the American Theatre,'" says Chamie McCurry, also of AEG. "It's a totally different venue with totally different shows. It just happens to share the same location. We're working hard to let it be known as the Roberts Orpheum Theater."

"It's going to be exciting for the city," says Makes. "We'll be dealing with a lot of different people coming into the area, so it's exciting that it's downtown. It will definitely add to downtown."

Roberts Orpheum Theater Opening Schedule

April 10: Backstreet Boys, \$52

April 17: Hydra (Mickey Hart with Particle), \$28

April 26: Mary Chapin Carpenter, Mindy Smith, \$29.50-\$49.50

May 7: Joe Jackson and Todd Rundgren, \$29.50-\$49.50

May 20: Bill Maher, \$27-\$47

June 9: Spyro Gyra, \$27-\$47

June 22: Jazz Attack with Rick Braun, Jonathan Butler, Richard Elliot and Peter White, \$29.50-\$65

July 22: Dave Koz, \$35-\$65

July 29: Rick Springfield, \$35-\$55

Aug. 6: Chris Isaak, \$40-\$62.50

Aug. 24: Brian Wilson, \$42-\$62

All shows start at 8 p.m. Tickets are available beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday through Ticketmaster, 314-241-1888 or www.ticketmaster.com.