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APRIL/MAY 2026
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A Movie Palace's
Transformation

Nancy Proctor

*Leads the Next Act for the Maryland Film
Festival and the SNF Parkway Theatre*

The SNF Parkway: A Movie Palace's Next Act

BY CARYN R. SAGAL



Executive Director
Nancy Proctor

One of the country's first "movie palaces" is right here in Charm City and is undergoing a renaissance.

Opened in 1915 at the corner of North and Charles streets, the Parkway Theatre screened thousands of motion pictures, from silent flicks to MGM classics to foreign films, until its closing in 1978.

Following decades of vacancy and disrepair, the Maryland Film Festival acquired the Parkway from the City of Baltimore. The building was added to

the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, and renovations to preserve its historical integrity began in 2012.

It reopened in 2017 as the SNF Parkway Theatre — and year-round home of the Maryland Film Festival — with support led by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Producers Club of Maryland, State of Maryland, Johns Hopkins University and the Maryland Institute College of Art.

In March 2024, the SNF Parkway's board of directors approved a bold new vision to transform the theater

through four core programmatic pillars — Film+, Live Arts, Education and Emerging Media — into "a hub of cultural innovation for the Baltimore community."

Leading the charge is Executive Director Nancy Proctor, who was chosen in July from a national search of 100 candidates.

At the Helm

Regarded as a cultural leader and new technology specialist, Proctor has a Ph.D. in American art history and a background in filmmaking, curation and feminist theory and criticism in the arts. After studying in Europe and making short films (including a Brazilian festival award winner), she helped museums worldwide produce audio and multimedia tours (including a BAFTA winner).

Back in the United States, she joined Discovery Communications and later headed up new media initiatives and mobile strategy at The Smithsonian. In Baltimore, she established the BMA's first digital division and oversaw the museum's marketing, communications and visitor services teams.

Most recently as (re)founding director of The Peale, she led the transformation of the historic site into a vibrant community museum and launched its lab for inclusive storytelling, immersive media and digital innovation.

Proctor jumped at the chance to join the SNF Parkway team in relaunching the historic theater as a center of excellence and innovation in film and interactive media.

"I wanted to see if the community-driven model we developed at The Peale could help activate other historic buildings as well," Proctor explains. "To further develop this approach at the beautifully restored SNF Parkway with its amazing team is a dream come true."

"This opportunity allows me to rekindle my early love of film and continue working with performing and visual artists and emerging technologies



New & Improved

Exterior enhancements include the new SNF Parkway Porch Presentations series of free concerts on the porch funded by the Baltimore National Heritage Area, and a new “canvas” adorning the theater’s Charles Street wall funded in large part by the Robert W. Deutsch Foundation, with a new painting by leading street artist, Adam Stab, in the works.

Increasing public art on its corner is a priority for the theater, including restoring the Amy Sherald mural on its western wall. A collaboration with the Central Baltimore Partnership will add lighting along Charles Street and, open a new bus stop – designed as a “living

in Baltimore and beyond,” she adds. “I couldn’t have imagined a more perfect place for my next chapter.”

Proctor takes pride in the fact that the SNF Parkway serves as an anchor institution for the Station North neighborhood and the city overall.

“When the SNF Parkway is open and thriving, it benefits all the businesses, organizations and communities around us,” Proctor says. “Along with filling the building’s screen, stage and other public spaces with arts and culture of all forms, we are activating our corner with public art and performances, and collaborating with local businesses and organizations on important enhancements to the area.”



room” – in front of the SNF Parkway this spring.

Interior upgrades include replacing the fixed screen with a retractable one, so that the entire stage can be used, and installing an additional sound system that is tuned for live performances to complement the current cinema audio installation.

Expanding beyond its curated programming of independent and art house films, classic movies, filmmaker events and musical performances, the SNF Parkway is planning a Salon series to bring new types of evening events.

Its Community Advisory



Committee is also brainstorming about reconfiguring and resourcing the lounges and public spaces to be more versatile and accommodating. So far, Film Club at the SNF Parkway is a new initiative that invites groups of friends into the small theaters and lounges to watch and discuss films they choose.

“We provide the place, the popcorn, technical support, a fully-staffed bar and the advice of a film ambassador if selecting a film proves challenging — all at a very affordable price,” Proctor says. “Some of the clubs are planning to feature food and wine tastings as well, to create full sensory experiences for their members’ meetings.”

Proctor is quick to note that the SNF Parkway is a welcoming venue for private events, from fundraisers to launches to personal milestones. She is also soliciting proposals and partnership opportunities from artists wanting to use the theater’s historic stage, screens or other public spaces.

In fact, an intergenerational program will debut this spring, in which teens from two youth organizations will work with local seniors to make video interviews about their lives and wisdom.

“As with our arts programming,

we do not plan to create youth and elder programming ourselves, but rather serve as a platform for the many organizations and experts already doing this great work in the city and who need spaces like ours to host their programs in Station North,” Proctor explains.

“We’d love to hear from other program leaders who would like to consider the SNF Parkway as a place for their communities to gather,” she adds. “Overall, we want to activate the building as close to 365 days per year as possible, and to bring in artists and audiences from outside of Baltimore to further grow the creative economy in Station North.”

Toward that end, the SNF Parkway is growing CineTech by welcoming gamers, game designers and interactive media creatives to share and showcase their work year-round.

“New technology and innovation are in the DNA of the SNF Parkway, and I’m told our 400-seat historic theater is a great space for gaming tournaments and festivals,” Proctor says. “We also hope to do more with projection mapping and immersive experiences in that space, in partnership with Baltimore’s incredible theater companies and the digital artists

who have placed the city at the leading edge of interactive and immersive practice.”

Additionally, the launch of three SNF Parkway Live Arts residencies, funded through a grant from the Mellon Foundation, will mark a major expansion of interdisciplinary work at the theater. The inaugural recipients will be recognized during the 2026 Maryland Film Festival’s opening night.

Festival Flair

Excitement is building for the theater’s “jewel in the crown” — the Maryland Film Festival, which attracts filmmakers and film lovers from all around the world.

“You might be a cinephile, curious about new creative technology, wanting to participate in meaningful conversations about issues raised in a documentary, or someone who likes a good party,” says KJ Mohr, director of the Maryland Film Festival & Film Programming at the SNF Parkway Theatre. “The festival is a place to meet people, have life-changing conversations and feel part of a community.”

Taking place April 8-12, this year’s iteration features packed daily slates of feature films and shorts, spotlighting emerging and established filmmakers from Maryland and across the globe. The lineup includes Hollywood classics, local documentaries, a beloved Japanese experimental horror film, and even a silent film with live musical accompaniment.

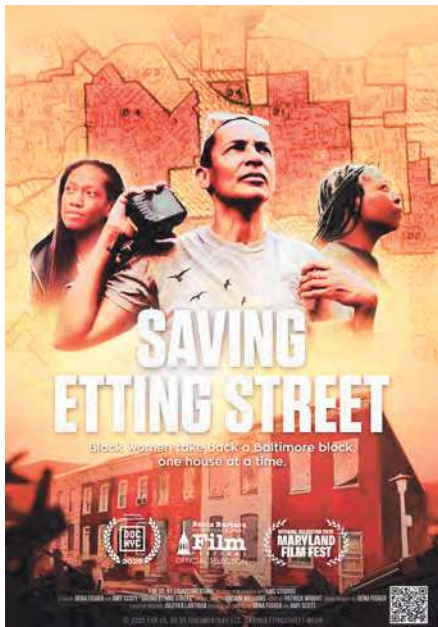
Additionally, the Middle School Media Program welcomes young learners into the world of filmmaking, the Student Film Summit connects emerging creators with industry professionals, and the festival’s first-ever Pitch Fest offers a platform for filmmakers to share projects with distributors and funders. Visiting and local filmmakers are invited to present to industry professionals a three-minute pitch for their next film of any genre and at any stage in production. “As the festival grows and matures, it’s important that we lean into new



A poster for the Maryland Film Festival attracts filmmakers and film lovers from all around the world.
CREDIT: SNF PARKWAY



HOUSE Poster
CREDIT: XXXX



SAVING ETTING STREET MDFF Poster
CREDIT: AMY SCOTT

technologies and expanding ways of storytelling,” Mohr says. “Increasingly, we are at the forefront of providing a platform for expanded reality and interactive experiences and narrative gaming via our CineTech showcase, as well as new forms of digital storytelling like this year’s focus on vertical content creation.”

“In the same vein, student filmmakers are a focus of our programming, as the great storytellers of tomorrow,” she adds, noting that education in film,



PICCADILLY Poster
CREDIT: AMY SCOTT

emerging media and performing arts runs throughout the festival and year-round at the SNF Parkway.

“We are always aiming at workforce and professional development for all of our audiences, from middle and high school students through established filmmakers,” Proctor explains. “The more filmmakers who learn their craft in Maryland, the more films will be made here, driving essential revenue for the city and state, as well as creating jobs of all kinds.”

Momentum from the five-day event continues May 2, Maryland Film Festival Day, with a special lineup of film, photography and media arts. And throughout May, the SNF Parkway will host Asia North, showcasing a wide array of visual and performing arts, as well as film and food.

Exhilarated over the transformation underway and motivated by the people she interacts with at the SNF Parkway, Proctor considers her work to be “like stumbling upon a marvelous new world.”

“I love being surprised by what people create that would never have occurred to me,” she says. “Seeing what creatives make fills me with joy, and I get a huge charge out of helping provide the platform and the resources they need to do their best work.”

Looking ahead, Proctor is “most excited about what this city of artists will bring to the SNF Parkway as we open our doors and grow our capacity as a comprehensive arts and cultural center.”

“That community-driven model is what brought the Peale Museum building back to life after 20 years of vacancy and brings such diversity of programming and audiences to it,” she adds. “We’re already seeing that approach working at the Parkway and it brings me joy every day.” □

For more information about the theater, visit SNF Parkway Theatre, visit <https://snfparkway.org>.

For more information about the 2026 Maryland Film Festival, visit <https://snfparkway.org/mdff>.

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