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RAISE \$500K OR CLOSE

Fiscal crisis at Brattle

Theater turns to donors

By Ed Symkus
CHRONICLE STAFF

U nless the Brattle Theatre can raise \$500,000 in the next two years, the art house movie theater will cease the repertory programming that has made it a Harvard Square landmark for the past 53

years.
In fact, without a successful fund-raising push, the Brattle may be forced to close its doors.
The crisis is fueled by a bitter combination of rising costs and falling revenue. In addition, the Brattle is carrying a debt that
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Brattle Theatre launches fund-raising campaign to stay afloat

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back rent and expand the marketing budget. Plans may include expanded advertising, as well as underwriting on public radio.

If the Brattle were forced to end its repertory programming, it would mark the loss of another institution that has given Harvard Square its distinctive character, its alternative charm. The Brattle's current format includes a mix of recent "art house" releases that might already have shown at The Kendall Square Cinema. The Brattle also snags the occasional first-run art house film such as "Russian Ark," "A tout de suite" or the director's cut of "Donnie Darko." But the Brattle's calling card has always been its ever-changing line-up of classic films, including the recent Stanley Kubrick retrospectives and the current series of Greta Garbo films. Fifty-three years ago, that commitment helped save classic films from fading into celluloid heaven. But the theater that once saved films now needs to be saved.

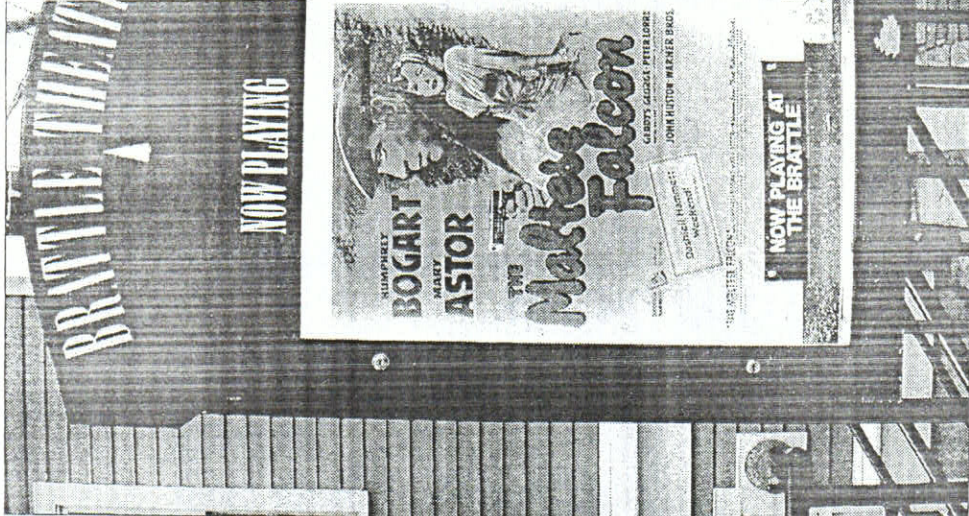
"Competition is part of the struggle," says Hinkle, referring to the nearby Kendall Square, which shows similar products and is part of the national Landmark chain. "And they are our primary competition when it comes to premieres." The other, even more formidable challenge is that more and more people have their own art house theater at home. "I think that being able to see these classic films on DVD at home on cheaper and cheaper and bigger and bigger TVs is affecting us," says Hinkle, who adds, in defense of his theater, "but very few people have a 20-foot wall in their house. What the Brattle really cares about is presenting films the way they were meant to be seen — in an auditorium, on a big screen, with a bunch of strangers, people who are going to have a different reaction than you to the film." Before the end of the year, the Preserve the Brattle Legacy Campaign will include a series of benefit concerts at the Brattle and at other venues; a gala event to be hosted by a yet-to-be-

named major filmmaker; and a repertory-style movie marathon, in which pledges will be made based on how long participants can stay in the theater watching movies.

"We have a great base of donors, people who give between \$25 or \$50 to \$250 or \$500 a year," says Hinkle. "We're hoping to double our base of people who can give something each year, and to connect with some of the so-called angel donors — people who can afford to make a significant commitment to the theater."

"We need to increase donations and foundation support," he adds. "And we've been working on that. The Brattle has been around for 53 years, but we've only been a nonprofit for five. So with a lot of foundations and a lot of grant-writing we're doing, we're only just becoming eligible for many grants. We're applying for things, but to keep us going and to keep us growing and to keep us vital, we need a lot of community involvement. To be blunt about it, we need donations."

For more information on the Brattle Theatre, visit www.brattlefilm.org/brc. Ed Symkus esymkus@cnc



The Brattle Theatre, a Harvard Square landmark, is raising campaign to save itself.

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