

## Songstress Diana Ross graces the McCallum stage

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Singing star Diana Ross made a strong argument for supporting the McCallum Theatre Wednesday.

Ross, who gave a lackluster concert at a local casino last year, performed similar songs for the McCallum's annual gala benefit.

But, with the sophisticated lighting and sound at the McCallum, and the social trappings of the black tie optional dinner gala, Ross turned this concert into a spectacle that could have fit onto a patio stage.

She again sang some hits by her '60s super group, The Supremes, a couple jazz ballads from her Billie Holiday film, "Lady Sings the Blues," and solo hits such as "Love Hangover" and "Touch Me in the Morning" (by absent desert resident Michael Masser) while changing into four colorful, outrageous gowns that could have been made on "Project Runway."

The social ambience not only enhanced the audience's appreciation of Ross' show, it seemed to energize her and enhance her subtle stage movements, which is what the elegant theater was built to do in 1988.

Songs like "Love Child" were energized by the many dancers in the audience who took advantage of the normal-priced concert-only tickets. Gala tickets came with dinner at one of four mid-valley restaurants

The McCallum is proceeding cautiously but steadily into its third decade in this turbulent economy. An architectural plan to expand the theater into a multi-venue complex was prepared this year, but, with costs projected at nearly \$200 million, including \$125 million for a 2,500-seat theater, the capital fundraising campaign was never officially announced.

But McCallum board chairman Harold Matzner, who co-chaired the gala with Jackie Lee Houston, said the gala grossed more than \$1 million, more than any except last year's 20th anniversary event with Liza Minnelli, which grossed \$1.4 million.

President and CEO Ted Giatas said the McCallum also received a record contribution from its Muses auxiliary of \$309,000. Other recent events that generated funds were "Bowling For Bucks" "Dancing Under the Stars Choreography Festival," and last April's "Open Call" talent contest.

The funds will be used for operational costs and McCallum Institute programs. An early funding priority for future expansions, said Giatas, will be more office space, especially for the McCallum Theatre Institute to advance its education agenda. He said, "All of us are being as conservative as we can."