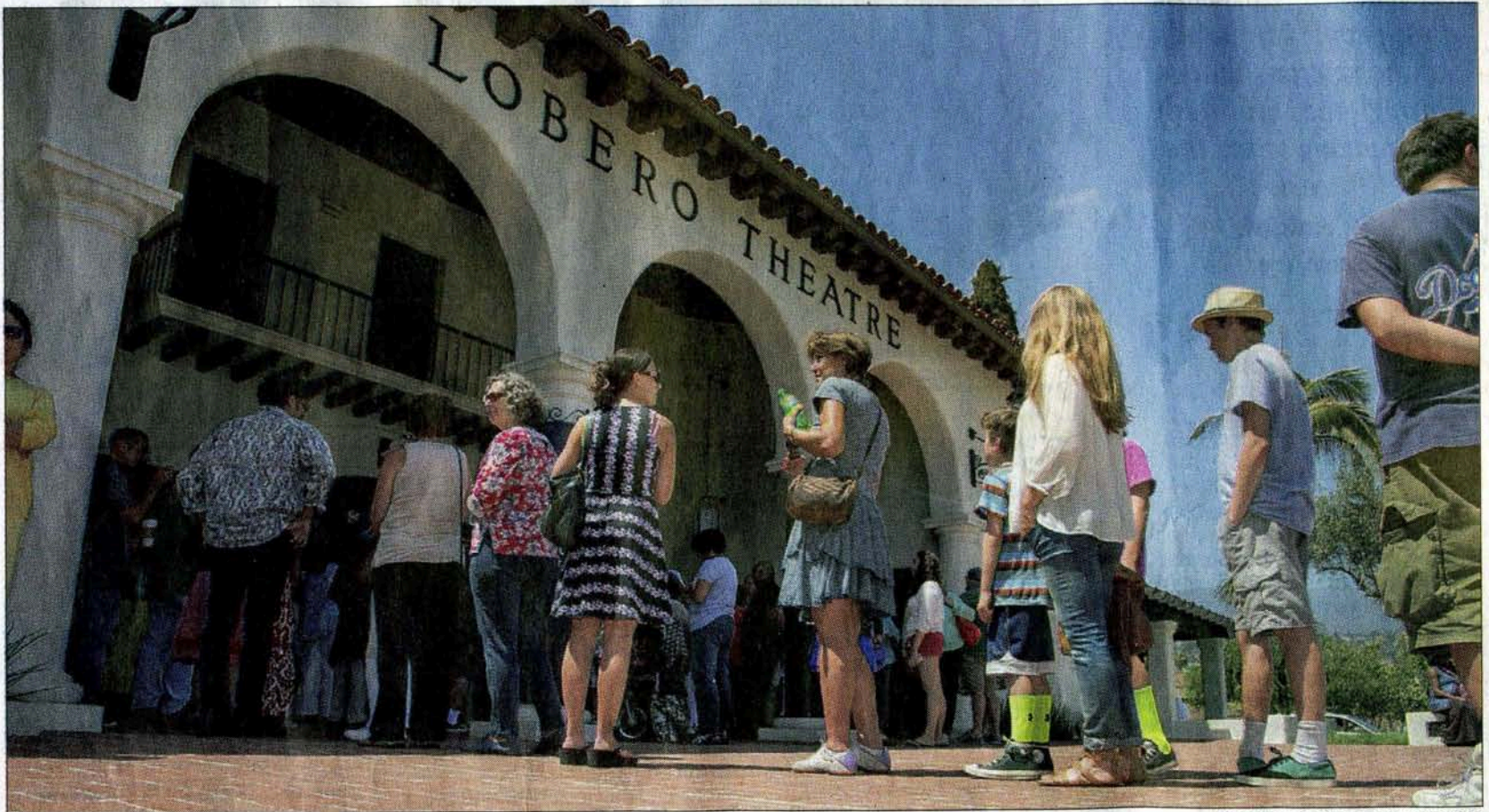




Something to sing about



MICHAEL MORIATIS / NEWS-PRESS

Local residents wait outside the Lobero Theatre to catch Mama Pat's Inner Light Gospel Choir. The choir was performing during a taping of a reality show for the Oxygen TV network.

National reality show chooses local choir for upcoming season

By **TED MILLS**

NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

A new reality show from the Oxygen network shot an episode at the Lobero Theatre on Sunday and used one of Santa Barbara's longest lasting choirs as part of its upcoming season. The as-yet-untitled program, slated for a premiere sometime in November, takes choirs that need some sort of help and assists them in getting to the next level.

How Mama Pat's Inner Light Gospel Choir got their chance to appear on the show? Choir members that we talked to could not say.

"We didn't really go out and find this sort of thing. It sort of found us," said Peter Hernandez, the choir's assistant director.

Regardless, a few weeks ago the show's producers reached out to the choir and soon their past week was spent rehearsing, doing exercises, and starting a youth choir, culminating in Sunday's Lobero perfor-

mance.

This performance was closed to press, but the general public was invited, as long as they signed a release to not speak about what when on inside. We do know that two celebrities are involved and possibly will sing with the choir.

"We were talking about going to the next level and so when this opportunity presented itself, we went for it," said Mr. Hernandez.

Bishop "Mama Pat" Pearl Patrick formed the Inner Light Gospel Choir in 1980 after being asked to teach an interested group gospel singing. She passed away in 2004 after bringing many local folks to the thrill and wonder of performing gospel music. Dauri Kennedy continues the legacy today as the choir's musical director. Ms. Kennedy also has kept Mama Pat's commitment of open arms to all who want to join, even if they don't necessarily think they are blessed with a special voice. Enthusiasm is the thing, as many who have worked

with Ms. Kennedy can attest.

Diane del Vecchio is one of the newest members at three months, who in her other life works in the advertising side of the entertainment industry.

"It's always been my passion to sing," said Ms. del Vecchio, "So I joined this choir because you don't have to audition. ... I started taking lessons from Dauri. My family laughs at me because they don't think I can sing. But Dauri thinks I can."

She was on a trip in Florida when she heard about the upcoming taping, so she flew right back home. Ms. del Vecchio's story, as well as others in the 20-member choir, will be part of the show. And Ms. del Vecchio thinks that the producers loved the story of the choir's founder, so they may focus a lot on her, too.

The week the choir has been together as part of the show has paid off already, said Mr. Hernandez. Usually they meet once a week and rehearse, but the "hurry up and wait"

approach of filming a show has allowed the members to just hang out and talk.

"And it's made a nicer bond for us," he said. "We talk about how our lives are. The choir is made up of people from all walks of life, but all from our community. We thought we were an unusual choir in town, but we've realized how unusual we are in the whole country."

The show will not just focus on Santa Barbara's choir, but feature a different choir each week from all over the United States. Come November, the choir plans to have a special evening in honor of its very own episode.

For those interested in the Inner Light's upcoming episode, follow their progress at www.facebook.com/pages/Mama-Pats-Inner-Light-Community-Gospel-Choir/128112848048.

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