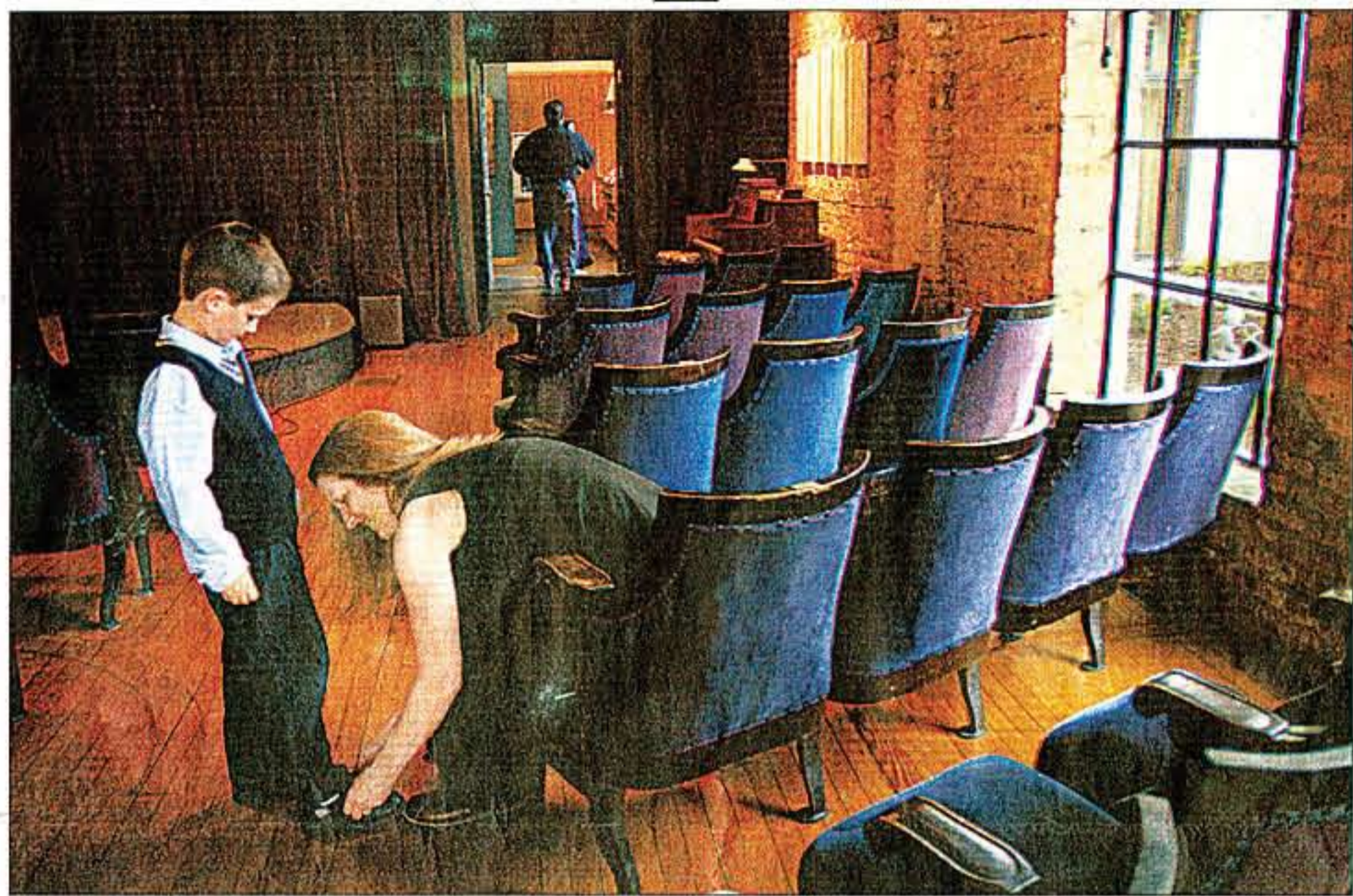


REAL ESTATE CLASSIFIED INSIDE AND ONLINE

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# Show places



Photos for the Tribune by Stacie Freudenberg

Poet Sheila Donahue (top photo) helps her son, Seamus Scott, 5, with his shoelaces before guests arrive for an evening performance. Donahue and her husband, Greg Scott (rear), have carved out theater space in their Logan Square home. Adjoining the theater is the family's living room, kitchen and dining area (above), which has views of an enclosed garden.



Tribune photo by Michael Walker

Jamie O'Reilly and her brother, Beau, have modified their Lincoln Square house to better accommodate guests for their home performances.

## Performance spaces put a new twist on 'home theater'

By Monica Kass Rogers | Special to the Tribune

Four-time National Poetry Slam champion Sheila Donahue stands on a velvet-curtained stage, ready to recite. It's a warm spring night, and through open windows, traffic sounds filter in from Fullerton Avenue. Guests find their seats, but Donahue doesn't start yet. Just now her 5-year-old son, Seamus, has the microphone, confidently finishing a joke before launching into Donahue's introduction. Baby daughter Julia twirls to show off the onesie she has under her fancy dress, and husband, Greg Scott, is pouring someone a drink.

If the family seems at home on stage, it's because they are at home. When the babysitter whisks the kids away moments later, it's through a door in the curtained, soundproofed wall behind the stage to an expansive kitchen, living and dining space beyond.

Once an 1890s storefront, the Logan Square building was a two-flat when Donahue and Scott bought it a decade ago. With the help of an architecture firm, the couple converted the bachelor pad apartment on the first level into a gallery and theater they now call Center Portion and turned the side parking lot into a landscaped garden and courtyard. An addition at the back was built to house a sleekly contemporary open kitchen, living room and dining room, and the tiny one-bedroom apartment they'd been living in upstairs was renovated and expanded too.

"There were so many things we could have done with this space," Donahue says. "It would have been cheaper and easier to just absorb the first

*'The idea that non-commercial music and performance only happens in garages and lofts is outdated.'*

—Acoustician Gary Gand of Northfield

floor as living space, but what we really wanted was to put performance at the center—figuratively and physically—for all that would mean for our family, and for the people that would come into this space."

Homeowners with a passion for the arts, like Donahue and Scott, are conjuring new ways to put performance at the heart of the home. Some are reshaping the idea of the 19th Century salon, while others are putting music rooms, practice rooms and recording studios in more prominent positions in the home. In the process, homeowners are tackling issues such as soundproofing,

acoustic enhancement, traffic flow and, in some instances, how to delineate between public and private areas of the home.

"The idea that non-commercial music and performance only happens in garages and lofts is outdated," says Gary Gand, president of Northfield based Gand Music & Sound and an acoustician.

Performing in a private home gives artists the opportunity to sharpen and shape their work and garner feedback in a relaxed atmosphere, says Chicago singer, producer and arts activist Jamie O'Reilly. Audiences benefit, too, she adds.

"I can think of nothing more wonderful than the intimacy and immediacy of a home salon," O'Reilly says. "It works so well for everything from poetry and storytelling to musical soirées, short theater works and solo performance pieces."

For O'Reilly, hosting private

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YOUR PLACE

FRIDAY MAY 12, 2006

## SHOW: A different kind of home entertainment

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performances at home is nothing new. She's been doing it for more than a dozen years at various Chicago addresses.

Still, O'Reilly just had two firsts.

One, she's sharing her current Lincoln Square home with her brother, Beau, who's co-founder of the Curious Theatre Branch, curator of the Rhino Festival of Plays and playwrighting adjunct professor at the School of the Art Institute. She's also renovating to better handle the wide range of private events she and her brother have planned for the space they've dubbed Roots.

"This is actually the first time I've built in changes specifically to make my home work better for private performance," O'Reilly says.

Some of the enhancements O'Reilly has done are small. New doors have been installed to separate private areas, such as the kitchen and master bedroom, from public ones. In the living room, portable tract lighting has been added to the ceiling and a portable stage to one corner.

But there are bigger projects, too: A side entry has been added and a laundry room converted into an interior passage, so latecomers can discreetly enter once performances begin. "Or a



Photo courtesy of Ron Jacobson

Tyler Jacobson, 10, and his sister, Rachel, 8, practice with their father, Ron, in the recording studio of their Vernon Hills home.

family member not involved in the event can unobtrusively come and go," O'Reilly says.

All this is done in a way that preserves the homeyness of the home, without excess ornament or visual clutter.

"That's one thing you learn over time," says O'Reilly. "The more stripped down the space, the more you are able to meet varying needs."

Keeping things clutter-free also helps with sound, says acoustician Gand, who recommends hard surfaces, wood, marble and terrazzo for performance spaces.

"Whether you're featuring a piano, voice or chamber music quartet in a home setting, to get the best sound, you don't want there to be a lot of soft furniture, thick curtains or carpeting," he explains. "And if you're going to have any decorative objects around, it's better to choose hard items, like the marble sculpture, over soft ones, like the macramé wall hanging."

*'Who really uses their living room as a living room these days? We sure didn't.'*

—Ron Jacobson

These reasons are precisely why Ron Jacobson banished curtains, rugs and couches from the music room he created at his Vernon Hills home. An orthodontist by day and musician and recording studio engineer by night, Jacobson built his new home with a recording studio. He also converted the living room into a music room, by removing the cushy furniture and installing a grand piano for his two children.

"Who really uses their living room as a living room these days?" Jacobson asks. "We sure didn't." As a music room, the space gets used daily, Jacobson

says.

Having a fully soundproofed studio in his home has been a big boon for his family, says Jacobson.

"When I was young, the music always had to happen out in the garage," he says. "That, or I'd get somebody banging on the floor with the broom handle. But I really love that my kids can feel free to make all the noise they want playing music and singing, and it's right here in the home."

At the Donahue and Scott residence, soundproofing the walls and ceiling between the performance space and the rest of the house has allowed the parents to act up a little too. Double drywall and insulation keeps sound from passing through the ceiling. Closets on either side of the dividing wall create air space and a sound lock between private and public spaces.

That way, says Donahue, she can present poems of ironic love, guns and growing up Catholic on one side of the wall while the kids cavort in pajamas in the room beyond.

"For the sake of keeping a sense of normalcy in routine for the children, it's been great that I can have events and then close it off," says Donahue, a performance poet who owns and operates a marketing communications firm with Scott.

Or not, Donahue adds. "Sometimes it's all open and the kids hear the shows and that can be good too."

Jacobson says that by bringing music into his home, his kids benefit.

"Our kids have been able to hear so many different kinds of music. I love the positive influence that's had on them."