

Carson Kievman Helps Keep the SoBe Theater Scene Alive

By Jorge Casuso in [Art](#)

Thu., Feb. 11 2010 @ 9:00AM

This is the fourth in a series of articles profiling the seven finalists for the New Times MasterMind Awards, which will be presented to four local artists during Artopia at the Freedom Tower February 11.



Carson Kievman has helped grow the SoBe Institute of Arts from a tiny creative incubator in a one-room studio into what some would argue is the future of live musical theater on the Beach.

The institute's Little Stage Theater recently summoned the ghost of '30s and '40s musical theater to bring life back to the oldest theatrical venue in South Beach by ringing in the new year with a multimedia arts cabaret.

As a lead-in to the theater's grand reopening, the group held a series of popular chamber concerts that traced the history of Western music in six weeks.

"Our audiences grew from a few people to packed houses," says Kievman, who was the composer in residence for the Florida Philharmonic.

That's a miracle of sorts considering the location of the old theater. "That area was dead," he recalls. "You didn't want to go there. You literally had to walk over bodies."

SoBe Arts rehabbed the theater working part-time with a "minimal amount of money." The group recently signed a five-year lease with the city, which owns the landmark building, with two two-year extensions.

Kievman hopes to use the venue to grow the audiences that will keep music and art alive in the Magic City.

"You hear about Miami becoming a cultural center," says Kievman, who has lived in New York and Europe. "The biggest issue is the lack of arts education. In any great

cultural capital, arts education is at the center. It's the life and breath of every big cultural capital."

Kievman, who once worked for legendary theater producer Joseph Papp, has big plans for the little theater. He wants to stage the cabaret every year, hold a Shakespeare music festival, and produce original plays. No small challenge in the midst of a recession.

"We're struggling to keep going," Kievman says. "The money [for the arts] is being sucked out of the economy. If we can contribute to South Florida being a cultural capital, we have done our job."