

Final act for Asian theater?

The Asian American Theater, which reopened its Richmond District doors in 1989, may be going bust.

According to Eric Hayashi, executive director of the theater, the nonprofit group has had to renegotiate a lower rent on its long-term lease on the theater at 405 Arguello Blvd. in order to stay afloat.

In addition, many of the theater's bills have remained unpaid, and the staff is drawing its payroll from the meager cash receipts.

Despite the bad financial picture, the theater celebrated its 20th anniversary with a show at the Cowell Theater in the Fort Mason Center. It featured a performance by Culture Clash and others and was hosted by Emerald Yee and Ben Fong-Torres.

Hayashi said he considered applying for a job in Atlanta because the stresses of dealing with the theater's bleak financial future, which have taken

their toll on the director.

Hayashi took over in and oversaw the move into the larger theater on Arguello Boulevard after spending six years without a home. During that time the group performed at the Fort Mason Center, Zephyr Theater and Music Hall Theater.

The troupe of Asian actors offered their first presentation, *Rosie's Cafe*, on Jan. 11, 1989 at the old Walt Baptiste building, originally built in 1908 as a Mason's building. The building has a stage with a 25-foot-tall ceiling and has had the exterior remodeled in an art deco style.

The Asian American Theater was founded in 1973 to develop, create and expand Asian American culture. Since its inception more than 35 plays have premiered that were written by Asian American authors.

—Paul Kozakiewicz