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Jimmy Buffett calls for encore for Miami Marine Stadium

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PATRICK FARRELL / MIAMI HERALD FILE

Jimmy Buffett calls Miami Marine Stadium 'a symbol of everything that's great about Florida -- boats, music, water and great Florida fun.'

An old pirate has joined the fight to rescue a favorite haunt from the pillages of neglect.

Singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett has publicly endorsed preservationists' efforts to restore and reopen the city-owned Miami Marine Stadium on Virginia Key, the site of many a Parrothead's fondest -- if also foggy -- memories.

In a newly released public-service spot, intercut with video from a 1985 Marine Stadium show that Buffett calls one of his Coral Reefer Band's best, the singer urges fans to support restoration of the graffiti-covered architectural landmark, closed

since 1992.

"It's a symbol of everything that's great about Florida -- boats, music, water and great Florida fun," a smiling Buffett says as a live version of *Margaritaville* from the stadium show plays in the background. "The stadium deserves a future."

The concert shots illustrate why the stadium, designed for speedboat racing, proved a memorable concert venue: A packed grandstand sways to the Coral Reefers, who play on a floating stage surrounded by anchored boats and people splashing in the water and bobbing on kayaks or inflatables.

Stadium supporters say snagging the support of the singer, a god-like figure to multitudes of worshipers at the church of Buffett, took a year and represents a coup for their campaign.

"He is the single performer who is most identified with that stadium," said Don Worth, a founder of Friends of Miami Marine Stadium, which has been leading the preservation effort with Dade Heritage Trust. "I like to think we proved ourselves to him. It's a huge credibility boost for us."

The campaign won historic designation from the city for the stadium, which sits at the edge of a man-made water basin, and garnered worldwide attention for the grandstand and its dramatic folded-concrete roof, increasingly recognized as an architectural and

engineering masterpiece.

But supporters recognize the financially strapped city is unlikely to foot the cost of restoring and operating the stadium by itself.

With the city's agreement, the World Monuments Fund has commissioned a privately funded, \$50,000 engineering study of the stadium to determine its structural condition and the extent of needed repairs, Worth said. The study is scheduled to begin this week.

The group's fondest wish: "To have Jimmy Buffett at the Marine Stadium again," said Dade Heritage Trust Director Becky Roper Matkov.

Is Jimmy game? Sure sounds like it.

"We had a great time at the marine stadium," he says in the spot. "Let's do it again."

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