

PALACE THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium, the second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 1564-1566 Broadway, Manhattan. Built 1912-13; architects, Kirchhoff & Rose.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 999, Lot 63.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Palace Theater, first floor interior consisting of the ticket lobby, the elevator vestibule, the inner lobby, the staircase vestibule, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the first balcony floor and all connecting entrance areas; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium, the upper part of the stage house, the staircases leading from the first balcony floor to the second balcony floor and all connecting entrance areas; the second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling, and the upper part of the stage house; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 63). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Two witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The owner, with his representatives, appeared at the hearing, and indicated that he had not formulated an opinion regarding designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

If one theater in New York's Broadway theater district were to be named the most famous, the privilege would fall virtually uncontested to the Palace, designed not as a legitimate stage theater but as a vaudeville house. Yet no other showplace has hosted a greater number of stars nor a wider variety of entertainment than this Broadway legend.

The Palace, among the earliest theaters surviving in the Times Square district, was built in 1912-13 for West-Coast showman and entrepreneur Martin Beck. It was operated, however, primarily by Beck's rival, E.F. Albee of the Keith-Albee Circuit. The theater was designed for Beck by the firm of Kirchhoff & Rose, midwestern theater architects. Combining a

theater with an office building, the Palace became the center of vaudeville for New York and the nation. Kirchoff and Rose's enormous and elaborately designed theater offered a suitable environment for the enormous and elaborate talents who aspired to its stage.

Since Sarah Bernhardt appeared on the Palace stage in 1913, the theater has established itself among performers and their audiences as a landmark on Broadway. For years it was the clearing house of the American stage, the dream of every vaudevillian, the trophy of achievement. It became the premier variety house in the world, and was reverently celebrated as the "La Scala" and "Valhalla" of vaudeville. Even after its adoption of a motion picture policy, the Palace remained the the standard against which entertainment quality was measured.

The Palace's reputation has not faltered since its conversion in 1966 to the legitimate stage, offering one box office sensation after another amid the splendor of its baroque, Beaux-Arts interior. In addition to its configuration, much of its extravagant ornamental plasterwork remains intact, evoking the history of the Palace as one of New York's great theaters. As a national symbol of vaudeville, currently housing Broadway theater, the Palace continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

The Development of the Broadway Theater District

The area of midtown Manhattan known today as the Broadway theater district encompasses the largest concentration of legitimate playhouses in the world. The theaters located there, some dating from the turn of the century, are significant for their contributions to the history of the New York stage, for their influence upon American theater as a whole, and in many cases for their architectural design.

The development of the area around Times Square as New York's theater district at the end of the 19th century occurred as a result of two related factors: the northward movement of the population of Manhattan Island (abetted by the growth of several forms of mass transportation), and the expansion of New York's role in American theater. The northward movement of Manhattan's residential, commercial, and entertainment districts had been occurring at a steady rate throughout the 19th century. In the early 1800s, businesses, stores, hotels, and places of amusement had clustered together in the vicinity of lower Broadway. As New York's various businesses moved north, they began to isolate themselves in more or less separate areas: the financial institutions remained downtown; the major retail stores situated themselves on Broadway between 14th and 23rd Streets, eventually moving to Herald Square and Fifth Avenue after the turn of the century; the hotels, originally located near the stores and theaters, began to congregate around major transportation centers such as Grand Central Terminal or on the newly fashionable Fifth Avenue; while the mansions of the wealthy spread farther north on Fifth Avenue, as did such objects of their beneficence as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. ¹

The theater district, which had existed in the midst of stores, hotels, and other businesses along lower Broadway for most of the 19th century, spread northward in stages, stopping for a time at Union Square, then Madison Square, then Herald Square. By the last two decades of the 19th century, far-sighted theater managers had begun to extend the theater district even farther north along Broadway, until they had reached the area that was then known as Long Acre Square and is today called Times Square.

A district of farmlands and rural summer homes in the early 1800s, Long Acre Square had by the turn of the century evolved into a hub of mass transportation. A horsecar line had run across 42nd Street as early as the 1860s, and in 1871, with the opening of Grand Central Depot and the completion of the Third and Sixth Avenue Elevated Railways, it was comparatively simple for both New Yorkers and out-of-towners to reach Long Acre Square. Transportation continued to play a large part in the development of the area; in 1904 New York's subway system was inaugurated, with a major station located at 42nd Street and Broadway. The area was then renamed Times Square in honor of the newly erected Times Building.² The evolution of the Times Square area as a center of Manhattan's various mass transit systems made it a natural choice for the location of legitimate playhouses, which needed to be easily accessible to their audiences.

The theater business that invaded Long Acre Square at the end of the 19th century consisted of far more than a few playhouses, for at that time New York was the starting-point for a vast, nationwide entertainment network known as "the road." This complex theater operation had its beginnings in the 1860s when the traditional method of running a theater, the stock system, was challenged by the growing popularity of touring "combination" shows. In contrast to the stock system, in which a theater manager engaged a company of actors for a season and presented them in a variety of plays, the combination system consisted of a company of actors appearing in a single show which toured from city to city, providing its own scenery, costumes, and sometimes musical accompaniment. Helped by the expansion of the nation's railroads after the Civil War,³ the combination system soon killed off the majority of stock companies.³ By 1904 there were some 420 combination companies touring through thousands of theaters in cities and towns across the country.⁴

Of crucial importance to the operation of the combination system was a single location where combination shows could be cast, rehearsed, tried out, and then booked for a cross-country tour. Since New York was already regarded as the most important theater city in America, it is not surprising that it became the headquarters for the combination system. In addition to the many theaters needed for an initial Broadway production for the combinations before they went on tour, New York's theater district encompassed rehearsal halls, the headquarters of scenery, costume, lighting, and makeup companies, offices of theatrical agents and producers, theatrical printers and newspapers, and other auxiliary enterprises. Close to the theater district were boarding houses catering to the hundreds of performers who came to New York in the hope of being hired for a touring show or a Broadway production.

As theaters were built farther uptown, the auxiliary enterprises also began to move north. By the turn of the century,

the section of Broadway between 37th Street and 42nd Street was known as the Rialto. Theater people gathered or promenaded there. Producers could sometimes cast a play by looking over the actors loitering on the Rialto; and out-of-town managers, gazing out of office windows, could book tours by seeing who was available.⁵

The theater district that began to move north to Long Acre Square in the 1890s was thus a vast array of business enterprises devoted to every facet of theatrical production.

The movement of the theater district north along Broadway had proceeded at a steady pace during the latter part of the 19th century. The Casino Theater was opened on the southeast corner of Broadway and 39th Street in 1882. A year later, it was joined by a most ambitious undertaking--the construction of the Metropolitan Opera House on Broadway between 39th and 40th Streets. In 1888, the Broadway Theater was erected on the southwest corner of Broadway and 41st Street. Five years later, the American Theater opened its doors at Eighth Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets, as did Abbey's Theater at Broadway and 38th Street and the Empire Theater at Broadway and Fortieth Street.

It remained for Oscar Hammerstein I to make the move into Long Acre Square itself. At the close of the 19th century, Long Acre Square housed Manhattan's harness and carriage businesses, but was little used at night, when it seems to have become a "thieves' lair."⁶ In 1895 Hammerstein erected an enormous theater building on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets. The original plan for the Olympia called for a "perfect palace of entertainment--which would have included three theaters, a bowling alley, a turkish bath, cafes and restaurants."⁷ Only part of this visionary plan ever became a reality. On November 25, 1895, Hammerstein opened the Lyric Theater section of the building, and a little over three weeks later he inaugurated the Music Hall section. Never a financial success, the Olympia closed its doors two years after it opened. Nevertheless, it earned Hammerstein the title of "Father of Times Square."

By the turn of the century Hammerstein had built two more theaters in the Long Acre Square area, and in the years 1901-1920 a total of forty-three additional theaters appeared in midtown Manhattan, most of them in the side streets east and west of Broadway. Much of this theater-building activity was inspired by the competition between two major forces in the industry, the Theatrical Syndicate and the Shubert Brothers, for control of the road. As each side in the rivalry drew its net more tightly around the playhouses it owned or controlled, the other side was forced to build new theaters to house its attractions. The result was a dramatic increase in the number of playhouses, both in New York and across the country. After World War I, as the road declined and New York's theatrical activity increased, the general economic prosperity made possible the construction of thirty additional playhouses in the Times Square area, expanding the boundaries of the theater district so that it stretched from just west of Eighth Avenue to Sixth Avenue, and from 39th Street to Columbus Circle.⁸

The stockmarket crash of 1929 and the resulting Depression caused a shrinkage in theater activity. Some playhouses were torn down, many were

converted to motion picture houses, and later to radio and television studios. From the time of the Depression until the 1960s no new Broadway playhouses were constructed. Fortunately, the theaters that survive from the early part of the century represent a cross-section of types and styles, and share among them a good deal of New York's rich theatrical history.

(MMK)

Evolution of Theater Design

The frenzy of theater construction that occurred in New York during the first thirty years of this century brought with it an evolution in architecture and decoration.⁹ At the close of the 19th century American theaters were still being built in the style of traditional European opera houses, with high proscenium arches, narrow auditoriums, two or three balconies built in a horseshoe configuration, and dozens of boxes, some set into the front of the first balcony. Although contemporary notices of the theaters attributed specific (though often vague) styles or periods to them, their interiors were more often than not a melange of styles and colors.

With the increase of theater construction after the turn of the century came a new attitude toward theater architecture and decoration as firms such as Herts and Tallant, Thomas W. Lamb, and others, began to plan the playhouse's exterior and interior as a single, integrated design. The Art Nouveau style New Amsterdam Theater, which opened in 1903, signalled this new seriousness in theater design.

Perhaps influenced by such European experiments as Wagner's Festival Theater at Bayreuth, American theater architects after the turn of the century began to structure their playhouses along different lines. Proscenium openings were made lower and wider, auditoriums were made shallower, seating was planned in a fan shape, and the number of balconies was usually reduced to one. Boxes were cut back to a minimum. The theaters that were built just before and after World War I for the most part shared this new configuration.

Because many of New York's extant playhouses were built during the period in which New York was serving as the starting-point for nationwide tours, they represent a style of theater architecture that is characteristic not only of New York but also of other cities across the United States, for a show which was originally produced in a New York theater would require similar conditions in the theaters in which it toured, and theater owners often hired the same architects to design and build theaters in several cities. Thus, New York's theaters set the standard for theater construction across the United States, as an inspection of designs for theaters in various cities will show.¹⁰

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The Broadway Theater in American Theatrical History

The playhouses still standing in the Broadway theater district share among them over eighty years of American theatrical history. In the early years of the century, when American theater was still heavily influenced by Europe, the theaters played host to such great international stars as Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and to adaptations of such European successes as The Merry Widow and Floradora.

It was in the Broadway theaters that the beginnings of a distinctly American drama could be seen in the Western melodramas of David Belasco, the social comedies of Clyde Fitch and Langdon Mitchell, and the problem plays of Edward Sheldon and Eugene Walter. With the rise of the "little theater" movement in the second decade of the century, it seemed that theatrical leadership had passed from Broadway to such experimental "art" theaters as the Provincetown Playhouse and the Neighborhood Playhouse. Before long, however, the innovations of the little theaters infused Broadway with new life. Beginning with the production of Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play, Beyond the Horizon, on Broadway in 1920, the playhouses of Broadway presented the work of a new generation of playwrights, including, in addition to O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, S.N. Behrman, Rachel Crothers, Sidney Howard, George S. Kaufman, George Kelly and Elmer Rice.

The Depression of the 1930s brought with it a new concern with political and social issues, and the dramas presented in the Broadway playhouses reflected that concern. Commercial producers gave us plays by Lillian Hellman, Robert E. Sherwood, and Thornton Wilder, while the Group Theater and other new organizations introduced such writers as Clifford Odets and Sidney Kingsley. The Broadway theaters continued to house challenging plays during the 1940s and 1950s, when new talents such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge first began writing for the theater.

Meanwhile, musical comedy had blossomed from the adaptations and imitations of European operetta popular at the turn of the century to a uniquely American art form. By the 1940s and 1950s the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and many others, were being exported from the stages of Broadway to theaters around the world.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of ferment and change, both in and out of the theater. As in the 1920s, the impetus for theatrical experimentation came from outside of Broadway, and as in the 1920s, the experimentation helped to revitalize the Broadway theater. Today, the playhouses of Broadway are showcases for the best plays of the Off- and Off-Off Broadway theaters, as well as for exciting productions from theatrical workshops, regional theaters, and outstanding foreign companies.

Having moved gradually northward all during the 19th century, New York's theater district finally came to rest at Times Square, where it has remained for almost ninety years. The economic Depression of the 1930s discouraged speculative ventures such as the construction of new theaters, while after prosperity returned in the wake of World War II, the cost of renting land and constructing a theater was prohibitively high. The

northward movement of the theater district may also have been discouraged for a number of years by the existence of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway, which crossed from Sixth to Ninth Avenues at 53rd Street, thereby providing a natural northern boundary for the theater district.¹¹

The Interior of the Palace Theater, as one of the Broadway theater interiors surviving today in the theater district, contributes to the totality of the district's history by virtue of its participation in that history.

(MMK)

Notes

1. The discussion of the northward movement of Manhattan's business and theaters is based on Mary Henderson, The City and the Theatre (Clifton, N.J.: James T. White and Co., 1973), pp. 130-131, 168-170.
2. W.G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, Carnival Crossroads: the Story of Times Square (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 39-78; Howard B. Furer, New York: A Chronological and Documentary History 1524-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 34 ff.; The New York Subway (New York: Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, n.d.).
3. Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Actors Equity Association, 1932; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 26.
4. Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 6.
5. Brooks Atkinson, Broadway, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 11.
6. Philip Paneth, Times Square, Crossroads of the World (New York: Living Books, 1965), p. 20.
7. Henderson, p. 263.
8. Henderson, p. 195-196.
9. The discussion of the developments in American theater architecture is based upon: Ned A. Bowman, "American Theatre Architecture: the Concrete Mirror Held Up to Yankee Nature," The American Theatre: The Sum of its Parts (New York: French, 1972), pp. 199-233; Burr C. Cook, "Twenty Years of Theatre Building," Theatre, 36 (August 1922), 98-99; Arthur S. Meloy, Theatres and Picture Houses (New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Co., 1916), p. 29.
10. See, for example, the discussion of various theaters in Randolph Williams Sexton and Ben Franklin Betts, eds., American Theaters of Today, 2 vols. (New York: Architectural Book Pubs., 1927, 1930; reprint ed., New York: Vestal, 1977).

11. Stanley Buder, "Forty-Second Street at the Crossroads: A History of Broadway to Eighth Avenue," West 42nd Street: "The Bright Light Zone" (New York: Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, 1978), p. 62.

Vaudeville

The term "vaudeville" refers to that type of theatrical entertainment in which a variety of comedy, magic and other sensational acts were interspersed with song and dance. The word itself seems to have derived from the French region of Vau de Vire (valley of the Vire River) where residents gathered in the 15th century to sing satirical songs about their British invaders. Another possible source was Revolutionary Paris where scathing political ballads were sung in the "voix de ville" (voice of the city). Whatever its origin, the term "vaudeville" ultimately came to be applied in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the successor of variety entertainment in America.¹

The movement was prompted in the 1840s by the desire of London tavern owners to emulate the musical programs offered by local pleasure resorts. At first they erected a simple stage at one end of their saloons, moving to the other side their usual chairs, tables and bar. Success bred greater sophistication and led ultimately in the 1880s to the construction of actual music halls, each with a fully equipped stage, proscenium arch, and multiple tier auditorium.²

In America, "concert saloons" began appearing in New York in the early 1850s, offering customers a variety of entertainments drawn from minstrel shows and circuses as an inducement to buy alcoholic "refreshments." By the late 1850s "concert saloons," "honky-tonks," and "free-and-easies," as they were called had sprung up from coast to coast. The largest and most elaborate of these boasted a regular auditorium and stage as well as a commodious bar or "wine room" serviced by "waiter girls." The entertainment in such places tended to be boisterous and lewd catering to the tastes of an almost exclusively male clientele.³

Beginning in the mid-1860s, however, a number of concert saloons began to advertise alcohol-free, smoke-free matinees suitable to women and children. At the head of this movement was Tony Pastor, the innovative impresario, who saw the opportunity to extend the patronage of variety theater by making it acceptable for the whole family.⁴

In the 1880s a number of other impresarios followed Pastor's lead, notably Benjamin Franklin Keith, his partner Edward Albee, and the Albany showman F.F. Proctor. As vaudeville evolved its programs moved progressively further away from the excessive slapstick of earlier comedy toward more genteel entertainments, including performances by stars of the legitimate stage in dramatic sketches and excerpts from current productions. Sarah Bernhardt proved the value of such celebrity appearances when she single-handedly rescued the Palace Theater from certain failure. From then on the Palace was the uncontested center of American vaudeville.⁵ It developed into a huge business, ruled by E.F. Albee from his sixth floor Palace suite.⁶

Theaters for vaudeville, which seem closely related in form to contemporary English variety halls [the Coliseum (1904, Frank Matcham), the Palladium (1910, Frank Matcham), and the Victoria Palace (1911, Frank Matcham), all in London, are examples], were designed in accordance with certain requirements, which differed somewhat from those of legitimate stage theaters. Of particular importance was the necessity of handling large crowds for the several shows that were given daily. This resulted in large lobby spaces as well as a spacious foyer at the rear of the orchestra level. Boxes and loggias [loges] (box-like areas at the front of the balcony) were very popular with vaudeville attendees, and usually far more of them were incorporated into the design of a vaudeville house than in a legitimate theater. A large stage to accommodate the voluminous properties that accompanied vaudeville shows was desirable; the recommended proscenium width was six feet greater than its height.⁷

For several decades vaudeville competed on equal terms with legitimate stage theater. During the early 20th century especially it created its own irresistible glamour and nurtured its own world famous -- and extremely well-paid -- stars. Sarah Bernhardt, for example, received for each performance \$500.00 (payment of which she insisted be made in gold). The mid-1920s saw the consolidation of the position of vaudeville as an important part of contemporary culture, but it was already showing signs of decline, not the least of which was the invasion of blue humor. Radio and motion pictures drained vaudeville of its strength, wooing its audiences with their technologically novel, more accessible, and less expensive entertainments. Television delivered the fatal blow. Paradoxically it was also in television that vaudeville survived, forming the basis of modern variety programming.⁸

(JA, GH, MP)

Notes

1. "Vaudeville," Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 859; Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 7.
2. "Music-Hall," Oxford Companion, p. 575.
3. Parker Zellers, Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971), pp. xiii-xix.
4. Zellers, pp. 41-42.
5. "Vaudeville, American," Oxford Companion, pp. 859-861; Douglas Gilbert, American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times (New York: Whittlesey House, 1940).
6. Spitzer, pp. 65-70.
7. For the requirements of a vaudeville theater, see Edward Renton, Vaudeville Theater (New York: Gotham, 1918), pp. 18, 34-37. Some

examples of vaudeville theaters meeting these requirements are the Maryland, Hagerstown, Maryland (1915, H.E. Yessler and Thomas W. Lamb), the Bushwick, Brooklyn (1912, J.H. McElfatrick), the American, St. Louis (1908, ?), the Orpheum, Kansas City (1914, G. Albert Lansburgh), the Jefferson (1912, Thomas Lamb/George Keister), B.F. Keith's New Theater, Boston (1894, J.B. McElfatrick), and Keith Memorial Theater, Boston (1928, Thomas Lamb).

8. For the last years of vaudeville see Joe Laurie, Jr., Vaudeville: From the Honky-tonks to the Palace (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953).

Martin Beck and E.F. Albee

At age sixteen, Martin Beck (1867-1940) emigrated from Czechoslovakia to America with a troupe of Middle European actors.¹ When the company dissolved soon after, Beck took on odd jobs ranging from door-to-door salesman to biergarten waiter at the Chicago World's Fair. His success at the latter led to the proprietor's permission to mount stage entertainments and to Beck's speedy promotion to stage and house manager, bartender, and bookkeeper.

After a short stint with Schiller's Vaudeville Company, Beck was hired in San Francisco by Gustave Walters, owner of a combined saloon-music hall known as the Orpheum. Heavily in debt, it soon passed to Morris Meyerfield, Jr., who kept Martin Beck on as house manager. The new owner continued to extend his theater holdings and soon controlled vaudeville west of Chicago. Beck consolidated his association with the Orpheum circuit by marrying Meyerfield's daughter; when he succeeded his father-in-law a president in 1920, the Circuit numbered more than fifty theaters.²

The Eastern counterpart of the Orpheum Circuit was the Keith's Circuit which was owned by Benjamin Franklin Keith (1846-1914) and Edward Franklin Albee (1857-1930). They were circus men who together built the country's largest vaudeville chain, not only through their own houses, but also through their United Booking Office which channeled talent to all important theaters. Albee, from Machiasport, Maine, had joined P.T. Barnum's circus in 1876; Keith, from Hillsborough, New Hampshire, opened a museum and curio hall in Boston in 1882. The two men met in Boston in the mid-1880s and started business doing inexpensive versions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. To their first theater in Boston, the Bijou, they added the Gaiety Museum in Providence, Rhode Island (1887); shortly thereafter they built the Bijou in Philadelphia. By the 1890s they had established a reputation for having made music hall entertainment respectable and vaudeville an entertainment fit for the family; it was a reputation which would characterize their later Palace Theater. Keith and Albee's success led to the inclusion of larger theaters in their circuit. In 1894 the Keith's chain came to New York and took over an old playhouse, the Union Square.³

Although the circuit bore Keith's name, Albee was generally considered to be in control. Around the turn of the century, Keith, Albee, F.F.

Proctor, and several other theater owners formed the United Booking Office which, under Albee's direction, controlled Eastern vaudeville for the next several years. With the U.B.O. as a power base, the Keith's circuit continued growing. In 1905 Keith and Albee arranged a truce with Beck establishing Chicago as the boundary line between the Keith and Orpheum circuits.

The truce endured until 1912, when Beck decided to establish a theater in New York. Called the Palace, it was to be the greatest vaudeville center in America. But it was no sooner opened by Beck than lost to Albee through a series of still mysterious double-crosses.⁵

It seems that an exclusive franchise on U.B.O. performers had been awarded to Willie Hammerstein's Victoria Theater, effectively preventing quality acts from appearing elsewhere and thus preventing the Palace's opening. Hammerstein, however, was in financial straits and sold the franchise back to Albee who in turn used it to usurp power from Beck. In the final account, Beck retained only 25 per cent control of the Palace and could book acts only on Albee's terms. He retained his position as head of the Orpheum Circuit until he was ousted in 1923. After this, Beck planned his own theater, the Martin Beck, and devoted himself to its management until his death in 1940.⁶

Meanwhile, Albee's partner, Keith, had died in 1914, leaving Albee in virtually solid control of the Palace and the larger Keith-Orpheum circuit. It was Albee who made the Palace great.⁷

The circuit continued to expand under Albee's direction; by 1925, when the circuit's name was changed to the Keith-Albee-Orpheum, it included over 350 theaters. During most of its existence, the Keith's circuit was vaudeville and had very little to do with movies. By the mid-1920s, however, it was apparent that movies would have to be included for the operation to stay competitive, and in 1926 Albee bought the Pathe and F.B.O. film companies. In 1928, with sound movies becoming popular, a merger was arranged which included the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit (KAO), the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), F.B.O. Pathe, the RCA Photophone sound systems, Victor Records, and N.B.C.; the resulting conglomerate was called Radio-Keith-Orpheum, or "RKO." Albee, near 70 at this time, retired, control passing to Joseph P. Kennedy and his partner David Sarnoff, head of the Radio Corporation of America. In subsequent days control passed on to Howard Hughes.⁸

(JA)

Notes

1. For Martin Beck see Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York: Atheneum, 1969), passim; and his obituaries in the New York Times, November 17, 1940; New York Herald Tribune, November 17, 1940; Variety, November 20, 1940. Additional material may be found in the Martin Beck Clipping File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
2. Spitzer, p. 8; Beck, obituary, Variety.

3. Spitzer, pp. 8-9; Donald C. King, "Keith, Albee et al, From Circus to Cinema," Marquee, Vol. 7, No. 3 (third quarter, 1975), 4-5.
4. King, pp. 6-7; Spitzer, pp. 8-9
5. King, p. 7.
6. Ibid.; Spitzer, pp. 12-13; Beck, obituary, Variety.
7. King, p. 8.
8. Ibid., pp. 8-9; Spitzer, pp. 148-152; Joe Laurie, Jr. Vaudeville: From the Honky-tonks to the Palace (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), p. 482.

Kirchhoff & Rose¹

In the late 19th century Kirchhoff & Rose were among the leading architects in Milwaukee, where they specialized in theater, commercial and industrial design. According to the New York Times, Kirchhoff & Rose "designed most of the Beck Orpheum Houses."²

Charles Kirchhoff, Jr. (1856-1916) was the son of a German immigrant cabinetmaker who settled in Milwaukee prior to the Civil War.³ Upon the boy's graduation from German-English Academy, he worked as a mason and carpenter while attending night school. Kirchhoff then spent two years studying architecture in Boston and New York before his return to Milwaukee in the early 1880s. From 1883 until 1885 he worked in the office of Henry Messmer, first as a draftsman and later as junior partner. Kirchhoff spent the following decade in independent practice, during which time he designed the Alhambra Theater in Milwaukee (1890). In 1896 he formed a partnership with Thomas Leslie Rose (1867-1935), a promising young architect from Chicago. The survival of their firm for almost nine decades distinguished it as Milwaukee's oldest continuous architectural office.

Thomas Rose, born in New York City, was the son of English-trained sculptor-artist James M. Rose.⁴ While still a child, his family moved to Chicago whereupon Thomas was enrolled in public school. He received his professional training in the office of Chicago architect James J. Egan, supplemented by evening classes at the Art Institute. In 1883 Rose relocated to Milwaukee where he became associated with Henry Starbuck until the latter's retirement a decade later. Rose then joined Charles Kirchhoff, becoming a partner in 1898.

Among Kirchhoff & Rose's best known works in Milwaukee are the Majestic Office and Theater Building (1907), Palace-Hippodrome (1915), Riverside (1929) and Garden (1921) theaters.⁵ The latter was a transformation of Milwaukee's Palm Garden, which Kirchhoff had designed for the Schlitz Brewing Company in 1895.⁶ Other notable works by the firm include the Dental School at Marquette University, Badger State Bank, several savings bank institutions and churches, including St. Anthony's, St. Michael's and Mount Olivet Lutheran Church. Outside Milwaukee Kirchhoff & Rose were responsible for the Princess Theater in Chicago

(1909), the Junior Orpheum and Hennepin Theater in Minneapolis and the Orpheum Theater (1910) in Winnipeg, Canada. Beck's Palace appears to be the firm's only major work in New York.

Both Kirchhoff and Rose were succeeded in the firm by their sons. The office changed its name for the first time in 1942 when it became known as Brimeyer-Grellinger & Rose. It was retitled twice more before it merged in 1973 with Schuett, Erdman and Gray, Architects III.

(JA)

Notes

1. The information presented here on the firm of Kirchhoff & Rose was compiled with the assistance of the Milwaukee Public Library, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Architectural Archive.
2. "Building of Theatres Still Continues," New York Times, September 8, 1912, sec. 7, p. 2.
3. Biographical information on Charles Kirchhoff, Jr. is based on Alyn W. Hess, "Biographical Outline of Roger C. Kirchhoff, Architect," Wisconsin Architectural Archive, Milwaukee Public Library, 1974 (copy on file in the Kirchhoff & Rose Research File, Landmarks Preservation Commission, N.Y.C.); J.G. Gregory, History of Milwaukee (Chicago and Milwaukee: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1931), v. 4, pp. 501-502.
4. For Rose see Gregory, v. 4., pp. 233-234; Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles: Hennesey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), p. 527.
5. A complete list of the firm's works between 1896 and 1973 is available in the Wisconsin Architectural Archive.
6. "Schlitz Palm Garden... 1895: The Garden Theatre... 1921," Marquee vol. 3, no. 1 (first quarter, 1971), 15.
7. "Kirchhoff & Rose: Firm Names and Locations," Wisconsin Architectural Archive. Copy in the Kirchhoff & Rose Research File.

The Palace

Martin Beck's Palace, designed by Kirchhoff & Rose, opened in 1913 to mixed reviews of its program, ranging from the World's "interesting throughout," to the Post's scarcely encouraging "not the sort of entertainment to attract attention to the new theatre."¹ Enthusiasm was reserved for the theater itself, which everyone agreed was extraordinary. "Airy" and less congested than the usual New York playhouse,² the Palace was, and still is, one of the largest theaters on Broadway. Its architects wrapped double balconies around its deeply splayed orchestra walls, terminating them with twenty (currently fourteen) tiered boxes along the

sides of the house. Yet in spite of its 1820 seats (currently 1701), the Palace was renowned for its intimacy, "purely perfect" sight lines and fine acoustics.³ Speaking some forty years after its 1913 opening, theater critic Robert Sylvester marveled at the "wondrous" Palace where, standing in the rear of its auditorium, he heard "every whisper just as plainly as [if he] were in the first row."⁴ The Palace was not only "quite the most comfortable music hall in New York,"⁵ it embraced "all the most modern ideas in stage construction and [was] handsomely decorated and finished."⁶ As described by New York Times:

The lobby is forty feet wide and decorated in Pavanazzo marble. The inner lobby is constructed of Sienna marble. Two sets of bronze screen doors set with stained glass lead into the lobbies.... The color scheme of the auditorium is old ivory and bronze, the walls are decorated with panels of old gold silk brocade and the drop curtain is of the same material.... The proscenium arch forty-four feet across the stage is decorated with a laurel wreath column in bronze, with a plastic motive decorated in old ivory. The wall panels here are in French grey. The dome and ceiling are brightly decorated and there is a chandelier of old ivory bronze fourteen feet across.⁷

The double-balconied auditorium with its multiplicity of boxes and loges on three levels, the unusually high and wide proscenium arch, the large stage, originally with a slanting floor, and the ample foyer and lobby spaces, all exemplify the design of a vaudeville theater.⁸ In addition, its high-relief ornamental plasterwork of extravagant baroque design was a visual cue to the lavish entertainments presented on the stage.

The Palace Theater is housed in an L-shaped structure which also includes offices. The eleven-story office building fronts on Broadway and includes the lobby entrance. The main entrance and marquee are located on this prominent facade. Behind it and extending eastwards along West 47th Street is the brick auditorium structure. The arrangement of office building connecting to a theater in the rear was not uncommon in the early decades of this century when city construction codes prohibited building over an auditorium (other examples in the theater district include the Selwyn, New Amsterdam, Harris, Ed Sullivan, and Studio 54 theaters). The Palace office building housed Martin Beck's and then Albee's offices (today used by the Nederlander Organization), and functioned as a center for the vaudeville industry.

The first alterations to the theater occurred in the late 1920s in response to the growing threat of motion pictures. The Palace had remained strong against the newly opened Strand (1914), Rialto (1916) and other movie theaters until 1926 when the 3500-seat Paramount opened just four blocks to the south. When the even larger Roxy opened on 50th Street in the following year, the Palace attempted to lure back its dwindling audience with an electric piano in its lobby and a new system of colored stage lights, not to mention high-powered entertainment. Subsequent enlargement of the projection booth anticipated an inevitable policy change in 1932 to a mixed vaudeville and motion picture bill.⁹ In the following years the Palace's increasing commitment to movies necessitated still further alterations.

Other "modernizations" followed, most notably the streamlining of its lobbies and marquee in 1939. Stripped of its moldings and projecting display frames, the outer lobby was refaced in black and white granite with aluminum and bronze display frames. The inner lobby was likewise repaneled, substituting zebra wood and black marble for granite.¹⁰

The auditorium of the Palace was also renovated in the 1940s, with a rearrangement of the orchestra seating and the changes to and removal of boxes.¹¹ Originally the boxes had served both a decorative and functional role, especially for vaudeville comedians who planted "stooges" in them. It was common knowledge that the occupants of the first balcony boxes (on the right facing the stage) were assistants to the evening's performers.¹² Since the boxes offered a more restricted view, they were not seen as desirable seating for viewing movies.

In 1951, the Palace's straight motion picture policy was abandoned for a mixed program of film and variety revival. In preparation for Judy Garland, who inaugurated the new "Night With..." format, the Palace was renovated and redecorated with new seats and carpeting, while its stage and acoustics were improved. A new ticket booth was also installed in the lobby.¹³

After eight years of mixed bills, the Palace reverted to a straight film policy until its purchase by the Nederlanders in 1965. Its new owners spent a half million dollars refurbishing the theater in 1965-66.¹⁴ They ripped out the plastic and plywood that had been applied to the walls for the sake of modernity, only to uncover a theater of baroque lavishness. They found ornate ironwork, elegant marble balustrades and, breaking through a plaster overlay, they revealed the original, elaborately sculpted ceiling of the lobby. In the basement were discovered a cache of crystal chandeliers, five feet wide and seven feet high (these now hang in the lobby).

The theater's natural assets were so strong that it was "quickly decided that the Palace project would be less a revamp than a restoration."¹⁵ Although there was no attempt at slavish recreation, designer Ralph Alswang did much to bring the theater back to its early splendor. Where old paneling was missing, he had it reproduced, just as he had lost parts of chandeliers copied and replaced. He enlarged the orchestra pit to accommodate thirty musicians, rebuilt stage right and left boxes at the first balcony level, and removed the stage floor dressing rooms to the basement while extending and leveling the previously inclined vaudeville stage. Alswang also replaced all the seats with red velour chairs, laid the present red, black and burgundy carpet (into which Greek wreath and lyre patterns were woven) and restored and painted the auditorium's ornate ceiling. Although he characterized his design as "a free restoration...a bit more baroque"¹⁶ than the original, he was careful to respect the integrity of the 1913 Palace. Today it is largely as Alswang revived it in 1965-66.

(JA)

Notes

1. "Great Crowds Flock to Palace Theatre," The World, March 25, 1913, p. 7, col. 3; "Palace Theatre a Palace for Comfort," New York Post, March 25, 1913, p. 9, col. 6.
2. "Palace Theatre...."
3. Robert Sylvester, "Dream Street," New York Daily News, June 2, 1956.
4. Ibid.
5. "Palace Theatre...."
6. "Palace Opens To-day," New York Times, March 24, 1913, p. 11, col. 3.
7. Ibid.
8. See p. 9 above.
9. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Alteration Permit 320-1929.
10. "RKO Will Streamline the Palace Theater," New York Times, July 20, 1939, p. 16, col. 2. Alteration Permit 1451-1939.
11. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan Building Notice 2476-40, Alteration 552-42.
12. John Hutchins, "Down from the Boxes," New York Times, March 1, 1931, sec. 8, p. 2, col. 7.
13. "Variety Returns to the Palace Today," New York Times, August 28, 1951, p. 18, col. 2. Building Notice 2547-51; Building Notice 1232-52.
14. For the restoration see "Rate the Refurbished New York Palace One of the Most Beautiful Theaters," Variety, January 26, 1966, p. 61; "Old Palace Theater Prepares for a Musical," New York Times, January 14, 1966; Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 246-249; "New Reign for the Palace," New York World-Telegram, October 25, 1965.
15. "Rate the Refurbished Palace...."
16. "New Reign for the Palace."

The Palace as Vaudeville House and Theater¹

When the Palace opened in March 1913, it was considered a flop. It struggled through high prices (\$2.00 top), long acts, fierce competition with the nearby Victoria (vaudeville) Theater, and a good deal of bad press before winning popular acclaim. But when Sarah Bernhardt appeared on its stage on May 5, 1913, the Palace Era began. Her combination of

unimpeachable acting talents (always delivered in French) and intriguing idiosyncracies (i.e. her sleeping in a coffin, her legions of lovers, and later, her wooden leg) were the very stuff of which the Palace legend was built. With the "Divine Sarah" the Palace rose to a pinnacle at which it would remain unchallenged for twenty years. In all of American theater there is no other showplace that has been the subject of so much lore, so much weepy reminiscence, so much greatness as the Palace. Not the New York Palace, the Broadway Palace or Times Square Palace, just the Palace. It was the dream of every vaudevillian to "play the Palace" and as the song goes, "until you've played the Palace, you haven't reached the top."²

In its day the Palace featured such seemingly indestructible entertainers as Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Sophie Tucker, George Jessel, Eddie Cantor and Ed Wynn, the latter being billed simply as "a comedian" on opening night in 1913. Other greats who appeared at the Palace include Lillian Russell, Ethel Barrymore, the Marx Brothers, Jimmy Durante, W.C. Fields, Houdini, Mae West, Kate Smith, Will Rogers, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and even Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan for a two-week engagement in 1920. About the only performer who didn't appear at the Palace was Al Jolson, and that was due to his contract with the rival Shuberts.

In general, the Palace offered two shows daily, each with a balanced nine-act bill. Included were a dramatic sketch (usually a one-act play of about twenty minutes duration) as well as animal shows, comedy, singing and dance routines. There were also specialty acts like Miss Robie Gordone who performed "Classic Reproductions of Famous Statues" and "Odiva, the Plunging Samoan Nymph" who entertained with "feats of agility, grace and endurance" while swimming in a tank full of sea lions. Regardless of the performance, Albee insisted on a policy of family entertainment, and fought with actors like the incendiary Sophie Tucker about "blue" humor. In fact, Albee went so far as to hang backstage a list of forbidden words including such unmentionables as "hell," "devil," "cockroach," and "spit."

The Palace was more than just an entertainment center; it became a veritable barometer of American life. On Sunday mornings its premises were used by religious, philanthropic and patriotic organizations, and during World War I it sold Liberty Bonds, rallied for recruitment and gave birth to the forerunner of the U.S.O.³ It also introduced "heatless Tuesdays" and did away with intermissions in order to conserve fuel.

Throughout the mid-1920s the Palace remained the unchallenged center of American entertainment, but radio and movies were beginning to make an inroad. Late in the decade the theater featured first a trickle, and then a flood, of displaced silent movie stars, and in the spring of 1930, the Palace was itself wired for sound. In an attempt to keep audience interest it installed an electric piano in the lobby, and initiated a third and then a fourth show daily. By 1932 the Palace's marquee read "continuous performance." On July 7 of the same year the Palace succumbed to the growing popularity of feature films and initiated a combined film and vaudeville policy. This lasted for several months before switching to straight films. The policy fluctuated at least eight times before October 1935, when the Palace began a fourteen-year program of feature films. Thereafter it enjoyed a short and nostalgic revival of vaudeville.⁴ On October 16, 1951, the new "A Night With..." format brought new generations of live entertainment to the stage, combining vaudeville with a featured

performance. Judy Garland inaugurated the policy with her record-breaking nineteen-week performance, followed by such big names as Betty Hutton, Liberace, Danny Kaye, Jerry Lewis and, finally, Harry Belafonte in 1959. Thereafter the Palace reverted to straight films before being sold to the Nederlanders in 1965. Under them it became the second largest legitimate playhouse on Broadway, and the first to open since the construction of the Ethel Barrymore in 1928.

The first play to open at the Palace was Neil Simon's Sweet Charity. Since the first of its 608 performances in January 1966,⁵ the theater has remained the home of top hit American musicals including, appropriately, George M. (about the early vaudeville career of George M. Cohan). Among the theater's other box-office sensations are Applause in 1970 and Lorelei four years later, followed by The Man of La Mancha in 1977. More recently, the Palace has showcased Woman of the Year with Lauren Bacall and her successor Raquel Welch. Its current production is Tony Award-winning La Cage aux Folles.

(JA)

Notes

1. This history of vaudeville at the Palace is based on Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York: Atheneum, 1969; Joe Laurie, Jr., Vaudeville: From the Honky-tonks to the Palace (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953), pp. 481-498; Vincent Canby, "The Paslace from Ed Wynn to Gwen Verdon," New York Times, January 23, 1966; Richard Harrity, "Two-a-Day at the Palace," Cosmopolitan, January 1957, pp. 49-53.
2. Harrity, "Two-a-Day at the Palace," p. 49.
3. "Liberty Loan Tablet for the Palace," New York Times, March 27, 1918, p. 11, col. 5. The Palace led all other playhouses in its sale of \$750,000 of Liberty Bonds.
4. "Variety Returns to Palace Today," New York Times, May 19, 1949.
5. This history of legitimate stage productions at the Palace Theater, condensed from the fuller version in the Appendix, is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against George Freedley, "Broadway Playhouses," bound typescript of the "Stage Today," 1941-43, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library; The Best Plays of... [annual] (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present); Theatre World [annual] Daniel Blum, editor (New York: Theatre World, 1946-present), The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1966); Edwin Bronner, The Encyclopedia of American Theater, 1900-1975 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1980); Gerald Bordman, Oxford Companion to American Theatre (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Louis Botto, At This Theatre: An Informal History of New York's Legitimate Theatre, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1984).

Description¹

Auditorium:

1) Configuration:

The configuration of the auditorium consists of a space which is slightly deeper than it is wide, with two balconies, a proscenium flanked by two tiers of boxes; an array of orchestra level boxes; a sounding board; an orchestra pit in front of the stage; the stage opening behind the proscenium arch; a coved ceiling with a center dome; orchestra and balcony promenades; and the sloping floor extending towards the proscenium arch.

Proscenium: the proscenium is elliptically-arched.

Sounding board: the sounding board is curved, rising from the proscenium.

Balconies: the two balconies with curved fronts are very deep, intended to bring the audience as close to the stage as possible. The first balcony extends halfway over the orchestra. It is penetrated halfway up by two staircase openings.

Boxes: at each side of the proscenium a box section rises to the sounding board. The orchestra level boxes extend from the orchestra pit to the rear of the auditorium. The wall sections behind the orchestra level boxes closest to the orchestra pit and the first balcony level boxes above them, have been rebuilt. A single rebuilt box at first balcony level on each side has been placed in the original niche below the sounding board. One original box, circular in plan, survives on each side at the first balcony level. At the second balcony level, five boxes with curved fronts and curved undersides step up on each side.

Staircases: staircases at the orchestra level lead up to the boxes at the first and second balcony level.

Ceiling: corner pendentives rise to meet the wide cove which outlines the ceiling. The cove supports a flat ceiling with two curved triangular panels and a shallow center dome.

Floor: the floor is raked.

Stage: the stage extends behind the proscenium arch and forms a stage picture (visible from the audience) framed by the proscenium arch.²

Orchestra Pit: the orchestra pit, enlarged in size in 1965, is placed in front of and below the level of the stage.

Promenades: the area of the orchestra promenade is defined by a standing rail, three piers supporting the balcony above, and a ceiling cornice. The area of the first balcony promenade is defined by a standing rail, three piers supporting the balcony above, and a ceiling cornice. The area of the second balcony promenade is defined by a ceiling cornice.

2) Ornament:

Most of the decorative ornament is high-relief plasterwork, a technique which allows it to be perceived more effectively in the very large auditorium space. This ornament is integrated into the surfaces which define the configuration of the auditorium. Decorative ornament includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Proscenium arch: the arch is outlined by a wide acanthus-leaf band enclosed by narrower decorative moldings -- pellet, egg and dart, and acanthus. A keystone at the center of the arch contains a cartouche adorned with leaves surrounding a child's face.

Sounding board: the sounding board is adorned with a central circular panel containing a lyre.

Orchestra: The rear and side walls at orchestra level were resurfaced during the 1965 renovation.

Orchestra promenade: The three piers supporting the balcony above are paneled and fluted and have console brackets at their bases. The ceiling cornice is composed of three enriched classical moldings.

First balcony level boxes: a doorway leading into the rebuilt box at first balcony level on each side is flanked by pilasters with console brackets supporting a curved pediment with a cartouche and three-branch candelabra filling the tympanum. The recessed lunette above takes the form of a shell with foliate ornament set in the ribs of the shell and crossed branches of oak above the pediment. The lunette is outlined by an arch surmounted by a large cartouche surrounded by foliate ornament. A wide foliate band rises from alongside the box sections and spans the ceiling along the sounding board.

Circular boxes at first balcony level: the circular boxes at each side of the first balcony level have decorative moldings on the front and a large acanthus-leaf medallion on the underside.

First balcony: the front of the first balcony displays ornament which is a continuation of that seen on the fronts of the boxes, but with the addition of classical masks, although the ornament is obscured by the addition of a light rail. The underside of the balcony is broken into a series of rectangular panels by plaster rope moldings. These date from the 1965 renovation, although the two wide decorative plasterwork bands at the front edge are original. The side walls of the first balcony contain exit doors in their original surrounds, some with curved pediments on stylized console brackets.

First balcony promenade: the ceiling cornice is composed of bands of classical moldings.

Second balcony level boxes: the five boxes at the second balcony level also have decorative moldings on their curved fronts and foliate moldings outlining their curved undersides.

Second balcony: the underside of the second balcony is divided into rectangular panels by rope moldings. The front edge contains panels with a guilloche molding, intersected by horseshoe-shaped panels with oak branches. These latter panels reflect the curves in the front of the second balcony. The decorative moldings on the front are a continuation of those seen on the box fronts, but with the addition of masks. The side walls of the second balcony are paneled with stylized pilasters rising to meet a frieze which curves down to meet the foliate molding outlining the sounding board. Exit doors on the side walls have their original surrounds, some with curved pediments like those seen at the first balcony level.

Second balcony promenade: the ceiling cornice is composed of bands of classical moldings.

Ceiling: corner pendentives, outlined by moldings and with wreaths and oak branches in the center panels, rise to meet the wide cove, executed in high relief plasterwork, which outlines the ceiling. The cove is divided into panels, created by a wide variety of classical, foliate, and floral moldings and scrolls. Centered at the front of the cove, linking it to the sounding board, is a cartouche flanked by putti. The cove supports a flat ceiling with two curved triangular panels with intricate foliation and a shallow center dome outlined by a band of alternating modillions and rosettes and a convex molding decorated with fruit and flowers. A decorative center pendant originally held a chandelier.

3) Attached fixtures:

Orchestra level boxes: the orchestra level boxes are enclosed by white marble railings above black marble baseboards.

Orchestra: Exit doors without ornamental detail are located on the side walls adjacent to the orchestra level boxes.

Orchestra promenade: one enters the auditorium from the rear through doors, set below overscaled transoms in foliate frames,³ from the staircase vestibule. The wall adjacent to these doors contains an ornate iron railing, now gilded, of foliate design, at the landing of the staircase leading from the staircase vestibule to the mezzanine foyer. This railing curves into the space of the promenade. Doorways without ornamental detail at each end of the orchestra promenade open onto the staircases leading up to the balconies. Marble balustrades extend from the outer piers supporting the first balcony behind the rear pair of boxes.

Staircases: the railings of the staircases leading into the boxes from the orchestra are of cast iron, with delicate newel posts and spindles.

Light fixtures: existing non-original light fixtures throughout the auditorium are stylistically compatible with its Beaux-Arts baroque style.

4) Known alterations:

Air conditioning grilles and duct covers have been added to the ceiling and undersides of the balconies. The technical booth at the rear of the second balcony has been enlarged and modernized, and a light rail has been placed on the front of the first balcony. Floating panels have been suspended from the ceiling. The theater was extensively renovated in 1965; changes include the resurfacing of the side and rear walls at orchestra level, the enlargement of the orchestra pit, and the reconstruction of the first balcony level boxes. The light fixtures appear to have been added in the 1965 renovation. The current color scheme emphasizes the baroque effect of the ornamental detail.

(MP)

Notes

1. This description identifies spaces and elements in the spaces that are included in this designation. Architecturally significant features are underlined as explained in the "Guidelines for Treatment of Theater Interiors" as adopted by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on December 10, 1985.
2. For the purposes of this description, the stage shall include the enclosing walls and roof of the stage house and a floor area behind the proscenium arch, but not any fixture or feature of or within that space.
3. These doors and transoms are visible in a 1942 photograph [Theatre Collection, Museum of the City of New York, reproduced in Louis Botto, At This Theatre (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1984), p. 47] These may have been installed when the Palace began showing movies in 1932.

Conclusion

The Palace Theater Interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that represent American theater for both New York and the nation. National symbol of vaudeville in America, built for Martin Beck during the early decades of this century, it helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district. Designed for Beck by the firm of Kirchhoff & Rose, the Palace, under the leadership of E.F. Albee, became the country's preeminent vaudeville institution, and represents a unique aspect of the nation's theatrical history. The Palace interior, a palatial 1700-seat auditorium lavishly adorned, legacy of its vaudeville history, continues to provide a plush setting and a sense of theater for the legitimate productions now presented there.

For three quarters of a century the Palace Theater has served New York, first as home to vaudeville, and for the last two decades as home to large numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater. As such, and as one of the few remaining theaters with a Broadway entrance, it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Major sections of report prepared by
Janet Adams (JA)
Research Department

The preparation of this report has involved the work of a number of consultants supervised and edited by Anthony W. Robins (AR), Deputy Director of Research. Individual authors are noted by initials at the ends of their sections. The consultant was Margaret Knapp (MMK). Gale Harris of the Research Department verified the citations and sources, and provided editorial assistance. Marjorie Pearson (MP), Director of Research, wrote the description. Research Department staff who contributed to the report include Marion Cleaver, Virginia Kurshan, Susan Strauss, and Jay Shockley.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this Interior, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Palace Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium; the second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, New York State, and the nation, and the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Palace Theater Interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that, built in 1912-13, it is among the oldest theaters surviving in New York City; that it was built for producer Martin Beck, West-Coast vaudeville impresario; that under the operation of E.F. Albee and the Keith Circuit it became the preeminent national center for vaudeville; that as such it represents a unique aspect of the city's and the nation's theatrical history; that the interior designed for Beck by the firm of Kirchhoff & Rose is an extravagant baroque design incorporating high-relief ornamental plasterwork, reflecting the lavish vaudeville productions for which the theater became nationally renowned; that the double-balconied auditorium with its multiplicity of boxes and loges on three levels, the unusually high and wide proscenium arch, the large stage, originally with a slanting floor, and the ample promenade areas, all exemplify the design of a vaudeville theater; that for over three quarters of a century the Palace Theater has served as home first to America's vaudeville greats and more recently to large numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that as such it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Palace Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium; the second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 1564-1566 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 999, Lot 63, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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APPENDIX

The following production history of the Palace Theater is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Gale Harris and Susan Strauss of the Research Department staff against George Freedley, "Broadway Playhouses," bound typescript of the "Stage Today," 1941-43, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library; The Best Plays of.... [annual] (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present); Theatre World [annual] Daniel Blum, editor (New York: Theatre World, 1946-present), The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1966); Play Statistics File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library; Programmes, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.

1913-1966

From its opening until 1966 the Palace showcased the greatest vaudeville performers in the country. Plays and musicals presented at the Palace since its conversion to the legitimate stage are listed below.

1966

SWEET CHARITY 1/29/66 (608 perfs.) by Neil Simon, music by Cy Coleman, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, choreography by Bob Fosse; with Gwen Verdon, and John McMartin.

1967

JUDY GARLAND AT HOME AT THE PALACE 6/31/67 (32 perfs.); with Judy Garland, John Bubbles, Lorna and Joey Luft.

BUDDY HACKET/EDDIE FISHER 8/28/67 (42 perfs.)

HENRY, SWEET HENRY 10/23/67 (80 perfs.) by Nunnally Johnson, based on a book by Nora Johnson, music and lyrics Bob Merrill; with Robin Wilson, Neva Small, and Don Ameche.

1968

THE GRAND MUSIC HALL OF ISRAEL 2/6/68 (63 perfs.)

GEORGE M! 4/10/68 (435 perfs.) by Michael Stewart and Fran Pascal, music and lyrics by George M. Cohan; with Joel Grey and Bernadette Peters.

1969

THE JIMMY ROSELLI SHOW 5/2/69 (13 perfs.)

1970

APPLAUSE 3/30/70 (896 perfs.) by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, based on the film ALL ABOUT EVE, music by Charles Strouse, lyric by Lee Adams; with Lauren Bacall Len Cariou, Penny Fuller and Bonnie Franklin.

1972

FROM ISRAEL WITH LOVE 10/2/72 (10 perfs.).

PACIFIC PARADISE 10/16/72 (5 perfs.) with the New Zealand Maori Company.

1973

DON JUAN IN HELL 1/15/75 (24 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Agnes Moorehead, Paul Henreid, Edward Mulhare, and Ricardo Montalban.

CYRANO 5/13/73 (49 perfs.) by Edmond Rostand, adapted by Anthony Burgess; with Christopher Plummer.

BETTE MIDLER 12/3/73 (19 perfs.) Bette Midler with the Harlettes.

JOSEPHINE BAKER 12/31/73 (8 perfs.)

1974

LORELEI OR GENTLEMEN STILL PREFER BLONDES 1/12/74 (320 perfs.) by Anita Loos and Joseph Fields adapted by Kenny Solms and Gail Parent, music Jule Styne, lyrics Leo Robin new music Jule Styne, new lyrics Betty Comden and Adolph Green; with Carol Channing, Tamara Long and Dody Goodman.

EDDIE ARNOLD 11/25/74 (8 perfs.)

LONDON ASSURANCE 12/5/74 (45 perfs.) by Dion Boucicaolt, adapted by Ronald Eyre; with Anthony Pedley, Polly Adams and Donald Sinden.

1975

GOOD-TIME CHARLEY 3/3/75 (104 perfs.) by Sidney Michaels, music by Larry Grossman, lyrics by Hal Hackady; with Joel Grey and Ann Reinking.

THE FIRST BREEZE OF SUMMER 6/10/75 (48 perfs.) by Leslie Lee; with Moses Gunn, Charles Brown and Ethel Ayler.

TREEMONISHA 11/3/ 75 (64 total perfs.) by Scott Joplin, with Betty Allen and Willard White (First opened at the Uris Theater 10/21/75.)

1976

HOME SWEET HOMER 1/4/76 (1 perf.) with Yul Brynner.

SHIRLEY MAC LAINE WITH SHIRLEY'S GYPSIES 4/19/76 (20 perfs.)

AN EVENING WIT DIANA ROSS 6/14/76 (16 perfs.)

SHIRLEY MAC LAINE 7/9/76 (20 perfs.)

SIAMSA: NATIONAL FOLK THEATRE OF IRELAND 9/27/76 (8 perfs.); with Sean O'Mahony, Liam Healisp and Sean Ahern.

HERZL 11/30/76 (20 perfs.) by Dore Schary and Amos Elon; with Paul Hecht and Judith Light.

1977

CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA 2/24/77 (12 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Rex Harrison and Elizabeth Ashley.

TOLLER CRANSTON'S ICE SHOW 5/19/77 (60 perfs.)

MAN OF LA MANCHA 9/15/77 (124 perfs.) by Dale Wasserman, music by Mitch Leigh, lyrics by Joe Darion; with Richard Kiley.

1978

ELVIS: THE LEGEND LIVES 1/31/78 (101 perfs.) conceived by John Finocchio, Larry Marshak and David Zann; with Rick Saucedo, Will Jordan and the Jordanaires.

1979

THE GRAND TOUR 1/19/79 (61 perfs.) by Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble; with Joel Grey and Ron Holgate.

A MEETING BY THE RIVER 3/28/79 (1 perf.) by Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy; with Siobban McKenna, Simon Ward and Sam Jaffe.

OKLAHOMA 12/13//79 (301 perfs.) book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers; with Mary Wickes, Christine Andreas, and Laurence Guittard.

1981

FRANKENSTEIN 1/4/81 (1 perf.); with John Carradine.

WOMAN OF THE YEAR 3/29/81 (770 perfs.) by Peter Stone based on the film by Ring Lardner, Jr., music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb; with Lauren Bacall and Harry Guardino.

1983

PARADE OF STARS PLAYING THE PALACE 5/2/83 (1 perf.), Benefit for the Actors Fund of America.

LA CAGE AUX FOLLES 8/21/83 (still playing 7/87) by Harvey Fierstein based on a play by Jean Poiret, music and lyrics by Jerry Herman; with Gene Barry and George Hearn.

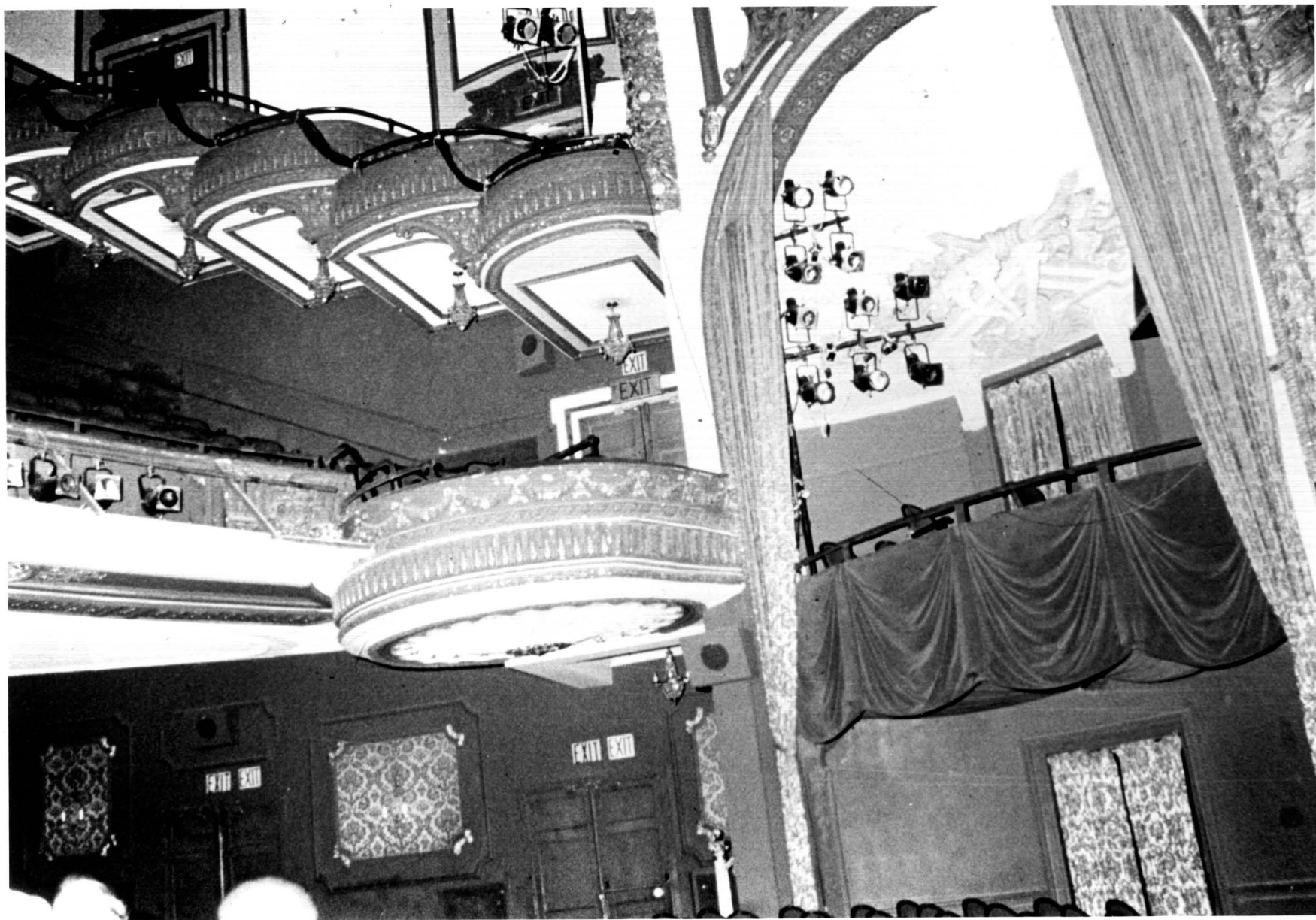


Palace Theater Interior



Palace Theater Interior
1564-1566 Broadway
Manhattan

Built: 1912-13
Architect: Kirchoff & Rose



Palace Theater Interior