

The Architecture and History of the State, Pantages and Orpheum Theaters

THE STATE THEATER

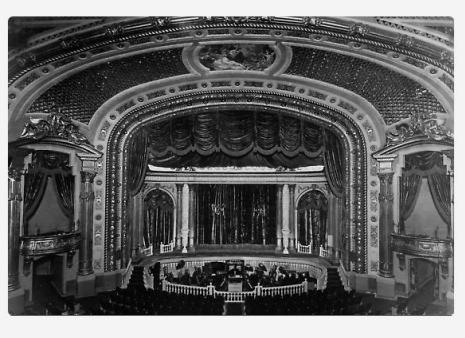
When the State Theatre opened in 1921, it was the largest and most extravagant theater in Minneapolis. Considered the most elaborate and technologically advanced theater in the United States, its ornate design reflected the exciting glamor of Broadway and Hollywood and the spirit of the jazz age. One Minneapolis newspaper columnist described it as, "a gilded pleasure palace, dedicated to the Hollywood dreams that captured America's heart in the roaring 20's."

Designed by Chicago architect J.E.O Pridemore, the architectural style is described as free-style Italian Renaissance Revival. This grand style is based loosely on the Italian palazzos of the sixteenth century, with an emphasis on arches, decorative pillars and columns, domes and niches with sculptures.



The exterior of the original State Theatre was constructed of white glazed terra cotta and featured a Marquee running the full length of the building and a vertical projecting "State" sign centered above a steel canopy. The original face was adorned with floral ornamentation and eagles perched on top of rectangular plaster columns.

The foyer and the lobby were built with black and white marble floors. The recessed paneled ceilings were formed from molded plaster with four grimacing faces mounted along the cornices.



Inside the 2200-seat auditorium Pridemore used a variety of colors in the plasterwork, along with embroidered gold draperies, gold-leaved moldings,

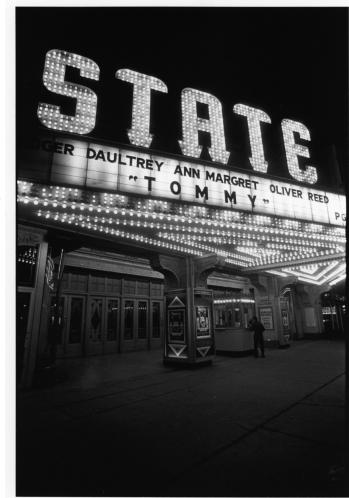
crystal chandeliers and monumental Corinthian pilasters to create a feeling of luxury and splendor that was being projected by the Hollywood films of the 1920's. One of the most prominent design features was the colorful plasterwork figures which represented Music, Drama and the Muse of Cinema. Several Renaissance-style murals of bountiful nudes decorated the walls, illustrating additional features of the architectural style. The original stage floor was made of glass, allowing light to be directed from below in order to create stunning visual effects. The stage floor could be modified within a few hours to accommodate various types of performances, including films, vaudeville, concerts, ballet and touring Broadway productions. In



addition to its extravagant design, the theater was home to the first modern air-conditioning system in Minneapolis, further representing the luxurious style that was developing in Minneapolis in that era. The State Theater played a vital role in the shaping of Theater in Minneapolis from 1921-1978 by providing a

varying array of performances. Though it was built to accommodate both stage and film productions, it operated mainly as a movie theater. Housing the largest screen west of the Mississippi when it was built, it opened on February 21, 1921 with a silent film, newsreel and a travelogue.

The first renovation to the State Theater came in 1925, when a pipe organ was installed, allowing the type of concerts to be elevated. Concerts were held every day for 25 cents. In the 1940's a neon marquee which ran the entire width of the theater front was installed. The State Theater was a successful venue



up until the 1970's. It closed its doors on New Years Eve of 1975 with a final showing of the movie "Tommy".

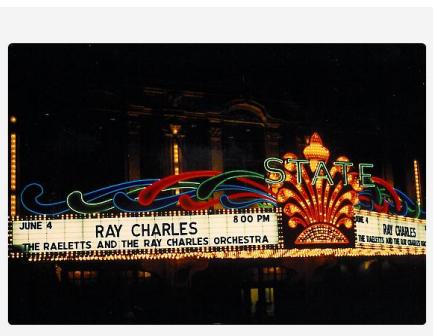
In 1978, it was purchased by the Jesus People Church to be used as their house of worship. The sculpted figures and murals were covered with drapes and plaster. The theater was used as a place of worship until 1989, when the Minneapolis Community Development Agency purchased the entire LaSalle Plaza block.



The renovation of the State Theater began immediately, with the intent to restore the building back to its original state. This process included removing all the plaster that covered the original design components designed by J.E.O. Pridemore. The two-year, \$8.8 million renovation also included the restoration of murals, the 6 original chandeliers and a proscenium that spans the width of the building and curves 100 feet above the stage. The preservation of the building carefully took into account the urban context of Hennepin Avenue while still preserving the 1920's Renaissance Revival Architectural style.



At the completion of the renovation in 1991, the State Theater re-opened, bringing life back to the theater's original intent, with its focus shifting back to live performances and concerts. The building's original structure and heritage has been preserved, and is an example of how America's theaters have evolved over time.



THE PANTAGES THEATER

The Pantages Theater opened its doors in Minneapolis as a vaudeville house in 1916. Originally designed by the Minneapolis firm of Kees and Colburn, it is the creation of Greek immigrant, Alexander Pantages, who was well known for his numerous theaters and their beautiful architecture. The original architecture was combination of Art Moderne/Beaux Arts style.



Beaux Arts style heavily influenced the architecture of the United States from 1880-1920. Generally, buildings in this style are constructed of stone. It is characterized by lavish sculptural floral and swag decorations, large arches, columns and balconies. The Art Moderne style emphasizes curving forms, domes, glass brick walls, long horizontal lines, brass hardware and subdued colors.

Originally conceived to be a 12-story building with hotel rooms above the theater, the design was quickly scaled down to a two-story building when cost became a factor. The lobby of the original theater was very simple, nothing at all like the interior. It contained one ticket booth and was clean and simple in design.

The interior of the original Pantages was quite extravagant, featuring ornate plaster ceiling coves, massive columns along the proscenium, and gold leafing. The design also included a mezzanine. The mezzanine, a creation of Alexander Pantages, was a carpeted lobby on the second floor with restrooms and telephones. This creation would become a standard among many theaters in the future. The mezzanine was lined with plaster faces keeping a constant eye

on the stage. This ornate piece of design became part of Alexander Pantages' signature slogan, "meet me at the mezzanine." This was part of his intent to turn theater experiences into a social meeting place, rather than just a place to watch a show.

In 1922, the theater was remodeled by noted theater architect, Marcus Priteca. The main design feature alteration was the addition of a stained glass dome to the ceiling, in order to increase the dramatic flair. It remains one of the most beautiful features of the current theater.



In 1926, the lobby was renovated with a new facade of red granite.

Up until this time, the Pantages had largely been used for variety-style stage acts. When it was sold to Radio Keith Orpheum (RKO) Corporation in 1929, the new owners decided to discontinue the theater's live entertainment in favor of showing talking picture shows.

The Pantages went through another renovation in 1945 when it was purchased by Edmund Ruben and the name was changed to RKO Pan. Much of the theater's original design was destroyed during the renovation, with the decrease in seating capacity and some, the addition of bird's eye maple to many areas. The main focus was to make the theater more accommodating for modern uses and give it a more modern-day feel.

The Pantages changed ownership again in 1961, when it was sold to Ted Mann, who owned a number of other theaters in the Minneapolis area. The theater underwent another renovation. Ted Mann had no interest in restoring the theater back to its original state, because the 1960's was a time



when anything old and classy was targeted to be torn down. His goal was to modernize it as much as possible and create a signature cinema theater. During the refurbishing, there was an



additional decrease in seating to 1100 red padded metal rocker seats, the mezzanine level, Alexander Pantages' signature element, was eliminated, the lobby was gutted and the colors were changed to blue and gold. Perhaps most devastating of all, was the stained glass skylight, which was covered with numerous layers of paint.

Although the original historical integrity of the Pantages design was lost, Mann was paramount in keeping the Pantages from the wrecking ball. Films such as "Spartacus", "West Side Story" and "Annie" were premiered at the newly renamed "Mann Theater".



And the "Sound of Music", which opened in 1965, went on to be the longest running film in the Twin Cities, running for just under two years. The Pantages was a very successful movie house until 1984, when it closed.

For twelve years, the Pantages sat empty, until it was purchased in 1996 by the City of Minneapolis. A five-year effort was initiated to restore the Pantages back to its original design. Historic architectural drawings were found and used to restore character of the theater. Molds were made from existing plasterwork to repair each piece of

decorative molding by hand. The stained glass skylight was refurbished after several layers of paint were removed and the mezzanine level was reestablished.

At a cost of \$9.5 million, the completely renewed



Pantages Theater

re-opened on November



7, 2002 under the management of the Hennepin Theater Group. It is currently used for both concerts and theater productions.

THE ORPHEUM THEATER

Originally known as The Hennepin, the Orpheum Theater opened in 1921. It was designed by the Milwaukee firm of Kirchhoff and Rose in the Beaux Arts style, similar to the Pantages. The terra cotta exterior was colorful and heavily ornamented. As with the other two, the extravagant design was meant to stand out from any other businesses on the street. Light bulbs were used by the hundreds, outlining the name of the theater. The recessed area below the marquee had large windows in the doors and walls which gave a view of the luxurious lobby. This served to suggest to the patron that they were already inside the lobby before they purchased their ticket. Like the



State and the Pantages Theaters, the Orpheum reflected luxury and the Golden Age of Hollywood.

The largest of the three restored theaters, the theater was actually two separate but connected structures.



The first was a long narrow lobby that extended back from the narrow facade along Hennepin Avenue. The stunning lobby contained terrazzo floors, brass light fixtures, and intricately detailed molded plaster,

reflecting the lavish feel of the Beaux Arts design. The auditorium featured a beautiful coffered ceiling with 30,000 squares of aluminum leaf, a recessed dome and a wide proscenium stage. Beautiful arches adorned the walls, as did delicate painting, further amplifying the opulence of the theater. On a practical note, the theater had a day care and a playroom for children of guests. The aim was to encourage people to see shows frequently. The Orpheum was heralded as the largest vaudeville house in the country and was a major performance venue for performers like Jack Benny, George Burns



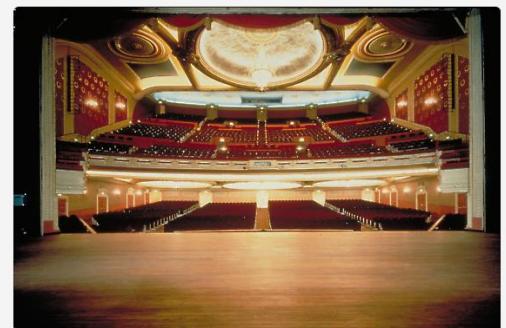
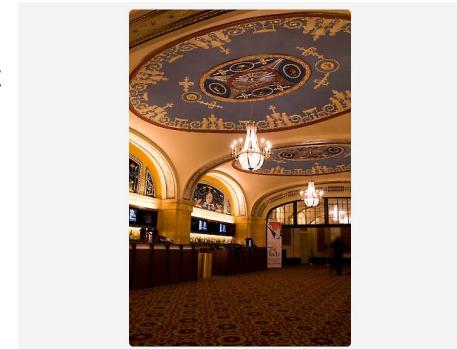
and the Marx Brothers.



When the popularity of vaudeville declined in the late 1930's, the Orpheum became a major venue for movies and big band music. For the next several years, it hosted a wide array of popular bands, until 1959, when it was

purchased by Ted Mann, owner of the nearby Pantages Theater. New ownership helped to bring in touring productions such as "Fiddler on the Roof" and "My Fair Lady". As the popularity of live theater in the 1960's, the Orpheum focused on showing movies.

Several years later, ownership changed hands again, when the theater was purchased and renovated by Bob Dylan. The renovation left much of the design intact, focusing mainly on the aspect of hosting concerts and Broadway plays. Dylan owned the theater for a short period of time, until 1988, when it was purchased by the Minneapolis Community Development Agency. Restoration began, with the focus on bringing back the original beauty of the Beaux Arts design. The colorful art of the plaster swags and garlands was restored, the beautiful medallions were repaired and the stage was extended 20 feet to allow for more elaborate Broadway productions. During the renovation, six Pompeian friezes were discovered under velour curtains and now stand in the lobby. Following the completion of the \$10 million restoration, the Orpheum re-opened in all its original 1920's Beaux Arts style in December of 1993.



Today, the Hennepin Theater Trust continues to own, operate and preserve these historic theaters. They are all on the National Register of Historic places. Each is considered an example of a structure that displays distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for study of style or method of construction. The original luxurious designs, meant to express the entertainment and fantasy of going to the theater have been restored for future generations to enjoy.