

= Her Majesty 's Theatre =

Her Majesty 's Theatre is a West End theatre situated on Haymarket in the City of Westminster , London . The present building was designed by Charles J. Phipps and was constructed in 1897 for actor @-@ manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree , who established the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art at the theatre . In the early decades of the 20th century , Tree produced spectacular productions of Shakespeare and other classical works , and the theatre hosted premières by major playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw , J. M. Synge , Noël Coward and J. B. Priestley . Since World War I , the wide stage has made the theatre suitable for large @-@ scale musical productions , and the theatre has specialised in hosting musicals . The theatre has been home to record @-@ setting musical theatre runs , notably the World War I sensation Chu Chin Chow and the current production , Andrew Lloyd Webber 's The Phantom of the Opera , which has played continuously at Her Majesty 's since 1986 .

The theatre was established by architect and playwright John Vanbrugh , in 1705 , as the Queen 's Theatre . Legitimate drama unaccompanied by music was prohibited by law in all but the two London patent theatres , and so this theatre quickly became an opera house . Between 1711 and 1739 , more than 25 operas by George Frideric Handel premiered here . In the early 19th century , the theatre hosted the opera company that was to move to the Theatre Royal , Covent Garden , in 1847 , and presented the first London performances of Mozart 's La clemenza di Tito , Così fan tutte and Don Giovanni . It also hosted the Ballet of her Majesty 's Theatre in the mid @-@ 19th century , before returning to hosting the London premières of such operas as Bizet 's Carmen and Wagner 's Ring Cycle .

The name of the theatre changes with the sex of the monarch ! It first became the King 's Theatre in 1714 on the accession of George I. It was renamed Her Majesty 's Theatre in 1837 . Most recently , the theatre was known as His Majesty 's Theatre from 1901 to 1952 , and it became Her Majesty 's on the accession of Elizabeth II . The theatre 's capacity is 1 @, @ 216 seats , and the building was Grade II \* listed by English Heritage in 1970 . Really Useful Theatres has owned the building since 2000 . The land beneath it is on a long @-@ term lease from the Crown Estate .

= = History = =

The end of the 17th century was a period of intense rivalry amongst London 's actors , and in 1695 there was a split in the United Company , who had a monopoly on the performance of drama at their two theatres . Dramatist and architect John Vanbrugh saw this as an opportunity to break the duopoly of the patent theatres , and in 1703 he acquired a former stable yard , at a cost of £ 2000 , for the construction of a new theatre on the Haymarket . In the new business , he hoped to improve the share of profits that would go to playwrights and actors . He raised the money by subscription , probably amongst members of the Kit @-@ Cat Club :

To recover them [ that is , Thomas Betterton 's company ] , therefore , to their due Estimation , a new Project was form 'd of building them a stately theatre in the Hay @-@ Market , by Sir John Vanbrugh , for which he raised a Subscription of thirty Persons of Quality , at one hundred Pounds each , in Consideration whereof every Subscriber , for his own Life , was to be admitted to whatever Entertainments should be publickly perform 'd there , without farther Payment for his Entrance .

? John Vanbrugh 's notice of subscription for the new theatre

He was joined in the enterprise by his principal associate and manager William Congreve and an actors ' co @-@ operative led by Thomas Betterton .

The theatre provided the first alternative to the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane , built in 1663 and the Lincoln 's Inn , founded in 1660 ( forerunner of the Theatre Royal , Covent Garden , built in 1728 ) . The theatre 's site is the second oldest such site in London that remains in use . These three post @-@ interregnum theatres defined the shape and use of modern theatres .

= = = Vanbrugh 's theatre : 1705 ? 1789 = = =

The land for the theatre was held on a lease renewable in 1740 and was ultimately owned , as it is today , by the Crown Estate . Building was delayed by the necessity of acquiring the street frontage , and a three bay entrance led to a brick shell 130 feet ( 39 @. @ 6 m ) long and 60 feet ( 18 @. @ 3 m ) wide . Colley Cibber described the audience fittings as lavish but the facilities for playing poor .

Vanbrugh and Congreve received Queen Anne 's authority to form a Company of Comedians on 14 December 1704 , and the theatre opened as The Queen 's Theatre on 9 April 1705 with imported Italian singers in *Gli amori d'Ergasto* ( The Loves of Ergasto ) , an opera by Jakob Greber , with an epilogue by Congreve . This was the first Italian opera performed in London . The opera failed , and the season struggled on through May , with revivals of plays and operas . The first new play performed was *The Conquest of Spain* by Mary Pix . The theatre proved too large for actors ' voices to carry across the auditorium , and the first season was a failure . Congreve departed , Vanbrugh bought out his other partners , and the actors reopened the Lincoln 's Inn Fields ' theatre in the summer . Although early productions combined spoken dialogue with incidental music , a taste was growing amongst the nobility for Italian opera , which was completely sung , and the theatre became devoted to opera . As he became progressively more involved in the construction of Blenheim Palace , Vanbrugh 's management of the theatre became increasingly chaotic , showing " numerous signs of confusion , inefficiency , missed opportunities , and bad judgement " . On 7 May 1707 , experiencing mounting losses and running costs , Vanbrugh was forced to sell a lease on the theatre for fourteen years to Owen Swiny at a considerable loss . In December of that year , the Lord Chamberlain 's Office ordered that " all Operas and other Musically presentments be performed for the future only at Her Majesty 's Theatre in the Hay Market " and forbade the performance of further non @-@ musical plays there .

After 1709 , the theatre was devoted to Italian opera and was sometimes known informally as The Haymarket Opera House . Young George Frideric Handel produced his English début , *Rinaldo* , on 24 February 1711 at the theatre , featuring the two leading castrati of the era , Nicolo Grimaldi and Valentino Urbani . This was the first Italian opera composed specifically for the London stage . The work was well received , and Handel was appointed resident composer for the theatre , but losses continued , and Swiny fled abroad to escape his creditors . John James Heidegger took over the management of the theatre and , from 1719 , began to extend the stage through arches into the houses to the south of the theatre . A " Royal Academy of Music " was formed by subscription from wealthy sponsors , including the Prince of Wales , to support Handel 's productions at the theatre . Under this sponsorship , Handel conducted a series of more than 25 of his original operas , continuing until 1739 Handel was also a partner in the management with Heidegger from 1729 to 1734 , and he contributed to incidental music for theatre , including for a revival of Ben Jonson 's *The Alchemist* , opening on 14 January 1710 .

On the accession of George I in 1714 , the theatre was renamed the King 's Theatre and remained so named during a succession of male monarchs who occupied the throne . At this time only the two patent theatres were permitted to perform serious drama in London , and lacking Letters patent , the theatre remained associated with opera . In 1762 , Johann Christian Bach travelled to London to première three operas at the theatre , including *Orione* on 19 February 1763 . This established his reputation in England , and he became music master to Queen Charlotte .

In 1778 , the lease for the theatre was transferred from James Brook to Thomas Harris , stage manager of the Theatre Royal , Covent Garden , and to the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan for £ 22 @, @ 000 . They paid for the remodelling of the interior by Robert Adam in the same year . In November 1778 , The Morning Chronicle reported that Harris and Sheridan had

... at a considerable expence , almost entirely new built the audience part of the house , and made a great variety of alterations , part of which are calculated for the rendering the theatre more light , elegant , and pleasant , and part for the ease and convenience of the company . The sides of the frontispiece are decorated with two figures painted by Gainsborough , which are remarkably picturesque and beautiful ; the heavy columns which gave the house so gloomy an aspect that it rather resembled a large mausoleum or a place for funeral dirges , than a theatre , are removed .

? November 1778 , The Morning Chronicle

The expense of the improvements was not matched by the box office receipts , and the partnership

dissolved , with Sheridan buying out his partner with a mortgage on the theatre of £ 12 @, @ 000 obtained from the banker Henry Hoare .

One member of the company , Giovanni Gallini , had made his début at the theatre in 1753 and had risen to the position of dancing master , gaining an international reputation . Gallini had tried to buy Harris ' share but had been rebuffed . He now purchased the mortgage . Sheridan quickly became bankrupt after placing the financial affairs of the theatre in the hands of William Taylor , a lawyer . The next few years saw a struggle for control of the theatre , and Taylor bought Sheridan 's interest in 1781 . In 1782 the theatre was remodelled by Michael Novosielski , formerly a scene painter at the theatre . In May 1783 , Taylor was arrested by his creditors , and a forced sale ensued , with Harris purchasing the lease and much of the effects . Further legal action transferred the interests in the theatre to a board of trustees , including Novosielski . The trustees acted with a flagrant disregard for the needs of the theatre or other creditors , seeking only to enrich themselves , and in August 1785 the Lord Chamberlain took over the running of the enterprise , in the interests of the creditors . Gallini , meanwhile , had become manager . In 1788 , the Lord Chancellor observed " that there appeared in all the proceedings respecting this business , a wish of distressing the property , and that it would probably be consumed in that very court to which ... [ the interested parties ] seemed to apply for relief " . Performances suffered , with the box receipts taken by Novosielski , rather than given to Gallini to run the house . Money continued to be squandered on endless litigation or was misappropriated . Gallini tried to keep the theatre going , but he was forced to employ amateur performers . The World described a performance as follows : " ... the dance , if such it can be called was like the movements of heavy cavalry . It was hissed very abundantly . " At other times , Gallini had to defend himself against a dissatisfied audience who charged the stage and destroyed the fittings , as the company ran for their lives .

The theatre burnt down on 17 June 1789 during evening rehearsals , and the dancers fled the building as beams fell onto the stage . The fire had been deliberately set on the roof , and Gallini offered a reward of £ 300 for capture of the culprit . With the theatre destroyed , each group laid their own plans for a replacement . Gallini obtained a licence from the Lord Chamberlain to perform opera at the nearby Little Theatre , and he entered into a partnership with R. B. O 'Reilly to obtain land in Leicester Fields for a new building , which too would require a licence . The two quarrelled , and each then planned to wrest control of the venture from the other . The authorities refused to grant either of them a patent for Leicester Fields , but O 'Reilly was granted a licence for four years to put on opera at the Oxford Street Pantheon . This too , would burn to the ground in 1792 . Meanwhile , Taylor reached an agreement with the creditors of the King 's Theatre and attempted to purchase the remainder of the lease from Edward Vanbrugh , but this was now promised to O 'Reilly . A further complication arose as the theatre needed to expand onto adjacent land that now came into the possession of a Taylor supporter . The scene was set for a further war of attrition between the lessees , but at this point O 'Reilly 's first season at the Pantheon failed miserably , and he fled to Paris to avoid his creditors .

By 1720 , Vanbrugh 's direct connection with the theatre had been terminated , but the leases and rents had been transferred to both his own family and that of his wife 's through a series of trusts and benefices , with Vanbrugh himself building a new home in Greenwich . After the fire , the Vanbrugh family 's long association with the theatre was terminated , and all their leases were surrendered by 1792 .

= = = Second theatre : 1791 ? 1867 = = =

Taylor completed a new theatre on the site in 1791 . Michael Novosielski had again been chosen as architect for the theatre on an enlarged site , but the building was described by Malcolm in 1807 as fronted by a stone basement in rustic work , with the commencement of a very superb building of the Doric order , consisting of three pillars , two windows , an entablature , pediment , and balustrade . This , if it had been continued , would have contributed considerably to the splendour of London ; but the unlucky fragment is fated to stand as a foil to the vile and absurd edifice of brick pieced to it , which I have not patience to describe .

? The critic Malcolm , quoted in Old and New London ( 1878 )

The Lord Chamberlain , a supporter of O 'Reilly , refused a performing licence to Taylor . The theatre opened on 26 March 1791 with a private performance of song and dance entertainment , but was not allowed to open to the public . The new theatre was heavily indebted and spanned separate plots of land that were leased to Taylor by four different owners on differing terms of revision . As a later manager of the theatre wrote , " In the history of property , there has probably been no parallel instance wherein the legal labyrinth has been so difficult to thread . " Meetings were held at Carlton House and Bedford House attempting to reconcile the parties . On 24 August 1792 a General Opera Trust Deed was signed by the parties . The general management of the theatre was to be entrusted to a committee of noblemen , appointed by the Prince of Wales , who would then appoint a general manager . Funds would be disbursed from the profits to compensate the creditors of both the King 's Theatre and the Pantheon . The committee never met , and management devolved to Taylor .

= = = = William Taylor = = = =

The first public performance of opera in the new theatre took place on 26 January 1793 , the dispute with the Lord Chamberlain over the licence having been settled . This theatre was , at that time , the largest in England , and it became the home of the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane company while that company 's home theatre was itself rebuilt between 1791 ? 94 .

From 1793 , seven small houses at the east side of the theatre fronting on the Haymarket were demolished and replaced by a large concert room . It was in this room that Joseph Haydn gave a series of concerts , under the sponsorship of Johann Peter Salomon , on his second visit to London in 1794 ? 95 . He presented his own symphonies , some of them premieres , conducted by himself , and was paid £ 50 each for 20 concerts . He was feted in London and returned to Vienna in May 1795 with 12 @ , @ 000 florins .

With the departure of the Drury Lane company in 1794 , the theatre returned to opera , hosting the first London performances of Mozart 's La clemenza di Tito in 1806 , Così fan tutte and Die Zauberflöte in 1811 , and Don Giovanni in 1816 . Between 1816 and 1818 , John Nash and George Repton made alterations to the façade and increased the capacity of the auditorium to 2 @ , @ 500 . They also added a shopping arcade , called the Royal Opera Arcade , which has survived fires and renovations and still exists . It runs along the rear of the theatre . In 1818 ? 20 , the British premières of Gioachino Rossini 's operas Il barbiere di Siviglia , Elisabetta , regina d 'Inghilterra , L 'italiana in Algeri , La Cenerentola and Tancredi took place , and the theatre became known as the Italian Opera House , Haymarket by the 1820s .

In 1797 , he was elected as member of Parliament for Leominster , a position that gave him immunity from his creditors . When that parliament dissolved in 1802 , he fled to France . Later , he returned , and was member of Parliament for Barnstaple from 1806 to 1812 while continuing his association with the theatre . Taylor paid little of the agreed receipts to performers , or composers , and lived for much of his period of management in the King 's Bench , a debtors ' prison in Southwark . Here he maintained an apartment next to Lady Hamilton and lived in some luxury , entertaining lavishly .

= = = = John Ebers = = = =

John Ebers , a bookseller , took over the management of the theatre in 1821 , and seven more London premieres of Rossini operas ( La gazza ladra , Il turco in Italia , Mosè in Egitto , Otello , La donna del lago , Matilde di Shabran and Ricciardo e Zoraide ) took place there in the following three years . Ebers sublet the theatre to Giambattista Benelli in 1824 , and Rossini was invited to conduct , remaining for a five @ - @ month season , with his wife Isabella Colbran performing . Two more of his operas , Zelmira and Semiramide , received their British premières during the season , but the theatre sustained huge losses , and Benelli absconded without paying either the composer or the artists . Ebers engaged Giuditta Pasta for the 1825 season , but he became involved in lawsuits which , combined with a large increase in the rent of the theatre , forced him into bankruptcy , after

which he returned to his bookselling business .

= = = Pierre François Laporte = = =

In 1828 , Ebers was succeeded as theatre manager by Pierre François Laporte , who held the position ( with a brief gap in 1831 ? 33 ) until his death in 1841 . Two of Rossini 's Paris operas ( *Le comte Ory* and *Le siège de Corinthe* ) had their British premières at the theatre during this period , and Laporte was also the first to introduce the operas of Vincenzo Bellini ( *La sonnambula* , *Norma* and *I puritani* ) and Gaetano Donizetti ( *Anna Bolena* , *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia* ) to the British public . Under Laporte , singers such as Giulia Grisi , Pauline Viardot , Giovanni Battista Rubini , Luigi Lablache and Mario made their London stage debuts at the theatre . Among the musical directors of this period was Nicolas Bochsa , the celebrated and eccentric French harpist . He was appointed in 1827 and remained for six years at this position . When Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 , the name of the theatre was changed to Her Majesty 's Theatre , Italian Opera House . In the same year , Samuel Phelps made his London début as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* at the theatre , also playing in other Shakespearean plays here .

Over the course of the 1840s , Dion Boucicault had five plays produced here : *The Bastile* [ sic ] , an " after @-@ piece " ( 1842 ) , *Old Heads and Young Hearts* ( 1844 ) , *The School for Scheming* ( 1847 ) , *Confidence* ( 1848 ) , and *The Knight Arva* ( 1848 ) . In 1853 , Robert Browning 's *Colombe* 's Birthday played at the theatre .

In 1841 , disputes arose over Laporte 's decision to replace the baritone Antonio Tamburini with a new singer , Colletti . The audience stormed the stage , and the performers formed a ' revolutionary conspiracy ' .

= = = Benjamin Lumley = = =

Laporte died suddenly , and Benjamin Lumley took over the management in 1842 , introducing London audiences to Donizetti 's late operas , *Don Pasquale* and *La fille du régiment* . Initially , relations between Lumley and Michael Costa , the principal conductor at Her Majesty 's were good . Verdi 's *Ernani* , *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* received their British premières in 1845 ? 46 , and Lumley commissioned *I masnadieri* from the composer . This opera received its world première on 22 July 1847 , with the Swedish operatic diva Jenny Lind in the role of Amalia , and the British premières of two more Verdi operas , *I due Foscari* and *Attila* , followed in 1847 ? 48 . Meanwhile , the performers had continued to feel neglected and the disputes continued . In 1847 , Costa finally transferred his opera company to the Theatre Royal , Covent Garden , and the theatre relinquished the sobriquet , ' Italian Opera House ' , to assume its present title , Her Majesty 's Theatre .

Lumley engaged Michael Balfe to conduct the orchestra and entered negotiations with Felix Mendelssohn for a new opera . Jenny Lind had made her English début on 4 May 1847 in the role of Alice in Giacomo Meyerbeer 's *Robert le Diable* , in the presence of the Royal family and the composer Felix Mendelssohn . Such was the press of people around the theatre that many " arrived at last with dresses crushed and torn , and coats hanging in shreds , having suffered bruises and blows in the struggle " . She performed for a number of acclaimed seasons at the theatre , interspersed with national tours , becoming known as the Swedish Nightingale . The secession of the orchestra to Covent Garden was a blow , and the theatre closed in 1852 , re @-@ opening in 1856 , when a fire closed its rival . After the reopening , Lumley presented two more British premières of Verdi operas : *La traviata* in 1856 and *Luisa Miller* in 1858 .

From the early 1830s until the late 1840s Her Majesty 's Theatre played host to the heyday of the era of the romantic ballet , and the theatre 's resident ballet company was considered the most renowned in Europe , aside from the Ballet du Théâtre de l 'Académie Royale de Musique in Paris . The celebrated ballet master Jules Perrot began staging ballet at Her Majesty 's in 1830 . Lumley appointed him Premier Maître de Ballet ( chief choreographer ) to the theatre in 1842 . Among the works of ballet that he staged were *Ondine* , ou *La Naïade* ( 1843 ) , *La Esmeralda* ( 1844 ) , and *Catarina* , ou *La Fille du Bandit* ( 1846 ) , as well as the celebrated divertissement *Pas de Quatre* (

1845 ) . Other ballet masters created works for the ballet of Her Majesty 's Theatre throughout the period of the romantic ballet , most notably Paul Taglioni ( son of Filippo Taglioni ) , who staged ballets including Coralia , ou Le Chevalier inconstant ( 1847 ) and Electra ( 1849 , the first production of a ballet to make use of electric lighting ) . Arthur Saint @-@ Léon staged such works as La Vivandière ( 1844 ) , Le Violin du Diable ( 1849 ) , and Le Jugement de Pâris ( 1850 ) , which was considered a sequel of sorts to Pas de Quatre .

The Italian composer Cesare Pugni was appointed Composer of the Ballet Music to the theatre in 1843 , a position created for him by Lumley . From 1843 until 1850 , he composed nearly every new ballet presented at the theatre . Pugni remains the most prolific composer of the genre , having composed more than 100 original ballets , as well as composing numerous divertissements and incidental dances that were often performed as diversions during the intermissions of opera performances at the theatre . Throughout the era of the romantic ballet , the theatre presented performances by notable ballerinas , including Marie Taglioni , Carlotta Grisi , Fanny Elssler , Lucile Grahn , and Fanny Cerrito , performing in the works of Perrot , Taglioni and Saint @-@ Léon .

= = = = J. H. Mapleson = = = =

From 1862 to 1867 , the theatre was managed by James Henry Mapleson , presenting Italian , French and German opera , including the British premières of La forza del destino , Médée , Faust and The Merry Wives of Windsor , and promoting such singers as Mario , Giulia Grisi , De Murska , Thérèse Tietjens , Antonio Giuglini , Charles Santley and Christine Nilsson . On the night of 6 December 1867 , the theatre was destroyed by fire , thought to have been caused by an overheated stove . Only the bare walls of the theatre remained , and most of the adjacent shops in Pall Mall , and the Clergy Club hotel in Charles Street , suffered damage of varying severity . The Royal Opera Arcade , on the western side , survived with only superficial damage . With the destruction of the theatre , Mapleson took his company to the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane .

By the 1850s , with the era of the romantic ballet at an end , the principal personalities of the ballet , such as Perrot , Saint @-@ Léon , Taglioni , and the composer Pugni , joined the Tsar 's Imperial Ballet of St. Petersburg , Russia . Ballet in London went through a considerable decline beginning with the fire at Her Majesty 's Theatre , a decline that lasted until the end of the 19th century . Ballet in London was not resurrected until the early 20th century , when such dancers as Adeline Genée began performing . The theatre 's ballet company found a new home at the Old Vic and soon took on the name of the Vic @-@ Wells Ballet . Later , relocating primarily to the Sadler 's Wells Theatre , the company became known as the Sadler 's Wells Ballet . Eventually the troupe began performing at the Royal Opera House and became the Royal Ballet , as it is known today .

= = = Third theatre : 1868 ? 1896 = = =

A third building was constructed in 1868 at a cost of £ 50 @,@ 000 , within the shell of the old theatre , for Lord Dudley . It was designed by Charles Lee and Sons and their partner , William Pain . They had taken over John Nash 's practice on his retirement . The new theatre was designed to be less susceptible to fire , with brick firewalls , iron roof trusses and Dennett 's patent gypsum @-@ cement floors . The auditorium had four tiers , with a stage large enough for the greatest spectacles . For opera , the theatre seated 1 @,@ 890 , and for plays , with the orchestra pit removed , 2 @,@ 500 . As a result of a dispute over the rent between Dudley and Mapleson , and a decline in the popularity of ballet , the theatre remained dark until 1874 , when it was sold to a Revivalist Christian group for £ 31 @,@ 000 .

Mapleson returned to Her Majesty 's in 1877 and 1878 , after a disastrous attempt to build a 2 @,@ 000 @-@ seat National Opera House on a site subsequently used for the building of Scotland Yard . On the return of the company , all the fittings of the theatre had been removed , including the seats , carpets and even the wallpaper . £ 6 @,@ 000 was spent on fitting out the theatre , and on 28 April 1877 the building returned to theatrical use with the opening of Vincenzo Bellini 's opera Norma . The London première of Bizet 's Carmen occurred here on 22 June 1878 , and in subsequent

seasons the theatre hosted the Carl Rosa Opera Company ( Rosa 's wife , Euphrosyne Parepa , had made her name in opera partly at Her Majesty 's ) and a programme of French plays and light opera . The company was the first to produce Carmen in English , at the theatre in February 1879 , starring Selina Dolaro in the title role and Durward Lely as Don José . In 1882 , the theatre hosted the London premières of Wagner 's Ring cycle .

Mapleson returned in 1887 and 1889 , but The Times commented that the repertoire comprised " works that had long ceased to attract a large public , the singers were exclusively of second @-@ rate quality , and the standard of performance was extremely low " . Rigoletto , on 25 May 1889 , was the last operatic performance given in the house .

= = Phipps ' theatre : 1897 ? present = =

With the rapid advances in theatre technology made during this period , the 1868 theatre quickly became outmoded , and the sub @-@ lease of the theatre , still held by the Dudley family , was due to expire in 1891 . The Commissioners of Woods , Forests and Land Revenues ( forerunners of the Crown Estate ) desired the entire block on which the theatre stood to be rebuilt , except for the Royal Arcade , where the lease did not expire until 1912 . Problems were encountered in obtaining all the buildings and in financing the scheme , but the theatre and surrounding buildings were demolished in 1892 . Plans were commissioned from architect Charles J. Phipps for a theatre and a hotel . In February 1896 an agreement was reached with Herbert Beerbohm Tree for the erection of the theatre at a cost of £ 55 @, @ 000 . The plans were approved in February 1897 , and on 16 July 1896 , the foundation stone of the new theatre was laid . Phipps died in 1897 , and the theatre was his last work .

= = = Architecture = = =

The theatre was designed as a symmetrical pair with the Carlton Hotel and restaurant on the adjacent site , now occupied by New Zealand House . The frontage formed three parts , each of nine bays . The hotel occupied two parts , the theatre one , and the two buildings were unified by a cornice above the ground floor . The buildings rose to four storeys , with attic floors above , surmounted by large squared domes in a style inspired by the French Renaissance . The theatre has a Corinthian colonnade at the first floor , rising to the second , forming a loggia in front of the circle foyer . This is above a canopy over the main ground floor entrances . The theatre lies on an east ? west axis . The stage at the western end was 49 feet ( 14 @. @ 9 m ) deep and 69 @. @ 5 feet ( 21 @. @ 2 m ) wide , and reputedly the first to be flat , rather than raked . The interior was designed by the consulting architect , W. H. Romaine @-@ Walker ( 1854 ? 1940 ) , after the Opera at Versailles by Gabriel . Stalls and the pit were entered at ground level , with two partly cantilevered tiers above accommodating dress and family circles on the first level , and upper circle , amphitheatre and gallery on the tier above . In all , there were 1 @, @ 319 seats . Contemporary opinion was critical of the project . Edwin Sachs wrote in his 1897 guide to theatres , " The treatment is considered to be in the French Renaissance style and stone has been used throughout . The detail cannot , however , be termed satisfactory , nor does the exterior architecturally express the purpose of the building . "

Modern opinion of the theatre is more generous , with English Heritage describing the building as both Phipps ' finest work and one of the best planned theatres in London . The building was Grade II \* listed in January 1970 . Appreciation of the buildings came too late to save the adjacent hotel from redevelopment as the new High Commission for New Zealand , completed in 1963 by British architects Robert Matthew , Johnson Marshall and Partners , who also designed the Commonwealth Institute . In 1995 , this too was Grade II listed as a fine example of 1960s architecture . The 200 @-@ year @-@ old Royal Opera Arcade , built by Nash and Repton , is all that survives of the second theatre and is the earliest example of a London arcade .

= = = Performance = = =

The current theatre opened on 28 April 1897 . Herbert Beerbohm Tree built the theatre with profits from his tremendous success at the Haymarket Theatre , and he owned , managed and lived in the theatre from its construction until his death in 1917 . For his personal use , he had a banqueting hall and living room installed in the massive , central , square French @-@ style dome . This building did not specialise in opera , although there were some operatic performances in its early years . The theatre opened with a dramatisation of Gilbert Parker 's The Seats of the Mighty . Adaptations of novels by Dickens , Tolstoy , and others formed a significant part of the repertoire , along with classical works from Molière and Shakespeare . The theatre also hosted the world première of J. M. Synge 's The Tinker 's Wedding on 11 November 1909 and George Bernard Shaw 's Pygmalion , with Tree as Henry Higgins and Mrs Patrick Campbell as Eliza , in 1914 . Tree 's productions were known for their elaborate and spectacular scenery and effects , often including live animals and real grass . These remained both popular and profitable , but in his last decade , Tree 's acting style was seen as increasingly outmoded , and many of his plays received bad reviews . Tree defended himself from critical censure , demonstrating his continuing popularity at the box office until his death .

In 1904 , Tree founded the Academy of Dramatic Art ( later RADA ) , which spent a year based in the theatre before moving in 1905 to Gower Street in Bloomsbury . Tree continued to take graduates of the Academy into his company at His Majesty 's , employing some 40 actors in this way by 1911 .

The facilities of the theatre naturally lent themselves to the new genre of musical theatre . Chu Chin Chow opened in 1916 and ran for an astonishing world record 2 @,@ 235 performances ( almost twice as long as the previous record for musical theatre ? a record that it held until surpassed by Salad Days in 1955 ) . Major productions of plays with large casts were also performed at His Majesty 's . George and Ira Gershwin 's Oh , Kay ! had its London première on 21 September 1927 . This starred Gertrude Lawrence and John Kirby , and ran for 213 performances . Noël Coward 's operetta Bitter Sweet enjoyed a run of 697 performances beginning 18 July 1929 . J. B. Priestley 's theatrical adaptation of his own The Good Companions premièred on 14 May 1931 .

Musicals continued to dominate at the theatre in the post @-@ World War II period , including transfers of the successful Broadway productions Follow the Girls ( 1945 ; 572 performances ) and the Lerner and Loewe musicals Brigadoon ( 1949 ; 685 performances ) and Paint Your Wagon ( 1953 ; 478 performances ) . Leonard Bernstein 's West Side Story opened in December 1958 for a run of 1 @,@ 039 performances , transferring from Broadway via the Manchester Opera House . The London première of Fiddler on the Roof was on 16 February 1967 , starring Chaim Topol , and the production ran at Her Majesty 's for 2 @,@ 030 performances . Forty years after the original stage adaptation , André Previn 's musical adaptation of The Good Companions premièred on 11 July 1974 , followed by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Alan Ayckbourn 's initially unsuccessful collaboration , Jeeves , on 22 April 1975 , which has since enjoyed considerable success .

John Cleese organised A Poke in the Eye ( With a Sharp Stick ) as a benefit for Amnesty International at the theatre in 1976 , and it was broadcast as Pleasure at Her Majesty 's . This was the first of The Secret Policeman 's Balls , organised by and starring such performers as Peter Cook , Graham Chapman , and Rowan Atkinson . The venue was also the setting for the popular ITV variety series Live from Her Majesty 's , which ran on television from 1983 to 1988 . It was on this programme that Tommy Cooper collapsed and died on stage in 1984 .

This theatre is one of the 40 theatres featured in the 2012 DVD documentary series Great West End Theatres , presented by Donald Sinden .

= = = Phantom of the Opera = = =

The Phantom of the Opera had its world première on 9 October 1986 at the theatre , winning the Olivier Award for Best New Musical and featuring Sarah Brightman and Michael Crawford , who won an Olivier award for his performance in the title role . The piece is still playing at Her Majesty 's , celebrating its 25th anniversary in October 2011 and surpassing 10 @,@ 000 performances in October 2010 . It is the second longest @-@ running West End musical in history ( after Les



Misérables ) . In a sign of its continuing popularity , Phantom ranked second in a 2006 BBC Radio 2 listener poll of the " Nation 's Number One Essential Musicals " . The musical is also the longest @-@ running show on Broadway , was made into a film in 2004 and had been seen by over 130 million people in 145 cities in 27 countries and grossed more than £ 3.2bn ( \$ 5bn ) by 2011 , the most successful entertainment project in history .

Her Majesty 's Theatre 's " grand exterior " and " luxurious interior , with its three tiers of boxes and gold statuary around the stage " , as well as French Renaissance design , " make it an ideal site for this Gothic tale " set at the Opéra Garnier . The original Victorian stage machinery remains beneath the stage of the theatre . Designer Maria Björnson found a way to use it " to show the Phantom travelling across the lake as if floating on a sea of mist and fire " , in a key scene from the musical . On 5 May 2008 , for the first time in the run , the show closed for three days . This allowed the installation of an improved sound system at the theatre , consisting of over 6 miles ( 10 km ) of cabling and the siting of 120 auditorium speakers .

The theatre 's capacity is 1 @, @ 216 seats on four levels . Really Useful Theatres Group purchased it in January 2000 with nine other London theatres formerly owned by the Stoll @-@ Moss Group . Between 1990 and 1993 , renovation and improvements were made by the H.L.M. and C. G. Twelves partnership . In 2014 , Really Useful Theatres split @-@ off from the Really Useful Group and owns the theatre .