

= Chicago Theatre =

The Chicago Theatre , originally known as the Balaban and Katz Chicago Theatre , is a landmark theater located on North State Street in the Loop area of Chicago , Illinois , in the United States . Built in 1921 , the Chicago Theatre was the flagship for the Balaban and Katz (B & K) group of theaters run by A. J. Balaban , his brother Barney Balaban and partner Sam Katz . Along with the other B & K theaters , from 1925 to 1945 the Chicago Theatre was a dominant movie theater enterprise . Currently , Madison Square Garden , Inc. owns and operates the Chicago Theatre as a performing arts venue for stage plays , magic shows , comedy , speeches , and popular music concerts .

The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places June 6 , 1979 , and was listed as a Chicago Landmark January 28 , 1983 . The distinctive Chicago Theatre marquee , " an unofficial emblem of the city " , appears frequently in film , television , artwork , and photography .

= = History = =

= = = Grand opening , growth , and decline = = =

Abe and Barney Balaban , together with Sam and Morris Katz ? founders of the Balaban and Katz theater chain , built the Chicago Theatre in 1921 as one of a large chain of opulent motion picture houses . The theater would become the flagship for 28 theaters in the city and over 100 others in the Midwestern United States that B & K operated in conjunction with the Paramount Publix chain . Cornelius W. Rapp and George L. Rapp were primary architects and the final construction cost was \$ 4 million (\$ 53 @. @ 1 million in 2016 dollars) . The Rapp brothers also designed many other B & K properties in Chicago , including the Oriental and Uptown Theatres . Preceded by the now @-@ demolished Tivoli Theatre of Chicago and Capitol Theatre of New York City , the Chicago Theatre was the " ... largest , most costly and grandest of the super deluxe movie palaces " built up to that date and thus now the oldest surviving grand movie palace . The Chicago Theatre was among the earliest theaters in the nation to be built in Rapp and Rapp 's signature Neo @-@ Baroque French @-@ revival style . It is the oldest surviving example of this style in Chicago .

The original 1921 interior decoration of the auditorium included fourteen large romantic French @-@ themed murals surrounding the proscenium by Chicago artist Louis Grell (1887 @-@ 1960) , a common feature that Rapp and Rapp architects included in their movie palace designs .

When it opened October 26 , 1921 , the 3 @, @ 880 seat theater was promoted as the " Wonder Theatre of the World " . Capacity crowds packed the theater during its opening week for the First National Pictures feature The Sign on the Door starring Norma Talmadge . Other attractions included a 50 @-@ piece orchestra , famed organist Jesse Crawford at the 26 @-@ rank Wurlitzer theatre organ ? " Oh , yes , it was mighty , " recalled Orson Welles ? and a live stage show . Poet Carl Sandburg , reporting for the Chicago Tribune , wrote that mounted police were required for crowd control . The theater 's strategy of enticing movie patrons with a plush environment and top notch service (including the pioneering use of air conditioning) was emulated nationwide .

During its first 40 years of operation , the Chicago Theatre presented premiere films and live entertainment . Throughout its existence , many of the top performers and stars of their day made live appearances at the theater . One of its biggest draws was live jazz , which Balaban and Katz promoted as early as September 1922 in a special event they called " Syncopation Week " . This proved so successful that jazz bands became a mainstay of the Chicago Theatre 's programming through the 1920s and into the 1930s . In preparation for the 1933 World 's Fair in Chicago , the Chicago Theatre was redecorated . Part of the World 's Fair renovation included another commission by Balaban & Katz for Grell to repaint the architecturally enclosed fourteen murals . This time Grell chose Greek / Roman deities as the theme for the large oil on canvas murals which are on public exhibit today in the theatre auditorium . The building has been associated with popular culture occasions . For example , Ronald Reagan announced his engagement to Jane Wyman at

the theater . Another modernization occurred in the 1950s when management discontinued stage shows .

During the economic and social changes of the 1970s , business at the theatre slowed for owner Plitt Theatres , affecting ongoing viability . In 1984 , the Chicago Theatre Preservation Group purchased the theater and adjoining Page Brothers Building for \$ 11 @. @ 5 million (\$ 26 @. @ 2 million today) . The group attempted to maintain the venue as a picture theater but was unable to remain viable and the facility closed September 19 , 1985 .

= = = Restoration = = =

The Chicago Theatre Preservation Group commenced renovation of the buildings which were completed in 1986 at a cost of \$ 9 million (\$ 19 @. @ 4 million) , with \$ 4 @. @ 3 million (\$ 9 @. @ 3 million) spent on the Theatre . The renovation by architects Daniel P. Coffey & Associates , Ltd. and interior design consultants A.T. Heinsbergen & Co. restored the Chicago Theatre to a 1930s appearance and a seating capacity of 3 @, @ 600 . The theatre reopened September 10 , 1986 , with a performance by Frank Sinatra marking the culmination of a four @- @ year historic preservation effort championed by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois , The gala reopening was also symbolic because Sinatra had performed at the theater in the 1950s . The restoration of the adjoining Page Building , itself a Chicago and National Register landmark , provided office space to support the theatre . The theater , like its neighbor the Joffrey Tower , is an important component of the North Loop / Theatre District revitalization plan . Theatre district revitalization plans go back as far as Mayor Jane Byrne 's 1981 plan .

= = = Revitalized = = =

On April 1 , 2004 , TheatreDreams Chicago , LLC purchased the building for \$ 3 million . The Balaban and Katz trademark is now the property of the Balaban and Katz Historical Foundation . New York 's Madison Square Garden Entertainment announced October 11 , 2007 , that it would buy the theater .

Prior to 2008 , the theater hosted the annual opening film of the Chicago International Film Festival until the festivities moved to the nearby Harris Theater . Mayor Richard M. Daley declared July 12 , 2005 " Roger Ebert Day in Chicago " and dedicated a plaque under the marquee in his honor . The theater is featured in the book , The Chicago Movie Palaces of Balaban and Katz , by David Balaban , grandson of the original owner .

As of 2011 , as permitted under the terms of sale dictated by the city , the vertical CHICAGO sign had a logotype for Chase Bank added to indicate sponsorship .

= = Architecture = =

The structure is seven stories tall and fills nearly one half of a city block . The 60 @- @ foot (18 m) wide by six @- @ story tall triumphal arch motif of the State Street façade has been journalistically compared to the l 'Arc de Triomphe in Paris . The central arch @- @ headed window adapts the familiar motif of Borromini 's false @- @ perspective window reveals of the top floor of Palazzo Barberini , Rome . The coat of arms of the Balaban and Katz chain ? two horses holding ribbons of 35 mm film in their mouths outlined by a border of film reels ? is set inside a circular Tiffany stained glass window inside the arch . The exterior of the building is covered in off @- @ white architectural terracotta supplied by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company with Neo @- @ Baroque stucco designs by the McNulty Brothers .

The interior shows French Baroque influence from the Second French Empire . The grand lobby , five stories high and surrounded by gallery promenades at the mezzanine and balcony levels , is influence by the Royal Chapel at Versailles . The grand staircase is patterned from the grand stair of the Paris Opera House and ascends to the various balcony levels . Marshall Field and Company supplied interior decorations including drapes and furniture . The crystal chandeliers and bronze

light fixtures fitted with Steuben glass shades were designed and built by Victor Pearlman and Co .

The stage dimensions exceed 60 feet (18 m) in width and 30 feet (9 @. @ 1 m) in depth . The orchestra pit is approximately 6 feet (1 @. @ 8 m) below stage level , 54 feet (16 m) wide at the stage lip , with a depth of 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) at center . An adjustable pit filler can be used for performances requiring other levels .

At the time of the building 's 1978 application for the National Register of Historic Places designation , the venue 's marquee had been replaced twice . The original marquee was basic and facilitated two lines of text for announcements . The 1922 ? 23 marquee had ornate " flashing pinwheels , swirls and garlands of colored lights " . It also included " milk glass letter attraction boards , and CHICAGO in large letters on three sides " . The 1949 replacement was similar to the second marquee , but its attraction boards were larger and the oversized CHICAGO lettering only appeared on the front . Until Balaban and Katz ' 1969 sale to the American Broadcasting Company , their name was on the marquee . The entire marquee was replaced in 1994 , but retains the look of its predecessor . In 2004 , the original marquee was donated to the Smithsonian Institution . The marquee is featured in numerous movies and TV shows set in Chicago , and its neon font was used in the title of the 2002 film Chicago .

= = Organ = =

The theatre is also known for its grand Wurlitzer pipe organ . At the time it was installed it was known as ? The Mighty Wurlitzer ? and could imitate the instruments of an orchestra . Jesse Crawford , a noted Theatre Organ performer , is attributed as the person who " was responsible for the design and choice of sounds " . The organ came from Wurlitzer 's North Tonawanda Barrel Organ Factory in July 1921 with " four manuals and 26 ranks of pipes @-@ Opus 434 " . The American Theatre Organ Society restored the organ in 1970 , which had expanded the organ from 26 to 29 ranks by that time . It is one of the oldest Mighty Wurlitzers still in existence .