Landmarks Preservation Commission
April 12, 1983 Designation List 164
LP-1234

CITY CENTER 55TH STREET THEATER/formerly MECCA TEMPLE, 131 West 55th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1924; architect H.P. Knowles.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1008, Lot 15.

On February 10, 1981, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the City Center 55th Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple as a Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing was continued to May 19, 1981 (Item No. 2). Both hearings had been advertised in accordance with the provision of the law. A total of five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

INTRODUCTION

City Center/Mecca Temple, built in 1924 to house the functions of the Ancient Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (the Shriners), has a significant place in the architectural and cultural history of New York City. Designed by Harry P. Knowles, himself a Shriner, in a Moorish-inspired style which is both symbolic and functionally expressive, the building is a major example of fraternal architecture. In 1943, under the leadership of Mayor LaGuardia, the building became the home of the City Center of Music and Drama, where it fostered a vast array of performing arts, including the New York City Ballet and the New York City Opera, for the people of New York City. In this capacity it has played a crucial role in generating support for dance in the United States, and it continues to operate under the auspices of the 55th Street Dance Theater Foundation.

History of the Ancient Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine

A brief history of the AAONMS (the Shriners), not only explains the appearance of Mecca Temple/City Center, it also puts the building into the context of the architecture of fraternal orders (see Appendix A). The Shriners are a 19th-century off-shoot of the Order of Freemasons. Associations with the architecture of past civilizations are manifest in Masonic buildings, especially the lodge room interiors.

Present day Masons see themselves as spiritual heirs of the craftsmen who engineered and built the major monuments of the ancient and medieval worlds including the pyramids, Solomon's Temple, the Roman aqueducts, thermae and colossi, and the medieval cathedrals. This inheritance rests not so much in the monuments but in the philanthropic, democratic and charitable principles these early builders espoused.[1]

A political and revolutionary mutation occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries. The original founders of Freemasonry, opponents of the abuses of divine right kingship, were attracted by the freedom the ancient craftsmen protected and cherished: "Freemasonry has always believed in the freedom of Man."[2] Early members included philosophers (Voltaire, Franklin), statesment (Washington), and even musicians (Mozart was a Freemason and his Magic Flute has Masonic associations). The symbols of Freemasonry, the right angles, the calipers and the ceremonial trowel, find their source in the tools of the ancient craftsmen. The Order's activities in this country are fraternal and philanthropic. Members progress within the organization by degrees. The Order, synonymous with democratic ideals and benevolence, spread until

by mid-19th century there was at least one Masonic Lodge in every city and town in this country.

The Shriners, who must also be Masons, attached themselved to a more exotic heritage, the Order of the Mystic Shrine founded at Mecca in 698 AD.[3] By mid-19th century its original purpose, to assist local governments in supressing crime and maintaining law and order, had matured to the more civilized level of fraternal benevolence.[4] Only the panoply and high principles, parallel to those of Western Freemasonry, survived; the "nobles" were urged to practice charity and work for the betterment of humanity.

The Order's theatrical associations and reputation as a major supporter of hospitals for crippled children can be traced to the professions of its co-founders. William Jermyn Florence (1831-91) was born Bernard Conlin in Albany, N.Y. He had become an actor and comedian of some note by 1850, the year he changed his name. Florence became a 32nd° Scottish Rite Mason in 1867 and was carried on the rolls of the Aurora Grata Consistory (Brooklyn) as a "sojourner" (the category for itinerant professionals). Dr. Walter Millard Fleming (1838-1913) was born in Portland, Me., and received his medical training in Albany. After serving as a surgeon in the Civil War he moved to Rochester where he became a Mason, though he was not "coroneted" a 32rd° Scottish Rite Mason until 1872 in New York. In 1872 Florence met Fleming at the Knickerbocker Cottage, a tavern and favorite meeting place of theatrical personalities and professional people, on 28th Street and Sixth Avenue. Many of these were Masons. We can infer from Florence's and Fleming's biographers that today's Shriner "policy" of good times, horseplay, and practical jokes in support of medical research, stems from the founders' subsequent collaboration. During his arduous Masonic preparation, Fleming determined a "playground for Masons" who had reached the 32° (Scottish or York Rite) would be beneficial and he shared this idea with Florence.

Two years earlier in 1870, Florence had played Marseilles and was taken to a Shrine meeting of the Bokara Temple, a unit of the Arabic Order of Bektash (an Islamic saint) and "survivor" of the Order of the Mystic Shrine. Subsequently he witnessed ceremonies in Algeria and Cairo. Whether from his host in Marseilles or in Cairo, he obtained a copy of the ritual, returning with it to New York. In collaboration Florence and Fleming made certain modifications, bringing the ritual into conformity with democratic standards. However, several Near Eastern emblems were retained: the tarboosh or tassled, scarlet cap worn by the students at the University of Fez (Morocco) and regarded as a symbol of learning and integrity; the colors red, yellow and green, a combination considered evocative of the Near East; and the crescent moon crossed with the scimitar (and often with a sphinx head imposed and a pendant five-pointed star), the "jewel" of the Order, seen as lapel pins, architectural finials and as an ever recurring Shriner decorative motif. Indeed, all the Shriners' temples have Arabic, Egyptian or Turkish names.[5]

Even as the ritual was being formulated, other prospective members were being approached at Masonic functions at Knickerbocker Cottage.[6] On September 26, 1872, the first formal meeting was held at the Old Masonic Hall, 114 East 13th Street, at which the ritual was approved, officers elected and the name Mecca adopted.[7] Expansion began: Mecca Temple membership was increased; Masons in other cities were selected to establish subordinate temples, and charter fees were set.[8]

Theater is an important part of the Shriner activity and its roots can be traced to its earliest raison d' etre: a playground for Masons; its earliest recruitment come-on, association with popular entertainers; and the general fantasy of its ex-

otic trappings. William Jermyn Florence and his wife, the dancer Malvia Littrell, were well-known personalities, playing New York, touring this country and Europe in light comedy pieces. But Florence was not its only well-known thespian member. Tony Pastor was initiated into the AAONMS in 1883. Pastor has been called "the father of vaudville" and "impresario of 14th Street" - Lillian Russell, George M. Cohan, and Sophie Tucker were all launched at this theater. He worked his way up, as a clown and early ringmaster for P.T. Barnum and later as a singer in variety shows, before he rented the first of his four theaters.[9] He popularized dancing, sentimental songs and clean comedy, vestiges of vaudeville which are now fixtures on Broadway. In 1859 he joined Masonic Lodge #330 and having achieved the necessary degrees, it is not surprising he should become a Shriner. He invited his fellow "nobles" to celebrate their fifteenth anniversary at his theater in 1887 and continued to make the hall available for their entertainments.[10]

Most Shriner entertainments are fundraising events for their major philanthropy, Shriners' Hospitals for Crippled Children. Long before the Shriners undertook the support of hospitals for orphaned and crippled children in 1920, they were engaged in philanthropic relief. In 1899, 71 of a total of 78 temples were involved in charitable work. Following the disastrous floods at Galveston, Texas, in 1904, Shriners responded generously. A large sum was sent to San Francisco following the earthquake and fire. Today there are 21 Shriners' Hospitals, 18 orthopedic units and three burn centers in the United States. Among the Shriners' chief fund raising methods are its circus troops which have amazed and delighted many across the land for decades.*

Mecca Temple and its Building

At the turn of the century Mecca Temple had begun a building fund.[11] Although routine meetings could be held at Masonic Headquarters at Sixth Avenue and 23rd Street (Napoleon LeBrun, 1875; replaced by the present building, Harry P. Knowles, 1909) locating a hall in which to present their evenings of entertainment and relaxation, large enough to accommodate their growing numbers was becoming a problem for the Shriners. After 1891 the Order had held its entertainments at the new Carnegie Hall, and after 1905, at the 71st Regiment Armory at 34th Street and Park Avenue.[12] Many in the Order were pleased to move from Carnegie Hall because of the restriction against smoking.[13] At the armory they could smoke as they wished, but the building contained neither the amenities not the specific facilities of a theater. The only time they could obtain a theater was at a non-theatrical time during the working day.

In April 1921, 1500 members voted to build a hall which would be income producing and could be rented out for conventions, concerts, special theatrical performances, and for the new and popular medium, film. That the building be a sound financial proposition was stressed, for the committee was aware of building debts and taxes and hoped to provide themselves with future income. They also anticipated that the theater district would continue its northward move up Broadway from 42nd Street to eventually reach 57th Street.**

* Shades of Dr. Fleming, "Billy" Florence, and Tony Pastor!

** The example of the Freemasons and their new office building (1909) may have goaded the Shriners to build.

On January 31, 1922, the Shriners, as Mecca Holding Company, bought a block-through tract, four lots on West 55th Street and three lots on West 56th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, from Yale University.[14] Two adjoining lots on 55th Street were secured three months later.[15] An abandoned motion picture studio occupied the Yale tract, the streets were unimproved, and stables and garages characterized the rest of the block.[16] The Shriners hoped their presence would improve the two streets, attracting apartment houses and office buildings with a consequent increase in land value.[17]

The architect for the new building, Harry Percy Knowles (1871-1923), had carried out at least two earlier Masonic commissions, the 17-story Masonic Building (1909), 46 West 23rd Street, Manhattan, and important additions to the Shriners' Hospital, Utica (1922). Knowles was himself a Master Mason as well as a Noble of the Mystic Shrine.[18] Although he was born in Hamilton, Ontario, to an American father, Thomas Knowles, and a Canadian mother, Josephine Davis Knowles, at present nothing is known about his professional training.[19] Knowles had come to New York City by 1891, and five years later was initiated into Pyramid (Masonic) Lodge #490. He must have been working for one or more architectual firms in the last decade of the 19th century and by 1899 was head draftsman for the prestigious firm of N. LeBrun and Sons.[20]

Napoleon LeBrun (1821-1901) began his distinguished career in Philadelphia. LeBrun had worked for Thomas U. Walter, architect of the United States Capitol and many other prominent buildings in several cities. In 1841 LeBrun established his own office and within a decade had designed two of Philadelphia's important mid-19th century buildings: the Academy of Music (1855-56) on Broad Street and the interior of the Cathedral of S.S. Peter and Paul on Logan Circle (completed 1864). In 1850 he joined Lodge #2 of the Masons in Philadelphia. He moved to New York in 1864 where his first significant commission was the new Masonic Hall (1875; demolished 1909) on the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and 23rd Street, a mansarded structure in the French Second Empire style. Except for ecclesiastical commissions, LeBrun preferred the classical architectural vocabulary. With both the ten-story Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Building (1890-93; altered 1950) on Madison Square and the 15-story Home Life Insurance Building (1893-94) at 265 Broadway, LeBrun used classical elements to achieve a balance between horizontals and verticals. Among LeBrun's other notable designs are a series of firehouses throughout the city.

The Home Life Building and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tower (1909) signal the firm's effort to deal with the aesthetic of tall building. The Home Life facade employs a tripartite scheme, while the Metropolitan Life tower is a 32-story shaft that recalls a Renaissance campanile: the clockface, arcade, steep hipped roof and cupola with beacon, are lofty terminal features rendered in classical terms.[21]

The strong articulation of these two skyscrapers is probably a direct consequence of the firm's use of steel frame construction. This is also reflected in LeBrun's Church of Saint Mary the Virgin (1895) on West 46th Street. Here he demonstrated the academic adherence to "style appropriate to function" and his knowledge of the Gothic ornamental vocabulary. But St. Mary's became known as the "Chicago Church" for its steel skeleton was the precursor, for the structural steel framework of the Metropolitan Life tower.[22] Knowles, of course was at the LeBrun firm during the planning of the Metropolitan Life tower, where he would have gained familiarity with steel frame technology.

Mecca Temple was Knowles' last work, for he died in January 1923. The cornerstone wasn't laid until October 13th of the same year. His design was postumously supervised by the firm of Clinton & Russell. The program called for four basic components: lodge and club rooms; a stage; an auditorium large enough to accommodate "any demand that may be made upon it;" and a banquet hall.[23]

Knowles was faced with a threefold challenge: an irregularly-shaped site; the juxtaposition of an access to spaces vastly varying in size and function; and the expression on the facade, of the Shriners' historic associations. He used the site to good advantage placing the auditorium within the broader West 55th Street frontage and reserving the narrower 56th Street lot for the 12-story tower (lodge and club rooms), and entrance and access to the mid-site stage area. The banquet hall, located below the auditorium, was accessible both from the auditorium lobby and the wide street entrance westernmost on 55th Street. The lodge and club rooms,identical in function, were housed in the tower, which also contains offices on its upper floors. These spaces, which were used much more frequently and at different times than the auditorium or banquet hall, share the West 56th Street entrance.

The concrete-encased structural steel framing for Mecca Temple, the technique used by the LeBrun firm, utilized custom girders for the dome ribs, the balcony spans, and various cantilevers. The location of the auditorium with its broad balconies and proscenium arch - all without vertical obstruction - above the necessarily column-free banquet hall required engineering ingenuity. Lattice trusses support the banquet hall ceiling (the auditorium floor). The sides of the building carry the bulk of the weight of the auditorium balconies, the roof, and the dome above.

A major structrual element was a 92 foot, 6 inch long, 13 foot wide, 65 ton girder called the largest single piece of steel ever set into a building in New York City.[24] Early on the morning of November 6, 1923, it was ferried across the Hudson from New Jersey on two barges. Two derricks lifted it to a long truck on the dock. The contractors feared for the subway tunnels, and over fifty manhole covers were broken on the way, but the girder safely reached the site and was set without further mishap.[25] This gigantic girder was necessary because Knowles designed Mecca's broad and deep balcony in the manner of movie houses, a long gradual pitch of seating oriented toward the back stage wall rather than the stage floor as in so many legitimate theaters.[26]

The West 55th Street facade of the Mecca Temple is a monumental expanse of ashlar sandstone enclosing the back of the auditorium and only sparsely pierced by slit-like lancets.[27] Knowles solved the problems of massive bulk on a narrow street by creating what are really two facades in one. The first is the massive one to be seen from the corner -- a huge sandstone cube encompassing a single, shallow, pointed arch inscribed across it, which is articulated by a cornice of heavy dentils suggesting crenellation, and the chamfered upper corners making the transition to the great, glazed-tile dome. The second focuses on the alfiz entrance enframement of terra cotta and polychromed glazed tile more intimately scaled to the passing pedestrian or approaching ticket holder.

The facade serves to announce the Shriners' ancient and treasured "heritage empreinte." No specific prototype was used for this domes temple. Knowles drew upon a more general academic historicism, including the Alhambra, Egyptian mosques and Templar church facades. As late 19th and early 20th century architects had drawn upon Oxford and Cambridge for their American university commissions, so Knowles drew upon Islamic architectural motifs (echoing the skillful use of classical and

and Gothic ornament at the LeBrun firm). The arcade of horseshoe arches, the schematized naturalistic forms in the attached columns and capitals, the colorful glazed tiles (from the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company in Long Island City), the pilasters and friezes of the alfiz itself, the lancet windows, and the contrast of all this with the tawny sandstone ashlar facing evoke Islamic sources.

The facade's success rests in the tightly balanced play, or mesh, of the two sub-schemes, massive bulk and human-scaled entrances. The determining factor in this equation is the internal arrangement of lobbies, auditorium, and staircases. Spanning the base of the giant pointed arch inscribed across the ashlar facade is an arcade of nine horseshoe arches. The main floor lobby is entered through the center five of these nine arches. Above each of these, five coupled-arch windows, lighting the mezzanine level, rest on a molding the length of the arcade. These two stories are framed together by an alfiz. The mezzanine molding extends over the remaining horseshoe arches at either side of the alfiz. Entrances through these arches open into staircases leading to the mezzanine and first balcony levels. The two larger horseshoe arched entrances flanking the giant facade arch are the two stairtowers leading down to the banqueting hall and up to the second balcony. This accent is described by the gentle curve of the arch. Thus, the alfiz and this great arch serve not only to unify the facade but to indicate interior arrangement of the exterior.

The use of polychrome, glazed terra cotta is remarkable. The alfiz, a characteristic Islamic aedicular motif, often rendered in "faience mosaique," is here composed of ochre-glazed terra-cotta pilasters on a sky-blue field supporting a muqarnas cornice, also of polychrome glazed terra cotta. The wall surface framed within is covered with glazed, polychrome tiles: an abstracted foliate form in dark blue, green, and ochre on a white ground. This tiled surface extends beyond both sides of the alfiz and below the mezzanine molding to the edge of the giant arch. The horseshoe arches, with voussoirs of the same glazed-ochre tile, are supported by slender, coupled and engaged polished pink and grey veined granite columns with polychrome (glazed) terra-cotta capitals derived from Owen Jones and Jules Goury's Alhambra. The tympana within the arches contain terra-cotta grilles, the scimitar and crescent -- one of the "jewels" of the Order, -- set against a smaller version of the foliate design, of green, ochre and white on a deep, blue ground. The engaged colonnettes between the coupled mezzanine windows are themselves polychrome, glazed, terra cotta. What in other hands might have been an eccentric or bizzare parade of Islamic motifs, Knowles has molded into a facade of authority and elegance.

The West 56th Street facade is very different, reflecting the function of this part of the building. The predominent material is yellow brick rendered in a more restrained and abstract classical style than the Moorish of the 55th Street facade. The ground floor, a high basement faced with the same tawny sandstone as the West 55th Street facade, contains five arches -- two pairs varying in height and width and a central arch, forming an A-B-C-B-A pattern. The outer arches (A) are the broadest and like the central arch (C), provide access to the rear of the stage. The two narrower arches (B), each with a fanlight and flanked by large lanterns serve as the building's pedestrian entrances. The eleven-story tower above housed the Order's lodge rooms of a prescribed interior design which renders conventional exterior fenestration unnecessary. On East 56th Street, successive layers of brick wall, corresponding to the rhythm of the ground arches (A-B-C-B-A), are superimposed to create a central vertical element terminating in a temple front. The six piers within this central element are made of bricks angled out from the bond in the same

position in every course for six stories. The shadows cast by the cutaway layers of brick wall and the angled brick piers are most subtle in the articulation of wall surface. Knowles relied as much upon the gradation of shadow as the vocabulary of classical forms at his disposal. While the third story pediments, balconies and moldings are sandstone, all the cartouches, capitals, and coping above are buff terra-cotta. The use of classical details created a subtle counterpoint to the brickwork, the presence of each enhancing the other.

Compared to the polychrome and Islamic evocation of the 55th Street facade, this facade is both expressive of the functions it encloses and an exercise in sophisticated constraint appropriate to the urbanity anticipated, in the early 1920s, for the rest of the street. It is not the equal, nor was it intended to be, of the 55th Street facade.

The great dome, covered with glazed roof tile and visible from a distance, is multifunctional.[29] Not only is it the building's terminal feature, but it also houses an integral part of the building's ventilation system, an exhaust fan eight feet in diameter. This ventilation system was required because, unlike Carnegie Hall, smoking was permitted in the auditorium during Shriner entertainments.

The West 55th Street facade has been called "Saracenic," Moresco-Baroque," and "delightfully absurd."[30] The Shriners preferred "modified Arabian."[31] The architects' serious, intelligent and skillful solution deserves recognition. Knowles, aware of his clients' wish to proclaim historic antecedents, created a totally appropriate and in may ways precursive and exemplary design. Here is a solution to the 20th-century phenomenon of windowless screen wall. This building, more than the "fantasy realm" suggested by much cinema architecture, is one of the best in the little documented building category: architecture of fraternal orders. With understandable pride, the Shriners projected their new home would rival the Flatiron and Singer Buildings as an object of local admiration and a major objective, "a Mecca," on the visitors' architectural pilgrimage of New York.[32]

How Mecca Temple Became City Center

The AAONMS were encouraged by sold out concerts at Carnegie and Aeolian Halls to believe a larger hall could be profitable. To build their magnificent mosque the Shriners both sold bonds and borrowed money.[33] Most AAONMS units, because of their philanthropic character, are exempt from taxation. But this could not be the case at Mecca, where the rental of the auditorium to outside theatrical enterprize was to guarantee the organization income.[34] This turned out to be financial over-extension. The decade of the 30s saw a retreat from the grand scheme that initiated Mecca Temple. In 1933 the building was transferred from the Mecca Holding Company, the agency that brought the idea to reality, to the Trustees of Mecca Temple, AAONMS, Oasis of New York. In 1937 Manufacturers Hanover foreclosed for mortgage payments due, selling its interest to Irving Verschleiser. Verschleiser attempted to make the hall profitable as Mecca Temple Casino, Inc.,but failed to do so. Two years later the Trustees transferred title to the 130 West 56th Street Corporation.[35] On September 10, 1942, the City of New York, foreclosed on the 130 West 56th Street Corporation to satisfy a tax claim of $622,543.00. "Our Mosque in West 55th Street is now a matter of past history..." was the cryptic message in the Order's June 1940 newsletter.[36]

The City put the building up for auction, and then was the successful bidder, bringing to completion the initial phase of a grand scheme conceived by four civic leaders, Fiorello LaGuardia, Newbold Morris, Morton Baum, and Joseph McGoldrick, to enhance the City's cultural life for a public in search of low-priced, high-quality entertainment.[37] Throughout the Depression, the City had been providing entertainment in the form of public concerts. In 1938 Fiorello LaGuardia's attitude of social responsibility and concern for "the little guy," prompted him to designate City Council President Newbold Morris liaison between New York City and the Federal Music Project sponsored by the Works Projects Administration. Thus began a twenty-five cent admission WPA concert series, first at Radio City and then at Carnegie Hall. But these were limited by the regular schedules of these halls. In 1940 federal funding, in the form of WPA grants, allowed Morris to broaden the concert series by sending musicians to high school gyms and neighborhood meeting halls. The need for a permanent house became apparent when he was confronted with the fact of trained and skillful musicians playing fine concerts under the most make-shift conditions.[38] When legal title to Mecca Temple passed to the City, LaGuardia assigned Morris the task of putting the building to use. After examining the structure Morris and Baum conceived the idea of a private, non-profit corporation, directed by public spirited citizens and representatives of cultural organizations. Although the City would not contribute financially, it would lease the building to the Corporation for $1.00 a year and assume any responsibility for repairs and improvements. (The alternative was conversion of the 3000-seat theater portion of the building into a parking garage.) Aymar Embury, Jr., architect for many City-sponsored structures in the 1940s, was asked to investigate the building.[39] On March 5, 1943, LaGuardia with Morris and Baum assembled the cultural movers and shakers in his office; in July the State Supreme Court approved the Papers of Incorporation. The City Center of Music and Drama was born.[40]

LaGuardia stated that the idea was a first attempt to make music and art self-supporting in New York, without fancy trimmings and with no performance offered just to fill a vacant date. He even suggested that shows start at 5:30 P.M. to save working people travel and train fare.[41] City Center's first managing director, Harry Friedgut, stressed the Center's role of a great municipal theater creating programs of extraordinary interest and variety, which would not be dependent upon the whims of public taste, unlike commercial theater. Cheap tickets for the People's Theater was his credo. His method was to organize a theater-going constituency through unions, schools, colleges, professional groups, educational and philanthropic societies, and government employee organizations, offering them coupons at a twenty percent discount. The top ticket price in 1943 was $1.65. Moreover, City Center provided a place of opportunity for untried talent, including the talent of many new immigrants, as well as an intelligent and discerning audience.

The Center opened December 11, 1943 with a concert by the New York Philharmonic Society, a gift in recognition of the new venture. Two days later a revival of the 1937 London and Broadway hit show Susan and God starring Gertrude Lawrence began a four week run.[42] But this pattern of variety for its own sake was difficult to sustain, and the concept of the Center as an umbrella for resident companies was introduced. In 1944 both the New York City Opera and the New York City Symphony, led by Leopold Stowkowski, were started. Among the important early productions were Othello with Paul Robeson and Jose Ferrer as Iago, Harriet with Helen Hayes, La Traviata with Dorothy Kirsten singing Violetta and Angel Street with Uta Hagen. Leonard Bernstein conducted the New York City Symphony in 1945. The Billy Rose production of Carmen Jones featured the music of Bizet, an Oscar Hammerstein II libretto, and an all Black cast. For five years the Ballet Russe of Monte Carlo

staged spring and winter seasons. A new group, the Ballet Society founded by Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine, debuted in 1946 and was asked to become resident dance company, the New York City Ballet, two years later. The deficits of the New York City Opera were covered by the small profits generated from dance and symphony concerts, theatrical productions and donations. At the end of the City Center's first year Newbold Morris reported that the experiment had survived and was solvent, a state of affairs which continued throughout the first decade.

Successful beginnings were followed by maintenance cares and growing pains in the 1950s. Although the Board of Estimate continued to approve the $1.00 a year lease, getting the City to uphold its maintenance commitment required a certain resourcefulness. In a news piece titled "How to Have the Roof Fixed," Morris' rainy night invitation to Mayor Impelletieri was reported.[43] The Mayor was placed in seat G-1 and soon his program was bleary with raindrops. (The roof was repaired soon after.) In 1955 Lincoln Kirstein's dissatisfaction with managerial policy was reported.[44] The New York City Ballet's innovation interpretation was well-known but management, preferring to deal only with earned profits, refused to extend funding for untried experiments in dance. But the Center continued to grow. The City Center Light Opera opened. Before the end of the decade City Center debuts had been made by Beverly Sills, Orson Wells, Maurice Evans, Celeste Holm, Emlyn Williams, Basil Rathbone, Edna Best, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Marcel Marceau, Elaine May, Mike Nichols, Lotte Lenya, and Tallulah Bankhead. Surplus profit for 1956-57 was $281,000.00 and $886,886.00 for 1957-58 (grants and contributions, not ticket sales).[45] In 1959 it was reported that City Center management was negotiating to move everything to Lincoln Center, then in the planning stages.[46]

Even as a broad spectrum of new efforts and guest companies were welcomed, the original groups were outgrowing the nest. In 1960 City Center hosted the Kabuki; in 1961 it presented its own Gilbert and Sullivan company and hosted the Deutches Schauspielhaus of Hamburg; and in 1964 the Comedie Francaise. The New York City Ballet departed 55th Street for the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center the same year, and two years later the City Center management leased the New York State Theater for fifty years. Meanwhile the Joffrey was asked to become the resident ballet company of the 55th Street building. In 1967 management implemented a $500,000.00 overhaul, including new air conditioning, rewiring and repainting. However, in 1969 Richard Clurman, a successor to Morris as chairman, claimed the building was inadequate and obsolete, and unveiled "City Center Plaza," an entertainment area, extending from Eighth Avenue to the Hudson River between 47th and 49th Streets which would include a 2000 seat theater for dance. Nothing came of this.[47]

By 1974 the City Center encompassed not only the New York City Opera (under the direction of Julius Rudell) and the New York City Ballet, led by Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine) at the New York State Theater, but also at City Center were the Joffrey Company, the Cinematheque (Henri Lanlois), the Young Peoples' Theater (Marjorie Sigley), the Alvin Ailey Company (which became a resident company in 1972) and the Center Acting Company (directed by John Houseman). In the very same year the building was threatened once again. Richard Clurman proposed razing it to make way for a block-through (55th to 56th Streets and Sixth to Seventh Avenues) apartment building to be developed by H.R. Shapiro of Fort Lee, New Jersey.[48] The scheme was deemed premature and was dropped. In 1976, however, City Center management not only withdrew its support of its resident companies, the Joffrey and the Ailey, but the theater building itself was no longer to receive funding.[49]

Efforts to save the house for dance coalesced under the new 55th Street Dance Theater Foundation in 1976. All expenses related to maintaining the house were guaranteed to City Center management by the Joffrey, Ailey and Elliot Feld Ballet Companies and the American Ballet Theater.[50] Sharing the house with other companies to defray costs has helped keep ticket prices down. The four founding companies have shared annual seasons with the Paul Taylor, Murray Louis, Louis Falco, Alvin Nickolais, Merce Cunningham Companies and Dance Theater of Harlem, among others.

A major rennovation of the house was recently undertaken.[51] A $700,000.00 Federal grant went toward interior renovation and reworking of the orchestra level to improve the long criticized poor sight lines.

CONCLUSION

Today the newly refurbished City Center proudly proclaims its heritage as the home of Mecca Temple, so vividly illustrated in its design, and as New York's most diverse preforming arts facility.

At City Center, dance in the United States grew and achieved a recognition it had never enjoyed before. New York is now an international capital for the dance, due in no small measure to the enormous role City Center played in its emergence. The large vision of its founders was matched by the big stage, many practice rooms and large seating capacity. The welcome given by City Center to a wide variety of the performing arts provided unparalleled opportunities for performers and audiences alike.

APPENDIX A - FRATERNAL ARCHITECTURE

The rich, universal architectural "heritage" of the Freemasons is very consciously expressed in the interiors of lodge rooms. One of the earliest surviving examples is the Masonic Temple in Philadelphia designed by James Windrim (a respected though less original contemporary of Frank Furness) and dedicated in 1873. Within the touted "Norman" palace opposite City Hall are lodge rooms evoking Egypt, Greece, Italy, German, France, England and Scotland - the lands of the "Mystic Ancestors." The Oriental Hall is a lodge room done in the Moorish style with coloring and ornamentation from the 13th- and 14th-century Palace of the Alhambra in Granada.[52]

Fraternal architecture as a building type did not achieve recognition in the architectural press until Architectural Forum published an issue devoted to this topic.[53] The introductory piece, "The Architecture of Fraternal Buildings," was by Harvey Wiley Corbett (architect of many New York City buildings, individually or in partnership, including Rockefeller Center, the "Tombs," and Metropolitan Life Insurance's North Annex) and himself a mason.[54] He knew whereof he wrote when he referred to the opportunities fraternal buildings gave architects. He reminded the profession that these are often large and massive enough to be landmarks, offering large wall surfaces with which architects love to work despite their difficulty. However, when he wrote of the problem of finding a prototype, he could only have meant that the Masonic heritage suggests so many. It is surprising that he made no direct reference to the new Mecca Temple.[55] Perhaps he was ignorant of this historical antecedents of the AAONMS.

R.R. Houston, of George Post and Sons, discussed the great antiquity of the Masons (Egyptian and Greek) and their affinity with the building trades; likewise he associated the temples of the Shriners with Saracen architecture.[56] The West Coast architect Herbert Greene wrote, "With the exception of mosques for the Mystic Shrine, which often and appropriately follow the motifs and details of the Saracenic style, fraternal buildings are generally designed in the Classical or Gothic styles or modifications thereof."[57] All agreed that the most difficult problem facing the architect was one of excess, of too slavishly following antique prototype or association.

While the Masons and the Shriners are the best-known of the fraternal orders in the United States, the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Columbus, and other groups are well represented by their architecture.

APPENDIX B - THE CITY CENTER AND DANCE

Of all the performing arts it has been the dance that City Center had sheltered longest. The building's place in the history of this art form's spectacular post-World War II emergence cannot be questioned. Hanya Holm had presented the important early modern work "Trend" at Mecca Auditorium in 1937.

In the spring of 1944 the Ballet Russe of Monte Carlo presented the first of their five double seasons with Alexandra Danilova, Igor Youshevitch and Frederick Franklin, and that fall George Balanchine's "Danses Concertantes" with Danilova and Maria Tallchief. The unbilled appearance of the New York Police Department, an authentic raid of Ruth Page and Bentley Stone's controversial "Frankie

and Johnny" (Miss Page and Mr. Stone in the title roles), was, perhaps, an indication of the public's relatively uninformed attitude toward modern dance in 1945. The following year Igor Stravinsky conducted his own score for Balanchine's "Le Baiser de la Fee." The house played host to the visiting Kurt Joos and the Paris Opera Ballets, and Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein initiated the Ballet Society to present new and experimental work. The Society staged a second season of new dances made by Balanchine, Jerome Robbins and Anthony Tudor in 1947 and in 1948 presented Balanchine's "Orpheus." Again Stravinsky conducted his own score; Isamu Noguchi created the sets and costumes worn by Tallchief, Moncion and Maganenes. The season included Robbins' "Summer Days" and Balanchine's "Theme and Variations." It was in 1948 that City Center management invited Balanchine and Kirstein to establish a resident company, and the New York City Ballet came into being. Associated with it in these early days were Merce Cunningham and Todd Bolender. While the Ballet Russe danced its last season at City Center in 1949, the NYCB premiered their "Firebird" with sets by Chagall and the music of Stravinsky, and Robbins' "Age of Anxiety" (W.H. Auden) with Bernstein's music.

The following decade saw the NYCB make its mark as a major world company. It continued the pattern of collaboration, avant-garde choreography, music and costuming for strong and flexible dancers. The company toured Europe in 1951. In 1955 there was another indication of new strength when the New York Times reported the disagreement between Mr. Kirstein who had more innovative productions to mount and City Center's management willing to experiment only with profits earned. The premier of "La Valse" in 1951 was followed by Robbins' "The Cage" (Stravinsky) and Ruthana Boris' "Cakewalk" (Gottschalk). The world premier of Sir Frederick Ashton's "Picnic at Tintagel" was given in 1952. Robbins' "Afternoon of a Faun" (Debussy) and "Fanfare" (Britten) and Balanchine's "Scotch Symphony" (Mendelsohn), "Metamorphoses" (Hindemith) and "Valse Fantasie" (Glinka) were all seen the following year. In 1954 the NYCB premiered its "Nutcracker," now an annual holiday treat. Balanchine's "Ivesiana" (Charles Ives) was introduced in 1955, while in 1956 he choreographed "Allegro Brillante" (Tchaikovsky) and Robbins presented "The Concert" (Chopin) and Bolender "Souvenir" (Barker). Stravinsky's "Agon" was premiered the following year and John Butler's "Unicorn, Gorgon and Manticore" (Gian Carlo Menotti) and Balanchine's "Divertimento" (Mozart) were seen. Important guest troupes also appeared in this decade, the Jose Limon Company in 1950 and Martha Graham's Company in "Episodes I" with Miss Graham in the lead in 1959.

Balanchine and Kirstein had created a minor miracle. In less than 20 years they had built up an enthusiastic audience for dance. In 1950 "Liederlieber Walzer" was premiered, followed by two more premiers in 1963, "Buzaku" (perhaps influenced by the Kabuki's City Center visit three years earlier) and "Tarantella." But the following year the NYCB moved up Broadway to Lincoln Center (with the New York City Opera). In 1966 the City Center Management invited the Joffrey Ballet to become the resident company on 55th Street, to appear twice yearly for ten years. (The New York City Opera and New York City Ballet schedules precluded sharing the State Theater).

The City Center Joffrey Company, founded in 1951, has a firm and stylistically important place in American ballet's development. Within the company Robert Joffrey and Gerald Arpino have revived as well as premiered renowed dances now in our national repertoire: Arpino's "Nightwings," "Olympics" (Mayuzumi), 1966; Joos' "Green Table," 1967; "Cello Concerto" (Vivaldi); "Astarte" (Chamberlain), "The Clowns" (Kay), 1968; "Chabriesque" (Chabrier), 1972; Feld's "Jive" (Gould), "Remembrances" (Wagner), 1973; "Reflections" (Tchaikovsky), 1974; "Drums, Dreams and Banjos" (Foster), Christian Holder's "Five Dances" (Rachmaninoff), 1975. It was with Joffrey that

Twyla Tharp choreographed and danced in "Deuce Coupe" (Beach Boys), 1973 and "Deuce Coupe II," 1975.

In 1972 the Alvin Ailey company was given resident status.

It was the year of the Joffrey's twenty-fifth anniversary that City Center management withdrew financial support from the Joffrey and the Ailey as well as City Center itself. The big stage, many practice rooms and large seating capacity were the impetus to save the house for dance, an effort which resulted in the 55th Street Dance Theater Foundation. LaGuardia's original concept still works; there's no reason to doubt that great dancers of the future will join those who have delighted City Center audiences for over 40 years. City Center and dance are synonymous.

APPENDIX C - THE CITY CENTER AND OPERA

In 1943 neither Newbold Morris nor Morton Baum wanted City Center to become a producing entity. Instead they looked for companies who could mount grand opera productions. The Metropolitan was economically unfeasible. Two smaller companies, the Mascagni and Salmaggis were both below the standard sought. The New Opera Company, started in 1941, had been unsuccessful with grand opera and more effective with light opera. Its founder, major backer and president, Mrs. Lytle Hull, was one of those who assembled in LaGuardia's office on March 5, 1943. But the New Opera was unwilling to return to grand opera.[58] At Jean Dalrymple's suggestion, Morris interviewed Lazlo Halasz, artistic music director of the Saint Louis Grand Opera Association. Morris was impressed and LaGuardia liked him.

Halasz had a strong background. Born in Budapest (1905), he studied with Bela Bartok, Ernst von Dohnanyi, Zoltan Kodaly and Leo Wiener. In 1928 he made his debut as a concert pianist. Under George Szell he was assistant conductor of the German Opera in Prague. In 1936 he came to this country as Toscanini's assistant conductor at the NBC Symphony. He went to Saint Louis to be chorus master of the Opera Company in 1937 and the following year led the Civic Grand Opera of Philadelphia. In 1939 he moved back to Saint Louis, but with the outbreak of war, that Grand Opera became inactive. One of the advantages attached to Halasz was that before he left Saint Louis, he was assured he could use their costumes and sets at a greatly reduced rental fee.

Halasz determined that there would be two seasons and three operas per season: one unfamiliar and two standard works, including one in English. A few of the soloists had reputations: Martha Lipton, Regina Resnick, Jennie Tourel, and Hugh Thompson from the New Opera Company and Norbert Ardelli and George Czaplicki from Saint Louis. The rest were young Americans getting a first chance. The initial season was scheduled with performances of "Tosca," "Martha," and Carmen."

While the Metropolitan appeared to tolerate the New York City Opera, the latter was ever aware of the fierce competition. Indeed, the Met had a much larger budget. Tourel, Lipton and Thompson were signed by the Met after the first season; and Dorothy Kirsten was lured away by the Met in 1947. The NYCO takes pride in the fact that Todd Duncan became the first of his race to sing with a major American company (1945) anticipating the Met by a decade.[59]

Personality conflicts characterized the New York City Opera in the early 1950s. In 1951 Halasz was dismissed - there were those who found him too autocratic - and the much admired conductor Jean Paul Morel resigned in sympathy. When Morel was offered the new vacancy he replied he had "neither the vices nor the talent necessary to run the Company."[60] Joseph Rosenstock replaced Halasz, but he had difficulty working with Lincoln Kirstein, who had become managing director in 1952. Two years later Kirstein stepped down returning to the New York City Ballet. But Rosenstock was never popular with the press who remained pro-Halasz and Kirstein. When Julius Rudel replaced Rosenstock in 1959 these tensions were greatly alleviated. Rudel had come as Halasz's musical assistant and therefore was qualified to run the Company. Rudel continued the innovative traditions of the Company, introducing many lesser known operas and young American singers to an eager public.

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1. The "Collegium Fabrorum," whose political and social independence was recognized and tolerated by the Roman Emperors, is a good example. Their European descedents had settled in and around Como before 1000 A.D. and subsequently the so-called Comacini were summoned from one monastic or cathedral site to another. These skilled building teams evolved into the medieval construction craft guilds. Here too, the fraternal principles were one with the skills of the craft.

2. Allen E. Roberts, The Craft and is Symbols, (Boston: McCoy Publishing, 1947), p. 4.

3. There are two principal sources for Shriner history, Alexander Ueland's biography William Jermyn Florence, Shriner and Humanitarian, (Boston: Chrisopher Publishing House, 1958) and George M. Saunders, A Short History of the Shrine, Chicago: 1972), on certain points these authors disagree.

4. Mohammed's death in 623 A.D. was followed by warring religious factions. In its earliest manifestation the Order had a police function and was also called "The Order of the Unwritten Law" - the Koran, of course, is the written law. Its oldest meeting place, the Alee (Mohammed's son-in-law) Temple, was in Mecca, Mohammed's native city (from which he escaped and where opposition continued long after his death). Its second oldest seat, the Saladin Temple, was at Damascus and the third, the Omar, was in Jerusalem. Not until 1837 was the Order, or a mutation of it, introduced to Cairo.

5. Mecca Temple, Oasis of New York, was the first established in 1872; Rochester's Damascus Temple was second, 1875; Mount Sinai in Montpelier, Vermont was third, 1876; and Cyprus Temple in Albany was fourth in 1877. In 1919 when a controversy arose about the North American Shrine's connection to the Arabian Order and glaring errors in terminology, titles and usage between the two were discovered, the Shriners refused to alter the ritual. "Noble Fleming gave the Shrine such harmless humor in his conception of the ritual, we would not mar his work through cold conformation to Arabic or any other customs."

6. Ueland, p. 28.

7. Ueland states the first meeting was held at the Masonic Hall, East 23rd Street. Napoleon LeBrun's new Masonic Hall, (1870-75) stood at 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue until it was demolished in 1908 to make way for the present Masonic Building on the same site. Masonic records have no evidence of a Masonic Hall on East 23rd Street.

8. In the 1870s the charter fee with ritual for new temples was $50.00 with $10.00 annual dues, and a $10.00 initiation fee. Saunders, p. 11.

9. His theaters were at 44 Broadway, 20 Bowery, 585 Broadway and Tony Pastor's in Tammany Hall on Union Square. M. Matlaw, "Tony the Trouper," The Theater Annual, 24, (1968), 81.

10. The nature of the entertainments approxiamtes the variety or minstrel show formula. Performers both professional and amateur, can be Shriners, though not necessarily. For example, Al Jolson and Irving Berlin were Shriners.

* Shades of Dr. Fleming, "Billy" Florence and Tony Pastor.

11. The Shriners had raised the initiation fee from $50.00 to $75.00. The $25.00 difference went into the Building Fund. The Meccan (Aug. 1919), 1.

12. The armory was designed by Clinton and Russell (1905), but was demolished to make way for Norman Thomas High School and Office Building, Shreve, Lamb & Harmon (1976).

13. Smoking was much discussed in The Meccan as the Shriners prepared to build. In those days a leisurely and relaxing evening out, free from the pressures of business, family, and Masonic inner growth, included puffing on a big panetella.

** The example of the Freemasons and their new office building, 1901, may have goaded the Shriners to build.

14. William S. and Mary E. Mason transferred lots 47-50 and 15-18 to the Yale Corporation on September 12, 1921, with the understanding they would be sold by Yale within six months.

15. These were bought from George S. and Marion P. Mason on April 19, 1922.

16. This description comes from two issues of The Meccan; (Jan. 1922); (May, 1922), 5.

17. Ibid.

18. Obituary, The Trestle Board of New York, (Jan. 6, 1923), 3.

19. W. Leonard Guarnera, Masonic historian, ferreted Knowles parents' names from the Death certificate, 1923-229.

20. Dennis S. Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City: 1840-1900 (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1980), p. 47.

21. Montgomery Schuyler, referring to the academic equating of the tall office building to the column (base, middle, capital), termed Home Life "very successfully realized, nearly for the first time." "The Work of Napoleon LeBrun," Architectural Record, 27 (April 1910), 366.

22. "The Metropolitan Tower," American Architect, 96 (Oct. 9, 1909), 125-129.

23. The Meccan, (Aug. 1923), 11-12.

24. The Meccan, (Nov. 1923), 8.

25. Pathe News recorded the event.

26. The Meccan, (Nov. 1924), 11. This vertical orientation is also true for the orchestra and upper balcony seating.

27. This tawny sandstone, sometimes called Caen Stone for stone of equal quality quarried on the coast of Normandy, comes from two Ohio quarries, Briar Hill in Sherrodsville and Buff Mountain in Glenmont.

28. At present, only the westernmost of these two smaller arches is used.

29. The tile was made by Sobel and Kraus; Joseph Sobel was a "Noble."

30. "Saracenic" - H. Greene, "The Planning of Fraternal Buildings," Architectural Forum, 45 (Sept.1926) 144; "Moresco-Baroque" - J.C. Waddell, "The Mecca Temple-Dance:10 - Looks:3, Playbill, Oct. 1976: "delightfully absurd" - Norval White and Elliot Willensky, AIA Guide to NYC, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), p. 173.

31. The Meccan, (Oct. 1923), 5.

32. The Meccan, (Oct. 1923), 5; (May 1924), 2.

33. Out of an issue of a million and a half dollars they sold "about a million dollars worth" in three years. They borrowed another million from Manufacturers Hanover Trust. The remainder of the issue they retained against the demands of current expenses, interest on the mortgage and taxes. The Meccan (Sept. 1925), 5.

34. Discussion with Freemason Grand Lodge Librarian, Dr. Alan Boudreau, 6/21/82.

35. Sidney Schwartz, Esq., attorney and AAONMS historian, suspects that 130 West 56th Street Corporation was a legal entity to take title.

36. The Meccan, (June-Nov. 1940), 2.

37. LaGuardia, Morris, Baum, and McGoldrick emerged from LaGuardia's Fusion Party as an efficient team of municipal administrators: LaGuardia, Mayor, 1934-45; Morris, Alderman, 1934-38, City Council President, 1938-46; Baum, Alderman 1934, Special Tax Counsel, 1935-38; McGoldrick, City Comptroller. All, according to Martin Sokol, had an abiding love of music. Martin L. Sokol, the New York City Opera, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1981), pp. 1-13.

38. Richard H. Rovere, "Profiles - Good Citizen 1," The New Yorker, April 28, 1944, p. 32.

39. His report included two separate proposals: immediate repairs (plumbing, electric, repainting and house cleaning - $12,000.00; and a new ceiling to improve the accoustics - $250,000.00). Only the first proposal was acted upon.

40. Morris was first chairman, Jean Dalrymple first press secretary, Bernard Ketchum first house manager, and Harry Friedgut first managing director.

41. New York Times, Dec. 7, 1943.

42. It was Miss Lawrence who established the precedent for top-billers taking only the Actors' Equity minimum at City Center.

43. Womens' Wear Daily, Jan. 20, 1954.

44. New York Times, Feb. 6, 1955.

45. Morning Telegraph, June 6, 1959.

46. New York Herald Tribune, July 1, 1959.

47. New York Times, March 28, 1969.

48. New York Times, March 10, 1974.

49. City Center management still has eighty years to go on the $1.00/year lease negotiated in 1962.

50. These were the original companies. The Feld now has its own house in the renovated Elgin Theater, now the Joyce, at 8th Avenue and 17th Street. The ABT now dances at the Metropolitan Opera House. The Joffrey has been invited to Los Angeles, though will continue to present an annual season in New York.

51. New York Times, March 16, 1982.

52. Owen Jones and Jules Goury's Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra, had been published in two volumes in London, 1842, and no doubt provided Windrim with a wealth of inspiration.

53. Architectural Forum, 46 (Sept. 1926), 129 ff.

54. Ibid., 129-136.

55. The Freemasons patiently tolerated their fun-loving Shriner brethren.

56. "The Interior Architecture of Fraternal Buildings," 137-140.

57. "The Planning of Fraternal Buildings," 141-144.

58. This company included choreographers Leonid Massine, George Balanchine, José Limon; and singers: Martha Lipton, Regina Resnick, Jennie Tourel, and Hugh Thompson.

59. For more detail this researcher recommends his source, Martin Sokol, The New York City Opera..., (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981).

60. Ibid., p. 78.

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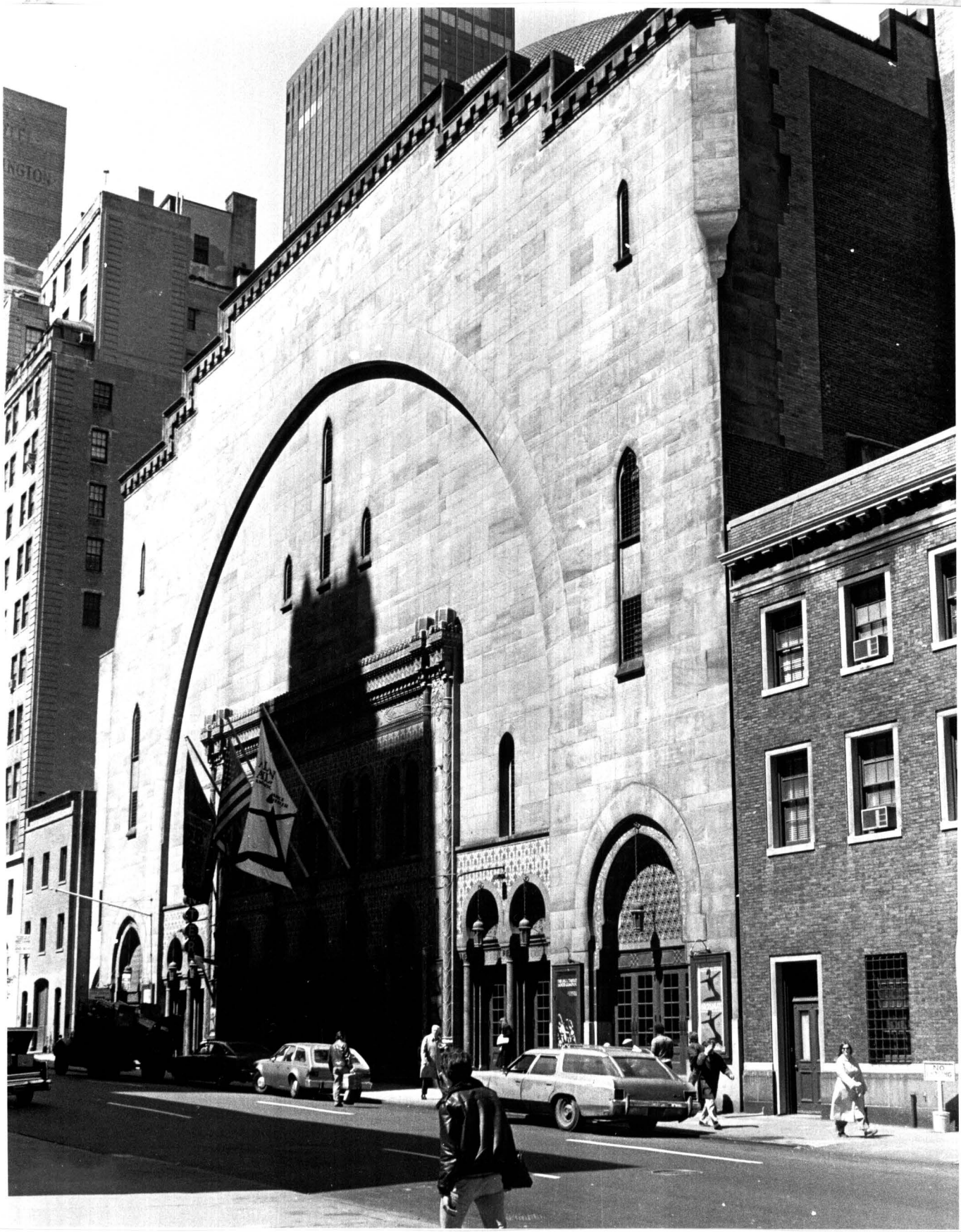
FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the City Center 55th Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple, has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

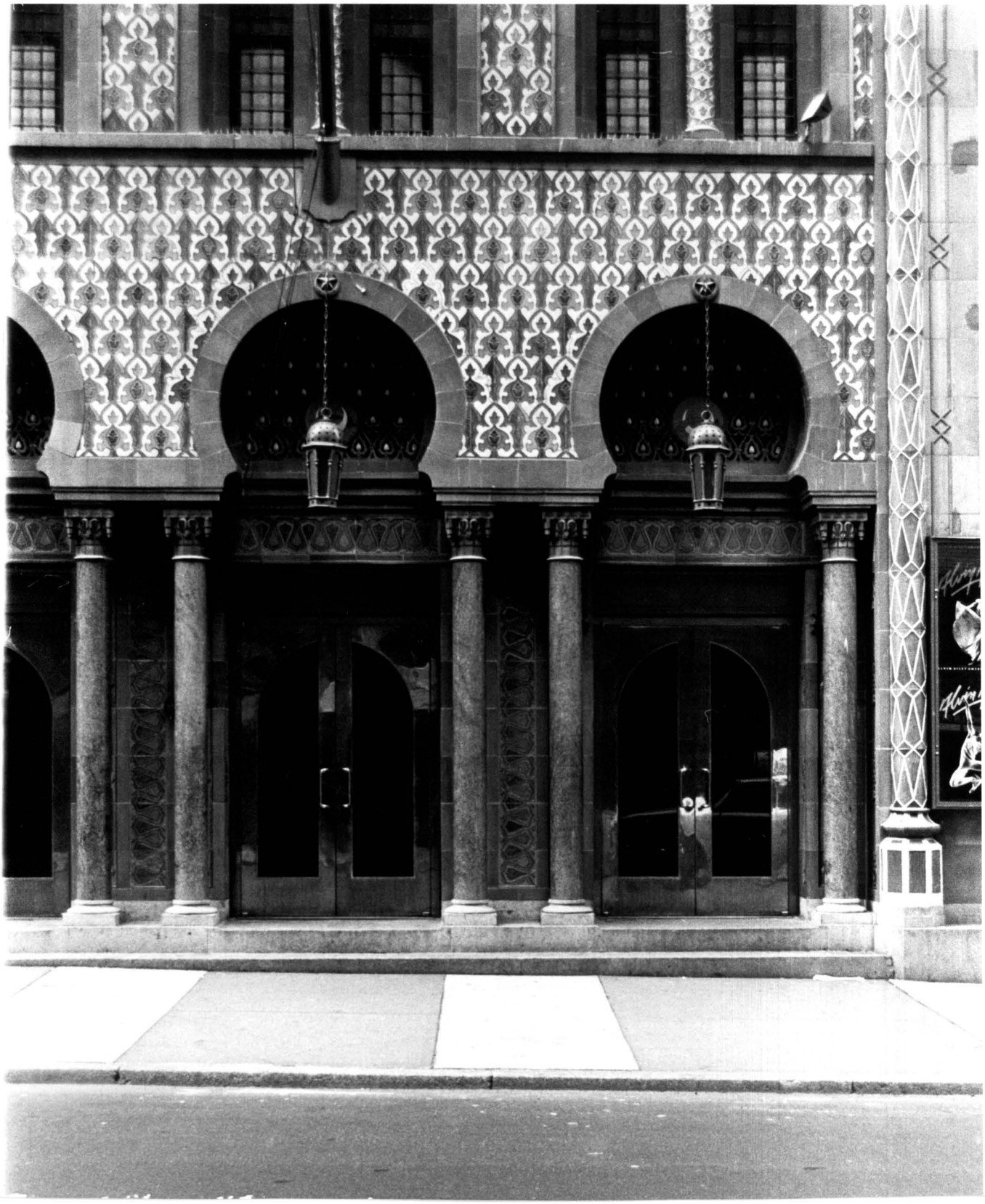
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the City Center 55th Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple, built in 1924 to house the functions of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (The Shriners) has a significant place in the architectural and cultural history of New York City; that it was designed by Harry P. Knowles in a Moorish-inspired style which is both symbolic and functionally expressive; that the building is a major example of fraternal architecture; that the 55th Street facade, which encloses the rear of the auditorium, is expressed as a massive sandstone cube, surmounted by a tiled dome and focused on the elaborate polychrome terra-cotta alfiz entrance enframement; that the 56th Street tower facade features handsome brickwork juxtaposed with restrained classical ornament; that the structural steel framing of the building, necessitated by the varying functions, was notable at that time for its scope and complexity; that in 1943, under the leadership of Mayor LaGuardia, the building became the home of the City Center of Music and Drama where it fostered a vast array of performing arts including the New York City Ballet and the New York City Opera; that the City Center has played a crucial role in generating support for dance in the United States and it continues to operate under the auspices of the 55th Street Dance Theater Foundation; and that the City Center 55th Street Theater remains one of New York City's major spaces for the performing arts and a cultural treasure.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the City Center 55th Street Theater/formerly Mecca Temple, 131 West 55th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1008, Lot 15, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.



CITY CENTER 55TH STREET THEATER/MECCA TEMPLE
135 West 55th Street
Manhattan

Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission



CITY CENTER 55TH STREET THEATER/MECCA TEMPLE
135 West 55th Street
Manhattan

Photo: Carl Forster

Entrance detail

CITY CENTER 55TH STREET THEATER/MECCA TEMPLE
130 West 56th Street
Manhattan

Photo: Carl Forster

56th Street tower facade