

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 4, 1987; Designation List 194  
LP-1312

BROOKS ATKINSON THEATER (originally Mansfield Theater), first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and the ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 256-262 West 47th Street, Manhattan. Built 1925-26; architect, Herbert J. Krapp.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1018, Lot 57.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Brooks Atkinson Theater, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor and all connecting entrance areas; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling, the upper part of the stage house; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 256-262 West 47th Street, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item 8). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty witnesses spoke or had statements read into the record in favor of designation. One witness spoke in opposition to designation. The owner, with his representatives, appeared at the hearing, and indicated that he had not formulated an opinion regarding designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The interior of the Brooks Atkinson Theater survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built during the mid-1920s, the Brooks Atkinson was among the half-dozen theaters constructed by the Chanin Organization, to the designs of Herbert J. Krapp, that typified the development of the Times Square/Broadway theater district.

Founded by Irwin S. Chanin, the Chanin organization was a major construction company in New York. During the 1920s, Chanin branched out into the building of theaters, and helped create much of the ambience of the heart of the theater district. Chanin built the Brooks Atkinson in honor of one of America's most famous 19th century actors, Richard Mansfield, for whom the theater was originally named.

Herbert J. Krapp, who designed all the Chanins' theaters, was the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district. Having worked in the

offices of Herts & Tallant, premier theater designers of the pre-war period, Krapp went on to design theaters for the two major builders of the post-war era, the Shubert and Chanin organizations.

The interior of the Brooks Atkinson represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, it is an exceptional design, reflecting the expertise of Chanin and Krapp, and the assistance of Roman Melzer, formerly an architect to Czar Nicholas II of Russia, who supervised the ornamental scheme. Unlike the great majority of the theaters built in the 1920s, the Atkinson's design includes a handsome series of murals as well as unusually fine ornamental plasterwork.

For half a century the interior of the Brooks Atkinson Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater. As such, it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

#### The development of the Broadway Theater District

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The stockmarket crash of 1929 and the resulting Depression caused a shrinkage in theater activity. Some playhouses were torn down, many were converted to motion picture houses, and later to radio and television studios. From the time of the Depression until the 1960s no new Broadway playhouses were constructed. Fortunately, the theaters that survive from the early part of the century represent a cross-section of types and styles, and share among them a good deal of New York's rich theatrical history.

(MMK)



## Evolution of Theater Design

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

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

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

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

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## The Broadway Theater in American Theatrical History

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

It was in the Broadway theaters that the beginnings of a distinctly American drama could be seen in the Western melodramas of David Belasco, the social comedies of Clyde Fitch and Langdon Mitchell, and the problem

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

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

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

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

Having moved gradually northward all during the 19th century, New York's theater district finally came to rest at Times Square, where it has remained for almost ninety years. The economic Depression of the 1930s discouraged speculative ventures such as the construction of new theaters, while after prosperity returned in the wake of World War II, the cost of renting land and constructing a theater was prohibitively high. The northward movement of the theater district may also have been discouraged for a number of years by the existence of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway, which crossed from Sixth to Ninth Avenues at 53rd Street, thereby providing a natural northern boundary for the theater district.<sup>11</sup>

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

(MMK)

## Notes

1. The discussion of the northward movement of Manhattan's business and theaters is based on Mary Henderson, The City and the Theatre (Clifton, N.J.: James T. White and Co., 1973), pp. 130-131, 168-170.
2. W.G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, Carnival Crossroads: the Story of Times Square (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 39-78; Howard B. Furer, New York: A Chronological and Documentary History 1524-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 34 ff.; The New York Subway (New York: Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, n.d.).
3. Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Actors Equity Association, 1932; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 26.
4. Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 6.
5. Brooks Atkinson, Broadway, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 11.
6. Philip Paneth, Times Square, Crossroads of the World (New York: Living Books, 1965), p. 20.
7. Henderson, The City and the Theatre, p. 263.
8. Henderson, p. 195-196.
9. The discussion of the developments in American theater architecture is based upon: Ned A. Bowman, "American Theatre Architecture: the Concrete Mirror Held Up to Yankee Nature," The American Theatre: The Sum of its Parts (New York: French, 1972), pp. 199-233; Burr C. Cook, "Twenty Years of Theatre Building," Theatre, 36 (August 1922), 98-99; Arthur S. Meloy, Theatres and Picture Houses (New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Co., 1916), p. 29.
10. See, for example, the discussion of various theaters in Randolph Williams Sexton and Ben Franklin Betts, eds., American Theaters of Today, 2 vols. (New York: Architectural Book Pubs., 1927, 1930; reprint ed., New York: Vestal, 1977).
11. Stanley Buder, "Forty-Second Street at the Crossroads: A History of Broadway to Eighth Avenue," West 42nd Street: "The Bright Light Zone" (New York: Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, 1978), p. 62.

## The Chanins

During the middle of the 1920s, the Chanin organization became the second major entrepreneurial builder of Broadway theaters, joining the Shuberts who had been established in the field for two decades. Unlike the Shuberts, however, the Chanins were builders rather than producers, and their six theaters represent a three-year chapter in a long and distinguished career in the building of New York.

The firm was founded by Irwin Salmon Chanin (b.1892), a native of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Soon after his birth the family returned to its native Ukraine, remaining there until 1907 when they moved back to Bensonhurst. Chanin graduated from Cooper Union in 1915 having studied engineering and architecture. His earliest employment was as an engineer working on subway construction in New York and Philadelphia. During World War I he participated in the construction of a poison gas factory for the U.S. Army. In 1919, upon leaving the army, Chanin began his building activities by constructing two houses in Bensonhurst. The success of this modest venture led to the construction of other one- and two-family houses in Bensonhurst as well as the formation of the Chanin Construction Company, in which he was joined by his brother Henry I. Chanin (1893-1973). The firm branched out into apartment buildings in Brooklyn, and erected an office building in downtown Brooklyn. Extending their activities to Manhattan in 1924, they constructed the Fur Center Building.<sup>1</sup> That same year the Chanins expanded into the theater business.

In a 1928 interview with Mary Mullett, Irwin Chanin recalled always having been interested in the theater. As a student at Cooper Union,

that was my one diversion. But I was so poor that all I could afford was an occasional fifty-cent seat in the top gallery. To reach this, I had to go to a separate door. I wasn't allowed to use the main entrance, and this always humiliated me.<sup>2</sup>

In 1924, with the Broadway theater industry booming, Chanin took the opportunity to enter the theater building field. He had no theater organization, but he had a number of friends in the theater and had secured the services of the Shuberts' theater architect, Herbert J. Krapp. Mindful of his early experience, Chanin resolved to develop a new type of plan in which "the girl from the five-and-ten and the richest aristocrat in town enter by the same door."<sup>3</sup> He envisioned an orchestra level with a steep slope towards the rear; the single entrance lobby would be below the slope of the rear orchestra. There would be one large balcony instead of the traditional two smaller ones, thus eliminating the distant second balcony. Krapp told Chanin that the Shuberts wouldn't like such a theater, but Chanin said he did not care what the Shuberts would like. He also insisted on wider seats, more space between rows, and more comfortable dressing rooms.<sup>4</sup>

Chanin's first theater was called Chanin's Forty-Sixth Street Theater (now the Forty-Sixty Street Theater),<sup>5</sup> and in it he and Krapp incorporated Chanin's novel interior arrangement.<sup>5</sup> It was a large theater, especially designed to accommodate musicals. The Forty-Sixth Street was followed by the construction of the Biltmore and the Mansfield (now the Brooks

Atkinson) in 1925. In 1926, Chanin undertook a major mixed-use multiple building project which doubled the number of his Broadway theaters and gave final form to what was to become the theater district's traditional heart. On the block bounded by West 45th and West 46th Streets, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, the Shuberts had already built the paired Shubert and Booth Theaters behind the Astor Hotel, along the narrow lane which became known as "Shubert Alley" (1911-12), and the similar adjoining pair of the Broadhurst and Plymouth (1916-18). Chanin completed the redevelopment of the block by building the Majestic Theater on West 44th Street, the Theater Masque (today the John Golden) and the adjoining Royale Theater on 45th Street, and the Hotel Lincoln (now the Milford Plaza Hotel) along the Eighth Avenue frontage, all as one interconnecting development. By completing the block's complement of theaters, and by using Herbert J. Krapp, who had already designed the Plymouth and Broadhurst theaters for the Shuberts, Chanin contributed greatly to the cohesiveness of Shubert Alley.

In addition to their six legitimate Broadway playhouses, the Chanins also built three movie palaces, the Loew's Coney Island (1925), the fabulous 6,000-seat Roxy (1927; popularly known as the "Cathedral of the Motion Picture; demolished), and the Beacon Theater, on Broadway between 74th and 75th Streets (1927-28; a designated New York City Interior Landmark). The Beacon, like the Shubert Alley group, was also an unusual mixed-use development, incorporating a movie palace with a hotel.

Chanin's interest in the theater was such that when, in 1927-29, he built the Chanin Building (a designated New York City Landmark), the company's 56-story headquarters located at the corner of Lexington Avenue and East 42nd Street, he included within it a 192-seat theater on the 50th floor (the theater no longer exists). Yet, despite Chanin's interest in theaters, and his construction of some of the city's most notable examples, his company left the theater construction field barely four years after entering it. Chanin's last involvement with the New York theater world was in 1930, when, in exchange for his interest in the Theater Masque and the Royale and Majestic theaters, he acquired from the Shuberts the Century (formerly New) Theater on Central Park West at 62nd Street and replaced it with the twin-towered, Art Deco style Century Apartments.<sup>6</sup>

After leaving the field of Broadway theaters, Chanin's firm moved into the building of luxury apartment houses on Central Park West, including the Century (a designated New York City Landmark) and the Majestic. Extensive suburban building activity, such as Green Acres in Valley Stream, Long Island, occupied much of the firm's time during the 1930s and 1940s. During World War II the firm built 2000 pre-fabricated dwellings in Newport News, Virginia, five hangars at National Airport in Washington, D.C., the Naval Ordnance Laboratory in White Oak, Maryland, and five Navy powder magazine buildings in Indian Head, Maryland. The firm has also built numerous manufacturing buildings in the New York City area and the impressive Coney Island Pumping Station for the City of New York. By 1952, when Irwin S. Chanin was profiled in the National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, the Chanin Organization was composed of approximately 25 firms and corporations engaged in architecture, engineering, and construction, and in the ownership and operation of real estate.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite the relatively brief span of time spent by the firm in the construction of Broadway theaters, its importance to Broadway's development was



disproportionately great. In his Broadway theaters, all of which survive to date, Chanin championed a democratic approach to theater design, created theaters considered among the best today for theatrical performances, and helped complete the development of "Shubert Alley," the heart of the theater district.

(FD, ASD)

#### Notes

1. Landmarks Preservation Commission, Chanin Building Designation Report (LP-0993), November 14, 1978, report prepared by Marjorie Pearson, p. 1. Also, Diana Agrest, ed., A Romance with the City: Irwin S. Chanin (New York: Cooper Union Press, 1982), pp. 16-17.
2. Mary B. Mullett, "The Chanins of Broadway," American Magazine 106 (August 1928), 126.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. For the Chanin theaters see Agrest, pp.13, 22-45; The Chanin Theaters: A Renaissance in Theatre Craft (New York: Chanin Theatres Corporation, n.d.).
6. Interview with Irwin Chanin by Andrew Dolkart, June 26, 1985.
7. "Chanin, Irwin Salmon," National Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. H, pp. 254-255. For the later projects see also Agrest, pp. 86-94.

#### Herbert J. Krapp

The character of today's Broadway theater district owes more to architect Herbert J. Krapp (1883-1973) than to any other architect. He designed sixteen of the extant Broadway theaters (almost half the total),<sup>1</sup> fourteen of which are in active theatrical use, as well as five that have been demolished.<sup>2</sup> Despite his enormous output, however, little is known today of his life and work.

Herbert Krapp's career coincided with the rise of the Shubert organization as the major force in the New York theater. Upon his graduation from Cooper Union, Krapp joined the office of noted theater architects Henry Herts and Hugh Tallant, who had designed some of the handsomest early twentieth-century theaters in New York, including the Lyceum (1903), New Amsterdam (1902-03), Helen Hayes (1911, demolished), and Longacre (1912-13). According to Krapp's daughter, the partners were becoming increasingly debilitated by morphine addiction, and gradually entrusted Krapp with responsibility for design and office operations.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, when the Shuberts next decided to build new theaters, in 1916, they turned to Krapp for designs, and proceeded to commission from him a dozen theaters in Times Square in as many years (1916-1928).

Throughout his professional career Krapp remained the preferred Shubert architect. He designed their theaters in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere, supervised Shubert theater alterations nationwide, and was even the architect for their private residences.<sup>4</sup>

Besides his twelve Shubert theaters, Krapp designed nine other Times Square houses. Six, built between 1924 and 1927, were for the Chanin Construction Company. Only three, the Alvin, the Hammerstein (now the Ed Sullivan), and the Waldorf (demolished) were designed for independent interests. A brilliant acoustician and gifted architect of great invention, Krapp was responsible for scores of theaters throughout New York City and State (including three movie houses in Queens: the Sunnyside in Woodside and the Jackson and the Boulevard in Jackson Heights) and others stretching from Palm Beach to Detroit. His office records document alterations to literally hundreds of theaters across the country.

Krapp's Broadway theaters closely reflect the interest and needs of a new breed of theatrical entrepreneur, the large-scale speculative owner/builder. Prior to the rise of the Shuberts as major theater owners, most theaters had been erected for independent impresarios, including Oscar Hammerstein who built the first Times Square theater and whose Victory Theater (1899) still stands on 42nd Street, Daniel Frohman who built the Lyceum (1903), Charles Dillingham who built the Lunt-Fontanne (1910), and David Belasco and John Cort who built the theaters that bear their names (1907 and 1912). At the turn of the century, Klaw and Erlanger's Theatrical Syndicate dominated most of the Times Square theaters, but did not sponsor a unified building campaign as the Shuberts eventually did. Since the Shuberts were building theaters largely as financial ventures, most of their buildings tended to be simpler than those designed for the impresarios who were attempting to draw attention both to their theaters and to themselves. The theaters that Krapp designed for the Shuberts are relatively restrained on both the exterior and interior, but they reflect Krapp's mastery of theater layout, as well as the general stylistic trends established by the earlier and more elaborate theater designs in the Times Square theater district.

Krapp's earliest theaters, the Plymouth (1916-17) and Broadhurst (1917), were built as a pair located immediately to the west of Henry Herts's earlier Shubert pair, the Shubert and Booth. The designs of the Plymouth and Broadhurst echo those of the earlier theaters. Like the Shubert and Booth, Krapp's houses have rounded corners that face towards Broadway (the direction from which most audience members arrived). Each corner is accented by an entrance with a broken pedimented enframement and by an oval cartouche. These forms imitate, in a simplified manner, the ornamental forms on Herts's buildings. In addition, Krapp's theaters are faced with bricks separated by wide, deeply inset mortar joints in a manner favored by Herts. The Plymouth and Broadhurst facades are simpler than their neighbors, but they were clearly designed to complement Herts's theaters and create a unified group of Shubert houses.

The Plymouth and Broadhurst are not adorned with a great deal of applied stone or terra cotta. This lack of architectural ornament is typical of Krapp's designs for the Shuberts;<sup>5</sup> the facades of these theaters are generally enlivened by diaper-patterned brick and occasionally by the use of ornamental iron balconies. The use of diaper-patterned brick can be

seen on the Plymouth and the Broadhurst, but it is most evident on the Morosco (1917, demolished), Ritz (1921), Ambassador (1921), and the 46th-Street facade of the Imperial (1923). Krapp's use of diaperwork might have been inspired by Herts & Tallant's use of an ornate diaper pattern of terra cotta on their Helen Hayes Theater (1911).

After building a large number of new theaters between 1916 and 1923 the Shuberts undertook very little construction in the Times Square area from 1924 through 1927. During these years the Chanin Construction Company emerged as the major theater builder in the area. The Chanins also turned to Krapp for their theater designs. Major New York City builders, the Chanins considered theaters to be sound financial investments from which they could not fail to profit. The six theaters that Krapp designed for the Chanins are more ornate than those he designed for the Shuberts. One reason may be that the Chanins, new to the theater world, decided that their theaters should project an elegant image; another, that as a building company, they were more concerned than the Shuberts about the exterior appearance of their buildings. Still another factor may have the greater availability of money in the middle of the 1920s as compared to the years during and immediately following World War I when most of the Shubert theaters were erected.

Krapp's first two theaters for the Chanins, the Forty-Sixth Street (1924) and the Biltmore (1925), are neo-Renaissance style structures with extensive terra-cotta detail that includes rusticated bases, monumental Corinthian pilasters, and ornate cornices and balustrades. Krapp's next commission, the Brooks Atkinson (1926), has a facade with the Mediterranean flavor that came to be favored by the Chanins. Referred to at the time as "modern Spanish" in style<sup>6</sup>, the Brooks Atkinson is a brick building articulated by three Palladian openings supported by twisted columns. Roundel panels and a Spanish-tiled parapet are additional Spanish forms on the facade. Krapp's largest commission from the Chanins was a trio of theaters, the Golden, Royale, and Majestic, all built between 1926 and 1927 in conjunction with the Lincoln Hotel (now the Milford Plaza Hotel). Like the Brooks Atkinson, these three theaters were described as being "modern Spanish in character."<sup>7</sup> All three were constructed of yellow brick and adorned with areas of decorative terra-cotta pilasters, twisted columns, arches, parapets, and columned loggias.<sup>8</sup>

Following his work for the Chanins, Krapp designed three independent houses, all of which were stylistically unusual. The Waldorf (1926, demolished) which stood on West 50th Street was an ornate French neo-Classical-style structure; the Alvin (1927, now the Neil Simon) an impressive neo-Federal style red brick building; and the Hammerstein (now the Ed Sullivan) a neo-Gothic theater housed in a tall office building. The latter two were commissioned by theatrical impresarios, hence their more elaborate design as compared to Krapp's work for the Shubert and Chanin theater chains.

In 1928 the Shuberts commissioned their final theater from Krapp. The Ethel Barrymore is among Krapp's finest and most unusual designs. The theater is a monumentally scaled structure combining an extremely ornate rusticated Beaux-Arts-style base with a superstructure boldly modeled after the windowed facade of a Roman bath.<sup>9</sup>

Like the exteriors of his buildings, Krapp's interiors are stylistically varied, reflecting the design eclecticism of the first decades of the twentieth century. On many occasions the style of the interior has little to do with that of the exterior. Most of the theater interiors designed for the Shuberts have Adamesque style ornament, a style deriving from the neo-Classical designs originated by the eighteenth-century English architect Robert Adam. Krapp's Adamesque interiors display the refined, elegant forms common to the style, and such features as delicate garlands, rosettes, and foliate bands. The "Spanish" theaters that Krapp designed for the Chanins have interior details such as twisted columns, arcades, and escutcheons that match the style of the exteriors. All of Krapp's interiors were designed to create a relaxing and comfortable environment for the theatergoer. The decor of the auditoriums is simple yet elegant, and generally complemented by similarly designed lobbies and lounges.

Although Krapp lived to the age of 86, he apparently designed no theaters during the last forty years of his life. Because of the theater glut caused by financial problems during the Depression, theaters ceased being a lucrative architectural specialty. Krapp survived as a building assessor for the City of New York, and turned increasingly to industrial design. A twentieth-century Renaissance man, he supplemented his architectural practice with the patterning of silver- and flatware and especially with his design of mechanical couplings.<sup>10</sup> The theaters he designed in the early decades of this century, however, remain a lasting legacy, and many of his buildings, such as the Majestic, Imperial, Plymouth, and 46th Street Theaters, are counted among the most successful and sought-after on Broadway.

(ASD)

#### Notes

1. Krapp's sixteen theaters are the Alvin (now the Neil Simon), Ambassador, Brooks Atkinson, Ethel Barrymore, Biltmore, Broadhurst, 46th Street, Golden, Imperial, Majestic, Eugene O'Neill, Plymouth, Ritz, Royale, and Ed Sullivan (originally Hammerstein). The Central (1567 Broadway at 47th Street) is now a movie house and all but its cornice is covered with billboards.
2. The five theaters designed by Krapp that have been demolished are the Bijou (209 West 45th Street), Century (932 Seventh Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets), 49th Street (235 West 49th Street), Morosco (217 West 45th Street), and Waldorf (116 West 50th Street).
3. Interview with Mrs. Peggy Elson, Herbert Krapp's daughter, by Janet Adams, November 16, 1984.
4. Herbert Krapp papers, currently in the possession of Mrs. Peggy Elson, New York City.
5. The 49th Street Theater (1921) was an exception. This building had a terra-cotta facade articulated by fluted pilasters.

6. Brooks Atkinson Theater, Souvenir Program of the dedication (as Mansfield Theater), February 15, 1926, n.p. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center branch, New York Public Library.
7. Royale Theater, Souvenir Program of the dedication, January 11, 1927, n.p. Billy Rose Theater Collection.
8. The use of restricted areas of very ornate detail set against an otherwise unornamented facade is reminiscent of Spanish Baroque or Churrigueresque architecture.
9. This theater is often overlooked because the present rectilinear marquee cuts the facade in half, hiding the ornate base and destroying the subtle juxtaposition between the top and bottom sections of the building.
10. Herbert Krapp papers, and interview with Mrs. Peggy Elson.

#### The Brooks Atkinson Theater

The Brooks Atkinson Theater was Irwin Chanin's third venture in the Broadway theater world in as many years, following the 46th Street and the Biltmore. In an unusual gesture, Chanin named the theater for matinee idol Richard Mansfield. Perhaps in honor of Mansfield, he and his architect, Herbert Krapp, produced an unusually handsome and elegant theater.

Richard Mansfield, born in England in 1857, had come to the United States in 1882 and launched an American career, first in comic opera and then as manager of his own company in 1886.<sup>1</sup> Playing the lead role in such hits as A Parisian Romance, Prince Karl, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Mansfield had made his reputation as a character actor and lead actor of remarkable and versatile talent. By his death in 1907, at the height of his career, it was said of Mansfield that no American actor had a greater following or left a more enduring memory.

Like his resolve to build theaters with common entrances and lobbies, Chanin's intention to name a theater for Mansfield had roots in his student days at the Cooper Union, when he heard Richard Mansfield describe the ephemeral nature of an actor's fame and memory:

Perhaps the saddest spot in the sad life of the actor is to be forgotten. Great paintings live to commemorate great painters; the statues of sculptors are their monuments; and books are the inscriptions of authors. But who shall say when this generation has passed away how Yorick played? ...When the curtain has fallen for the last time and only the unseen spirit hovers in the wings, what book will speak of all the mummer did and suffered in his time?<sup>2</sup>

Two decades after leaving school and laying the foundations of his real estate empire, Chanin was able to build and name a theater for



Mansfield, and Mansfield's widow expressed her gratitude for the honor. In a letter to Chanin dated January 8, 1926, and well publicized for its melodramatic effect, Mrs. Mansfield related how, at the time her husband had taken over the old Harrigan's theater, he had been advised to rename it for himself, as was the practice of many impresarios. Instead, he renamed it the Garrick. According to his wife, he explained that "if sometime a theater may be named for me, I should esteem it an honor -- but I will not name it for myself, but for the man whose scholar I have been in spirit and whose work I have tried to follow."<sup>3</sup>

The theater remained known as the Mansfield until it closed in 1950 to become a radio and television studio. When it reopened for legitimate use in 1960, the theater was renamed for the venerable theater critic Brooks Atkinson.

Unlike Chanin's first two theaters, the 46th Street and the Biltmore, the design of the Brooks Atkinson looked not to the neo-Classical terracotta arcades of so many earlier theaters, but rather to a more eclectic style, which its builders described as "modern Spanish."<sup>4</sup> Chanin and Krapp used this same style for their remaining three theaters as well. The design of the exterior of the Brooks Atkinson incorporated three Palladian arches with spiral Corinthian columns, a more picturesque version of the neo-classical arcades familiar from earlier theater buildings. Narrow round-arched windows, a projecting cornice, and a Spanish-tiled roof completed the eclectic design.

The theater's interior is notable for its auditorium configuration, wider than usual, but not as deep, thus bringing the audience closer to the stage. For its ornamental program, Chanin retained Roman Melzer, former architect and decorator to Czar Nicholas II of Russia before World War I, to act as consultant and advisor.<sup>5</sup> Although it remains unclear exactly who contributed what, together Chanin, Krapp and Melzer created an unusually elaborate and handsome interior design, which echoes the "modern Spanish" of the exterior, as well as incorporating classically-inspired motifs typical of Krapp's theaters.

Melzer was known in Russia as one of the steadiest followers of the "modern" Russian style.<sup>6</sup> Prior to his immigration to America in 1918, Melzer, as architect of the Imperial Court, designed an imposing ornamental fence around the garden of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, and a palace at Tsarskoye Selo. Apart from a number of private residences in St. Petersburg, he also designed a palace for the Grand Duke Michael, a bridge across the Neva River, and airplanes for the Russian army during World War I. Fleeing the revolution, Melzer established himself as a designer in the United States. Among his American works are several Russian Orthodox churches in Brooklyn and Yonkers.<sup>7</sup>

The Atkinson's interior design includes a series of murals, not unusual in the theaters built for individual impresarios before World War I, but rarely found in the speculatively built theaters of the 1920s. The murals were painted by A. Battisti and G. Troombul.<sup>8</sup> The unusually handsome ornamental plasterwork adorning the interior was designed by Joseph F. Dujat, sculptor and president of the Architectural Plastering Company.<sup>9</sup>

The overall effect of the Brooks Atkinson theater is of a more elegant and elaborate design than Chanin's other Broadway houses, or most of the speculative houses built by the Shuberts. Although its name has changed, the Atkinson can still be considered a tribute by Irwin Chanin to Richard Mansfield and to the theatrical profession.

(PD, AR)

#### Notes

1. The following account of Richard Mansfield's career is based on his obituary in the New York Dramatic Mirror, September 7, 1907.
2. Brooks Atkinson Theater, Souvenir Program of the Dedication.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. See Melzer's obituary in Architectural Forum, (June 19, 1943), 126.
6. Architectural Monuments of Leningrad (Leningrad, 1975), 400-401.
7. Obituary, Architectural Forum.
8. Mansfield Theater, Souvenir Program.
9. Ibid.

#### The Brooks Atkinson as a Playhouse<sup>1</sup>

The Brooks Atkinson opened on February 15, 1926 with The Night Duel, by Daniel Rubin and Edgar MacGregor. Many of the theater's early productions suffered from brief runs, in part because of adventurous programming. Among the unusual and often short-lived shows at the theater in the late 1920s were Franz Werfel's Schweiger; a revival of Eugene O'Neill's Beyond the Horizon; Ibsen's Ghosts; and a trio of plays staged by the Moscow Habimah company, performing in Hebrew: Ansky's The Dybbuk, Berger's The Deluge, and The Eternal Jew.

Lew Fields, the veteran comic of the Weber and Fields comedy team, leased the theater from April 1928 to March 1929. Near the end of his career, he produced and acted in several plays in the Mansfield, including "Hello, Daddy" in which he made his last stage appearance.

In 1930 the Mansfield found major success with The Green Pastures, a Pulitzer Prize winner for author and director Marc Connelly. Performed by an all black cast, it had a long run of 640 performances.

A number of Group Theater productions played the Mansfield.<sup>2</sup> The Group Theater was founded in 1931 by Howard Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg. All three had been associated with the Theater Guild, but, as committed "leftists," broke away in protest of the Guild's apolitical policies. The rupture marked the beginning of the Theater Guild's decline.

The Group Theater's first effort was the House of Connelly. Other notable productions included Men in White, Awake and Sing, Waiting for Lefty, Johnny Johnson, Golden Boy, Rocket to the Moon, The Gentle People, and My Heart's in the Highlands. The Group Theater was the first to present the work of Clifford Odets and Marc Blitzstein, and it boosted the careers of Luther Adler, Stella Adler, John Garfield, Elia Kazan, and Franchot Tone.

Other productions at the Mansfield associated with renowned actors and directors included Page Miss Glory (1934) with James Stewart; Anthony and Cleopatra (1937) with Tallulah Bankhead, and music by Virgil Thompson; Thunder Rock (1939) with Lee J. Cobb and Frances Farmer, directed by Elia Kazan; and In Time to Come (1941), produced and directed by Otto Preminger.

In 1945 the Mansfield was purchased by Michael Myerberg, a stage and screen producer and financier. Anna Lucasta, Philip Yordan's black variation of the "Anna Christie" theme starring Hilda Simms and Canada Lee, ran 957 performances from August 1944 to November 1946. It was followed by Ruth Gordon's autobiographical comedy Years Ago, which starred Frederic March and Patricia Kirkland as the stagestruck young Ruth. Produced by Max Gordon and staged by Garson Kanin, it ran 199 performances.

Many short runs in 1947 were followed in 1948 by a two-month engagement by the Dublin Gate Theatre (February and March); a short-lived revue starring Billie Holliday (April); and finally, in December, Jean-Paul Sartre's The Red Gloves with Charles Boyer and Joan Tetzel (113 performances).

CBS used the theater as a television studio from 1950 to 1960. Reopening in 1960 as the Brooks Atkinson, the theater saw the production, in 1961, of Neil Simon's first Broadway play, Come Blow Your Horn. Other notable productions included The Glass Menagerie (1965), A Day in the Life of Joe Egg (1968) with Albert Finney, and Jimmy Shine (1968) with Dustin Hoffman. Cliff Gorman won a Tony Award for his memorable performance in the title role of Lenny (1971). From 1975 to 1978, Same Time, Next Year prospered at the Atkinson with 1,444 performances. Jack Lemmon in Tribune and the British comedy hit Bedroom Farce played the Atkinson in the late 1970s. On February 20, 1980, the Pulitzer Prize winning Talley's Folly opened.

## Notes

1. This production history of the Brooks Atkinson Theater, condensed from the fuller version in the Appendix, is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against George Freedley, "Broadway Playhouses," bound typescript of the "Stage Today," 1941-43, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch,

New York Public Library; The Best Plays of....[annual] (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present); Theatre World [annual] Daniel Blum, editor (New York: Theatre World, 1946-present), The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1966); Edwin Bronner, The Encyclopedia of American Theater, 1900-1975 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1980); Gerald Bordman, Oxford Companion to American Theatre (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

2. Gerald Bordman, Oxford Companion to American Theatre (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 311.

## Description<sup>1</sup>

### Auditorium:

#### 1) Configuration:

The configuration of the auditorium consists of a space, wider than it is deep, with curving side walls, a single balcony, a proscenium flanked by boxes, the stage opening behind the proscenium arch, a promenade at the rear of the orchestra, a ceiling, and a sloping floor extending towards the proscenium arch.

Proscenium: the proscenium is formed by a three-centered arch.

Balconies: There is a single balcony with a cross-over aisle.

Boxes: At each side of the proscenium the wall curves in and contains three boxes with curved fronts.

Staircases: Staircases at the rear of the auditorium lead to the balcony level.

Ceiling: A ceiling beam divides the ceiling into two sections. The portion of the ceiling in front of this beam is coved and defines the area of the boxes and the proscenium.

Floor: The floor is raked.

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

Promenade: A promenade is located at the rear of the orchestra.

#### 2) Ornament:

The decorative ornament is low-relief plasterwork, which is integrated into the surfaces which define the configuration of the auditorium. Decorative ornament includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Proscenium arch: the arch is outlined by bands of anthemion, rope, and egg-and-dart moldings. Adamesque sphinxes fill the spandrels of the arch. Engaged fluted Corinthian pilasters with gilded capitals flank the arch and support a frieze with fan-filled arch motifs.

Orchestra: The side and rear walls of the orchestra are enhanced by panels. A cornice with moldings extends across the rear wall. Two columns at the rear of the orchestra flank a decorative railing. Exit signs above the doors are flanked by foliate swags.

Boxes: The three curving boxes are framed by engaged fluted Corinthian pilasters with gilded capitals. Below each box, at orchestra level, is a rectangular opening set in simulated rustication. The boxes are adorned with panels containing shields and foliation. An arched opening rises from each box. Each arch is composed of twisted colonnettes with small Corinthian capitals supporting an egg-and-dart molding. Engaged fluted Corinthian pilasters flank the center arch and support a decorative molding.

Balcony: A swag-adorned frieze and a large arch form are set above the exit doors on the balcony side walls. These elements are flanked by pilasters and paneled wall surfaces. The upper panels have foliate decoration. A decorative cornice like that above the proscenium spans the pilasters, panels, and arch on each side. The rear balcony wall is paneled. The balcony front contains panels with shields and foliation like those on the box fronts. The underside of the balcony is quite ornate with plasterwork panels in low relief.

Ceiling: the ceiling is a particularly handsome feature, done in plasterwork panels that create intertwined arches and lozenge shapes. The panels are outlined by beaded moldings. Large foliate cartouches are placed over the moldings near the sides. The ceiling beam that divides the ceiling into two sections is adored with a cornice and frieze with arch motifs. The coved portion of the ceiling in front of this beam is also set off by a frieze with arch motifs and cornice like that above the proscenium. The sections of the cove are outlined by moldings and adorned with foliate and urn motifs.

### 3) Attached fixtures:

Orchestra: Doors lead from the lobby to the north side of the auditorium. Exit doors are located on the south wall and the rear wall. There are exit signs above the doors. A decorative railing is at the rear of the orchestra, marking the space of the promenade. At balcony level the side walls contain exit doors at the level of the crossover aisle which divides the balcony into two tiers.

Staircases: At the rear of the orchestra, staircases with decorative iron railings lead up to the balcony level.

Light fixtures: Existing light fixtures throughout the auditorium are stylistically compatible with its Adamesque style. Four candelabra chandeliers are suspended from four foliate cartouches placed over the



moldings near the sides of the ceiling. A large non-original crystal chandelier is suspended from the center of the coved section of the ceiling. A crystal light fixture is suspended from a central medallion on the underside of each box. There are crystal light fixtures placed in the decorative medallions on the underside of the balcony. The side and rear orchestra walls have original bronze wall sconces.

Murals: On each wall above the boxes are painted murals by A. Battisti and G. Troombul, depicting muses and **commedia del arte** figures. These murals are irreplaceable.

4) Known alterations: Some of the panels on the underside of the balcony have been redone for the installation of air conditioning grilles. A light rail is placed on the balcony front. The current color scheme allows the ornamental detail to be perceived and complements the murals.

(MP)

#### Notes

1. This description identifies the spaces that are included in this designation. Specific elements are listed and architecturally significant features are underlined as explained in the "Guidelines for Treatment of Theater Interiors" as adopted by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on December 10, 1985.
2. For the purposes of this description, the stage shall include the enclosing walls and roof of the stage house and a floor area behind the proscenium arch, but not any fixture or feature of or within that space.

#### Conclusion

The interior of the Brooks Atkinson Theater survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. One of the group of theaters constructed for the Chanin Organization during the early decades of this century, the Brooks Atkinson helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district. Designed for the Chanins by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district, the Brooks Atkinson represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history.

Built in honor of, and originally named for, actor Richard Mansfield, the Atkinson interior is unusually handsome. Roman Melzer, a former architect and designer for the Czar of Russia, supervised the design of the interior, which features exceptionally handsome murals and decorative plasterwork.

For half a century the Brooks Atkinson Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater. As such, it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

The preparation of this report has involved the work of a number of consultants supervised and edited by Anthony W. Robins (AR), Deputy Director of Research. Individual authors are noted by initials at the ends of their sections. The consultants were Margaret Knapp (MMK), Andrew S. Dolkart (ASD), Alice McGown (AM), Felicia Dryden (FD) and Peter Donhauser (PD). Gale Harris of the Research Department supplemented the research, verified the citations and sources, and provided editorial assistance. Marjorie Pearson (MP), Director of Research, wrote the description. Research Department staff who contributed to the report include Marion Cleaver, Virginia Kurshan, Susan Strauss, and Jay Shockley.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission gratefully acknowledges the assistance rendered by many concerned citizens in studying the Broadway theaters. Special thanks are due the New York City Planning Commission; Community Planning Board 5, Manhattan; the New York Landmarks Conservancy; the Actors Equity Committee to Save the Theaters; and the individual theater owners.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the interior of the Brooks Atkinson Theater survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that, built in 1925-26, the Brooks Atkinson was among the group of theaters constructed for the Chanin Organization during the early decades of this century which helped shaped the character of the Broadway theater district; that the Chanins intended it as a tribute to actor Richard Mansfield; that it was designed for the Chanins by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district; that as a Chanin theater designed by Herbert Krapp it represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history; that its interior, reflecting the supervision of Roman Melzer, continues the "modern Spanish" theme of its exterior; that its design includes unusually handsome plasterwork and murals of high quality; that for half a century the interior of the Brooks Atkinson Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that as such it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Brooks Atkinson Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and the ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 256-262 West 47th Street, Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1018, Lot 57, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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## APPENDIX

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

### 1926

THE NIGHT DUEL 2/15/26 (17 perfs.) by Daniel Rubin and Edgar MacGregor with Marjorie Rambeau, Felix Krembs and John Marston

THE MASQUE OF VENICE 3/2/26 (15 perfs) by George Dunning Gribble; with Arnold Daly, Selena Royle, Osgood Perkins and Kenneth MacKenna.

SCHWEIGER 3/23/26 (31 perfs.) by Franz Werfel; with Jacob Ben-Ami, Ann Harding and Minnie Dupree.

BEAU-STRINGS 4/26/26 (24 perfs.) by C.K. Munro; with Estelle Winwood Clarence Derwent and Lyonel Watts.

MY MAGNOLIA 7/12/26 (4 perfs.). Revue with songs by C. Luckey Roberts and Alex C. Rogers.

IF I WAS RICH 9/2/26 (92 perfs.) by William Anthony McGuire; with Joe Laurie, Jr., Mildred McLeod and Joseph Kilgour.

THE LADDER 10/22/26 (794 total perfs.) by J. Frank Davis; with Antoinette Perry, Vernon Steele, Irene Purcell, Ross Alexander, Edgar Stehli and Edward J. McNamara.

BEYOND THE HORIZON 11/30/26 (111 perfs.) by Eugene O'Neill; with Aline MacMahon, Robert Keith and Thomas Chalmers.

THE DYBBUK 12/13/26 (111 perfs.) by S. Ansky; THE DELUGE by Henning Berger and THE ETERNAL JEW; with the Habima Players of Moscow: Benno Schneider, Benjamin Zemach, David Itkin, Tmima Yudelwitch and Tamar Robins.

### 1927

GHOSTS 1/10/27 (24 perfs.) by Henrik Ibsen; with Mrs. Fiske.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE 1/31/27 (24 perfs.) by Allen de Lano; with Alexander Woolcott.

THE ADVENTUROUS AGE 2/7/27 (16 perfs.) by Frederick Whitney; with Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

WINDOW PANES 2/21/27 (32 perfs.) by Olga Printlaw; with Eileen Huban and Charles Dalton.

LOST 3/28/27 (8 perfs.) by A.E. Thomas and George Agnew; with Mona Kingsley.

THE GOSSIPY SEX 3/19/27 (23 perfs.) by Lawrence Grattan; with Llyn Overman.

SPEAK EASY 9/26/27 (57 perfs.) by Edward Knoblock and George Rosener; with Dorothy Hall.

THE SPRING BOARD 10/12/27 (37 perfs.) by Alice Duer Miller; with Madge Kennedy.

NEW YORK 11/14/27 (16 perfs.) by Samuel Ruskin Golding; with Ruth Shepley.

CASTE 12/23/27 (16 perfs.) by Cosmo Hamilton; with Horace Braham and Vivian Martin.

#### 1928

ATLAS & EVA 2/6/28 (24 perfs.) by Harry Delf and Leona Hograth and Harry Delf.

PRESENT ARMS 4/26/28 (147 perfs.) by Herbert Fields; lyrics by Lorenz Hart; music by Richard Rodgers; with Charles King and Flora Le Breton.

CHEE-CHEE 9/25/28 (32 perfs.) by Herbert Fields, lyrics by Lorenz Hart music by Richard Rogers; with Betty Starbuck, William Williams, Helen Ford, Philip Loeb and George Hassell.

HELLO DADDY 12/26/28 (196 perfs.) by Herbert and Dorothy Fields; with Lew Fields, Betty Starbuck and Mary Lawlor.

#### 1929

INDECRETION 3/4/29 (40 perfs.) by Myron G. Fagan; with Minna Gombell.

PHILADELPHIA 9/16/29 (32 perfs.) by S. John Park; with Jack Motte.

CORTEZ 11/4/29 (8 perfs.); with Lou Tellagen.

1930

THE GREEN PASTURES 2/26/30 (640 perfs.) by Marc Connelly; with Richard B. Harrison and Wesley Hill.

1931

'1931' 12/10/31 (12 perfs.) by Claire and Paul Sifton; a Group Theater Production.

THE HOUSE OF CONNOLLY 12/25/31 (91 perfs.); by Paul Green; Group Theater Production; with Franchot Tone and Stella Adler.

1932

LOST BOY 1/5/32 (15 perfs.) By T.C. Upham; with Elisha Cook, Jr.

MONKEY 2/11/32 (29 perfs.) by Robert Sparks; with Nedda Harrington and Richard Whorf.

1934

PAGE MISS GLORY 11/27/34 (63 perfs.) by Joseph Schrank and Philip Dunning; with Charles D. Brown, James Stewart, Jane Seymour, Dorothy Hall, Royal Dana Tracy, Peggy Shannon, Royal Beal and Betty Field.

1935

FIELD OF ERMINE 2/8/35 (11 perfs.); by Jacinto Benavente adapted by John Garrett Underhill; with Frances Starr, Nedda Harrington, Alma Kruger, Mary Mason, Leonard Penn and Clarence Derwent.

LADY OF LETTERS 3/8/35 (20 perfs.) by Turner Bullock; with Muriel Kirkland.

ON STAGE 10/29/35 (47 perfs.) by B.M. Kaye; with Osgood Perkins, Selena Royle, Claudia Morgan and Alan Marshall.

1936

LEND ME YOUR EARS! 10/5/36 (8 perfs.) by Philip Wood and Stuart Beach; with Walter C. Kelly and Ann Winthrop.

BLACK LIMELIGHT 11/9/36 (64 perfs.) by Gordon Sherry; with Winifred Lenihan, Alexander Kirkland and George Curzon.

### 1937

BEHIND RED LIGHTS 1/13/37 (176 perfs.) by Samuel Shipman and Beth Brown; with Dorothy Hall and Hardie Abright.

SEA LEGS 5/18/37 (15 perfs.) by Arthur Swanstrom and Michael Cleary; with Dorothy Stone, Charles Collins and Roscoe Ates.

ANTONY & CLEOPATRA 11/10/37 (5 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; music by Virgil Thompson; with Tallulah Bankhead, Conway Tearle, John Emery and Fania Marinoff.

TELL ME, PRETTY MAIDEN 12/16/37 (28 perfs.) by Dorothy Day Wendell; with Doris Nolan, May Buckley and Ann Thomas.

### 1938

IF I WERE YOU 1/24/38 (8 perfs.) by Paul Harvey Fox and Benn Levy; with Constance Cummings and Bernard Lee.

GLORIOUS MORNING 11/26/38 (9 perfs.) by Norman Macowan; with Jeanne Dante.

### 1939

WHAT A LIFE 1/9/39 (538 total perfs.) by Clifford Goldsmith; with Eddie Bracken. (First opened at the Biltmore Theater 4/13/38.)

THUNDER ROCK 11/14/39 23 perfs.) by Robert Ardrey; a Group Theater production, with Luther Adler, Lee J. Cobb and Frances Farmer.

### 1940

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK 1/16/40 (105 perfs.) by Sean O'Casey; with Arthur Sheilds, Effie Shannon, Barry Fitzgerald and Sara Allgood.

SEPARATE ROOMS 4/15/40 (613 total perfs.) by Joseph Carole and Alan Dinehart, in collaboration with Alex Gottlieb and Edmond Joseph; with Alan Dinehart, Glenda Farrell, Lyle Talbot. (First opened at the Maxine Elliot Theater 3/23/40.)

HORSE FEVER 11/23/40 (23 perfs.) By Eugene Conrad, Zac and Ruby Gable; with Ezra Stone and "Tribly" (a horse).

MEET THE PEOPLE 12/25/40 (160 perfs.); by Henry Myers, music by Jay Gorney and George Bassman; produced by the Hollywood Theater Alliance; with Nanette Fabray, Jack Gilford and Jack Albertson.

1941

AS YOU LIKE IT 10/20/41 (8 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Helen Craig and Alfred Drake.

CUCKOOS ON THE HEARTH 11/2/41 (129 total perfs.) by Parker W. Fennelly; with Margaret Callahan. (Opened at the Morosco Theater 9/26/41; moved to the Ambassador 11/21/42.)

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET 11/21/41 (11 perfs.) by Charles Rann Kennedy; with Ian Maclaren.

IN TIME TO COME 12/28/41 (40 perfs.) by Howard Koch and John Huston; with Richard Gaines, Nedda Harrigan, William Harrigan and Randolph Preston.

1942

THEY SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN BED 2/13/42 (11 perfs.) by Leo Rifkin, Frank Tarloff and David Shaw; with Grant Richards and Jack Gilford.

THE TIME, THE PLACE AND THE GIRL 10/21/42 (13 perfs.) by Will Morrissey John Neff and William B. Friedlander.

SWEET CHARITY 12/28/42 (8 perfs.) by Irving Brecker and Manuel Seff; with Viola Roache, Jane Seymour and Augusta Dabney.

1943

FOR YOUR PLEASURE 2/5/43 (11 perfs.). Revue with Yolanda Casazza and Frank Veloz.

APOLOGY 3/22/43 (8 perfs.) by Charles Schnee and Theodore Newton.

VICTORY BELLES 10/26/43 (87 perfs.) by Alice Gerstenberg; with Ellen Merrill, Mabel Taliaferro and Barbara Bennet.

1944

THANK YOU SVOBODA 3/1/44 (6 perfs.) by H.S. Kraft; with Sam Jaffe.

PUBLIC RELATIONS 4/6/44 (28 perfs.) by Dale Eunson; with Ann Andrews and Philip Merivale.

HICKORY STICK 5/8/44 (8 perfs.) by Frederick Stephani and Murray Burnett; with Steve Cochran and Vito Christi.

ACCORDING TO LAW by Noel Houston/A STRANGE PLAY by Patti Spears 6/1/44; (4 perfs.).

ANNA LUCASTA 8/30/44 (956 perfs.) by Philip Yordan; with Valerie Black.



1946

YEARS AGO 12/3/46 (199 perfs.) by Ruth Gordon; with Fredric March, Patricia Kirkland and Florence Eldridge.

1947

DEAR JUDAS 10/5/47 (16 perfs.) by Michael Myerberg, with Margaret Wycherly and Roy Hargrave.

THE GENTLEMEN FROM ATHENS 12/9/47 (7 perfs.) by Emmet Lavery with Anthony Quinn.

THE CRADLE WILL ROCK 12/26/47 (34 perfs.) by Marc Blitzsten; with Will Geer, Estelle Loring, Alfred Drake and Muriel Smith.

1948

THE MEN WE MARRY 1/6/48 (3 perfs.) by Elisabeth Cobb and Herschel Williams; with Shirley Booth.

KATHLEEN 2/3/48 (2 perfs.) by Michael Sayers; with Andree Wallace.

JOHN BULL'S OTHER ISLAND 2/10/48 (8 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with the Dublin Gate Theater Company starring Hilton Edwards, Michael MacLiammoir and Meriel Moore.

THE OLD LADY SAYS NO 2/17/48 (8 perfs.) by Denis Johnston; with the Dublin Gate Theatre Company.

WHERE STARS WALK 2/24/48 (16 perfs.) by Michael MacLiammoir; with the Dublin Gate Theatre Company.

HOLIDAY ON BRAODWAY 4/27/48 (6 perfs.) Revue with Wyatt and Taylor, The Shaw Stewart Trio, and Billie Holliday with the Bobby Tucker Quintet.

THE RED GLOVES 12/4/48 (113 perfs.) by Jean-Paul Sartre; with Charles Boyer and Joan Tetzl.

1949

THE BIGGEST THIEF IN TOWN 3/20/49 (13 perfs.) by Dalton Trumbo with Thomas Mitchell, Lois Nettleton and Walter Abel.

MAGNOLIA ALLEY 4/18/49 (8 perfs.) by George Batson; with Julie Harris, Jesse Royce Landis and Jackie Cooper.

CONCERTO FOR FUN 5/9/49 (1 perf.) with Henry L. Scott.

## 1950

DESIGN FOR STAINED GLASS 1/29/50 (8 perfs.) by William Berney and Howard Richardson; with Martha Scott and Charlton Heston.

1950-1960: The Brooks Atkinson Theater was used as a T.V. studio during this time.

## 1960

VINTAGE '60 9/12/60 (8 perfs.) by Jack Wilson, Alan Jeffreys and Maxwell Grant; with Barbara Heller and Fay De Witt.

SEND ME NO FLOWERS 12/5/60 (40 perfs.) by Norman Baeasch and Carroll Moore; with David Wayne and Nancy Olson.

## 1961

HOW TO MAKE A MAN 12/2/61 (12 perfs.) by William Welch; with Barbara Britton.

COME BLOW YOUR HORN 2/22/61 (677 perfs.) by Neil Simon; with Hal March, Arlene Golonka, Warren Berlinger and Lou Jacobi.

## 1962

NIGHT LIFE 10/23/62 (63 perfs.) by Sidney Kingsley; with Carol Lawrence Jack Kelly, Neville Brand and Walter Abel.

## 1963

PHOTO FINISH 2/12/63 (160 perfs.) by Peter Ustinov; with Peter Ustinov and Eileen Herlie.

PHAEDRE & BERENICE 10/20/63 (16 perfs.) by Racine; with Marie Bell & Company.

MAN AND BOY 11/21/63 (54 perfs.) by Terrence Rattigan; with Charles Boyer and Louise Sorel.

## 1964

THE MILK TRAIN DOESN'T STOP HERE ANYMORE 1/1/64 (5 perfs.) (revised) by Tennessee Williams; with Tallulah Bankhead, Marion Seldes, Tab Hunter and Ruth Ford.

THE DEPUTY 2/26/64 (316 total perfs.) by Rolf Hochhuth; with Emlyn Williams, Fred Stewart, Denise Joyce, Jeremy Brett and Ron Leibman.

READY WHEN YOU ARE, C.B. 12/7/64 (80 perfs.) by Susan Slade; with Julie Harris and Estelle Parsons.

1965

THE GLASS MENAGERIE 5/4/65 (563 perfs.) by Tennessee Williams; with Maureen Stapleton, George Grizzard, Piper Laurie and Pat Hingle.

POSTMARK ZERO 11/1/65 (8 perfs.) by Robert Nemiroff; with Viveca Lindfors.

THE PLAYROOM 12/5/65 (33 perfs.) by Mary Drayton; with Karen Black and Richard Thomas.

1966

NATHAN WEINSTEIN, MYSTIC CONNECTICUT 2/25/66 (3 perfs.) by David Rayfiel; with Estelle Parsons and Sam Levene.

THE BEST LAID PLANS 3/25/66 (3 perfs.) by Gwyn Davis; with Kenneth Mars, Edward Woodward, Marion Hailey and Polly Rowles.

1967

LOVE IN E-FLAT 2/13/67 (24 perfs.) by Norman Krasna; with Kathleen Nolan.

SING ISRAEL, SING 5/11/67 (14 perfs.) with Rose and Max Bozyk.

A MINOR ADJUSTMENT 10/6/67 (3 perfs.) by Eric Nicol; with Joan Darling, Austin Willis and William Redfield.

HALFWAY UP THE TREE 11/7/67 (63 perfs.) by Peter Ustinov; with Sam Waterson, Anthony Quayle and Eileen Herlie.

1968

A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG 2/1/68 (154 perfs.) by Peter Nichols; with Albert Finney.

LOVERS AND OTHER STRANGERS 9/16/68 (70 perfs.) by Renee Taylor and Joseph Bologna; with Renee Taylor and Zohra Lampert.

JIMMY SHINE 12/5/68 (161 perfs.) by Murray Schisgal; with Dustin Hoffman.

1969

INDIANS 10/13/69 (96 perfs.) by Arthur Kopit; with Stacey Keach, Sam Waterson, Raul Julia, Charles Durning and Manu Topou.

TRUMPETS OF THE LORD 4/29/69 (7 perfs.) by Vinette Carroll; with  
Theresa Merritt and Cicely Tyson.

PARIS IS OUT! 1/19/70 (96 perfs.) by Richard Seff; with Molly Picon,  
Sam Levene and Dorothy Sands.

CHARLEY'S AUNT 7/4/70 (9 perfs.) by Brandon Thomas; with Louis Nye and  
Maureen O'Sullivan.

NOT NOW, DARLING 10/29/70 (21 perfs.) by Ray Cooney and John Chapman;  
with Ed Zimmerman and Norman Wisdom.

#### 1971

ABELARD AND HELOISE 3/10/71 (523 perfs.) by Ronald Millar; with  
Keith Mitchell, Diana Rigg and Ronald Radd.

LENNY 5/26/71 (453 perfs.) by Julian Barry; with Cliff Gorman, Joe  
Silver and Johnny Armen.

#### 1972

LYSISTRATA 11/13/72 (8 perfs.) by Aristophanes; with Melina Mercouri  
and Priscilla Lopez.

#### 1973

STATUS QUO VADIS 2/18/73 (1 perf.) by Donald Driver, with Gail Strickland.

THE RIVER NIGER 3/27/73 (162 perfs.) by Joseph A. Walker; with Graham  
Brown, Douglas Turner Ward and Grenna Whitaker.

#### 1974

FIND YOUR WAY HOME 2/2/74 (133 total perfs.) by John Hopkins; with  
Michael Moriarty and Jane Alexander. (Moved to the Biltmore  
3/19/74.)

MY FAT FRIEND 3/31/74 (288 perfs.) by Charles Laurence; with John Lithgow  
George Rose and Lynn Redgrave.

OF MICE AND MEN 12/18/74 (62 perfs.) by John Steinbeck; with Kevin  
Conway and James Earl Jones.

#### 1975

SAME TIME NEXT YEAR 3/13/75 (1,444 perfs.) by Bernard Slade; with  
Ellen Burstyn and Charles Grodin.

1978

TRIBUTE 6/1/78 (212 perfs.) by Bernard Slade; with Jack Lemmon.

1979

BEDROOM FARCE 3/29/79 (278 perfs.) by Alan Ayckbourn; with Stephen Moore, Michael Stroud and Polly Adams.

TEIBELE AND HER DEMON 12/16/79 (25 perfs.) by Isaac Bashevis Singer; with F. Murray Abraham, Laura Esterman, Ron Perlman and Barry Primus.

1980

TALLEY'S FOLLY 2/20/80 (286 perfs.) by Lanford Wilson; with Judd Hirsch and Trish Hawkins.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE 11/6/80 (1 perf.) by Sidney Michaels; with George C. Scott and Trish Van Devere.

MIXED COUPLES 12/28/80 (9 perfs.) by James Prideaux; with Rip Torn and Geraldine Page.

1981

LOLITA 3/19/81 (12 perfs.) by Edward Albee; with Donald Sutherland, Ian Richardson and Blanche Baker.

WALLY'S CAFE 6/12/81 (11 perfs.) by Sam Bobrick and Ron Clark; with Rita Moreno, James Coco and Sally Struthers.

THE DRESSER 11/9/81 (208 perfs.) by Ronald Harwood; with Tom Courtenay and Paul Rogers.

1982

BEYOND THERAPY 5/26/82 (21 perfs.) by Christopher Durang; with John Lithgow.

GHOSTS 10/2/82 (40 perfs) by Henrik Ibsen; with Liv Ullman and John Neville.

STEAMING 12/12/82 (65 perfs.) by Nell Dunn; with Linda Thorson, Pauline Flanagan and Judith Ivey.

1983

K2 3/30/83 (85 perfs.) by Patrick Meyers; with Jeffrey DeMunn and Jay Patterson.

BEN KINGSLEY AS EDMUND KEAN 9/27/83 (29 perfs.) by Raymond Fitzsimons.

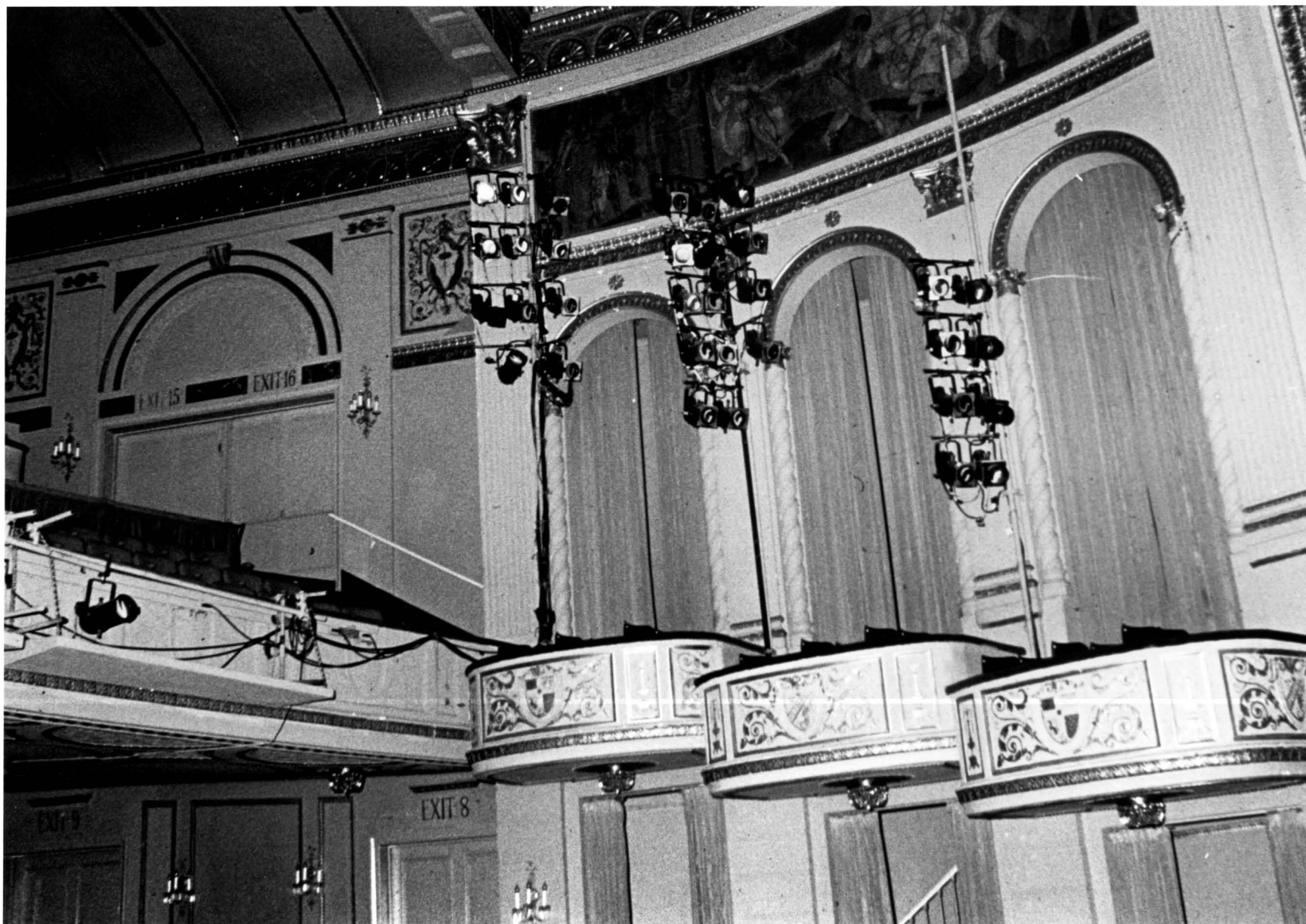
NOISES OFF 12/11/83 (562 perfs.) by Michael Frayn; with Dorothy Loudon.





Brooks Atkinson Theater Interior

Photo: Forster, LPC



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