

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 4, 1987; Designation List 194  
LP-1316

MARTIN BECK THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the outer lobby, the inner lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the mezzanine lounge, the upper part of the lobby, the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and 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; 302-314 West 45th Street, Manhattan. Built 1923-24; architect, G. Albert Lansburgh.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1035, Lot 37.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Martin Beck Theater, first floor interior consisting of the outer lobby, the inner lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the mezzanine lounge, the upper part of the lobby, 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; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty-one witnesses spoke or had statements read into the record in favor of designation. Two witnesses 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 Martin Beck Theater interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. It was built in 1923-24 by Martin Beck, a West Coast producer who had formerly been president of the Orpheum Circuit. After building the Palace, the legendary New York vaudeville showcase, and being forced out of its management, Beck determined to build another New York theater for himself, and spent the rest of his life running it.

Wanting to build as extraordinary a theater as possible, Beck brought architect G. Albert Lansburgh to New York from his native San Francisco, where Lansburgh had been the Orpheum Circuit's chief architect. A designer primarily of movie palaces, Lansburgh created for Beck a fantastic Moorish-

inspired theater, among the most lavishly decorated in the Broadway area. It included painted ornament by Albert Herter, an artist with whom Lansburgh had worked on other theaters. The only Broadway theater built west of Eighth Avenue, the Beck inspired no other theaters to follow, but has survived its location in grand style.

The Martin Beck represents a special and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, its interior is an unusual Moorish design, unlike that of any other Broadway theater. It stands as a reminder of the career of the great producer Martin Beck, whose name it still bears, and as G. Albert Lansburgh's only major New York theater.

For half a century the Martin Beck 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.

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## 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 Martin Beck 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.

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## 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, 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.

## Martin Beck

At age sixteen, Martin Beck (1867-1940) emigrated from Czechoslovakia to America with a troupe of middle European actors.<sup>1</sup> When the company dissolved soon after, Beck took on odd jobs ranging from door-to-door

salesman to biergarten waiter at the Chicago World's Fair. His success at the latter led to the proprietor's permission for Beck to mount stage entertainments and to Beck's speedy promotion as stage and house manager, bartender and bookkeeper.

After a short stint with Schiller's Vaudeville Company, Beck was hired in San Francisco by Gustave Walters, owner of a combined saloon-music hall known as the Orpheum. Heavily in debt, it soon passed to Morris Meyerfield, Jr., who kept Martin Beck on as house manager. The new owner continued to extend his theater holdings and soon controlled vaudeville west of Chicago. Beck consolidated his association with the Orpheum circuit by marrying Meyerfield's daughter; when he succeeded his father-in-law as president in 1920, the Circuit numbered more than fifty theaters.<sup>2</sup>

The Eastern counterpart of the Orpheum Circuit was the Keith's Circuit which was owned by Benjamin Franklin Keith (1846-1914) and Edward Franklin Albee (1857-1930). They were circus men who together built the country's largest vaudeville chain, not only through their own theaters, but also through their United Booking Office which channeled talent to all important theaters. By the 1890s the two men had established a reputation for having made music hall entertainment respectable and vaudeville an entertainment fit for the family.<sup>3</sup>

Around the turn of the century, Keith, Albee, F. F. Proctor, and several other theater owners formed the United Booking Office which, under Albee's direction, controlled Eastern vaudeville for the next several years. With the U.B.O. as a power base, the Keith's circuit continued growing. In 1912 Keith and Albee arranged a merger with the Orpheum chain, and created the Keith-Orpheum Circuit.<sup>4</sup>

With Martin Beck as the ambitious kingpin in the West, the Keith-Orpheum circuit was uneasy. The inevitable falling out came when Beck decided to establish a theater in New York. Called the Palace, it was to be the greatest vaudeville center in America. But it was no sooner opened by Beck, in 1913, than it was lost to Albee through a series of still mysterious double-crosses.<sup>5</sup>

In the final account, Beck retained only 25% control of the Palace and could book acts only on Albee's terms. He retained his position as head of the Orpheum Circuit but was finally ousted in 1923. Determined not to be driven from New York, Beck planned to build his own theater, the Martin Beck. He devoted himself to its design and construction, and brought the Orpheum's house architect, G. Albert Lansburgh, from San Francisco to New York to build his theater.

Beck built and ran the Martin Beck theater as a legitimate house, but he always considered himself first and foremost a vaudeville producer. He managed to combine the two interests in what he considered his "greatest triumph": signing<sup>6</sup> the legendary actress Sarah Bernhardt to play two-a-day at the Palace.

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## Notes

1. For Martin Beck see Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York: Atheneum, 1969), *passim*; and his obituaries in the New York Times, November 17, 1940; New York Herald Tribune, November 17, 1940; Variety, November 20, 1940. Additional material may be found in the Martin Beck Clipping File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
2. Spitzer, pp. 6-7; Variety, Nov. 20, 1940.
3. Spitzer, pp. 7-9; Donald C. King, "Keith, Albee et al, From Circus to Cinema," Marquee, 7 (Third Quarter, 1975), 4-5.
4. King, pp. 6-7.
5. Spitzer, p. 7.
6. Martin Beck, obituary, New York Herald Tribune, November 17, 1940.

## G. Albert Lansburgh

G. Albert Lansburgh (1876-1969) was a San Francisco architect specializing in theater designs.<sup>1</sup> Trained in Paris, he became known for his lavish movie palaces in the West. Through the early 1920s his designs were dominated by the classical detailing he had studied in Paris.<sup>2</sup> His later designs used a wide variety of romantic, eclectic elements drawn from Byzantine, Moorish and Islamic architecture. As chief theater designer for the Orpheum circuit, he was well-known to Martin Beck, the circuit's retired president, and Beck brought him to New York to design his Martin Beck Theater.

Lansburgh was born in Panama of Jewish parents. He was three years old when his father died, and in 1882, when he was six, his mother moved the family to San Francisco. In 1894 Lansburgh entered the University of California, Berkeley. He studied architecture there for two years. During his vacations he worked in an architectural office with Bernard Maybeck, the future designer of the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Maybeck encouraged Lansburgh to travel abroad and later to enroll in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Lansburgh got the opportunity to travel to Paris in 1898 as the companion of a young man he was tutoring. Lansburgh then approached his guardian, Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger, for assistance in finding a patron to sponsor his education in Paris. Mr. and Mrs. Moses A. Gunst agreed to act as Lansburgh's benefactors. Gunst was a major cigar manufacturer, a philanthropist, and long-time police commissioner of San Francisco.

Lansburgh graduated from the Ecole in 1906 with highest honors. In addition to his architectural studies in Paris, he also studied painting, modeling, sculpture, engineering and art history. In 1906, he received a medal given by the Society of French Architects for the design of a new Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco.<sup>3</sup>



Lansburgh returned to San Francisco in 1906, one month after the earthquake. The need for new buildings in the earthquake's aftermath provided him with many commissions early in his career. From 1906 to 1908 Lansburgh practiced with Bernard J. Joseph. He designed the restoration in 1907 of the Sutter Street Temple Emanu-El, used until a new synagogue was completed in 1925. Lansburgh and Bernard Maybeck acted as consultants for the new temple.<sup>4</sup>

Lansburgh's first commissions in San Francisco included two buildings for the Gunst family. He went on to design the Koshland building at Market and California, the Hotel Manx at O'Farrell and Powell, and many other commercial structures in that city.<sup>5</sup> Early in his career he designed a number of San Francisco branch libraries, all using Renaissance style details: the Mission, Sunset, Presidio and North Beach branches. In 1915 he was appointed to the architectural commission of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, and he designed the decorations for the Taft banquet held at the Palace Hotel on the eve of the Exposition's ground-breaking.<sup>7</sup>

Despite his varied commissions, however, it was as a theater designer that Lansburgh became best known. His first was the 2500-seat San Francisco Orpheum, opening April 19, 1909, three years and a day after the earthquake.<sup>8</sup> This was the first of several theaters that Lansburgh designed for the Orpheum Circuit. His relationship with the Orpheum was quite close. Its president, Morris Meyerfeld, Jr., was a member of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco, and Lansburgh and Meyerfeld belonged to the same clubs. Lansburgh's brother Simon was the house counsel to the Orpheum Theater and Realty Company.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequent Orpheum theaters designed by Lansburgh included two by that name in Los Angeles (1910, and 1925); the Orpheum Theaters in Salt Lake City (c.1913), Kansas City, Mo. (c.1916), and New Orleans (c.1920); the State-Lake Theater in Chicago (1919); and the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco (1922).<sup>10</sup>

Lansburgh's designs for the Orpheum Circuit established him as a theater architect and brought him nationwide recognition. Besides the Orpheum theaters, he designed: the Municipal Auditorium, San Francisco (pre-1922); the Hill Street Theater, Los Angeles (pre-1922); the Kinema Theater, Fresno, California (pre-1922); Loew's State Theater, San Francisco (pre-1922); Loew's Warfield Theater, San Francisco (1922); Memorial Auditorium, Sacramento (1925-27); the El Capitan (now Paramount), Los Angeles (1925); the 6400-seat auditorium in the Al Malaikah Temple, Los Angeles Masonic Shrine (1926); the Warner (now Pacific) Theater, Los Angeles (1927); the El Capitan Theater, San Francisco (1928); the Wiltern Theater, Los Angeles (1930-31); and perhaps one of his best known works, the War Memorial Opera House, San Francisco (1932, with Arthur Brown, Jr.)<sup>11</sup>

With the onset of World War II and the suspension of theater building, Lansburgh produced drawings for seaplanes and destroyer tenders until bad health forced him into semi-retirement.<sup>12</sup>

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## Notes

1. For Lansburgh, see Norman B. Stern and William M. Kramer, "G. Albert Lansburgh, San Francisco's Jewish Architect from Panama," Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly, 13(April 1981), 210-224.
2. John E. Miller, "Moderne Theaters of the West," Marquee, 4 (First Quarter, 1972), 3.
3. Stern and Kramer, p. 214.
4. Ibid., pp. 214-215, 223; Robert G. Bernhardt, Great Buildings of San Francisco: A Photographic Guide (New York: Dover Publications, 1980), pp. 6-7.
5. Stern and Kramer, p. 215; Michael R. Corbett, Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage (San Francisco: California Living Books, 1979), pp. 128, 165.
6. "Some of San Francisco's Fine Buildings, G. Albert Lansburgh, Architect," San Francisco Chronicle, March 12, 1924, p. 7.
7. Stern and Kramer, p. 216.
8. Steven Levin, "San Francisco: From the Fire to the Fair," Marquee, 7 (Second Quarter, 1975), 5.
9. Stern and Kramer, pp. 218-219.
10. 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), vol. 1, pp. 123, 125. Paul Gleye, The Architecture of Los Angeles (Pasadena: Showcase Publications, 1979), pp. 99, 104. Harris Allen, "Recent Theaters Designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, Architect", Architect and Engineer, 71(November 1922), 57, 64-69. "Engineering Features of the Modern Theater - Part II", American Architect, 116(July 23, 1919), 123-129.
11. Stern and Kramer, pp. 216, 218; Sexton and Betts, vol. 1, 131-135; "Memorial Auditorium, Sacramento," Architectural Forum, 47(September 1927), pl. 39; R.R. Houston, "The Interior of Fraternal Buildings," Architectural Forum, 45 (September 1926), p. 135-136; David Gebhard and Robert Winter, A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1977).
12. Stern and Kramer, p. 222.

## The Martin Beck Theater

The theater that Martin Beck set out to build, and hired Lansburgh to design, was intended for the legitimate theater, not vaudeville. Beck determined, however, that it would be one of the most lavishly appointed theaters in the Broadway area, and as both he and Lansburgh came from the movie palace world, his theater reflected movie palace aesthetics.

Beck chose to build his theater on West 45th Street, in the heart of the theater district. West 45th Street was already heavily developed with theaters -- there were eight on the block between Broadway and Eighth Avenue (the Astor, Bijou, Morosco, Booth, Plymouth, Music Box, Imperial and Klaw<sup>1</sup>); Beck, however, defying Broadway traditions, picked a site on the west side of Eighth Avenue.

Having acquired a large site, Beck set Lansburgh to work on a design. Lansburgh, a movie palace specialist, had designed several extraordinary theaters on the West Coast in the exotic, eclectic stylistic pastiches that had become popular in movie theaters. The Hill Street Theater in Los Angeles, and the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco, were extraordinary fantasies drawing on widely scattered sources, primarily Moorish. He had achieved particularly picturesque effects in both with imitation fan-vaults, boxes sweeping up in curves to meet the curve of the balconies, and painted shallow-domed ceilings with enormous chandeliers. Both these theaters had recently been published.<sup>2</sup>

Lansburgh designed a similar Moorish, or Byzantine, fantasy for Martin Beck. In contrast with the neo-classicism of the nearby Broadway theaters, he created a long, triple-story Moorish arcade down 45th Street, markedly three-dimensional, unlike the largely flat neighboring facades. The interior was still more elaborately adorned, in a manner largely reminiscent of Lansburgh's earlier West Coast Moorish theaters. Like them, its auditorium featured boxes with plasterwork in a fan-vault pattern, sweeping up to meet the curve of the balcony, and an extraordinary painted shallow-dome ceiling with chandelier. To paint the ceiling and dome, Lansburgh brought in painter Albert Herter, with whom he had collaborated on earlier theaters.

Herter (1871-1950) was the son of Christian Herter, the noted 19th-century decorator and artist. He had studied art in New York City and Paris. In 1890, he received an honorable mention at the Paris Salon, and won a number of other awards and prizes early in his career.

Herter specialized in mural painting, but his work also included magazine covers, illustrations, water colors, stage sets, tapestries, cartoons, textile design, interior decoration, and garden planning. About 1895 he submitted a series of four magazine covers in a competition sponsored by Scribner's and, winning with all of them, his were the first magazine covers in color to be published in the United States. In 1911, in association with V. Everit Macy, he founded the Herter Looms in New York City. They wove tapestries, curtains, furniture coverings and rugs. The company gradually expanded its activities to include interior decorating.

Some of Herter's best murals are in the State Capitol, Madison, Wisconsin; the Capitol library in Hartford, Connecticut; the State Library at Los Angeles, California; the Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.; the Gare de L'Est, Paris; and the Erlanger Columbia theater, San Francisco. In 1923 he was made a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor.

Herter's work with Lansburgh in 1922 at the interior of the Loew's Warfield theater in San Francisco prepared him for his part in the design of the Martin Beck. The vibrantly designed ceiling is one of the theater's major design features.

Other spaces in the Martin Beck were treated by Herter in an equally elaborate manner. The ticket lobby had a vaulted Romanesque look, and the inner lobby featured three domes, each with murals. Lansburgh considered the Beck his best theater.<sup>3</sup>

When Martin Beck's theater opened, it was immediately noticed for its unusual location and unusual style. "Martin Beck has presented the town with one of its handsomest playhouses," wrote one critic.<sup>4</sup> The Times described it as the only theater "in America in the Byzantine genre."<sup>5</sup> Architecture and Building described it as "in effect reminiscent of the Plaza of St. Mark's," and "unusual but unquestionably interesting and effective."<sup>6</sup>

Despite its unorthodox style and location, the Martin Beck went on to achieve a solid reputation in the legitimate theater. Beck managed the theater for the rest of his life, and even after his death in 1940 the theater remained in the family until the mid-1960s.

(AR)

#### Notes

1. "New Martin Beck Theater to Open Tuesday Evening," New York Times, November 9, 1924.
2. The Hill Street and Golden Gate theaters had been published in 1922 in Harris Allen, "Recent Theaters Designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, Architect", Architect and Engineer, 71(November 1922), 48 ff.
3. Stern and Kramer, p. 221.
4. Unnamed critic cited in William C. Young, Documents of American Theater History. Volume 2: Famous American Playhouses 1900-1971 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973),p. 62.
5. "New Martin Beck Theater to Open Tuesday Evening."
6. "Martin Beck Theatre, New York City," Architecture and Building, 57 (1925), 30.

#### The Martin Beck as a Playhouse

The Martin Beck opened on November 11, 1924, with Wilda Bennett singing the title role in Madame Pompadour. Beck had imported this musical from London where it had been extremely popular. The theater has been home to a number of award winning plays and popular hits. From 1928 through 1932 the Beck housed Theater Guild productions, including Shaw's The Apple Cart, Philip Barry's Hotel Universe with Ruth Gordon, Morris Carnovsky and Franchot Tone; and Reunion in Vienna by Robert E. Sherwood with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt. The first production of the Group Theater was performed at the Martin Beck in 1931, sponsored by the Theater Guild: The House of Connelly by Paul Green, directed by Lee Strasberg.

The 1932-33 season was dominated by productions of the The Abbey Theater Irish Players. The next season, the legendary D'Oyly Carte Opera Company performed eleven Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Katharine Cornell's production of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet followed, with dance direction by Martha Graham, and a cast including Katharine Cornell, Basil Rathbone, Edith Evans and Orson Welles.

Guthrie McClintic directed a number of plays at the Beck from 1935 to 1937, many of them produced by Katharine Cornell. These included Winterset by Maxwell Anderson, another production of Romeo and Juliet, Shaw's Saint Joan with Brian Aherne, Maurice Evans, Tyrone Power, Jr., and Katharine Cornell, and the long running High Tor by Maxwell Anderson in 1937, with Burgess Meredith, Peggy Ashcroft and Hume Cronyn. High Tor was awarded the 1936-37 Drama Critics' Circle Award.

D'Oyly Carte returned to the Beck in the 1936-37 season. Helen Hayes occupied much of the 1938/39 and 1939/40 seasons bringing in Victoria Regina, with which she had been touring, for an 87 performance run in October of 1938, then returning a year later with a new MacArthur/Hecht comedy, Ladies and Gentlemen. Ethel Waters gave a legendary performance at the Beck in the 1940-41 season in the musical Cabin in the Sky, staged by George Balanchine. Next to appear was Lillian Hellman's great war effort, Watch on the Rhine, which won the Drama Critics' Circle Award for 1940-41.

The 1940s at the Beck saw such masterpieces as John Steinbeck's The Moon is Down and Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh. Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt starred in S.N. Behrman's The Pirate; E.G. Marshall in Elia Kazan's popular production of Jacobowsky and the Colonel; Tallulah Bankhead in Philip Barry's Foolish Notion; Charlton Heston, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach and Katharine Cornell in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra; and Robert Morley and Peggy Ashcroft in Edward, My Son. The decade also saw two successful musicals at the Beck: Rodgers and Hart's A Connecticut Yankee; and Harold Arlen's and Johnny Mercer's St. Louis Woman, with Pearl Bailey in her Broadway debut.

Highlights from the 1950s included Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo and Sweet Bird of Youth, Truman Capote's The Grass Harp, Arthur Miller's The Crucible, and that most famous of failures, Candide, with a book by Lillian Hellman, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Richard Wilbur. John Patrick's The Teahouse of the August Moon, based on a novel by Vern Sneider, ran for two and a half years, winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and a Tony Award in 1954.

No less successful were the 1960s, with the popular musical Bye Bye Birdie followed by Milk and Honey. Edward Albee's The Ballad of the Sad Cafe played the Beck, as did his 1967 Pulitzer Prize winner, A Delicate Balance. Marat Sade dominated the 1965-66 season. Then in 1968 Man of La Mancha with Jose Ferrer moved here from the downtown ANTA theater for an extensive run.

In recent years popular successes at the Beck have included Dracula with Frank Langella, The Little Foxes with Elizabeth Taylor, and The Rink, with Chita Rivera and Liza Minelli.

(EH)



## Notes

1. This production history of the Martin Beck 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).

## Description<sup>1</sup>

Outer lobby:

The outer, ticket lobby is square in plan, is faced in beige cast stone, and has a groin-vaulted ceiling of Guastavino tile. The end walls have inset segmental arches; that at the west end encompasses the ticket windows.

Fixtures: Original wrought-iron lanterns are affixed to these two walls. Two sets of original bronze and glass double doors with decorative grilles open onto the street. Two sets of modern bronze and glass double doors open into the inner lobby.

Inner Lobby:

The inner lobby is a relatively narrow, two-story rectangular space which extends behind the rear of the auditorium. The long walls are divided into sections by piers, from which spring round arches forming three domed ceiling sections. At the southeast corner of the lobby a staircase leads to the mezzanine lounge.

1) Ornament: decorative ornament includes but is not limited to the following:

Ceiling: Each dome contains a painted mural simulating a Byzantine mosaic, depicting medieval figures against a gold background. The center of each dome has a perforated centerpiece composed of pointed arches.

Walls: Each arched section on the wall adjacent to the auditorium contains a paneled balcony rail carried on modillions and pilasters with Moorish-Byzantine-style capitals composed of volutes and stylized leaves. Moldings of dentils and bosses adorn the base of each panel. The arched

section on the opposite wall also have paneled balcony rails. The section of wall above the entrance doors from the ticket lobby is also arched and contains three smaller arched forms filled with glass panes set in geometric patterns. A wide paneled section with moldings is placed below the arch.

2) Fixtures:

Walls: The two outer sections contain double doors of bronze and leaded, colored glass leading into the auditorium. Original wrought-iron wall sconces are placed on the piers.

Staircase: A wrought-iron stair railing of the staircase leading to the mezzanine lounge has twisted balusters forming round arches with flowers in the spandrels.

Mezzanine Lounge:

The mezzanine lounge is an L-shaped space which wraps around the space of the entrance lobby and overlooks the entrance lobby through the three arches rising above the auditorium entrances. The space is subdivided into a series of smaller spaces by means of three-quarter piers and freestanding piers from which spring groin and half-groin vaults. At the northern end of the lounge another staircase leads down to the rear of the auditorium at orchestra level.

1) Ornament: The capitals of the piers are of stylized leaf forms.

2) Fixtures: A marble water fountain is placed in a niche in the seating area at the head of the stairs. Wrought-iron wall sconces are placed on the walls. At either end of the lounge double doors lead into the balcony.

Staircase: The staircase leading to the rear of the auditorium has a wrought-iron railing, and a wrought-iron chandelier suspended from the ceiling of the stairwell.

Auditorium:

1) Configuration: The configuration of the auditorium consists of a wide, relatively shallow space with a single balcony; a proscenium flanked by boxes; a sounding board; an orchestra pit in front of the stage; the stage opening behind the proscenium arch; an orchestra promenade; a ceiling; and the sloping floor extending towards the proscenium arch.

Proscenium: the proscenium is elliptically-arched.

Sounding board: the sounding board rises above the proscenium arch.

Balcony: There is a single balcony.

Boxes: Two large, curving boxes flank the proscenium.

Staircases: Staircases lead from the orchestra level to the boxes. At the rear of the orchestra level a staircase leads up to the mezzanine lounge.

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

Ceiling: The ceiling is divided into recessed panels, and dominated by a circular wooden dome suspended from the center octagonal panel.

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>

Orchestra Pit: The orchestra pit is placed in front of and below the level of the stage.

## 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 proscenium arch is composed of four concentric arches carried on half-columns decorated with geometric, Moorish-Byzantine-inspired motifs.

Sounding board: The sounding board is made of perforated plaster.

Boxes: The large curving boxes are framed by arches with Moorish-Byzantine-inspired ornament. The boxes are supported on decorated, clustered columns, and the undersides are paneled. The box fronts are paneled plasterwork with geometric designs. Three arches carried on marble pilasters with Moorish-Byzantine capitals rise from each box and carry a small half dome which intersects the sounding board. Clustered columns at the center of each box carry a plasterwork fan vault adorned with Byzantine motifs which rises to the ceiling.

Balcony: The sections at the front of the balcony leading into the boxes are defined by decorated columns carrying ribs which extend up and across the ceiling. The balcony front is a continuation of the box fronts and has the same decorative treatment. The underside of the balcony is ornately paneled and outlined with bands and moldings. Five of the panels contain circular frames holding wrought-iron grilles covering ceiling lights (see below, under fixtures).

Ceiling: The ceiling is divided into recessed panels outlined by moldings, and is dominated by a circular wooden dome suspended from the center octagonal panel. The dome is attached to the corners of the octagonal by strips of canvas stretched between rope moldings. Both the dome and canvas strips are painted in geometric motifs in shades of red, green, and yellow.

3) Attached fixtures:

Orchestra: One enters the auditorium through the double doors at the rear. Exit doors are placed along the side walls.

Balcony: Wrought-iron railings help define entrance aisles and stairways in the balcony. Exit doors are placed along the side walls.

Staircases: The staircases leading from the orchestra level to the boxes retain their original wrought-iron railings; wrought-iron sconces adorn the stairwell walls. The staircase at the rear of the orchestra level leading to the mezzanine lounge has a wrought-iron railing.

Light fixtures: All light fixtures are original. Wrought-iron sconces are placed along the side and rear walls of the orchestra. A painted glass chandelier is suspended from the center of the ceiling dome. Ceiling lights are contained within wrought-iron grilles in circular frames on the underside of the balcony. There are wrought-iron sconces along the side walls of the balcony.

4) Known alterations: Air conditioning grilles and vents have been installed in the ceiling and walls. Much of the balcony front is now covered by a modern light box. A modern technical booth has been placed at the rear of the balcony. Two large Persian-style murals on canvas have been removed from the side walls at balcony level. The current color scheme does not detract from the perception of the ornament.

(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 Martin Beck Theater interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built as a legitimate stage theater by Martin Beck, the great vaudeville producer of the Orpheum Circuit and the legendary Palace theater, the Beck helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district.

Designed for Beck by G. Albert Lansburgh, a prominent architect of movie palaces, the Beck represents a special and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Its exotic Moorish interior, with sweeping curved boxes and balcony, plasterwork fan-vaults, and grand painted ceiling and dome, is unique among the Broadway theaters. The ceiling and other murals were painted by Albert Herter, a noted American muralist.

For half a century the Martin Beck Theater interior 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), and Eugenie Hoffmeyer (EH). 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 Martin Beck Theater, first floor interior consisting of the outer lobby, the inner lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the mezzanine lounge, the upper part of the lobby, the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and 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 Martin Beck Theater interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that it was built for Martin Beck, one of America's great vaudeville producers; that it was designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, a prominent theater designer who considered it his finest work; that Beck and Lansburgh created an unusual and exotic design based on Byzantine motifs, making the Beck architecturally unique among the Broadway theaters; that among its outstanding characteristics are a triple-domed lobby with murals, and an auditorium with spiral-ribbed proscenium arch and fan vaults; that its exotic painted domed ceiling is the work of Albert Herter, a noted American muralist; that for over half a century the Martin Beck interior has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that its presence helps visually to 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 Martin Beck Theater, first floor interior consisting of the outer lobby, the inner lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the mezzanine lounge, the upper part of the lobby, the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and 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; 302-314 West 45th Street Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1035, Lot 37, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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## APPENDIX

The following production history of the Martin Beck 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.

### 1924-25

MADAME POMPADOUR 11/11/24 (80 perfs.); musical adaptation by Clare Kummer, book and lyrics by Rudolph Schanzer and Ernst Welisch, music by Leo Fall; produced by Martin Beck and Charles Dillingham; with Wilda Bennett.

### 1925

CHINA ROSE 1/19/25 (126 perfs.) by Harry L. Cort and George E. Stoddard; produced by Charles Dillingham, Martin Beck and John Cort; with J. Harold Murray, and Olga Steck.

CAPE SMOKE 2/16/25 (105 perfs.) by Walter Archer Frost; with Percy Waram, Ruth Shepley and James Rennie.

CAPTAIN JINKS 9/8/25 (167 perfs.) by Frank Mandel and Laurence Schwab, music by Lewis E. Gensler and Stephen Jones, lyrics by B.G. DeSylva; with Louise Brown, J. Harold Murray and Joe E. Brown.

### 1926

THE SHANGHAI GESTURE 2/1/26 (210 perfs.) by John Colton; with Florence Reed.

THE WILD ROSE 10/20/26 (62 perfs.) book and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein, II, music by Rudolph Friml; with Desiree Ellinger and William Collier.

THE WOODEN KIMONA 12/27/26 (201 perfs.) by John Floyd; with Jean Dixon.

1927

SPREAD EAGLE 4/4/27 (80 perfs.) By George S. Brooks and Walter B. Lister;  
with Osgood Perkins, Charles D. Brown and Fritz Williams.

A LA CARTE 8/17/27 (46 perfs.) by George Kelly, songs by Louis Alter,  
Norma Gregg, Paul Lanin, Creamer and Johnson and Herman Hauptman.

THE SHANNONS OF BRAODWAY 9/26/27 (288 perfs.) by James Gleason; with  
James Gleason and Lucile Webster.

1928

NIGHT HOSTESS 9/12/28 (119 perfs.) by Philip Dunning; with Norman Foster,  
Ruth Lyons and Averell Harris.

WINGS OVER EUROPE 12/10/28 (33 perfs.) by Robert Nichols and Maurice  
Browne; with Frank Conroy, Ernest Lawford amd Alexander Kirkland.

1929

DYNAMO 2/11/29 (66 perfs.) by Eugene O'Neill; with Glenn Anders, Helen  
Westley, Claudette Colbert and Dudley Digges.

THE CAMEL THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE 4/15/29 (196 perfs.) by Frantisek  
Langer, adapted by Philip Moeller; with Miriam Hopkins, Morris  
Carnovsky and Claude Rains.

PORGY 9/13/29 (34 perfs.) by Dorothy and DuBose Heyward; with Frank  
Wilson.

THE SILVER SWAN 11/27/29 (21 perfs.) by William S. Brady and Alonzo Price.

RED RUST 12/17/29 (65 perfs.) by V. Kirchon and A. Ouspensky, adapted  
by Virginia and Frank Vernon; with Gale Sondergaard, Franchot Tone,  
Lee Strasberg, Luther Adler, Eunice Stoddard and George Tobias.

1930

THE APPLE CART 2/4/30 (88 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Tom Powers  
Violet Kemble Cooper, Rex O'Malley and Claude Rains.

HOTEL UNIVERSE 4/14/30 (81 perfs.) by Philip Barry; with Ruth Gordon,  
Morris Carnovsky, Franchot Tone and Glenn Anders.

ROAR CHINA 10/27/30 (72 perfs.) by S. Tretyakov; with William Gargan.

1931

MIRACLE AT VERDUN 3/16/31 (48 perfs.) by Hans Chlumberg; with Claude  
Rains, Alexander Ivo, Miriam Elias and Akim Tamiroff.

THE HOUSE OF CONNELLY 9/28/31 (91 perfs.) by Paul Green; with Franchot Tone, Stella Adler, Robert Lewis, Clifford Odetts and Morris Carnovsky.

REUNION IN VIENNA 11/16/31 (280 perfs.) by Robert E. Sherwood; with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt.

1932

THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S 10/17/32 (4 perfs.) by Paul Vincent Carroll; with Barry Fitzgerald.

THE FAR OFF-HILLS 10/18/32 (4 perfs.) by Lennox Robinson.

THE NEW GOSSOON 10/21/31 (6 perfs.) by George Shiels; with the Abbey Theatre Irish Players.

CHRYSALIS 11/15/32 (23 perfs.) by Rose Albert Potter; with Humphrey Bogart and Osgood Perkins.

1933

FAR-AWAY HORSES 3/21/33 (4 perfs.) by Michael Birmingham and Gilbert Emery.

HILDA CASSIDY 3/21/33 (4 perfs.) by Henry and Sylvia Lieferant; with Stella Adler.

THE LAKE 12/26/33 (55 perfs.) by Dorothy Massingham and Murray MacDonald; with Frances Starr and Katharine Hepburn.

1934

YELLOW JACK 3/6/34 (79 perfs.) by Sidney Howard; with John M. Hern and James Stewart.

D'OYLY CARTE OPERA COMPANY PRESENTING GILBERT AND SULLIVAN IN REPERTORY:

THE GONDOLIERS 9/3/34 (19 perfs.)  
COX AND BOX/THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE 9/6/34; (13 perfs.).  
IOLANTHE 9/10/34 (15 perfs.).  
TRIAL BY JURY/H.M.S. PINAFORE 9/13/34 (12 perfs.).  
THE MIKADO 9/17/34 (20 perfs.).  
THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD 9/20/34 (11 perfs.).  
RUDDIGORE 9/30/34 (11 perfs.).  
PRINCESS IDA 9/27/34 (10 perfs.).  
PATIENCE 10/11/34 (10 perfs.).

ROMEO AND JULIET 12/20/34 (78 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Basil Rathbone, Katharine Cornell, Edith Evans and Orson Welles.

1935

THE BARRETT'S OF WIMPOLE STREET 2/25/35 (24 perfs.) by Rudolph Besier;  
with Burgess Meredith and Katharine Cornell.

FLOWERS OF THE FOREST 4/8/35 (40 perfs.) by John van Druten; with  
Burgess Meredith and Katharine Cornell.

WINTERSET 9/25/35 (178 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson; with Margo, Richard  
Bennett and Burgess Meredith.

ROMEO AND JULIET 12/23/35 (16 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with  
Ralph Richardson, Maurice Evans, Katharine Cornell and Tyrone  
Power, Jr.

SAINT JOAN 3/9/36 (89 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Katharine  
Cornell, Brian Aherne, Maurice Evans & Tyrone Power, Jr.

D'OYLY CARTE OPERA COMPANY PRESENTING GILBERT AND SULLIVAN IN REPORTORY

THE MIKADO 8/20/36 (20 perfs.)

TRIAL BY JURY/THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE 8/31/36 (20 perfs.)

THE GONDOLIERS 9/7/36 (20 perfs.)

THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD 9/14/36 (20 perfs.)

IOLANTHE 9/21/36 (20 perfs.)

COX AND BOX/H.M.S. PINAFORE 9/28/36 (16 perfs.)

PATIENCE 10/5/36 (12 perfs.)

PRINCESS IDA 10/12/36 (12 perfs.)

RUDDIGORE 10/22/36 (8 perfs.)

1937

HIGH TOR 1/8/37 (171 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson; with Burgess Meredith,  
Peggy Ashcroft and Hume Cronyn.

BARCHESTER TOWERS 11/30/37 (37 perfs.) by Thomas Job, based on a novel  
by Anthony Trollope; with Ina Claire.

1938

HOW TO GET TOUGH ABOUT IT 2/8/38 (23 perfs.) by Robert Ardrey; with  
Katherine Locke, Kent Smith, Karl Malden and Jose Ferrer.

SAVE ME THE WALTZ 2/28/38 (8 perfs.) by Katherine Dayton; with Jane Wyatt  
and Leo G. Carroll.

SPRING THAW 3/21/38 (8 perfs.) by Clare Kummer; with Roland Young.

VICTORIA REGINA 10/3/38 (87 perfs.) by Laurence Houseman; with Helen Hayes.

1939

AMERICAN LYRIC THEATER 5/18/39 (12 perfs.) with the League of Composers.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN 10/17/39 (105 perfs.) by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht; with Helen Hayes, Philip Merivale and Evelyn Arden.

1940

LADY IN WAITING 3/27/40 (87 perfs.) by Margery Sharp; with Gladys George.

CABIN IN THE SKY 10/25/40 (156 perfs.) by Lynn Root; lyrics by John Latouche, music by Vernon Duke; with Ethel Waters and Dooley Wilson.

1941

WATCH ON THE RHINE 4/1/31 (378 perfs.) by Lillian Hellman; with Paul Lukas.

1942

THE MOON IS DOWN 4/7/42 (71 perfs.) by John Steinbeck; with Ralph Morgan.

THE CAT SCREAMS 6/16/42 (7 perfs.) by Basil Beyea; with Mildred Dunnock.

THE PIRATE 11/25/42 (176 perfs.) by S.N. Behrman; with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt.

1943

THE CORN IS GREEN 5/3/43 (56 perfs.) by Emlyn Williams; with Ethel Barrymore.

THE ARMY PLAY-BY-PLAY 8/2/43 (40 perfs.) by:

Pfc. John B. O'Dea (WHERE E'RE WE GO)  
Cpl. Kurt S. Kasznar (FIRST COUSINS)  
Pfc. Irving Gaynor Neiman (BUTTON YOUR LIP)  
Lt. Ralph Nelson (MAIL CALL)  
Pfc. Alfred D. Geto (PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES)

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE 11/17/43 (135 perfs.) by Herbert Fields, based on a novel by Mark Twain, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart; with Dick Foran and Vivienne Segal.

1944

JACOBOWSKY AND THE COLONEL 3/14/44 (415 perfs.) by S.N. Behrman, based on a play by Franz Werfel; with E.G. Marshall, Louis Calhern and Annabella.

1945

FOOLISH NOTION 3/15/45 (103 perfs.) with Philip Barry; with Tallulah Bankhead and Mildred Dunnock.

1946

JEB 2/21/46 (9 perfs.) by Robert Ardrey; with Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee.

LITTLE BROWN JUG 3/6/46 (5 perfs.) by Marie Baumer; with Percy Kilbride.

ST. LOUIS WOMAN 3/30/46 (113 perfs.) by Anna Bontemps and Countee Cullen, music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer; with Pearl Baily.

THE ICEMAN COMETH 10/9/46 (136 perfs.) by Eugene O'Neill; with E.G. Marshall and Dudley Digges.

1947

BAREFOOT BOY WITH CHEEK 4/3/47 (108 perfs.) by Max Shulman; with Red Buttons and Nancy Walker.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA 11/26/47 (126 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Katharine Cornell, Charlton Heston, Godfrey Tearle, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, and Joseph Wiseman.

1948

YOU NEVER CAN TELL 3/16/48 (39 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Leo G. Carroll.

SALLY 5/6/48 (36 perfs.) by Guy Bolton; with Bambi Lynn.

EDWARD, MY SON 9/30/48 (260 perfs.) by Robert Morley and Noel Langly; with Robert Morley and Peggy Ashcroft.

1949

THAT LADY 11/22/49 (79 perfs.) by Kate O'Brien; with Katharine Cornell, Joseph Wiseman and Marian Seldes.

1950

THE WISTERIA TREES 3/29/50 (165 perfs.) by Joshua Logan; with Helen Hayes, Ossie Davis and Walter Abel.

THE CURIOUS SAVAGE 10/24/50 (31 perfs.) by John Patrick; with Lillian Gish.

RING AROUND THE MOON 11/23/50 (68 perfs.) by Jean Anouilh, translated by Christopher Fry; with Denholm Elliott and Brenda Forbes.



1951

THE ROSE TATOO 2/3/51 (300 perfs.) by Tennessee Williams; with Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach and Don Murray.

BAREFOOT IN ATHENS 10/31/51 (29 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson; with Lotte Lenya.

THE GRAND TOUR 12/10/51 (8 perfs.) by Elmer Rice; with Beatrice Straight.

1952

THE GRASS HARP 3/27/52 (36 perfs.) by Truman Capote.

THE CLIMATE OF EDEN 11/13/52 (20 perfs.) by Moss Hart; with Rosemary Harris.

THE GREY-EYED PEOPLE 12.17/52 (5 perfs.) by John D. Hess; with Walter Matthau.

1953

THE CRUCIBLE 1/22/53 (197 perfs.) by Arthur Miller; with Arthur Kennedy, E.G. Marshall and Beatrice Straight.

THE TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON 10/15/53 (1027 perfs.) by John Patrick; with David Wayne.

1956

MISTER JOHNSON 3/29/56 (44 perfs.) by Norman Rosten; with Earle Hyman and Gaby Rogers.

THE LOVERS 5/10/56 (4 perfs.) by Leslie Stevens; with Joanne Woodward, Darren McGavin, Morris Carnovsky and Frances Chaney.

MAJOR BARBARA 10/30/56 (232 total perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Glynis Johns, Burgess Meredith, Charles Laughton and Eli Wallach.

CANDIDE 12/1/56 (73 perfs.) by Lillian Hellman, based on a novel by f Voltaire, music by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Richard Wilbur; with Robert Rounseville, Barbara Cook, Conrad Bain and Max Adrian.

1957

ORPHEUS DESCENDING 3/21/57 (68 perfs.) by Tennessee Williams; with Maureen Stapleton and Cliff Roberts.

COPPER AND BRASS 10/17/57 (36 perfs.) by Ellen Viollett and David Craig; with Nancy Walker

1958

WHO WAS THAT LADY I SAW YOU WITH? 3/3/58 (208 perfs.) by Norman Krasna;  
with Peter Lind Hayes, Mary Healy and Ray Walston.

HANDFUL OF FIRE 10/1/58 (5 perfs.) by N. Richard Nash; with James Daly  
and Roddy McDowall.

MARIA GOLOVIN 11/5/58 (5 perfs.) by Gian Carlo Menotti; with Richard Cross  
and Franca Duval.

1959

SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH 3/10/59 (375 perfs.) by Tennessee Williams; with  
Paul Newman, Geraldine Page, Rip Torn and Bruce Dern.

1960

BEG, BORROW OR STEAL 2/10/60 (5 perfs.) by Marvin Seiger and Bud Freeman;  
Estelle Parsons, Betty Garrett and Eddie Bracken.

SEMI-DETACHED 3/10/60 (4 perfs.) by Patricia Joudry; with Ed Begley and  
Jean Muir.

BYE BYE BIRDIE 4/14/60 (607 perfs.) by Michael Stewart, music by Charles  
Strause, lyrics by Lee Adams; with Dick Van Dyke, Chita Rivera, Paul  
Lynde, Michael J. Pollard and Charles Nelson Reilly. (Moved to the  
Shubert 1/16/61.)

RAPE OF THE BELT 11/5/60 (9 perfs.) by Ben W. Levy; with Peggy Wood.

LOVE AND LIBEL, OR THE OGRE OF THE PROVINCIAL WORLD 12/7/60 (5 perfs.)  
by Robertson Davies.

1961

MIDGIE PURVIS 2/1/61 (21 perfs.) by Mary Chase; with Tallulah Bankhead.

THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD 4/3/61 (96 perfs.) by Fred Saidy and  
Henry Myers, lyrics by E.Y. Harburg, music by Jacque Offenbach;  
with Cyril Richard.

MILK AND HONEY 10/10/61 (543 perfs.) by Don Appell, music and lyrics by  
Jerry Herman; with Molly Picon.

1963

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN 3/28/63 (52 perfs.) by Bertolt Brecht; with  
Anne Bancroft, Zohra Lampert, Barbara Harris and Gene Wilder.

STRANGE INTERLUDE 5/27/63 (111 perfs.) by Eugene O'Neill; with Franchot Tone, Geraldine Page, Ben Gazzara, Richard Thomas and Jane Fonda. (First opened at the Hudson Theater 3/11/63.)

THE BALLAD OF SAD CAFE 10/30/63 (123 perfs.) by Edward Albee based on a novella by Carson McCullers; with Colleen Dewhurst and Roscoe Lee Brown.

1964

CAFE CROWN 4/17/64 (3 perfs.) book by Hy Kraft; with Alan Alda and Theodore Bikel.

THE PHYSICISTS 10/13/64 (55 perfs.) by Freidrich Duerrenmatt; adapted by James Kirkup; with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy.

I HAD A BALL 12/15/64 (99 perfs.) by Jerome Chodorov; music and lyrics by Jack Lawrence and Stan Freeman with Buddy Hackett, Richard Kiley and Marty Allen.

1965

OLIVER 8/2/65 (64 perfs.) by Lionel Bart; with the National Touring Company starring Victor Stiles and Robin Ramsay.

DRAT! THE CAT! 10/10/65 (8 perfs.) book and lyrics by Ira Levin, music by Milton Schafer; with Charles Durning, Elliott Gould and Leslie Anne Warren.

THE PERSECUTION AND ASSASSINATION OF MARAT AS PERFORMED BY THE INMATES OF THE ASYLUM OF CHARENTON UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE 12/22/65 (144 perfs.) by Peter Weiss; English version by Geoffrey Skelton; with Glenda Jackson, Ian Richardson and Patrick Magee.

1966

A DELICATE BALANCE 9/22/66 (133 perfs.) by Edward Albee; with Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn and Marian Seldes.

1967

HALLELUJAH, BABY 4/26/67 (293 perfs.) by Arthur Laurents, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green; with Leslie Uggums.

1968

MAN OF LA MANCHA 3/19/68 (2328 total perfs.) by Dale Wasserman, music by Mitch Leigh, lyrics by Joe Darion; with Jose Ferrer. (First opened at the ANTA Washington Square 11/22/65.)

1969-1970

Theater was dark for the entire season.

1971

ALL OVER 3/28/71 (42 perfs.) by Edward Albee; with Jessica Tandy,  
Colleen Dewhurst and Madeleine Sherwood.

THE GRASS HARP 11/21/71 (7 perfs.) by Kenneth Elmslie, based on a novel by  
Truman Capote; with Barbara Cook, Ruth Ford and Russ Thacker

1972

RING ROUND THE BATHTUB 4/29/72 (1 perf.) by Jane Trahey; with Elizabeth  
Ashley and Carol Kane.

1973

NO HARD FEELINGS 4/8/73 (1 perf.) by Sam Bobrick and Ron Clark; with  
Eddie Albert, Nanette Fabray, Stockard Channing and Conrad Janis.

1974

SATURDAY, SUNDAY, MONDAY 11/12/74 (12 perfs.) by Eduardo de Filippo; with  
Sada Thompson, Eli Wallach, Jan Miller and Walter Abel.

1975

HABEAS CORPUS 11/25/75 (95 perfs.) by Alan Bennett; with June Havoc,  
Kristopher Tabori, Jean Marsh, Celeste Holm and Rachel Roberts.

1977

LADIES AT THE ALAMO 4/7/77 (20 perfs.) by Paul Zindel; with Estelle  
Parsons and Eileen Heckart.

HAPPY END 5/7/77 (75 perfs.) by Michael Feingold based on a play by  
Dorothy Lane, music by Kurt Weill, lyrics by Bertolt Brecht; with  
Meryl Streep and Grayson Hall.

DRACULA 10/20/77 (925 perfs.) by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston;  
with Frank Langella.

1980

HAROLD AND MAUDE 2/7/80 (4 perfs.) by Colin Higgins; with Keith McDermott,  
Janet Gaynor and Ruth Ford.

IT'S SO NICE TO BE CIVILIZED 6/30/80 (8 perfs.) by Micki Grant; with Vivian Reed, Mabel King and Obba Babatunde.

ONWARD VICTORIA 12/14/80 (1 perf.).

1981

BRING BACK BIRDIE 4/5/81 (4 perfs.) by Michael Stewart; music Strouse, lyrics Lee Adams; with Chita Rivera and Donald O'Connor.

THE LITTLE FOXES 5/7/81 (123 perfs.) by Lillian Hellman; with Maureen Stapleton and Elizabeth Taylor.

THE FIRST 12/12/81 (37 perfs.) by Joe Siegel and Martin Charnin; with David Alan Grier.

1982

COME BACK TO THE FIVE AND DIME, JIMMY DEAN, JIMMY DEAN 2/18/82 (52 perfs.) by Ed Graczyk; with Cher, Sandy Dennis and Karen Black.

A LITTLE FAMILY BUSINESS 12/15/82 (13 perfs.) by Jay Presson Allen; with Angela Lansbury and John McMartin.

1983

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL 4/13/83 (38 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Philip Franks, John Franklyn-Robbins and Harriet Walter.

1984

THE RINK 2/9/84 (204 perfs.) by Terence McNally, music by John Kandler, lyrics by Fred Ebb; with Chita Rivera and Liza Minnelli.



Martin Beck Theater Interior





Martin Beck Theater Interior  
302-314 West 45th Street  
Manhattan

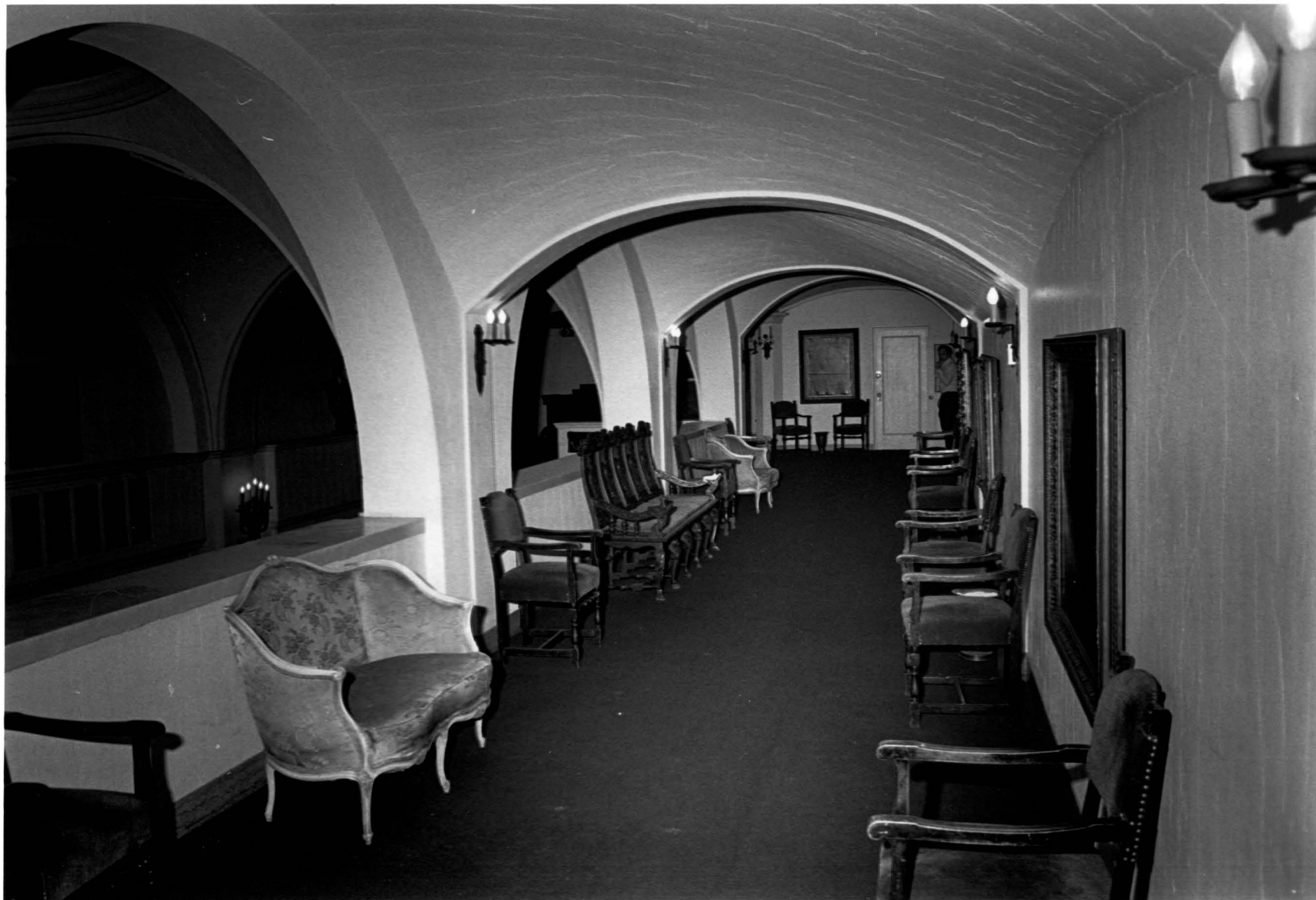
Built: 1923-24  
Architect: G. Albert Lansburgh

Photo: Forster, LPC



Martin Beck Theater Interior  
Inner Lobby

Photo: Forster, LPC



Martin Beck Theater Interior  
Mezzanine Lounge

Photo: Forster, LPC



Martin Beck Theater Interior  
Outer Lobby





Martin Beck Theater Interior

Photo: Forster, LPC