

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 4, 1987; Designation List 194  
LP-1318

BELASCO THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the first balcony floor; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium; the staircases leading from the first balcony floor up to the second balcony; second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; 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; 111-121 West 44th Street, Manhattan. Built 1906-1907; architect George Keister.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 997, Lot 23.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Belasco Theater, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the first balcony floor, and all connecting entrance areas; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium, the upper part of the stagehouse; the staircases leading from the first balcony floor up to the second balcony floor and all connecting entrance areas; the second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling, and 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. 14). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty-two 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 was opposed to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The interior of the Belasco Theater (originally Belasco's Stuyvesant) was built in 1906-07 as the ideal playhouse of David Belasco. Actor, dramatist, manager and director, he was one of the most important personalities in the history of American stage. Belasco was a pioneer in the development of the American Little Theater movement where dramatic experience depended on close contact between actors and audience. He conceived of his house as a "living room" and consciously attempted its domestication with a warm color scheme, intimate spaces and especially with light diffused through stained and leaded glass fixtures on the walls and ceiling of the auditorium. Home of all Belasco's theatrical operations (and after 1909 his personal home as well), it was executed by some of the finest talents of the day. Included are an entrance lobby and doors by

theater designer John Rapp, light fixtures by Tiffany Studios and murals by the noted Ash Can School artist Everett Shinn. The house itself is the earliest known theater in New York by the important theater architect George Keister.

In addition to being Belasco's personal repertory theater where he featured his proteges David Warfield, Frances Starr and Blanche Bates, the house also served as Belasco's laboratory. In it he developed staging and especially lighting techniques to unprecedented standards of perfection. Their impact was of enduring significance for theater worldwide.

As the sixth oldest playhouse in the Broadway theater district, the Belasco preserves much of its early twentieth-century character. Its splendid combination of art and drama within a domesticated theatrical setting, together with the indelible imprint of its brilliant (and eccentric) namesake, have caused many to see the Belasco as the house which "best express[es] the theater's special intangible glamour."<sup>1</sup>

For three-quarters of a century the Belasco 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.

(JA)

#### Notes

1. John Keating, "The Belasco Gives Up the Ghost," Cue (Sept. 24, 1949), pp. 16-17.

#### 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.

(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>

(MMK)

## 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 interior of the Belasco Theater, as one of the Broadway theater interiors 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.

### David Belasco

David Belasco (1853-1931) was born in a San Francisco cellar to English immigrant parents who were lured to the West by the gold rush. His father, a struggling comedic actor, relocated the family to Vancouver where his son was educated by Catholic priests. Despite his Sephardic Jewish heritage, David adopted in later life the clerical garb of his early teachers, earning for himself the sobriquets "St. David" and "the Bishop of Broadway."<sup>1</sup> Belasco's eccentric dress was only one facet of his theatrical life. Actor, dramatist, producer, manager and playwright, he grasped the theater with a totality equaled by none. In the course of his half-century long career, Belasco redefined the meaning of dramatic art and introduced an unprecedented standard of technical perfection and staging improvements which were of enduring significance for theater worldwide. Laboring ceaselessly for the cultivation of ideal values, his name became synonymous with perfection in detail. "He was not a great man in the theater --- he was the theater" itself.<sup>2</sup>

Belasco began his professional career at age 14 when he wrote, produced and starred in Jim Black at Mozart Hall in San Francisco. His casting of local hooligans gave the seven-act play an arresting realism, a quality Belasco would pursue for the remainder of his life. In the following years he toured the West coast as a vagabond actor and appeared for a short time at Piper's Opera House in Virginia City, Nevada (where he also took dictation for the famous, then ailing, playwright Dion Boucicaut). By 1874 Belasco had returned to San Francisco where he served as stage manager at Maguire's Theater and in 1876, as assistant to stage manager James A. Herne at Lucky Baldwin's Academy of Music. Two years later he took full charge of Baldwin's as well as of the Grand Opera House and the Metropolitan (all in San Francisco). At age 19 Belasco was not only the youngest stage manager in the West, but also the most gifted and versatile. His early experience in copying scripts for stock companies prepared him for his later adaptations of novels for the stage and encouraged him to write his own material.

One of Belasco's works, American Born, was put on tour by Charles Frohman who simultaneously retained the author as the show's traveling manager. This led in 1882 to Belasco's employment by Frohman's brother Daniel, manager of Madison Square Theater in New York. Their five year contract allowed Belasco to earn extra money (\$10.00 per night) staging his own plays at the house.<sup>3</sup> The artistic productions for which the theater became famous during Belasco's tenure were largely due to his casting and painstaking attention to detail.

In 1886 Frohman took over management of the failing Lyceum Theater, bringing Belasco in as his stage manager and in-house playwright. By 1890 the theater was one of the most profitable in New York, Frohman one of the



most important men in the business and Belasco among its most eminent playwrights. The scenario was repeated at Charles Frohman's new Empire Theater which opened in 1893 with Belasco's The Girl I Left Behind Me. Four years later, Belasco himself became a producer, mounting Francis Power's The First Born at the Manhattan Theater. Within a few years he was one of the most successful producer-managers in the country, responsible for such hits as Zaza with Mrs. Leslie Carter (1899) and Under Two Flags with Blanche Bates (1901).

Belasco's plays toured the country but invariably ran into problems with the Syndicate which controlled theater bookings nationwide and exacted heavy tributes for the privilege. As Belasco's reputation grew, he became increasingly rebellious toward the heavy-handed trust and was forced to pay the consequences with limited outlets left available for his productions. He therefore jumped in 1902 at the opportunity to secure his independence by leasing the Republic Theater on West 42nd Street from Oscar Hammerstein. It gave Belasco financial security, a permanent showcase for his pupils and productions, and most important, the opportunity to develop the staging effects for which he is best remembered. Prompted by a desire to create on stage a convincing slice of life, Belasco became obsessed with atmospheric stage lighting, constantly modulating hue and intensity and always laboring to perfect new techniques. He used his theater as an experimental workshop, frequently spending more time and money on his light rehearsals alone than on all other production costs combined.<sup>4</sup> No less obsessive was Belasco's fanatical attention to detail, insisting on props bought in Paris for DuBarry, furniture from England for Sweet Kitty Bellairs and pieces brought from Japan for his oriental production of The Darling of the Gods.

Belasco's staging was criticized by some as reducing acting and drama to a collection of convincing details. But to him they were an essential component of the actor's perfect interpretation of his (generally melodramatic) role. Belasco was less interested in the theater of ideas than in the theater of sentimental experience. He dedicated his entire life to its achievement, even after the American stage had long abandoned sensationalism. By the time he died in 1931 Belasco and his productions were considered contrived and old fashioned. But they were innovative enough at the turn of the century to have entertained a whole generation of spellbound audiences.

In 1906, fearing the non-renewal of his 42nd Street lease, Belasco undertook construction of a new theater on West 44th Street (David Belasco's Stuyvesant Theater) and it was there that he developed his dream of an ideal theater. Opening the house on October 16, 1907, he used it as a forum for his proteges Blanche Bates, David Warfield and Frances Starr, as well as a laboratory for new atmospheric effects and the headquarters of his theatrical operations. After 1907 Belasco did little writing. Instead, he dedicated himself to managing, producing and directing. To find new material he established a script-finding agency, its success assured by the prestige of the Belasco name.

At age 76 Belasco was looking forward to his "best season" yet. But weakened by a struggle of several months with pneumonia, he suffered two heart attacks, the second of which was fatal. The scene was enacted with a drama that Belasco himself would have admired. Raising his hoary white head, he threw up his arms, announced that he was fighting for his life,

and died.<sup>5</sup> Although the popularity of Belasco's sensationalistic staging had waned, his personal stature never faltered. In the course of a half century he had staged hundreds of plays, 123 of them on Broadway, and more than a hundred of which were entirely or partially of his own creation. Among them were more acknowledged successes than could be claimed by any other American dramatist.<sup>6</sup> His contributions were recognized by numerous national honors, and by membership in the French Legion of Honor and the Moscow Art Theater.<sup>7</sup> With his death, the theater mourned the passing of an era, and the loss of "the greatest producer the theater has ever known."<sup>8</sup> In the words of George M. Cohan, "if theaters could weep, they all would have [had] a good cry" on May 14, 1931.<sup>9</sup>

(JA)

#### Notes

1. Herbert Kleinfield, "The Theatrical Career of David Belasco," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1956, p. 377.
2. David Belasco, obituary, New York Times, May 15, 1931, p. 1.
3. Kleinfield, p. 84.
4. William Winter, The Life and Work of David Belasco, (New York: Jefferson Winter, 1925) p. 247.
5. Lise-Lone Marker, David Belasco: Naturalism in the American Theater, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) p. 396.
6. "Belasco, Magician of the Stage, is 75," New York Times Magazine, July 21, 1929, sec. 5 p. 7.
7. "David Belasco Gets French Decoration," New York Times, November 27, 1924, p. 25, and "Gets Honor at Moscow," New York Times, May 14, 1927, p. 25.
8. Belasco obituary.
9. Ibid.

#### George Keister and Everett Shinn

Although Belasco had maintained his independence from the Syndicate by leasing Hammerstein's Republic Theater in 1902, he lacked the security of owning his own house. By 1906 his personal fortune was sufficient to allow a half million dollar investment in the construction of a new theater. A site was purchased on West 44th Street (just two blocks north of Belasco's former house), and construction arranged with contractor Meyer R. Bimberg. Designs were commissioned from George Keister<sup>1</sup> and murals from Everett Shinn.

Keister was a skilled but little known architect who was active in New York from the mid-1880s into the third decade of the twentieth century. He had a brief partnership with Frank E. Wallis (1887-88) and in the 1890s, served as secretary of the Architectural League. Although barely a score of his buildings have been identified, the collection indicates a gifted and innovative architect with facile design ability in a variety of styles. Prior to Belasco's Stuyvesant, he had designed three New York theaters: in 1905, the Colonial (Hampton's; at 1887 Broadway) and Loew's Yorkville Theater (157 East 86th Street), and the Astor Theater in the following year; all three have been demolished. Belasco's Stuyvesant Theater thus takes on the added significance of being the earliest extant theater of an architect who would later make theaters his specialty, executing at least a dozen others in New York by 1923. Among his most notable were the George M. Cohan (1911; demolished), the Bronx Opera House (1912-13), the enormously important Apollo Theater in Harlem (1913-14), Broadway's Selwyn Theater (1917-18, 229 West 42nd Street) and the Earl Carroll Theater at 753-59 Seventh Avenue (1923; 1931 Art Deco remodeling; altered).<sup>2</sup>

Although the circumstances of his commission from Belasco are obscure, Keister was most likely known to the producer as architect of the Gerard Apartment Hotel (1893) which was located immediately west of the site of Belasco's new theater. Rising 13 stories on West 44th Street, this fine neo-medieval/neo-Renaissance composition was one of the tallest buildings in the area.

Among Keister's other notable commissions is the eccentrically massed First Baptist Church (1891) on the northwest corner of Broadway and 79th Street. Like Belasco's Stuyvesant, it features stained glass in its ceiling, although here rendered more boldly as a splendid stained glass barrel vault in appropriate ecclesiastical terms. Keister's other works include neo-Grec and neo-Renaissance tenements in Greenwich Village, an eclectic group of rowhouses known as the Bertine Block (1891) on East 136th Street in the Bronx, the McAlpin-Miller residence at 9 East 90th Street (purchased by a daughter of Andrew Carnegie and now part of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum), as well as a neo-Gothic office building from 1925, located several doors west of Belasco's Theater on West 44th Street (No. 156).<sup>3</sup>

Everett Shinn (1876-1953) was born in Woodtown, New Jersey. After study at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, he became an artist-illustrator for Edward Davis (father of Stuart Davis), art director of the Philadelphia Press.<sup>4</sup> Other members of the staff included George Luks, William Glackens and John Sloan. Under the influence of Robert Henri these young men turned from illustration to painting. They rejected the genteel European traditions of Victorian art and sought instead to record realistically the American scene. They were the first group of artists to formulate consciously a native American style.

By 1904 the Philadelphia-based group had moved to New York where it was joined by Maurice Prendergast, Ernest Lawson and Arthur B. Davies. They called themselves "The Eight" but their humble subject matter gave rise to their better known name: "The Ash Can School." Among the group, Shinn was the most closely connected with high society. Through his association with Stanford White and especially Clyde Fitch (who introduced Shinn to Belasco), he became increasingly involved in the theater, attracted by its dramatic lights and illusion. Shinn's greatest

inspiration came from Degas, and like him, Shinn concentrated on the candid portrayal of performers, caught in a fleeting moment before a brilliant marquee or drenched wearily in the spotlights of an over-demanding stage. He executed portraits of such leading theater personalities as Ethel Barrymore, David Warfield, Clyde Fitch and Belasco, among others. Shinn also wrote several plays and worked as art director for a number of motion picture studios. Ultimately he deserted the Ash Can's social philosophy for a more decorative Rococco style particularly appropriate for theater interiors. It was used to great advantage in Belasco's Stuyvesant where, however, in keeping with the theater's subdued color scheme, it takes on a character similar to Fragonard's most muted works, relieved by an almost Rubensian delight in corpulent nudity. Among Shinn's other commissions are murals for the City Hall in Trenton, New Jersey, and three others installed in the Oak Bar of New York's Plaza Hotel in 1944.

(JA)

### Notes

1. "New Times Square Theater," New York Times, June 12, 1906, p. 1. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Permit 969-06.
2. Other Keister theaters include Miner's (Loew's Victory) Theater (1910, 3024 Third Avenue, Bronx; demolished); Willis Theater (1912, 411 East 138th Street, Bronx); Empire Theater (1913, 867 Westchester Avenue, Bronx); Globe Theater (1914, 7 Sumpter Avenue, Brooklyn); Benson Theater (1920-21, 2005-11 86th Street, Brooklyn) and the Chaloner Theater (1921-22, 847 Ninth Avenue, Manhattan).
3. Several of Keister's buildings are designated New York City Landmarks. These include the Apollo Theater, The Gerard Apartment Hotel, the McAlpin-Miller House which is part of the designated Cooper Hewitt Museum and tenements in the Greenwich Village Historic District.
4. See Edith DeShazo, Everett Shinn, 1876 - 1953: A Figure in His Time (New York: C.N. Potter; distributed by Crown Publishers, 1974), passim; Milton Brown, American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 24-26.

### The Belasco Theater

Although Keister was responsible for the design of the theater, Belasco had input into every aspect of its planning from the seating configuration and decoration of the auditorium, to the specifications of the stage elevator and particularly the technical requirements of the theater's innovative lighting system. The house was to be the realization of Belasco's ideal theater.

The cornerstone was laid on December 5, 1906, as the cast of "The Rose of the Rancho" (Belasco's current hit) looked on. Its leading lady, Blanche Bates, laid the mortar while expressing her hope that "Mr. Belasco will stick to all of us, and that we and all his friends will stick to Mr. Belasco, as this mortar will eternally stick to this stone."<sup>1</sup> The warmth

of the sentiment expressed the close bond between the producer and his actors. It was also appropriate to his vision of the new theater as his home where guests would visit his "living room" for an evening's entertainment.

The facade provides a strong suggestion of Belasco's domestic hospitality. Unlike the Broadway theaters which preceded it --- and indeed, unlike most which followed --- Belasco's Stuyvesant did not depend upon imposing and dramatic classically-inspired styles. Instead, Keister used the neo-Georgian style, an idiom more usually associated with residences and early civic buildings. The theater's apparent dedication to Peter Stuyvesant, early Dutch governor of New York, may have also been an attempt to evoke the domesticity of "Old New York." The conceit would have been typical of Belasco's theatrical mind. At the same time, the facade's temple frontal is appropriate to the almost sacred regard in which Belasco held the theater. This aspect was not lost on contemporary critics who called it a "temple of theatrical art."<sup>2</sup>

By comparison with other Broadway playhouses, the Belasco is a relatively small theater. It was an early monument in the development of the intimate, or "little theater," movement which would later be so richly developed by Winthrop Ames. Significantly, when Ames built his own playhouse in 1911-12 (also on 44th Street, just one block west of the Belasco), he continued the domestic neo-Georgian style on his facade.

Belasco had developed his interest in the little theater movement through exposure to the European stage where naturalistic drama was dependent upon close contact between actors and audience. "I like a moderate sized, even small theater for most plays," he said, "because of the intimacy, the close contact which permits the closest observation, so that the most delicate and subtle touches, intonations and glances --- the fluttering of an eyelid, the trembling of a lip, the tense tremor of nervous fingers shall not be obscured."<sup>3</sup> The house was provided with just over 1,000 seats, arranged in a broad shallow configuration with 450 in the orchestra, 320 in the balcony, and 240 in the gallery above. There were no interior supports to obstruct the view. (The five columns below the first balcony were originally part of a foyer screen and even now are located behind the last row of orchestra seats). Both of the reinforced concrete balconies were cantilevered from the rear wall, the first balcony to a point unusually close to the stage apron. Opera glasses, a critic noted, were "scarcely necessary" from any seat in the house.<sup>4</sup>

When the theater opened on October 16, 1907, Belasco explained that it was "not a mere auditorium in which a certain number of unrelated [people] should be gathered by the mere chance that each had paid the price of a ticket for admission, but a living room in a high sense of that sometimes commonplace phrase...", a setting where the viewer "would feel not so much that he was in a public place as in a private house to which he had personally been invited."<sup>5</sup> This domestic quality permeated the entire theater from the entrance lobby (by noted theater designer John Rapp) and elaborate wood and marble side lobby (reminiscent of a 19th century living hall; now painted white with black trim) to the auditorium's color scheme as a whole. Unlike its more bombastic contemporaries, the house was bathed in a soothing blend of amber, golden brown, dusty gray, orange and faded greens.<sup>6</sup> The general interior decorative scheme was the work of Wilfred

Buckland, complemented by eighteen mural panels by Everett Shinn (most of which are extant).

The murals have no single theme but, following Belasco's suggestion, provide decorative accents which "tie the color scheme together" and form "an arc of atmospheric intimacy" around the proscenium.<sup>7</sup> Those along the side and rear walls depict singers and dancers in pastoral scenes; those above the proscenium and boxes (four extant of the original eight) are loose allegories of the emotions Belasco sought to excite. The proscenium mural is 35 feet long and 8 feet high, narrowing to 6 feet at center. It contains 29 largely paired figures. Beginning at far left is the evil composite of "Intrigue", "Treason" and "Calumny" repulsing the nearby standing figure. Next comes the bondage of physical, moral and intellectual slavery, followed by a third pair depicting "Motherly Devotion." Standing behind are "Scorn" and "Mutual Sins," contrasted by paired images of "Feminine Vanity" and "Frivolity and Gaiety" at the right and far right respectively. The center of the proscenium is occupied by "Love." To the right of this embracing couple are "Misfortune and Sympathy" together with the kneeling image of "Fear." These are followed by the "Hero" ("so necessary a part in all drama") who rescues a limp woman from a threatening spirit. In the foreground is the less happy alternative: "Grief" mourning his loved one's "Death." The mural terminates with the reclining figure of "Vanity" and the contrast of the wizened "Avarice" clutching his bags of gold while the "Spendthrift" showers himself with money.

The central theme of love is developed more fully in the murals above the side boxes. On the left, "Female Fascination" is enthroned amid her distraught suitors, one of whom becomes a pack horse and lays his burdensome struggle for her attention at her feet. "Domestic Happiness and Harmony" occupy the lunette below. On the opposite wall, "Blind Love" reveals its devastating consequences as an infatuated woman follows in the casualty-strewn path of her merciless and ego-centric lover. In the lunette below a mother protects her child from worldly enticements as the father lounges in the background, easy in the knowledge that "whatever [the child's need, it must be met] by the mother; there is nothing for him to do [!]."

The murals' subdued tones, together with the auditorium's coordinated hues, made it seem as if the whole interior had been dipped into one color. The effect was emphasized by diffused illumination. The original harmony has been largely lost on the current walls (cream with gold and gray-black accents), although the original lighting fixtures remain. And it was for magically lit interiors that Belasco and his house were most famous. Under his direct supervision the scheme was worked out by Louis Hartman and executed by Nimis & Nimis (experts in theatrical lighting) with fixtures by Tiffany Studios. In order to prevent the disturbing effect of localized spot illumination, the auditorium's lighting was diffused through stained and leaded glass with small pendant lanterns under the balcony and on the side of the boxes and other Tiffany fixtures along the rear wall (many of which are extant, but have been removed to prevent theft).<sup>8</sup> There is, in addition, a lightweight (balsa wood) chandelier suspended in front of the stage and most notably, the splendid stained glass capitals of the columns surrounding the orchestra box and under the first balcony. Even more remarkable was the auditorium's ground glass ceiling, illuminated from

behind to give the impression of "real daylight."<sup>9</sup> Divided into deep coffers with broad ribs of reinforced plaster in geometric patterns, it holds 22 stained glass panels, each ornamented with two shields representing the countries which contributed most to theater as well as such celebrated dramatists as Goethe, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Moliere and others. Prominently located above the stage is the shield of Stuyvesant in whose honor the house was named.<sup>10</sup>

The artistry of the public auditorium was surpassed only by the technical achievements behind stage where Belasco perfected the lighting that he had pioneered during his lease of Hammerstein's Republic. Having abandoned the harsh glare of conventional footlights, he installed bands of dimmers, border lights and plugging sockets around the fly gallery and stage for a total of 4,500 electric lights, all of which were controlled by what was then the largest, most flexible and technically advanced switchboard in the world.<sup>11</sup> Belasco constantly experimented with new techniques and thus frequently revamped the theater's lighting system. In 1917, for instance, he removed the footlights totally and replaced them with incandescent lamps with hoods and reflectors behind the proscenium so that all light came from above as in nature. At the same time he installed supplemental spots in a glass box along the balcony fascia, hidden from the viewer during intermissions by little doors which swung open automatically upon use (these have since been removed).<sup>12</sup>

Belasco's intimate ideal required that the stage be relatively small, the proscenium measuring only 32 feet wide x 30 feet high x 27 feet deep (the stage itself was 80 feet wide, enlarged by Belasco in 1915 by the addition of an adjustable 5 foot apron in front of the curtain line).<sup>13</sup> As in Belasco's first theater (Hammerstein's Republic), the stage was equipped with a trap elevator (20' x 10') which carried the entire fittings of his stage sets to one of two basement levels. There the central platform, constructed like a large wagon, was rolled aside and replaced by another already filled with props for the next scene.<sup>14</sup>

Once an actor himself, Belasco treated his casts with considerably more thoughtfulness than the average producer. In virtually unprecedented fashion he provided a comfortable and clean work environment, even forbidding stage hands "the expectoration of tobacco juice upon the floors."<sup>15</sup> Actors were provided with chairs behind stage and padded runners leading off the proscenium so they could walk back and forth in silence. Their dressing rooms likewise had such amenities as natural light and air and a bath on each floor. Located in the wing on the western side of the building and separated from it by a thick fire wall, the dressing rooms had windows onto the theater's side alley and rear courtyard --- a fringe benefit of the newly instituted fire code. In compliance with it the Belasco was constructed as a freestanding structure, completely surrounded by a generous 10 foot alley. Upon its completion in 1907 it was the safest theater in New York. With 19 exits on the ground floor and still more at balcony level, the entire house could be emptied within three minutes.<sup>16</sup>

The four-story front of the wing was occupied by Belasco's offices, supplemented in 1909 by a ten-room rooftop duplex which housed his personal apartments. Part of this addition appears in the southeastern corner of the theater where a Palladian-fenestrated pavilion rises above the facade's

cornice. It was designed to complement the original pavilion in the west. The contents of the penthouse were as eccentric as Belasco himself. They included a crypt-like installation for his collection of ancient glass, his plush museum of Napoleonic artifacts (featuring a much-prized lock of the emperor's hair), and a Japanese-style bedroom. There was, in addition, the Gothic Room (dominated by a freestanding fireplace inspired by Stanford White) where a curious combination of medieval art and erotica was illuminated by hidden switches. The apartment also had a dining room, library and more.<sup>17</sup> The suite's contents were dispersed after Belasco's death in 1931. His books were bequeathed to the New York Public Library and some of the trappings were installed in the "Belasco Room" at Sardi's, but most items were sold at auction.

When Belasco's Stuyvesant opened on October 16, 1907, it was commended as "the most complete and satisfactory playhouse in existence."<sup>18</sup> Its interior was proclaimed "much the most beautiful in New York."<sup>19</sup> As Belasco intended, the audience warmed to the cozy and dimly lit "living room" in a high sense of that sometimes commonplace phrase. It was domestic in a regal sense, artistic, melodramatic, and in a word, theatrical. It was, according to Belasco, the "milestone of his career," a theater which, in defiance of the Syndicate, would "always fly the flag of independence."<sup>20</sup> It did so, but only until two years later when Belasco became associated with Klaw & Erlanger, thereby terminating the fierce warfare that he had waged with the Syndicate over the course of more than a half decade.<sup>21</sup>

Belasco used the theater for 24 years, rechristening it from the "Stuyvesant" to the "Belasco" in 1910 (when his first theater reverted to Hammerstein's "Republic"). Aside from its constantly changing light systems, the house underwent several alterations under the producer's watchful eye. Among the most significant were the installation of new orchestra boxes, seats and eastern balcony stairs in 1919,<sup>22</sup> followed in the next year by the construction of an additional rooftop room above the office portion of the building.<sup>23</sup> Eight years later additional seats were installed in the rear of the orchestra with the consequent relocation of the wooden and glass screen behind (subsequently removed).<sup>24</sup>

During the course of his occupancy Belasco presented 47 different shows in the theater. Nearly all were successful and almost all, produced and directed by Belasco. During the entire period he never missed a premier --- until pneumonia prevented his attendance at the opening of Tonight or Never on November 11, 1930. When the apparently revived producer returned to Broadway in March of the following year, the show was given a second opening for his benefit.<sup>25</sup> It was the last one he would ever attend.

Belasco's death in May 1931 coincided with a difficult period on Broadway as numerous houses folded in the face of the Depression. Belasco's theater, however, was rescued almost immediately by Katharine Cornell, star of the Empire Theater's enormously successful Barretts of Wimpole Street, as well as a producer, manager and easily the most accomplished woman on Broadway. She leased the house for two years beginning on September 21, 1931, intending to transform Belasco's repertory theater into her own with feature productions by herself and husband Guthrie McClintic. Five truckloads of curios and antiques were carted out



from Belasco's apartments, but the theater remained intact. It was the intention of the new landlords to "leave things as they are," including the theater's Belasco name.<sup>26</sup> Cornell and McClintic weathered their lease with only moderate success, and in 1934 the house was sold to Mrs. Elmer Rice, wife of the famous playwright and regional director of the WPA Theater Project. She found the theater in "good condition," and "merely freshened it up,"<sup>27</sup> with a minor stage alteration.<sup>28</sup> For the next year the Belasco was used as the showcase for Elmer Rice productions before foreclosure and repurchase by the Belasco estate.<sup>29</sup> Continuing the presentation of legitimate theater, the house was sold once more in 1944 and again four years later before succumbing to financial pressures.<sup>30</sup> Like so many other Broadway theaters, most of which had been converted long before, the Belasco was transformed into a radio studio for NBC. Orchestra seats were removed and sound booths installed as directors, performers and theater lovers at large mourned the passing of the playhouse which, for decades, "best expressed the theater's special intangible glamor."<sup>31</sup> From 1949 to 1953 the Belasco broadcast the quiz show "Take it or Leave it," hosted by Eddie Cantor. It recalled its distinguished history only with the broadcast of the "Theatre Guild on the Air." In 1953 the house returned to the legitimate stage. It was altered in 1975 when service stands were installed and the orchestra's seats replaced by tables and chairs for the short-lived cabaret production of the Rocky Horror Show.<sup>32</sup> In 1976 the Belasco returned again to the legitimate stage where it has remained ever since, enjoying its longest running show beginning in 1981 with 1,618 performances of Ain't Misbehavin.

(JA)

#### Notes

1. "Stuyvesant Theater Named," New York Times, June 6, 1906, p. 4.
2. Arthur David, "An Intimate Auditorium," Architectural Record, 23 (March, 1908), p. 227.
3. Quoted by Lise-Lone Marker, David Belasco: Naturalism in the American Theater, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 37.
4. "Light Like Day in the New Theatre," New York Times, April 29, 1907, p. 9.
5. Belasco Theater. Souvenir program of the dedication (as the Stuyvesant Theater), October 16, 1907. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
6. David, p. 223.
7. Belasco Theater souvenir program (as the Stuyvesant Theater). Architectural Review, 15 (May 1908), 97; "Aging Belasco Prepares for a New Theatrical Life," New York Times, January 27, 1975, p. 27. For the murals see also Edith De Shazo, Everett Shinn, 1876-1953: A Figure in His Time (New York: C.N. Potter: Distributed by Crown Publishers, 1974), pp. 94-95, 97.
8. Information provided by the late Archie Thompson, for years the manager of the Lyceum Theater.

9. "Light Like Day...", p. 9.
10. "Stuyvesant Finished: New Temple of Dramatic Art to be Dedicated Wednesday Night," Tribune, October 13, 1907.
11. "The Stuyvesant Theatre," Architects and Builders Magazine, 40 (Nov. 1907), 85-89.
12. Kenneth McGowan, Theatre of Tomorrow, (New York: Boni and Liveright Publishers, 1921), p. 51 and William Winter, The Life and Work of David Belasco, (New York: Jefferson Winter, 1925).
13. Marker, p. 95-96.
14. Ibid., p. 38-39.
15. William Winter, The Wallet of Time, Containing Personal, Biographical and Critical Reminiscences of the American Theater (New York: Moffat Yard and Company, 1913), p. 10.
16. "Light Like Day...",
17. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Alteration Permits 928-09 and 2552-09. Winter, Belasco, pp. 240 ff. See also "A Ghost in Belasco's Theater," Daily News, August 21, 1984, p. 57 and "Aging Belasco Preens...."
18. Unidentified clipping, Oct. 21, 1907 in Robinson Locke collection of Dramatic Scrapbooks, vol. 477 p. 2, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
19. David, p. 223.
20. "Opening of Belasco's New Stuyvesant," Belasco News, October 23, 1907 in the Billy Rose Theater Collection.
21. "Independents Join Klaw and Erlanger," New York Times, April 30, 1909, p. 1.
22. Alteration Permit 1290-19.
23. Alteration Permit 277-20.
24. Alteration Permit 2297-28.
25. "Belasco's Broadway Visit," New York Times, March 18, 1931, p. 23.
26. "Broadway After Dark," The Sun, October 12, 1931.
27. "Theatres Figure in Midtown Deal," New York Times, August 5, 1934, secs. 10 and 11, p. 1.
28. Alteration Permit 2917-35.

29. "Theater Taken Back by Belasco Estate," New York Times, March 4, 1936, p. 40.
30. "Belasco Theater Has New Owners," New York Times, November 1, 1948, p. 29.
31. Alteration Permit 1393-49; John Keating, "The Belasco Gives Up the Ghost," Cue (Sept. 24, 1949), pp. 16-17, 25 and Elia Kazan, "About Broadway and the Herring Catch," New York Times, October 16, 1949, sec. 2, p. 1.
32. Alteration Permit 1883-74. See also, "Stage: A Flashy 'Rocky Horror Show,'" New York Times, March 11, 1975, p. 26.

### The Belasco as a Playhouse<sup>1</sup>

Belasco opened his theater on October 16, 1907, with A Grand Army Man, not his own work, nor that of a noted dramatist, but a play by amateur playwrights Pauline Phelps and Marion Short (which, in typical fashion, was totally revamped by Belasco). A melodrama about a Civil War veteran, Belasco used it primarily as a vehicle for his protege David Warfield who once again proved his thesis: "Sob and the world sobs with you." The second male lead was played by William Elliott, Belasco's future son-in-law.

Over the next two decades Belasco produced and directed nearly fifty shows, almost all of which had respectable runs of over a hundred performances, and some with considerably more. Among the highlights were The Concert (1910-11), a comedy rated among critic George Jean Nathan's prestigious "Top 10" list, followed immediately by the Return of Peter Grimm on which Belasco collaborated with Cecil B. deMille (1911-12). Always an innovator, Belasco had the distinction in 1914 of presenting The Phantom Rival by Ferenc Molnar, a critically acclaimed production notable also as the first show to make both set and costume changes during a blackout rather than behind a lowered curtain. In the next year (1915) Belasco produced and directed one of his biggest hits in the house with 522 performances of Winchell Smith and Victor Mapes' The Boomerang. Two years later he enjoyed a different but no less significant distinction when President and Mrs. Wilson attended one of 315 performances of Polly with a Past featuring Ziegfeld Follies starlet Ina Claire.<sup>2</sup> In 1920-21 Lionel Atwill gave his career's most memorable performance in 189 stagings of Sacha Guitry's Deburau, while Belasco was simultaneously acclaimed for one of the most beautiful and impressive productions on the New York stage. In the following year he showcased his greatest blockbuster in the house with 580 performances of the American adaptation of Andre Picard's spicy French play Kiki. In 1924 Tiger Cats opened with 48 performances by Katharine Cornell who, seven years later, would lease the house as her own repertory theater.

Throughout the 1920s Belasco stretched stagecraft to previously unknown dimensions, enjoying the success of 461 performances of Lulu Belle in 1925-26 and the sensation of Ferenc Molnar's Mima three years later. A high-tech fantasy in the footsteps of Fritz Lang, it presented the

terrifying invention of the Devil's scientifically-minded lieutenant: the "Psycho-corrupter" --- a device so powerful that, the lieutenant explained, it "could accomplish within an hour what it takes the evil city of New York twenty years to do: namely, corrupt a human soul beyond redemption."<sup>3</sup> For this dramatic extravaganza Belasco revamped the proscenium and sheathed the orchestra boxes and balcony in metal, transforming his "living room" into something more closely resembling the engine room of a battle ship. Seventy-three years old and still experimenting, he lost a quarter million dollars on the production. Some of his losses were recovered in 1929 with 378 performances of Laurence E. Johnson's It's a Wise Child, followed in the next year by Tonight or Never, the last show Belasco ever produced.

After Belasco's death in 1931 Guthrie McClintic and Katharine Cornell staged six productions, the most successful of which was Criminal at Large with 161 performances in 1932. Thereafter the Belasco weathered the Depression with nine shows of varying success before Norman Bel Geddes produced a two year run of The Dead End in 1935-36. This enormously successful production featured 684 performances by Sidney Lumet among others and led to the movie series "Dead End Kids" and "The Bowery Boys." Clifford Odets' Golden Boy, one of a number of Group Theater productions to play the Belasco, followed in 1937-38 (with a young Lee J. Cobb appearing) and merited inclusion in the "Best Plays" of the season. John Barrymore starred in My Dear Children in 1940, succeeded three years later by the Russian comedy Dark Eyes. For the next several years shows at the Belasco had little success, one of the most notable presentations being Home of the Brave in 1945 which was Arthur Laurent's first play. New life came in 1946-47 when Bert Lahr appeared 439 times in a revival of George Watters and Arthur Hopkin's Burlesque. In 1948 the Belasco showcased The Madwoman of Chaillot, a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award-winning play by Jean Giraudoux, before being transformed into an NBC radio playhouse.

The Belasco returned to the legitimate stage with 520 performances of The Solid Gold Cadillac in 1953-54. Since that time it has presented plays by Noel Coward, Lorraine Hansberry's Raisin in the Sun (1959-60) and Pulitzer Prize-winning All the Way Home (1960-61) by Tad Mosel. In subsequent years it featured Saul Bellow's The Last Analysis (1964-65), Frank Gilroy's The Subject was Roses (1966-67) and Frank Marcus' The Killing of Sister George (1966-67) before the 1971-72 presentation of Oh! Calcutta which moved from the off-Broadway Eden Theater for a total run of 1316 performances. After 45 performances of the Rocky Horror Show (1975-76) the Belasco returned to the legitimate stage, limpingly at first, but in unprecedented style as of 1980 when it began the theater's all time blockbuster: 1,618 performances of Fats Waller's music in Ain't Misbehavin. The Belasco's most recent production was The Accidental Death of an Anarchist (1984-85).

(JA)

#### Notes

1. This production history of the Belasco 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. Timberlake, p. 333.

3. Ibid., p. 389-91.

### Description<sup>1</sup>

#### Entrance Lobby:

The entrance lobby is a small almost square space. The ticket office is located on the opposite wall and set in a recess which is given a highly ornate treatment. The ticket window is centered in the wall and set in an arched opening.

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

Ticket window: the ticket window is flanked by Corinthian colonnettes supporting a curved pediment. This in turn is flanked by arched panels with the arches supported on flat pilasters. The arches contain carved heads. The entire recess is framed by Corinthian columns set on marble bases; these support a carved entablature which is a continuation of that extending around the entire space. A secondary ticket window with pedimented surround, to the left, and a doorway, to the right, both set in elliptical arches, are placed on either side of the recess.

Walls and ceiling: The side walls are paneled and flanked by flat Corinthian pilasters; the paneling rises from a wainscoting of Rouge Duranche marble. The entablature encircling the room has a modillioned cornice; rising from this above the ticket office is colored circle glass and a carved pedimented aedicule holding a bronze figure. The surrounding wall surfaces are covered with Lincrusta Walton simulating leather.

Floor: The floor is a combination of terrazzo and mosaic tiles, which harmonize with the marble wainscoting.

2) Attached fixtures:

Doors: Doors on the east wall lead into the auditorium. Two pairs of double doors lead in to the lobby from the street.

Murals: Above the doors are painted irreplaceable Everett Shinn murals.

Light fixtures: There are original gilt wall sconces in the panels of the side walls. An ornate gilt chandelier is suspended from the ceiling.

3) Known alterations: A brass standing rail has been removed from in front of the ticket window. The secondary ticket window was originally a doorway. The color scheme of this space is now black and yellow which does not enhance the ornamental detail.

Auditorium:

1) Configuration: The configuration of the auditorium consists of a space which is wider than it is deep, two balconies, curving walls, a proscenium, boxes, the stage opening behind the proscenium arch, promenades at the rear of the orchestra and the first balcony, and a sloping floor extending towards the proscenium arch.

Proscenium: The proscenium is formed by a segmental arch.

Balconies: There are two balconies.

Boxes: At each side of the proscenium is a pair of boxes at the second balcony level. (The boxes at the first balcony level and the box area at orchestra level have been removed.)

Staircases: On the east side of the orchestra a staircase leads up to the boxes. Staircases at each side of the rear exit doors lead up to the first balcony level.

Ceiling: The ceiling is a particularly notable feature of the auditorium, executed in a series of lozenge-shaped panels.

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>

Promenades: Promenades are located at the rear of the orchestra and the first balcony.

2) Ornament: The ornament of the auditorium 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 side portions of the proscenium surround have been removed, but the arch itself is still outlined by a wide band of foliation and a bracketed molding. The mural (see below, under fixtures) rising above the proscenium arch is framed by foliate panels.

Orchestra: The side walls are covered with painted wood paneling at orchestra level. An arched opening on the west wall leads into a small

side lobby space. At the rear of the orchestra, four eight-sided columns with stained-glass capitals (see below, under fixtures) help support the balcony.

**Boxes:** The box walls are framed by eight-sided columns with bands of vertical foliation and stained-glass capitals. The surviving boxes, which are carried on console brackets, have angled sides and foliate panels. A colonnette between each box rises to a lunette. An arch with decorative molding sets off a mural (see below, under fixtures) which rises to the ceiling and is framed by foliate panels employing the same motifs as the panels framing the proscenium mural. (See below, under fixtures, for the stained-glass capitals.)

**Balconies:** The underside of the first balcony has paneled bands which follow the curve of the balcony and contain light fixtures (see below under fixtures.) The balcony fronts have foliate bands above bosses, a continuation of the motifs of the box fronts. The side and rear walls of the two balcony levels have wainscotings. The underside of the second balcony has the same paneled bands as the first balcony.

**Ceiling:** The color scheme of the ceiling is original in shades of brown and rose.

### 3) Attached fixtures:

**Boxes:** (See below, under light fixtures.)

**Orchestra:** Doors from the western corner of the entrance lobby provide the entrance to the rear of the orchestra. Exit doors are located on the east wall. At the rear of the orchestra, there are stained-glass capitals on each of four eight-sided columns that help support the balcony (see above, under ornament, for the columns). At the rear of the orchestra, four sets of exit doors lead out to the street.

**Ceiling:** The lozenge-shaped panels of the ceiling contain twenty-two stained-glass panels decorated with shields and heraldic designs of the coats of arms of famous dramatists, authors, and nations which have contributed to the dramatic arts.

**Staircases:** There are brass railings on the staircases at each side of the exit doors lead up to the first balcony level. Wrought-iron railings mark the staircase openings at the rear sections of the balconies.

**Murals:** The auditorium is adorned with a series of irreplaceable murals by Everett Shinn. They are located above the proscenium arch; above the painted wood paneling of the orchestra side walls; in lunettes between the stained glass capitals on colonnettes between each box; and rising to the ceiling above each box.

**Light fixtures:** The multitude of light fixtures, and the stained-glass capitals and ceiling panels are irreplaceable. Large gilt wall sconces are placed above and between two of the pairs of doors at the rear of the orchestra. Suspended from the underside of the first and second balconies are small gilt chandeliers. Gilt wall sconces are placed on the

walls of the two balcony levels. A large gilt and glass chandelier is suspended from the ceiling, and smaller stained-glass chandeliers are hung from the ceiling over the upper balcony. The colonnettes between each box have stained glass capitals. There are also stained-glass capitals on the eight-sided columns framing the box walls and at the rear of the orchestra supporting the balcony.

4) Known alterations: The boxes at the first balcony level and the box area at orchestra level have been removed. The side portions of the proscenium surround have been removed. Air conditioning ducts and grilles have been installed in the walls and ceiling, obscuring some of the detail. Air conditioning grilles have been placed through the murals above the boxes. A modern technical booth has been placed at the rear of the second balcony. A small recessed light box has been installed in the center of the front balcony rail. Except for the ceiling, the remainder of the auditorium is painted in a manner which does not enhance the ornamental detail.

(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 Belasco Theater interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built in 1906-07, it is among the oldest theaters surviving in New York City. It was designed by George Keister, an important theater architect, as the ideal playhouse of producer-manager-director-playwright David Belasco. Conceived as Belasco's "living room," it evokes domesticity through intimate spaces, diffused illumination with lighting fixtures by Tiffany Studios, and murals by Everett Shinn. An early monument in the development of the "Little Theater" in New York, it represents an important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. For three quarters of a century the Belasco 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.

Report prepared by  
Janet Adams (JA)  
Research Department



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 consultant was Margaret Knapp (MMK). Gale Harris of the Research Department 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 Belasco Theater, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the first balcony floor; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium; the staircases leading from the first balcony floor up to the second balcony; second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; 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; 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 Belasco Theater survives today as one of the oldest historic theater interiors in New York City; that it was designed in 1906-07 for producer-manager-director-playwright David Belasco, one of the most important personalities in the history of the American stage; that it served as Belasco's laboratory for the development of unprecedented staging and lighting techniques that were of enduring significance worldwide; that it was designed as Belasco's ideal theater by George Keister, an important theater architect; that it depends on design features associated with residential architecture to evoke a domestic atmosphere, suggestive of the intimate drama presented by Belasco; that as such it represents an early monument in the development of the "Little Theater" movement in New York; that it was decorated by noted theater designer John Rapp, with murals by famed American painter Everett Shinn and lighting fixtures by Tiffany Studios; that for over three quarters of a century it 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 Belasco Theater, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the first balcony floor; the first balcony floor interior consisting of the first balcony, the upper part of the auditorium; the staircases leading from the first balcony floor up to the second balcony; second balcony floor interior consisting of the second balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; 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; 111-121 West 44th Street, Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 997, Lot 23, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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## APPENDIX

The following production history of the Belasco 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.

### 1907

A GRAND ARMY MAN 10/16/07 (149 perfs.) by Pauline Phelps, Marion Short and David Belasco; with David Warfield.

### 1908

THE MUSIC MASTER 2/24/08 (70 perfs.) by Charles Klein; with David Warfield.

THE WARRENS OF VIRGINIA 5/4/08 (190 total perfs.) by William C. de Mille; with Cecil B. de Mille and Mary Pickford (in her New York debut). (First opened at the Belasco/Republic Theater 12/3/07.)

THE FIGHTING HOPE 9/22/08 (231 total perfs.) by William J. Hurlbut; with Charles Richman. (Moved to the Belasco/Republic Theater 9/23/08.)

### 1909

THE EASIEST WAY 1/19/09 (157 perfs.) by Eugene Walter; with Francis Starr and Joseph Kilgour.

IS MATRIMONY A FAILURE? 8/24/09 (183 perfs.) by Oscar Blumenthal and Gustave Kadelberg, adapted by Leo Ditrichstein; with Jane Cowland and Blanche Yurka.

THE LILY 12/23/09 (164 perfs.) by Pierre Wolff and Gaston Leroux; with Nance O'Neil.

### 1910

JUST A WIFE 2/1/10 (79 perfs.) by Eugene Walter; with Ernest Glendinning.

THE CONCERT 10/4/10 (264 perfs.) by Herman Bahr, adapted by Lee  
Ditrichstein with Janet Beecher, Jane Grey and Cora Witherspoon.

1911

THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM 10/17/11 (231 perfs.) by David Belasco; with  
David Warfield and Marie Bates.

1912

THE CASE OF BECKY 10/1/12 (95 perfs.) by Edward Locke; with Frances Starr.

PHILANTHROPY 11/26/12 (1 perf.) by Abraham Goldknapf; with Joseph Kilgour.

YEARS OF DISCRETION 12/25/12 (190 perfs.) by Frederick and Fanny Hatton;  
with Effie Shannon.

1913

THE TEMPERMENTAL JOURNEY 9/4/13 (124 perfs.) by Andre Rivoire and Yves  
Mirandeis, adapted by Leo Ditrichstein; with Leo Ditrichstein and  
Cora Witherspoon. (Moved to the Republic 9/4/13.)

THE AUCTIONEER 9/30/13 (95 perfs.) by Lee Arthur and Charles Klein; with  
David Warfield and Marie Bates.

THE SECRET 12/23/13 (143 perfs.) by Henri Bernstein; with Frances Starr.

1914

THE PHANTOM RIVAL 10/6/14 (127 perfs.) by Ferenc Molnar; with Leo  
Ditrichstein and Laura Hope Crews.

1915

MARIE-ODILE 1/26/15 (119 perfs.) by Edward Knoblock; with Frances Starr.

THE BOOMERANG 8/10/15 (522 perfs.) by Winchell Smith and Victor Mapes;  
with Arthur Byron and Wallace Eddinger.

1916

SEVEN CHANCES 10/23/16 (151 total perfs.) by Roi Cooper Megrue; with  
Frank Craven. (Originally opened at the Cohan Theater 8/8/16.)

THE LITTLE LADY IN BLUE 12/21/16 (100 perfs.) by Horace Hodges and  
T. Wigney Percyval; with Frances Starr.



1917

THE VERY MINUTE 4/9/17 (32 perfs.) by John Meehan.

POLLY WITH A PAST 9/6/17 (315 perfs.) by George Middleton and Guy Bolton;  
with Ina Claire, Cyril Scott and H. Reeves-Smith.

1918

DADDIES 9/15/18 (340 total perfs.) by John L. Hobbie; with Jeanne Eagles  
and George Abbott. (Moved to Lyceum 11/4/18.)

TIGER! TIGER! 11/12/18 (183 perfs.) by Edward Knoblock; with Lionel  
Atwill, O.P. Heggie and Frances Starr.

1919

DARK ROSALEEN 4/22/19 (87 perfs.) by Whitford Kane and W.D. Hepenstall;  
with Charles Bickford.

THE SON-DAUGHTER 11/19/19 (233 perfs.) by George Scarborough and David  
Belasco; with Lenore Ulric and Albert Brunning.

1920

ONE 9/14/20 (111 perfs.) by Edward Knoblock; with Francis Starr.

DEBURAU 12/23/20 (189 perfs.) by Sacha Guitry, adapted by Granville  
Barker; with Lionel Atwill.

1921

THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM 9/21/21/ (78 perfs.); with David Warfield.

KIKI 11/29/21 (580 perfs.) by Andre Picard, adapted by David Belasco;  
with Lenore Ulrich.

1923

MARY, MARY QUITE CONTRARY 9/11/23 (86 perfs.) by St. John Ervine; with  
Mrs. Fiske and C. Aubrey Smith.

LAUGH, CLOWN, LAUGH! 11/28/23 (133 perfs.) by Faurto Martini, adapted by  
David Belasco and Tom Cushing; with Lionel Barrymore and Ian Keith.

THE LITTLE THEATER TOURNAMENT 5/5/23 (8 perfs.); produced by the New York  
Drama League and Walter Hartwig (competition for three \$100 prizes).

1924

TIGER CATS 10/21/24 (48 perfs.) by Michael Orme, adapted by Karen Bramston; with Katharine Cornell and Robert Loraine.

THE HAREM 12/2/24 (183 perfs.) by Ernest Vajda, adapted by Avery Hopwood; with Lenore Ulric and William Courtenay

1925

ACCUSED 9/29/25 (95 perfs.) by Brieux, adapted by George Middleton; with E.H. Sothern.

STRONGER THEN LOVE 12/28/25 (49 perfs.) by Dario Niccodemi, with Ralph Forbes and Nance O'Neil.

1926

LULU BELLE 2/9/26 (461 perfs.) by Edward Sheldon and Charles MacArthur; with Lenore Ulric.

1927

HIT THE DECK 4/25/27 (352 perfs.) by Herbert Fields, lyrics by Leo Robin and Clifford Grey, music by Vincent Youmans; with Brian Donlevy.

1928

THE BACHELOR FATHER 2/13/28 (264 perfs.) by Edward Childs Carpenter; with June Walker and C. Aubrey Smith.

MIMA 12/12/28 (180 perfs.) by Ferenc Molnar, adapted by David Belasco; with Lenore Ulric.

1929

IT'S A WISE CHILD 8/6/29 (378 perfs.) by Laurence E. Johnson; with Humphery Bogart and Mildred McCoy.

1930

DANCING PARTNER 8/5/30 (119 perfs.) by Alexander Engel and Alfred Grunwald; with Lynne Overman and Irene Purcell.

TONIGHT OR NEVER 11/18/30 (231 perfs.) by Lili Hatvany; with Helen Gahagan and Melvin Douglas.

1931

BRIEF MOMENT 11/9/31 (129 perfs.) by S.N. Behrman; with Alexander Woolcott, Paul Harvey and Francine Larrimore.

1932

DISTANT DRUMS 1/18/32 (40 perfs.) by Dan Totheroh; with Pauline Lord, Arthur Hohl and Beulah Bondi.

THE TRUTH ABOUT BLAYDS 4/11/32 (24 perfs.) by A.A.Milne; with O.P. Heggie and Pauline Lord.

CRIMINAL AT LARGE 10/10/32 (162 perfs.) by Edgar Wallace; with William Harrigan, Emlyn Williams and Alexandra Carlisle.

LUCRECE 12/20/32 (31 perfs.) by Andre Obey, translated by Thornton Wilder; with Katharine Cornell and Pedro de Cordoba.

1933

ALIEN CORN 2/20/33 (98 perfs.) by Sidney Howard; with Katharine Cornell and Luther Adler.

COME EASY 8/29/33 (23 perfs.) by Felicia Metcalfe; with Nancy Sheridan and Edward Raquello.

1934

THE JOYOUS SEASON 1/29/34 (16 perfs.) by Philip Barry; with Jane Wyatt, Eric Dressler, Lillian Gish, Kate Mayhew and John Elderedge.

JUDGEMENT DAY 9/12/34 (94 perfs.) by Elmer Rice; with Josephine Victor, Walter N. Greaza and Eric Wollencott.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS 10/25/34 (32 perfs.) by Elmer Rice; produced and directed by Elmer Rice; with Gladys Feldman, Thomas H. Manning, Ned Glass, Josephine Dunn, Francis Compton, Joseph Schildkraut and Ruth Tomlinson.

1935

AWAKE AND SING 2/19/35 (184 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; produced by the Group Theater; with Stella Adler, Morris Carnovsky, John Garfield, Luther Adler and Sanford Meisner.

WAITING FOR LEFTY/AWAKE AND SING 7/22/35 (87 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; produced by the Group Theater; directed by Sanford Meisner; with Ruth Nelson, Elia Kazan, Bob Lewis and Clifford Odets.

AWAKE AND SING/WAITING FOR LEFTY (return) 9/9/35 (24 perfs.).

DEAD END 10/28/35 (684 perfs.) by Sidney Kingsley; produced by Norman Bel Geddes; directed by Sidney Kinglsey; with Gabriel Dell, Billy Hallop, Huntz Hall, Bobby Jordan Martin Gabel, Leo Gorcey, Marjorie Main, Sidney Lumet and Dan Duryea.

1937

GOLDEN BOY 11/4/37 (248 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; produced by The Group Theater; with Luther Adler, Frances Farmer, Lee J. Cobb, John Garfield, Moris Carnovsky, Elia Kazan, Howard Da Silva, Curt Conway and Martin Ritt.

1938

DANCE NIGHT 10/14/38 (3 perfs.) by Kenyon Nicholson; with Bert Conway, Lyle Bettger, Mary Rolfe and Terry Fay.

ROCKET TO THE MOON 11/24/38 (131 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; with Morris Carnovsky, Ruth Nelson, Luther Adler, Leif Erickson and Sanford Meisner.

1939

THE GENTLE PEOPLE 1/5/39 (141 perfs.) by Irwin Shaw; produced by The Group Theater; with Sam Jaffe, Roman Bohnen, Franchot Tone, Karl Malden, Sylvia Sydney, Elia Kazan, Lee J. Cobb and Martin Ritt.

FOREIGNERS 12/5/39 (7 perfs.) by Frederick Lonsdale; with Richard Ainley and Martha Scott.

1940

MY DEAR CHILDREN 1/31/40 (117 perfs.) by Catherine Turney and Jerry Horwin; with John Barrymore.

AT THE STROKE OF EIGHT 5/20/40 (8 perfs.) by Percy Robinson; with Richard Waring and Frank Maxwell.

JOHNNY BELINDA 9/18/40 (321 perfs.) by Elmer Harris; with Helen Craig, Louis Hector and Horace McNally.

RETREAT TO PLEASURE 12/17/40 (23 perf.) by Irwin Shaw; with Edith Atwater, Helen Ford, Leif Erickson, Hume Cronyn and Ruth Nelson.

1941

MR. AND MRS. NORTH 1/12/41 (163 perfs.) by Owen Davis; with Albert Hackett, Peggy Conklin and Frank Wilcox.

THE MAN WITH BLONDE HAIR 11/4/41 (7 perfs.) by Norman Krasna; with Rex Williams and Bernard Lenrow.

CLASH BY NIGHT 12/27/41 (49 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; with Tallulah Bankhead, Lee J. Cobb, Joseph Schildkraut, Robert Ryan and Katherine Locke.

1942

PLAN M 2/20/42 (6 perfs.) by James Edward Grant; with Len Doyle.

NATHAN THE WISE 4/3/42 (28 perfs.) by Gotthold Ephriam Lessing, adapted by Ferdinand Bruckner; with Olive Deering and Herbert Berghof.

THE WALKING GENTLEMEN 5/7/42 (6 perfs.) by Grace Perkins and Fulton Oursler; with Arlene Francis and Richard Gaines.

ACROSS THE BOARD ON TOMORROW MORNING/TALKING TO YOU 8/17/42 (8 perfs.): two one act plays by William Saroyan; with Canada Lee.

MAGIC by G.K. Chesterton and HELLO OUT THERE by William Saroyan 9/29/42 (47 perfs.) produced and directed by Eddie Dowling; with Eddie Dowling.

LIFELINE 11/30/42 (8 perfs.) by Norman Armstrong; with Rhys Williams.

1943

DARK EYES 1/14/43 (230 perfs.) by Elena Miramova and Eugenie Leontovich; with Eugenie Leontovich and Elena Miramova.

LAND OF FAME 9/21/43 (6 perfs.) by Albert and Mary Bein, music by Joseph Wood; with Norman Rose, Beatrice Straight, Richard Baseheart and Ed Begley.

INNOCENT VOYAGE 11/15/43 (40 perfs.) by Paul Osborn, based on a novel by Richard Hughes; with Clarence Derwent, Edger Kent, Dean Stockwell, Guy Stockwell and Herbert Berghof.

1944

STORM OPERATION 1/11/44 (23 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson.

DECISION 2/2/44 (158 perfs.) by Edward Chodorov; with Dick Van Patten, Gwen Anderson, Matt Crowley and Paul Ford.

MRS. JANUARY AND MR. X 3/31/44 (43 perfs.) by Zoe Akins; with Billie Burke, Helen Carew, Frank Craven, Phil Sheridan and Barbara Bel Geddes.

LOWER NORTH 8/24/44 (11 perfs.) by Martin Bidwell; with Arthur Hunnicutt, Kim Spalding , Robert Breton and Paul Ford.

VIOLET 10/24/44 (23 perfs.) by Whitfield Cook; with Harvey Stephens and Helen Claire.

IN BED WE CRY 11/14/44 (47 perfs.) by Ilka Chase; with Ilka Chase, Francis De Sales and Frederick Tozere.

TRIO 12/22/44 (69 perfs.) by Dorothy and Howard Baker, based on a novel by Dorothy Baker; with Richard Widmark, Lydia St. Clair and Lois Wheeler.

#### 1945

KISS THEM FOR ME 3/20/45 (110 perfs.) by Luther Davis, based on a novel by Frederick Wakeman; with Dennis King, Jr., Richard Davis, Richard Widmark, Judy Holliday, Virginia Kay and Paul Ford.

BLUE HOLIDAY 5/21/45 (8 perfs.); music by Duke Ellington, Al Moritz, E.Y. Harburg and Earl Robinson; with Ethel Waters and Josh White.

LIVE LIFE AGAIN 9/29/45 (2 perfs.) by Dan Totheroh; with Donald Buka and Mary Rolfe.

SKYDRIFT 11/13/45 (7 perfs.) by Harry Keiner; with Arthur Keegan and Olive Deering.

HOME OF THE BRAVE 12/27/45 (69 perfs.) by Arthur Laurents; with Alan Baxter, Russell Hardie and Joseph Pevney.

#### 1946

TRUCKLINE CAFE 2/27/46 (13 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson; with Virginia Gilmore, Karl Malden, Irene Dailey, Marlon Brando and Ann Shepherd.

FLAMINGO ROAD 3/19/46 (7 perfs.) by Robert and Sally Wilder; with Francis J. Felton, Judith Parrish, Will Geer and Paul Ford.

SONG OF BERNADETTE 3/26/46 (3 perfs.) by Jean and Walter Kerr, based on a novel by Franz Werfel; with Elizabeth Ross.

WOMAN BITES DOG 4/17/46 (5 perfs.) by Bella and Samuel Spewack; with E.G. Marshall, Mercedes McCambridge, Kirk Douglas and Taylor Holmes.

THIS TOO, SHALL PASS 4/30/46 (63 perfs.) by Don Appell; with Sam Wanamaker, Walter Starkey and Jan Sterling.

MAID IN THE OZARKS 7/15/46 (103 perfs.) by Claire Parrish; with Gloria Humphreys, John Dawson and Jack Mathiesen.

LYSISTRATA 10/17/46 (4 perfs.) by Aristophanes, adapted by Gilbert Seldes; with Etta Moten, "Babe" Wallace, Fredi Washington and Sidney Poitier.

BAL NEGRE 11/7/46 (54 perfs.); dance revue choreographed and staged by Katherine Dunham; with Eartha Kitt.

BURLESQUE (revival) 12/15/46 (439 perfs.) by George Manker Watters and Arthur Hopkins; with Bert Lahr, Jean Parker and Jerri Blanchard.

#### 1948

LAST DANCE 1/27/48 (7 perfs.) by Peter Goldbaum and Robin Short, based on a play by August Strindberg; with Anne Jackson, Jessie Royce Landis and Oscar Homolka.

ME AND MOLLY 2/26/48 (156 perfs.) by Gertrude Berg; with Gertrude Berg, Eli Mintz, Michael Enserro and Philip Loeb.

SUNDOWN BEACH 9/7/48 (7 perfs.) by Bessie Breuer; with Nehemiah Persoff, Martin Balsam, Joan Copeland, Julie Harris, Cloris Leachman and John Sylvester.

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, MOTHER! 11/16/48 (7 perfs.) by Julie Berns; with Nancy Carroll and Molly Picon.

THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT 12/27/48 (368 perfs.) by Jean Giradoux, adapted by Maurice Valency; with Marita Hunt, Estelle Winwood and John Carradine.

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#### 1953

THE SOLID GOLD CADILLAC 11/5/53 (526 perfs.) by Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman; with Josephine Hull and Henry Jones.

#### 1954

FRAGILE FOX 10/12/54 (55 perfs.) by Norman A. Brooks; with Andrew Duggan and Dane Clark.

THE FLOWERING PEACH 12/28/54 (135 perfs.) by Clifford Odets; with Menasha Skulnik, Berta Gersten, Martin Ritt and Barbara Baxley.

#### 1955

WILL SUCCESS SPOIL ROCK HUNTER? 10/15/55 (444 perfs.) by George Axelrod; with Orson Bean, Walter Matthau and Jayne Mansfield.

#### 1956

TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE 10/11/56 (36 perfs.) by Robert Yale Libott; with Barry Sullivan, Paul Mann and Ellen Holly.

1957

A CLEARING IN THE WOODS 1/10/57 (36 perfs.) by Arthur Laurents; with Kim Stanley, Pernell Roberts and Robert Culp.

GOOD AS GOLD 3/7/57 (4 perfs.) by John Patrick; with Roddy McDowall, Zero Mostel, Paul Ford and Lou Gilbert.

THE FIRST GENTLEMEN 4/25/57 (28 perfs.) by Norman Ginsbury; with Dorothy Sands, Inga Swenson and Walter Slezak.

I KNOCK AT THE DOOR 9/29/57 (48 perfs.) by Paul Shyre, based on a novel by Sean O'Casey; Rae Allen, Aline MacMahon, Roy Poole, George Brellim, Paul Shyre and Staats Cotsworth.

NUDE WITH VIOLIN 11/14/57 (86 perfs.) by Noel Coward; with Noel Coward, Morris Carnovsky, Luba Malina, William Traylor and Therese Quadri.

1958

PRESENT LAUGHTER 1/31/58 (6 perfs.) by Noel Coward (revival); with Noel Coward and Eva Gabor. (Alternated with NUDE WITH VIOLIN until closing.)

THE DAY THE MONEY STOPPED 2/20/58 (4 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson and Brendan Gill, based on a novel by Brendan Gill; with Kevin McCarthy, Mildred Natwick and Richard Basehart.

JANE EYRE 5/1/58 (52 perfs.) by Huntington Hartford, based on a novel by Charlotte Bronte; with Jan Brooks and Eric Portman.

THE GIRLS IN 509 10/15/58 (117 perfs.) by Howard Teichmann; with Imogene Coca, Peggy Wood and King Donovan.

1959

TALL STORY 1/29/59 (108 perfs.) by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; with Robert Elston, Nina Wilcox, Marc Connelly, Hans Conried, John Astin and Robert Redford.

A RAISIN IN THE SUN 10/19/59 (530 total perfs.) by Lorraine Hansberry; with Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis and Diana Sands. (First opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theater 3/11/59.)

1960

ALL THE WAY HOME 11/30/60 (333 perfs.) by Tad Mosel, based on a novel by James Agee; with Arthur Hill, Lillian Gish and Coleen Dewhurst.



1961

WRITE ME A MURDER 10/26/61 (196 perfs.) by Frederick Knott; with Kim Hunter and Torin Thatcher.

1962

SEIDMAN AND SON 10/15/62 (216 perfs.) by Elick Moll; with Sam Levene, Frances Chaney and Vincent Gardenia.

1963

A RAINY DAY IN NEWARK 10/22/63 (6 perfs.) by Howard Teichmann; with Gene Hackman, Tom Ahearne, Zachary Scott, Dody Goodman, Eddie Mayehoff and John McMartin.

SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY 11/19/63 (111 total perfs.) by Edgar Lee Masters; with Betty Garrett, Joyce Van Patten, Robert Elston, Charles Aidman, Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn and Hal Lynch. (First opened at the Booth Theater 9/29/63.)

1964

ABRAHAM COCHRANE 2/17/64 (1 perf.) by John Sherry.

THE SEAGULL 4/5/64 (32 perfs.) by Anton Chekhov; with Farley Granger, Barbara Stanton, Anne Meacham and Eva Le Gallienne.

THE CRUCIBLE 4/6/64 (32 perfs.) by Arthur Miller; with Farley Granger, Barbara Stanton, Anne Meacham, Eva Le Gallienne and Pamela Gruen.

THE LAST ANALYSIS 10/1/64 (28 perfs.) by Saul Bellow; with Sam Levene, Anthony Roberts, Ann Wedgewood, Will Lee, Tresa Hughs and Minerva Pios.

ONE BY ONE 12/1/64 (7 perfs.) by Dore Schary; with Donald Madden and Michael Myers.

1965

A VERY RICH WOMAN 9/30/65 (28 perfs.) by Ruth Gordon, based on a play by Phillip Heriat; with Ruth Gordon, Madge Kennedy, Carrie Nye, Dick Van Patten and Ernest Truex.

INADMISSIBLE EVIDENCE 11/30/65 (167 perfs.) by John Osborne; with Nicol Williamson, Madeleine Sherwood and Jill Townsend.

1966

FIRST ONE ASLEEP, WHISTLE 2/26/66 (1 perf.) by Oliver Hailey; with Salome Jens and Frank Converse.

THE SUBJECT WAS ROSES 3/1/66 (834 total perfs.) by Frank Gilroy; with Chester Morris, Maureen O'Sullivan and Walter McGinn. (First opened at the Royale Theater 5/5/64; moved several times.)

THE KILLING OF SISTER GEORGE 10/5/66 (205 perfs.) by Frank Marcus; with Eileen Atkins, Beryl Reid and Polly Rowles.

1967

DR. COOK'S GARDEN 9/25/67 (8 perfs.) by Ira Levine; with Keir Dullea and Burl Ives.

1968

WOMAN IS MY IDEA 9/25/68 (5 perfs.) by Don C. Liljenquist; with John Heffernan and David Huddleston.

THE SUDDEN AND ACCIDENTAL RE-EDUCATION OF HORSE JOHNSON 12/18/68 (5 perfs.) by Douglas Taylor; with Jack Klugman and Jill Clayburgh.

1969

DOES A TIGER WEAR A NECKTIE? 2/25/69 (39 perfs.) by Don Peterson; with Hal Holbrook, Al Pacino and Lauren Jones.

1970

GRIN AND BEAR IT by Tom Cushing/POSTCARDS by James Prideaux 3/16/70 (16 perfs.) with Kate Wilkinson, Ray Stewart and James Burge.

LIGHT, LIVELY AND YIDDISH 10/27/70 (87 perfs.) by A. Shulman Wolf and Sylvia Younin, music by Eli Rubinstein; with David Ellin, Mina Bern, and Leon Liebgold.

1971

OH! CALCUTTA 2/25/71 (1316 total perfs -- 606 at the Balasco) devised by Kenneth Tynan; with Jack Shearer, Pamela Dilkenton, George Rethmeir and Samantha Harper. (First opened at the Eden Theater 6/17/69.)

1972

MOTHER EARTH 10/19/72 (12 perfs.) by Ron Thronson, music by Toni Shearer;  
with Gail Boggs and Kelly Garrett.

1973

CHILDREN OF THE WIND 10/24/73 (5 perfs.) by Jerry Devine; with Sarah Hardy.

1975

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW 3/10/75 (45 perfs.) by Richard O'Brien;  
with Tim Curry, Meat Loaf and Kim Milford.

1977

AMERICAN BUFFALO 4/12/77 (122 total perfs.) by David Mamet; with Kenneth  
McMillan, John Savage and Robert Duvall. (First opened at the Ethel  
Barrymore Theater 2/16/77.)

AN ALMOST PERFECT PERSON 10/27/77 (108 perfs.) by Judith Ross; with  
Coleen Dewhurst, George Hearn and Rex Robbins.

1978

STAGES 3/19/78 (13 perfs.) by Stuart Ostrow; with Jack Warden, Tom  
Alderedge, Philip Bosco, Roy Brocksmith and Ralph Drischell.

1979

THE GOOD-BYE PEOPLE 4/30/79 (1 perf.) by Herb Gardner; with Herschel  
Bernardi.

1980

CHARLOTTE 2/27/80 (1 perf.) by Peter Hacks; with Uta Hagen and Charles  
Nelson Reilly.

HIDE AND SEEK 5/4/80 (9 perfs.) by Lezley Havard; with Elizabeth Ashley.

YOUR ARMS TOO SHORT TO BOX WITH GOD (revival) 9/11/80 (153 perfs.)  
conceived by Vinnette Carroll, music and lyrics by Alex Bradford  
and Micki Grant; with Jennifer Holliday. (First opened at the  
Ambassador Theater 6/2/80.)

1981

AIN'T MISBEHAVIN 1/26/81 (160 total perfs.) revue featuring the music of Fats Waller; with Nell Carter and Andre DeShields, (First opened at the Longacre 5/9/78; moved to the Plymouth 1/29/79.)

1983

MARCEL MARCEAU 3/9/83 (46 perfs.).



Belasco Theater Interior  
111-121 West 44th Street  
Manhattan

Built: 1906-07  
Architect: George Keister

Photo: Forster, LPC



Belasco Theater Interior

Photo: Forster, LPC



Belasco Theater Interior



Belasco Theater Interior  
Ceiling





Belasco Theater Interior  
Ticket Lobby

Photo: Forster, LPC