

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 10, 1987; Designation List 195  
LP-1320

BILTMORE THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor up to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 261-265 West 47th Street, Manhattan. Built 1925-26; architect, Herbert J. Krapp.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1019, Lot 5.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Biltmore Theater, first floor interior consisting of the lobby, the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor down to the basement, the staircases leading from the first floor up to the balcony floor and all connecting entrance areas; the basement interior consisting of the basement lounge; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling, the upper part of the stage house; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling and floor surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 16). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty-one witnesses spoke or had statements read into the record in favor of designation. Two witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The then-owner did not appear at the hearings and did not take a position on the designation. The then long-term lessee, with his representatives, appeared at the hearing, and indicated that he had not formulated an opinion regarding designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

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

Founded by Irwin S. Chanin, the Chanin organization was a major construction company in New York. During the 1920s, Chanin branched out into the building of theaters, and helped create much of the ambience of the heart of the theater district. Chanin built the Biltmore in 1925-26, shortly after his first theater, Chanin's 46th Street, had opened.

Herbert J. Krapp, who designed all the Chanin theaters, was the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district. Having worked in the offices of Herts & Tallant, premier theater designers of the pre-war period, Krapp went on to design theaters for the two major builders of the post-war era, the Shubert and Chanin organizations.

The Biltmore interior represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, its interior is a handsome design, based on the traditional Adamesque styles with which Herbert Krapp adorned so many of his Broadway theaters. Its horseshoe-shaped plan is highly unusual among Broadway houses.

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

### The development of the Broadway Theater District

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(MMK)

## Evolution of Theater Design

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

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

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

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

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## The Broadway Theater in American Theatrical History

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

It was in the Broadway theaters that the beginnings of a distinctly American drama could be seen in the Western melodramas of David Belasco, the social comedies of Clyde Fitch and Langdon Mitchell, and the problem plays of Edward Sheldon and Eugene Walter. With the rise of the "little

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

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

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

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

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

The Biltmore 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.

(MMK)

## Notes

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

## The Chanins

During the middle of the 1920s, the Chanin organization became the second major entrepreneurial builder of Broadway theaters, joining the Shuberts who had been established in the field for two decades. Unlike the

Shuberts, however, the Chanins were builders rather than producers, and their six theaters represent a three-year chapter in a long and distinguished career in the building of New York.

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

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

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

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

Chanin's first theater was called Chanin's Forty-Sixth Street Theater (now the Forty-Sixty Street Theater),<sup>5</sup> and in it he and Krapp incorporated Chanin's novel interior arrangement.<sup>5</sup> It was a large theater, especially designed to accommodate musicals. The Forty-Sixth Street was followed by the construction of the Biltmore and the Mansfield (now the Brooks Atkinson) in 1925. In 1926, Chanin undertook a major mixed-use multiple building project which doubled the number of his Broadway theaters and gave final form to what was to become the theater district's traditional heart. On the block bounded by West 45th and West 46th Streets, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, the Shuberts had already built the paired Shubert and

Booth Theaters behind the Astor Hotel, along the narrow lane which became known as "Shubert Alley" (1911-12), and the similar adjoining pair of the Broadhurst and Plymouth (1916-18). Chanin completed the redevelopment of the block by building the Majestic Theater on West 44th Street, the Theater Masque (today the John Golden) and the adjoining Royale Theater on 45th Street, and the Hotel Lincoln (now the Milford Plaza Hotel) along the Eighth Avenue frontage, all as one interconnecting development. By completing the block's complement of theaters, and by using Herbert J. Krapp, who had already designed the Plymouth and Broadhurst theaters for the Shuberts, Chanin contributed greatly to the cohesiveness of Shubert Alley.

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

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

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

helped complete the development of "Shubert Alley," the heart of the theater district.

(FD, ASD)

### Notes

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

### Herbert J. Krapp

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

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

and elsewhere, supervised Shubert theater alterations nationwide, and was even the architect for their private residences.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

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

The Plymouth and Broadhurst are not adorned with a great deal of applied stone or terra cotta. This lack of architectural ornament is typical of Krapp's designs for the Shuberts;<sup>5</sup> the facades of these theaters are generally enlivened by diaper-patterned brick and occasionally by the use of ornamental iron balconies. The use of diaper-patterned brick can be seen on the Plymouth and the Broadhurst, but it is most evident on the Morosco (1917, demolished), Ritz (1921), Ambassador (1921), and the 46th-

Street facade of the Imperial (1923). Krapp's use of diaperwork might have been inspired by Herts & Tallant's use of an ornate diaper pattern of terra cotta on their Helen Hayes Theater (1911).

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

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

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

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

Like the exteriors of his buildings, Krapp's interiors are stylistically varied, reflecting the design eclecticism of the first

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

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

(ASD)

#### Notes

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

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

#### The Biltmore Theater

The Biltmore Theater, on West 47th Street, was the second of Irwin Chanin's Broadway houses, following closely on the heels of his first, the Chanin's 46th Street, just one block away, and followed in turn almost immediately by the Mansfield (now Brooks Atkinson), across the street. Carving out new territory for themselves, with their second and third theaters, the Chanins transformed formerly residential 47th Street into a new part of the theater district, to be joined a few years later by the Shuberts' Barrymore Theater.

The Biltmore's plan is most unusual among the Broadway houses in that its auditorium, set slightly askew to the site, is in a horseshoe shape, with a single aisle. The decorative ornamental scheme is a handsome design in the Adamesque style, featuring a ceiling dome with a crystal chandelier, handsome pseudo-boxes, and very ornate plasterwork detailing.

The Adamesque style takes its name from the brothers Robert and James Adam, 18th century British architects. Robert Adam (1728-1792), following English tradition, went to Italy to study the monuments of classical antiquity, but unlike his predecessors was attracted not to the great public monuments but rather to ancient domestic buildings. He took inspiration from these works to develop a highly ornamental and refined style of low-relief plasterwork with which he adorned a succession of English town and country houses.

Adam's works were equally notable for their plans: the rooms in his houses were often circular, or oval, or rectangular with curved ends. A typical Adam room might be a long rectangular hall with a curved apse at one end, with walls articulated by shallow ornamental pilasters and bands of swags, and a ceiling covered with delicate plaster fan-light shaped tracery and murals of rustic scenes.

Robert Adam became quite influential in his time, and his work was widely imitated, making the "Adamesque" something of a generic 18th century

style. When English architecture crossed the Atlantic with the colonists in the 18th century, versions of the Adamesque became the style of Federal America. An early 20th-century revival of interest in the Georgian and Federal periods in this country brought with it a revival of the Adamesque for interior decor.

Several early Broadway theaters were designed in the neo-Georgian or neo-Federal styles (e.g. the Little Theater, 1912, and the Henry Miller Theater, 1917-18), and their red-brick Georgian exteriors were complemented by Adamesque plasterwork ornament in their interiors. In the 1920s, the style became very popular, and was used freely, particularly by theater architects such as Herbert Krapp and Thomas Lamb, in theaters whose exteriors had nothing to do with the neo-Georgian.

The auditorium of Krapp's Biltmore Theater is a handsome adaptation of the Adamesque to the needs of a theater. Like Adam's rooms, the auditorium is a rectangle with differently shaped ends, in this case a horse-shoe at one end and the proscenium arch at the other. The walls are lined with shallow pilasters, the pseudo-boxes are handsomely designed as neo-classical aedicules within a larger arch carried on columns, while the technique of highly ornamental, low relief plasterwork has been used to produce a stunningly handsome ceiling, as well as elaborately worked panels on the balcony rail and the walls.

The Biltmore was the last of Krapp's Adamesque-style interiors for the Chanins. He designed the remaining four in a more eclectic "modern Spanish" style.

#### Notes

1. This brief account of the work of Robert Adam is based on Margaret Whinney, "The Adam Style," in Home House: No. 20 Portman Square (Feltham, Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd, 1969), pp. 15-17.
2. See for instance the Back Parlour of Home House, 20 Portman Square, London, designed by Robert Adam and built about 1775.

#### The Biltmore as a Playhouse

The Biltmore opened on December 7, 1925, with Owen Davis's Easy Come, Easy Go; it had been playing for two months previously at the George M. Cohan (now Harris) Theater.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by Kongo, by Chester DeVonde and Kilbourn Gordon, with Walter Huston. Claudette Colbert and Huston starred in The Barker, by Kenyon Nicholson, which ran for 225 performances in 1927. A dramatization of Oscar Wilde's story Dorian Gray did poorly in 1928, and that same year the police raided Mae West's play, Pleasure Man, arresting the cast and closing the show. A more innocent production, Tin Pan Alley, by Hugh Stanislaus Stange, starred Claudette Colbert and played 77 performances later in the year. Noel Coward's Marquise also played the Biltmore that year.

A number of very short runs in the 1930s included an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, with Lee J. Cobb, that lasted only fifteen performances. In 1936, the WPA used the Biltmore for its "Living Newspaper" series, including a production called Ethiopia that never opened because of political complications, and Triple-A Plowed Under, which presented topical news sketches on stage. The remainder of the decade at the Biltmore was dominated by two long-running productions: Brother Rat, by John Monks, Jr. and Fred F. Finklehoff, with Eddie Albert and Jose Ferrer, for 575 performances in 1936-37; and Clifford Goldsmith's What A Life, produced and directed by George Abbott, and starring Eddie Bracken and Butterfly McQueen -- it ran 538 performances.

Milton Berle played the Biltmore in 1939, starring in See My Lawyer. Compared to the 224 performances of that show, Ayn Rand's play The Unconquered lasted only six. For the next two seasons the Biltmore housed Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov's My Sister Eileen, adapted from stories by Ruth McKenney and starring Shirley Booth; it ran a total of 866 performance. Other productions in the 1940s included F. Hugh Herbert's Kiss and Tell, with Joan Caulfield, and a not very long run of an adaptation of Emile Zola's Therese with Dame May Whitty and Eva Le Gallienne. Jean Paul Sartre's No Exit lasted just 31 performances in 1946. A dramatization of Melville's Billy Budd in 1951 was among the last productions to play at the Biltmore before it closed in 1952 and was converted to a radio and television playhouse.

Reopening in 1961, the Biltmore Theater saw a decade of extraordinary, long-running hit shows. Take Her, She's Mine ran over 400 performances with Art Carney and Elizabeth Ashley in 1961-62. Neil Simon's Barefoot in the Park held the stage from 1963 to 1967, playing over 1500 performances. The king of all rock musicals, Hair, moved to the Biltmore from the Public Theater and ran from 1967 through 1972, with over 1700 performances.

The 1970s saw Jules Feiffer's Knock Knock, and Lily Tomlin in her one-woman show, Appearing Nitely. Hair was revived briefly in 1977, followed by a revival of The Effect of Gamma Rays on the Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds by Paul Zindel. In 1980, Arthur Miller's The American Clock played only 12 performances. Death Trap moved to the Biltmore from the Music Box Theater in 1982.

(PD, AR)

#### Notes

1. This production history of the Biltmore Theater, condensed from the fuller version in the Appendix, is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against George Freedley, "Broadway Playhouses," bound typescript of the "Stage Today," 1941-43, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library; The Best Plays of...[annual] (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present); Theatre World [annual] Daniel Blum, editor (New York: Theatre World, 1946-present), The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon,

editor (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1966); Edwin Bronner, The Encyclopedia of American Theater, 1900-1975 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1980); Gerald Bordman, Oxford Companion to American Theatre (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

## Description<sup>1</sup>

Auditorium:

1) Configuration: The configuration of the auditorium consists of a horseshoe shaped space, set slightly askew in relationship to its site, with a single aisle, a single balcony with a cross-over aisle, a proscenium, flanking pseudo-boxes, an orchestra pit in front of the stage, the stage opening behind the proscenium arch, a promenade at the rear of the orchestra, a ceiling, and the sloping floor extending towards the proscenium arch.

Orchestra: The rear and side walls at orchestra level are curved.

Proscenium: The proscenium is arched.

Balcony: There is a single balcony; it is subdivided into two tiers by a crossover aisle. The side walls curve towards the boxes.

Boxes: the boxes are pseudo-boxes (see below, under ornament).

Staircases: Staircases at either side of the rear of the orchestra lead up to the balcony level.

Ceiling: The ceiling incorporates a large oval dome.

Floor: the floor is raked.

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

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

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

2) Ornament:

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

Proscenium arch: The arch is outlined by a rope molding and is surmounted by a cartouche. The spandrels of the arch are filled with Adamesque ornament.

Orchestra: The curved rear and side walls at orchestra level have paneled wainscoting.

Boxes: At each side of the proscenium is a pseudo-box framed by fluted pilasters and columns supporting arches. At orchestra level the paneled wall surfaces are punctured by doors under the boxes. Each box is carried on consoles. The rectangular opening rising from the box is surmounted by a pediment with Adamesque detail carried on console brackets. This in turn is framed by "trophy"-adorned panels -- in this case musical instruments -- supporting a lunette adorned with cameo motifs. The pilasters and columns flanking the box have modified Ionic capitals. Relief panels adorn the arch spandrels.

Balcony: At balcony level the side walls are subdivided into sections by paired engaged pilasters. Above the wall sections is a wide frieze with shield-adorned panels. The balcony front has panels with decorative medallions. The underside of the balcony is quite ornate with Adamesque plasterwork panels in low relief.

Ceiling: The large oval dome of the ceiling is outlined by Adamesque moldings. There is a centerpiece of Adamesque panels. Beyond the dome the ceiling is subdivided into paneled sections outlined by moldings. The ceiling angles down in a broad Adamesque frieze to meet the decorative cornice which extends all around the space.

3) Attached fixtures:

Orchestra: One enters the auditorium through sets of doors at the center and sides at the rear.

Ceiling: Some of the paneled sections of the ceiling have grilles.

Staircases: Where the staircases leading up from the orchestra terminate at the balcony they are partially enclosed by decorative wrought-iron railings.

Light fixtures: Existing light fixtures throughout the auditorium are stylistically compatible with its Adamesque style. A large crystal chandelier is suspended from the ceiling's centerpiece. Bronze wall sconces are placed on the side and rear walls of the balcony. Small brass and crystal chandeliers are suspended from decorative medallions on the underside of the balcony.

4) Known alterations: Air conditioning grilles and vents have been installed on the underside of the balcony and in the ceiling. A light rail has been placed on the balcony front. A modern technical booth has been installed at the rear of the balcony. The current off-white and gilt color scheme helps to highlight 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 Biltmore Theater Interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. One of the group of theaters constructed for the Chanin Organization during the early decades of this century, it helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district. Designed for the Chanins by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district, the Biltmore represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Its interior is a fine example of the handsome Adamesque style, in which Herbert Krapp designed so many of the Broadway theaters. Its horseshoe-shaped plan with a single aisle is highly unusual among Broadway houses.

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

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

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

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Biltmore Theater Interior survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that, built in 1925-26, it was among the group of theaters constructed for the Chanin Organization during the early decades of this century which helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district; that it was designed for the Chanins by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district; that as a Chanin theater designed by Herbert Krapp it represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history; that its horseshoe-shaped plan with a single aisle is highly unusual among Broadway houses; that its ornamental interior design is a fine example of the Adamesque style with which Herbert Krapp adorned so many of his Broadway theaters; that among its outstanding characteristics are its ornate plaster-work ceiling and handsome pseudo-boxes; that for half a century the Biltmore Theater interior has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that as such it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Biltmore Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor up to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, doors, stair railings and attached decorative elements; 261-265 West 47th Street, Manhattan, 47th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1019, Lot 5, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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## APPENDIX

The following production history of the Biltmore 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.

### 1925

EASY COME EASY GO 12/7/25 (180 total perfs.) by Owen Davis; with Otto Kruger, Victor Moore and Betty Garde. (First opened at the George M. Cohan Thearer 10/26/25.)

### 1926

KONGO 3/30/26 (135 total perfs.) by Chester DeVonde and Kilbourn Gordon; with Walter Huston.

LOOSE ANKLES 8/16/26 (161 perfs.) by Sam Janney; with Kathleen Comegys, Osgood Perkins, Harold Vermilyea and Lenore Sorsby.

OLD BILL, M.P. 11/10/26 (23 perfs.) by Bruce Bairnsfather; with Charles McNaughton and Charles Coburn.

### 1927

THE BARKER 1/18/27 (225 perfs.) by Kenyon Nicholson; with Walter Huston, Claudette Colbert and Norman Foster.

THE TRIUMPHANT BACHELOR 9/15/27 (12 perfs.) by Owen Davis; with Robert Ames.

JIMMIE'S WOMEN 9/26/27 (217 perfs.) by Myron C. Fagan; with Robert Williams, Lucia Laska and Minna Gombel.

INK 11/1/27 (15 perfs.) by Dana Watterson Greeley; with Charles Richman.

### 1928

ROPE 2/22/28 (32 perfs.) by David Wallace and T.S. Stribling, based on novel by Stribling; with Ben Smith, Leslie Hunt and Crane Wilbur.

DIVORCE A LA CARTE 3/26/28 (8 perfs.) by Samuel Ruskin Golding; with Regina Wallace, Hale Hamilton and Geoffrey Harwood.

DORIAN GRAY 5/21/28 (16 perfs.) by David Thorne based on a story by Oscar Wilde; with Howard Cull, Wallace Clark.

THE INTRUDER 7/25/28 (5 perfs.) by Paul Eldrige; with Viola Frayne, Richard Gordon and Anne Sutherland.

PLEASURE MAN 10/1/28 (3 perfs.) by Mae West; with Alan Brooks.

THE K GUY 10/15/28 (8 perfs.) by Walter De Leon and Alethea Luce; with Francis Compton.

TIN PAN ALLEY 11/1/28 (77 perfs.) by Hugh Stanislaus Stange; with Claudette Colbert and Norman Foster.

THE MARQUISE 11/14/28 (82 perfs.) by Noel Coward; with Billie Burke, Reginald Owen and Madge Evans.

POPPA 12/24/28 (98 perfs.) by Bella and Samuel Spewack; with Sam Jaffe and William E. Morris.

#### 1929

DEEP HARLEM 1/7/29 (8 perfs.) book by Whitney & Tutt, lyrics by Homer Tutt and Henry Creamer.

YOUNG ALEXANDER 3/12/29 (7 perfs.) by Hardwick Nevin; with Henry Hull and Jesse Royce Landis.

MAN'S ESTATE 4/1/29 (55 perfs.) by Bruce Gould and Beatrice Blackmar; with Dudley Digges, Earle Larimore, Armina Marshall and Margalo Gilmore.

GETTING EVEN 8/19/29 (4 perfs.) by Nathaniel Wilson; with Georgia Clarke, Eugene Kane and Ann Jordan.

THE NUT FARM 10/14/29 (41 perfs.) by John C. Brownell; with Wallace Ford, Louis Kimball and Natalie Schater.

CLAIRE ADAMS 11/19/29 (7 perfs.) by Daniel N. Rubin; with Charles Starrett and Buford Armitage.

WHIRLPOOL 12/3/29 (3 perfs.) by William Jourdan Rapp and Walter Marquiss; with Edward Leiter and Louise Quinn.

#### 1930

THE GAME OF LOVE AND DEATH (48 total perfs.) by Romain Rolland; with Otto Kruger, Alice Brady and Claude Rains. (First opened at the Guild Theater 11/25/29.)

CHILDREN OF DARKNESS 1/7/30 (79 perfs.) by Edwin Justus Mayer; with Mary Ellis, Walter Kingsford, Basil Sydney and Charles Dalton.

PENAL LAW 2010 4/18/30 (19 perfs.) by Alexander Gerry and Augusta Greely; with Frank Milan, Cecil Holm and Janet McLeay.

LET AND SUBLET 5/19/30 (40 perfs.) by Martha Stanley; with Dorothea Chard and George Dill.

THE UP AND UP 9/8/30 (81 perfs.) by Eva Kay Flint and Martha Madison; with Donald MacDonald, Sylvia Field, Percy Kilbride and Pat O'Brien. (Moved to the Longacre Theater 10/20/30.)

UNCLE VANYA 11/17/30 by Anton Chekhov; adapted by Rose Caylor; with Walter Connolly, Zita Johann, Lillian Gish, Osgood Perkins and Eugene Powers.

### 1931

PHILIP GOES FORTH 1/12/31 (98 perfs.) by George Kelly; with Harry Ellerbe, Cora Witherspoon, Thurston Hall, Madge Evans and Dorothy Stickney.

HER SUPPORTING CAST 5/4/31 (32 perfs.) by Harold Sherman; with Mildred McCoy, Otto Hulett, Dodson L. Mitchell and Jack Hartley.

THE WOODEN SOLDIER 6/22/31 (8 perfs.) by Alexander Carr; with Alexander Carr and Robert Leonard.

THE GUEST ROOM 10/6/31 (65 perfs.) by Arthur Wilmurt; with Helen Lowell Beverly Sitgreaves and Joan Kenyon.

SENTINELS 12/25/31 (11 perfs.) by Lulu Vollmer; with Ben Smith, Elizabeth Love and Burke Clark.

### 1932

ZOMBIE 2/10/32 (20 perfs.) by Kenneth Webb; with Pauline Starke, Robert J. Stanley, and Hunter Gardner.

BORDER-LAND 3/29/32 (23 perfs.) by Crane Wilbur; with Lester Vail, Alan Campbell and Robert Lowing.

THE OTHER ONE 10/3/32 (16 perfs.) by Henry Myers; with Helen Ford, George Baxter and George Nash.

CARRY NATION 10/29/32 (31 perfs.) by Frank McGrath; with Esther Dale, Mildred Natwick, Daisy Belmore, Joshua L. Logan, Myron McCormick and James Stewart.

1933

FOUR O'CLOCK 2/13/33 (16 perfs.) by Nan O'Reilly and Rupert Darrell;  
with Ara Gerald and Herbert Warren.

THE FAMILY UPSTAIRS (revival) 10/27/33 (3 perfs.) by Harry Delf; with  
Helen Carew, Florence Ross and Thomas W. Ross.

THE SCORPION 11/27/33 (8 perfs.) by Bernard J. McOwen; with Annette  
Margulies, Leslie Austen and Douglas Gerard.

1934

BIG HEARTED HERBERT 1/1/34 (154 perfs.) by Sophie Kerr and Anna Steese  
Richardson, based on a story by Sophie Kerr; with David Morris, Betty  
Lancaster and Alan Bunce.

BRIDAL QUILT 10/10/34 (5 perfs.) by Tom Powers; with Blaine Cordner,  
Claudia Morgan and Lester Vail.

1935

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT 1/22/35 (15 perfs.) adapted from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's  
novel; with Morgan Farley and Lee J. Cobb.

IF A BODY 4/30/35 (46 perfs.) by Edward Knoblock and George Rosener;  
with Courtney White and Arthur Pierson.

GOOD MEN AND TRUE 10/25/35 (11 perfs.) by Brian Marlow and Frank Merlin;  
with Martha Sleeper and Donald Foster.

WHATEVER GOES UP 11/25/35 (24 perfs.) by Milton Lazarus; with Ernest Truex  
and Peggy O'Donnell.

1936

JEFFERSON DAVIS (W.P.A. Federal Theatre Project) 2/18/36 (3 perfs.) by John  
McGee; with Guy Standing, Jr.

ETHIOPIA (W.P.A. Federal Theatre Project -- Living Newspaper) never  
opened -- material considered too controversial.

TRIPLE-A PLOWED UNDER (W.P.A. Federal Theatre Project -- Living Newspaper)  
3/14/36 (85 perfs.) dramatized news sketches with a cast of 100  
actors.

NINETEEN THIRTY FIVE (W.P.A. Federal Theatre Project -- Living Newspaper)  
5/12/36 (34 perfs.)

BROTHER RAT 12/16/36 (575 perfs.) by John Monks Jr., and Fred F.  
Finklehoffe; with Eddie Albert, Jose Ferrer and Ezra Stone.

1937

WISE TOMORROW 10/15/37 (3 perfs.) by Stephen Powys; with Josephine Victor and Olive Reeves-Smith.

MANY MANSIONS 10/27/37 (157 perfs.) by Jules Eckert Goodman and Eckert Goodman; with Alexander Kirkland and Gage Clarke.

BROWN SUGAR 12/2/37 (4 perfs.) by Bernie Angus; with Canada Lee and Christola Williams.

1938

ALL THAT GLITTERS 1/19/38 (69 perfs.) by John Baragwanath and Kenneth Simpson; with Allyn Joslyn, Jean Casto, Arlene Francis and Everett Sloane.

WHAT A LIFE 4/13/38 (538 perfs.) by Clifford Goldsmith; with Eddie Bracken, Butterfly McQueen, Betty Field and Ezra Stone.

1939

THE PRIMROSE PATH 1/4/39 (166 perfs.) by Robert Buckner and Walter Hart, based on the novel February Hill by Victoria Lincoln; with Helen Westley, Leslie Barrett, Betty Field and Betty Garde.

THE FLASHING STREAM 4/10/39 (8 perfs.) by Charles Morgan; with Leo Genn, Godfrey Tearle and Margaret Rawlings.

DAY IN THE SUN 5/16/39 (6 perfs.) by Edward R. Sammis and Ernest V. Heyn; with Taylor Holmes.

SEE MY LAWYER 9/27/39 (224 perfs.) by Richard Maibaum and Harry Clork; with Milton Berle, Gary Merrill, Teddy Hart and Eddie Nugent.

THE WOMAN BROWN 12/8/39 (11 perfs.) by Dorothy Cumming; with Daisy Belmore, Franciska Gaal and Colin Keith-Johnston.

1940

THE UNCONQUERED 2/13/40 (6 perfs.) by Ayn Rand, adapted from her novel, We The Living; with Helen Craig, John Emery and Dean Jagger.

GOODBYE IN THE NIGHT 3/18/40 (8 perfs.) by Jerome Mayer; with Jean Adair, James Bell and Ruth McDevitt.

OUT FROM UNDER 5/4/40 (9 perfs.) by John Walter Kelly; with Ruth Weston and John Alexander.

JUPITER LAUGHS 9/9/40 (24 perfs.) By A.J. Cronin; with Reginald Mason, Edith Meiser and Jessica Tandy.

MY SISTER EILEEN 12/26/40 (866 perfs.) by Joseph A. Fields and Jerome Chodorov, based on stories by Ruth McKenney; with Shirley Booth, Morris Carnovsky and Jo Ann Sayers.

1942

LITTLE DARLING 10/27/42 (23 perfs.) by Eric Hatch; with Leon Ames, Barbara Bel Geddes and Karen Morley.

THE SUN FIELD 12/9/42 (5 perfs.) by Milton Lazarus; with Karl Malden, Frank Otto and Tom Tully.

1943

ASK MY FRIEND SANDY 2/4/43 (12 perfs.) by Stanley Young; with Roland Young, Mary Sargent and Norman Lloyd.

KISS AND TELL 3/17/43 (962 perfs.) by F. Hugh Herbert; with Joan Caulfield, Judith Parrish, Robert White, Jessie Royce Landis and Richard Widmark. (Moved to the Bijou Theater 12/3/44.)

1945

SNAFU 1/1/45 (156 perfs.) by Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman; with Enid Markey, Dort Clark, Anne Dere and Billy Redfield. (Originally opened at the Hudson Theater 10/25/44.)

HAPPILY EVER AFTER 3/15/45 (12 perfs.) by Donald Kirkley and Howard Burman; with Gene Lockhart.

STAR SPANGLED FAMILY 4/10/45 (5 perfs.) by B. Harrison Orkow; with Frances Reid, Jean Adair and Edward Nugent.

ROUND TRIP 5/29/45 (7 perfs.) by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham; with Sidney Blackmer and Patricia Kirkland.

A BOY WHO LIVED TWICE 9/11/45 (15 perfs.) by Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby; with Anne Sargent and John Heath.

THERESE 10/9/45 (96 perfs.) by Thomas Job; with Dame May Whitty, Eva Le Gallienne and Victor Jory.

1946

A JOY FOREVER 1/7/46 (16 perfs.) by Vincent McConnor; with Loring Smith and Guy Kibbee.

APPLE OF HIS EYE 2/5/46 (118 perfs.) by Kenyon Nicholson and Charles Robinson; with Walter Huston and Tom Ewell.

THE DANCER 6/5/46 (5 perfs.) by Milton Lewis and Julian Funt; with Colin Keith-Johnston and Anton Dolin.

LOCO 10/16/46 (37 perfs.) by Dale Eunson and Katherine Albert; with Jay Fassett, Jean Parker and Elaine Stritch.

NO EXIT 11/26/46 (31 perfs.) by Jean Paul Sartre; with Claude Dauphin, Peter Kass, Annabella, and Ruth Ford.

1947

LOVE GOES TO PRESS 1/1/47 (5 perfs.) by Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles; with Joyce Heron and Jane Middleton.

IT TAKES TWO 2/3/47 (8 perfs.) by Virginia Faulkner and Dana Suesse; with Martha Scott, Reta Shaw, Hugh Marlowe, Anthony Ross, Temple Texas and John Forsythe.

PARLOR STORY 3/4/47 (23 perfs.) by William McCleery; with Edith Atwater, Walter Abel, Dennis King, Jr., and Royal Beal.

THE WHOLE WORLD OVER 3/27/47 (100 perfs.) by Konstantine Simonov; with Joseph Buloff, Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner, Michael Strong and Jo Van Fleet.

THE HEIRESS 9/29/47 (410 perfs.) by Ruth and Augustus Goetz; with Basil Rathbone, Patricia Collinge, Wendy Hiller and Peter Cookson.

1948

THE SILVER WISTLE 11/24/48 (219 perfs.) by Robert E. McEnroe; with Jose Ferrer.

1949

CLUTTERBUCK 12/3/49 (218 perfs.) by Benn W. Levy; with Ruth Ford, Ruth Matteson and Tom Helmore.

1950

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE 9/26/50 (23 perfs.) by Owen Crump; with Cameron Mitchell.

PRIDE'S CROSSING 11/20/50 (8 perfs.) by Victor Wolfson; with Mildred Dunnock.

1951

BILLY BUDD 2/10/51 (105 perfs.) by Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman, based on the novel by Herman Melville; with Jeff Morrow, Dennis King and Charles Nolte.

THE NUMBER 10/30/51 (88 perfs.) by Arthur Carter; with Peggy Nelson, Murvyn Vye and Dane Clark.

The Biltmore Theater was used as a radio and T.V. playhouse from the 1952-53 through the 1960-61 seasons.

1961

TAKE HER, SHE'S MINE 12/12/61 (404 perfs.) by Phoebe and Henry Ephron; with Art Carney, Elizabeth Ashley and Phyllis Thaxter.

1962

IN THE COUNTING HOUSE 12/13/62 (4 perfs.) by Leslie Weiner; with Sydney Chaplin, Howard Da Silva, Nancy R. Pollock and Kay Medford.

1963

ANDORRA 2/9/63 (9 perfs.) by Max Frisch; with Horst Buchholz, Hugh Griffith, Irene Dailey and Clifton James.

MAN IN THE MOON 4/11/63 (Limited Engagement 7 perfs.) book by Arthur Burns, music by Jerry Block, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, based on a story by Bil Baird.

BAREFOOT IN THE PARK 10/23/63 (1,530 perfs.) by Neil Simon; with Robert Redford, Elizabeth Ashley, Mildred Natwick and Kurt Kasznar.

1967

THE NINETY DAY MISTRESS 11/6/67 (24 perfs.) by J.J. Coyle; with Ruth Ford, Walter Abel, Dyan Cannon and Martin Milner.

1968

STAIRCASE 1/10/68 (61 perfs.) by Charles Dyer; with Eli Wallach and Milo O'Shea.

LOOT 3/18/68 (22 perfs.) by Joe Orton; with Liam Redmond, George Rose and Carol Shelley.

HAIR 4/19/68 (1,750 total perfs.) by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, music by Galt McDermot; with Gerome Ragni, James Rado, Delores Hall and Jill O'Hara. (First opened at the Public Theater.)

1973

LET ME HEAR YOU SMILE 1/16/73 (1 perf.) by Leonora Thuna and Henry Cauley; with Sandy Dennis, James Broderick and Paul B. Price.

1974

FIND YOUR WAY HOME 3/19/74 (133 total perfs.) by John Hopkins; with Michael Moriarty, John Ramsey, Lee Richardson and Jane Alexander. (First opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theater 1/2/74.)

FLOWERS 10/7/74 (24 perfs.) by Lindsay Kemp; with Lindsay Kemp, David Haughton and David Meyer.

1975

MURDER AMONG FRIENDS 12/28/75 (17 perfs.) by Bob Barry; with Janet Leigh, Jack Cassidy and Jane Hoffman.

1976

KNOCK, KNOCK 2/24/76 (192 total perfs.) by Jules Feiffer; with Judd Hirsch, Neil Flanagan, Nancy Snyder and Daniel Seltzer. (First opened at the Circle Repertory Theater 1/8/76.)

KNOCK, KNOCK 2/2/76 (38 perfs.) new production with Charles Durning, Lynn Redgrave, and Leonard Frey.

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM 10/9/76 (145 perfs.) by Alfred Uhry; with Barry Bostwick, Barbara Lang and Rhonda Coulet.

1977

LILY TOMLIN in "APPEARING NIGHTLY" 3/24/77 (84 perfs.) by Jane Wagner; with Lily Tomlin.

HAIR 10/5/77 (43 perfs.) by Gerome Ragni and James Rado, music by Galt McDermot; with Randall Esterbrook, Michael Holt and Ellen Foley.

1978

CHEATERS 1/15/78 (32 perfs.) by Michael Jacobs; with Rosemary Murphy, Lou Jacobi, Jack Weston, Doris Roberts, Roxanne Hart and Jim Staskel.

THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS 3/14/78 (16 perfs.) by Paul Zindel; with Shelley Winters, Carol Kane, Lori Shelle and Isabella Hoopes.

THE KINGFISHER 12/6/78 (182 perfs.) by William Douglas Home; with Claudette Colbert, George Rose and Rex Harrison.

1979

PETER ALLEN in "UP IN ONE" 5/23/79 (46 perfs.) by Peter Allen and Craig Zadan; with Peter Allen and Lenora Nemetz.

1980

REGGAE 3/27/80 (21 perfs.) by Michael Butler; with Philip Michael Thomas and Obba Babatunde.

NUTS 4/28/80 (96 perfs.) by Tom Topor; with Michael Zobel, Gregory Abels, Linda Howes and Anne Twomey.

THE AMERICAN CLOCK 11/20/80 (12 perfs.) by Arthur Miller; with William Atherton, Joan Copeland, Salem Ludwig and Francine Beers.

1981

TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE WE GO 1/14/81 (61 perfs.) by Joanna M. Glass; with Eva Le Gallienne, Kim Hunter, Pamela Brook, Shepperd Strudwick, Anne Twomey, David Snell, Leslie Denniston and Ruth Nelson.

INACENT BLACK 5/6/81 (15 perfs.) by A. Marcus Hemphill; with Melba Moore.

THE SUPPORTING CAST 8/6/81 (36 perfs.) by George Furth; with Betty Garrett, Sandy Dennis, Jack Gilford and Hope Lang.

A TALENT FOR MURDER 10/1/81 (77 perfs.) by Jerome Chodorov and Norman Panama; with Claudette Colbert and Jean-Pierre Aumont.

1982

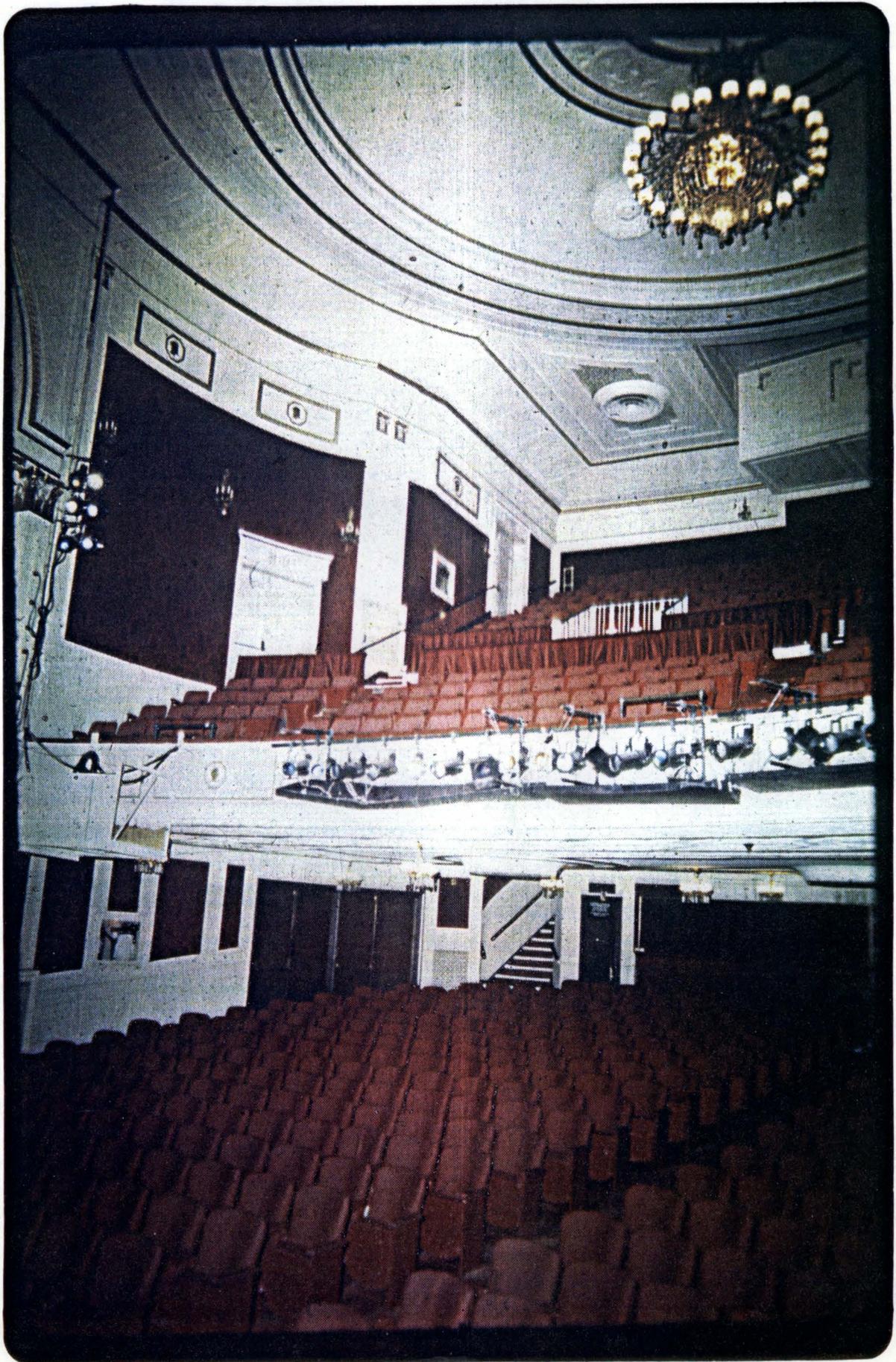
DEATHTRAP 5/1/82 (1,793 total perfs.) by Ira Levin; with Farley Granger and Marion Seldes. (First opened at the Music Box Theater 2/26/78.)



Biltmore Theater Interior  
261-265 West 47th Street  
Manhattan

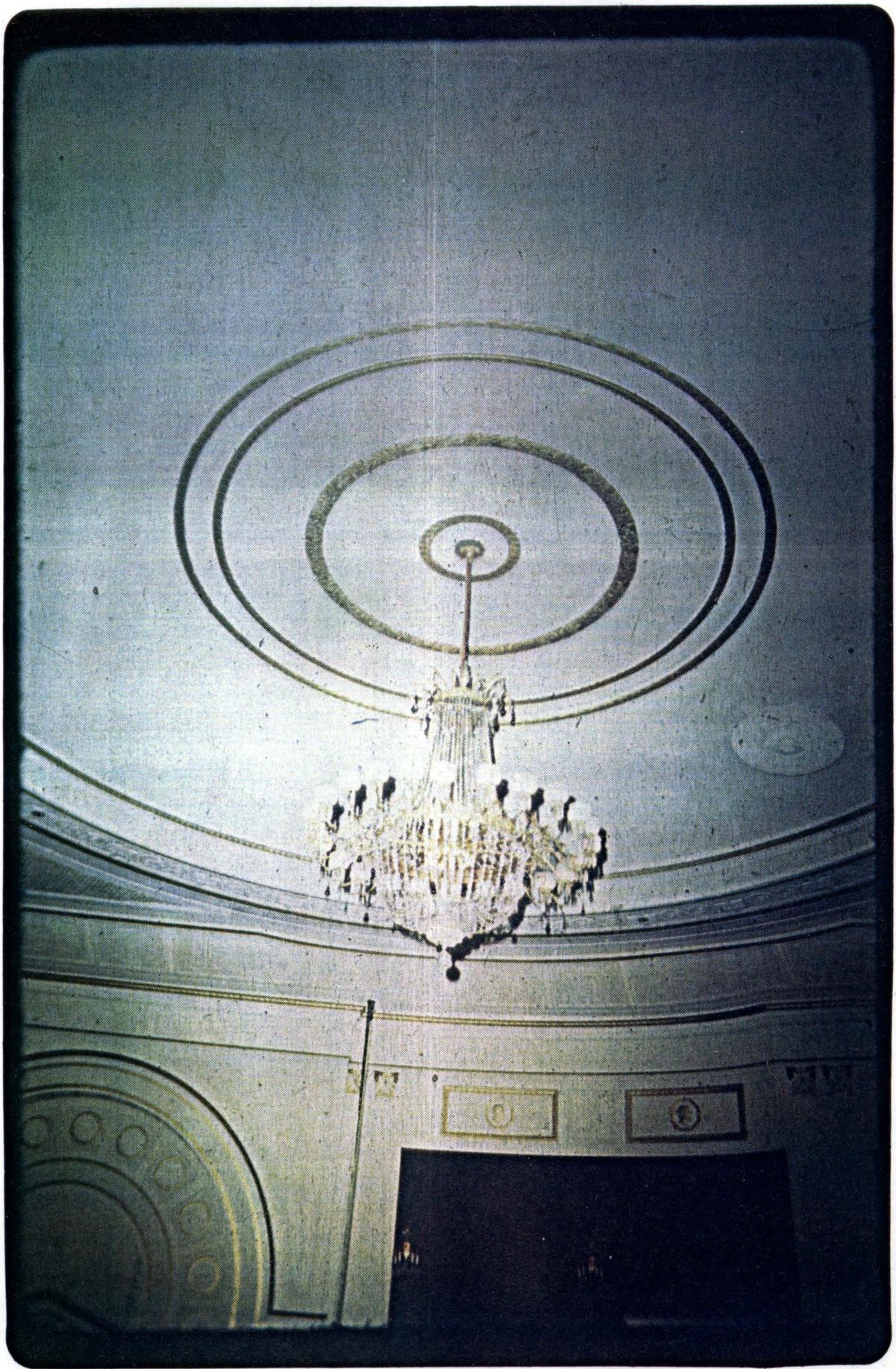
Built: 1925-26  
Architect: Herbert Krapp

Photo: Forster, LPC



Biltmore Theater Interior

Photo: Forster, LPC



Biltmore Theater Interior  
Detail