

Landmarks Preservation Commission
December 8, 1987; Designation List 197
LP-1355

MAJESTIC THEATER, 245-257 West 44th Street, Manhattan. Built 1926-27; architect Herbert J. Krapp.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1016, Lot 5.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Majestic Theater and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 51). 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. One witness spoke in opposition to designation. The owner, with his representatives, appeared at the hearing, and indicated that he had not formulated an opinion regarding designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Majestic Theater survives today as one of the historic theaters that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built in 1926-27, the Majestic was among the half-dozen theaters constructed by the Chanin Organization in the mid-1920s, 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 Majestic Theater as part of a complex on Shubert Alley including three theaters--the Theatre Masque, the Royale and the Majestic--and a hotel, the Lincoln (now the Milford Plaza). The theaters were of varying sizes, and the Majestic was intended to be a very large theater of 1800 seats, presenting large-scale musical revues.

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

The Majestic represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, its facade is a handsome design, one of a group of Chanin theaters which depart from the traditional neo-Classical style for a more romantic, eclectic style which Chanin and Krapp called "Spanish modern."

For half a century the Majestic 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 after 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.¹

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.²

The evolution of the Times Square area as a center of Manhattan's various mass transit systems made it a natural choice for the location of legitimate playhouses, which needed to be easily accessible to their audiences.

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

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.⁵

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."⁶ 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."⁷ 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 just west of Eighth Avenue to Sixth Avenue, and from 39th Street to Columbus Circle.⁸

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

(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.¹¹

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

(MMK)

Notes

1. The discussion of the northward movement of Manhattan's business and theaters is based on Mary Henderson, The City and the Theatre (Clifton, N.J.: James T. White and Co., 1973), pp. 130-131, 168-170.
2. W.G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, Carnival Crossroads: the Story of Times Square (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 39-78; Howard B. Furer, New York: A Chronological and Documentary History 1524-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 34 ff.; The New York Subway (New York: Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, n.d.).

3. Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Actors Equity Association, 1932; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 26.
4. Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 6.
5. Brooks Atkinson, Broadway, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 11.
6. Philip Paneth, Times Square, Crossroads of the World (New York: Living Books, 1965), p. 20.
7. Henderson, p. 263.
8. Henderson, p. 195-196.
9. The discussion of the developments in American theater architecture is based upon: Ned A. Bowman, "American Theatre Architecture: the Concrete Mirror Held Up to Yankee Nature," The American Theatre: The Sum of its Parts (New York: French, 1972), pp. 199-233; Burr C. Cook, "Twenty Years of Theatre Building," Theatre, 36 (August 1922), 98-99; Arthur S. Meloy, Theatres and Picture Houses (New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Co., 1916), p. 29.
10. See, for example, the discussion of various theaters in Randolph Williams Sexton and Ben Franklin Betts, eds., American Theaters of Today, 2 vols. (New York: Architectural Book Pubs., 1927, 1930; reprint ed., New York: Vestal, 1977).
11. Stanley Buder, "Forty-Second Street at the Crossroads: A History of Broadway to Eighth Avenue," West 42nd Street: "The Bright Light Zone" (New York: Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, 1978), p. 62.

The Chanins

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

The firm was founded by Irwin Salmon Chanin (b.1892), a native of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Soon after his birth the family returned to its native Ukraine, remaining there until 1907 when they moved back to Bensonhurst. Chanin graduated from Cooper Union in 1915 having studied engineering and architecture. His earliest employment was as an engineer working on subway construction in New York and Philadelphia. During World War I he participated in the construction of a poison gas factory for the U.S. Army. In 1919, upon leaving the army, Chanin began his building

activities by constructing two houses in Bensonhurst. The success of this modest venture led to the construction of other one- and two-family houses in Bensonhurst as well as the formation of the Chanin Construction Company, in which he was joined by his brother Henry I. Chanin (1893-1973). The firm branched out into apartment buildings in Brooklyn, and erected an office building in downtown Brooklyn. Extending their activities to Manhattan in 1924, they constructed the Fur Center Building.¹ 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.²

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."³ 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.⁴

Chanin's first theater was called Chanin's Forty-Sixth Street Theater (now the Forty-Sixty Street Theater), and in it he and Krapp incorporated Chanin's novel interior arrangement.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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),¹ fourteen of which are in active theatrical use, as well as five that have been demolished.² 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.³ 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.⁴

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 enframing 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;⁵ 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,⁶ the Brooks Atkinson is a brick building articulated by three Palladian openings supported by twisted columns. Roundel panels and a Spanish-tiled sloping roof are additional Spanish forms on the facade. Krapp's largest commission from the Chanins was a trio of theaters, the Theatre Masque (now 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."⁷ All three were constructed of yellow brick and adorned with areas of decorative terra-cotta pilasters, twisted columns, arches, parapets, and columned loggias.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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 Forty-Sixth 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, Forty-Sixth 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 Majestic Theater

The Majestic Theater is one of three theaters (the other two being the Theatre Masque, known today as the Golden, and the Royale) built together with the Lincoln Hotel (known today as the Milford Plaza) as a single project by the Chanin organization.¹ The theaters and hotel occupied the western end of the block bounded by Broadway and Eighth Avenue and West 44th and 45th Streets. The eastern edge of this block was already occupied by the Astor Hotel, facing Broadway; to its west were the Shubert and Booth Theaters built by the Shuberts in 1911-12. The alley separating the hotel from the theaters became popularly known as "Shubert Alley." The Shuberts expanded to the west with the construction of the Plymouth and Broadhurst theaters, adjoining the Shubert and Booth, in 1916-17. With the construction of the Theatre Masque, Royale, and Majestic, and the Hotel Lincoln on Eighth Avenue, the Chanins completed the development of the block which has remained the densest concentration of legitimate theaters in New York. The block of West 45th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue eventually became known as "the street of hits."

The completion of the complex was marked by the Chanins in a gold rivet ceremony:

Yesterday, [Irwin] Chanin, in company with his brother, Henry I. Chanin, climbed to the top of their new thirty-story Lincoln Hotel at Eighth Avenue, Manhattan. There they pushed home the two golden rivets which completed the steel frame of the hotel, the fourth and last unit in their \$12,000,000 west side building operations, which, in addition to the hotel, includes three theatres, the Royale, Theatre Masque, and the Majestic, all opened this year.²

The three new Chanin theaters were intended from the first to serve different functions. According to a Chanin publicity brochure,

the Theatre Masque in West Forty-fifth Strteet, with 800 seats, is intended to be the home of fine plays of the 'artistic' or 'intimate' type....

while the Royale,

with 1200 seats, is a musical comedy theatre.

The third theater,

The 1800-seat Majestic in West Forty-fourth Street, the largest legitimate theatre in the Times Square district, is expressly a house for revues and light operas. Thus there is an entente cordiale between players and audiences, even before the rise of the curtain, as each Chanin theatre is designed for a particular purpose....³

The Majestic was part of a balanced program: its large size enabled the Chanins to plan the connecting Theatre Masque as an unusual small theater housing "intimate" productions.⁴ All three theaters benefited from the "mass architecture" of the project, the economies of mass purchase of furnishings, and ultimately of mass administration.

Following the precedent of their Mansfield (now Brooks Atkinson) Theater, the Chanins had Herbert Krapp design the theater-hotel complex in what they called the "modern Spanish" manner. Although not identical designs, the facades of the three theaters are interrelated through the use of a rusticated terra-cotta base with a Roman-brick wall above, adorned with round-arched windows and terra-cotta Spanish Renaissance-inspired ornament. The chief ornaments of the Majestic's facade include a highly ornamental blind stylized Palladian window with spiral columns, and two long wrought-iron galleries with simulated Spanish-tile roofs. The Theatre Masque includes a centrally placed arcade with windows, and a colonnaded loggia with balustrade above the roof line. The Royale's facade is similar, but its central arcade is five bays wide, rather than three, and in place of a colonnaded loggia has an ornamental parapet.

The Chanins intended at this point in their career to launch themselves into the national theater scene. In October 1926, they announced

...that they have completed plans for "the maintenance and operation of a chain of theatres in New York and half a dozen other large cities in the United States."it is planned to build houses in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Also, the two brothers have organized the Chanin Producing Company, and will immediately enter the field of play production on a large scale. The announcement by the Chanins is taken by theatrical men to mean the definite arrival, at an early date, of the so-called "third circuit" as a competitor of the Shubert and Erlanger Circuits.⁵

These plans never came to fruition, however, and the multi-theater and hotel project was the Chanins' last venture in theater building.

The Chanins' hopes for the Majestic materialized almost immediately, as the theater "from its opening...was one of the most desirable playhouses in New York for the production of musicals."⁶ With the coming of the Depression, however, the Chanins gave up their theaters, and in 1930 they exchanged their interest in the Majestic, as well as the Theatre Masque and the Royale, with the Shuberts, for an interest in the New Theater (later the Century Theater) on Central Park West.⁷

(AR)

Notes

1. "Masque Opens Tonight," New York Times, February 24, 1927, p. 27.
2. "Made Fortune in 8 Years," New York Times, April 28, 1927, p. 40.

3. "The Chanin Theatres: A Renaissance in Theatre Craft" (New York: Chanin Organization, 1927).
4. "The Chanins to Try Art for Art's Sake in Newest Theatre, the Masque," New York Post, February 18, 1927.
5. "Chanins to Build Chain of Theatres," New York Times, October 24, 1926, p. 23.
6. William C. Young, Documents of American Theater History 1900-1971 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), p. 76.
7. See above, p. 9.

The Majestic as a Playhouse¹

The Majestic Theater has traditionally been home to successful musicals. Some of the most notable early revues were choreographed by Busby Berkeley, including Pleasure Bound in 1929 and The International Review. The latter starred Gertrude Lawrence and Harry Richman and introduced two Dorothy Fields-Jimmy McHugh hits, "On the Sunny Side of the Street" and "Exactly Like You." Operettas predominated in the early 'thirties including Sigmund Romberg's Nina Rosa and Student Prince and S.M. Chartock's productions of Gilbert and Sullivan with William Danforth and Roy Cropper. In the mid-thirties Earl Carroll moved two shows to the Majestic, Murder at the Vanities of 1933 and Earl Carroll's Sketchbook of 1935. Increasingly, producers were to follow his lead, moving established hits to the Majestic which had the largest seating capacity of any legitimate house on Broadway. Thus, though they did not originate at the Majestic, such hits as Susan and God, Streets of Paris, Margin for Error, Hellzapoppin and Junior Miss played there in the late 'thirties and early 'forties. In addition the theater featured a successful revival of Gershwin's Porgy and Bess in 1942 (286 performances) and a new adaptation of The Merry Widow in 1943 (321 performances).

Rodgers and Hammerstein provided thousands of enchanted evenings in the late 'forties and early 'fifties with four successive shows. Carousel had an innovative score featuring "If I Loved You," "June is Bustin' Out All Over," and "You'll Never Walk Alone." Starring John Raitt and Jan Clayton, it ran 890 performances and won the 1945 New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Allegro, with John Battles and Lisa Kirk, was choreographed and directed by Agnes De Mille; it ran 315 performances in 1947-48. South Pacific followed, opening on April 7, 1949, for a remarkable 1,925 performance run. It won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1950, was voted the best musical of the year by the New York Drama Critics Circle, and swept the Tony and Donaldson awards, winning in all the major musical categories. Rodgers and Hammerstein followed in 1953 with Me and Juliet, a somewhat disappointing show business musical that still achieved a 358 performance run.

In 1954, Ezio Pinza, who had made his Broadway debut in South Pacific, returned to the Majestic, starring in Fanny with Florence Henderson and

Walter Slerzak. Slezak won a Tony for his performance and the show went on to play 888 performances. It was succeeded in 1956 by Happy Hunting with Ethel Merman and Fernando Lamas, which ran 412 performances. Meredith Willson's joyous The Music Man opened in 1957, for a triumphant 1,375 performance run winning Tony Awards for author-composer Willson, star Robert Preston, and supporting players Barbara Cook and David Burns.

Lerner and Loewe's Camelot, staged by Moss Hart, opened in 1960 and played 873 performances with Richard Burton, Robert Goulet and Julie Andrews. Sammy Davis, Jr., opened in Golden Boy in 1964 beginning a run of 569 performances. Sugar, based on the screenplay Some Like It Hot, opened in 1972 and ran 505 performances. The Wiz, based on The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, opened in 1975 and ran 1666 performances. It won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Musical Score, Best Supporting Actor and Actress, Best Director, Best Costumes and Best Choreographer. Liza Minelli won a Tony Award for Outstanding Actress in a Musical for her performance in The Act which opened in 1977 and played 233 times.

The next few years saw a variety of musical productions which included Liv Ullman making her Broadway musical debut in I Remember Mama in 1979, and revues starring Bette Midler and Harry Blackstone. 42nd Street moved from the Winter Garden Theater to the Majestic in 1981, where it is still playing.

(PD, GH)

Notes

1. This production history of the Majestic 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).

Description¹

The Majestic Theater has an asymmetrically organized "modern Spanish" style facade, which is divided into two sections -- a major portion encompassing the entrance and auditorium which is wider than it is high, and a narrower and slightly higher portion incorporating the stage house. Both portions are linked by a continuous ground floor base of rusticated

terra cotta set on a granite water table. The stage house portion of the base is punctuated by three doorways with recessed metal doors. The entrance/auditorium portion of the base contains a pair of aluminum and glass entrance doors, with original iron frames, below transoms at the west and three pairs of metal exit doors from the auditorium at the east. A modern marquee with signs extends over the entrance doors. Large aluminum-framed sign boards are placed on the wall between the doors. Immediately flanking the doors are smaller sign boards set in aluminum frames, in turn set in terra-cotta frames with egg-and-dart moldings supporting cartouches, which are original to the design. The base is surmounted by a wide ovolo molding. Above the base the wall in both sections is faced with Roman brick of a golden hue laid up in running bond. The entrance/auditorium section is dominated by two wrought-iron galleries, containing fire exits, covered with simulated Spanish tile roofs of sheet metal. A terra-cotta bandcourse links the galleries. The wall above the galleries is relieved by terra-cotta blocks set in a regular pattern. Set in the wall above the entrance is a blind stylized Palladian window of terra cotta with twisted colonnettes and foliate pilasters carrying an arch encompassing a tympanum with foliate molding and surmounted by a finial. A large vertical sign with the name of the theater marks the division between the auditorium and the stage house portions of the facade. Simulated balconettes with ornamental panels carried on corbels are placed just below the roofline. A terra-cotta coping partially carried on brackets is surmounted by a parapet with stylized finials and a stylized pediment with simulated balustrade, finials, and central arch form. Immediately above the base the brick wall of the stage house is partially covered by a large flat sign. The four floors above are punctuated by regularly-spaced window openings with terra-cotta sills and one-over-one metal-clad sash. A sign projects out between the third-floor windows. The sixth-floor windows are outlined by terra-cotta arches with scrolled keystones and arched tympanum plaques above the windows. Pilasters with stylized Ionic columns flank the arches. A dentiled cornice at the roofline is surmounted by an ornate terra-cotta parapet with finials, of the same design as that above the auditorium.

(MP)

Notes

1. Architecturally significant features are underlined.

Conclusion

The Majestic Theater survives today as one of the historic playhouses that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. One of the group of theaters constructed for the Chanin Organization during the 1920s, 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 Majestic represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history.

Built as part of the Chanins' mixed-use project of three theaters and a hotel, the Majestic helped complete the development of "Shubert Alley," the heart of the theater district. A large, 1800-seat theater designed to house major musicals, it was part of a larger project that made possible the smaller Royale and the "intimate" Theatre Masque (now Golden Theater). Its facade, in the "Modern Spanish" style Krapp developed for the Chanins' later theaters, is a handsome design, which links it stylistically to the other theaters in the group.

For half a century the Majestic Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays, especially musical comedies, 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 (PD). Gale Harris (GH) of the Research Department expanded 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 building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Majestic Theater 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.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Majestic Theater survives today as one of the historic theaters that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that, built in 1926-27, 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 it was part of an unusual multi-use project including three theaters and a hotel; that it was intended to be a large theater, seating 1800, for large-scale musical revues; that its facade is a fine example of the romantic "modern Spanish" style with which Herbert Krapp adorned the Chanins' later theaters; that among its significant architectural features are its balcony with simulated Spanish-style tile roof, blind stylized Palladian window, and rusticated base; that for half a century the Majestic Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays, especially musical comedies, 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 a Landmark the Majestic Theater, 245-257 West 44th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1016, Lot 5, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agrest, Diana. ed. A Romance with the City: Irwin S. Chanin. New York: Cooper Union Press, 1982.
- A Renaissance in Theatre Craft: The Chanin Theatres. New York: Chanin Theatres Corporation, n.d.
- Atkinson, Brooks. Broadway. Rev. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1974.
- Bernheim, Alfred K. The Business of the Theatre. New York: Actors Equity Assn., 1932; reprint ed. New York: Benjamin Blom. 1964.
- The Best Plays of....[annual]. New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present.
- Bordman, Gerald. Oxford Companion to American Theatre. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Bordman, Gerald. American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Botto, Louis. At This Theatre: An Informal History of New York's Legitimate Theatre. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1984.
- Bowman, Ned A. "American Theatre Architecture: The Concrete Mirror Held Held Up to Yankee Nature." The American Theatre: The Sum of its Parts. New York: French, 1972.
- The Broadway Association. Broadway: The Grand Canyon of American Business. New York: The Broadway Association. 1926.
- "Broadway Footnotes." New York World, January 30, 1927.
- Bronner, Edwin. The Encyclopedia of the American Theatre, 1900-1975. New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc. 1980.
- Brooks Atkinson Theater. Souvenir Program of the Dedication (as the Mansfield), February 15, 1926. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
- Buder, Stanley. "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.
- Chanin, Henry I. Obituary. New York Times, February 27, 1973, p. 40.
- Chanin, Irwin, Interview with Andrew S. Dolkart, June 6, 1985.
- "Chanin, Irwin Salmon." The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, vol H, (1952), 254-55.
- "The Chanin to Try Art for Art's Sake in Newest Theatre, the Masque." New York Post, February 18, 1927.

"Chanins to Build Chain of Theatres." New York Times, October 24, 1926,
p. 23.

The Chanins. Clipping Files and Scrapbook. Billy Rose Theatre Collection,
Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.

"Chanins to Open Sixth Theatre." New York Telegraph, February 24, 1927.

Chanin's Royale Theatre. New York: Chanin Theatres Corporation, 1927.

Cook, Burr C. "Twenty Years of Theatre Building." Theatre
36(August 1922), 98-99.

Ellis, Edward Robb. The Epic of New York City. New York:
Coward-McCann, 1966.

Elson, Mrs. Peggy. Interview with Janet Adams, November 16, 1984.

Freedley, George. "Broadway Playhouses." Bound typescript of "The Stage
Today," 1941-43. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch,
New York Public Library.

Furer, Howard B. New York: A Chronological and Documentary History,
1524-1970. Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1974.

Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates. 30 Theaters. New York:
privately printed, 1983.

Henderson, Mary C. The City and the Theatre. Clifton, N.J.:
James T. White and Co., 1973.

Jenkins, Stephen. The Greatest Street in the World. New York:
G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1911.

Krapp, Herbert. Obituary. New York Times, February 17, 1973,
p. 34, col. 5.

Krapp, Herbert. Obituary. Variety, February 21, 1973, p. 63.

Krapp, Herbert. Papers and Photographs in the possession of Mrs. Peggy
Elson.

Laas, William. Crossroads of the World: The Story of Times Square.
New York: Popular Library, 1965.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Beacon Theater Designation Report
(LP-1097). Prepared by Marjorie Pearson. New York: City of New
York, 1979.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Chanin Building Designation Report
(LP-0993). Prepared by Marjorie Pearson. New York: City of New
York, 1978.

"Made Fortune in 8 Years." New York Times, April 28, 1927, p. 40.

- "Majestic Theatre to Open Tonight." New York Times, March 28, 1927.
- "Majestic Theatre, New York City: Herbert J. Krapp, Architect." Architecture and Building 59 (June 1927), 208-210, 214.
- "Masque Opens Tonight." New York Times, February 24, 1927.
- Meloy, Arthur S. Theatres and Picture Houses. New York: Architects Supply and Publishing Co., 1916.
- "Mr. Chanin Enters Our Hall of Fame." Review of Reviews, 79 (March 1929), 122, 124-25.
- Mullett, Mary B. "The Chanins of Broadway." American Magazine, 106 (August 1928), 22-23, 122-127.
- New York City. Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets.
- New York County. Office of the Register. Liber Deeds and Mortgages.
- The New York Subway. New York: Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904 reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, n.d.
- Paneth, Philip. Times Square, Crossroads of the World. New York: Living Books, 1965.
- Play Statistics File. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
- Poggi, Jack. Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Programmes. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
- Rigdon, Walter, ed. The Biographical Encyclopaedia & Who's Who of the American Theater. New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966.
- Rogers, W.G., and Weston, Mildred. Carnival Crossroads: The Story of Times Square. New York: Doubleday, 1960.
- Rogers, Cameron, "Youth at the Top: Concerning Irwin S. Chanin." World's Work Magazine, 58 (January 1929), 59, 152.
- Sexton, Randolph Williams, and Betts, Ben Franklin, eds. American Theatres of Today. 2 vols. New York: Architectural Book Pubs., 1927, 1930; reprint ed., New York: Vestal, 1977.
- Theatre World [annual]. Ed. Daniel Blum. New York: Theatre World, 1946 -- present.
- Young, William C. Documents of American Theater History. Volume 2: Famous American Playhouses 1900-1971. Chicago: American Library Association, 1973.

APPENDIX

The following production history of the Majestic 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.

1927

- RUFUS LEMAIRE'S AFFAIRS 3/28/27 (56 perfs.) by Ballard MacDonald and Andy Rice; with Ted Lewis, Charlotte Greenwood and Lester Allen.
- RANG TANG 9/12/27 (112 total perfs.) by Kaj Gynt, lyrics by Jo Trent; with Miller and Lyles. (First opened at the Royale Theater 7/12/27.)
- THE LOVE CALL 10/24/27 (81 perfs.) by Edward Locke, music by Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Harry B. Smith; with Alice Fischer, Joseph Macauley and John Barker.

1928

- THE PATRIOT 1/19/28 (12 perfs.) by Ashley Dukes; with Madge Titheradge, John Gielgud and Clarence Derwent.
- BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM 2/27/28 (88 total perfs.) by George Kelly; with Judith Anderson. (First opened at the Cort Theater 12/26/27.)
- RIO RITA 3/12/28 (504 total perfs.) by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson, music by Harry Tierney; with Ethelind Terry and J. Harold Murray. (First opened at the Ziegfeld Theater 2/2/27.)
- THE BIG FIGHT 9/18/28 (31 perfs.) by Milton Herbert Gropper and Max Marcin; with Jack Dempsey.
- THE JEALOUS MOON 11/20/28 (72 perfs.) by Theodore Charles and Jane Cowl; with Jane Cowl, Philip Merivale, Guy Standing.

1929

PLEASURE BOUND 2/18/29 (136 perfs.) by Harold Atteridge and Max and Nathaniel Lief, music by Muriel Pollock; with Phil Baker, Aileen Stanley, Jack Pearl.

A WONDERFUL NIGHT 10/31/29 (125 perfs.) by Johann Strauss, adapted by Fanny Todd Mitchell; with Gladys Baxter and Archie Leach (aka Cary Grant).

1930

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW 2/25/30 (95 perfs.) by Nat N. Dorfman and Lew Leslie, music and lyrics by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh; with Gertrude Lawrence, Florence Moore, Jack Pearl, Harry Richman.

ARTISTS AND MODELS 6/10/30 (55 perfs.) by Harold Stern and Ernie Golden; with George Hassell and Aileen Stanley.

NINA ROSA 9/20/30 (129 perfs.) by Otto Harbach, lyrics by Irving Caesar, music by Sigmund Romberg; with Guy Robertson, Armida, Ethelind Terry, Leonard Ceeley.

1931

THE STUDENT PRINCE 1/29/31 (45 perfs.) by Dorothy Donnelly; music by Sigmund Romberg; with Edward Nell Jr. and Elizabeth Gergely.

SIMPLE SIMON 3/9/31 (16 perfs.) by Ed Wynn and Guy Bolton; with Ed Wynn.

1932

THE ROUND UP 3/7/32 (9 perfs.) by Edmund Day; with Gertrude Michael and Byron Shores.

1933

PARDON MY ENGLISH 1/20/33 (43 perfs.) by Herbert Fields, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, music by George Gershwin; with Jack Pearl, George Geivot, Eleanor Shaler, Carl Randall.

STRIKE ME PINK 3/4/33 (122 perfs.) by Ray Henderson and Lew Brown; with Jimmy Durante and Hope Williams.

THE BOHEMIAN GIRL 7/27/33 (11 perfs.) by Michael Balfe; with Allan Waterous.

PIRATES OF PENZANCE/YEOMAN OF THE GUARD 8/7/33 (8 perfs.) by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan; with William Danforth.

MURDER AT THE VANITIES 11/6/33 (298 total perfs.) by Earl Carroll and Rufus King, music and lyrics by Edward Heyman and Richard Myers; with James Rennie, Bela Lugosi and Olga Baccia Nova. (First opened at the New Amsterdam Theater 9/12/33.)

1934

A GILBERT AND SULLIVAN SERIES, presented by S.M. Chartock; with William Danforth and Roy Cropper.

THE MIKADO 4/2/34 (8 perfs.)
PIRATES OF PENZANCE 5/7/34 (8 perfs.)
H.M.S. PINAFORE/TRIAL BY JURY 4/16/34 (16 perfs.)
IOLANTHE 4/30/34 (8 perfs.)
THE MIKADO 5/21/34 (20 perfs.)

MUSIC HATH CHARMS 12/29/34 (29 perfs.) by Rowland Leigh, George Rosener and John Shubert, music by Rudolf Friml; with Robert Halliday and Natalie Hall.

1935

MOSCOW ART PLAYERS 2/16/35 (52 perfs.) Repertory of eight Russian plays; with Michael Chekhov.

1936

A GILBERT AND SULLIVAN SERIES, presented by S.M. Chartock; with William Danforth, Roy Cropper and Vivian Hart.

THE MIKADO 4/10/36 (19 perfs.)
PIRATES OF PENZANCE 4/20/36 (8 perfs.)
H.M.S. PINAFORE/TRIAL BY JURY 4/27/36 (16 perfs.)
IOLANTHE 5/4/36 (8 perfs.)

1937

THE BAT 5/31/37 (18 perfs.) by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood; with May Vokes and Minnette Barrett.

THE CAT AND THE CANARY 6/14/37 (9 perfs.) by John Willard; with Howard Miller and Helen Claire.

THREE WALTZES 12/25/37 (122 perfs.) by Clare Kummer and Rowland Leigh from a play of Paul Knepler and Armin Robinson, music by Johann Strauss Sr., Johann Strauss Jr., Oscar Strauss; with Kitty Carlisle, John Barker, Ann Andrews, Glenn Anders.

1938

GREAT LADY 12/1/38 (20 perfs.) by Earle Crooker and Lowell Brentano; music by Frederick Loewe; with Norma Terris, Shepperd Strudwick, Tullio Caminati and Irene Bordonì.

SUSAN AND GOD 12/26/38 (287 total perfs.) by Rachel Crothers; with Lily Cahill and Walter Gilbert. (First opened at the Plymouth Theater 10/7/37.)

1939

STARS IN YOUR EYES 2/9/39 (127 perfs.) by J.P. McEvoy, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, music by Arthur Schwartz; with Ethel Merman, Jimmy Durante, Richard Carlson and Mildred Natwick.

YOKEL BOY 7/6/39 (208 perfs.) music and lyrics by Lew Brown, Charles Tobias and Samuel H. Stept; with Buddy Ebsen, Judy Canova and Phil Silvers.

1940

STREETS OF PARIS 1/22/40 (274 total perfs.) music by Jimmy McHugh, lyrics by Al Dubin; with Bobby Clark, Luella Gear, Carmen Miranda, Abbott & Costello and Gower Champion. (First opened at the Broadhurst Theater 6/19/39.)

MARGIN FOR ERROR 4/22/40 (264 total perfs) by Clare Booth; with Bramwell Fletcher, Sam Levene and Otto Preminger. (First opened at the Plymouth Theater 11/3/39.)

ALL IN FUN 12/27/40 (3 perfs.) Musical revue with Imogene Coca, Pert Kelton and Bill Robinson.

1941

VIVA O'BRIEN 10/9/41 (20 perfs.) by William K. and Eleanor Wells; with Edgar Mason.

HELLZAPOPPIN 11/25/41 (1,404 total perfs). written by and starring Ole Olson and Chic Johnson. (First opened at the Forty-sixth Street Theater 9/22/38).

1942

PORGY AND BESS 1/22/42 (286 perfs.) by DuBose Heyward, music by George Gershwin; with Todd Duncan and Anne Brown.

NATIVE SON 10/23/42 (84 perfs.) by Paul Green and Richard Wright; with Canada Lee and John Ireland.

1943

JUNIOR MISS 3/28/43 (710 total perfs.) by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields; with Barbara Robbins, Alexander Kirkland, Patricia Peardon, Jack Davis and Lenore Lonergan. (First opened at the Lyceum Theater 11/18/41.)

THE MERRY WIDOW 8/4/43 (321 perfs.) by Frans Lehar, Victor Leon and Leo Skin, adapted by Robert Stolz; with Marta Eggerth, Jan Kiepura and Gene Barry.

1944

DREAM WITH MUSIC 5/18/44 (28 perfs.) by Sidney Sheldon, Dorothy Kilgallen and Ben Roberts; with Vera Zorina.

STAR TIME 9/12/44 (120 perfs.) by Paul Small; with Lou Holtz and Benny Field.

MEXICAN HAYRIDE 12/23/44 (479 total perfs.) by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, music and lyrics by Cole Porter; with Bobby Clark, George Givot and June Havoc. (First opened at the Winter Garden Theater 1/28/44.)

1945

CAROUSEL 4/19/45 (890 perfs.) by Benjamin F. Glazer, based on LILIOM by Ferenc Molnar, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II; with Jan Clayton, John Raitt and Jean Darling.

1947

ALICE IN WONDERLAND 5/28/47 (100 total perfs.) by Lewis Carroll, adapted by Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus; with Eva Le Gallienne, Richard Waring and Bambi Linn. (First opened at the International Theater 4/5/47.)

CALL ME MISTER 7/21/47 (734 perfs.) sketches by Arnold Auerbach, music and lyrics by Harold Rome; with Jack E. Carter, Maria Karnilova and Jane Kean. (First opened at the Plymouth Theater 10/6/47.)

ALLEGRO 10/10/47 (315 perfs.) book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers, choreography by Agnes de Mille; with John Battles, Lisa Kirk and John Conte.

1949

SOUTH PACIFIC 4/7/49 (1,925 perfs.) by Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II; with Mary Martin, Ezio Pinza, Juanita Hall, Thomas Gleason and William Tabbert.

1953

ME AND JULIET 5/28/53 (358 perfs.) book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers; with Isabel Bigley, Joan McCracken, Buzz Miller, Ray Walston, Barbara Carroll.

1954

BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA 4/8/54 (268 perfs.) by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, music by Arthur Schwartz, lyrics by Dorothy Fields; with Shirley Booth, Anne Francine, Wilbur Evans and Carol Leigh. (Moved to the Imperial Theater 10/4/54.)

FANNY 11/4/54 (888 perfs.) by S.N. Behrman and Joshua Logan, music and lyrics by Harold Rome; with Ezio Pinza, Florence Henderson and Walter Slezak.

1956

HAPPY HUNTING 12/6/56 (412 perfs.) by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, music by Harold Karr, lyrics by Matt Dubey; with Fernando Lamas and Ethel Merman.

1957

THE MUSIC MAN 12/19/57 (1,375 perfs.) book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson; with Robert Preston, Barbara Cook and Eddie Hodges.

1960

CAMELOT 12/3/60 (873 perfs.) book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe; with Richard Burton, Robert Goulet, Julie Andrews and Roddy McDowall.

1963

THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL 1/24/63 (60) perfs.) by Richard Brinsley Sheridan; with John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, Geraldine McEwan and Richard Easton.

HOT SPOT 4/19/63 (43 perfs.) by Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert, music by Mary Rodgers, lyrics by Martin Chernin; with Judy Holliday, Howard Freeman, Joseph Campanella and Mary Louise Wilson.

TOVARICH (264 total perfs.) by David Shaw based on a play by Robert E. Sherwood and Jacques Deval, music by Lee Pockriss, lyrics by Anne Crosswell; with Vivien Leigh and Jean Pierre Aumont. (First opened at the Broadway Theater 3/18/63.)

JENNIE 10/17/63 (82 perfs.) by Arnold Schulman, lyrics & music by Howard Dietz & Arthur Schwartz; with Mary Martin and George Wallace.

1964

ANYONE CAN WHISTLE 4/4/64 (9 perfs.) by Arthur Laurents, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim; with Harry Guardino, Lee Remick and Angela Lansbury.

GOLDEN BOY 10/20/64 (569 perfs.) by Clifford Odets and William Gibson; with Sammy Davis, Jr., Paula Wayne, Louis Gossett and Johnny Brown.

1966

FUNNY GIRL 3/14/66 (1348 total perfs.) by Isobel Lennart, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Bob Merrill; with Barbra Streisand and Sydney Chaplin. (First opened at the Winter Garden Theater 3/26/64; moved to the Broadway Theater 11/22/66.)

1967

THE PERSECUTION AND ASSASSINATION OF JEAN-PAUL MARAT AS PERFORMED BY THE INMATES OF THE ASYLUM OF CHARENTON UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MARQUIS DE SADE 1/3/67 (55 perfs.) by Peter Weiss; with The National Players Company.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF 2/27/67 (3,242 total perfs.) book by Joseph Stein based on their stories of Sholom Aleicheim, music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick; with Harry Goz, Maria Karnilova and Bette Midler (First opened at the Imperial Theater 9/22/64).

1970

LOVELY LADIES, KIND GENTLEMEN 12/28/70 (19 perfs.) by John Patrick; with Ron Husmann, Remak Ramsey and David Burns.

1971

1776 1/18/71 (1,217 total perfs.) by Peter Stone, music and lyrics by Sherman Edward; with Howard DaSilva, Virginia Westoff, William Daniels, Paul Hecht, Clifford David, John Cullum, Ken Howard and Ronald Holgate. (First opened at Forty Sixth Street Theatre 3/16/69).

1972

SUGAR 4/9/72 (505 perfs.) by Peter Stone based on "Some Like It Hot", music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Bob Merrill; with Robert Morse, Tony Roberts, Elaine Joyce and Cyril Ritchard.

1973

- A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC 9/18/73 (527 total perfs.) by Hugh Wheeler from a film by Ingmar Bergman, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim; with Hermione Gingold, Len Cariou, Glynis Johns, Patricia Elliott, Leunance Guittard, Victoria Mallory. (First opened at the Shubert Theater 2/25/73).

1974

- MACK AND MABEL 10/6/74 (66 perfs.) by Michael Stewart; with Lisa Kirk; Robert Preston and Bernadette Peters.

1975

- THE WIZ 1/5/75 (1,666 total perfs.) book by William F. Brown based on The Wizard Of Oz by L. Frank Baum, music and lyrics by Charles Smalls; with Andre de Shields, Stephanie Mills and Mabel King. (Moved to Broadway Theater 5/25/77).

1977

- ESTRADA 9/20/77 (7 perfs.).

- THE ACT 10/29/77 (233 perfs.) by George Furth, music by John Furth, lyrics by Fred Ebb; with Liza Minnelli and Barry Nelson.

1978

- FIRST MONDAY IN OCTOBER 10/3/78 (79 perfs.) by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee; with Henry Fonda and Jane Alexander.

- BALLROOM 12/14/78 (116 perfs.) book by Jerome Kass, music by Billy Goldenberg, lyrics by Alan and Marilyn Bergman, choreographed by Mitch Benny; with Dorothy Louden and Vincent Gardenia.

1979

- I REMEMBER MAMA 5/31/79 (108 perfs.) by John Van Druten, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Martin Charnin; with Liv Ullmann, Maureen Silliman, George Hearn, Dolores Wilson and George S. Irving.

- THE MOST HAPPY FELLA 10/11/79 (53 perfs.) by Frank Loesser; with Giorgio Tozzi, Sharon Daniels, Dennis Warning and Louisa Flaningam.

- BETTE! DIVINE MADNESS 12/5/79 (40 perfs.) with Bette Midler, the Staggering Harlettes, and Chabba-Doo.

1980

BLACKSTONE 5/19/80 (104 perfs.) by Kevin Carlisle; with Harry Blackstone.

BRIGADOON 10/16/80 (133 perfs.) by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe; with Stephan Lehew, Martin Vidnovic, Meg Bussert and John Curry.

1981

42ND STREET 3/30/81 (still running 12/86) by Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble based on a novel by Bradford Ropes, music by Harry Warren, lyrics by Al Dubin; with Tammy Grimes, Jerry Orbach and Lee Roy Reams. (First opened at the Winter Garden Theater 8/25/80).



Majestic Theater