

Landmarks Preservation Commission
December 8, 1987; Designation List 197
LP-1359

MUSIC BOX THEATER, 239-247 West 45th Street. Built 1920; architects C. Howard Crane & E. George Kiehler.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1017, Lot 11.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Music Box Theater and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 55). 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. Representatives of the two co-owners appeared at the hearing and indicated that neither had 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 Music Box Theater survives today as one of the historic playhouses that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Constructed shortly after the end of World War I, the Music Box was built by producer Sam Harris to house Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues.

Sam Harris was a legendary Broadway producer, who first reached fame through his successful partnership with George M. Cohan, and then collaborated with Irving Berlin and later with Kaufman and Hart. Irving Berlin is among the greatest and best-known American songwriters of this century. Together they staged Berlin's Music Box Revues for the first five years of the 1920s.

C. Howard Crane was a nationally prominent theater architect when Harris and Berlin hired him, along with his associate E. George Kiehler, to design the Music Box. Besides his two Broadway houses (the Music Box and the Guild -- now the Virginia), he designed legitimate theaters and grand movie palaces in cities across the country, and later in England.

The Music Box Theater represents a special and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, its facade is an unusually handsome Palladian-inspired design.

For over half a century, beginning with the Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues, the Music Box 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 Music Box Theater, as one of the Broadway playhouses 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.

Irving Berlin and Sam H. Harris

The Music Box was built for Sam Harris and Irving Berlin, legendary Broadway figures who each played an important role in shaping the history of American theater entertainment. Sam Harris was a soft-spoken, behind-the-scenes genius whose percentage of hits is still one of the highest in Broadway history.¹ Irving Berlin is one of the great American songwriters of this century. Together they created the Music Box Theater and made it what one writer called "the home of the hits!"²

Sam Harris, a native New Yorker, was born February 3, 1872, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He left school at the age of fourteen, and by the age of seventeen was organizing local holiday entertainment and athletic exhibitions. Harris also raised thoroughbred racing horses and promoted prize fighters, including the featherweight champion of 1897, "Terrible Terry" McGovern. The enterprising Harris figured "Terrible Terry" could do more than just box in the ring, so beginning in 1898 he had McGovern delivering punch lines on the stage, first in The Bowery After Dark, a financial success which went on to tour the country, and then in The Gay Morning Glories, not nearly as popular.

In 1904, Sam Harris began a lengthy collaboration with composer George M. Cohan. Their first great success was Little Johnnie Jones. It was Cohan's show; he acted in it and wrote the music, including the songs "Give My Regards to Broadway." Harris, however, knew better than anyone the

business end of good popular entertainment; together Cohan and Harris are still regarded as one of the most successful teams in Broadway history.

Harris also controlled several theaters with Cohan: in 1913, they built the Bronx Opera House on East 149th Street and Third Avenue (extant),³ and together they took control of the Cohan and Harris Theater. Their personal lives were linked through their marriages to sisters, Alice Nolan (Harris's first wife), and Agnes Nolan (Cohan's wife). Their partnership eventually dissolved over a disagreement during the actors' strike which preceded the formation of Actors' Equity in 1920. Despite their feud, Cohan and Harris remained good friends and even revived their partnership in 1937 to produce one more show, Fulton of Oak Falls.

When Harris parted with Cohan, he joined Irving Berlin in the Music Box Theater project. In addition to Berlin, Harris went on to collaborate with George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart on a number of productions, including Once In a Lifetime, Dinner At Eight, and The Man Who Came To Dinner. Three of his productions won Pulitzer Prizes: Icebound in 1923, Of Thee I Sing in 1932, and You Can't Take It With You in 1937. Harris died in 1941, a successful and respected stage figure whose name, Max Gordon once said, "stood for impeccable taste and something called for lack of a better word, 'class.'"⁴

Irving Berlin, still alive today at the age of 99, has been one of the most versatile and popular songwriters of the twentieth century. Born May 11, 1888, in Eastern Russia, Israel Baline immigrated to the United States with his family in 1892 when he was only four years old.⁵ His first published song (1907) was "Marie From Sunny Italy." A printer's error on the cover spelled his name I. Berlin, and he kept the name. Unable to read music and without any formal training, Berlin nonetheless has had over 1500 songs published, many of them internationally known. He can play the piano only in the key of F-sharp, and even has a special instrument furnished with a clutch that enables him to switch automatically to any key.

At the beginning of his career, Irving Berlin was a "Tin Pan Alley" pioneer, helping to win wide acceptance for ragtime jazz and the accompanying dance craze. His first great musical success, "Alexander's Ragtime Band," became an international hit when vaudeville star Emma Carus introduced its syncopated march rhythms to Chicago audiences in 1911. By 1915, the song had sold over two million sheet copies⁶ and Berlin had become identified in the public mind with ragtime.

In 1914 Berlin wrote his first complete score for the Vernon and Irene Castle revue Watch Your Step that popularized "Play a Simple Melody." At that time he was also performing in vaudeville, appearing at such theaters as the London Hippodrome, where he was billed as the "king of ragtime." Drafted into the army in 1918, Berlin wrote and starred in Yip-Yip Yaphank, a service musical in which he first introduced "I Hate to Get Up in the Morning."

In 1919, the songwriter formed his own musical publishing company, Irving Berlin, Inc. During the 1920s Berlin wrote for a number of revues including the Ziegfeld Follies of 1920 and 1927 and his own Music Box Revues of 1921-24. In 1925, he scored his first musical comedy, The Cocoanuts, for the Marx Brothers. His work took on a more sober tone in

the early 1930s with two political satires, Face the Music (1932) and As Thousands Cheer (1933), the latter featuring his holiday classic, "Easter Parade." In 1935 Berlin began writing for the movies. Bing Crosby, Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire and Judy Garland owed some of their greatest hits to him. Top Hat (1935) featured Rogers and Astaire dancing to "Isn't This a Lovely Day" and "Cheek to Cheek," Crosby introduced "White Christmas" in Holiday Inn (1942), and Garland and Astaire walked up the avenue in Easter Parade (1948). On Broadway, Berlin was particularly identified with Ethel Merman who starred in his greatest hit Annie Get Your Gun (1944) and later spoofed Perle Mesta in Call Me Madam (1950).

In 1954 Berlin went into retirement. He returned to Broadway in 1962 with the score for Mr. President, a great popular success despite a lukewarm reception from the critics. In 1955, President Eisenhower presented Berlin with a gold medal "in recognition of his services in composing warm patriotic songs,"⁸ the most famous of these being "God Bless America."

(PD, GH)

Notes

1. Sam Harris, obituary, Variety, July 9, 1941, p. 50.
2. Sam Harris, obituary, New York Times, July 4, 1941, p. 14.
3. "The Bronx Opera House," New York Times, August 1, 1983, p. B3.
4. Max Gordon and Lewis Funke, Max Gordon Presents (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 195.
5. Material on Irving Berlin from "Irving Berlin," Current Biography, 1963, pp. 35-36; Michael Freedland, Irving Berlin (London, W.H. Allen, 1974).
6. "Irving Berlin," Current Biography, 1942, p. 74.
7. Ibid, pp. 74-75.
8. Current Biography, 1963, p. 36.

C. Howard Crane and E. George Kiehler

During a career that spanned almost fifty years, Charles Howard Crane designed more than two hundred theaters in the United States and some 125 more in Canada and Great Britain. Among the most widely publicized of these were his only two Broadway playhouses, the Music Box (1921) and the Guild (later the ANTA, currently the Virginia; 1924-25). Quite different from each other in appearance -- the Guild is modeled on a Tuscan villa while the Music Box is severely Palladian in style -- both theaters display Crane's academically correct eclecticism. Crane believed that

theaters ought to exemplify architecture as an art of dramatization. Unlike many other theater architects of the time, who blended various historical elements into a personal style, Crane never developed a "signature" in his work.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1885, Crane began his career in that city in 1904.¹ He moved to Detroit in 1905 where he apprenticed himself to Albert Kahn. Only a year later he had become the chief draftsman for the firm of Field, Hynchman & Smith, and by 1909 he had established his own practice. His expertise in theater design and construction, and specifically in acoustics, gained him a solid reputation and kept his services in constant demand, particularly during the 1920s. At one time he employed fifty-three draftsmen who assisted him with projects in almost every major American city. In Detroit alone, he designed almost fifty theaters, the most heralded two being the Majestic (1917) and Orchestra Hall (1919).

Crane employed two senior associates: Ben A. Dore, chief designer in the Detroit office, who collaborated on, or was in charge of, many mid-western projects; and Kenneth Franzheim (1891-1959), who ran Crane's New York City office.² Two well publicized examples of Crane and Franzheim's collaboration were the twin Selwyn and Harris Theaters in Chicago. Archie and Edgar Selwyn, both prominent New York producers, commissioned one; and Sam Harris, impressed with his architect's 1921 Music Box design, commissioned Crane to build the other. The two separate but adjoining structures were roughly the same size and consisted of similarly fashioned Renaissance style facades.³ Another Crane and Franzheim collaboration was the Capitol Theater and Office Building in Boston in 1926. This elaborate design incorporated a two-story Ionic colonnaded facade into a standard fourteen-story office tower with an extremely plush and decorative interior. E. George Kiehler was also a collaborator on some of Crane's theater projects, including the Music Box, but his specific contributions are not known.

At the height of Crane's career, shortly before the Depression, many American film studios and theater corporations had attained their greatest financial and popular success. Individual theaters and theater chains became one part of an expanding entertainment empire. Beginning in 1925, for example, the Fox Theater Corporation embarked on a campaign to build or acquire what would amount to 800 theaters by the year 1929. Crane alone was commissioned by Fox to design twenty-five new theaters. Two of them, the Detroit Fox and the St. Louis Fox, both completed in 1928, were among the largest theaters in the country. Typically for Crane, the style of the Detroit Fox blended East Indian, Byzantine and Baroque motifs.⁴ Another similar theater in the Fox chain, the Brooklyn Fox, also by Crane in 1928, had a seating capacity of 4,305, and became a famous showcase for first-run motion pictures.⁵

United Artists took advantage of Crane's talents too in 1927 when they commissioned him to design the Spanish Gothic style United Artists Theater in Los Angeles. With a lobby that resembled a vaulted Spanish cathedral, the theater also featured intricate tracery and a mirrored auditorium ceiling.⁶

In 1932, one of the worst years of the Depression, Crane moved to Europe, first to Milan where he designed Italy's first skyscraper, then to London where he settled permanently.⁷ Although his reasons for leaving the United States remain unclear, Crane continued to build theaters in England and maintained his office in Detroit. Perhaps his greatest architectural challenge, and certainly his finest engineering accomplishment, resulted in 1937 in his Earl's Court Exhibition Hall, sports and amusement center. Faced with a triangular twelve-acre site above a network of railway tracks, Crane created a modern curvilinear structure with a 118-foot high arena and five exhibition halls which could be opened into one vast amphitheater seating 30,000. It also featured an Olympic-sized swimming pool which could be raised, frozen for skating, or used as a stage or playing field. All this, it is said, was erected without stopping a single train below the construction.⁸

During and after World War II, Crane rechanneled his efforts into industrial design while working on the rebuilding of London factories and the modernization of other British plants. He continued to visit the United States frequently to lecture, but resided in London until his death there in 1952.

(PD, FD)

Notes

1. Biographical summary from "Harris and Selwyn Theaters: Preliminary Summary of Information" (Chicago: Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, June 1979; revised November 1982), pp. 4-5, and Historical American Building Survey, NY - 5554, Fox Theater, Brooklyn, N.Y. reprinted in "The Brooklyn Fox Theatre," Theatre Historical Society Annual 9 (1982), 5-6.
2. Kenneth Franzheim, obituary, New York Times, March 18, 1959.
3. Harris and Selwyn Theaters, 4-5.
4. "Brooklyn Fox," p. 5.
5. Ibid.
6. Paul Gleye, The Architecture of Los Angeles (Los Angeles: Rosebud, 1981), 107.
7. Harris and Selwyn Theaters, p. 4.
8. "Earls Court Exhibition Building," Architecture and Building News 151 (August 1937), 247-254.

The Music Box Theater

According to one account, Sam Harris first mentioned his interest in building a theater to Irving Berlin in 1919. Berlin responded, "If you

ever do, I have a great title for you." "A title for a song?" asked Harris. "No, a title for a theater, the Music Box," replied Berlin.¹

The following year Harris joined with Berlin to build the Music Box Theater, shortly after the termination of Harris's partnership with George M. Cohan. Harris built the Music Box Theater specifically to house Berlin's Music Box Revues. (Harris and Berlin were joined in the venture by a mutual friend, motion picture magnate Joseph Schenck, who soon after the theater's completion sold his interest to the Shubert Organization.) A site on 45th Street was purchased from the Astor Realty Co., and on September 22, 1921 the Music Box Theater opened with an extravaganza Berlin wrote especially for the new house. The property cost \$400,000, the building \$600,000, and more than \$240,000 was spent for Hassard Short to produce and stage the first show.² Theatre Magazine's reviewer obviously thought the expense well worthwhile, for he proclaimed Berlin's Music Box Revue and the Music Box theater "a wonderful new show in a superlatively beautiful new theatre."³ For another reviewer the theater and show were "the most eye-filling and appealing combination of play and playhouse that local playgoers -- accustomed as they are to things gorgeous theatrically -- have ever been treated to."⁴ "Say It With Music" became Berlin's theme song for the theater and for his Music Box Revues of 1921, 1922, 1923, and 1924.

The Music Box was one of the small number of theaters built in the 1920s for an individual producer, rather than for a large organization like the Shuberts or the Chanins. Harris and Berlin turned to C. Howard Crane for an unusual and individual design that would mark the theater as the home of Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues.

Crane's design for the Music Box combined Palladian and Adamesque motifs from an architectural tradition that was essentially English and neo-Georgian.⁵ Its most prominent feature was a delicate limestone Ionic colonnade screening the gallery, with pedimented doorways and finely designed lanterns. The bays on either side were framed by double pilasters and punctuated by Palladian windows on the second level, and a single window on the third. The theater was then crowned by a mansard roof with four dormer windows and a decorative wrought-iron balustrade running the length of the 100 foot theater. As described by the contemporary architectural press:

The delicate limestone colonnade and gallery with its finely designed doorways and lanterns is the central feature. Pylon like at the sides the structural masses give strength and proportion to the design and the mansard roof with its dormer windows and balustrades is decidedly a crowning feature. The freedom of the front from the blatant electric advertising sign is a relief. Two signs of small size designed and proportioned in keeping with the whole scheme proclaim the purpose of the building and the marquise-a concession to the needs of a stormy night-is so submerged as not to obtrude to the detriment of the composition.⁶

The overall effect of Crane's design for the Music Box was distinctly domestic. The combination of Palladian and neo-Georgian elements was suggestive of a grand country house. Such an approach was not new to the

theater district; a number of earlier theaters built as headquarters/homes for theatrical impresarios followed similar themes. David Belasco's Stuyvesant Theater (today the Belasco) used a neo-Georgian facade to suggest an intimate, if luxurious, livingroom housing his productions. Winthrop Ames's Little Theater used a similarly styled facade to suggest a domestic home for his intimate "little theater" productions, and his architects, Ingalls & Hoffman, did something similar for Henry Miller's Theater a few years later. Contemporary with the Music Box was the Theater Guild's home (also designed by Crane), whose Italian palazzo-inspired facade deliberately evoked the homes of the Renaissance princes who patronized the theatrical arts. This connection between neo-Georgian architecture and intimate theater appears to have been generally understood at the time, and a contemporary architectural periodical noted of the Music Box:

This small theatre seats one thousand and is designed for the so-called "intimate" production. This idea is well carried into the design by the use of the style of the Georgian period following the delicacy of domestic architecture more than the monumental.⁷

From the first the Broadway critics were impressed with the beauty and refinement of the Music Box's design. Jack Lait of Variety called it "the daintiest theatre in America,"⁸ and the Evening Telegram's reviewer dubbed it "a theatre unparalleled....so beautiful and so satisfying that its like is not to be found here or even on the continent."⁹ For the Herald's reviewer the Music Box's facade provided a welcome contrast to the more mundane theater buildings then going up in the Broadway area:

The audience which gathered to witness the brilliant opening of the Music Box last night had its first surprise on approaching the building. The new theater actually has a front -- it even deserves to be called a facade -- with pillars and other dignified architectural decorations....¹⁰

The architectural press was equally enthusiastic, though perhaps less colorful in its praise. A number of journals published photos, plans, and descriptions of the Music Box. The American Architect-Architectural Review devoted eight pages to Crane's playhouse in the February 1, 1922, issue, calling it one of the most "artistic additions to New York's large number of theaters."¹¹ The journal added "how remarkable" the Music Box was "for the quiet dignity of its design and in its plan for those elements of comfort and luxurious ease...."¹²

A few years later in the American Spirit in Architecture, Talbot Hamlin ranked the Music Box "among the most beautiful of modern theaters" saying:

It is in a modernized Adam style, and borrows much from our own native tradition in its quiet wall and roof surfaces and its delicately proportioned loggia. Proportion, detail, atmosphere make its facade a true ornament to the city, and prove that gayety is quite compatible with repose and dignity.¹³

Berlin presented a Music Box Revue in each of the next four years. He moved on to other creative projects after 1925 but maintained his controlling interest with Sam Harris in the Music Box Theater. Their careful supervision of outside productions using the theater gave the Music Box an outstanding performance record: in its first twenty-five years only three shows ran less than 100 performances.

Today Irving Berlin retains a share in the ownership of the Music Box Theater -- "What the hell does a songwriter want with a theater?" he said in 1971. "I've sold real estate, but I've held on to the Music Box. It's a sentimental interest."¹⁴ The Music Box remains remarkably intact inside and out, its facade largely unaltered from the day it was built.

(PD)

Notes

1. Mel Gussow, "The Music Box Takes a Bow at 50," The New York Times, September 23, 1971, p. 60.
2. John Peter Toohey, "The Music Box Stops to Count Up," New York Times, September 27, 1931, sec. 8, p. 2.
3. "Mr. Hornblow Goes to the Play," Theatre Magazine, December 1921, p. 387.
4. Unidentified clipping in the Music Box Theater Clipping File, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library.
5. "The Music Box Theater, New York," Architecture and Building 53 (December 1921), p. 95.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Jack Lait, "America's Greatest Show: The Music Box Revue," Variety, September 30, 1921, p. 15.
9. "Big Revue in Music Box," Evening Telegram, September 23, 1921.
10. "William Collier and Sam Bernard at the Head of a Notable Cast of Comedians," New York Herald, September 23, 1923.
11. "The Music Box Theatre, West 45th Street," The American Architect-The Architectural Review vol. 121, No. 2386 (February 1, 1922), 99, pls.
12. Ibid., p. 99.
13. Talbot F. Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 305.
14. Gussow, p. 60.

The Music Box as a Playhouse¹

Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues occupied the Music Box Theater for its first four years. The Mail called the Revue of 1922 "four hours of jazz, girls, gorgeous costuming, spectacles that at times were dazzling, dancing acrobatics, and all the hurly-burly of color movement associated with its predecessor."²

The first straight play produced at the Music Box following Berlin's Revues was The Cradle Snatchers (1925), whose cast included the young Humphrey Bogart. Two more hit comedies followed, Chicago with Charles Bickford and Francine Larrimore in 1926 and Philip Barry's Paris Bound with Hope Williams in 1927. Music returned to the theater in 1928 with Cole Porter's Paris starring the glamorous Irene Bordoni. The following year Clifton Webb, Fred Allen and Libby Holman appeared in the Little Show revue. In 1931, the third edition of this series also appeared at the Music Box featuring Bea Lillie's rendition of Noel Coward's "Mad Dogs and Englishmen." For the most part, however, during the 'thirties the Music Box was given over to the the works of George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart who either together or in collaboration with others supplied the house with one hit after another. The decade opened with Kaufman and Hart's first joint effort, Once in a Lifetime, a Hollywood satire with Jean Dixon that convulsed audiences for 410 performances. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind collaborated on the Music Box's next production, the Gershwin musical Of Thee I Sing, which ran 446 performances in 1931-32 and won the first Pulitzer Prize awarded to a musical. Subsequent productions involving Kaufman or Hart included Dinner at Eight (1932, Kaufman and Edna Ferber), As Thousands Cheer (1933, book by Hart), Merrily We Roll Along (1934, Kaufman and Hart), First Lady (1935, Kaufman and Katherine Dayton), Stage Door (1936, Kaufman and Ferber) and The Man Who Came to Dinner (1939, Kaufman and Hart). Kaufman also directed all of the above productions as well as John Steinbeck's dramatization of his novel Of Mice and Men which won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1938.

Following the death of Sam Harris in 1941 the Music Box was leased to independent producers on a show-by-show basis. Continuing to attract strong productions, it retained its reputation as one of the most successful theaters on Broadway. Contributing to this success was Mike Todd's Star and Garter, a rowdy revue starring Gypsy Rose Lee that racked up an impressive 605 performances in 1942-43. Rodgers and Hammerstein's productions of John Van Druten's I Remember Mama also enjoyed great success with 714 performances in 1944-45. The young Marlon Brando made his Broadway debut in this production which also starred Mady Christians and Oscar Homolka. Other notable productions from the forties included Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke (1948) and the Maxwell Anderson-Kurt Weill musical Lost in the Stars (1949).

The fifties were marked by a happy association between the Music Box and playwright William Inge who supplied the theater with three hits: the Pulitzer Prize winning Picnic (1953), Bus Stop (1954), and Dark at the Top of the Stairs (1958). Other highlights of the 'fifties included Separate Tables which featured a Tony Award-winning performance by actress Margaret Leighton, and Five Finger Exercise which won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best foreign play of the 1959/60 season.

During the 1960s the Music Box housed a number of distinguished dramas, including A Far Country (1961) with Steven Hill and Kim Stanley, and The Homecoming (1967) with Ian Holm and Vivien Merchant. Its most popular attraction, however, was a romantic comedy Any Wednesday (1964) which ran 983 performances and and garnered paeans of praise from the critics for actress Sandy Dennis.

Two thrillers dominated the 1970s, Anthony Shaffer's Sleuth (1970), a British import with Anthony Quayle and Keith Baxter, and Ira Levin's Deathtrap (1978), the Music Box's longest running play to date. In addition there was another long running comedy with Sandy Dennis, Absurd Person Singular (1974), and a revue of songs by Stephen Sondheim, Side by Side by Sondheim (1977), with Millicent Martin and Julie McKenzie. In recent years the Music Box has housed the stark drama Agnes of God (1983) with Elizabeth Ashley, Geraldine Page and Amanda Plummer, a charming revival of Noel Coward's Hay Fever (1985) with Rosemary Harris and Roy Dotrice, and a critically acclaimed production by the Royal Shakespeare Company of Les Liaisons Dangereuses (1987).

The success of the Music Box as a theater may be best summarized in the words of Moss Hart:

The Music Box is everybody's dream of a theatre. If there is such a thing as a theatre's making a subtle contribution to the play being given on its stage, the Music Box is that theatre. Except for the Haymarket Theatre in London, I know of no other that possesses so strong an atmosphere of its own, as living and as personal, as the Music Box. Even in broad daylight, as we stepped inside its doors and into its darkened auditorium, there was an undefinable sense that here the theatre was always at its best.³

(GH)

Notes

1. This production history of the Music Box Theater, condensed from the fuller version in the Appendix, is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against George Freedley, "Broadway Playhouses," bound typescript of the "Stage Today," 1941-43, Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center Branch, New York Public Library; The Best Plays of....[annual] (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1899-present); Theatre World [annual] Daniel Blum, editor (New York: Theatre World, 1946-present), The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1966); Edwin Bronner, The Encyclopedia of American Theater, 1900-1975 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1980); Gerald Bordman, Oxford Companion to American Theatre (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
2. Sam Harris Clippings File, Billy Rose Theater Collection.

3. Moss Hart, Act One: An Autobiography (New York: Random House, 1959), pp. 261-262.

Description¹

The Music Box Theater has a symmetrically-organized facade which is wider than it is high. The ground floor, which is of stone (with concrete infill and patches) is dominated by its doorways. Four pairs of original bronze and glass doors adorned with curvilinear motifs, lead into the ticket lobby at the right (east). These are flanked by original bronze-painted wood and glass signboards, framed by colonnettes with grotesques and crowned by stylized pediments (of sheetmetal over wood) composed of waves flanking lyres in wreath surrounds. A modern marquee extends out over the entrance doors. Three pairs of original bronze and glass exit doors from the auditorium are flanked by similar signboards of bronze-painted iron, and doorways, that to the east with a single door, and that to the west with a decorative painted wrought-iron gate at the foot of the fire stairs. Decorative iron railings flank the two granite steps leading from the gate. Two large original iron signboards are placed on the wall adjacent to the recessed paired bronze stage doors. A single bronze stage door in an iron frame is at the western end. These two stage door openings flank a single original sign board. The ground floor is surmounted by a cornice with a wide Adamesque frieze containing vertical ribs, urns, and swags. The major portion of the facade, rising from the ground floor base, is faced with stone and is organized into a colonnaded center section with flanking end bays. Double-height fluted columns with stylized Corinthian capitals are linked by wrought-iron railings with cast-iron panels which shield a recessed portion of the facade. The gallery thus created serves as the exit for a set of fire stairs at the east and for the three doorways from the balcony level of the auditorium. These doorways have paneled doors and are surmounted by entablatures with urn- and swag-adorned friezes supporting triangular pediments (at the outer doors) and a scrolled broken pediment with pineapple finial (at the center door). Three wrought-iron and glass lanterns are suspended from the ceiling of the gallery. The end bays are flanked by pilasters with stylized Corinthian capitals. A Palladianesque window with fan-filled tympanum is placed at the second floor of each bay. The windows have multi-paned casement sash. At the third floor of each bay is a window with a simple molded surround. The sash are multi-paned casements. A vertical sign projects from the wall of the eastern bay. An entablature with rosette-adorned frieze, dentils, and modillioned cornice spans the facade. This is surmounted by a slate-covered sloping roof punctuated by round-arched sheetmetal dormers with multi-paned sash. Wrought- and cast-iron railings are placed above the cornice and at the roofline.

(MP)

Notes

1. Architecturally significant features are underlined.

Conclusion

The Music Box Theater survives today as one of the historic playhouses that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built by producer Sam Harris to showcase Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues, it helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district. Designed by C. Howard Crane, one of the country's preeminent theater designers, the Music Box represents a special aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Its facade is an unusually handsome Palladian-inspired design.

For over half a century the Music Box Theater, beginning with Irving Berlin's Music Box Revues, 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), 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. Other 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 Music Box 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 Music Box Theater survives today as one of the historic theaters that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that it was designed for producer Sam Harris, a legendary figure in American entertainment history, to showcase the Music Box Revues of Irving Berlin, one of the greatest American songwriters of the 20th century; that it was designed for Harris and Berlin by the nationally prominent theater architect C. Howard Crane with E. George Kiehler; that its facade is an unusually handsome Palladian-inspired design; that among its significant architectural features are its double-height loggia with Corinthian columns, flanking Palladian windows, and sloping tile roof with dormer windows; that for over half a century, beginning with Irving Berlin's Revues, the Music Box Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that as such it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Music Box Theater, 239-247 West 45th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1017, Lot 11, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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APPENDIX

The following production history of the Music Box 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.

1921

THE MUSIC BOX REVUE OF 1921 2/22/21 (440 perfs.) lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; with Irving Berlin, William Collier and Wilda Bennett.

1922

THE MUSIC BOX REVUE OF 1922 10/23/22 (330 perfs.) lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; with Charlotte Greenwood, Bobby Clark, Grace LaRue, John Steel and William Gaxton.

1923

THE MUSIC BOX REVUE OF 1923 9/22/23 (277 perfs.) lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; with Robert Benchley, Grace Moore and Ivy Sawyer.

1924

EARL CARROLL'S VANITIES 9/10/24 (134 perfs.) lyrics and music by Earl Carroll; with Sophie Tucker and Joe Cook.

THE MUSIC BOX REVUE OF 1924 12/1/24 (184 perfs.) lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; with Bobby Clark, Fanny Brice, Grace Moore and Claire Luce.

1925

CRADLE SNATCHERS 9/7/25 (485 perfs.) by Russell Medcraft and Norma Mitchell; with Humphrey Bogart, Mary Boland and Edna May Oliver.

1926

GENTLE GRAFTERS 10/27/26 (13 perfs.) by Owen Davis; with Katharine Alexander and Charlotte Granville.

MOZART 11/22/26 (33 perfs.) by Sacha Guitry; with Irene Bordoni and Lucile Watson.

CHICAGO 12/30/26 (173 perfs.) by Maurine Watkins; with Charles Bickford, Francine Larrimore, Dorothy Stickney and Eda Heineman.

1927

PARIS BOUND 12/27/27 (234 perfs.) by Philip Barry; with Madge Kennedy, Donn Cook and Hope Williams.

1928

PARIS 10/8/28 (194 perfs.) by Martin Brown, songs by Cole Porter and E. Ray Goetz; with Irene Bordoni, Arthur Margetson and Louise Closser Hale.

1929

THE LITTLE SHOW 4/30/29 (321 perfs.) by Howard Dietz, music by Arthur Schwartz; with Clifton Webb, Fred Allen, Portland Hoffa and Libby Holman.

1930

TOPAZE 2/12/30 (159 perfs.) by Marcel Pagnol; with Frank Morgan, Harry Davenport, Clarence Derwent and Phoebe Foster.

ONCE IN A LIFETIME 9/24/30 (401 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart; with Hugh O'Connell, Jean Dixon, George S. Kaufman and Spring Byington.

1931

THE THIRD LITTLE SHOW 6/1/31 (136 perfs.) by Dwight Deere Wiman; with Beatrice Lillie and Ernest Truex.

OF THEE I SING 12/26/31 (446 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, music by George Gershwin; with Victor Moore, William Gaxton, Lois Moran and Grace Brinkley. (Moved to the Forty-Sixth Street Theater 10/8/32.)

1932

DINNER AT EIGHT 10/22/32 (243 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber; with Cesar Romero, Jane Wyatt, Malcolm Duncan, Ann Andrews, Constance Collier and Margaret Dale.

1933

AS THOUSANDS CHEER 9/30/33 (390 perfs.) by Moss Hart, music & lyrics by Irving Berlin; with Marilyn Miller, Ethel Waters, Clifton Webb and Helen Broderick.

1934

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG 9/29/34 (155 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart; with Mary Philips, Kenneth MacKenna, Jessie Royce Landis and Walter Abel.

1935

RAIN 2/12/35 (47 perfs.) by John Colton and Clemence Randolph from a story by W. Somerset Maugham; with Tallulah Bankhead.

CEILING ZERO 4/10/35 (102 perfs.) by Frank Wead; with Osgood Perkins, John Litel, John Boruff and Margaret Perry.

IF THIS BE TREASON 9/23/35 (40 perfs.) by Dr. John Haynes Holmes and Reginald Lawrence; with McKay Morris, Walter N. Greaza and Kathleen Comegys.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE 11/5/35 (219 perfs.) by Helen Jerome from a novel by Jane Austen; with Helen Chandler, Adrienne Allen and Colin Keith-Johnston. (Moved to Plymouth Theatre 11/26/35).

FIRST LADY 11/26/35 (244 perfs.) by Katharine Dayton and George S. Kaufman; with Jane Cowl and Lily Cahill.

1936

STAGE DOOR 10/22/36 (169 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber; with Margaret Sullavan, Tom Ewell, Richard Kendrick, Lee Patrick and Frances Fuller.

1937

YOUNG MADAM CONTI 3/31/37 (22 perfs.) by Hubert Griffith and Benn W. Levy from a play by Bruno Frank; with Constance Cummings.

OF MICE AND MEN 11/23/37 (207 perfs.) by John Steinbeck; with Wallace Ford, Broderick Crawford, Will Geer and Claire Luce.

1938

I'D RATHER BE RIGHT 5/23/38 (289 total perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lornz Hart; with George M. Cohan. (First opened at the Alvin Theater 11/2/37.)

SING OUT THE NEWS 9/24/38 (105 perfs.) by Harold Rome and Charles Friedman, words and music by Harold Rome; with Will Geer, June Allyson, Phillip Loeb and Rex Ingram.

1939

SET TO MUSIC 1/18/39 (129 perfs.) by Noel Coward; with Beatrice Lillie and Anne Jackson.

FROM VIENNA 6/20/39 (79 perfs.) Musical revue produced by the Refugee Artists Group.

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER 10/16/39 (739 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart; with Monty Woolley, Mary Wickes, Edith Atwater and Carol Goodner.

1941

THE LAND IS BRIGHT 10/28/41 (79 perfs.) by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber; with Ralph Theadore, Phyllis Povah, Martha Sleeper, Hugh Marlowe and Dickie Van Patten.

1942

KISS FOR CINDERELLA 3/10/42 (48 perfs.) by James M. Barrie; with Luise Rainer, Ralph Forbes and Cecil Humphreys.

STAR AND GARTER 6/24/42 (605 perfs.) music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, Harold Rome, Al Dubin, Will Irwin, Lester Lee, Irving Gordon, Harold Arlen, etc., produced by Michael Todd; with Bobby Clark, Gypsy Rose Lee and Georgia Sothern.

1943

FEATHERS IN A GALE 12/21/43 (7 perfs.) by Pauline Jamerson and Reginald Lawrence; with Peggy Conklin, Louise Lorimer, Paula Trueman and John Hamilton.

1944

OVER 21 1/3/44 (221 perfs.) by Ruth Gordon; with Ruth Gordon, Beatrice Pearson, Harvey Stephens and Loring Smith.

I REMEMBER MAMA 10/19/44 (714 perfs.) by John Van Druten; with Joan Tetzl, Mady Christians, Marlon Brando and Oscar Homolka.

1946

MR. PEEBLES AND MR. HOOKER 10/10/46 (4 perfs.) by Edward E. Paramore; with Howard Smith, Rhys Williams and Juanita Hall.

A FLAG IS BORN 10/22/46 (120 total perfs.) by Ben Hecht, music by Kurt Weill; with Paul Muni, Marlon Brando and Celia Adler.

CHRISTOPHER BLAKE 11/30/46 (114 perfs.) by Moss Hart; with Richard Tyler, Martha Sleeper and Shepperd Strudwick.

JOHN LOVES MARY 3/17/47 (923 total perfs.) by Norman Krasna; with Tom Ewell, Ann Mason, Nina Foch and William Prince. (First opened at the Booth Theater 2/4/47).

1948

THE LINDEN TREE 3/2/48 (7 perfs.) by J.B. Priestley; with Boris Karloff and Barbara Everest.

THE CUP OF TREMBLING 4/20/48 (31 perfs.) by Louis Paul; with Elisabeth Bergner, Martin Wolfson, John Carradine and Arlene Francis.

BALLET BALLADS/SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS / WILLIE THE WEEPER/THE ECCENTRICITIES OF DAVY CROCKETT 5/18/48 (62 perfs.); three dance plays.

SUMMER AND SMOKE 10/6/48 (102 perfs.) by Tennessee Williams; with Margaret Phillips, Ralph Theadore, Hildy Parks, Anne Jackson and Ray Walston.

1949

THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WANTED 2/16/49 (61 perfs.) by Sidney Howard; with Paul Muni and Carol Stone.

MRS. GIBBONS' BOYS 5/4/49 (5 perfs.) by Will Glickman and Joseph Stein; with Lois Bolton, Ray Walston, Edward Andrews and Richard Carlyle.

LOST IN THE STARS 10/30/49 (281 perfs.) by Maxwell Anderson based on a novel by Alan Paton, music by Kurt Weill, lyrics by Anderson; with Todd Duncan, Georgette Harvey and Inez Matthews.

1950

DAPHNE LAUREOLA 9/18/50 (56 perfs.) by James Bridie; with Edith Evans, Cecil Parker, John Van Dreelen and Elizabeth Ashley.

AFFAIRS OF STATE 11/6/50 (610 total perfs.) by Louis Verneuil; with Sheppard Strudwick, Celeste Holm and Reginald Owen. (First opened at the Royale Theater 9/25/50).

1952

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT 3/18/52 (46 perfs.) by George Tabori; with Paul Lukas, Gusti Huber, Zero Mostel and Jo Van Fleet.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5/1/52 (4 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Clair Luce, John W. Austin, Dierdre Owens and Antony Eustrel.

THE MALE ANIMAL 5/15/52 (317 total perfs.) by James Thurber & Elliott Nugent; with Martha Scott, Robert Preston, and Elliott Nugent. (First opened at City Center 4/30/52).

1953

TOUCHSTONE 2/3/53 (7 perfs.) by William Stucky; with Ossie Davis and Paul McGrath.

PICNIC 2/19/53 (477 perfs.) by William Inge; with Ruth McDevitt, Ralph Meeker, Peggy Conklin, Eileen Heckart and Paul Newman.

1955

BUS STOP 3/2/55 (478 perfs.) by William Inge; with Elaine Stritch and Kim Stanley.

1956

THE PONDER HEART 2/16/56 (149 perfs.) by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov from a story by Eudore Welty; with Una Merkel, Juanita Hall and Will Geer.

SEPARATE TABLES 10/25/56 (332 perfs.) by Terence Rattigan; with Margaret Leighton.

1957

MISS LONELYHEARTS 10/3/57 (12 perfs.) by Howard Teichmann from the novel by Nathanael West; with Henderson Forsythe, Pat O'Brien, Fritz Weaver, Anne Meara and Ruth Warrick.

THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS 12/5/57 (468 perfs.) by William Inge; with Frank Overton, Eileen Heckart, Teresa Wright and Pat Hingle.

1959

RASHOMON 1/27/59 (159 perfs.) by Fay and Michael Kanin based on stories by Ryunosu ke Akutagawa; with Rod Steiger and Claire Bloom.

FIVE FINGER EXERCISE 12/2/59 (337 perfs.) by Peter Shaffer; with Jessica Tandy, Roland Culver and Juliet Mills.

1960

INVITATION TO A MARCH 10/29/60 (113 perfs.) by Arthur Laurents; with Celeste Holm, Eileen Heckart, Jane Fonda and James MacArthur.

1961

ONCE THERE WAS A RUSSIAN 2/18/61 (1 perf.) by Sam Spewack; with Julie Newmar, Walter Matthau, Françoise Rosay and Sig Ruman.

A FAR COUNTRY 4/4/61 (271 perfs.) by Henry Denker; with Steven Hill and Kim Stanley.

DAUGHTER OF SILENCE 11/30/61 (36 perfs.) by Morris L. West; with Vincent Gardenia and Rip Torn.

1962

ROMULUS 1/10/62 (69 perfs.) by Friedrich Duerrenmatt, adapted by Gore Vidal; with Frances Compton, Cyril Ritchard, Cathleen Nesbitt and Howard Da Silva.

THE BEAUTY PART 12/26/62 (85 perfs.) by S.J.Perelman; with Alice Ghostley, Bert Lahr, Larry Hagman and Charlotte Rae.

1963

DEAR ME, THE SKY IS FALLING 3/2/63 (145 perfs.) by Leonard Spigelgass; with Gertrude Berg, Howard Da Silva, Minerva Pious and Jill Kraft.

SEMI-DETACHED 10/7/63 (16 perfs.) by David Turner; with Gillian Raine and Bryan Stanyon.

HAVE I GOT A GIRL FOR YOU! 12/2/63 (1 perf.) by Irving Cooper; with Dick Van Patten, Nancy Pollock and Simon Oakland.

LOVE AND KISSES 12/18/63 (13 perfs.) by Anita Rowe Block; with Larry Parks, Bert Convy and Alberta Grant.

1964

ANY WEDNESDAY 2/18/64 (983 perfs.) by Muriel Resnik; with Don Porter, Sandy Dennis, Gene Hackman and Rosemary Murphy.

1966

HOSTILE WITNESS 2/17/66 (157 perfs.) by Jack Roffey; with Ray Milland, Michael Allinson and Norman Barrs.

HOW'S THE WORLD TREATING YOU? 10/24/66 (40 perfs.) by Roger Milner; with Patricia Routledge and James Bolam.

1967

THE HOMECOMING 1/5/67 (324 perfs.) by Harold Pinter; with Paul Rogers, Ian Holm and Vivien Merchant.

THERE'S A GIRL IN MY SOUP 10/18/67 (322 perfs.) by Terence Frisby; with Gig Young and Barbara Ferris.

1969

THE WATERING PLACE 3/12/69 (1 perf.) by Lyle Kessler; with Vivian Nathan and Shirley Knight.

ANGELA 10/30/69 (4 perfs.) by Sumner Arthur Long; with Geraldine Page and Tom Ligon.

LOVE IS A TIME OF DAY 12/22/69 (8 perfs.) by John Patrick; with Sandy Duncan and Tom Ligon.

1970

CHARLES AZNAVOUR 2/4/70 (23 perfs.).

INQUEST 4/23/70 (28 perfs.) by Donald Freed; with Anne Jackson, George Grizzard, James Whitmore, Mason Adams and Mike Bursten.

SLEUTH 11/12/70 (1,222 perfs.) by Anthony Shaffer; with Anthony Quayle and Keith Baxter.

1973

VERONICA'S ROOM 10/25/73 (75 perfs.) by Ira Levin; with Eileen Heckart, Arthur Kennedy, Regina Baff and Kipp Osborne.

1974

RAINBOW JONES 2/13/74 (1 perf.) by Jill Willians; with Ruby Persson.

ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR 10/8/74 (271 perfs.) by Alan Ayckbourn; with Geraldine Page, Sandy Dennis, Tony Roberts, Richard Kiley, Carol Shelley and Larry Blyden.

1976

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF? 4/1/76 (117 perfs.) by Edward Albee; with Ben Gazzara and Coleen Dewhurst.

COMEDIANS 11/28/76 (145 perfs.) by Trevor Griffiths; with Jonathon Pryce and Milo O'Shea.

1977

SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM 4/18/77 (384 perfs,) by Stephen Sondheim; with David Kernan and Millicent Martin.

1978

DEATHTRAP 12/26/78 (1,793 per total perfs.) by Ira Levin; with John Wood and Victor Garber. (Moved to Biltmore Theatre 1/5/82)

1982

SPECIAL OCCASIONS 2/7/82 (1 perf.)

AGNES OF GOD 3/30/82 (599 perfs.) by John Pielmeier; with Elizabeth Ashley, Geraldine Page and Amanda Plummer.

1983

BROTHERS 11/9/83 (1 perf.) by George Sibbald; with Frank Converse.

1984

OPEN ADMISSIONS 1/29/84 (17 perfs.) by Shirley Lauro.

END OF THE WORLD 5/6/84 (33 perfs.) by Arthur Kopit; with Barnard Hughes, John Shea and Linda Hunt.

ALONE TOGETHER 11/21/84 (97 perfs.) by Lawrence Roman; with Kevin McCarthy and Janis Paige.

1985

THE OCTETTE BRIDGE CLUB 3/5/85 (24 perfs.) by P.J. Barry; with Nancy Marchand and Peggy Cass.

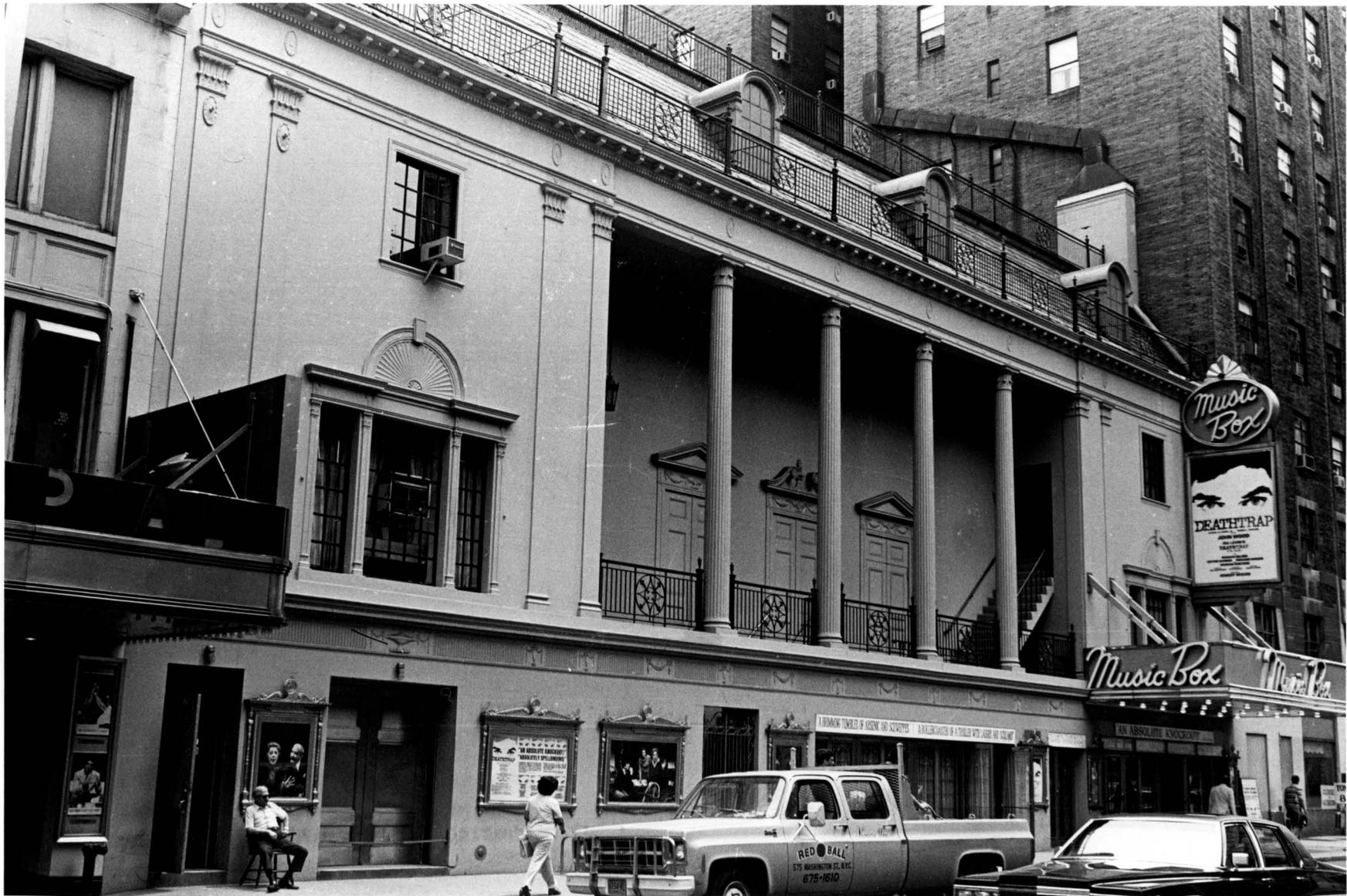
HAY FEVER 12/12/85 (124 perfs.) by Noel Coward; with Rosemary Harris and Roy Dotrice.

LOOT 4/7/86 (64 perfs.) by Joe Orton; with Charles Keating and Alec Baldwin.

1987

SWEET SUE 1/8/87 (164 total perfs.) by A.R. Gurney, Jr.; with Mary Tyler Moore and Lynn Redgrave. (Moved to the Royale 3/31/87.)

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES 4/30/87 by Christopher Hampton, based on a novel by Choderlos de Laclos; with Suzanne Burden, Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman.



Music Box Theater
239-247 West 45th Street
Manhattan

Built: 1920
Architect: Crane & Kiehler