

Earl Carroll Theatre History

Key Facts:

Opened: December 26, 1938

Architect: Gordon B. Kaufmann, with interior and exterior design work by Count Alexis de Sakhnovsky and Kaufmann.

Building Cost: estimated at \$500,000

Seating: 1,000 -- in a dinner-show arrangement

(Gordon B. Kaufman also designed the original LA Times building, Hoover Dam, Santa Anita Race Park, and the Palladium across the street, among other buildings.)

Earl Carroll built his second famous theater at 6230 Sunset Boulevard in [Hollywood, California](#). It opened on December 26, 1938. As he had done at the New York theater, over the entrance Carroll emblazoned the words "*Through these portals pass the most beautiful girls in the world*". An "entertainment palace", the glamorous [supper club](#)-theater offered shows on a massive stage that featured a 60' turntable with separately operated inner and outer sections. There was also a water curtain, an orchestra pit lift, a small circular lift downstage center for a soloist and a revolving tower of four pianos stage right.



The building's façade was adorned by what at the time was one of Hollywood's most famous [landmarks](#): a 20-foot-high (6.1 m) neon head portrait of entertainer [Beryl Wallace](#), one of Earl Carroll's "most beautiful girls in the world", who became his devoted companion. The sign survived several changes of ownership and venue name but was completely removed during major decorative overhauling in 1968. A re-creation made from photos is today on display at [Universal CityWalk](#), at [Universal City](#), as part of the collection of historic neon signs from the [Museum of](#)

[Neon Art](#). Another prominent exterior feature was the "Wall of Fame", on which were mounted more than a hundred individual concrete blocks autographed by Hollywood celebrities, including some of the biggest stars of the 1930s and 1940s.

Later achieving various degrees of fame in films and on television, [Jean Spangler](#), [Mara Corday](#), [Yvonne De Carlo](#), [Phyllis Coates](#), [Maila Nurmi](#), [Gloria Pall](#), and [Mamie Van Doren](#) were some of the showgirls who performed there. The facility was a popular night spot for many of Hollywood's most glamorous stars and powerful film industry moguls such as [Darryl Zanuck](#) and [Walter Wanger](#), who sat on the Earl Carroll Theatre's board of governors.

The theater was sold following the 1948 deaths of Earl Carroll and Beryl Wallace in the crash of [United Airlines Flight 624](#). It continued to operate but by the early 1950s it was falling on hard times.

(continued)

Other names:

Moulin Rouge

In 1953, Las Vegas showman Frank Sennes reopened the theater as a [nightclub](#) under the name "Moulin Rouge". The popular TV contest show *Queen for a Day* was broadcast from the Moulin Rouge during part of the show's 1956–1964 run.

Hullabaloo

In late 1965 it became the "Hullabaloo", a minors-welcome [rock and roll](#) club, capitalizing on the popularity of the television variety show *Hullabaloo*.

Kaleidoscope

For several months in 1968 it was the "Kaleidoscope" and featured many top West Coast rock acts, with an emphasis on local bands such as [The Doors](#).

Aquarius Theater

Later in 1968, the venue was redecorated in the [psychedelic art](#) style, renamed the "Aquarius Theater", and rededicated as the home of a long-running Los Angeles production of the Broadway musical *Hair*. It was still sometimes used for rock concerts on Mondays, when the *Hair* company had its day off, and as a result the Aquarius is famous as the place where The Doors performed on July 21, 1969, making live recordings that were later issued commercially.

In 1983, the Pick-Vanoff Company purchased the property and converted it into a state-of-the-art television theater that for nine years was the [taping](#) site of *Star Search*. The Pick-Vanoff Company also owned Sunset-Gower Studios, formerly the home of Columbia Pictures. For many years, it was used for the annual *Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon*. In the fall of 1993, the theater was the venue for [Fox Network's](#) *The Chevy Chase Show* under the name "The Chevy Chase Theater". The talk show was a disaster and was cancelled after five weeks; the theater reverted to its previous name soon after.^[6]

In 1977 it was briefly known as the **Longhorn Theatre**. It was also called the **Sunset Blvd. Theatre**, the **Star Search Theatre** and (in 1993) the **Chevy Chase Theatre**. Other uses have included being a venue for Jerry Lewis Telethons and Filmex.

Nickelodeon on Sunset

In the late 1990s, the name of the theater was changed to "[Nickelodeon on Sunset](#)" and it became the headquarters for [Nickelodeon's](#) West Coast live-action television production after the theater was acquired by the cable television channel [Nickelodeon](#). Some of the shows filmed there for Nickelodeon include the ten-season run of *All That*, *The Amanda Show*, *Drake & Josh*, and more recently *iCarly* and *Victorious*.

EARL CARROLL

He's been called "the troubadour of the nude," "the impresario of feminine epidermis," "the elongated purveyor of feminine pulchritude," and "the most notorious connoisseur of female flesh in the history of show business."

Earl Carroll was Florenz Ziegfeld's only real competition in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but he left Broadway under a cloud of scandal and bankruptcy. Looking for a fresh start and determined to reinvent himself in Hollywood, he opened the colossal Earl Carroll Theatre at 6230 Sunset Boulevard on December 26, 1938.

The 1000-seat "entertainment palace" and supper club quickly became known for the glory and gaiety of its grandiose productions featuring casts of 60 girls performing atop a double revolving stage. Guests were dazzled by more than six thousand feet of blue and gold neon and massive, 30-foot illuminated columns. For \$1000, VIP memberships to Carroll's Inner Circle guaranteed a lifetime cover charge and a reserved seating.

While it was Carroll's behind-the-scenes puppeteering that powered the operation, it was ravishing beauty Beryl Wallace whose face characterized the Earl Carroll Theatre to the world. Not only was she the star showgirl in Carroll's lavish musical comedy revues known as "Vanities," Beryl was his longtime devoted companion. "Thru these portals pass the most beautiful girls in the world," the theatre's celebrated slogan, encompassed a 24-foot neon silhouette portrait of the stunning chosen showgirl. Illuminating Sunset Boulevard, just east of Vine, the sign soon became one of Hollywood's most famous landmarks.

Following World War II and nearly a decade in Hollywood, Earl Carroll unveiled his plans for \$15 million facility what promised to be the "World's Largest Motion Picture Theatre and Broadcasting Studios" to be erected a half a block east of the existing structure on Sunset. Larger than Radio City Music Hall, the plans for the 7,000 seat theatre touted a 130-foot proscenium, three revolving stages, and an ice rink adjacent to a water tank, purportedly so that both Sonja Henie and Esther Williams could perform simultaneously with more than 100 dancing girls.

Tragedy struck on June 17, 1948 when United Airlines Flight 624 crashed in Pennsylvania. Earl Carroll and Beryl Wallace were among the 39 passengers killed instantly. In true Carroll "show must go on" fashion, the grieving showgirls took the stage the following night presenting the Earl Carroll Vanities with Virginia Dew, Beryl's stand-in, going on in her place. Carroll and Wallace were interred together in the Garden of Memory at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.

After operating in the red for more than a year, the Vanities came to a close on October 15, 1949 and the theatre went dark. The theatre reopened in 1953 as the Moulin Rouge nightclub and went through a number of incarnations (including the Hullabaloo, Kaleidoscope, Aquarius and Longhorn Theatres) before becoming the west coast production hub for Nickelodeon in 1997. Nickelodeon on Sunset is currently the production headquarters for the network's "Victorious" television series.



"A Night at Earl Carroll's" (Paramount, 1940).

<https://vimeo.com/86051056> (Go to 5 min to see lobby.)

We see all the wonders of the great stage demonstrated in "A Night at Earl Carroll's" (Paramount, 1940). The plot is slim, but it doesn't matter. A mobster engineers a kidnapping of Mr. Carroll and the lead performers so there won't be a show. But quite a show we get! In addition to Mr. Carroll, the film features Ken Murray, Rose Hobart, J. Carrol Naish, Lela Moore and Forbes Murray -- and a cameo by Beryl Wallace.



An amazing lobby photo by Maynard Parker. The description noted that "the statue by Martin Deutsch still graces the lobby, though her ribbon of neon is gone."



The Box Office

Those vertical tubes at the top of the lobby and auditorium are neon.





The top of the stairs to the lounges. The etched glass is gone now.



The bars in the lobby were originally open to the auditorium. The wall separating lobby and auditorium was added later. The glass columns were internally lit with neon

