



DOCUMENTS OF AMERICAN THEATER HISTORY

Volume 2

Famous American Playhouses
1900-1971

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American Library Association

which Broadway, Bertoldo McClean of "Come With Me Now" from New York playwright Mary Curran, Stanley Tracy representing the President's Commission on the Arts, Gov. Anderson and Mayor Allen.

The building, with existing building facilities, is the first hall to house a high level theater in Atlanta in more than 20 years.

Working for several days, including their parking decks, the building contains, in addition to complete theater facilities, a 7,000 square foot area to be used as a restaurant and cocktail lounge and more 10,000 square feet reserved for use during other uses.

The plan is to extend the building an additional three to five stories to total other uses.

The architect had prepared the Turner Center Theatre in Minneapolis and the Victor-Brownstein Theatre in Los Angeles Center, New York, represents the combined efforts of New York-based architectural firm of Albert Kahn.

It features a 75-foot stage with a 30-foot wing spread. The auditorium will seating 17,000 seats, above selected theater is light placement.

The use of the lighting equipment, including remotely controlled screens, is estimated at \$17,000. The auditorium is built in charcoal tones with gold and red charcoal seats. It is surrounded by a promenade and exhibition area.

THE MUSIC CENTER

Los Angeles Theatre Authority board of directors engaged New York producer-director Leo Weid in their managing director. It was Weid who pushed for a permanent repertory company.

The core group of professionals are members of including Leo Weid, who was instrumental in setting the pace.

Mr. Leo Weid, the director of a drama club in New York, had long dreamed of establishing a theater

school for young people. Now an acting school is included in the Theatre Authority program.

A NEW THEATER

"But what incentive has failed to reach me," the public school teacher and director, "is the work, the struggle and the effort behind it all. It took a lot of guts."

It also took the cooperation of civic and business leaders, which was truly great.

At one point the group decided to give up the idea of a new theater and lease the building to other uses, but the backers said, "no." The money was obtained for a theater and that's what they wanted it to be.

"The Broad Way of the West" looks off a 10-block section of repertory, which will include Jack Kirkland's adaptation of "Lorraine Hansberry's 'The Signifying Monkey,'" G. B. Stern's "Carnegie and Company," Arthur Miller's "After the Fall," and William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury." Other works include "Moby Dick, Rehearsed," and a first original production to be selected from manuscripts submitted to a Theatre Authority playwright contest.

55. MUSIC CENTER OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Los Angeles, California

Opened April 12, 1967

The Music Center of Los Angeles County has been one of the most praised cultural centers in the United States. The architectural concept is efficient and beautiful and the three theaters not only artistically attractive but acoustically perfect. The first of the theaters to open was the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, which was dedicated on April 9, 1964, primarily for operas, concerts, and ballets. It was not until three years later that the Mark Taper Forum and the Ahmanson Theatre were opened, but it was estimated that in the first three years, with only the Dorothy Chandler

Pavilion in use, the Music Center served 3,967,981 persons, certainly an outstanding record.

A description of the center was published by the center, and the following excerpts are from that publication:

55:1 The Music Center is comprised of three theatres—the 3,250-seat Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 750-seat Mark Taper Forum, and 2,100-seat Ahmanson Theatre. The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, dedicated on December 6, 1964, contains unexcelled facilities for staging symphony orchestra concerts, opera, recitals, musical comedy, and dance programs. The Mark Taper Forum, dedicated on April 9, 1967, provides for intimate drama, recitals, lectures, and civic presentations; while the Ahmanson Theatre, dedicated April 12, 1967, is designed for drama, musicals, and ballet.

Planned, designed and engineered by Welton Becket and Associates, architects, engineers, and interior designers, and constructed by Peter Kiewit and Sons Company, general contractors, the three buildings are arranged on either side of the sweeping Mall Plaza with its reflecting pool, fountain, and evergreen trees. The Mark Taper Forum and Ahmanson Theatre are joined as a unit by a graceful colonade. Beneath the complex are four split levels of parking for 2,000 automobiles.

THE DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION presents a series of sculptured, fluted columns, faced in white quartz, extending the full length of the building and continuing around its entire periphery. Dimension of the six-level building are on a grand scale, 330 feet long, 252 feet wide, and it rises 92 feet from the Mall Plaza to the sculptured overhanging roof.

The Pavilion's auditorium is outstanding in its complete flexibility of acoustics, lighting and staging. It is capable of ac-

commodating with equal ease opera, which utilizes a mammoth overhead stagehouse in addition to natural acoustics, musical comedy, which requires electrical amplification and a smaller, highly efficient stagehouse, and symphony concerts, which require natural acoustics as well as an acoustical shell enclosing the Orchestra and isolating it from the stagehouse.

A key to the auditorium's acoustical flexibility is a unique canopy which projects outward from the top of the proscenium and is adjustable to three different positions. In its lowest position, the canopy radiates sound to all seats in the house. This position is used for symphony concerts, opera and recitals. For musical comedy, which usually requires amplification, the canopy is raised to the second position, uncovering the speakers of the five-channel stereophonic system. The third position is similar to the second in that amplification can be used, but the canopy moves, exposing a light gallery for special stage lighting effects.

In sharp contradiction to the rule of thumb that a fine concert hall should be rectangular in shape, this auditorium is virtually square, providing an unusually intimate feeling for a house its size. Seating is on four levels—Orchestra, Founders Circle, Loge, and Balcony. Ninety per cent of the audience is within 105 feet of the stage. Seating on the Orchestra level is in the continental fashion, without front-to-rear aisles.

The stage of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion is one of the largest in the nation—169 feet wide and 64 feet deep. It opens to a 40-foot by 172-foot rear stage and to a 40-foot by 60-foot side stage. 120 scenery battens are located beneath the 94-foot grid.

The orchestra pit is in two sections for flexibility and is hydraulically located so that the orchestra can be lifted into position from below stage level.

There are star dressing rooms on stage and mezzanine levels. On the Grand Ave-

55:1. Souvenir brochure published by Music Center of Los Angeles County, n.d.

nue level, there are dressing rooms for 200 dancers and chorus members, with complete wardrobe facilities, as well as press room, a first aid room, lounges, a music library and areas for instrument and scenery storage.

Offices for the Music Center Operating Company, Southern California Symphony-Hollywood Bowl Association, Los Angeles Civic Opera Association, Southern California Choral Music Association, the Music Center Opera Association, the Los Angeles County Music Center Coordinator, and the Los Angeles County Music and Performing Arts Commission are contained on the third and fourth floors.

The fourth floor also contains four large rehearsal halls, one of which is equal in size to the playing area of the stage.

The fifth floor of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion is devoted to dining facilities. The Pavilion Restaurant has been designed for elegance and comfort. Its dining room offers buffet and Continental service with a sweeping view of the surrounding city. Two banquet rooms, the Blue Ribbon Room, seating 220, and the El Dorado Room, seating 170, are available for special parties. Another dining room, the Curtain Call Restaurant, decorated with mementos of early Los Angeles theatrical life, is located on the Grand Avenue level.

Major public areas include the magnificent Grand Hall, Oval Room and The Founders on the second floor and the Green Room on the Grand Avenue level. A mirrored Grand Stairway rises from the Grand Avenue entrance to all seating levels.

THE MARK TAPER FORUM anticipates the needs of the small theatre without imposing limits on flexibility of space and facilities. The circular structure rises from the center of a 175-foot-square reflecting pool, with the building's upper 27 feet cantilevering outward from its base to a diameter of 140 feet. Four broad walkways span the pool, with entry from the Mall Plaza across the south walk-

way beneath an aluminum canopy. Enclosing the upper portion of the building is a large, precast concrete mural suggestive of the forms and movement of the theatre. The mural was created by Beton Form Designers of San Francisco with design consultant Jacques Overhoff. Contrasting with the white panels of the mural are the dark precast panels which sheathe the Mark Taper Forum's circular base.

Entry to the theatre itself is into a main lobby dominated by a 60-foot curved wall faced with abalone shell cut into small squares and set as mosaic tile, executed by Tony Duquette. A bronze bust of Mark Taper by sculptor Robert Berks stands in the lobby.

A pentagonal thrust stage creates the focal point of the Mark Taper Forum's auditorium. This stage offers exceptionally good sight lines from the 14 rows of seats which rise steeply from the floor in a semi-oval around the stage. The stage, which extends 28 feet outward from the curved north wall and has a maximum depth of 30 feet, is a simple platform three steps up from the house floor. Completely without proscenium or stage curtains, the stage gives broad latitude to the production and permits the audience to become virtually a physical part of the presentation. Enhancing this stage is the combination of an arc-shaped cyclorama projection wall at the rear, movable open aluminum screens in front of the cyclorama wall, and a moving floor system between the screens and the wall.

A broad range of stage lighting is made possible through the inclusion of 300 lights in the ceiling above and between the acoustical panels. Additional lighting effects are made possible through the use of a lighting gallery at the rear of the house, a row of recessed lights above the cyclorama screen, and lights recessed into the face of the stage which are used to conceal onstage changes from the audience. A cyclorama projection room is located above the acoustical panels in the

center of the house, on the same level as the light and sound control booth. Dressing rooms and scenery storage areas are behind the cyclorama wall. Additional storage areas and two quick-change rooms are on the main floor, and ten dressing rooms are located on the second level.

THE AHMANSON THEATRE'S 73-foot-high facade is enclosed by a full wall of dark gray glass, allowing patrons in the lobby and two upper promenades an excellent view of the Mark Taper Forum and its reflecting pool. In the evening the Ahmanson Theatre's exterior appearance is enlivened by the movement of patrons inside the building seen through the glass wall. The other three walls of the structure are precast concrete panels textured with off-white onyx aggregate.

The achievement of maximum intimacy of audience with performer guided the design of the theatre. The auditorium's depth is equal to its width. A bowed stage can bring the performance closer to the audience than in most theatres its size. The proscenium is as wide as the auditorium at the stage wall and runs the full height of the theatre, eliminating the formal proscenium arch. Thus, the physical barrier which separates audience from performer has been removed.

Added to these enhancing factors are the excellent sight lines from all seats. This is accomplished by using a square rather than the usual tunnel-like auditorium.

Grand stairways on both sides of the lobby lead downward to the 1,000-seat Orchestra level, which is below Mall level, and upward to the 500-seat Parquet Terrace and 600-seat Balcony. The first 13 rows of the Orchestra are arranged in continental fashion to create a dress circle. Entry to the Orchestra's continental seating is from both sides, while all other seating levels are entered from promenades at the rear of the auditorium.

The stage playing area is 40 feet wide and 45 feet deep, with the total inside

stage width extending to 110 feet. A 75-foot-high grid provides 98 battens from which to fly scenery, curtain and props. The proscenium is 42 feet high and the house curtain raises to 30 feet to create an informal proscenium arch.

Acoustical flexibility is provided by a 20-by-60-foot canopy suspended from ceiling mounts above the proscenium. The canopy can be lowered to within 30 feet of the stage. When sound reinforcement is desired, a speaker border with a three-channel stereophonic speaker system can be dropped from behind the house curtain.

The orchestra pit is adjustable in two sections to accommodate up to 70 musicians who enter from the basement level, which houses locker rooms for orchestra members, a music library, and mechanical and electrical equipment. When not required for a presentation, the orchestra pit can be closed over with hinged decking on which removable seats can be placed.

A wardrobe room and dressing rooms are located on stage level. Two rehearsal rooms, one on the second floor and one on the third, allow a double rehearsal schedule in addition to onstage rehearsal. There is a suite of offices for the Center Theatre Group on the west side of the fourth floor. The fifth level is devoted to lighting galleries and electrical equipment. Additional stage lights are located on either side of the proscenium, behind walnut screens.

56. PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK

Cincinnati, Ohio

Opened July 18, 1968

The Playhouse in the Park had been a favorite entertainment spot of Cincinnati playgrounds since 1900. The original theater was a pavilion in Eden Park converted for use as a street stage. It was also quite small with a seating capacity of only 275, scarcely adequate