

row of the circle towards the stage, pushing out the side walls which they clothed with superb boxes with impossible sightlines, just one of the decorative devices that had as their sole object the narrowing of over-wide auditoriums. Ceilings spanned the entire circle (more often one than two) in contrast to the late nineteenth century British practice of central space capped with dome and deep shelves off. On stage the four walls policy (only recently overtaken by the introduction of permanent lighting installations on Broadway) resulted in stripped out fly towers with no false proscenium for the incoming show to set behind. Just as sets spilled through the wider openings so the auditoriums spilled into the street. It is generally known that Broadway theatres do not have bars. It is probably less well known that the New York fire codes allowed all vertical circulation for the audience to be within the auditorium volume and safety exits applied to the outside in the form of open ironwork staircases. But what makes New York theatres as simple as barns or cathedrals (i.e. porch direct to nave direct to sanctuary) is that in New York there was no pit, by which in Britain was meant separate rear stalls at prices considerably lower than all other places except the rear top balcony. In England, the convolutions of stair, passage, tunnel, go-up to go-down are designed to restrict the foyers and saloons to the inhabitants of dress circle or front orchestra stalls who must never meet or even see the pit-ites. In democratic turn of the century America you strolled straight off the street, through the lobby into the rear of the stalls, significantly called the orchestra from front to back. The architect was allowed arcades, decorated screens and elegant balustrades to his rear-of-the-orchestra stair up to the mezzanine, no theatres being buried below ground level as they were in safety conscious Edwardian England.

From this generation of theatres, 1903 to 1930, we had seen the best of Broadway. Frohman's Lyceum of 1903, which has an atmosphere not unlike London's Haymarket and carved wood effects which Grinling Gibbons would have envied plus foyer paintings of Garrick and Siddons after Reynolds which this author did envy. The Winter Gardens of 1912 which is deeply articulated, much too wide and gives the feeling that it has been sat upon by a skyscraper. (It hasn't, but is a conversion of a riding school, an oddly Viennese touch for a theatre where David Merrick wants \$35 off you for a side seat at 45° to the proscenium to see '42nd Street' – not worth it.) Next came the incomparable Mark Hellinger, formerly and more appropriately The Hollywood, which opened as a baroque picture house in 1930 looking just like a studio set for Monsieur Beaucaire (the Bob Hope/Louis XIV movie). Today the oval lobby, Bavarian in its rich colonnaded simplicity (see Cover), is full eight times a week with the smash hit burlesque musical 'Sugar Babies' which at \$250,000 a week in a 1,600 seat house is the only show your author has seen twice in a three month

span. (Thanks, Francis, for the tip – see CUE No. 5)

Back to those buses after this Levinesque parenthesis. Past Columbia University, through Harlem to the George Washington Bridge and the borders of the Bronx. We have arrived at Loew's 175th Street. Let us hand you over to the Loew's and M.G.M. PR Department: 'An Oriental Palace of Jewels! 4,000 seats! A Rajah's Ransom in Furnishings' – 'Ancient splendour and beauty of the Indo-Chinese architecture! Pagan glories of old are revived to create an atmosphere of luxury and exotic charm.' – 'Voluptuous pagan ornament.' Thus the effect when this theatre was opened with a policy of vaudeville and talking productions (films). Norma Shearer had been there with co-star Robert Montgomery and M.G.M. boss Nicholas M. Schenk on the great day, February 22nd, 1930. But we knew that within eighteen months the Depression had killed off the stage shows, the entrance price was reduced from 50 cents to 35 cents and the cinema demoted from first run to second run in an area that had moved downwards ghettowise from Jewish to Black. In 1960 the cinema was closed and sold.



Harold Rambusch, saluted by friends on his election as Honorary Member of the Theatre Historical Society (of the United States of America). L to R: William Weber (Rambusch Studios), Glenn Loney (THS & City University), Harold Rambusch, Joseph Rosenberg (THS & Municipal Art Society of New York) and Iain Mackintosh (Theatre Projects Consultants and author of this article).

What we found was still Aladdin's cave. The interior had been magnificently restored. Regilded, scrubbed clean and shining with a massive electrical installation for coast to coast TV, Loew's 175th Street had been translated, converted, *reborn*, and was now the United Palace Church, Pastor the Rev. Ike. The Dream Palace, which had failed due to the Depression, had now come into its own and plays to capacity Friday nights and twice on Sundays. The dollars pour in and the organ, a 4/23 Robert Morton it appears, is in full throat. This vast theatre, occupying an entire city block, is an oasis of noisy confidence in an area of sullen poverty.

Back to the buses. Perhaps this regeneration, this new life for an old theatre was an exception. We peeled off East and headed into the heartland of Harlem. First stop Hammerstein's Opera House on 125th Street, New York's oldest remaining theatre building dating from 1890 when it was thought erroneously that the new middle class would continue to march up Manhattan. A beautifully balanced theatre, this is now near derelict with only one useful function, the stage being a basket ball pitch which, being raked, must give a new slant to young Globetrotters. But just as we think 175th Street an exception we draw up outside the Regent in central Harlem. Smiling ladies in large mauve hats greet us for this is now a Baptist Church. Inside the colour scheme introduced by 'Roxy' Rothapfel in 1913 for the screening of the opening film, 'Last Days of Pompeii', has been set aside for something a little stronger. Walls are apricot decorated in gold over viridian or cobalt with scarlet lining. The original boxes, six a side have been retained and regilded. Each and every 'putti' has been given paper wings. The stalls seats have been replaced with white formica. 'Old Glory' stands Down Stage

Left and within the stage are four rows of choir stalls built within a solid plastic shell. Over, eighteen feet above the pastor's head, flies a bridge supported on two slender columns. Centre and built into this bridge we see a full-length see-through font.

This is nearing completion. We inspect the changing rooms each side at fly floor level. We inspect the font, complete with two taps. We are unable to take part in its commissioning. But by now it must be fully operational and provide an effect that Roxy would envy. The Regent is in good hands.

Clearly, this is no isolated phenomenon. It would seem to be a revivalist movement. Off then, in our nostrils the scent of victory