

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Paramount Theatre

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2025 Broadway

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Oakland

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

___ VICINITY OF

8th

STATE

California

CODE

06

COUNTY

Alameda

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___ DISTRICT	___ PUBLIC	___ OCCUPIED	___ AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	___ UNOCCUPIED	___ MUSEUM
___ STRUCTURE	___ BOTH	___ WORK IN PROGRESS	___ COMMERCIAL
___ SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	___ EDUCATIONAL
___ OBJECT	___ IN PROCESS	___ YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	___ BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
		___ NO	___ RELIGIOUS
			___ GOVERNMENT
			___ INDUSTRIAL
			___ MILITARY
			___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

The City of Oakland, John J. Redding, Mayor

STREET & NUMBER

14 and Washington Streets

CITY, TOWN

Oakland

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

California

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Alameda County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

1225 Fallon Street

CITY, TOWN

Oakland

STATE

California

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

March/May 1976

FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D. C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The following description is excerpted from the HABS report.

Description of the Exterior:

Layout, Shape, and Mass: The theatre structure consists of two major block-like units, the end of the narrower (lobby) block set against the front of the wider (auditorium) block, with the right sides even, leaving a blunted L-shape. The lobby block alone is approximately 50 by 80 feet, and is set with the front or narrow end toward the street. The rear structural block contains the auditorium, mezzanine, stage, and all related lounges, working and storage areas.

One story in height, the auditorium is 90 feet high and the stage roof 95 feet.

Wall construction and design:

The entrance facade is a rectangle approximately 50 feet wide and 100 feet high. This is the front end-wall of the lobby block. The facade is divided horizontally by the projecting marquee, and vertically, at mid-point above the marquee, by the tall theatre sign. Below the marquee the area is recessed into the volume of the structure, where the outer face, composed almost entirely of glazed entrance doors, was planned originally to open into a shallow inner vestibule. Today they open directly into the Grand Lobby.

Above the marquee the wall area is treated as two superimposed panels in a single plane. A "background" panel, faced in glossy, deep red tiles approximately 6 inches square, appears as a wide frame at the sides and bottom of a central ornamental panel. The central panel itself is a great pictorial mosaic, rising above the background in the form of a parapet wall, bisected by the sign of the theatre rising to its central apex.

Each half of the central mosaic panel holds a colossal, very rigid Byzantine figure, one male, one female, each cloaked, and both with sandaled feet. The cloaks or robes are decorated at the hems with a combination of Peruvian, Greek Key, and Vitruvian scroll pattern, and "embroidered" at the shoulders in true Byzantine fashion with vine tendrils and small flowers.

They control marionettes on golden strings that represent the arts. There is a large neon sign proclaiming "Paramount."

Outer vestibule and ticket booth: The marquee's soffit extends a distance within the structure and is ornamented with narrow white bands in a combined radial and scroll pattern on a silver ground. There is a lavish ticket booth of black granite and glass.

(Continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1931 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Timothy Pflueger of Miller and Pflueger

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Oakland Paramount Theatre is one of the two great Art Deco movie palaces left in America (with Radio City Music Hall). Built during the Depression and opened in December 1931, it was the largest auditorium seating 3,476 on the West Coast; it was recently magnificently refurbished for two-million dollars rather than a projected thirteen-million dollar cultural arts center.

One of the Publix Theatres until financial trouble forced the sale of the incomplete structure to Fox-West Cost Theatres, the Paramount was one of three Publix Theatres on the West Coast.

Progressive Architecture said:

"Architecturally the building owes its distinction to the genius of Timothy Pflueger, chief designer for the San Francisco firm of Miller & Pflueger. Pflueger is best known nationally for his office tower design in San Francisco's Pacific Telephone Building of 1926 and Medical Dental Building of 1930. The Telephone Building was directly inspired by Saarinen's second prize design for the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition; the Medical-Dental Building, in Art-Deco style, is still one of San Francisco's most admired office towers.

Equally important to the firm's livelihood was the theater design practice which began in 1922. In fact, it was so influential that Paramount Publix chain broke with its usual architects to hire Miller & Pflueger for the Oakland theater. This decision resulted in a building that achieves a rare unity of architecture and the decorative arts.

The Paramount's facade is, in effect, a 110-ft-high billboard that shows the name of the theater and a tile mosaic of two monumental figures, a male and female puppeteer, who manipulate a series of marionette groups from the magic world of the movie screen. This mural began as a 3-ft-high painting by Gerald Fitzgerald, an artist in Pflueger's office it was blown up to full scale by the outdoor advertising firm of Foster & Kleiser and used as a mock-up for the mosaic.

The rest of the building's exterior is an unadorned expression of its internal functions. Since it stands in the middle of the block the architects assumed

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,0	56,4	4,6,0	4,1	8,4	7,8,0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		

B						
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See continuation sheet).

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE

2/17/77

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW.

TELEPHONE

202/523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____

STATE ____

LOCAL ____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Roof: flat raised truss cover.

Floor Plans: Ground floor, public lounges and facilities; first floor (street level), small vestibule, grand lobby, orchestra foyer, grand staircase and mezzanine foyer. There is an upper foyer and balcony (3 tiers of seats) and projection room.

The Grand Lobby is a large spectacular open room decorated with deco motifs set in tile and carved in the bronze rails and window sills. There is a band of frozen dancing girls on the sills. The walls and ceiling are treated as one unit set in brilliant mosaic. Two great light fixtures called a "canopy of light" (one in the lobby and one in the auditorium) are made of grillework, 40 feet wide and 120 feet long, and ornamented with opal flashed glass that appears in shades of green. There were elaborate descriptions of this monumental "Fountain of Light" in current architectural publications--one said "it is worked in six or seven planes of sand-blasted glass. It purports to represent waves of water bubbling and boiling up from a center: rising higher and higher and finally curling over...whatever interpretation we put on this simply conceived device, its effect is amazingly impressive, and whether it is the spirit of water or the water-flower, the lotus, or the lotus deity himself--is all in one."

Ground floor Lounges are lavishly decorated and many of the original fixtures survive.

The Ladies Smoking Room's black lacquered walls are divided into horizontal quarters by narrow strips of vermilion molding. The ceiling, a series of receding offset planes, is finished in gold with edges painted green. Occupying almost the entirety of one wall is a mural executed by California's prize-winning painter-lithographer, Charles Stafford Duncan, in a smooth, broad-brush style. The mural shows four picknickers seated beneath a tree on a hill overlooking a large body of water, dotted with islands and sailing boats, and plainly meant to be San Francisco Bay. On adjoining walls two other painted heads are figured, and represent the muses of music and drama.

The Ladies Cosmetic Room adjoins the Ladies Lounge and has its walls and ceilings painted yellow, trimmed with silver. It is furnished with a heavy glass shelf and black carpets.

Gentlemen's Lounge: The walls of the Men's Lounge are lined with adzed, quartered oak, and have a soft, matt finish. The floor is brick-shaped tiles, laid herringbone fashion.

(Continued)

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Passing through the quiet Orchestra foyer, the auditorium is reached.

This theatre, built well into the advent of sound pictures, was also to be prepared for stage and opera performances, so that acoustics had to be of primary consideration. For this reason, the deep recesses, box seats, and large ceiling domes that had been almost standard features in large theatres, but which had created severe acoustical problems, were eliminated from the design of the Paramount. Instead, the treatment used was one of "largescale smoothness of the interior shell and smallscale roughness of all the surfaces." The Auditorium interior is conceived as a shell, set within the structural box of the building, and "thin enough in construction to resonate, yet sound-absorbing in material, with heavily worked surfaces to prevent echoes and focusing of sound." The great acoustician, Vern O. Knudsen, Associate Professor at UCLA, was consulted.

The stage, thirty-two feet deep from the footlights to the back wall and fifty feet wide, was equipped for "deluxe" extravaganzas and other stage productions in the 1930's.

The proscenium arch is wide and deep and is decorated by bathers, horses and a winged hero and framed by two fluted "Columns of Incandescence." The curtains are painted and were created by Michael Goodman. Above the curtain is the second "Canopy of Light" taking up 3/5 of the width of the auditorium. The auditorium walls were covered with reliefs by the California artist, Robert Boardman Howard and were probably influenced by the sculptor, Jacob Epstein. Most spectacular light effects on the main ceiling are controlled by a complicated panel and can be "played" to produce extraordinary color combinations. The upholstery and carpets are designed to fit the scheme throughout the theatre. Throughout in all of the smaller rooms, the Art-Deco motifs are used in endless variety down to the drinking fountains, clocks and ushers call boxes.

A complete description is recorded in HABS files.

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it would be surrounded by other buildings. This combination of spectacular advertising with stark functionalism gives the building an unintended relevance to the contemporary pop-vernacular school of design of the Venturis. The only change to the exterior was the removal of the rectangular marquee; the triangular replacement has been faced to approximate the original.

The lobby lives up to the facade's promise of spectacular fare within. In addition, it is well planned for circulation. Access to balcony and orchestra are clearly indicated to arriving patrons by the branching staircase over the main floor entrance to the auditorium. During intermission or upon leaving the theater, the visitor is greeted by an ethereal vision as good as any he might have seen on the screen. This is a 40-ft-high sculpture made of leaves of frosted glass indirectly lit, which Pfleuger called a "Fountain of Light."¹

The opening on December 16, 1931, was graced by the stars in the premier film "The False Madonna" (Frances Dee and William Boyd) while Lou Kislloff led the 16 piece orchestra. There was also a stage show called "Slavique Idea" which interpreted "Russian imperialism in terms of dance, song and lighthearted comedy." By 1970, the Paramount was largely empty except for a matinee once a week but in 1973, the building got a new lease on life as a community cultural center. The meticulous restoration program was carried out by Steven Levin, President of the Theatre Historical Society and Paramount manager Jack Bethards." The firm of Milton Pfleuger and Associates, formerly Timothy Pfleuger, provided original plans and served as historical consultants. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill served as architectural consultants.

Today the Paramount is as lively as when it opened 43 years ago. With a stage large enough for any presentation except grand opera, a mechanically elevated orchestra pit, and 20 production and dressing rooms, it serves all the arts from symphony and dance to variety shows and movies. The large public areas may house art shows, trade exhibits, or receptions. It is also an acoustically excellent recording and broadcasting studio. Location in downtown Oakland, half a block from a Bay Area Rapid Transit station, five blocks from a freeway on-ramp and in the center of bus transit, makes it accessible from all parts of the Bay Area."²

¹Sally Woodbridge, Progressive Architecture, July 1974, pp. 50-55.

²ibid.

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Beginning at a point on a North Westerly line of Broadway distance thereon north $26^{\circ} 15'$ feet, east 140 feet from the point of intersection thereof with the north-eastern line of 20th Street; running thence North $26^{\circ} 15'$ feet, east along said line of Broadway 50 feet; thence north $63^{\circ} 45'$ feet west 100.05 feet; thence north $11^{\circ} 32'$ feet 40 inches, east 105.52 feet to the southwestern line of Hobart Street, thence north $78^{\circ} 27'$ ft. 20 in. west along last named line 188.92 feet to a point distant thereon $578^{\circ} 27'$ ft. 20 in., east 104 feet from the point of intersection thereof with the southeastern line of Telegraph Avenue, as said line existed prior to widening of said Telegraph Avenue by that certain final decree of condemnation entered September 13, 1937, in the Superior Court, State Of California, in and for the County of Alameda, in an action had therein entitled "City of Oakland, plaintiff, VS Annie Seligman, et al., defendants." Case number 144927, a certified copy of which final decree was recorded September 13, 1937 in book 3537 of official Records at page 84, in the Office of the County Recorder of Alameda County, thence South $11^{\circ} 13'$ west parallel with said line of Telegraph Avenue, 149.20' to a line drawn parallel with northeastern line of 20th Street and distant at right angles 100' northeasterly therefrom; thence south $63^{\circ} 45'$, east 105.81' to a line drawn parallel with northwestern line of Broadway and distant at right angles 165.50' northwesterly therefrom; thence south $26^{\circ} 15'$ west 100' to north-eastern line of 20th Street; thence south $63^{\circ} 45'$ east along the last named line 7'; thence north $26^{\circ} 15'$ east 100'; thence south $63^{\circ} 45'$ east 58.50'; thence north $26^{\circ} 15'$ east 40'; thence south $63^{\circ} 45'$ east 100' to the point of the beginning.