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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Celebrity Theatre

Other names/site number: HiwayHouse Convention Center/Phoenix Star Theatre

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 440 North 32nd Street

City or town: Phoenix State: Arizona County: Maricopa

Not for Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B X C D

 Signature of certifying official/Title:	<u>23 Nov 2018</u> Date
<u>ASSTPO / Arizona State Parks and Trails</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain) _____


Signature of the Keeper

1/24/19
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: CONCRETE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Celebrity Theatre is located at 440 North 32nd Street, Phoenix, Arizona. It is an icosagonal (twenty-sided) building with a roof consisting of an assemblage of wedge-shaped, precast, prestressed, and post-tensioned concrete double tees supported by concrete T-shaped columns, held together with a tension ring, shear connections, and a compression ring, and collectively creating an inverted cone with acoustic qualities. The building has three levels, an upper main level just above grade, a center stage level, and a lower level for offices, green rooms, support systems, and a lounge. The foundation is concrete with reinforced concrete walls at the lower level, and non-load-bearing projecting bays called "pods" located between the columns, except at the four entrances. While modifications have been made to the building, primarily to adapt it to technological changes in the entertainment business, there have been no alterations to the building's distinctive structural configuration, and it retains a high-level of its architectural integrity. Designed by California architect Perry M. Neuschatz, with structural engineering assistance from T. Y. Lin and acoustic engineering from the firm Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, the Celebrity Theatre is a well-maintained early example of the application of prestressed concrete in the construction of a midcentury entertainment venue.

Narrative Description

The Celebrity Theatre is located near the corner of 32nd Street and Van Buren Street in the eastern portion of the city of Phoenix, approximately midway between city's downtown and its eastern boundary. The theater is located on approximately seven acres in a mixed usage area of the city. To the north are multi-family

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developments, including a trailer park and apartments; to the south is currently a parking lot zoned for eventual multiple family residential development and some commercial properties; west of the property is a public school; and to the east is a combination of multifamily residential and commercial properties. The property boundaries are Fillmore Street on the north, the aforementioned parking lot and commercial properties on the south, 30th Place on the west, and 32nd Street on the east (figure 1).



Figure 1. The area in the vicinity to the Celebrity Theatre. Courtesy of the Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

A wrought iron fence surrounds the property on the three sides with streets, the fourth side is a block wall. The property is primarily entered from 32nd Street, via a gated boulevard entrance, but another public gate is located at the southwest corner of the property. The latter gate is used primarily for exiting the property to 30th Place, a collector street. A restricted gate is also located in the north fence opening to Filmore Street,

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also a collector street. With the exception of the theater and a few landscaped islands, the property is paved in asphalt to provide parking for 768 cars (figure 2).



Figure 2. Celebrity Theatre property. Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

The theater building has an icosagonal (twenty-sided polygon) plan with a circumdiameter of 196 feet.¹ It has three levels, the uppermost main level being 2 feet above grade. There is also a stage level and a lower level (figure 3).

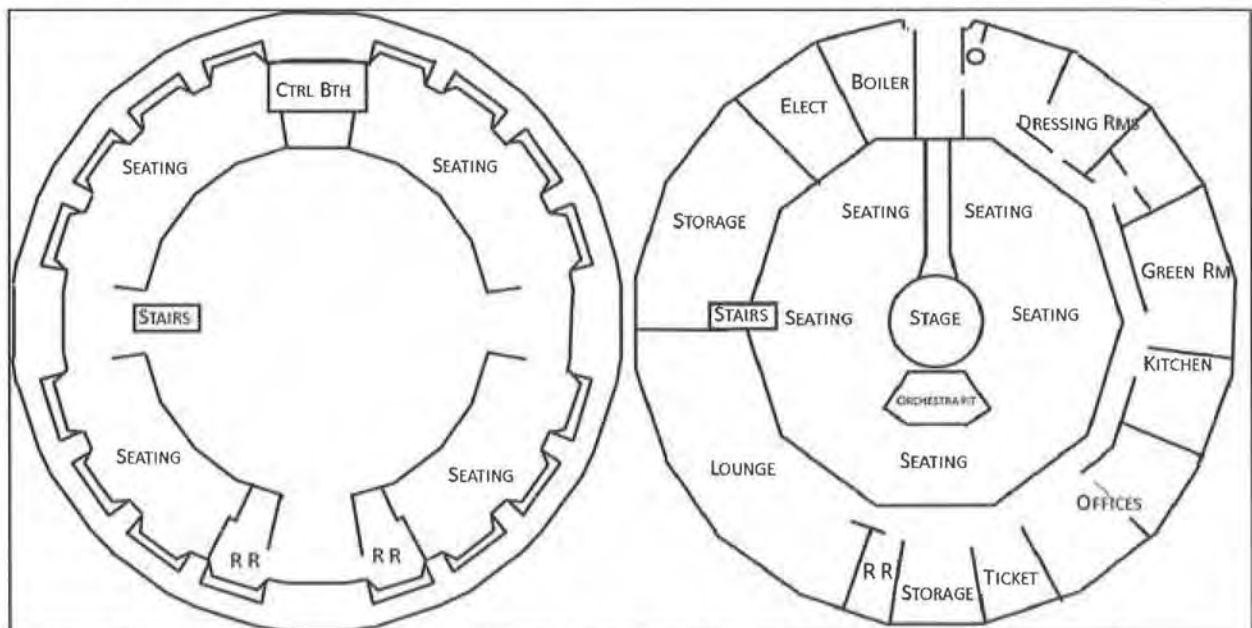


Figure 3. The main upper level (left) and stage and lower levels (right).

The main level is accessible by way of three entrances at the south, east, and west sides of the building (figures 4, 5 and 6, respectively). These entrances are accessed via three steps up to three bridges over a dry moat. An accessibility ramp leads to the bridge at the east entrance (figure 5)

¹ A circumdiameter is the diameter of a circumscribed circle that passes through all of the vertices of a polygon.
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Figure 4. Main entrance, facing north.



Figure 5. The accessibility ramp and east moat bridge, facing southwest.



Figure 6. West entrance.

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The north entrance (figure 7) is the restricted backstage entrance for performers and it provides access to the stage level and lower level where the green rooms are located. The north entrance is also flanked by ramps down to the lower level on each side. The lower level is also accessible via stairs that lead to the ticket office on the south side of the building.



Figure 7. Backstage entrance, facing south.

The building consists of forty, prestressed² concrete, wedge-shaped, double-haunched, double tees pieced together similar to a huge pie and supported by twenty T-shaped columns on belled caissons. The double tees are 88 feet long, cast in 5,000 psi concrete, post-tensioned with 1/2-inch tendons, and are in two designs referenced by their appearance; “hi-hats” are double tees that are higher in the center at the outer end (figure 8) and “flats” are double tees that are level across the top (figures 9).

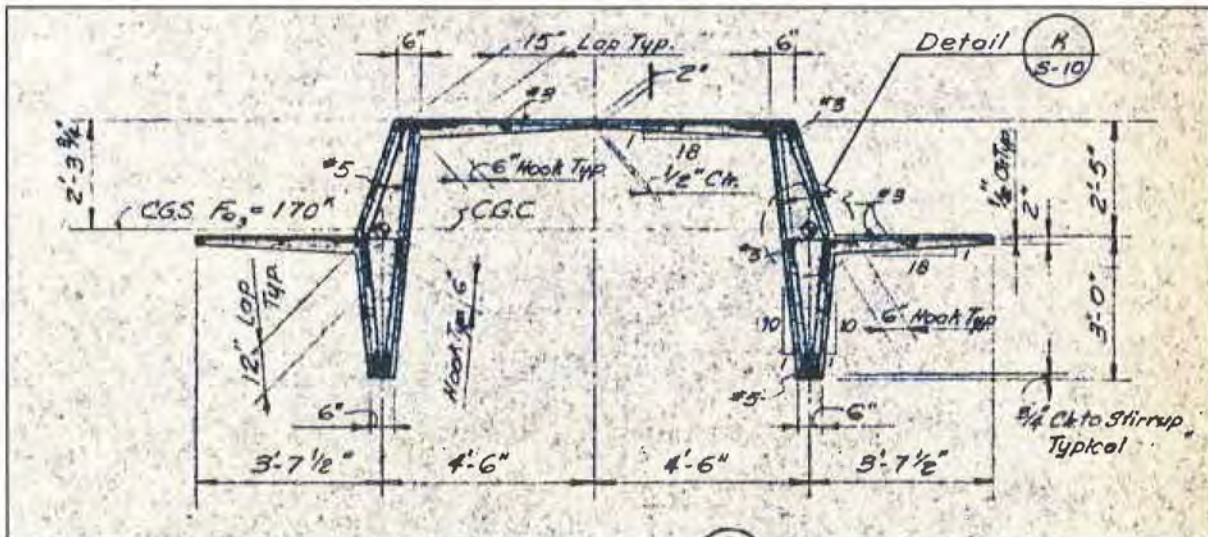


Figure 8. Front elevation of hi-hat double tee. Perry Neuschatz, Arizona Center.

² “Prestressing is a way of counteracting the effect of external loads on a structure by imposing a state of stresses contrary to the load effects. The most common way to achieve this is by means of tendons, which are stressed prior to final loading of the structure.” *fib Bulletin 31: Post-tensioning in Buildings*, Cambridge: Federation Internationale du Beton, 2005), 3-5.

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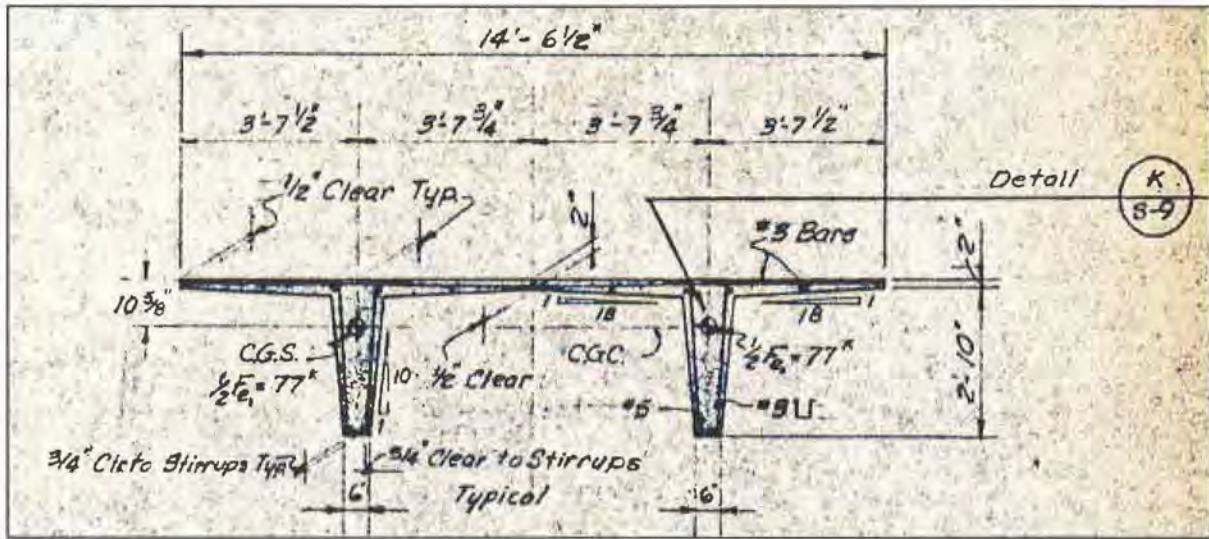


Figure 9. Front elevation of flat double tee. Perry Neuschatz, Arizona Center.

Twenty of the double tees are 50-ton hi-hats measuring 16.25 feet wide and 5.5 feet deep at the outside end and tapering to 1.5 feet wide and 2 feet deep at the center. The other twenty double tees are 40-ton flats measuring 14.5 feet wide and 3 feet deep at the outside end and taper to 1.5 feet wide and 2 feet deep. The hi-hats are mounted on top of the T-shaped columns; the flats span between the twenty columns and are connected to the columns with high tensile bolts.

A 60-foot diameter tension ring, cast in place with 280, 1/2-inch steel tendons, with 3.2 million pounds of tension holds the pieces together near the center. In conjunction with the shear connections and a 189-foot diameter, cast-in-place, reinforced concrete compression ring, there is no need for center support (figure 10). The roof has an inverted conical shape that, in combination with the exposed radial stems of the double tees, is designed to enhance the acoustics of the building and disperse soundwaves away from the center of the building (the location of the stage) while reducing heating and cooling requirements.

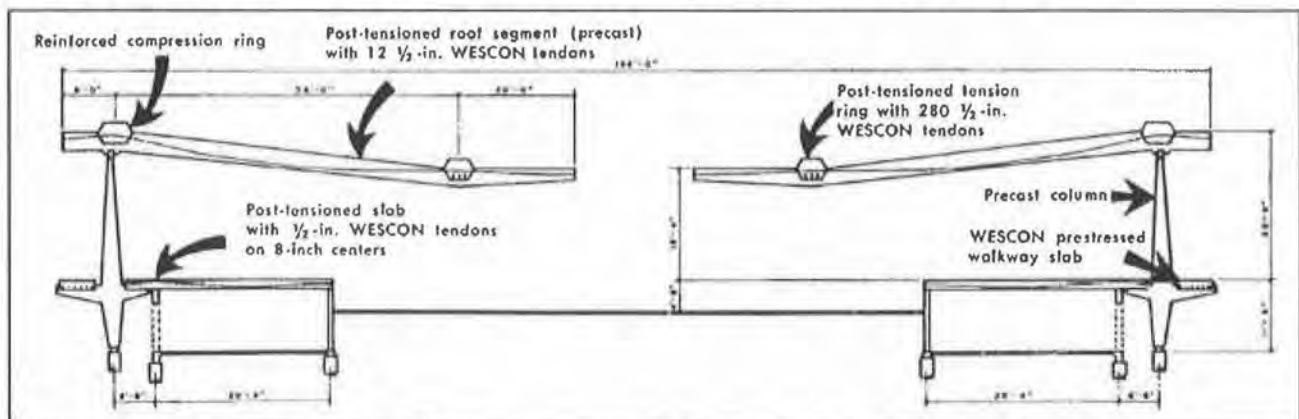


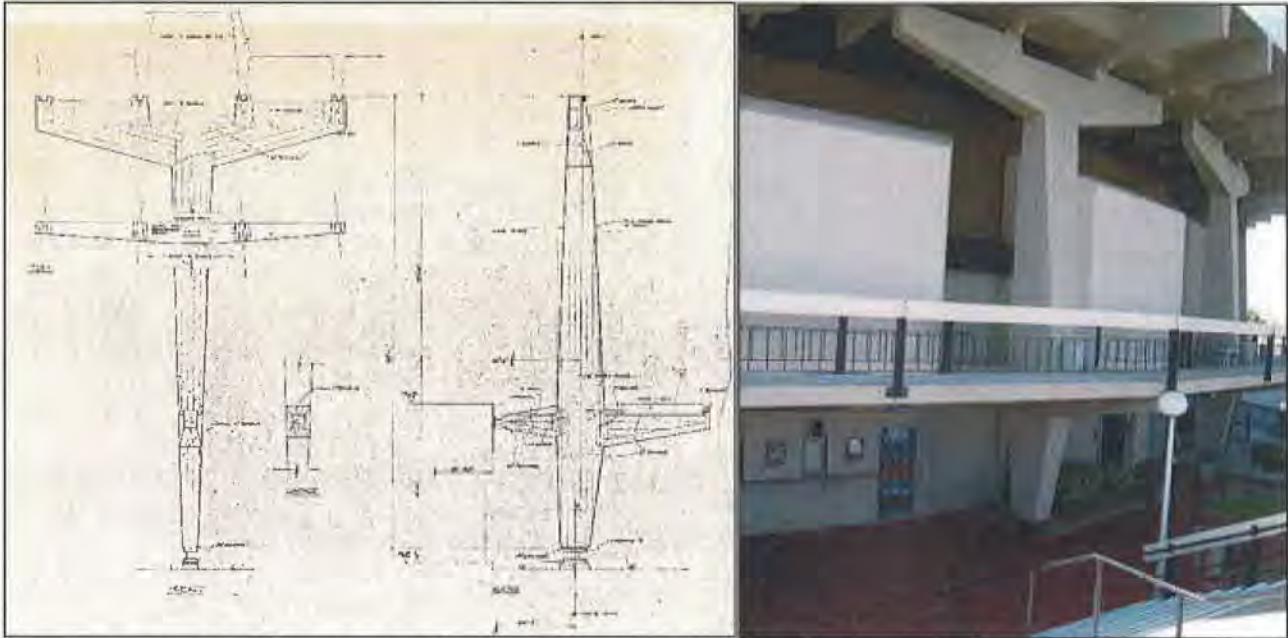
Figure 10. Cutaway of roof and rings. Wescon advertisement in *Builder/Architect*, September 1964.

Each of the twenty T-shaped columns weighs over 25 tons and are precast with a rough board finish (figure 11). The columns are 34 feet tall with an upper arm span of 22.5 feet and are supported by belled caissons measuring 5.5 feet in diameter and embedded 7 feet deep below the moat base. At 10.5 feet above the recessed moat base is a 12-inch thick, 10-foot wide, prestressed concrete slab supported by the lower arms

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of the columns. This slab creates an exterior walkway around the building (figure 12). The lower level holds the offices, ticket office, green and dressing rooms, storage, and support systems. Access to the various areas is via the moat or from stairs within the building.



Figures 11 and 12. Front and side elevation of T-shaped columns (left). Perry Neuschatz, Arizona Center. The dry moat and lower level and wrap around walkway (right). The ticket office is below the walkway on the left; the business office is on the right.

At the same level as the walkway, encircling the building within the columns and supported by reinforced cast-in-place concrete walls, is a 12-inch thick, 30-foot wide, prestressed, post-tensioned concrete slab creating the main level of the theater.

A revolving stage measuring 30 feet across is the centerpiece of the theater, allowing for the placement of seats around the entirety of the theater, with no seat further than 75 feet from the entertainment (figures 13 and 14). Rolling on thirty metal castors, each with a weight capacity of 700 pounds (for a combined operation capacity of 10 tons), the stage is operated by a motor with variable speeds, rotating in either direction, without being a distraction to the performer.

When added to the theater in 1969, promoter Buster Bonoff noted the stage's merits, "Entertainers experienced with the theater in the round will work the entire audience, but props or large instruments sometimes make it very difficult to move around. This revolving stage will ensure that everyone in the audience sees the show from the front."³

³ "Star stage to revolve," *Arizona Republic*, 12 January 1969, N.1.
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Figure 13. The revolving stage, facing north. The upper seats are on the main level.



Figure 14. The stage facing south.

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Integrity

When built, the theater was also used as a conference venue. At the time, folding walls were pulled out from storage closets to create individual conference rooms on the main, stage, and lower levels. Doorways between the projecting bays provided access to the main level conference rooms from the exterior walkway. When used as a theater for musical productions, removable risers and folding chairs were brought in and, when erected, blocked the conference room doorways. When the building ceased being used for conference purposes in 1972, the then-owners installed permanent risers and stored the folding walls into closets. The owners also expanded the seating into the projecting bays and enclosed the main level exterior conference room doorways. Conference rooms in the lower level were partitioned into offices and the kitchen area was reduced in size, as it was no longer needed for banquets. During the early 1980s, the large storage room on the lower level was no longer needed for storing risers and chairs and a portion of the space, along with conference room space, was converted into a lounge. A metal shed roof extends over the moat adjacent to the lounge to create shade for a patio area. Empty lots at the entrance, acquired in 1972, were paved in the late 1990s for additional parking.

These modifications are minor and do not impact the architectural character of the building. While the area has changed outside of the property, the seven-acre parking lot surrounding the building shields the theater from any impact to its setting. Though some changes from the original design are evident, the distinctive appearance of the building, with its exposed concrete double-tees supported by T-shaped columns, reflect both the aesthetics and the technological breakthrough of its design and method of construction.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1964

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Perry Neuschatz, architect
T. Y. Lin, structural engineer
Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, acoustic engineers
E. L. Farmer Construction Company, builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Celebrity Theatre is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level for Engineering. Designed by architect Perry Neuschatz, the building is an early example of the load balance design method applied to prestressed concrete as promoted by structural engineer T. Y. Lin. Neuschatz's exceptional design coupled with Lin's innovative method allowed for the safe and

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expedient application of prestressed, post-tensioned concrete to the creation of a conference and entertainment venue. Though its function has changed over time—it is no longer a conference center—it continues to embody the distinctive characteristics of its method of construction.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Engineering of the Celebrity Theatre

On April 25, 1963, HiwayHouse Hotels, Inc. held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new theater/conference facility. Heralded as “Arizona’s Largest Convention Auditorium and Cultural Center,” the invitation to the ceremony—advertised statewide in the *Arizona Republic* newspaper—touted it as “a theatre un-paralleled in modern design and acoustic perfection.”⁴

Architect Perry Maurice Neuschatz conceived the idea for the building. Born in New York City in 1930, Perry Neuschatz attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) earning a bachelor’s degree in Architecture in 1952. After a brief stint in the Airforce, Neuschatz worked for nine months as a junior draftsman with architect William F. Jenter in New York City. In 1954, he moved to California where he was hired as a junior draftsman by Richard J. Neutra. During the next three years, he became a senior draftsman, project architect and collaborator working alongside Dion Neutra, Benno Fischer, Serge Koschin, John Blanton, Toby Schmidbauer, Donald Polsky, and Gunnar Serneblad.⁵

In January 1958, Neuschatz started his own firm and within a few years was well-known for his residential work in the Los Angeles area. He also dabbled in commercial buildings such as the Conejo Village Professional Building (1959). The records are unclear as to how he acquired the contract for the new conference center and entertainment venue, which he titled “Arizona Center” in his working drawings, but the June 1962 issue of *Builder Architect* noted that Neuschatz and T. Y. Lin were selected for the project.⁶

The June 1962 issue provided an artist rendering of the future building which it described as a “circular structure (that) represents an interesting application of prestressed concrete in the roof—onsite forming of twelve 2 ½” thick, pie-shaped arch shells, and twelve bents ... anchored to concrete footings and joined at the apex.” The umbrella-shaped roof was to be 200 feet wide and 40 feet high at the center (figure 15). This design was, however, not built. While diligent research has not uncovered the reason for the design change, or if it was actually Neuschatz’s work (his children suggest that it is not), it may be due to the design consultation provided by Lin.⁷

Born in Fuzhou, China in 1912, Tung-Yen “T. Y.” Lin attended Jiao Tong University’s Tangshan Engineering College and earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1931. He then moved to California to begin graduate studies at University of California Berkeley. At UC Berkeley, Linn stood out with a master’s thesis on direct moment distribution that was published by the American Society of Civil Engineers.⁸

⁴ “Announcement,” *Arizona Republic*, 24 April 1963 and “Auditorium Work Starts At Phoenix,” 26 April 1963, A.7.

⁵ “Application for Membership” (Washington: American Institute of Architects, 1958), AP 13306; *Record Houses of 1956* (Concord: Architectural Record, 1956), 127-128.

⁶ *American Architects Directory* (New York: Bowker, 1962), 512; “Auditorium Convention Center,” *Builder Architect* (June 1962), 6

⁷ Email from Andy Neuschatz dated 12 June 1968

⁸ “T. Y. Lin, world renowned structural engineer, dies at 91,” *UC Berkeley News*, 18 November 2003, website: www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/11/18_lin.shtml, accessed 3 April 2018.

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Figure 15. Proposed HiwayHouse Motor Hotel Auditorium-Convention Center. Builder/Architect June 1962.

After earning a master's degree in 1933, Lin returned to China to work with the Ministry of Railways and within four-years became the chief bridge engineer for the Yunnan-Chongqing Railway where he oversaw the survey, design, and construction of over a thousand bridges in the mountainous regions of China. In 1946, the engineer accepted a faculty position at UC Berkeley where he began groundbreaking research in the use of prestressed concrete, which simplified the design process and led to the popularization and perfection of the material for use in high-rises and long-span structures that capable of bearing heavy loads and withstanding hurricanes and earthquakes. He founded the firm T. Y. Lin and Associates in 1954 to promote the real-world application of his theories. Lin also simultaneously served as the chair of the Division of Structural Engineering and Structural Mechanics and as director of the Structural Engineering Laboratory at U.C. Berkeley at the time of his work on the conference center.⁹

Prior to 1963, the analysis techniques for prestressed concrete members were "tedious, highly mathematical, and non-intuitive." That year, Lin published a paper in the *American Concrete Institute Journal* on an analysis method called "load balancing," demonstrating how, during design, the steel tendons could be thought of as being replaced by the loads they exert on the concrete member thereby allowing the structure to be designed as any non-stressed structure. Hence, using Lin's technique, post-tensioned structures could be fully and accurately analyzed using any standard structural engineering technique. Essentially, T.Y. Lin's load balancing method revolutionized the construction industry in the early 1960s. The Celebrity Theatre (then known as the HiwayHouse Motor Hotel Auditorium-Convention Center) was an early example of this method put into a real-time application.¹⁰

Bolt, Beranek, and Newman provided acoustical consultation and designed the sound system for the then-new building. The acoustical engineering firm was founded in 1948 by MIT Professors Leo Beranek and

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tyson Dinges, "The History of Prestressed Concrete: 1888 to 1963," master's thesis (Kansas State University, 2009), 81.

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Richard Bolt and one of Bolt's former students Robert Newman. By 1962 they had ample experience working on projects such as the Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center in New York, and the Kresge Auditorium at MIT. By the time the new HiwayHouse convention center and theater was built, they were considered by many to be the world's leading acoustic consultants to government and industry.¹¹

BBN, as they became known, soon left the acoustics industry and went on to explore the uses of computers for medical records and libraries. In 1969, the company developed the technology for creating ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) the predecessor of today's Internet.

E. L. Farmer Construction Company received the contract to erect the new building. The company was owned and operated by Evert L. Farmer, who entered the construction business in 1937 with Herbert Anderson and later partnered with Fritz Godfrey before branching out under one name in the late 1950s. Considered one of the largest residential builders in Arizona, E. L. Farmer Construction Company also built office buildings, shopping centers, restaurants, and bowling alleys until the death of Farmer in 1975.¹²

At the time of construction, the double tees were considered some of the heaviest in the nation, even though the aggregate used in the concrete was Ridgelite. Produced by the Pacific Lightweight Products of California, Ridgelite was made from pulverized clay with the moisture extruded under high pressure and then baked at a temperature of around 2000° F. The clay pieces become vitreous with a hard-ceramic glaze and expanded interior composed of microscopic, non-interconnected voids making the material intrinsically lightweight but structurally strong.¹³

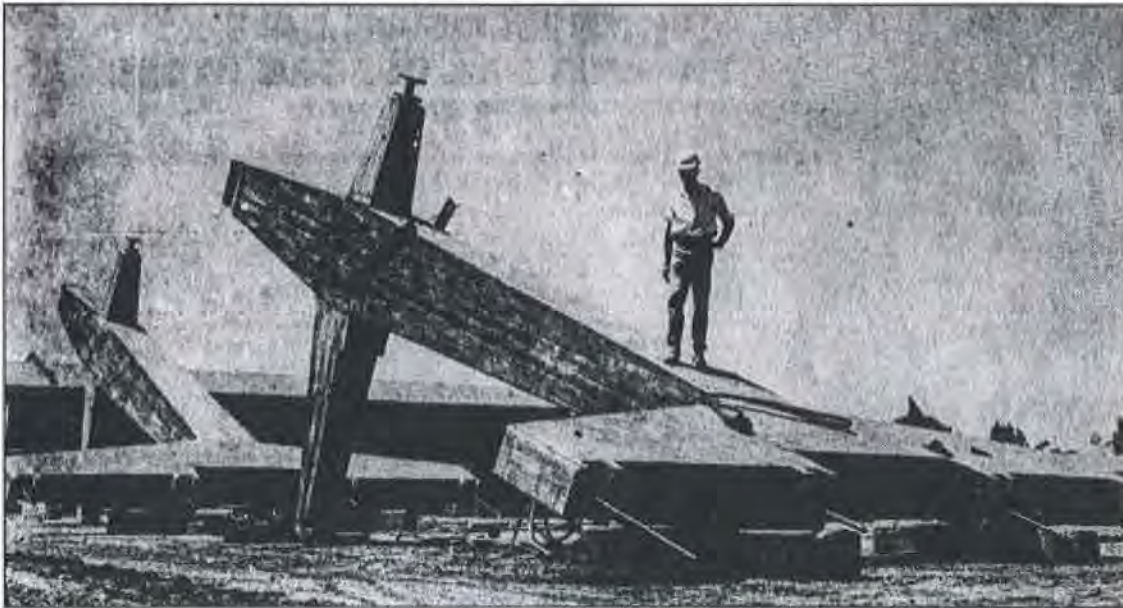


Figure 16. Construction of the T-shaped columns. *Arizona Republic*, 28 July 1963.

¹¹ "Acoustics Blend Art And Science," *Indianapolis Star*, 8.7; "Cannon To Test 'Tuning' Of Hall," *Arizona Daily Star*, 15 May 1962, B.2; "Advertisement," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 26 October 1964, 8B and *Star-Gazette*, 11 November 1964, 20.

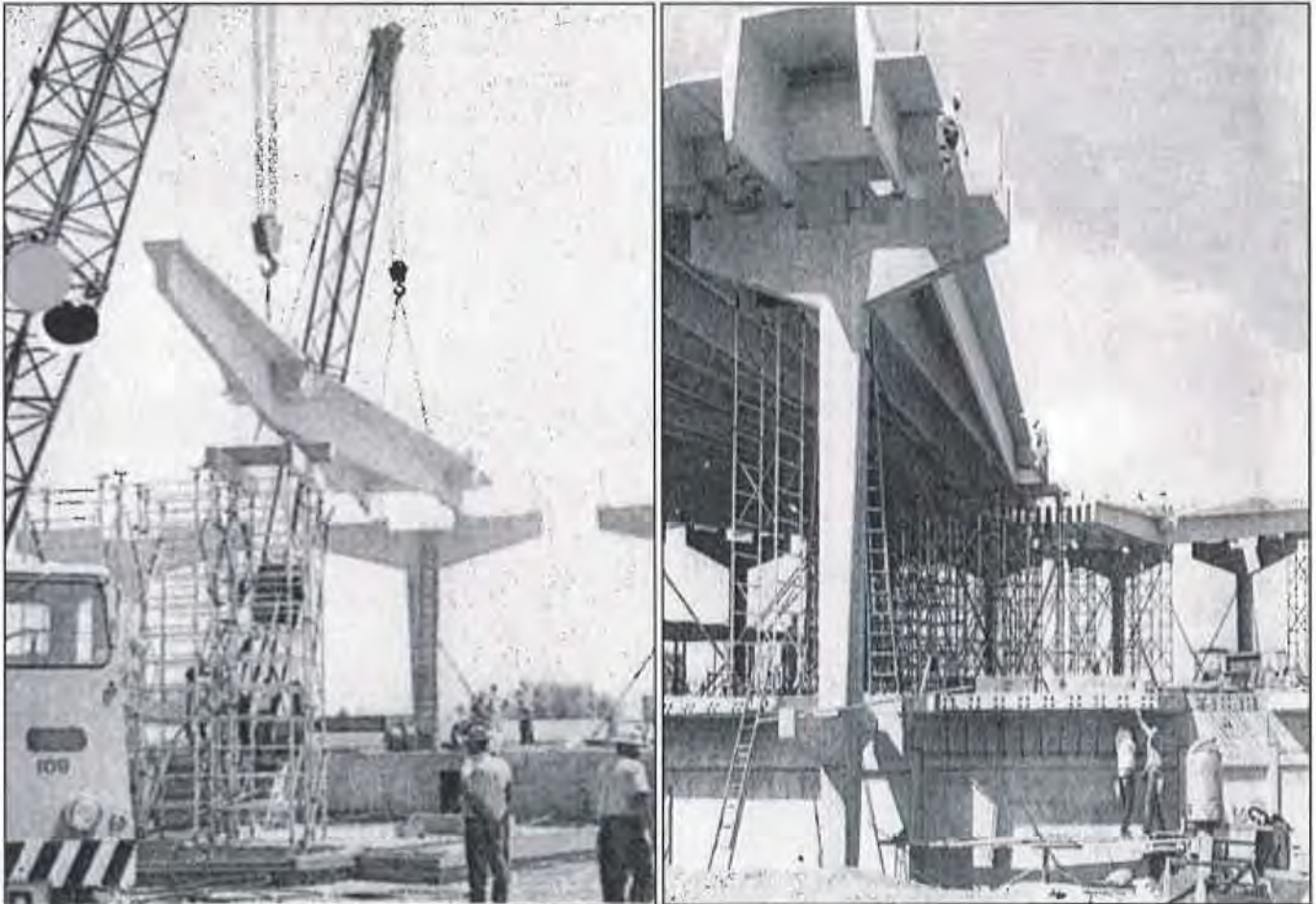
¹² "Advertisement," 9 February 1957, 33; "Rental Project Keys Go To County Housing Group," 13 June 1954, 3; "Evert L. Farmer," 29 July 1975, B15, and "James Farmer," 6 June 1982 AA17; "Facing demolition, historic public housing saved near downtown Phoenix," <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/05/08/historic-public-housing-saved-demolition-near-downtown-phoenix/83504552/>, accessed 4 April 2018.

¹³ "Process for the Production of Concrete Building Products," Patent 5,108,679 (Washington: United States Patent Office, 1992),5.

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The T-shaped columns were cast on site (figure 16). Because of the weight, the double tees were cast on site using two molds, one for each type. Using hydraulic jacks to remove the double tees from their casting beds, two cranes with the capacity of 50 and 75 tons then lifted the double tees into place (figures 17-18), positioning them on the T-shaped columns.¹⁴



Figures 17 and 18. Lifting and placing the double tees. *Builder/Architect*, September 1964.

Scaffolding supported the center of the double tees until all of them were in place. Then 280 steel strands within the 60-foot diameter cast-in-place tension ring, with a cross section of 3 feet by 4 feet, were tensioned to a total of 3.2 million pounds lifting the tees off of the scaffolding.¹⁵

The total cost for the building was \$1.5 million and it was almost completed in time for its first theatrical performance scheduled for January 13, 1964, Rogers and Hammerstein's musical, "South Pacific," starring Betsy Palmer. A day earlier, construction contractor Evert Farmer acknowledged that the work was incomplete. While the parking lot was paved, and lighting and air conditioning installed, the lower level remained under construction. Farmer stated the reason the work was still ongoing was due to his company working for eight months on a project the scale of which would normally require a year. According to architect Perry Neuschatz, the design of the roof saved about three months construction time, as compared with other then-contemporary systems, and eliminated between \$1 and \$2 per square foot for falsework

¹⁴ "Phoenix Convention Center Captures National Honors," *Builder/Architect* (September 1964), 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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(temporary frameworks used in construction). This brought the construction cost of the roof, which weighs almost 2,000 tons, to \$3.75 per square foot. The double tees cured for 36 hours before post-tensioning, and it took only one hour to put each double tee in place. However, according to Walter Schmidt, the construction company superintendent, the crews also worked six days a week to meet the deadline, casting six double tees and three columns a week.¹⁶

At its 1964 annual meeting, the Prestressed Concrete Institute gave the building top honors out of hundreds of entries. As noted collectively by the judges, "Here is an excellent example of a design which is entirely functional yet achieves a striking appearance. Obviously, the architect did not have a simple problem. He had to consider the diverse uses of space, the environment, cost factors, acoustical requirements, and so on. The building has elegance and unity and is true to its purpose and environment."¹⁷

After construction, Perry Neuschatz continued his work primarily in California, though he designed a movie theater – the Cinerama – in Las Vegas, which opened in 1965. T. Y. Lin returned to Phoenix in to provide engineering consultation to the architectural firm of Lescher and Mahoney in their design of the Veterans Memorial Coliseum (1965). Lin was eventually involved in the construction of sports and entertainment venues in other states, noting in an interview, "...there are so many of them, that our firm (T. Y. Lin, International) had been living on them for a few years. Everybody was building coliseums and things of the sort."¹⁸

Historical Background

In the winter of 1956-1957, the Del Webb Construction Company built the HiwayHouse,¹⁹ a 291-unit motor hotel located on thirteen acres at the northwest corner of 32nd Street and Van Buren Street (figure 19). It had hexagonal walks enclosing rose gardens and a putting green with a sand trap. A small railroad, three quarters of a mile long, passed in front of the office and circled the interior apartments. The then-new hospitality venue had banquet rooms with a public address system, platforms for display purposes, and touted its reasonable rates for conventions, business meetings, and wedding parties.²⁰

¹⁶ "Spectacular Theater in Round To Open With 'South Pacific'," *Arizona Journal*, 29 December 1963, 18; "Business Briefs," *Phoenix Magazine* (January 1964), 8; "Star Theater Job Readied For Opening," *Arizona Republic*, 12 January 1964, E-5.

¹⁷ "Phoenix Convention Center Captures National Honors," *Builder/Architect* (September 1964), 10.

¹⁸ "Roof on Coliseum Of Unique Design," *Arizona Republic*, 28 June 1964, E1-2 and "On the Town With Vic Wilmot," 22 July 1964, 18; Quote from T. Y. Lin, "The Father of Prestressed Concrete: Teaching Engineers, Bridging Rivers and Borders, 1931 to 1999," an oral history conducted in 1999 by Eleanor Swent, Regional Oral History Office (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, University of California, 2001), 218.

¹⁹ Note: though the spelling varies in newspapers articles, the official spelling is HiwayHouse with no space.

²⁰ "\$533,000 Permit Granted Hiway House," *Arizona Republic*, 21 September 1956, 43. "Advertisement," *Arizona Republic*, 16 April 1957, 10. "Building Record Set On 250-Room Hotel," *Arizona Republic*, 27 January 1957, 5.10.

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Figure 19. The HiwayHouse ca. 1959. Flood Control District of Maricopa County.

The development of the HiwayHouse coincided with the completion of two other major hotel conference facilities, the Valley Ho and the Safari in Scottsdale, east of Phoenix. All three provided banquet facilities which were used for attracting conventions to the Salt River Valley. Instead of seeing the new construction as competition, the management from three popular resorts, the Royal Palms, Camelback Inn, and Biltmore in northeast Phoenix, acknowledged the importance of conventions to the area as they resulted in an increase in business and would potentially extend the tourism season. Their prophecies soon came to fruition.²¹

By 1958, the hotel-motel accommodation industry was growing quickly, adding not only to the number of hotel guest rooms to the Phoenix market, but also to the number of meeting facilities. That year, the long-established Camelback Inn and Arizona Manor added space for conventions and the 231-room Phoenix Caravan and 278-room Ramada Inn were planned additions to the big motor hotel line up. Actively

²¹ Valley Racks Up Best Tourist Season," *Arizona Republic*, 5 May 1957, 2.14.
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attracting new clientele, the busy season expanded from January through March to November through May.²²

That year, the Del Webb Corporation, the parent company of the Del Webb Construction Company, added motor-hotel ownership to its portfolio, forming the Del E. Webb Hotel Company and purchasing the HiwayHouse chain. The company also built a new headquarters for its hospitality company chain at 3130 East Van Buren Street, adjacent to the motel property (this association would lead to legends in later years of Del Webb's construction of the Celebrity Theatre). Almost immediately, the company began development on another HiwayHouse on Grand Avenue near downtown Phoenix and another in Albuquerque.²³

Three years later, in 1961, the Del E. Webb Hotel Company sold ten of its HiwayHouse motor hotels for \$6.5 million to Arizona Manor owners Gus W. Lampe and George J. Gottfried who, with some business associates, formed the HiwayHouse Hotels, Inc. Within a short time, the partners decided to expand on the HiwayHouse at 32nd Street and Van Buren Street by adding a free-standing multiuse convention facility that would include use as a theater in the round.²⁴

The theater in the round component was the brainchild of Burton L. "Buster" Bonoff, a New England theater owner-operator who came from a line of theater owner-operators. His grandparents, Charlie and Minnie Bonoff immigrated to the United States from the Ukraine in the 1890s, settling in Brooklyn, New York around the turn of the twentieth century. The couple eventually moved to Madison, Connecticut where they opened a toy store, dry goods store, and a theater, operating the business with sons Irving and Leo. Born in 1924, Burton was the son of Leo who was running a theater in Providence Rhode Island in 1930. The family continued to operate theaters in New England under Leo's leadership after the deaths of Charlie in 1929 and Irving in 1938. The family sold the theater and two stores in 1953 and Leo became the town clerk.²⁵

The following year, police arrested Burton Bonoff and his father-in-law Samuel Wasserman, for showing the musical, *The French Line* at the Court Square Theater in Springfield, Massachusetts. Apparently, the arresting officers deemed Jane Russell's dancing—filmed in 3D—to be indecent. The court disagreed, Judge Thomas J. O'Malley ruling, "I've seen on TV scenes I consider just as distasteful," and opinioned Russell's dance in the number "Lookin' for Trouble" as "course and vulgar" but not indecent within the meaning of the law and the two were acquitted. This episode may have been the catalyst that led Bonoff to change venues.²⁶

²² "Valley Innkeepers Lucky—And More," *Arizona Republic*, 9 November 1958, 2.15 and "Motor Hotels Hurry To Reach Set Deadline," 19 January 1959, 5.20.

²³ "Phoenix Headquarters For Motor Hotel Chain," *Arizona Republic*, 25 May 1958, 2.5 and "Webb To Erect New \$1 Million Hiway House (sic)," 9 October 1968, 16.

²⁴ "Webb Sells 10 Hiway Houses (sic) At \$6½ Million," *Arizona Republic*, 14 July 1961, 1.

²⁵ *Twelfth Census of the United States* (Washington: Census Bureau, 1900), Brooklyn Ward 21, Kings, New York, Enumeration District 334, 10-11; *Thirteenth Census of the United States* (1910), Brooklyn Ward 25, Enumeration District 704, 118; ; *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (1930), Providence, Providence, Rhode Island, Enumeration District 3, 5A and Madison, New Haven, Connecticut, Enumeration District 145, 8B; *Hartford Courant*, "Madison Theater Man Dies After Accident," 21 August 1929, 1, "Corporation Papers Filed," 19 June 1935, 14, "I.M. Bonoff, Madison Theater Owner, Dies," 11 February 1938, 2, "Corporation Papers Filed," 11 January 1939, 16, "Theater To Be Sold," 3 November 1953, 18, and "Leo Bonoff: Town History By Himself," 8 January 1973, 21.

²⁶ "Theater Men Acquitted in Springfield Case," *Hartford Courant*, 22 May 1954, 6.

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In 1954, Bonoff, with Robert Lappin of Middleton, Connecticut, and Ben Segal of New Haven, launched the Warwick Musical Theatre in Warwick, Rhode Island. Unlike the bricks and mortar theaters playing movies year-round, this was a seasonal operation produced under an immense tent. This was a new venture for Bonoff, but not a new business; tent repertoire theatre became an established form of American entertainment in the late nineteenth century and reached its zenith in the 1920s as the motion picture industry acquired dominance over indoor theaters. Though the medium was in decline during the Depression, it made somewhat of a comeback in the decades following World War II.²⁷

Unlike the original travelling tent show, in this case the tents were stationary for an entire summer season and offered various shows for a week at a time. Following this trend, Segal opened the Oakdale Theatre in Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1954. Not only was the Oakdale a tent theatre, it also provided performances in the theatre-in-the-round format, where the stage is surrounded by the audience. The following year, Bonoff partnered with Segal in the Warwick Musical Theatre.²⁸

The theaters initially produced summer stock musicals, using Equity actors, but it was not easy to compete with movie theaters where fans could see their favorite actors. As a result, around 1959, Segal and Bonoff began traveling to Hollywood, California, to enlist television and movie celebrities for their Broadway productions. The two soon saw record profits and were joined by Bob Hall, Segal's partner in the Carousel Theatre in Framingham, Massachusetts and Melody Fair in Buffalo, New York.²⁹

It was a circuit for the actors, performing for a week at a time at each venue, filling out a summer season. After close of the 1962 season, the *Arizona Republic* newspaper announced that Burton Bonoff signed a lease with the HiwayHouse on east Van Buren Street to exclusively produce musicals on the site of what would be known seasonally as the Phoenix Star Theater and Convention Center. The announcement gave a project completion date of February 15, 1963 and noted that "occasional concerts by such talent as Harry Belafonte, Danny Kaye, and Jose Greco would be interspersed among the musicals."³⁰

Two decades later, Betsy Palmer recalled a rainstorm when the theater first opened, "It rained opening night and the roof leaked so management passed out umbrellas. It still makes me laugh to think of singing 'I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair' to an audience that was huddled under umbrellas."³¹ With an incomplete building, Ms. Palmer's story seems entirely plausible. However, Phoenix had no measurable rain between November 21, 1963 and January 23, 1964. Her performances ran from January 13 through 25, so it may be that she had the dates wrong and the leaking roof occurred later in the production schedule.³²

Buster Bonoff's lease of the building ran from January through April and allowed him to use the HiwayHouse liquor license. After a successful first season, Buster Bonoff continued to use the conference center as the Phoenix Star Theatre for the next eight years, until the Phoenix Civic Plaza and Phoenix Symphony Hall opened. In the meantime, the motor-hotel and its multiuse conference center changed both owners and brands. In 1967, the Travelodge Corporation purchased the hotel and theater-conference center

²⁷ ; Jerry L. Martin, *Henry L. Brunk and Brunk's Comedians: Tent Repertoire Empire of the Southwest* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1984), 1-4; "Death Notices: Segal, Ben," *Hartford Courant*, 1 January 2003, B6.

²⁸ "Gossip of the Rialto," *Bridgeport Post*, 5 June 1955, B16.

²⁹ "Gossip of the Rialto," *Bridgeport Post*, 20 March 1960, B10; "Siegel Puts Tent in 'Contented,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1960, 4.13, "The Tent-Show Boys Strike Again," 24 March 1961, 3.11, and "Tent-Show Pair Line Up Stars," 27 March 1962, 4.11.

³⁰ "Oakdale Tent Signs Flock Of Top Stars," *Hartford Courant*, 2 April 1961, 8B; "Deal All Set Here For Live Musicals," *Arizona Republic*, 27 October 1962, 36.

³¹ "'Gigi' comes to ASU," *Arizona Republic*, 26 April 1985, SE7.

³² "Showers Might Not Stay Away From City Today," *Arizona Republic*, 23 January 1964, A.5.

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and changed the name to the Phoenix Airport Travelodge. When not in use as the Phoenix Star Theatre, the conference center-theater was known as the TraveLodge Convention and Theater Center.³³

The revolving stage became a mainstay in 1969, the sixth season of the Phoenix Star Theater. Liberace was the featured opening act of the season on January 13, and the stage was tested the day of the performance and it was not without concerns. While it had tested fine, it had not been tried for an entire evening with a glass-topped grand piano, twenty-seven musicians, and two dozen Esso oil barrels. Joining the flamboyant singer as his orchestra was the 26-member Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band and there were issues with fitting all of their oil drum instruments on the stage around the large piano. That day, Buster Bonoff pointed out to the highest paid performer of his time, "If you had a spinet piano, you'd have room." Liberace replied with a proposal for his own substitution, "I have a marvelous idea. I have a player piano at home. Why don't I just send it along with pictures (of myself)?"³⁴ Initially a novelty, the revolving stage became an important aspect for the theater.

Celebrity Theatre

In 1972, Max Wexler, a former Chicago and New Orleans Symphony violinist, bought the Phoenix Airport TraveLodge and Buster Bonoff moved the Phoenix Star Theatre to the then-recently built Symphony Hall. Though a multiuse facility, the convention and theater center was used only periodically for conferences. After the first year of construction, its primary use was as an entertainment venue, hosting concerts, boxing matches, and other events using the theater format. Shortly after purchasing the building, Wexler rebranded the building the Celebrity Theatre and made it a year-round operation, by replacing the temporary seat risers and folding chairs with permanent risers and fixed theater seating. In combination with the revolving stage, the theater became well-known for both its theater-in-the-round format and for its intimate seating—there being no seat located than 75 feet from the stage.³⁵

The Phoenix Airport TraveLodge née HiwayHouse motel portion of the property did not fare as well. Shortly after its purchase in 1972 it was rebranded the International Airport Motel. It almost immediately began having financial problems and by the end of the decade had been leased as a women's correctional facility. It was demolished in 2006.³⁶

The theater, as a separate operation from the motel, survived the latter's demise. Though it changed hands repeatedly over the years, the Celebrity Theatre continues to be one of Arizona's best concert venues. Often overlooked by the multitude of music fans who enter its doors every year, Perry Neuschatz's distinctive design using T. Y. Lin's pioneering engineering concepts remains evident in the building and its historic significance was recognized by the City of Phoenix, which added the property to the Phoenix Historic Property Register in 2013. The theater was inducted into the Arizona Music and Entertainment Hall of Fame in 2017 for its history as an entertainment venue, but its exceptional design and the distinctive characteristics of its method of construction make it eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

³³ "Spectacular Theater in Round To Open With 'South Pacific,'" *Arizona Journal*, 29 December 1963, 18; "Travelodge Buys HiwayHouse Hotel," *Arizona Republic*, 2 December 1967, 69

³⁴ "Buster Bonoff; a-round and a-round he goes," *Arizona Republic*, 16 February 1969, Arizona.58.

³⁵, "Couple buys airport hotel and theater," *Arizona Republic*, 4 March 1972, 31, "Travelodge work planned," 29 May 1972, 25, "Celebrity now solely for entertainment," 13 June 1972, 28.

³⁶ "Fire damage to empty hotel put at \$20,000," *Arizona Republic*, 30 November 1977, B1; "Giggles in women's prison mask grim pasts," *Arizona Daily Star*, 28 December 1980, K1.

Celebrity Theatre
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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 7

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 33.454439 | Longitude: -112.014750 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

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UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

That area between 31st Place, 32nd Street, Fillmore Street, and the block wall separating this property from those directly to the south, coinciding the Maricopa County parcels numbered 121-67-001A, 121-67-002A, 121-67-007, 121-67-008, 121-67-009A, and 121-67-010F.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The area selected includes the Celebrity Theater and its surrounding parking lot.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Vincent S. Murray, Architectural Historian
organization: Arizona Historical Research
street & number: 2825 N. 26th Place
city or town: Phoenix state: Arizona zip code: 85008
e-mail vince@azhistory.net
telephone: (480)-829-0267
date: November 21, 2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Sketch Map. Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Celebrity Theatre

City or Vicinity: Phoenix

County: Maricopa

State: Arizona

Photographer: Vincent Murray

Date Photographed: May 10, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 9. The theater from the corner of 32nd Street and Fillmore Street, facing southwest.
- 2 of 9. East entrance, facing west.
- 3 of 9. Main entrance, facing north.
- 4 of 9. West entrance facing northeast.
- 5 of 9. North (restricted) entrance, facing.
- 6 of 9. Moat, facing south.
- 7 of 9. Covered patio area in moat, facing southeast.

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8 of 9. Revolving stage and north (restricted entrance), facing north.

9 of 9. Revolving stage, facing south.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Photographs:



Photograph 1. The theater from the corner of 32nd Street and Fillmore Street, facing southwest.

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Photograph 2. East entrance, facing west.

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Photograph 3. Main entrance, facing north.

Celebrity Theatre
Name of Property

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Photograph 4. West entrance facing northeast.

Celebrity Theatre
Name of Property

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Photograph 5. North (restricted) entrance, facing.

Celebrity Theatre
Name of Property

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Photograph 6. Moat, facing south.

Celebrity Theatre
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Photograph 7. Covered patio area in moat, facing southeast.

Celebrity Theatre
Name of Property

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Photograph 8. Revolving stage and north (restricted entrance), facing north.

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Photograph 9. Revolving stage, facing south.



N 30TH PL



Celebrity Theatre









FIRE DEPT
SPRINKLER
RISER RM

FIRE DEPT
ACCESS

ESS
Through these doors pass
some of the most talented people
in the world.

BACK STAGE
ENTRANCE

Celebrity
Theatre









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Celebrity Theatre

Multiple Name:

State & County: ARIZONA, Maricopa

Date Received: 12/10/2018 Date of Pending List: 1/28/2019 2:48:57 PM Date of 16th Day: 1/14/2019 Date of 45th Day: 1/24/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100003323

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 1/24/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Automatic listing due to lapse in appropriations.

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed 

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2278

Date

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

IRRADIATED

**ARIZONA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE (SHPO)
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION
TRANSMITTAL FORM
FEDERAL EXPRESS**

DATE: November 26, 2018

TO:

**Joy Beasley
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, D.C. 20240**

FROM:

**William Collins
National Register Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office
1100 West Washington Street
Phoenix AZ 85007**

National Register Nomination New Submittal:

**Celebrity Theatre
Phoenix, Maricopa County, Arizona**

**Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at
wcollins@azstateparks.gov or 602.542.7159.**