

PABST THEATER

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Pabst Theater

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 144 East Wells Street

Not for publication: _____

City/Town: Milwaukee

Vicinity: _____

State: WI

County: Milwaukee

Code: 55

Zip Code: 53202

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

- ___:Private
- X:Public-local
- ___:Public-State
- ___:Public-Federal

Category of Property

- X:Building(s)
- ___:District
- ___:Site
- ___:Structure
- ___:Object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

- 1:Buildings
- ___:Sites
- ___:Structures
- ___:Objects
- 1:Total

Noncontributing

- ___:Buildings
- ___:Sites
- ___:Structures
- ___:Objects
- 0:Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ 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 ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

Date

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

Date

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

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):

Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: THEATER

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: THEATER

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification

LATE VICTORIAN:

ITALIANATE

Materials

Foundation: CONCRETE

Walls: SANDSTONE; BRICK

Roof: SLATE

Other: TERRA COTTA

WROUGHT-IRON

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Page 4**DESCRIBE PRESENT AND HISTORIC PHYSICAL APPEARANCE.****SUMMARY¹**

The Pabst Theater, a Milwaukee showplace for nearly a century, stands on the north side of E. Wells Street just west and across the street from the City Hall. It faces south, with its long axis oriented east-west. It is bounded on the east by a small park, and on the north and west by the Milwaukee Center complex. It has been linked to that complex by a compatibly designed hyphen that joins the theater only at the east end of the Pabst's north facade.

The Pabst is a rectangular building measuring some 148' east-west by 80' north-south. A grand example of Victorian Baroque architecture, owing a debt to the Italian Renaissance in its style, it is opulent and highly decorated. The interior is particularly lavish. (The theater will be described here as restored in 1975-76.)

EXTERIOR

On the first story, the south (main facade) and west walls are chiefly light gray sandstone. Above that level they are St. Louis pressed brick, with ornament of stone, brick, terra cotta, and pressed metal.

The south elevation's most noticeable feature is a single-story finely detailed wrought-iron porch with a flat roof that extends over the sidewalk the eastern two-thirds of the width of the facade. The north wall is Milwaukee common brick, as was the east wall, which was formerly a party wall. The latter wall remained rough and unpainted after the removal in the early 1930s of a surviving portion of the theater that preceded the Pabst on the site, and which had functioned as the Pabst cafe and office building since 1895. In the 1975-76 restoration of the Pabst the east wall was faced by a new stone and brick curtain wall with blind arcading to harmonize better with the front facade and the facades of neighboring buildings.²

¹ The basic sources used in preparing this description include the Historic American Buildings Survey materials (HABS WIS-269) for the Pabst Theater, prepared in 1971 by John Thiel and Mary Ellen Wietczykowski; the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Pabst prepared by Ms. Wietzykoski as Chairman of the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission in 1972; and the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Plankinton/Wells/Water Street Historic District, prepared by Les Vollmert et al. of the Milwaukee Department of City Development in 1986. Additional materials compiled by Phil Procter, Executive Director of the Theater, and James Rankin have been used to revise and update the older data.

² Mark A. Pfaller, "Pabst Theater, The Architect as a Makeup Artist," Wisconsin Architect (November 1976): 4-7. Architect Pfaller performed the 1975-76 restoration.

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The Pabst's main entrance is in a "pavilion" near the east end of the south elevation. Here two sets of double doors of pressed metal in foliated forms give access to the foyer, which opens into the main lobby. These doors are surmounted by arched transom lights and are flanked by polished black granite columns, with a like column between the pairs of doors.

The upper portion of the entrance pavilion of the theater is articulated with four brick pilasters with terra-cotta composite capitals surmounted by a decorative blind balustrade flanking a bold relief, terra-cotta, wreath-enframed cartouche emblazoned with the letter "P". Above the terra-cotta modillion cornice are the words "Pabst Theater," in high relief terra-cotta, crowned by a foliated triangular pediment surmounted by a gilded harp flanked by two gilded urns.

The middle section of the facade is divided into a central projecting bay flanked by single, arcaded side bays with blind fenestration. There are two sets of rectangular double fire doors near the center of the facade in the low symmetrical center section. The bowed central bay contains a pedimented door leading to the porch roof at the second-story level. The third-story level is ornamented with banded brick masonry and paired terra-cotta columns cantilevered out from the arcade on plinths flanking a curving balcony with an elaborate wrought iron railing. Above the balcony door a shallow arch shelters a terra-cotta bust of a female figure set in front of a blind fan. Above the terra-cotta modillion cornice is a parapet balustrade.

The west pavilion is divided into three blind arcades extending from the second through the third stories above the plain, limestone-clad, first-story level, where there is an iron stage door near the west end. The west pavilion is unified with the central section of the facade by the continuation of the terra-cotta cornice and banded brickwork across the upper part of the elevation.

There are two rectangular metal stage doors in the west elevation.

A gambrel roof, with an air vent at the center of the main ridge, covers the auditorium and public areas on the east. The stage, on the west end, is covered by a higher convex mansard of slate, the flat top of which is surrounded by ornamental iron cresting.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan

Within the building, the theater is oriented east-west, having lobbies, public cloakrooms, restrooms, and staircases on the east; the stage dressing rooms, equipment rooms, and the like on the west; and the domed and drum shaped auditorium between. The auditorium proper has a main level and two balconies and seats nearly 1400 persons.

On the main level at the east end are the foyer, house manager's office, main lobby, and auxiliary spaces. To the west is the theater proper and, to its west, the stage. Backstage, at stage level, are two principal dressing rooms with restrooms.

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The second level is that of the mezzanine lobby and first balcony, with storage rooms. On the top level are the second balcony and restrooms.

Backstage, above two stars' dressing rooms north and south of the stage on the first level, are dressing rooms with toilets. At the fourth landing above the stage is a catwalk used for storing and controlling scenery drops; a second catwalk, at the top of the stage, holds mechanical equipment for the drops.

The basement level contains additional dressing rooms, restrooms, property rooms, electrical equipment areas, a light storage room, blower and heating equipment rooms, plenum space, and a public lounge.

Decorative Features

The original interior decoration of the Pabst was elaborate and colorful: the decoration has remained virtually intact and the color scheme has been revived in the 1975-76 restoration. In the foyer, main, and mezzanine lobbies is wainscot of gold Siena marble, with the base and chair rail of green marble. Above the chair rail the walls are of painted plaster. The lobbies are also fitted with gold scagliola columns and gilded Ionic marble and plaster pilasters and are crowned with paneled ornamental plaster ceilings with recessed light fixtures. A splendid white marble staircase, moved to its present location in 1928-29, joins the upper and lower lobbies.

In the auditorium, the side and rear walls are painted plaster punctuated by gilded Ionic pilasters. The proscenium arch (35' wide and 21' high), in the auditorium's west wall, is set in a large rectangular panel, with triangular panels above the arch at the north and south having ornamental plaster grilles. The archivolt is heavily encrusted with gold-painted decorative plaster work. A gilded life-size sculpture of Apollo between two female figures representing Tragedy and Comedy surmounts the proscenium. Side walls meet the proscenium at shallow angles. They formerly held multiple box seats; now they contain two arched side openings holding the organ pipe chambers behind acoustically transparent draperies. Crowning the auditorium is a shallow circular dome which rises above a richly ornamented plaster cornice, about the base of which are pilaster-framed plaques bearing the names of celebrated painters, sculptors, musicians, and writers, including Wagner, Goethe, Beethoven, Garrick, Aeschylus, and Dante. A grand chandelier (not original, but resembling the original) now hangs from the center of the dome.

Attention to detail is marked throughout. Even the railings of the two remaining boxes and the balconies are richly decorated and the seat backs have designs that incorporate the Pabst name.

ALTERATIONS

The sumptuously designed Pabst has survived almost a century. The only major alterations were in 1928-29. The building has not been seriously affected. With exceptions as noted below, major alterations were reversed in the 1975-76 restoration.

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Exterior:

The south, west, and north elevations have undergone only minor modifications; a few openings have been bricked up and several new openings made. On the facade, the small balcony, removed in 1928 and replaced with a large vertical "marquee" sign advertising the theater, has been duplicated. The marquee sign has been removed. In 1989, the Pabst was interconnected with the new Milwaukee Center development at the Pabst's northeast corner.³

Interior:

The interior has seen some alteration, but its characteristic elements remain. In addition to a change in color scheme, three alterations to its physical appearance in 1928-29 were highly noticeable: the removal of all the box seats, with redesign of the proscenium in light of their absence⁴; repositioning to its present location along the east wall of the original white marble grand staircase in the foyer, utilizing the original treads, balusters, newels, and handrails; and the removal of the original elaborate chandelier and its replacement by an art glass disk. (As noted above, this last change has been reversed). Removal of the box seats permitted the forming of the current grillework proscenium arch and flanking organ screens. Other changes included lowering and enlarging the orchestra pit, new seats and some alteration of the seating arrangement.

Other less visible elements of the 1928-29 renovation included reconstruction of the foundations, installation of new heating and ventilating systems and new lighting; repartitioning of the basement; alterations to the stage, including a new floor surface and removal of the fly gallery and freight elevator; and the bricking up of doorways that originally joined the lobbies and the adjacent surviving section of the "New" Stadt Theater that had served as the Pabst cafe.

³ For details and photos, see "Pabst Theater, New Lobby," Wisconsin Architect (November/December 1990), pp. 16-17.

⁴ There is a theory the boxes were eliminated because they supposedly reflected the elitist ideas of royalty and the nobility which were, in 1928, anathema to the Socialist city administration of Milwaukee. See James Rankin's comment in his "Application with Documentation....," p. 5.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A X B ___ C ___ D ___

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G ___

NHL Criteria:

1

NHL Theme(s):

- XX. Theater
 - F. Theater Buildings
- XXII. Music
 - J. Forums (Halls and Auditoriums)
- XXX American Ways of Life
 - E. Ethnic Communities: German-Americans

Area(s) of Significance

PERFORMING ARTS

Period(s) of Significance

1895-1935

Significant Date(s)

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Otto Strack

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STATE SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPERTY, AND JUSTIFY CRITERIA, CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS, AND AREAS AND PERIODS OF SIGNIFICANCE NOTED ABOVE.**SUMMARY**

The Pabst Theater is the best preserved German-American theater in the United States and is one of the most tangible reminders of the cultural role of Milwaukee, the "Deutsch Athen" (German Athens), as it was known to generations of German-Americans. The Pabst is also important in theater design and for its long-time multi-cultural appeal.¹

The building has a conservative design, with strong Baroque or Italian Renaissance overtones, that is not emphatically German. This traditional exterior design belies the fact that its technical aspects, such as acoustics, stage facilities, and fireproof construction, were advanced for its time.

The theater played a key cultural role for Milwaukee's German-American community from its construction in 1895 until the German theater company dissolved in 1935. The survival of the theater through and after a period of anti-German feeling associated with World War I is quite remarkable, though even before 1935, reflective of the growing assimilation of German-Americans and the increasing diversity of their tastes, the Pabst was already becoming more cosmopolitan in its performers, performances and audiences.

The Pabst thus is nationally significant for both its importance to German-American history and for its significance in the history of the American theater. It has been praised and appreciated by performers and theatergoers of many nationalities for nearly a century.

HISTORY**The Pabst: Milwaukee's German Theater**

German-American settlement in Wisconsin generally coincided with the peopling of the State and with the three great waves of German immigration to the United States in the second half of the 19th century. In 1900, the Germans of Wisconsin represented some 10% of the entire

¹ Many elements of significance set out in this study are abstracted from a compilation of historical materials gathered in 1990 by researcher James Rankin at the request of Philip Procter, Executive Director of the Pabst Theater, and submitted to the National Park Service as an "Application with Documentation to the National Park Service for Designating the Pabst Theater in Milwaukee as a National Historic Landmark of the United States." Mr. Rankin's materials include several original essays on aspects of the Pabst's history, as well as copies of historical documents, news articles, and early pamphlets. Mr. Rankin's essays have not been published. His materials are not consecutively paginated and will accordingly be referenced only by their presence in the collection, a copy of which is on file in the National Park Service's History Division.

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population of the State.² In Milwaukee, the German community thrived and German theater grew along with it. The German theater company was organized in 1851.³

The phenomenal growth of the business owned by a German immigrant, Frederick Pabst, was one of his community's outstanding success stories. By 1890, the namesake of the Pabst Brewing Company owned the largest brewery in the world--in Milwaukee. Pabst was a wealthy man but a generous one, and he began a tradition of philanthropic gifts to the community, including to the German theater.

Frederick Pabst, then, was largely responsible for the beauty and theatrical innovations associated with the Pabst. He had assisted the Milwaukee German theater for some years already at the "Old" Stadt, a theater on N. 3rd Street, when in 1890, he acquired the Nunnemacher Grand Opera House, dating to 1871, and renamed it Das Neues Deutsches Stadt Theater (The New German City Theater, or "New" Stadt). Its downtown location was choice. The city's impressive City Hall would go up in 1895 across the street.

In January 1895, however, fire gutted the west end of the renamed opera house, which had occupied the entire street frontage in the block. Pabst ordered that a theater be rebuilt and put his "house" architect, Otto Strack, who had designed buildings for the Pabst brewing company, to work on it. Although Strack had never designed a theater, he was familiar with European theaters and supplemented this knowledge with study of prominent American playhouses and concert halls.

Pabst spent more than \$300,000 to build, furnish, and equip his theater. The edifice was not only grand in design, luxurious in its decorations, and elaborately ornamented, but was planned and equipped with excellent, and, in some instances, advanced stage facilities, fine audience accommodations, excellent acoustics, and safety measures. For one thing, Pabst had learned his lesson, and Strack was asked to take particular care in fireproofing. Thus, the only wood in the new edifice was the stage floor and the seatbacks, the entire construction being of masonry, iron, and concrete beams--even the floors and balconies. The theater also had an early system of air conditioning, which used the same pipes from the Pabst powerhouse that were used to heat it. Finally, a surviving portion of the old opera house was connected to the Pabst by doors from the new theater's lobby and served until 1931 as a cafe and restaurant much frequented by theatergoers.

German Theater at the Pabst

The grand opening, on November 9, 1895, featured a march composed for the occasion (see illustration), a prologue read by artistic manager and director Ferdinand Welb (who also acted in the evening's play), brief remarks by business manager and director Leon Wachsner,

² Historical context on the history of the German immigration in Wisconsin, prepared by the State Historic Preservation Office.

³ This section is largely derived from James Rankin's essays and from Robert Brennan, "The Pabst Theater, Milwaukee, 1895," Marquee 8, 3 (1976): 12-17.

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the intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana, other musical selections, and the American premiere of Zwei Wappen ("Two Coats of Arms"), a comedy by Oscar Blumenthal and Gustav Kadelburg that was an import from the previous year's Berlin theater season. Flora Glasel, who was the darling of German court theater, made her local debut.

When the Pabst was built, the popularity of German theater was at its height nationally. Milwaukee was second only to New York City in the country in the production of contemporary and classic German plays and translated versions of English and French productions.⁴

The years before World War I were the Pabst's high point as an artistic and social showplace for Milwaukee's Germans. The repertoire was largely that of the German stage. It included classic German drama, as well as contemporary German plays, and non-German plays in translation. It also occasionally included works by German-American authors. One of these was an 1897 revival of Wilhelm Muller's prize-winning comedy Im gelobten Land ("In the Promised Land"), about immigrant life in America.⁵

The Pabst in this period has been characterized as having "housed the best plays over the longest period" and as having a "first-class" permanent German repertory company which was joined more or less regularly by great German and Austrian actors in America on tour. Renowned players like Emanuel Reicher, Karl Koenig, and Alexander Moissi appeared. The German classics from Kleist to Goethe and Schiller were frequently on the playbill, as well as Sudermann and Hauptmann. German versions of Shakespeare, Moliere, and Ibsen were likewise performed.⁶ (See playbills that follow this section for a sampling of the Pabst's performances.)

Ethnic theater in the U.S. generally was sapped by the falling off in immigration, especially after the restrictive legislation of the early 1920s. Acculturation also took its toll; the second generation appreciated performances in the mother tongue less, and the third generation even less. Movies also drew audiences away. But another force sapped the vitality of the German theater: the First World War and anti-German sentiment that grew up during and after it.⁷

⁴ Theodore Mueller, "Milwaukee's German Heritage: 'Das Deutsch-Athen am Michigan See'" Historical Messenger of Milwaukee County Historical Society 24 (September 1968): 92.

⁵ Peter Merrill, "German-American Plays and Operettas in Milwaukee," Milwaukee History 9, 2 (Summer 1986): 50-57, discusses German-American theater, as opposed to German imports, on the German-American stage. Muller's play is discussed at p. 54.

⁶ J.R. Isaacs and Rosamunde Gilder, "The German Theater in Milwaukee," Theater Arts 28 (1944): 465-466, 471.

⁷ Gerhard Becker, "German Theater in Milwaukee, 1914 to 1918," Milwaukee History 13, 1 (Spring 1990): 2-9, is the source for the remainder of this section.

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The impact was felt immediately, for the opening of the 1914-15 season was delayed when some performers had trouble sailing to America to perform. The influence of the war began to be felt in other ways as well. The Pabst had always relied on the German stage for material as well as performers. German playwrights turned to patriotic subjects and their plays followed their home country runs with appearances on American stages. As long as the United States was officially neutral, this might cause some muttering, but not general alarm or calls for legal action.

Thus, before the April 1917 declaration of war by the United States on Germany, at least ten war-themed plays presenting a markedly pro-German view were performed at the Pabst Theater. All of the playwrights were German or Austrian, except Max Simon, a German-American living in New York. For examples the performance on November 29, 1914 of three one-act plays--Vorwärts ("Forward"), Der Konig ruft ("The King Calls"), and Ein Held ("A Hero")--was interspersed with medleys of patriotic songs, including Die Wacht am Rhein ("The Watch on the Rhine"), in which the audience joined.

The declaration of war brought a different reception, however. After April 6, the Pabst continued to offer German language plays, but generally only comedies. But this was not sufficient. The governing board of the German Theater Company split at the close of the 1917-18 season over whether to continue performances in German.

The company also elected not to perform pro-American war plays, and during the period of debate over whether to perform in German was under pressure from the Wisconsin Loyalty League, which addressed resolutions to the company opposing performances in German. The members of the company first voted to suspend performances in German, then reversed itself, and finally closed entirely for the 1918-19 season. A new all-"American" stock company took over for the year.

German language performances resumed in September 1919, but, except in the 1925-26 season, they never regained the consistent popularity they had enjoyed before the war. Other types of performances began to fill the void in the playbill and continued the Pabst's role as a prime venue for the American theater.

The Theater's Spectacular Record Continues⁸

The Pabst long had had English performances, as well as German, and music and dance, which are trans-national. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra played a part of its season in the Pabst from 1896 to 1969. The orchestra featured many famous soloists, including Vladimir Horowitz, Lauritz Melchior, Yehudi Menuhin, Pablo Casals, and Richard Strauss. Its roster of visiting conductors included Artur Rodzinski, Rafael Kubelik, Fritz Reiner, Sir Georg Solti, Pierre Monteux, Eugene Ormandy, Sir Thomas Beecham, George Szell, Leopold Stokowski, Charles Munch, Erich Leinsdorf, Carlo Maria Giulini, and Leonard Bernstein. Composers Ottorino Respighi, Igor Stravinsky, and Aaron Copland conducted works of their own in the theater. In addition to the ranks of famous musicians which the orchestra brought to the Pabst, the Symphony also premiered certain orchestral works there, including the world premiere of Samuel Barber's Souvenirs.

The Chicago Symphony also conducted auditions and contests in Milwaukee. In 1940, a young local keyboard artist showed "a very considerable gift for brilliant pianism. His tone was excellent and his musical sense impressive." The young performer was Walter Liberace ("Liberace").

The Pabst also hosted opera, notably the Chicago Grand Opera Company and the Castle Square Opera Company. Among the immortals of the operatic world who appeared was Enrico Caruso. Other musicians who held forth in the Pabst over the years included John Philip Sousa, Ethel Merman, and Marlene Dietrich.

Dance was also in the Pabst's schedule. In the teens and twenties, Anna Pavlova appeared, as did the Pavley-Oukrainsky Russian Ballet, founded by two of her contemporaries from the Imperial Russian Ballet. Later, the Ballet Russe De Monte Carlo, with its prima ballerina, Alexandra Danilova, was a staple of the Pabst Theater's dance offerings. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn and their Denishawn Dancers were an annual attraction.

Other artists and performers brought to the Pabst were Oscar Wilde, Florenz Ziegfeld, Arturo Toscanini, John Drew, Sergei Rachmaninoff, George M. Cohan, Sir Laurence Olivier, George Bernard Shaw, Noel Coward, Isadora Duncan, Paul Robeson, Sarah Bernhardt, Helen Hayes, and Katherine Hepburn.

Church services and political rallies even took place in the Pabst, confirming that the theater was a public assembly place; the building's proximity to City Hall no doubt spurred this use. Not all the civic events staged were universally popular.

⁸ This section is summarized from an essay in James Rankin's collection referenced in Note 1, "A Panoply of Performances:Pabst Theater: A Multi-Discipline, Multi-Cultural History."

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But other uses filled out the Pabst's outstanding record in theater. The Theater Guild, founded in 1918, was to prove one of the longest lived theatrical producing groups in the United States. Their productions traveled throughout the country, establishing regular theater seasons in 30 cities with a total subscriber base of 200,000 by the late forties. In Milwaukee, the Theater Guild always played the Pabst.

While the Pabst Theater was the home of one of the finest German language theater companies, it also became the "home" theater of one of America's most famous acting couples: Alfred Lunt and his wife, Lynn Fontanne, who often starred in Theater Guild productions and were box office hits both on Broadway and on the road. They lived in Genesee Depot, a small town outside Milwaukee. They often started or ended their tours at the Pabst.

The Pabst Theater's record of performances continues, nearly 96 years after the theater first opened its doors. Recent performers include Isaac Stern, Yo Yo Ma, Claire Bloom, the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, Hal Holbrook, Dave Brubeck, the Eliot Feld Ballet, Philip Glass, etc.

Recent History

The theater belonged to the Pabst interests until 1953 when it was sold to the Pabst Theater Foundation, Inc., organized by the Lynde Bradley, Allis-Chalmers, and Froedtert Foundations. This foundation, in turn, sold it to the city in 1961, but continued to operate the theater under a lease arrangement. The theater, during that decade, was used only intermittently and mostly for local productions.

The theater closed in 1969, the same year as the Milwaukee County Performing Arts Center opened adjacent to it. The next year the City took over direct management of the theater from the Foundation. Some favored demolishing the building for a parking lot. Listing as a local landmark in 1967 and in the National Register in 1972, as well as support from Mayor Henry Maier, among others, helped mobilize support for preserving the theater.

In early 1973, the City decided to undertake a restoration-renovation of the Pabst.⁹ In addition to needed plumbing, electrical, roofing, and other code items, the first step taken was the building of a new facade on the east, which had presented an ugly face to City Hall for some four decades. Painting and decorating to restore much of the interior followed.

Gifts from the Pabst family in 1975 made possible new seating, a new stage floor, a hydraulic forestage-orchestra elevator, a new pipe organ, an orchestra shell, a modern scenery rigging system to supplement the historic Knickelbein system (described below), and new stage lights.

⁹ The renovation/restoration is described in Brennan, *op. cit.*, p. 21, and in Mark A. Pfaller, "Pabst Theater, the Architect as a Makeup Artist," Wisconsin Architect (November 1976): 4-8.

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Theatrical Innovations

The Pabst had several technologically advanced features as completed in 1895. These included its electric organ (probably the first in the United States)¹⁰; its stage lifts; one of the country's first fire curtains, of steel wire and hard fire clay; its remarkably early air conditioning system, which used electric fans in the attic and discreetly covered openings under the seats, along with mountains of ice; and its electrical illumination--1,000 light bulbs--with no back-up gas light, but with a spare dynamo.¹¹

Later the theater apparently had the first counterweight system for hoisting scenery. Gustave Knickelbein's rigging system, an original system for moving scenery, which has been retained in the Pabst and is likely the only one of its type still in use, represented a major innovation for its time. It was installed shortly after World War I. It has elements of both traditional rope sets and modern counterweight systems.¹²

Other German Theaters

In American cities where the German presence was a major historical influence, the theaters that were vehicles of German culture are mostly gone, and in Milwaukee only the incomparable Pabst is left. It is the most important survivor nationally.

In the United States, New York City outranked Milwaukee in the production of contemporary and classic German plays and German translations from other languages. Yet New York's great German theaters--the Germania, the Neues Deutsches Theater, and the Irving Place--have all been razed.¹³ St. Louis had the Victoria, but World I brought a name change to the Liberty--and German productions ended. The 1928 Deutsches Haus in St. Louis had only a tableau stage and it is now a non-German church.¹⁴ Cincinnati's German theaters all appear to have been demolished, though that City's Music Hall (a National

¹⁰ David L. Junchen, The Encyclopedia of the American Theater Organ (Pasadena: Showcase Publishers, 1986), p. 43.

¹¹ See Note 1. These points are discussed in James Rankin's essays, "The Pivotal Place of Milwaukee's Pabst Theater to the German-American Stage" and "Pabst Theater History: Long and Distinguished."

¹² See Note 1. James Rankin's essay, "The Knickelbein Rigging System: A Pabst Theater Paradigm." Also Michael Schurrer, "The Knickelbein System of Counterweights for Hemp Sets," 1981.

¹³ See Note 1. The source is Rankin's essay, "Pabst Theater History: Long and Distinguished."

¹⁴ Mary Bagley, The Theater Historical Society Guide to St. Louis Theaters (St. Louis, 1984).

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Historic Landmark) has some ties to German culture.¹⁵ Finally, Chicago's German theaters--the Garrick (aka Schiller), the McVickers, and the Power, have also vanished.¹⁶ The Pabst alone retains so much of its character.

CONCLUSION

In the course of gathering information for this study, the proponents of designation have gathered an extraordinary range of endorsements from individuals of renown in theater and music. Some of these have come unsolicited. Some are written on personal stationery. None appear to be form letters. A selection of these letters is included with this study as an illustration of the Pabst's striking capacity to appeal to artists of a broad range of talents. One of the most moving of these, a handwritten note from comedian Gene Wilder, refers not to his performances there, but to being inspired by the Pabst as a boy. The Pabst's significance then is not just to great artists, but to common folk who sometimes become great artists.

¹⁵ Robert J. Wimberg, Cincinnati: Over the Rhine... (Cincinnati: The Ohio Book Store, 1987).

¹⁶ Joseph R. Ducibella, Theaters of Chicago (Chicago, 1973).

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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: # HABS-WIS-269
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State Agency
 Federal Agency
 Local Government
 University
 Other: Specify Repository: City of Milwaukee, Department of City Development

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATAAcreage of Property: Approximately 0.3 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 16 425870 4765530**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:**

A rectangular plot 148' east-west by 90' north-south, embracing the land on which the building stands and the 10' sidewalk along its south frontage on E. Wells Street.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

This boundary includes only the building and the Wells street sidewalk fronting it, the latter of which is overhung for two-thirds its length by the theater's decorative porch.

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11. FORM PREPARED BYName/Title: James H. Charleton, HistorianOrganization: NPS/WASO, History Division (418)Street/#: P.O. Box 37127City/Town: WashingtonState: District of ColumbiaZIP: 20013-7127Telephone: (202) 343-3793Date: August 20, 1991

August 21, 1991