

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAR 23 1977
DATE ENTERED AUG 15 1977

**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
The New Orpheum Theatre
AND/OR COMMON
The Malco Theatre

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
197 South Main Street NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN
Memphis VICINITY OF Eighth CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE
Tennessee CODE 47 COUNTY Shelby CODE 157

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Memphis Development Foundation
STREET & NUMBER
67 Madison Avenue, Suite 901
CITY, TOWN
Memphis VICINITY OF _____ STATE Tennessee

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Shelby County Register
STREET & NUMBER
Shelby County Office Building, 160 North Main Street
CITY, TOWN
Memphis STATE Tennessee

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Tennessee Historical and Architectural Survey
DATE
January 1977 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
Tennessee Historical Commission
CITY, TOWN
Nashville STATE Tennessee

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The New Orpheum Theatre, constructed in 1927-28, stands at the southwest corner of Main and Beale Streets in downtown Memphis. Designed by the architectural firm of C. W. and George L. Rapp, it is the city's largest and finest "movie palace." As such it is characterized by the opulence and grandeur which were typical of this building type.

Although the building now stands alone in a block leveled by the urban renewal projects of the 1960s, this location was originally the heart of the South Main Street commercial district. The once prestigious corner site is still marked by the large illuminated upright sign, with its recently restored "Orpheum" logo in yellow letters on a red field.

The east and north facades, facing Main and Beale Streets respectively, may be best described as Italian Renaissance in style. At the first floor level the facade is terra cotta granite. The buff brick masonry above the first floor is set in a diaper pattern on the house portion to the rear of the building. The two-story front portion is divided into three bays along the Main Street side. The two side bays contain retail commercial space at ground level with copper-framed plate glass storefronts. The second floor contains theater office space. Ornamentation at this level consists of molded terra cotta window lintels and cornices. The center bay is higher than the two side bays and is set slightly forward for emphasis. At the second floor three high-arched windows with lunettes, four medallions, a cornice, and balustrade, all in terra cotta, further emphasize the center bay. At the street level is located the main theater entrance sheltered by the marquise with its "waterfall and scroll" light display and illuminated metal soffit. The main box office and entrance foyer materials include black marble, cast iron pilasters, and terrazzo flooring. Originally a second entrance and box office were located on the Beale Street side with a separate stairway to the uppermost gallery.

The main entrance foyer opens into the lobby with its grand staircase to the mezzanine floor. The lobby walls are travertine with damask panels. Two ornate crystal chandeliers are suspended from the plaster ceiling with its gold and ivory relief work. The original terrazzo floor has been covered with carpeting. Later alterations also include large pink-tinted mirrors on the upper east wall of the lobby and a concession booth.

From the lobby circulation is channeled either up to the mezzanine floor, straight through to the orchestra level of the auditorium or down to the lower level. On the lower level are located the large lounge with its Art Deco etched glass lighting fixtures, coat rooms, and restrooms.

The main auditorium, measuring one hundred ten feet by ninety-six feet deep, originally contained seating for 2,800 patrons and was the largest privately owned performance hall in the city. Twin loges, each three stories in height and accented with massive crystal chandeliers, frame the proscenium. The original rose and green draperies and damask wall panels remain. So does the original Wilton carpet with its black, red, and green figures on the floor, a large cove-lit dome dominates the ornate molded plaster ceiling. Concealed from view are the great steel roof trusses from which is suspended the entire ceiling assembly.

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Four levels of balconies cantilever out into the auditorium space. Access to each is gained from a separate foyer richly decorated with crystal chandeliers and heavy draperies. Each level is provided with its own lounges and restrooms. High above all the balcony levels is located the projection booth with its three carbon-arc projectors, Benograph, spotlight, and Stereopticon slide projector.

Designed for both live theater and motion pictures, the stage and backstage areas of the Orpheum Theatre include facilities for a wide variety of performance types. The original Master System switchboard controls both stage and house lights, as well as the automatic vaudeville annunciator boards located at either side of the proscenium. The union grid fly system is still operable and many of the original Keith-Albee-Orpheum Circuit sets and backdrops remain. Behind the thirty foot by ninety foot stage are fourteen dressing rooms on three floor levels. Below the stage are located storerooms, rehearsal rooms, switchboard relays and mechanical equipment rooms. Access is also provided to the orchestra pit. Here is located the organ console, installed on its own elevator lift which allows the organist to rise dramatically from the pit into full view of the audience.

When new, the house organ was the largest theater organ in Memphis. Manufactured by the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company, it is a style 240, thirteen rank instrument, opus 1956. The pipes are located in two chambers above the loges, at balcony level. Repaired in 1969-70, it is currently in good working order.

In the Orpheum basement are located the main mechanical equipment rooms. The twin boilers are still operable although the original air conditioning has been replaced by a new system.

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 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 checked="" 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 1927-28

BUILDER/ARCHITECT C. W. and George L. Rapp,
Architects

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The New Orpheum Theatre is Memphis' largest and finest "movie palace" of the 1920s and represents the only local example of the work of C. W. and George L. Rapp, Architects. In addition to its architectural significance the building has long played a major role in the social and cultural life of the city as the setting for both live theater and motion pictures.

In 1927 construction began on a new 2,800 seat theater which was to be the latest in the Keith-Albee-Orpheum Circuit's nationwide chain of vaudeville and motion picture playhouses. Located at the corner of Main and Beale streets in downtown Memphis, the New Orpheum replaced the original Orpheum Theatre (first known as the Grand Opera House) which occupied the site from 1890 until its destruction by fire in 1923.

The New Orpheum was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of C. W. and George L. Rapp, who were well known for the grandeur and opulence of their theaters. Among the many other movie palaces across the country designed by Rapp and Rapp are included the Paramount Theatre in New York, the Tivoli, the Oriental, and the Uptown in Chicago, and the Tivoli in Chattanooga.

The 1928 opening night performance at the New Orpheum was preceded by an address by Mayor Watkins Overton, a recital on the Wurlitzer organ, and an overture by the theater orchestra. The main program consisted of a series of vaudeville acts followed by a showing of The Outcast starring Corinne Griffith.

The decline of vaudeville, as well as financial and managerial problems, plagued the New Orpheum during the 1930s. Nevertheless the theater presented many of the best known live entertainers of the day to Memphis audiences. Appearing on stage during these years were Eddie Cantor, George Hessel, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, the Mills Brothers, the Folies Bergere, Sally Rand, and Milton Slosser at the organ.

In 1935, under new management, the theater name was changed to The Malco. It continued to be operated under this name, primarily as a first-run motion picture theater, until the 1970s. Live presentations continued to be offered from time to time including Hair and No, No, Nanette in 1972.

In 1976, as part of a plan to revive the southern end of the downtown area, the theater was purchased by the Memphis Development Foundation and renamed the Orpheum. Current plans call for its renovation and restoration as a performing arts center.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Astor, Vincent C., "Memphis' Magnificnet Malco," The Console, Vol. VIV, No. 8, August 197
 "'Folies Bergere' Presents Tops in Girl Shows," The Press-Scimitar, September 30, 1939.
 Hall, Ben M., The Best Remaining Seats, Bramhall House, New York, 1961.
 Keith-Albee-Orpheum Circuit, Souvenir and Opening Program of the Keith-Albee-Orpheum
 Circuit's New Orpheum Theatre, 1928; copy in the Memphis Room, Memphis and Shelby
 County Public Library.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .5
 UTM REFERENCES

A

1	5	7	6	8	3	2	0	3	8	9	2	3	3	0
ZONE			EASTING					NORTHING						

 C

ZONE			EASTING					NORTHING						

B

ZONE			EASTING					NORTHING						

 D

ZONE			EASTING					NORTHING						

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property nominated is a 110' by 200' lot located on the southwest corner of Main Street and Beale Street.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James Floyd Williamson, Jr.

ORGANIZATION

Keith Kays and Associates, Architects

DATE

January 1977

STREET & NUMBER

83 Madison Avenue

TELEPHONE

(901) 525-3040

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis

STATE

Tennessee

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Herbert L. Hyman

TITLE

Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

DATE

3/15/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/15/77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8.12.77

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"Orpheum Manager Returns with Shows," The Commercial Appeal, February 20, 1933.

"Orpheum May Take Rest," The Commercial Appeal, June 1, 1935.

"Orpheum Reopens on September 30 with New Stage, Screen Policy," The Commercial Appeal, September 21, 1938.

"Orpheum Rich in Tradition, Gains in Property Value," The Commercial Appeal, September 14, 1930.

"Orpheum Will Start Building in 10 Days," The Commercial Appeal, October 27, 1927.

Rapp, C. W. and George L., Architects, "Orpheum Theatre Building," (architectural plans), January-February 1928.