

State's glory is recalled

By Peter Bellamy

CRITIC AT LARGE

When the State Theater has its glorious reopening as Cleveland's home of the Metropolitan Opera on June 11, it will be interesting to see if it has a ghost or "Phantom of the Opera."

For theaters are not unknown to have ghosts, and the State is no exception.

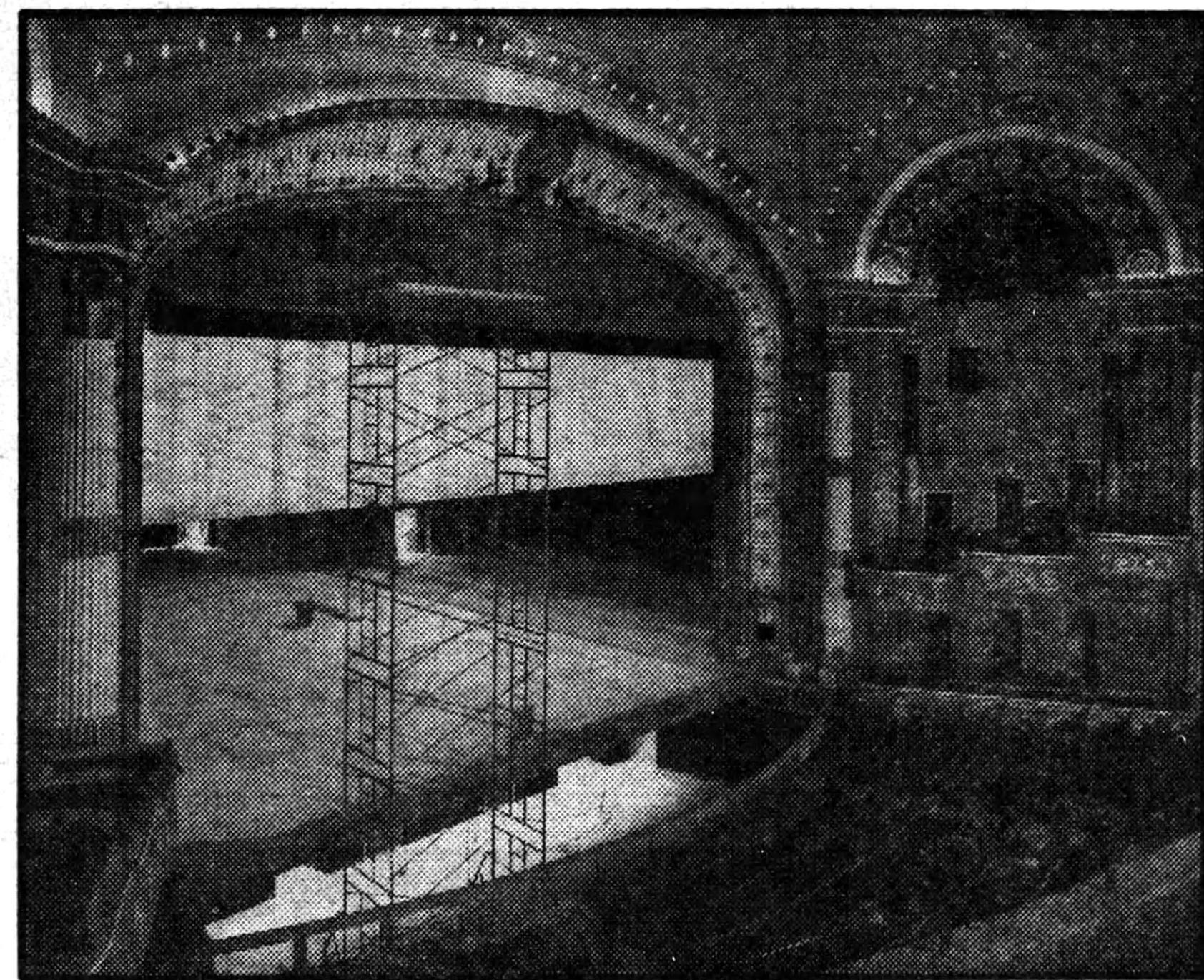
The ghostly shades of superstar Judy Garland and her mother, Ethel Gumm, have been seen on the State mezzanine as recently as 1974 by several persons. One is Weldon Carpenter, former archivist for the Playhouse Square Foundation.

"I have a photograph of Garland taken backstage at the State in 1938 before she attained eternal stardom in 'The Wizard of Oz' in 1939," Carpenter said. "In the picture she's reading a copy of The Plain Dealer."

This reporter in 1938 wrote of the meeting between Garland and then Mayor Harold H. Burton, later a U.S. senator from Ohio and associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. The mayor gave her the keys to the city.

All I remember of their meeting was that an early teen-age Garland remarked to Burton in her breathless, tremulous voice, "It must be very hard to be a mayor."

I thought at the time that it must be very hard to be Judy Garland. In view of her subsequent triumphant but tragic career, I was right.



DAVID M. THUM

A view of the rebuilt stage of the State Theater.

ON STAGE/SCREEN

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Even a ghostly visit by Garland to the State at its glamorous reopening would be a welcome one and a case for a standing ovation.

But ghosts or no ghosts, the magnificent State Theater has had some golden moments in its 63-year history.

The first came with its opening on Feb. 5, 1921, when it was considered one of the finest theaters ever designed by Thomas Lamb, the architect responsible for some 300 theaters across the nation, including the old Madison Square Garden.

The State was publicized as having Italian Renaissance architectural style, although its 3,400-seat (now 3,000-seat) auditorium combines Greek, Roman and European baroque design concepts.

Aside from its extraordinary acoustics, the State offers much to dazzle the eye.

That includes two sets of grand, marble staircases leading to the mezzanine level, one of the largest coffered ceilings in the nation and art-glass oval insets distributed throughout the theater and lit from behind.

The theater's lobby is one of the largest in the world and could hold 4,000 persons. It had to be long so the auditorium could wrap around in back of the Palace Theater on E. 17th St.

The lobby features a 14th century Venetian ceiling, towering mahogany pillars, a large marble fireplace and four 50-foot-long murals painted by James Daugherty.

The canvases show "The Spirit of Fantasy — Asia," "The Spirit of Adventure — Africa," "The Spirit of Drama — Europe" and "The Spirit of Cinema — America."

The murals are considered to be among the best work accomplished by an American artist in the 1920s and were once featured in *Life*

Magazine.

To the grand opening came movie tycoon Marcus Loew and stars including Ruth Roland, heroine of many cliff-hanging serials, Montague Love, Hope Hampton, and Alice Terry and her husband, director Rex Ingram.

The opening film was "Polly With a Past," starring Ina Claire and Ralph Graves.

At the time nobody dreamed that the State would close in 1969 because it could no longer compete with newly built suburban theaters for first-run films. It appeared that the State and Ohio Theaters would be razed for a huge parking lot.

Happily, the Playhouse Square Association was formed in July 1970, with the goal of saving the State, Ohio and Palace theaters.

In 1972, the Junior League of Cleveland Inc. donated \$25,000 to help save the State and Ohio. This led to creation of a cabaret theater in the State's lobby and to other golden moments in the theater's history.

They came with a presentation of the musical, "Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris." The musical captured the hearts of Cleve-

landers and became the longest running show of any kind in the city's history.

And now another golden hour and metamorphosis is at hand for the State with the opening of "Peter Grimes."

The newly restored State now has a \$7 million, 10-story stage house, much larger than the theater itself. Half of the money for its construction came from the federal government and the other half from a matching grant from Cuyahoga County.

Another \$3,140 million for restoration of the theater came from the federal government.

The stage house has two rehearsal halls as large as the average stage. The basement of the stage house is color coded so performers won't get lost getting to stage left or stage right.

The theater has a total of 50 boxes, including supper stage boxes, 14 lower stage boxes and 30 loge boxes on the mezzanine. The stage flies have room for 85 different back drops.

It all forecasts a golden future for the State, and the opening of "Peter Grimes" should be one of the most exciting in many years.

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