

History of Hennepin Theatre Trust, the Hennepin Theatre District, the Historic Orpheum, State and Pantages Theatres and the New Century Theatre

Established in 2000, Hennepin Theatre Trust is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization created to secure the future of the Orpheum, State and Pantages Theatres on Hennepin Avenue in downtown Minneapolis. When the historic theatres fell into disrepair in the 1970's and 80's, standard practice was for the city to purchase and condemn undesirable properties on behalf of developers. Tom Hoch, then a staff member with the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, advocated for the city to purchase the LaSalle block in the late 80's and renovate the State Theatre, instead of tearing it down as the developers wished. Understanding that the two other historic theatres on Hennepin Avenue, the Orpheum and Pantages, were susceptible to the same fate, he successfully urged the city to save both as well.

Renovations financed by the city totaled more than \$20 million. In 1996, Hoch left city employment to manage the theatres and, along with Fred Krohn, worked together under a management agreement with the city to run the theatres from 1996-2000 as a for-profit enterprise. They also garnered the support of local property owners for streetscape improvements that grace the Hennepin Theatre District today. In 2000, Hennepin Theatre Trust was created as a long-term arrangement to save the theatres and make it possible to fill them with high quality shows. The newly established non-profit took over the management arrangement with the city. Tom Hoch has been President and Chief Executive Officer of Hennepin Theatre Trust since its inception and contracts with Historic Theatre Group to manage the day-to-day operations of the State, Orpheum and Pantages Theatres. Today, over 500,000 patrons visit the Trust's State, Orpheum and Pantages Theatres annually.

The Hennepin Theatre District in downtown Minneapolis showcases the exquisitely restored Orpheum, State and Pantages Theatres that help form the Upper Midwest's foremost theatre sector, or famed "Great White Way" named for Broadway's white lights. Each theater has its own unique character, capturing anew the golden age of performance. The Orpheum (seating 2579, opened in 1921 and designed by the Milwaukee firm Kirchoff & Rose in a Beaux Arts style), was the premiere vaudeville and concert house of its time, hosting such stars as the Marx Brothers, George Burns, Benny Goodman and Count Basie. The State (seating 2181, opened in 1921 and designed by Chicago architect J.E.O. Pridmore in a free Italian Renaissance style), was the largest and most elaborate presentation house between Chicago and the Pacific Coast. The Pantages (seating 1014, opened in 1916 and designed by the Minneapolis firm of Kees & Colburn in an Art Moderne/Beaux Arts style), is a vaudeville house that was originally part of Greek immigrant Alexander Pantages' renowned consortia of 500 theatre.

During 1980-90, the three theatres were purchased by the City of Minneapolis, completely renovated and returned to their original use as presenting venues. After its restoration, the Orpheum, once owned by Bob Dylan and his brother, was chosen for the pre-Broadway world premieres of *Disney's The Lion King*, *Sweet Charity* and *Victor/Victoria*. It continues as a main Midwest venue for premier touring Broadway shows as well as major musical and comedy events. Since it reopened in 1991, the State has hosted special events including the world premiere of the Minnesota-based film "Grumpy Old Men" and remains a popular venue for Broadway productions and prestigious concerts. The more intimate Pantages, renovated in 2002, presents a range of music and theatre, has featured artists from Mikhail Baryshnikov to Vince Gill and collaborative productions with various Minneapolis/St. Paul arts organizations including the Jungle Theatre and Chanhassen Dinner Theatres.

In 2011, Hennepin Theatre Trust established the New Century Theatre, a flexible use performance space on the street level of City Center. Seating up to 300, this new venue is used for local and touring performances and education initiatives offered by the Trust such as the *Broadway Confidential* series, student cabarets and training for the *SpotLight Musical Theatre Program*. The New Century Theatre is named in homage to the Century Theatre, one of four historic theatres that used to operate near the site of what is now City Center. The original theater opened in 1908 as a 2,000-seat vaudeville house called the Miles. It was rebuilt several times, eventually named the Century Theatre in 1929 and transformed into the 1,145 seat Century Cinerama in the mid 1950s. The Century burned in 1964 and was bulldozed the following year.