

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building (Yiddish Art Theatre)
Name of Property
New York County, NY
County and State
8500427
NR Reference Number

State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this x additional documentation move removal
x name change (additional documentation) other

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.



Signature of Certifying Official/Title:

8/5/25

Date of Action

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
- additional documentation accepted
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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SUMMARY

The Yiddish Art Theatre was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 19, 1985, at the local level of significance for its association with the history of Yiddish theater in New York City and for its intact Moorish-inspired exterior and interior decoration, including a central recessed ceiling dome containing a prominent Star of David. The nomination discussed the history of Yiddish theater in Europe and the United States, Jewish immigration to America and especially New York City, and the social institutions that became important to Eastern European Jewish immigrants living in pluralistic urban settlements. Although no period of significance was stated, the original draft notes that the theater was built in 1926 and that the first Yiddish troupe using the theater was in operation until 1950. Since then, additional research has been compiled on the history of the theater and its association with Jewish performance art. Since Jewish theater is not the primary purpose of this submission, this additional information has been included in two appendices. Appendix A is the Yiddish theater heyday history from 1926 to 1945, and Appendix B is the revival Yiddish theater history from 1961 to 1987.

The purpose of this additional documentation is to document the theater's LGBT associations during its use as a live theater venue (Phoenix Theater) and for its association with Club 181, a venue that featured lavish shows of "female impersonators" (a term used at the time) and "drag king" (women dressed as men) wait staff under criterion A in areas of Social History/LGBT and Performing Arts. In addition, the document adds significance under criteria A and B and criteria consideration G in the areas of Social History/LGBT and Art for the theater's associations with the life and work of three exceptionally important LGBT artists, **Jackie Curtis**, **Peter Hujar**, and **David Wojnarowicz**.¹ Each of the three lived and worked in the building at separate times between 1968 and 1992, and in each case, this building is the place most closely associated with the artist's significant contributions. The end date for the period of significance for the building has been expanded to 1992 to encompass the periods of residence for these three significant artists

Name Change to Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building

This building was listed on the National Register as the Yiddish Art Theatre. However, that nomination confused the name of the first theater troupe in the building with the name of the performance venue. While this theater was intended as the permanent home of the Yiddish Art Theatre, that company only performed here during four theater seasons (1926-28 and 1932-34), so the theater was known under that name only during those years. During its entire Yiddish theater heyday, from 1926 to 1945, the theater operated under many different names according to the theater company then in residence. It was often known as the Yiddish Folks Theater to distinguish it from the Yiddish Art Theatre troupe. Other names included the [Ludwig] Satz Folks Theater, Molly Picon's Folks Theater, and [Misha and Lucy]

¹ Note: The names of LGBT people are in **bold**.

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Germans' Folks Theater, taking the name of the star Yiddish performers leading their troupes, as well as the New York Art Troupe at the Yiddish Folks Theater, and New Jewish Folk Theater. These theater names appeared on the building's marquee, as well as in advertisements and theater programs. After its initial Yiddish theater period, the theater operated under a variety of names – Phoenix, Casino East, Gayety, Eden, Entermedia, and Second Avenue – as well as several movie theater names. Appendix D includes the history of these later theaters and their LGBT associations.

The name Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building was chosen to represent the owner and builder of the theater and more appropriately embraces the entire history of the building, including its history during the post-Yiddish theater years. Louis Nathaniel Jaffe (1882-1944) was a Russian-born Brooklyn lawyer, prominent Jewish civic leader, and philanthropist. A Yiddish speaker and a devotee of Maurice Schwartz and his Yiddish Art Theatre troupe, Jaffe vowed to construct a theater for them. After two years, however, Schwartz decided that this theater was not adequate for his ambitious productions, so his company performed elsewhere throughout its existence. Jaffe then rented the theater to various other Yiddish companies. Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater was referenced in contemporary newspaper accounts, and the name "JAFFE ART THEATRE BLDG" appears on the building.²

Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building was also the name chosen for the landmark designations by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1993.³ Thus, a name change would bring a consistency to its various designations. The inclusion of the word "building" also references the history of the spaces that were not part of the actual theater itself – downstairs restaurants/clubs and the front portion offices that were later converted to loft residences. These spaces, which became residences for three significant artists, are integral to the additional documentation being submitted.

DESCRIPTION

Changes to the Interior Since the 1985 Listing

The description submitted with the original nomination is comprehensive and accurate. However, the building has been altered since the original nomination. In 1990, the Jaffe Art Theater was converted into a seven-screen complex of movie theaters. To accommodate this change, the orchestra floor level of the auditorium was removed, and a new floor level inserted at the height of the stage; two new double stairways were installed to connect this level with the balcony level -- this is now the main movie theater

² One example is "Attorney in Debt for \$223, 394 Has No Real Assets," *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 19, 1931, 3.

³ Jay Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theatre/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report* and *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theatre/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Interior Designation Report* (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1993). These reports form a basis for this amended nomination, but much more material has become available in the subsequent three decades, along with the internet, than has been included in this document.

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in the complex. Additional movie theaters were inserted below this, behind the proscenium arch, and downstairs. The entrance lobby on Second Avenue was substantially rebuilt, with only the original ceiling remaining. Most other aspects of the historic interior remain essentially intact. The plasterwork of the ceiling of the auditorium was extensively damaged by the partial collapse of the concrete roof above it in 1989. A successful ceiling restoration project was carried out by CTA Architects and Evergreene Architectural Studio from 2012 to 2015.

Residential Space not described in the original nomination

The 3N loft apartment that was the consecutive residence of three significant artists between 1968 and 1992 is located in the northern half of the third story in the front portion of the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building. It was formerly two office spaces that were combined into one large loft apartment by the removal of an interior wall when some of the Jaffee offices were converted for use as residential loft apartments by 1968. It is mostly a large open space, approximately 1,036 square feet, with a high ceiling (based on 1925 blueprints, the original ten-foot ceiling was significantly lower).⁴ The ceiling has a number of exposed concrete beams. Paired round-arched windows, each 6'-9" in width, are located on the northern side, as well as the northern end of the eastern side. Additionally on the eastern side, to the south, is a large arched window, 7'-10" in width, located above the main theater entrance. The bathroom, and later photographic darkroom, were located in the northwest corner of the loft. To the east of this, separated by a wall, was the kitchenette. To the south of the kitchenette was a doorway to the bathroom/darkroom area, and to the south of that was an open closet and shelving. The long south wall was blank. Access to the loft is by a long stairway from the street, with a door located to the south of the main theater entrance. The door into the loft apartment is just to the north of the third-floor landing. It leads into a small hallway, with another doorway into the main loft space. It is believed that the configuration of the loft apartment today is the same as it was in the 1968-1992 period.

⁴ Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building blueprints (1925), New York City Department of Buildings.

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SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building is significant under criterion A in the area of Social History/LGBT and Entertainment/Recreation for its association with Club 181, a venue that, from 1946 to 1953, featured lavish shows of “female impersonators” (a term used at the time) and “drag king” (women dressed as men) wait staff, and performing arts for its association with the Phoenix Theater, a pioneering Off-Broadway theater, from 1953 to 1961, co-founded by the influential **Norris Houghton**, a gay man. These two venues operated here in the immediate post-World War II years, a socially and politically conservative time when LGBT people, largely invisible in mainstream society, were under increased surveillance and social control. Club 181 and the Phoenix Theater provide invaluable insight into the LGBT experience in nightlife and theater – cornerstones of LGBT life – in New York City during one of the most homophobic periods of American history.

Club 181 was, according to **Lisa E. Davis**, historian and author of mid-twentieth century lesbian Manhattan nightlife, “the most famous of Village gay cabarets.”⁵ Operated by the Mafia, the club is an early post-war example of the LGBT community’s long and complex relationship with mob-controlled nightlife spaces. Influential drag kings, such as **Buddy Kent** (one of the most renowned from the 1940s to the 1960s), **Gail Williams** and **Blackie Dennis**, who performed at Club 181, later revealed that the Mafia protected them from being violently attacked for dressing in drag. At the same time, they did not want their names attached to any stories connecting them to the mob during their lifetimes. The club’s popularity ultimately could not save it from being a target of institutional homophobia. After going to court to fight the loss of its license by the New York State Liquor Authority, mainly because of the mere presence of LGBT performers and patrons, the club closed in 1953.

The Phoenix Theater, in addition to being an early Off-Broadway theater and influencing the proliferation of regional American theater, is considered one of the most important, prolific, and creative companies of its time. Notable LGBT theater artists, other than Houghton, associated with the Phoenix include directors **Michael Redgrave**, **Eric Bentley**, and **Tony Richardson**; actors **Montgomery Clift**, **Farley Granger**, **Eva Le Gallienne**, and **Joel Grey**; costumer designer **Alvin Colt**; lighting designer **Tharon Musser**; scenic and costume designer **Rouben Ter-Arutunian**; and production and lighting designer **Jean Rosenthal**. Because the Phoenix operated during a highly homophobic period, it is important to acknowledge the names of the many LGBT individuals associated with the theater as a way of providing visibility and concrete documentation of the community’s influence on the American theater.

⁵ Lisa E. Davis, “Drag Kings of Village Nightlife: Before and Way Before Stonewall,” *Google Arts & Culture*, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/drag-kings-of-village-nightlife-before-and-way-before-stonewall/swUhRaa9JaRsbg>.

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The building is also exceptionally significant under criteria A and B and criteria consideration G in the areas of Social History/LGBT and Art in the area of art as the residence and workspace of three significant LGBT artists between 1968 and 1992: playwright, director, performer, and poet **Jackie Curtis**; photographer **Peter Hujar**; and artist **David Wojnarowicz**. Their contributions to the arts scene in the East Village from the 1960s to the 1990s embodied major cultural trends of the LGBT experience in this era, which included new ideas about gender identity and expression, the creation of new forms of art, and the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic. Each of the artists lived here, in the same loft apartment, sequentially, in three separate periods between 1968 and 1992. In case, this is the most important space associated with the artist's life and work. Jackie Curtis developed a pioneering genderfluid persona that defied gender stereotypes. He came to be at the center of, and a legend in, Manhattan's East Village Off-Off-Broadway theater, underground film, and LGBT scenes from the late-1960s through the 1970s. He became a successful playwright and a "Superstar" in Andy Warhol films. Curtis resided in the loft space from around the end of 1968 to 1973. Peter Hujar, already a photographer, fully developed his craft during his time in this residence, creating a darkroom and using his apartment as a photography studio. A stalwart of the East Village art scene, but an impoverished artist, Hujar was only partially recognized in his lifetime. Since his death from an AIDS-related illness, however, he has come to be regarded as one of the greatest American photographers of the twentieth century, particularly noted for his portraits. Hujar resided in the space from 1973 until his death in 1987. David Wojnarowicz channeled a life of extreme hardship into radical multimedia art, photography, filmmaking, writing, music, performance, and activism. He is among the most famous artists of the East Village scene of the 1980s, as well as one of the most esteemed activists lost during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s. A fearless political firebrand, he challenged the art world and lambasted America for failing the LGBT community, particularly in response to AIDS, and his fury spurred several national controversies. Wojnarowicz resided in the space from 1988 until his death in 1992, when he was given the first political funeral of the AIDS epidemic. These three artists were among the major players and influencers in the downtown art scene, and they are indelibly associated with the neighborhood. This additional documentation provides context for the building's diverse and dynamic social and cultural significance and recognizes a variety of different people and themes that helped to define the importance of the Lower East Side in its heyday. The additional documentation also expands the period of significance for the theater building to 1992 to encompass the period of residence for each of the three artists. The period of significance was identified as follows:

The period and area of significance recognized in the original nomination was 1926, architecture. We did not amend this portion of the nomination.

The additional criteria and areas of significance documented in the additional documentation are as follows:

- criterion A, entertainment and recreation, social history/LGBT, 1943-1953
- criterion A, performing arts, social history/LGBT, 1953-1961
- criterion B, Jackie Curtis, social history/LGBT, art, 1969-1973
- criterion B, Peter Hujar, social history/LGBT, art, 1973-1987
- criterion B, David Wojnarowicz, 1988-1992, social history/LGBT, art, 1988-1992

The LGBT Presence on the Lower East Side

Despite the real and constant threat of urban renewal plans and neighborhood displacement, artists, writers, and people in the theater "discovered" the Lower East Side by the early 1950s. Many of these people would ordinarily have been attracted to Greenwich Village; but the increasing costs of living in that neighborhood forced them to find housing outside of that traditionally LGBT-welcoming

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community. The demolition of the Third Avenue elevated in 1955 made the area just to the east more desirable and more “connected” to New York University and Greenwich Village, especially between East Houston and East 14th Streets. Realtors began marketing this area, first as “Village East” and then as the “East Village.” This area was still populated by substantial clusters of immigrant populations, including Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian. “Loisaida” (Spanglish for the Lower East Side), along the lettered avenues, had a large Puerto Rican community. Nevertheless, the newer residents soon established the East Village’s reputation as edgy, artistic, and “counter-cultural,” with residents such as the Beats and poets of the 1950s, the creation of underground film and Off-Off-Broadway theater in the 1950-60s, and the hippies of the 1960s.

According to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission’s *East Village/Lower East Side Historic District Designation Report*:

New York experienced a prolonged economic decline during the 1970s and early 1980s as the city lost many of its manufacturing jobs as well as a significant part of its population. The symbolic low point came during the financial crisis of 1975 when the municipal government barely avoided declaring bankruptcy. The East Village was particularly hard hit as many local property owners, unwilling or unable to pay for maintenance or property taxes, entered into a downward cycle of disinvestment in their buildings. The city assumed control of many of these properties, but because of the municipal economic crisis and a decrease in federal assistance for affordable housing, it too was unable to invest sufficiently in the neighborhood’s housing stock. Some local residents and community groups began to rehabilitate their buildings through sweat-equity projects, in some cases via officially-sanctioned channels such as the Urban Homesteading Program and in others through illegal means such as squatting.⁶

Through this cycle of disinvestment and rehabilitation, the East Village became, for a decade in the 1980s, a center of locally, then nationally celebrated, avant-garde punk counterculture, art, and nightlife. The easternmost section of the East Village was particularly gritty. Artist and later gallery owner **Alan Barrows** described it and the 1980s as “a blockbuster decade for creative talent and the reinventing of a city after decades of neglect. Mountains of garbage and sealed up tenements in a neighborhood with its abandoned burnt out cars and trash resembled war-torn Beirut rather than part of the largest city in the United States.”⁷

East Village residents in that period created a downtown art scene that was accompanied by an

⁶ Christopher D. Brazee, *East Village/Lower East Side Historic District Designation Report* (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2012).

⁷ Alan Barrows, Civilian Warfare Gallery, <https://civilianwarfaregallery.wordpress.com>.

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explosion of art galleries (briefly the center of the New York art world), other businesses and institutions, music venues, bars and clubs. Cheaper rents (many of the tenements did not have individual bathrooms in each apartment) attracted younger political activists and organizations and artists of all types. The LGBT community was a significant and accepted presence in the East Village – as artists and gallery and business owners in the Off-Off-Broadway theater world and in bars and clubs for LGBT nightlife, with its accompanying drag scene. The neighborhood and its artistic and LGBT scenes were drastically, negatively affected by the end of the decade by a number of factors. These included the AIDS epidemic, which emerged in 1981, and rampant drug abuse, both of which resulted in countless deaths, and significant changes in taste in the fickle art world. After that, the East Village succumbed to increasing gentrification. Loft apartments in the Jaffe Building were quite desirable, being centrally located amidst all of the East Village scenes, not to mention the cultural activities in the theater itself.

LGBT Associations with the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building 1946-1992

Club 181 - 1946 to 1951

After the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building's completion, the downstairs, entered at the south end on Second Avenue, was the location of a series of clubs and restaurants, most reflecting the then Russian-Ukrainian-Polish immigrant population of the neighborhood. All of them featured live entertainment: Russian Art Restaurant (1927-38), New Russian Art Restaurant (1939-40), Adria Polish Restaurant (1940), Club Adria (1941), Club 181 (1941-42), an “outpost of Harlem swing,” and the Roumanian Folks Casino (1944-45).

Of particular significance to LGBT history was the popular Club 181 [not to be confused with the previous jazz club with that name]. Operating from 1946 to 1951, Club 181 was one of the most luxurious clubs in the U.S. that featured lavish shows of “female impersonators” (who might today identify as drag queens or transgender women) and a wait staff of “drag kings” (women dressed as men and who would perhaps identify as lesbians today) who also performed.⁸ The club, under Mafia control, drew many LGBT patrons, as well as heterosexuals. It, therefore, serves as an important and early example of the LGBT nightlife experience, both in the audience and on stage, in the immediate post-World War II era, when the community faced increased policing and social control. This reflected a nationwide political conservatism that culminated in anti-Communist witch-hunts (the Second Red Scare) led by Senator Joseph A. McCarthy. A parallel “lavender scare” also greatly impacted LGBT people.

Laws curtailing homosexual activities were enacted or more strongly enforced beginning in the 1930s. After Prohibition ended in 1933, the New York Legislature created the New York State Liquor

⁸ Jay Shockley, “Club 181,” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, March 2017, revised November 2021, <https://www.nyclightsites.org/site/louis-n-jaffee-art-theater>.

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Authority (SLA) in 1934, which had the power to revoke the licenses of bar owners who “suffer or permit [their] premises to become disorderly.” Though legislators declined to define “disorderly” in this context, the SLA, prodded by moral crusaders, took the interpretation of the state’s homophobic 1923 solicitation statute and considered the mere presence of homosexuals at a bar to be so defined.⁹ A bar could lose its liquor license if caught serving such “criminals.” The Mafia, familiar with operating speakeasies during Prohibition and seizing another opportunity for exploitation and profit, opened some establishments under the ruse of being members-only private “bottle clubs” that didn’t need a license. (Stonewall, an NHL, was a later example of this type of establishment.) But with the creation of the SLA, virtually all gay and lesbian bars or establishments that tolerated a gay, lesbian, or gender non-conforming presence, came to be owned and/or operated with some type of involvement by the Mafia, and a vicious cycle began of Mafia-police-SLA payoffs that continued through the 1980s. Owners and operators were forced to take out Mafia loans and patronize their monopoly on bar equipment and vending machines. Ironically, through these bribes and payoffs, the police and SLA authorities actually protected Mafia interests and kept many gay bars open.

Club 181 was opened by the family of the infamous Mafia boss Vito Genovese, who was one of the bigger Mafia club operators in Greenwich Village starting in the 1930s. **Anna Genovese** (1905-1982), Vito’s bisexual wife, ran it with her brothers, Pete and Fred Petillo, and Genovese frontman/manager Stephen Franse. Anna had started out in clubs as the proprietor of Club Caravan, 578 West Broadway (demolished), in 1939, taking over many of her husband’s business interests when he left New York City for exile in Italy in 1937 to avoid arrest for a murder and other crimes.

The Mafia connections at Club 181 illustrate the complex relationship that LGBT people had with the mob in the post-World War II era. Historian **Lisa E. Davis** stated, “You’d think that for gay girls, working for the Mafia would be some kind of scourge — it was the greatest thing that ever happened to them!”¹⁰ Davis also said, “Being gay — dressing up in your little trousers and suit — you could easily get yourself murdered. The Mafia protected them.”¹¹ At the same time, they did not want their names connected to any stories about them while they were alive. They told Davis that “Anna [Genovese] was definitely into the girls” and that having to navigate the situation without angering her or her husband was an issue.

Davis’s research into this era led her to write the mystery novel *Under the Mink* (2001), set in

⁹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 1994), 337.

¹⁰ Hugh Ryan, “The Three Lives of Malvina Schwartz,” *Hazlitt*, October 12, 2016, <https://hazlitt.net/longreads/three-lives-malvina-schwartz>.

¹¹ Hugh Ryan, “Back in the Day, Lesbian Drag Kings Worked for the Mafia,” *Vice*, July 5, 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/when-drag-kings-ruled-alongside-the-mafia-235>.

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Greenwich Village in 1949 and based on the famed drag kings of the era. The protagonist, Blackie Cole, was based on **Buddy Kent**, a Club 181 performer and one of the city's most renowned drag kings from the 1940s to the 1960s. Born Malvina Schwartz ca. 1925 in Manhattan, she adopted the name Buddy Kent after high school, noting that being Jewish and a lesbian made it difficult to find work. Frequenting the lesbian bar scene in Greenwich Village as a working-class teenager, she wore her preferred outfit – a white boy's shirt, a bow tie, a navy blue or black skirt, and men's shoes (because she had large feet) – and slicked her curly hair wet to make it straight. At eighteen years old, dressing by this point in what she described as “full drag” (pants, vest, shirt, tie, and short hair), she started bartending at Ernie's, one of several bars popular with lesbians in 1930s Greenwich Village. One night, Ernie's was short an act, so Kent filled in with a dancing routine. Seeing potential, people associated with Ernie's helped Kent put together a real act.

Kent would soon be performing at Club 181, “the most famous of Village gay cabarets,” according to Davis.¹² In a 1983 interview with Joan Nestle for the Lesbian Herstory Archives, Kent described her experience at the club:

When I was twenty-one, the 181 Club was hiring attractive lesbians to wait tables. If you had any talent, they put you in the chorus. So I became a chorus boy/waiter. We were all making money and buying cars and really living it up. I did a strip out of top hat and tails, a Fred Astaire dance and then — with one flip of the hand — my pants flew out from under me. Then I went into a girl strip. When I finished people didn't know if I was a boy or a girl because I was quite slim and very flat.¹³

Among other notable drag king performers at Club 181 were **Gail Williams** (Gayle Krumpkin) and **Blackie Dennis**. Davis notes that Dennis was a star and a crooner. A popular lesbian stripper at the club was **Toni Bennett**.

Swarsarnt Neuf's Gay Guides (1949) stated that “New York boasts two all-out drag shows. The 181... is the more elegant and pretentious of the two.”¹⁴ Three shows performed nightly were produced by Neil Stone and “conceived, staged, and directed” by Broadway dancer (and later Tony Award-winning choreographer for stage, film and TV) Danny Daniels. Live music was provided by the orchestra of prolific Broadway conductor and musical director Al Goodman.¹⁵ Historian **Lillian Faderman** wrote that the Club 181 had “waiters who were butch lesbians in tuxedos ... Like the bars of the 1920s, it drew many heterosexuals who came to gawk or to dabble, but many more men and women who were

¹² Lisa E. Davis, “Drag Kings of Village Nightlife: Before and Way Before Stonewall.”

¹³ Interview of Malvina Schwartz (aka Bubbles Kent, Buddy Kent) by Joan Nestle for the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1983, via Hugh Ryan, <https://hazlitt.net/longreads/three-lives-malvina-schwartz>.

¹⁴ Hugh Hagius, *Swarsarnt Nerf's Gay Guides for 1949* (Bibliogay Publications, 2010).

¹⁵ Club 181 souvenir programs and advertisement (n.d.).

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committed to homosexuality and who came to be with other homosexuals.”¹⁶ One lesbian waiter, **Bertie Halpern**, reminisced that “it was like the homosexual Copacabana. It was a lovely club. Wedgewood walls, white and blue. It had a nice stage. They had the cream of the crop, as far as female impersonators. These weren’t just drag queens. They were guys that had talent behind their costumes.”¹⁷ One such performer was the influential “**Kitt Russell**” (**Russell Paull**), who got his start here in 1948. He later became the director of the Club 82 Revue at Club 82, 82 East 4th Street.

Even with the Mafia’s influence, Club 181 had to navigate an era when widespread homophobia could shut down a business no matter its popularity. The extremely homophobic *Confidential* guidebooks, written by Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, provide insight: “the most notorious Lesbian night club in New York is on Second Avenue, south of 14th Street, on the lower East Side - the 181 Club” (*New York: Confidential!*, 1948/1951); “New York’s most evil and notorious fairy-haunt, the disgusting 181 Club, at that address on Second Ave., where every cabaret law and ordinance on the books is fractured nightly” (*Washington: Confidential!*, 1951); and “the most famous fag joint in town” (*U.S.A. Confidential*, 1952).¹⁸

Through an action of the SLA, Club 181 lost its liquor license in April 1951. For five nights – December 15 through 19, 1950 – the club, its performers, staff, and patrons were surveilled by undercover police. The club was then cited for nine violations, including the sale of alcohol after hours; staff allegedly inducing patrons to buy alcohol; the club permitting an “indecent” act by a patron; the presence of “homosexuals,” lesbians, and other “undesirables,” and that the club put on “obscene, indecent” performances and exhibitions. In its report, the *New York Daily News* called the club “a hangout for perverts of both sexes.”¹⁹

Club 181 was extremely profitable, however, with a substantially straight outer borough and tourist crowd, and receipts for 1950 were reported as \$480,000. The Mafia, through the 181 Restaurant Corp., with Stephen Franse as president, contested the revocation of its license. The case was heard in the New York Supreme Court on March 28 and April 11, 1951. The counsel for the SLA stated, “the operation of this club constituted an affront to the community and a danger to the morals of the citizenry,” and much of the police testimony centered on the gender non-conforming dress and behavior of the performers, staff, and patrons. Franse was forced to deny any knowledge that gay men or lesbians frequented the club or were employed there. Interestingly, the club attempted to challenge the SLA’s use of the term

¹⁶ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th-Century America* (Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Allison Owings, *Hey, Waitress!: the USA From the Other Side of the Tray* (University of California Press, 2002), 193-194.

¹⁸ Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer, *New York: Confidential!* (Crown Publishers, 1948/1951), *Washington: Confidential!* (Crown Publishers, 1951), and *U.S.A. Confidential* (Crown Publishers, 1952).

¹⁹ “Which-Sex-Is-Which Club Loses License,” *New York Daily News*, April 28, 1951.

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“disorderly” (in Section 106 of its law) to revoke the licenses of places with an LGBT clientele, since it was so vague and the legislature had never defined it. Club 181’s license was officially revoked on April 27, then it was stayed until review by the court’s Appellate Division, which denied the appeal on June 6. The New York State Court of Appeals affirmed the earlier decision on July 11, and the club’s final appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court was denied.²⁰ Club 181’s operation was basically transferred to Club 82 in 1953.²¹

Phoenix Theater - 1953 to 1961

Following the end of Yiddish theater at the Jaffe (New Jewish Folk) in 1945, it became a movie theater in 1946 known as the Stuyvesant Theater. In the fall of 1953, the vacant Stuyvesant was leased by a newly created theater company, and both the company and the theater were named the Phoenix Theater. The legendary Phoenix was an early Off-Broadway theater and considered one of the most important, prolific, and creative companies of its time. It had an influence on the proliferation of regional American theater as well.²²

Though there had been small, early “experimental” theaters in Greenwich Village, such as the Provincetown Playhouse (1916), the concept of what today is known as less commercialized, “Off-Broadway” theater in New York dates from the late 1940s and early 1950s. Theater historians often credit the Living Theatre (1947), created by actor/director Judith Malina and painter Julian Beck, as the first. Circle in the Square Theater, 5 Sheridan Square, was founded in 1951 by a group of actors that included Jose Quintero and Theodore Mann. It became known for producing revivals of plays by well-known playwrights and had an early success with Tennessee Williams’s *Summer and Smoke* in 1952. Another milestone in the history of Off-Broadway was the production of Brecht/Weill’s *The Threepenny Opera* at the Theatre de Lys, 121 Christopher Street, which ran from 1955 to 1961.

The co-founders of the Phoenix Theater were **Norris Houghton** (1909-2001), who became the artistic director, and T. Edward Hambleton (1911-2005), who acted as manager of the company. Houghton,

²⁰ New York Supreme Court, *181 Restaurant Corp. v. O’Connell, et al.* (New York State Liquor Authority), March 28 and April 11, 1951; New York State Court of Appeals, *Lenore F. Moore, Inc. v. O’Connell, et al.* (New York State Liquor Authority), June 19, 1951.

²¹ Jay Shockley, “Club 82,” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, November 2021, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/club-82>.

²² Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report*; Richard A. Cordell and Lowell Matson, ed., *The Off-Broadway Theatre: Seven Plays* (Random House, 1959); Weldon R. Durham, ed., *American Theatre Companies, 1931-1986* (Greenwood Press, 1989); Michael Feingold, “The Phoenix Theater 1953-1982,” *Village Voice*, Dec. 21, 1982, 117, 130; Norris Houghton, “The Phoenix Rises,” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1953, II, 1, 3; Stuart W. Little, *Off-Broadway: The Prophetic Theater (A Documentary History from 1952 to the Present)* (Coward McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1972); Stuart Vaughan, *A Possible Theatre: The Experiences of a Pioneer in America’s Resident Theatre* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969); “Tandy and Cronyn Launching New Theater,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 29, 1953; Albert Bermel, “The Phoenix Has Two Heads,” *Tulane Drama Review* (September 1959), 60-89, <https://www-jstor-org.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/stable/1124805?seq=1>.

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born in Indianapolis, graduated from Princeton University, and in 1931 became a stage manager and scenic designer of the University Players in West Falmouth, Massachusetts. Following a Guggenheim Fellowship to study theater in Russia in 1934-35, he was an assistant to actor **Katharine Cornell** and director **Guthrie McClintic** (1936), was the scenic designer of seven Broadway productions (1937-38) and art director of the St. Louis Municipal Opera (1939). Houghton received a Rockefeller Foundation grant in 1940 to travel around the country to observe local theaters. In 1945, he was a founder, producer and director of Theatre, Inc., a non-profit producing organization, and was associate editor of *Theatre Arts* in 1945-48. He was the first American to direct a Shakespeare play in England, in 1947, and he directed three Broadway shows between 1948 and 1951, including **Michael Redgrave** in *Macbeth*.²³ Hambleton, descendant of a wealthy Baltimore banking family, had theater management and production experience. A Yale University drama graduate, he ran a theater in Rhode Island and produced seven Broadway shows between 1937 and 1950. He became associated with the Experimental Theater of the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA) in 1946 and was responsible for bringing German playwright Bertolt Brecht to Los Angeles in 1947 for *Galileo*.²⁴

The Phoenix Theater was formed initially as a limited partnership company, its partners including such theatrical luminaries as Richard Rodgers, Elia Kazan, Mildred Dunnock, **William Inge**, and Peggy Wood. It also had financial backing from the wealthy and successful theater producer Roger L. Stevens. Planned as an “art theater”/repertory company, modelled in part after the Lyric Hammersmith Theater in London, the Phoenix was envisioned to be freed from the restrictions, both artistic and economic, of the Broadway stage. In their statement of purpose, the theater’s founders expressed their desires “to release actors, directors, playwrights, and designers from the pressures forced on them by the hit-or-flop patterns of Broadway” and to give theater patrons “a playhouse where they can see top-flight productions of fine plays with professional casts within the limitations of their budgets.”²⁵

The search for a theater away from the Times Square area led the founders to this vacant house in the East Village. Houghton touted the attractiveness of the 1,100-seat theater, which was newer than many of the Broadway houses, and its advantages of location, in terms of transportation and proximity to the 30,000 residents of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village. The goal of presenting serious theater, with tickets costing only \$1.20 to \$3.00, was to be met through union concessions, a salary ceiling for

²³ Paula Burba, “Theater director, producer Norris Houghton dies,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, October 12, 2001; John Russell, “A Dear Comrade in Art,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1991, 7-2; Kenneth Jones, “Norris Houghton, Director and Designer Who Co-Founded Influential Phoenix, Dead at 92,” *Playbill*, <https://www.playbill.com/article/norris-houghton-director-and-designer-who-co-founded-influential-phoenix-dead-at-92-com-99104>; “Norris Houghton,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norris_Houghton;

²⁴ J. Wynn Rousuck, “Pioneering producer reshaped the theater,” *Baltimore Sun*, December 20, 2005; Celestine Bohlen, “Norris Houghton, Theater Director, Dies at 92,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2001.

²⁵ Little, 54.

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performers at \$100 a week, and a limited engagement schedule of four weeks per production.

The theater opened in December 1953, with Sidney Howard's *Madam, Will You Walk*, starring Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn. Over the course of eight full seasons in this house, the Phoenix Theater presented an impressive array of American and European theatrical talent, from both the stage and motion pictures. Directors of Phoenix productions included John Houseman, Howard da Silva, Sidney Lumet, Oscar Homolka, Tyrone Guthrie, **Michael Redgrave**, **Eric Bentley**, **Tony Richardson**, and George Abbott. The numerous distinguished actors with the company included Robert Ryan, Mildred Natwick, Kaye Ballard, **Montgomery Clift**, Maureen Stapleton, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Nancy Walker, **Farley Granger**, Viveca Lindfors, Uta Hagen, Siobhan McKenna, **Eva Le Gallienne**, Irene Worth, Eli Wallach, Joan Plowright, June Havoc, Jacob Ben-Ami, Lillian Gish, and Mildred Dunnock. Despite the company's emphasis on established actors, it also formed a reputation for assisting the careers of talented newcomers, some of whom included Tammy Grimes, **Joel Grey**, Charlotte Rae, Larry Storch, Jerry Stiller, Peter Falk, and Fritz Weaver.

The theater also employed esteemed scenic, costume, and lighting designers, composers, librettists, and choreographers. The company tended toward classic dramas (by Shakespeare, Chekhov, Shaw, Ibsen, Brecht, Schiller, Eliot, O'Casey, etc.), but it became notable as well for its innovative musicals.

The Phoenix Theater was never a profitable venture after its first critically successful season (which included *The Golden Apple*), and it had periods of failure, success, and change. The second season saw its first major popular hit, the musical revue *Phoenix '55*, and the installation of air conditioning for the first time, so that the house could still be used during the warmest months. Following the fourth season, the company was reorganized both as a nonprofit organization under the financial administration of Theatre, Inc. (Roger L. Stevens, president), and as a permanent repertory company under artistic director Stuart Vaughan. The theater's least successful season (1958-59) was followed by its greatest success, the musical comedy *Once Upon a Mattress*, which launched the career of Carol Burnett. The company was later acclaimed for its productions of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (Parts I and II) and *Hamlet*, the latter, starring Donald Madden, one of the most successful American presentations of that play to date. After years of deficits, the Phoenix Theater directors considered its large house to be a burden for its type of theater company, and Houghton was increasingly turning his attention to academia. The Phoenix moved to a smaller house at 334 East 74th Street in the fall of 1961, and the company survived until 1982, still influential.

LGBT Associations at the Phoenix Theater

As with Club 181, the Phoenix operated at the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building during one of the most homophobic periods in American history – the post-World War II era. At this time, the policing

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and social control of LGBT people extended even to the New York theater world.²⁶ In 1927, the New York Legislature had passed the Wales Padlock Law, which made “depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion” illegal, and offending theaters could be closed; the law remained on the books until 1967. While it is not clear if productions at the Phoenix were directly impacted, this legal discrimination helped foster such a high level of invisibility and secrecy that determining the full extent of LGBT contributions to the theater remains a difficult task. As such, documenting the names of LGBT individuals associated with any theater, when possible, provides important and concrete evidence of their enormous contributions.

The Gay & Lesbian Theatrical Legacy: A Biographical Dictionary of Major Figures in American Stage History in the Pre-Stonewall Era (2005) was a pioneering effort to compile biographies of some of the leading LGBT people in American theater, prior to 1969, in one volume. The introduction of this work saliently articulated the unique difficulties of this task:

The theater has long borne the reputation of being a “haven for homosexuality.” As such, it has been both denigrated as a denizen of depravity by members of the dominant, straight culture and sought after as a refuge by queer people, those whose sexual desires deviated from prevailing norms. If the haven has allowed indulgence in transgressive behavior, it has also served as a closet, as both straights and queers have been heavily invested in obscuring the sexual identities of its specific inhabitants. ... These dynamics of closeting have been particularly salient in the United States... Thus for all the queers rumored to be have inhabited the theatrical haven, precise knowledge of who they were and what they did has remained, until recently, very shrouded, and it is still largely diffuse, couched in a relatively few studies focused on individual figures that dare to deal openly with their sexuality.²⁷

This project further argued that:

knowledge of the role of same-sex sexual desire in historical figures’ theatrical careers is central to understanding their contributions... Our larger project has been to examine how societal and cultural attitudes shaped our subjects’ sense of sexual difference in their respective periods and the interplay of their on- and offstage lives in this context; how their sexuality affected their choice of intimates, professional associates, the kind of work they did, and how they performed it; how shared understandings with people of like persuasion both enabled and inhibited their collaborations; and how they and their

²⁶ For more information on the policing and social control of LGBT people in theater, see Amanda Davis, *Caffe Cino, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 2016.

²⁷ *The Gay & Lesbian Theatrical Legacy: A Biographical Dictionary of Major Figures in American Stage History in the Pre-Stonewall Era*, Billy J. Harbin, Kim Marra, and Robert A. Schanke, eds. (University of Michigan Press, 2005), Introduction, 1.

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associates exploited as well as suffered from modes of oppression and discrimination.²⁸

The Phoenix Theater featured the work of many significant LGBT authors, composers, lyricists, directors, scenic, costume, and lighting designers, and actors, some well-established and some at the start of their careers. They collectively demonstrate the important contributions of the LGBT community to the creation of Off-Broadway theater and to American theater in general. Notable LGBT designers, all of whom earned acclaim over their careers, included costume designer **Alvin Colt** (sixteen productions), lighting designer **Tharon Musser** (six productions), production and lighting designer **Jean Rosenthal** (five productions), and scenic and costume designer **Rouben Ter-Arutunian** (three productions). Within the context described at the beginning of this section, determining which theatrical figures involved in the Phoenix Theater were/are LGBT has not been an easy task.²⁹ Other than famous individuals, there were many lesser known, but very significant, LGBT actors and creators where the only evidence of their sexuality has been an obituary, and usually only when there is a surviving partner. Appendix A is a production history of the Phoenix Theater, including current knowledge of which LGBT individuals created work there.

LGBT Residents of the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building

The Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building, aside from the theater and downstairs restaurant/club space, also originally contained six commercial stores on the ground story with offices above them. By the late 1960s, some of the offices were converted for use as loft apartments.³⁰ Three notable interconnected LGBT residents who lived sequentially in apartment 3N on the third floor were **Jackie Curtis, Peter Hujar, and David Wojnarowicz**, all of whom were part of the arts scene in the East Village from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s.³¹

²⁸ *The Gay & Lesbian Theatrical Legacy*, Introduction, 2.

²⁹ NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project; Hundreds of online searches of countless resources.

³⁰ According to the building's 1994 Certificate of Occupancy, there was one apartment and one office on the second floor, two apartments on the third floor, and one apartment on the fourth. According to the Property Shark website in 2024, there are three residences and two commercial spaces. Current buzzers on the building indicate cinema offices on the second floor, two apartments on the third floor, and one apartment on the fourth floor.

³¹ These three artists were mentioned in Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theatre/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report*.

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*Jackie Curtis (1947-1985)*³²

Prolific avant-garde playwright, director, performer, singer, poet, and Warhol “Superstar” **Jackie Curtis** resided in third-story loft apartment 3N in the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building from around the end of 1968 to 1973. Though he lived in other apartments during his relatively short life, this building is significant as the residence where he lived when many of his plays were produced and when his reputation as an influential downtown artist was solidified, and this was also the only apartment that he had on his own. His plays were performed at several downtown theaters, but most notably at La MaMa, the Off-Off-Broadway theater company with which he would become the most associated over the course of his career. Curtis met **Andy Warhol** shortly before moving to the Second Avenue loft, later becoming a Warhol “Superstar” (fellow Superstar **Candy Darling** briefly lived with him here). He and other Superstars were immortalized in **Lou Reed**’s famous 1972 song “Walk on the Wild Side” during the period Curtis lived on Second Avenue.

Born John Curtis Holder Jr. (1947-1985), Curtis was raised in the East Village and became interested in performing at a young age. He adopted the name Jackie Curtis in the mid-1960s as he developed his pioneering gender-fluid persona. He came to be at the center of, and a legend in, the East Village Off-Off-Broadway, underground film, and LGBT scenes in the late 1960s through the 1970s.

His father, John Holder Sr., worked for the Veterans Administration, and his mother, Jenevieve (Jean) Uglialoro, worked as a certified public accountant. They met in a New York dance hall, married, and moved to Tennessee after their son was born. Not relating to that location and missing New York, Jean separated from her husband after seven months, moved back to the city, and divorced Holder in 1948. In the 1950 United States Census, Jean Holder, age twenty-three, was living with her son “Jack” at 315 East 13th Street and working as a “hostess” in a dance hall. Her mother, Anna Uglialoro, was living in another apartment in the same building (where she worked as a superintendent) with her husband, Joseph Verra, her daughter, Josephine, and her son, Jack. Anna, Jean, and Josephine all worked as “taxi dancers” in the 1940s-50s.

³² Ken Lustbader, “Jackie Curtis Residence,” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, February 2021, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/jackie-curtis-residence>; Collection #142 – Jackie Curtis Papers, NYC LGBT Community Center National History Archive; Craig B. Highberger, email to Ken Lustbader/ NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, January 2021; Joe Preston, Executor of the Estate of Jackie Curtis, emails to Ken Lustbader/ NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, January and February 2021; Guy Trebay, “A Vision in Thrift-Shop Chic Visits From the 60’s,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2004; Jackie Curtis (accessed February 6, 2021), bit.ly/3aG5GcU; “Jackie Curtis, 38, Performer And Writer for Warhol Films,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1985; “Jackie Curtis,” The Downtown Pop Underground (accessed February 8, 2021), bit.ly/36U15T8; Rosalyn Regelson, “Not a Boy, Not a Girl, Just Me, Jackie,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1969; Craig B. Highberger, director and producer, *Superstar in a Housedress* documentary, 2004; Craig B. Highberger, *Superstar in a Housedress: the Life and Legend of Jackie Curtis* (Open Road, 2015); Joe Preston, *Jackie Curtis Undressed!* (Independent, 2024).

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Jack Holder reportedly was raised largely by his grandmother, who in 1956 opened a bar called “Slugger Ann’s” at 192 Second Avenue, at the northeast corner of East 12th Street, cattycorner from the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater. The bar’s name referenced her reputation for the way in which she dealt with men who made inappropriate advances. In 1959, the Phoenix Theater, the company then in the Jaffee Theater, had its biggest hit, *Once Upon a Mattress*, which made Carol Burnett a star. Young Jack, age twelve, used to wait for her at the stage door until he finally met her and was photographed with her. He later said that Burnett inspired him to become a performer.

Holder attended the School of Art and Design from 1962 to 1965. He became friends in 1965 with Susana Ventura (the future Off-Off-Broadway actor **Penny Arcade**), and the pair used to haunt the thrift shops of the neighborhood. Ventura claims to be the first one to dress Holder in drag. That same year, he started to use the name “Jackie Curtis.” Also in 1965, his grandmother rented an apartment at 324 East 14th Street (their East 13th Street building was going to be demolished) and Curtis moved into this apartment.

Around this time, Jackie Curtis met Ellen Stewart, founder of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, one of New York’s early and influential Off-Off-Broadway theaters, located in the East Village. Off-Off-Broadway theater, largely associated with Greenwich Village and the East Village, was experimental, avant-garde, and strictly non-commercial. Caffe Cino, 31 Cornelia Street (NRHP-listed), which operated from 1958 to 1968, is widely recognized as the birthplace of Off-Off-Broadway and of gay theater. After this, La MaMa was one of the most significant Off-Off-Broadway venues and one that was also important for putting on the work of LGBT playwrights and performers. Curtis had a long-time association with La MaMa as playwright, performer, or both. Fresh out of high school, he wrote his first play, *Glamour, Glory and Gold* (1965). In December 1965, he made his first stage appearance, at La MaMa, in **Tom Eyen**’s *Miss Nefertiti Regrets*, which starred a young Bette Midler.

During this period, Curtis began creating his pioneering persona that defied gender stereotypes without attempting to “pass” as female. In March 1966, he met transgender performers **Candy Darling** and **Holly Woodlawn**. He told his friend and future biographer **Craig B. Highberger** that “Candy and Holly take female hormones and talk about having sex change operations. That is not for me at all, because my body is my body, and my sex is my sex and my ambiguity is my ambiguity. And I cling to that, fervently.”³³ Throughout his life, Curtis expressed elements of his personality that ignored sexual or gender identity labels. He spent years both living and performing in his unique style of drag. Standing at 5’11,” he would appear in private and in public wearing female attire (without falsies), older thrift shop dresses or miniskirts, expensive outfits purposely torn, ripped stockings, and haphazard makeup (often

³³ Highberger, *Superstar in a Housedress*” (2005), 39.

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with glitter around his eyes). Depending on his mood, he would also adopt what he described as his male “**James Dean**” persona. In 1969, he described himself to the *New York Times* as “not a boy, not a girl, not a faggot, not a drag queen, not a transsexual – just me, Jackie,” adding that he was “not trying to pass as a woman.”³⁴ This concept was uncommon at the time, as drag before this was usually associated with “realness.” Curtis’s “style” was widely adopted by others, including many fashion designers in the 1970s and ‘80s, and is often cited as an inspiration for the “glam-rock” look.

In 1967, Curtis and Darling met artist **Andy Warhol** while walking in Greenwich Village. In September, Curtis’s play *Glamour, Glory and Gold: the Life and Legend of Nola Noonan, Goddess and Star* opened at Tony Bastiano’s Playwright’s Workshop Club at 14 Waverly Place, with Warhol in attendance. Directed by **Ron Link**, with Curtis and Darling in the cast, it was a hit and ran for six months. At the time, Curtis and Darling were also working at Slugger Ann’s Bar. Curtis’s next play, the musical *Lucky Wonderful*, with Curtis as the lead, opened at Playwright’s Workshop Club in March 1968 to mixed reviews but was still a hit. A second production of *Glamour, Glory and Gold* in May included Robert DeNiro in his stage debut.

Warhol’s association helped to get Curtis’s plays noticed. In the summer of 1968, Warhol’s publicist and filmmaker, Paul Morrissey, filmed the movie *Flesh*, with Curtis and Darling in the cast in their movie debuts. It was an immediate cult “underground” hit. Morrissey’s next film, also a success, was *Trash* (1970), co-starring Woodlawn. Curtis, Darling, and Woodlawn became known as Warhol “Superstars,” regularly hanging out at Max’s Kansas City (213 Park Avenue South) with Warhol and his entourage. Morrissey next cast these three Superstars in *Women in Revolt* (filmed in 1970, released in 1971), his parody of the women’s liberation movement. Warhol reportedly stated, “Jackie Curtis is not a drag queen. Jackie is an artist. A pioneer without a frontier.”³⁵ Curtis appeared on the cover of the newspaper *Gay Power* in 1969. Noted portrait painter Alice Neel painted Curtis in drag in *Jackie Curtis and Ritta Redd* in 1970 (Cleveland Museum of Art), and as a male in *Jackie Curtis as a Boy* in 1972 (private collection).

Around the fall of 1968, Curtis and Darling rented a room at the Hotel Albert on University Place. According to **Joe Preston**, Curtis’s cousin, their grandmother “Slugger Ann” was the super of the building that her bar was in, and since the same company also owned the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building, she also worked as a super there. After some of the Jaffee offices were converted for use as residential loft apartments, Curtis moved into the northern space on the third story, around the end of 1968. He lived there until 1973, and this was the only apartment that he had on his own. Candy Darling’s biographer, Cynthia Carr, wrote that Darling for a short time curtained off a corner of the loft

³⁴ Regelson.

³⁵ Cited in Highberger, book, 67.

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and lived there with Curtis.³⁶ Preston described it as a “cavernous studio with high ceilings” that was “a nucleus hang-out respite for the circuit of downtown performers and creative artists who would drop by at all times of the day and night.”³⁷ The space included the main loft area, an open floor plan facing Second Avenue to the east and East 12th Street to the north, and a western section with no windows.

Beginning in the late 1960s, while he lived in the Jaffee building, plays by Curtis in which he performed the lead roles were produced at La MaMa and elsewhere downtown. His work featured trans and non-binary actors and characters and themes that lampooned sexual and social conventions. Curtis’s collaborators included many names that are now revered in Off-Off-Broadway history. Curtis was in Tom Murrin’s play *Cock Strong at John Vaccaro*’s Play-House of the Ridiculous in June 1969. Vaccaro also produced Curtis’s play *Heaven Grand in Amber Orbit* in September, but he fired Curtis from the cast after creative differences. It was positively reviewed and an immediate hit, and it also played at La MaMa in February 1970 (Vaccaro took it on tour in Europe for over a year). Curtis’s next play, *Femme Fatale: the Three Faces of Gloria*, was performed at La MaMa in May 1970, with Curtis, Patti Smith, **Penny Arcade**, and **Wayne County** in the cast and, despite mixed reviews, it was another hit. *Vain Victory: the Vicissitudes of the Damned* was Curtis’s next play, which he also directed, at La MaMa, opening in May 1971. With a large cast that included Curtis, Darling, **Agosto Machado**, **Mario Montez**, and fashion photographer **Francesco Scavullo**, it was a huge sold-out hit, transferring in August, as a musical, to the Workshop of the Player’s Art, 333 Bowery. Curtis’s *America Cleopatra*, featuring Curtis, **Alexis de Lago**, **Harvey Fierstein**, and Machado in the cast, opened in May 1972 to mixed reviews.

Lou Reed immortalized Warhol Superstars Curtis, Darling, Woodlawn, and Joe Dallesandro in his famous 1972 song “Walk on the Wild Side” -- one of the lyrics was “Jackie is just speeding away / Thought she was James Dean for a day / Then I guess she had to crash...” Struggling with alcohol and drug addiction and not always able to pay the rent, Curtis moved out of the Jaffee Art Theater Building loft in 1973. After his grandmother’s bar building was renovated, she assisted Curtis in renting a small studio behind her bar, at 301 East 12th Street, where he lived for a few years. He also stayed at several other apartments with friends.

Glamour, Glory and Gold was revived to acclaim in March 1974, again directed by Ron Link, with Curtis as the lead. In May-June 1974, Curtis and Woodlawn had a huge success performing “Cabaret in the Sky – an Evening with Holly Woodlawn and Jackie Curtis” at the New York Cultural Center at Columbus Circle. *Heaven Grand in Amber Orbit* was revived in September 1976 at La MaMa. After spending some time in Tennessee and Los Angeles in 1977, Curtis returned to New York in January

³⁶ Cynthia Carr, *Candy Darling: Dreamer, Icon, Superstar* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2024), 213.

³⁷ Preston, 4

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1978 and moved into his grandmother's apartment at 324 East 14th Street, which was his last residence. In the fall of 1979, Curtis performed in drag on weekends at Slugger Ann's Bar. His grandmother died in July 1980.

In the early 1980s, Curtis's new work included *Flop* (1982), a musical; *I Died Yesterday* (1983), by Nick Markovich, at La MaMa, based on the story of actor Frances Farmer, with Curtis as the lead and also with Penny Arcade; and *Champagne*, his last play, at La MaMa, in January 1985, with Curtis as the lead. During this period, Curtis performed in several cabaret venues, as well as at events for the Poetry Project and at the Pyramid Club, both located in the East Village. Curtis had experimented with heroin since 1971, and in May 1985 he died of an accidental overdose at the age of thirty-eight. A wake was held at the Andrett Funeral Home at 353 Second Avenue, while a funeral mass was held at St. Ann's Church (demolished except for the façade), 110 East 12th Street.

Craig B. Highberger created the acclaimed documentary *Superstar in a Housedress: the Life and Legend of Jackie Curtis* (2004), as well as a biography with the same name (2015). The legendary La MaMa founder Ellen Stewart said of Curtis, "He was always extremely talented. In fact, I thought he was a genius. And he created many beautiful things. Jackie was a wonderful writer." She believed that Curtis really wanted to be known most as a writer, but that drag brought him more fame.³⁸ Renowned comedian/actor **Lily Tomlin** lauded Curtis as an original, natural satirist who lived his life as a kind of performance art.³⁹ Jackie Curtis's papers are held by the LGBT Community Center National History Archive in Greenwich Village.

*Peter William Hujar (1934-1987)*⁴⁰

When Jackie Curtis moved out of the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building in 1973, **Peter Hujar** (1934-1987), a neighbor and friend, moved into the 3N loft apartment space, where he lived until his death. A photographer since 1955, Hujar, during his time in this residence, fully developed his craft. He created a

³⁸ Highberger, book, 41.

³⁹ Highberger, documentary.

⁴⁰ George Benson, "Peter Hujar Residence," NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, January 2021, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/peter-hujar-residence-studio-david-wojnarowicz-residence-studio>; Guy Trebay, "Peter Hujar and the Lost New York," *New York Times*, March 4, 2016, nyti.ms/3hXzbbF; Peter Schjeldahl, "The Bohemian Rhapsody of Peter Hujar," *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2018, bit.ly/3cl8AUZ; Holland Cotter, "He Made Them Glow: A Maverick's Portraits Live On," *New York Times*, February 8, 2018, nyti.ms/2ZXIhPq; Simon Bowcock, "Peter Hujar: the photographer who defined downtown New York," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2016, bit.ly/2ROmzJx; Edmund White, "Why Can't We Stop Talking About New York in the Late 1970s?," *New York Times Style Magazine*, September 10, 2015, nyti.ms/3mNXMU; "About," The Peter Hujar Archive, bit.ly/3hTklmw; "Peter Hujar," Wikipedia, bit.ly/302cAEG; Linda Rosenkrantz, "What It Was Like When Peter Hujar Took Your Photograph," *Opinion*, November 25, 2021, <https://www.frieze.com/article/linda-rosenkrantz-remembers-peter-hujar>; Jackson Davidov, "Peter Hujar Died Young. Now, His Striking Photographs of Queer Culture Are Being Resurrected," *Art in America*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/peter-hujar-queer-culture-resurrected-1234720349>.

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darkroom and used the apartment as a photography studio. A stalwart of the East Village art scene and the definition of an impoverished artist, Hujar was only partially recognized in his lifetime. Since his death, however, he has come to be regarded as one of the greatest American photographers in the twentieth century.

Born in 1934 in Trenton, New Jersey, Hujar started life on a New Jersey farm with his Ukrainian grandparents (English was his second language). His father had abandoned the family before he was born, and his mother left him to work in New York City. At the age of eleven, he moved in with her in Manhattan, but he left at sixteen. He had received his first camera in 1947. After graduating from the School of Industrial Art (later the High School of Art and Design) and at the urging of **Daisy Aldan** – a poet, editor, and English teacher who recognized his artistic talent – Hujar got apprenticeships in commercial photography studios starting in 1955.

He accompanied his then-lover, artist **Joseph Raffael**, on a trip to Italy in 1958. Hujar later returned to Italy on a Fulbright-sponsored trip in 1963 with the future artist **Paul Thek**, his lover at the time. Images that Hujar took on this second trip appeared later in the only book of his photography published in his lifetime, *Portraits in Life and Death* (1976, republished 2024). Hujar worked as a fashion photographer for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly*.

From 1968 to 1971, photographs by Hujar were printed in *Newspaper*, which was an experimental pictures-only tabloid. It was published out of the apartment at 188 Second Avenue (across the avenue from the Jaffe Art Theater Building) of its editor, **Paul Lawrence**, who was then Hujar's lover. Hujar lived with him there until they had a falling out in 1973. *Newspaper* “was the product of a coterie that largely revolved around Hujar and a circle of friends which included photographers, painters, musicians, performers, and sculptors. The publication brought together the disparate subjects, interests, and artworks of their Downtown New York arts scene.”⁴¹

Even though Hujar was not politically involved, art critic **Holland Cotter** observed, “He was around for the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion. And when, in its wake, his then-lover, **Jim Fouratt**, became a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, Hujar contributed to the cause the only way he knew how, with a photograph - of GLF members staging a protest march for his camera. It remains one of the signature images of the time.”⁴²

Photographer Lisette Model was one of the influences on Hujar’s decision to turn from freelance fashion

⁴¹ Marcelo Gabriel Yanez, “Peter Hujar and the Brief History of ‘Newspaper’,” <https://jeudepaume.org/en/mediateque/peter-hujar-and-the-brief-history-of-newspaper-by-marcelo-gabriel-yanez>.

⁴² Cotter.

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and commercial photography to almost solely personal art photography in 1973. This was the time when he moved into Curtis's former loft in the Jaffee Building. The space was large enough that he no longer had to rent studio time elsewhere. The concrete floor and the bare wall on the south side of the main loft area would provide the primary setting for his photography, an informal "studio." Friends of Hujar, **Gary Schneider** and his partner, **John Erdman**, who formed the firm Schneider/Erdman Inc., through which Schneider became a renowned master printer, were familiar with the space. They recalled that the darkroom was originally in the bathroom, with a black curtain to keep light out. Located in the northwestern section of the loft, the bathroom did not have exterior windows. Later, builder Charles Baxter, of Coxsackie, New York, built Hujar a real darkroom with dry and wet labs that backed into the plumbing of the kitchenette (located to the east in the main loft area).⁴³

In this space, Hujar developed the skills to be considered a master printer of his own work and to take many of the photographs for the genre that he is best known for today – black and white portraits of artists, many of whom are now legendary figures. These include **Jackie Curtis**, drag performer **Ethyl Eichelberger**, Downtown performer **Agosto Machado**, filmmaker **John Waters**, actor/drag performer **Divine**, actor Mink Stole, poet/dance critic **Edwin Denby**, fashion editor Diana Vreeland, poet/painter/art critic/actor **Rene Ricard**, Downtown theater legend **Charles Ludlam**, artists **David Wojnarowicz**, Louise Nevelson and Kiki Smith, choreographer **Merce Cunningham**, composer **John Cage**, theater director **Robert Wilson**, TV personality/journalist/punk rock musician **Lance Loud**, and writers **Susan Sontag**, **Fran Lebowitz**, and **William S. Burroughs**. Some critics consider his photo of actress **Candy Darling**, taken just before her death in 1974, among his finest portraits.⁴⁴

Hujar took many of these portraits, as well as self-portraits, in his Second Avenue loft; most often, the background was the loft's bare south wall and concrete floor.⁴⁵ Regarding Hujar's portraits, Cotter recalled, "He did most of his indoor photographs there, using available furniture - a kitchen chair, his bed - as props. His sitters were often neighborhood friends, usually male, frequently nude, sometimes in a state of sexual arousal. Whether identified by name or not, the likenesses went well beyond being those of studio models; they had a particularity that made them read as portraits."⁴⁶ A selection of these portraits, spanning Hujar's residency in the loft, include actor **Larry Ree** (1975), Schneider (1979), transgender artist **Greer Lankton** (1983), a group portrait of artists Wojnarowicz, **Chuck Nanney**, **Steve Brown**, and **Steve Doughton** (1985), and Cunningham and Cage (1986). Notably, Hujar took several portraits here of Eichelberger, often in costume, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some were used in promotional materials for Eichelberger's performances at popular local underground venues,

⁴³ Peter Hujar Archive.

⁴⁴ Christie's, <https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/photographs/> peter-hujar-1934-1987-3/163273, 2022.

⁴⁵ Based on Hujar's digitized portraits, including those at Second Avenue, via The Peter Hujar Archive.

⁴⁶ Cotter.

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such as a 1979 portrait as Medea that appeared in a 1980 flyer for Club 57, and a 1979 portrait as Nefertiti in a 1983 flyer for the Pyramid Club.

Friend and fellow photographer **Nan Goldin** gave Hujar's portraits the highest praise: "Peter didn't photograph anyone or anything he didn't have deep feelings for. He had such integrity. When he got a new camera, he had to find out whether it was speaking for him, and if not he would return it. That was something I learned from him. The depth in Peter's photographs is astounding. They are as calm as he was but so intense. He had a special relationship with light. Many people have tried to imitate it and failed. In his portraits, he doesn't exert the gaze, which is the norm of most photography. He met people where they lived. He is the greatest portraitist of the twentieth century."⁴⁷ The Pace Gallery stated that "Peter Hujar photographed his subjects with penetrating sensitivity and psychological depth. Unflinching and at times dark, he captured intellectuals, luminaries, and members of New York City subculture in moments of disarmed vulnerability. Hujar embraced male sexuality unabashedly and was unafraid to examine death and dying."⁴⁸

Along with his portraits, Hujar became known for photographs of animals and landscapes, capturing street scenes of a New York in decline, and the gay life that blossomed along the piers on the Hudson River waterfront. He also chronicled the unique creative world of the East Village in the 1970s and '80s that largely died out with AIDS and, later, gentrification.

Published in 1976, with an introduction by his friend Susan Sontag, *Portraits in Life and Death* was Hujar's only book of photography published in his lifetime. It featured portraits taken in 1974-75, juxtaposed with photographs of corpses entombed in the catacombs of Palermo, Sicily, that he had taken on his 1963 trip. The book received a tepid reception, however, and only gained its place as a classic of American photography after his death (and was republished in 2024).

The Second Avenue loft played a central role in Hujar's personal and professional life. He had a large social and artistic circle, and his loft was known for having a constantly open door. Friends noted that people were naturally drawn to Hujar, but he was more circumspect about who he entertained and photographed at the loft.⁴⁹ He used the northern half of the main loft area as his living space, and area rugs covered most of the concrete floor here. His friends said that his loft was tidy and sparse with a kitchen table near the kitchenette in the northwest corner.⁵⁰ **John Douglas Millar**, Hujar's biographer,

⁴⁷ Nan Goldin, in Sarah Nicole Prickett, "The Eternal Peter Hujar," *Document*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.documentjournal.com/2018/02/nan-goldin-dev-hynes-david-velasco-on-the-eternal-peter-hujar>.

⁴⁸ "Peter Hujar," Pace Gallery, <https://www.pacegallery.com/artists/peter-hujar>.

⁴⁹ David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁵⁰ The David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project. Those interviewed include Anita Vitale, Board Chair, The David Wojnarowicz Foundation; Jean Foos, Creative Director, The David Wojnarowicz

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suggests that “the elegant images of the loft … are fictions constructed by Peter … Peter was a fastidious minimalist by temperament.”⁵¹ A number of Hujar’s photographs feature his living space, either on its own or as the backdrop of his self-portraits, revealing an intimate connection between the artist and his residence. One of his most iconic self-portraits, *Self-Portrait Jumping (I)* (1974), shows him jumping in the air here. Two undated black and white images of the main loft area show the northeast corner furnished with two chairs and a coffee table on a large area rug, a dresser with a record player, lamp, potted plants, a desk with a lamp, a television on a stand, and a simple rectangular mirror (with a bird wing on top) hanging on the wall above a radiator. Directly to the south, a twin bed sits next to an upright piano, both projecting into the room from the east wall, with a large area rug to the west of both pieces and a smaller one in front of the piano; and, directly to the south, a white harpsichord and potted plants are located on the bare concrete floor next to the large arched window. Sheer, light-colored curtains hang on rods at the windows. The sparsely decorated walls, beamed ceiling, and window trim are painted the same white (or light) color.

A 1976 self-portrait shows Hujar with his camera looking at the mirror. Shown in the mirror - behind him - is the wall that divides the main area from the western section with the bathroom and darkroom. The wall has an open doorway with the kitchenette to the north and an open closet with clothes and items on racks and shelves to the south (this closet is in line with the bed on the other side of the room, as if creating a separation from the southern half of the loft where he did his photography). Another photograph shows the southern end of the main loft area, in which the bare white walls, ceiling, and concrete floor provide a blank backdrop for a bicycle, bench, and empty shelving at the southwest corner. According to friends, Hujar also displayed a 1983 multi-frame portrait of himself by Paul Thek in the small hallway by the loft’s southwest entrance.⁵²

Insight into how Hujar used his space can be gleaned from the book *Peter Hujar’s Day* (2022), by his friend Linda Rosenkrantz, which includes the full transcript of a tape-recorded conversation that the two had about everything Hujar did the day prior, December 18, 1974.⁵³ The David Wojnarowicz Foundation summarized the exchange, noting that Hujar recalled,

…oversleeping his alarm, jumping into the clothes he’ll wear for two days; welcoming an editor from *Elle* magazine from France picking up his portraits of actress Lauren Hutton, fielding a dozen phone calls including one from Susan Sontag, taking two naps, making

Foundation; Gary Schneider, Master Printer for David Wojnarowicz and Peter Hujar; John Erdman, partner of Gary Schneider in Schneider/Erdman Photography; Cynthia Carr, biographer of David Wojnarowicz and Candy Darling; and John Douglas Millar, biographer of a work in progress of Peter Hujar.

⁵¹ John Douglas Millar, in David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁵² David Wojnarowicz Foundation interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁵³ The film version of the same name, directed by Ira Sachs, was released in 2025.

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two meals, going to the shop downstairs to buy cigarettes, watering his plants, leaving again to photograph Allen Ginsberg for the *Times*; developing film and making prints in the darkroom for several hours; welcoming Glenn O'Brien who drops in for ten minutes, and a friend who comes to use his shower (in exchange for a Chinese takeout dinner); then playing his harpsichord before bed.⁵⁴

Hujar was considered a towering figure in the East Village, often donning the role of tutor or parental figure to up-and-coming artists, such as photographers Nan Goldin and Gary Schneider and artist Kiki Smith. Hujar is now partly remembered for his intense relationship with **David Wojnarowicz** [see below], who he met in 1980. Hujar was for a time his lover and served as an unparalleled source of support, inspiration, and tutelage for the younger man to start creating and to become an artist.

Wojnarowicz saw Hujar as “like the parent I never had, like the brother I never had.”⁵⁵ Friend and writer **Stephen Koch**, to whom Hujar left his estate, observed that “one of the keys to [Hujar’s] personality, I later figured out, was that anyone who had been an abused child was automatically on Peter’s A list.”⁵⁶ This was certainly the case with Wojnarowicz, and the two found solidarity in upbringings of shared hardship. Several of Hujar’s friends recall that he displayed Wojnarowicz’s painting, *Evolution* (1986), over his bed in the last year of his life.⁵⁷

Despite his prolific work, many who knew Hujar said that he rigidly avoided commercialism, and some considered his career largely self-sabotaged. His friend Fran Lebowitz noted at his funeral that “Peter Hujar has hung up on every important photography dealer in the Western world.”⁵⁸ Another friend, poet **Steve Turtell**, vividly remembered Hujar’s lifestyle in his Second Avenue loft and studio: “I watched Peter wring out a pair of blue jeans he had just washed in his own sink and hang them over the curtain rod to dry” because he couldn’t afford the laundromat. He often went without heat and emptied his household garbage into public trash cans. Turtell added that Hujar’s loft “was like a monk’s cell. He had what he needed and nothing more.”⁵⁹

Tragically, Hujar received a diagnosis of AIDS at the beginning of January 1987. In despair, he never photographed again, except for one portrait session as a favor for his friend **John Heys**. Wojnarowicz attempted to cheer up his friend and mentor by spray-painting the entire intersection of Second Avenue and East 12th Street, so it could be seen from the windows of Hujar’s apartment. Wojnarowicz variously painted “friendly cows” with a hamburger in a thought bubble, or dreaming of a television. (He had

⁵⁴ David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁵⁵ Schjeldahl.

⁵⁶ Schjeldahl.

⁵⁷ David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁵⁸ Schjeldahl.

⁵⁹ Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012), 183.

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previously painted this intersection in 1982 with his signature “gagging cow,” an image of the head of a cow on its way to slaughter.)

During his time living in the Jaffe Building loft apartment, Hujar did receive recognition. Between 1974 and 1986, his photographs were included in at least seven gallery exhibitions in New York City and New York State, and eight in Europe.⁶⁰ Wojnarowicz convinced Gracie Mansion Gallery in the East Village to host a retrospective of Hujar’s photographs, which was *Peter Hujar: Recent Photographs* in January 1986. Of the 100 prints on display, only two were sold.

Hujar died at age fifty-three from AIDS-related pneumonia on November 26, 1987, at Cabrini Medical Center near Gramercy Park. Wojnarowicz was by his bedside and was overcome with sadness. He famously photographed Hujar in the hospital bed. Hujar’s body was handled by Redden’s Funeral Home, 325 West 14th Street, the first in all of New York City to provide service for those who died of AIDS. His funeral was held on November 28 at St. Joseph’s R.C. Church in Greenwich Village. In its obituary, *Newsday* called Hujar “a noted city photographer whose signed portraits of literary and artistic celebrities hang in the collections of several major museums and are prized by private collectors.”⁶¹

Wojnarowicz held a celebration of Hujar’s life in his Jaffe Building loft apartment on December 20, complete with Hujar’s photographs on the walls, and a shrine to his mentor. Wojnarowicz commented that “coming back to his place the candle and shrine had burnt down to a beige hard puddle. I told him out loud how sad I am... I can’t imagine my life without this man...”⁶² Wojnarowicz once stated that “everything I made, I made for Peter,” and he had difficulty in expressing what he felt after Hujar’s death, since Hujar had been the recipient of his most personal thoughts.⁶³ Wojnarowicz created a panel for Hujar for the memorial National AIDS Quilt, which had been started in 1987 in San Francisco, and also designed the headstone – the shape, according to Wojnarowicz biographer Cynthia Carr, of the small arched windows of the Second Avenue loft – for Hujar’s grave in Westchester County, New York.

Hujar suspected he would only gain notoriety after his death, which turned out to be true. Posthumously, Hujar’s photographs have been shown in numerous solo museum and commercial gallery exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe. (In June 1992, shortly before his own death from AIDS-related complications, Wojnarowicz donated four of his Hujar prints to the Museum of Modern Art.) Hujar’s work has often been more favorably compared to his contemporary, photographer **Robert**

⁶⁰ “Peter Hujar,” Wikipedia.

⁶¹ “Peter Hujar, Photographer,” *Newsday*, November 30, 1987, 43.

⁶² Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 381.

⁶³ Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 179.

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Mapplethorpe, who produced more stylized celebrity portraits.⁶⁴ *Peter Hujar Photographs* was the first retrospective exhibit at New York University's Grey Art Gallery in 1989.⁶⁵ Associated with the Peter Hujar Archive after 2000 were the Matthew Marks Gallery and Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. In 2014, the Fraenkel Gallery put on the exhibition of his lesser displayed erotic works, *Peter Hujar: Love & Lust*.⁶⁶

Since 2013, the Morgan Library and Museum has been the foremost institution for research on Hujar, since it acquired all of Hujar's personal and business papers, 100 photographic prints, and all of his 5,783 photographic contact sheets spanning his entire photographic career. Its 2018 traveling exhibition, *Peter Hujar: Speed of Life*, was a full retrospective of his career, and the catalogue included the first full account of Hujar's life.⁶⁷

Hujar's work is also held in the permanent collections of many other major institutions. These include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Brooklyn Museum, in New York; Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Dallas Museum of Art; Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri; St. Louis Art Museum; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; and at least five museums in Europe.

Benjamin Moser in the *New Yorker* in 2024 summarized Hujar's significance:

Since Hujar's death, this marginal artist has found himself understood to a degree barely comprehensible to those who knew him during his lifetime. Book has followed book, and exhibition upon exhibition. The attendees are young, and never complain that it is hard to understand. But the pictures haven't changed. Something else has, and it has rendered Hujar "assimilable" in a way he never was. ... Hujar's milieu – downtown opposed to uptown, homosexual opposed to heterosexual, counterculture opposed to culture – was not big; it was bounded by a few streets and inhabited by people who, though they surely weren't opposed to money, made no real effort to pursue it. They chose instead the occupations – as poets and artists, as drag performers and Off Broadway actors – that were proud to exist at the margins.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Andy Grundberg, "Review/Photography: Photos by Peter Hujar, a Mapplethorpe Precursor," *New York Times*, February 2, 1990.

⁶⁵ "Grey Art Gallery," *Newsday*, February 2, 1990, 176.

⁶⁶ Fraenkel Gallery, "Vince Aletti on Peter Hujar's Love & Lust," January 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyjZTKWa-F4>.

⁶⁷ Morgan Library and Museum, *Peter Hujar: Speed of Life*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-lCgOoLmCc>, and "Peter Hujar's Career in Contact Sheets/Collection in Focus," 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kynVlvL6FTg>.

⁶⁸ Benjamin Moser, "The Enduring Power of Peter Hujar's 'Portraits in Life and Death,'" *The New Yorker*, October 8, 2024.

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The film *Peter Hujar's Day*, by director **Ira Sachs**, was based on the aforementioned conversation Hujar had with his friend Linda Rosenkrantz in 1974 and was released in 2025.

*David Michael Wojnarowicz (1954-1992)*⁶⁹

A fearless political firebrand, the radical artist **David Wojnarowicz** challenged the art world and lambasted America for failing the LGBT community, particularly in response to the AIDS crisis. Wojnarowicz lived and worked in Peter Hujar's former loft apartment in the Jaffe Art Theater Building from 1988 until his death (in the loft) from AIDS in 1992, the period of his greatest fame and notoriety. He was also given the first political funeral of the AIDS epidemic, which began outside the loft.

Wojnarowicz (1954-1992) lived a life of extreme hardship, but it was one he was able to channel into his radical multimedia art, photography, filmmaking, writing, music, performance, and activism.

Writer **Fran Lebowitz**, a friend of Hujar's, described Wojnarowicz's upbringing as "a classic background for a serial killer."⁷⁰ He was born in Red Bank, New Jersey, to a physically abusive, alcoholic father and neglectful mother. After a brief time at age eleven living with his mother in Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan, he left home and had a very rough life living on the streets, in halfway houses, cheap hotels, the Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse (99 Wooster Street), in squats, and was hustling in Times Square.⁷¹ He managed to enroll in the prestigious High School for Music and Art and graduated in 1973.

After an experience hitchhiking with a friend across the U.S. in 1976, he went with a sister for a nine-month stay in Paris in 1978. After his return to New York in 1979, Wojnarowicz lived for a time with a friend in Vinegar Hill, Brooklyn. He began to photograph friends posing in various locations around the city, wearing a mask of the face of one of his personal "outsider" heroes, the nineteenth-century French poet **Arthur Rimbaud**. He also began to create collages that were tributes to other heroes and kept journals and audio recordings of his daily life, a habit which continued for the rest of his life.

⁶⁹ George Benson, "David Wojnarowicz Residence," NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, January 2021, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/peter-hujar-residence-studio-david-wojnarowicz-residence-studio>; Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*; Christine Smallwood, "The Rage and Tenderness of David Wojnarowicz's Art," *New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 2018, [nyti.ms/2JrCmxh](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/magazine/the-life-and-times-of-david-wojnarowicz.html); Moira Donegan, "David Wojnarowicz's Still-Burning Rage," *New Yorker*, August 18, 2018, [bit.ly/3aNtQnx](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-life-and-times-of-david-wojnarowicz); "David Wojnarowicz," Visual AIDS, [bit.ly/2X4FqCN](https://www.visualaids.org/artist/david-wojnarowicz); Chris McKim, director, *Wojnarowicz: Fuck You Faggot Fucker* documentary (2020); Rosa von Praunheim, director, *Silence = Death* film (1990); David Wojnarowicz Foundation, <https://wojfound.org>, and emails to the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, October 2024; Alan Barrows, Civilian Warfare Gallery, <https://civilianwarfaregallery.wordpress.com>; Art Blart, *Exhibition: 'David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York,'* September 28, 2018, <https://artblart.com/tag/david-wojnarowicz-hujar-dead>; "David Wojnarowicz," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Wojnarowicz.

⁷⁰ Cited in Smallwood.

⁷¹ The Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse was designated a landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in June 2019.

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Wojnarowicz gravitated to the East Village, where he found rapport with the characters he met there. He was attracted to those he considered outsiders, like himself, of the “pre-invented world,” his term for societal structures that influence people from birth, such as the law, language, religion, and the corporate sphere. For a meager salary in 1980, he worked at gay activist **Jim Fourratt**’s club Danceteria on West 37th Street and, until June 1981, lived with friends at 159 Second Avenue.

Wojnarowicz met photographer **Peter Hujar** in 1980 at The Bar on Second Avenue and East 4th Street. Hujar was for a time his lover, and then the two settled into a platonic spiritual bond that for both men would be their most important relationship. Hujar acted as the father figure Wojnarowicz never had and served as an unparalleled source of support, inspiration, and tutelage for the younger man to expand as an artist and to start painting. Hujar told Wojnarowicz never to compromise in his art, advice that he took to heart always. The two often used each other as subjects in their art. Wojnarowicz later paid tribute to his friend by convincing Gracie Mansion Gallery to host a retrospective of Hujar’s photographs, which was *Peter Hujar: Recent Photographs* in January 1986.

Wojnarowicz began as a street artist, spray-painting stencils of images such as targets, a falling man, and a burning house, on cars, buildings and streets, for which he began to be noticed. There were no East Village art galleries at the time, so local art was being shown in other places, such as clubs and cafes. Wojnarowicz was invited to include some of his art in artist **Keith Haring**’s *First Annual Group Erotic and Pornographic Art Exhibition* at Club 57, 57 St. Mark’s Place, in February 1981. Wojnarowicz had a photograph included in a photographic exhibition at FOTO Gallery, 492 Broome Street in SoHo, in June 1981. Starting in July 1981, Wojnarowicz lived with Tom Cochran, the manager of his band (3 Teens Kill 4), at 36 East 4th Street for four years (to May 1985). Wojnarowicz turned to art full time in 1982, finding inspiration in found printed matter and objects on the streets of the East Village. His art was deeply personal, expressed as “diaries” of his life.

Wojnarowicz also began to frequent the abandoned pier buildings along the Hudson River waterfront that had been appropriated by gay men, both for cruising and sex. Wojnarowicz began to create large drawings on interior surfaces in some piers. He joined with artist Mike Bidlo in inviting other artists to do their artwork at the enormous, abandoned Pier 34 on the Hudson River at Canal Street in late 1982 to early 1983. Joined eventually by hundreds of artists, who painted on all available surfaces, it was a significant moment in time that represented the intersection between the emerging, edgy downtown artistic scene and the LGBT community, which included many of these artists. Unsanctioned by New York officialdom, Pier 34 was closed by police and demolished in 1984.

Wojnarowicz’s first painting, a portrait of Hujar, was included in June 1982 for his first time in an art gallery - the *Fast Exhibition* at the Alexander F. Milliken Gallery, at 141 Prince Street in SoHo. His

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inclusion was the result of artist/curator **Ed Baynard** asking Hujar who was creating the stencil art he had seen around the neighborhood. Wojnarowicz's painting, known as *Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: Saint Sebastian*, was explicitly homoerotic, with Hujar dreaming of bisexual Japanese author/playwright **Yukio Mishima**, who is masturbating to an image of Saint Sebastian.

The art gallery scene in the East Village began to emerge in 1981. Civilian Warfare Gallery, at 526 East 11th Street (new façade), was one of the first of note, started by two gay artists, **Alan Barrows** and **Dean Savard**, in the spring of 1982. Gracie Mansion Gallery, started by *Gracie Mansion* (Joanne Mayhew-Young), included Wojnarowicz in *The Famous Show* in 1982. Wojnarowicz curated a group show at Lucky Strike Cafe, 16 Stuyvesant Street, in October 1982 that featured his work along with that of friends, including Hujar, and Wojnarowicz's 3 Teens Kill 4 bandmates Doug Bressler and Julie Hair. Wojnarowicz had his first solo exhibition at the Milliken Gallery in December 1982. He later told his biographer Cynthia Carr that "I was really happy with some of the images I made. Things dealing with homosexuality, and guys arming themselves as defense against government's intrusion in their sexual lives, things dealing with myth -- self-created myth."⁷²

An article by Grace Glueck in the *New York Times* on the East Village art scene in June 1983 helped to fuel an explosion of art galleries in the neighborhood, and wealthy collectors descending downtown to search out the art. The scene was further featured in the article "Slouching Towards Avenue D" in *Art in America* in the summer of 1984. At its height, there were 176 art galleries in the East Village.⁷³

Wojnarowicz was featured in a number of solo exhibitions at several East Village galleries: Civilian Warfare Gallery, June 1983; **Hal Bromm** Gallery's East Village branch, November 1983; Civilian Warfare Gallery, May 1984; Gracie Mansion Gallery, his *Installation Room* (and the gallery became his representative), 1984; and Ground Zero Gallery, *You Killed Me First Installation #8*, a multimedia collaboration with Richard Kern, 1985.

By the mid-1980s Wojnarowicz's artwork grew more complex, filled with signs and symbols that were his commentary on an American culture that he believed excluded so many people from the mainstream. His breakthrough into the museum world came in 1985 when the Whitney Museum of American Art exhibited two of his paintings in its Biennial (he was also included in the 1991 Biennial). In April 1986, Gracie Mansion Gallery put on his "An Exploration of the History of Collisions in Reverse" exhibition, and all of the paintings sold. Wojnarowicz, however, was deeply ambivalent about this success, in part because of his dislike and distrust of rich people, and he stopped painting for a time.

⁷² David Wojnarowicz Foundation website.

⁷³ Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 240.

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In September 1985, Wojnarowicz moved into 225 East 2nd Street (between Avenues B and C), and in January 1986 he moved to 529 East 13th Street. On January 1, 1986, he met **Tom Rauffenbart**, a social worker, at the porn Bijou Theater in the East Village. They were partners for the rest of Wojnarowicz's life, and he began painting again.

On a trip to Mexico in 1986, he filmed as "a visual notebook" and began to edit the footage into a video, *A Fire in My Belly*, that was never completed. Ground Zero Gallery displayed his *Mexican Diaries* paintings in January 1987, but nothing sold. Gracie Mansion Gallery in September 1987 put on the Wojnarowicz exhibition *The Four Elements*, but only one of the paintings was sold -- *Wind (for Peter Hujar)*. The East Village art scene was considered essentially over. As cogently written by Cynthia Carr, "The discovery, exploitation, and demise of New York's last bohemia coincided with – among other things – the new visibility of queer culture, due in part to the advancing horror of AIDS. In brief, the media spotlight suddenly illuminated what had once been the cultural margin, exposing artists (especially gay artists) to an audience guaranteed to find them intolerable."⁷⁴

As mentioned above, Wojnarowicz was greatly impacted by Hujar's death. In January 1988, Wojnarowicz moved into Hujar's loft apartment so that, according to his biographer, he could "breathe the same air Hujar had breathed. He would hang on to any vestige."⁷⁵ Wojnarowicz also stated that he couldn't afford the rent at the place where he was then living on 13th Street, which had doubled in two years. In May, Wojnarowicz was diagnosed with AIDS. According to Carr, the building owner refused his rent checks since he was not on the apartment lease, so the Hujar Estate paid the rent and was reimbursed by Wojnarowicz. He was notified that he had to vacate the loft after the lease expired on November 30, 1988, so he was forced to hire a lawyer to fight eviction in court. An unusual compromise was reached in which the eviction was stayed, as long as Wojnarowicz remained HIV+ but, should he be cured, he would have to leave.⁷⁶ (Wojnarowicz would continue to live in the loft for the last five years of his life.) Wojnarowicz's friends recall that he lived more messily in the loft than Hujar had, which is corroborated in two films of Wojnarowicz here [see below]. That the basic layout of the loft remained the same is confirmed by a photograph taken of friend and photographer Marion Scemama in the kitchenette, as well as a video that Scemama made in 1989, *Self Portrait in 23 Rounds*, which shows Wojnarowicz in front of the kitchenette area.⁷⁷

Street life happening outside Wojnarowicz's loft captured his attention, as is evident in many photos he

⁷⁴ Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 4.

⁷⁵ Carr, *3 Fire in the Belly*, 82.

⁷⁶ Carr, *3 Fire in the Belly*, 94-396, 400-401, 414-415.

⁷⁷ Found on a contact sheet in the David Wojnarowicz Papers, The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

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took of the Second Avenue and East 12th Street intersection.⁷⁸ The loft was where he made paintings and printed photographs. (In 1987, before Wojnarowicz moved into the loft, he used a Super-8mm camera to create a silent thirteen-minute sequence in Hujar's memory. Filmed in black and white and in color, this is the only known film he made there.) Wojnarowicz utilized Hujar's loft darkroom, which further spurred his artistic process and allowed him to produce some of his most memorable images. He had kept many negatives of photographs that he had taken but never developed over the years, and he had never shown his own photography until after Hujar's death. According to Carr, he was at first intimidated by the darkroom, since he had not worked in one since the early 1980s. Master printers **Gary Schneider** and **John Erdman**, who printed final versions of all of Wojnarowicz's work since 1984, recalled that the first versions of *Untitled (Falling Buffalo)* (1988-89) were done in the loft, as were the "technically complex" *Untitled (Sex Series)* (1989). Schneider commented that "Of all the work that I made for David, the *Sex Series* was the most poetic of our relationship, because I could bring this technical thing to it and he had made these masterpieces of the darkroom."⁷⁹ This series was Wojnarowicz's response to the backlash against sexual activity among gay and bisexual men that the AIDS epidemic fomented. Photography would become increasingly important from this point in Wojnarowicz's artistic output.

Wojnarowicz had worried that his art career was over, particularly since the East Village art scene had basically ended and only one of his works had sold in 1987, but he started to paint again in the summer of 1988. All of Wojnarowicz's paintings from this point on, as well as his work on a film, were created in this loft residence and studio, with the exception of a few works done in 1990 while he was in Illinois [see below]. After the Jaffe Theater closed as a live venue in 1987, it was being converted into a multiplex movie theater, which was quite disruptive for Wojnarowicz and the other residential tenants.

Several weeks after Hujar's death, Wojnarowicz's partner, Rauffenbart, tested positive for AIDS, then Wojnarowicz did too in May 1988. They started attending meetings and demonstrations of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which had formed in March 1987. ACT UP became New York's leading AIDS political action group, fighting to bring widespread attention to AIDS and for a governmental response to the epidemic, as well as for access to experimental drugs. Already one of the major figureheads of the East Village art scene, Wojnarowicz helped to inspire people into taking direct action in the fight against AIDS. Though his art had never featured a signature visual style, it had always contained within it his acid wit, burning rage, and transgressive politics. His piece "Untitled (Hujar Dead)" was shown at a Lower Broadway gallery in October 1988, and was written about in *Arts* magazine, changing the art world's perception of the artist - he "wasn't just the East Village primitive

⁷⁸ Based on contact sheets in the David Wojnarowicz Papers, The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

⁷⁹ David Wojnarowicz Foundation, "Master Printer Gary Schneider," https://wojfound.org/oral_history/gary-schneider.

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anymore" but a furious gay man with "the power to change lives."⁸⁰

Knowing that he probably had little time left, since there was no cure in sight for AIDS, Wojnarowicz used the disease as a focus and a furious weapon in his art, and even more particularly in his writings – raging against American society, for its indifference, paranoia, hatred, bigotry, and homophobia. Wojnarowicz wrote extensively and did many readings of his work. A 1990 interview with National Public Radio's Terry Gross gave insight into what motivated Wojnarowicz as an artist: "Whatever work I've done, it's always been informed by my experience as an American in this country, as a homosexual in this country, as a person who is legislated into silence in this country."⁸¹ He didn't always perceive his art as provocation but as a way to express his truth. As Carr wrote, "David never wanted to be known as an 'AIDS artist' but felt compelled to respond to the devastation around him."⁸²

Wojnarowicz wrote an essay in 1989 called "Postcards from America: X-rays from Hell" for the catalogue of the Artists Space Gallery exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* in 1989-90, organized by artist/photographer Nan Goldin, at 233 West Broadway. The press release stated that "Witnesses represents a personal reflection on the influence AIDS has had on aesthetics, culture and sexuality among Goldin's friends in Manhattan's Lower East Side community."⁸³ Wojnarowicz attempted to describe his own state of mind and body and that of other friends with AIDS and expressed his outrage at the medical community, conservative religious leaders and politicians, and the museum and art collecting world – "WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I'D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I'D CONTRACTED A DISEASED SOCIETY AS WELL." He expressed many things that he would like to do, in his mind, to display that outrage in response to the epidemic and the loss of friends and lovers, but at the end of the essay he offered hope that others would respond, in public, to assist in the crisis:

But, bottom line, this is my own feeling of urgency and need; bottom line emotionally, even a tiny charcoal scratching done as a gesture to mark a person's response to this epidemic means whole worlds to me if it is hung in public; bottom line, each and every gesture carries a reverberation that is meaningful in its diversity; bottom line, we have to find our own forms of gesture and communication – you can never depend on the mass media to reflect us or our needs or our states of mind.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 402.

⁸¹ Maximiliano Duron, "David Wojnarowicz's Art Continues to Resonate, But a New Documentary About Him Fails to Impress," *ARTnews*, November 11, 2020.

⁸² Carr, *Fire in the Belly*, 439.

⁸³ Artists Space, "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing" press release, November 1989.

⁸⁴ David Wojnarowicz, *Postcards from America: X-rays from Hell*, in Artists Space Gallery, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* exhibition catalogue, 1989.

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The exhibition and catalogue, and especially Wojnarowicz's essay, meant to be local and elegiac, ended up igniting a national controversy. Earlier in 1989, Congressional controversies started over National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding for homoerotic photography by Robert Mapplethorpe and the painting *Piss Christ* by Andres Serrano. The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington cancelled its planned Mapplethorpe exhibition, igniting a firestorm of protest from the artistic community, then came to regret its decision. In October 1989, Congress' 1990 Appropriation Act for NEA prohibited funding for, among other things, "obscene" or "homoerotic" art that was deemed lacking in artistic merit. Artists Space had received a \$10,000 NEA grant, but newly appointed NEA chairman John E. Frohnmayer withdrew the grant, stating that the funds were slated for an exhibition that was artistic in nature, not political. But much of the political pressure in the attack on Artists Space was due to Wojnarowicz's frank essay, in which he criticized, by name, New York's Catholic Cardinal, John O'Connor, conservative California Representative William Dannemeyer, and conservative North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms. The NEA grant was restored, for the exhibition only, but not the catalogue, under the technicality that the grant had originally been given prior to the legislation. During the controversy, Wojnarowicz was filmed by **Phil Zwickler** in his loft apartment, as seen in *Footage of Wojnarowicz speaking about the National Endowment for the Arts controversy* (1989). The loft apartment was also seen in German director **Rosa von Praunheim**'s film *Silence = Death* (1989), in which Wojnarowicz is interviewed and rants furiously; it includes footage from Wojnarowicz's unfinished *Fire in My Belly*.

Barry Blinderman, director of the University Galleries at Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, had acquired an important early Wojnarowicz painting, *Fuck You Faggot Fucker* (1984), its title taken from a homophobic scrap of paper he found and included in the work. In 1990, to honor Wojnarowicz (he had been contacted by Gracie Mansion after Wojnarowicz's AIDS diagnosis), Blinderman organized a retrospective exhibition titled *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame* in Normal. At the February opening, Wojnarowicz gave a performance amidst four of his videos, to an enthusiastic crowd of over 700 people, and the exhibition catalogue sold out. The exhibition, however, which had received an NEA grant of \$15,000, started another national controversy. The right-wing, self-appointed moralist "Reverend" Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association (AFA) defamed Wojnarowicz's art and mailed thousands of leaflets to members of Congress and to religious institutions throughout the U.S. Wojnarowicz sued Wildmon for a million dollars for defamation, copyright infringement, and taking his artwork out of context. Wildmon used the created controversy for fundraising. After the court case in June, AFA was ordered to send a corrective mailing, but Wojnarowicz was only awarded \$1.00 in damages. *Tongues of Flame* opened in July 1990 at the Santa Monica Museum of Art, where it was also attacked by the right-wing "religious" community in California. In November, *Tongues of Flame* was displayed at Exit Art in New York, but the gallery had great difficulty obtaining any funding for it.

Between the "Tongues of Flame" trial and the end of 1990, Wojnarowicz created his last visual art. He

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had stayed in Bloomington-Normal for several weeks during the exhibition, where he produced a number of lithographs. Later in August he went back to Normal for a month, while work was being done in his New York loft apartment, and a broken pipe had flooded it. Perhaps his most famous artwork created in 1990-91 was *Untitled (One Day This Kid...)*. Wojnarowicz surrounded a black and white image of himself, around the age of eight, with text written in his characteristically relentless rhythm, taking aim at societal structures that made “existence intolerable for this kid” because of oppressive abuse and homophobic attitudes towards his sexuality.

Wojnarowicz’s last solo exhibition, in November 1990, was at the P.P.O.W. Gallery in New York. *In the Garden* was a series he had created in Normal. Wojnarowicz had expressed that he was tired of the controversies and his image as a bad boy angry artist and wanted to do something beautiful, so he created four exotic flower paintings with blocks of text, which were hung along with photographs and other new and old art. Some have interpreted the flower paintings as symbols of the importance of beauty, of the beauty of one’s body and its fragility, and of AIDS.⁸⁵

As he was becoming increasingly sicker from AIDS, Wojnarowicz took a “last trip” with friend Marion Scemama to Arizona. She took a photograph that has now become iconic – of Wojnarowicz buried in the dirt, with only parts of his face showing. On October 26, 1991, Wojnarowicz gave his last reading, at the Drawing Center, as a benefit for ACT UP. *Seven Miles a Second* (1991), a comic book version of his life, was created by James Romberger and Marguerite van Cook. Wojnarowicz’s two memoirs were published -- *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991), with “Hujar Dreaming” on the cover, and *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* (1992). In June 1992, the Museum of Modern Art acquired Wojnarowicz’s painting *Fire* from his *The Four Elements* series.

Wojnarowicz’s partner, Tom Rauffenbart, moved into his loft apartment in December 1991, in order to assist in his care. Wojnarowicz was able to receive round-the-clock home care, due in part (according to his doctor) to the force of his personality.⁸⁶ According to friends, in the last six months of his life, he purposely hung his work *Fever* (1988-89) above his bed.⁸⁷ In this period, he also asked his friend, performance artist Karen Finley, to take a baby elephant skeleton that he had prominently displayed in this residence and his previous one after purchasing it, along with other skeletons, in Paris in 1985. Finley, who believed he wanted her to ensure its safekeeping, said, “I always saw it as an image really of him, of his totem. He’s an elephant. The elephant never forgets. You know—there’s the ancientness of it.”⁸⁸ (The skeleton appears next to Wojnarowicz at the loft in a 1990 portrait by Nan Goldin.)

⁸⁵ Smallwood.

⁸⁶ McKim, documentary.

⁸⁷ David Wojnarowicz Foundation, interview by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.

⁸⁸ “Sculpture—Other Objects, David Wojnarowicz Knowledge Base,” Artist Archives Initiative, New York University,

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Wojnarowicz died, at age thirty-seven, in his loft apartment on July 22, 1992, surrounded by Rauffenbart, four friends, and three of his siblings. An image, taken by an unknown photographer, shows the dying Wojnarowicz lying in his bed in the Second Avenue loft.⁸⁹ His body was taken to Redden's Funeral Home on West 14th Street, as had Hujar's. Friends, some of whom were ACT UP members, urged Rauffenbart to open the loft on the Sunday after Wojnarowicz's death, since they wanted to plan an action that followed Wojnarowicz's writing that AIDS deaths should be made public.

One week after his death, on July 29, Wojnarowicz was given the first political funeral to come out of the AIDS epidemic, organized by members of ACT UP and the PWA (People With AIDS) Coalition. Written across a huge banner that led the funeral procession, which began at the Jaffee Art Theater Building, were the words: DAVID WOJNAROWICZ, 1954–1992, DIED OF AIDS DUE TO GOVERNMENT NEGLECT. The group, estimated at 300, marched south on Second Avenue, then east to Avenue A, where they were joined by a police car that led them, then south to Houston Street, west to the Bowery, and north to the Cooper Union Building. Marchers walked in silence to the beat of the Women's Action Coalition drum corps, and many people stepped off the sidewalks to join. Near Cooper Union, Wojnarowicz images were projected on a wall, along with readings of his words, then the funeral banner was set on fire along with placards that people had carried.⁹⁰ A Memorial for Wojnarowicz was held on September 14 at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. Rauffenbart took Wojnarowicz's ashes to many places of meaning to them both – some were sealed into the wall of the loft apartment, and some, as a final political statement, were thrown onto the White House lawn.

Even after his death Wojnarowicz was a touchstone for right-wing controversy. In 2010, the National Portrait Gallery was forced to remove an eleven-second portion of his silent video *Fire in My Belly* from an exhibition. This was *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, a pioneering look at sexual difference in American art, that had been refused by every major museum in New York City. The secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, C. Wayne Clough, under pressure from the Catholic League and right-wing politicians who threatened funding cuts for the Smithsonian, made the decision since he was worried that the entire exhibition would be shut down. In turn, this decision received a storm of criticism from the national arts world. The University Galleries of Illinois State University summarized the import of Wojnarowicz's work in the context of that latest controversy:

Self-taught in the arts and letters, David Wojnarowicz used any mode of communication at his disposal to fight for visibility in what he termed “the pre-invented world.” He

https://artistarchives.hosting.nyu.edu/DavidWojnarowicz/KnowledgeBase/index.php/Sculpture--Other_Objects.html#cite_note-1.

⁸⁹ The image can be found in David Wojnarowicz Papers, Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

⁹⁰ Carr, *Fire in the Belly*; Guy Trebay, “City of Widows,” *Village Voice*, August 11, 1992, 14.

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developed a stirring and concise lexicon of sounds and images, looking to visionary discontents like **Jean Genet**, **Arthur Rimbaud**, and **William Burroughs** for inspiration. Following his diagnosis with AIDS in the late 1980s, Wojnarowicz's relentless anger at a homophobic Church, and politicians who ignored the existence of this deadly illness, fueled much of his scathing imagery. The soul-piercing diatribes he delivered to audiences throughout the U.S. until his death in 1992 still resound today; the sustained power of his work is evident in the political storm surrounding the removal of his video *Fire in My Belly* from an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 2010.⁹¹

In 2020, Maximiliano Duron in *ARTnews* opined that “David Wojnarowicz is among the most famous artists and activists lost during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early '90s. His life and his beautiful, unapologetically political art continue to intrigue, and in recent years, they have been the subject of a biography, an Aperture monograph, a Whitney Museum retrospective, and, now, a new documentary.”⁹²

The continuing interest and study of Wojnarowicz's life and work is indicated by the many books, exhibitions, and a documentary on him since his death: the book *David Wojnarowicz: Brush Fires in the Social Landscape* by Aperture (1994); the exhibition *Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz* at the New Museum (1999); the *Artforum* special issue on East Village art (1999), which featured a photograph of Wojnarowicz at Pier 34 on the cover; the book *In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz*, Amy Scholder, editor, Grove/Atlantic (2000); the book *Rimbaud In New York 1978–1979*, Andrew Roth, editor, Roth Horowitz, LLC/PPP Editions (2004); *Spirituality*, a partial retrospective at the P.P.O.W. Gallery (2011); Art reporter Cynthia Carr's exhaustive biography, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*, New York: Bloomsbury USA (2012); the book *Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz*, Lisa Darms and David O'Neill, editors, MIT Press (2018); and the documentary *Wojnarowicz: Fuck You Faggot Fucker* by director Chris McKim (2020). In 2018, the Whitney Museum of American Art exhibited the full retrospective *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night*. The Whitney extolled his significance:

In an artistic practice spanning photography, painting, collage, sculpture, film, and writing, David Wojnarowicz distilled his moral fury into a powerful weapon amid the political and social turbulence of the 1980s -- addressing in particular the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, homophobic politicians and policy, and the institutionalized apathy and loss of spirituality he saw in American society.⁹³

⁹¹ University Galleries of Illinois State University, *David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame*, <https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/exhibitions/1990/Wojnarowicz>.

⁹² Duron.

⁹³ Whitney Museum of American Art, *David Wojnarowicz 1954–1992*, <https://whitney.org/artists/3598>.

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The David Wojnarowicz Papers are housed at the Fales Library at New York University, and the David Wojnarowicz Foundation maintains an online research archive. The P.P.O.W. Gallery has managed the Estate of David Wojnarowicz since his death in 1992. Wojnarowicz's artwork is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York; Princeton University Art Museum; Art Institute of Chicago; Hammer Museum of Art and The Broad, Los Angeles; Minneapolis Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Cleveland Museum of Art; Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey; Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin; Hallmark Art Collection, St. Louis, Missouri; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Philadelphia Museum of Art; University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal; Dallas Museum of Art; Hall Art Foundation, Reading, Vermont; Harvard University Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; Tate Britain, London, England; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid,

SUMMARY

The Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building illustrates several key themes connected to LGBT history over nearly half a century. Despite living through two of the most homophobic periods in American history – the post-World War II era and the AIDS crisis – LGBT people connected to this site made important and well-documented contributions to American culture through the performing arts, nightlife, the visual arts, and AIDS activism from the 1940s to the 1990s. In that time, the people associated with the building represented a wide range of identities within the LGBT community: lesbians, gay men, drag kings, female impersonators, and those who today might identify as gender fluid, gender nonconforming, or transgender. As a result, this additional documentation for LGBT history for the Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building provides context for the site's diverse and dynamic social and cultural significance in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building (Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
Name of Property
New York County, NY
County and State
85002427
NR Reference Number

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United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)

Name of Property
New York County, NY

County and State
85002427

NR Reference Number

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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
- City

Name of repository: NYCLGBT Historic Sites Project

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .28 acres

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

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

1. Latitude: 40.730980 Longitude: -73.986394

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

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary remains exactly the same as for the original listing

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building (Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
Name of Property
New York County, NY
County and State
85002427
NR Reference Number

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jay Shockley and Amanda Davis CONTACT: Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO
Appendices by Jay Shockley

organization NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project date May 2025
street & number 71 West 23rd St telephone _____
city or town New York state NY zip code 10010
e-mail _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

United States Department of the Interior

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
Name of Property
New York County, NY
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85002427
NR Reference Number

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building (Yiddish Art Theatre Additional Documentation and Name Change)

City or Vicinity: New York

County: New York State: New York

Photographer: photos 1-3 Christopher D. Brazee; photos 4-5 Ken Lustbader

Date Photographed: 2016

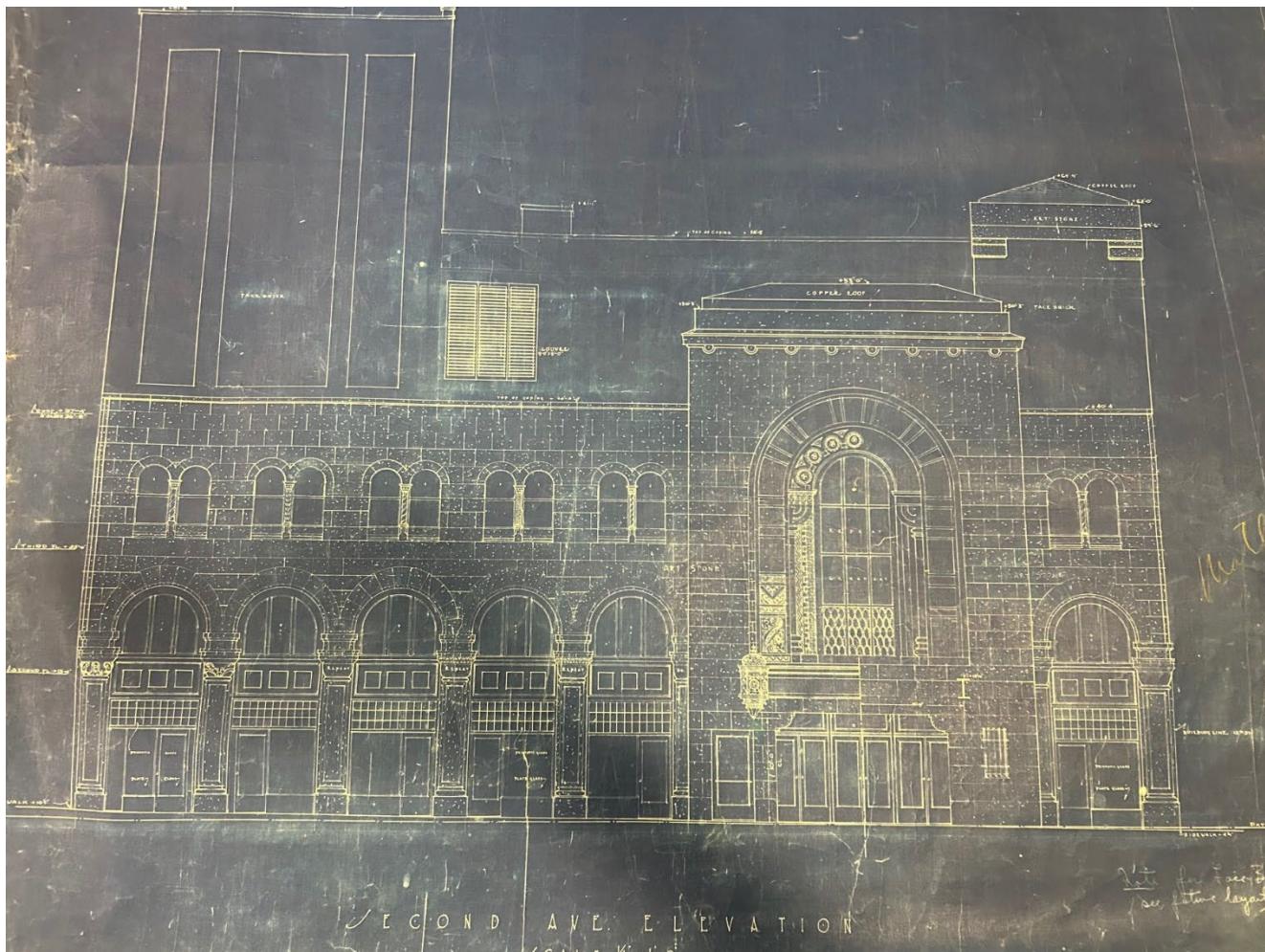
Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 0001. Second Ave elevation
- 0002. Second Avenue and East 12th Street elevations
- 0003. Upper story window
- 0004. Second Story loft window
- 0005. Door to apartment 3N

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
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NR Reference Number

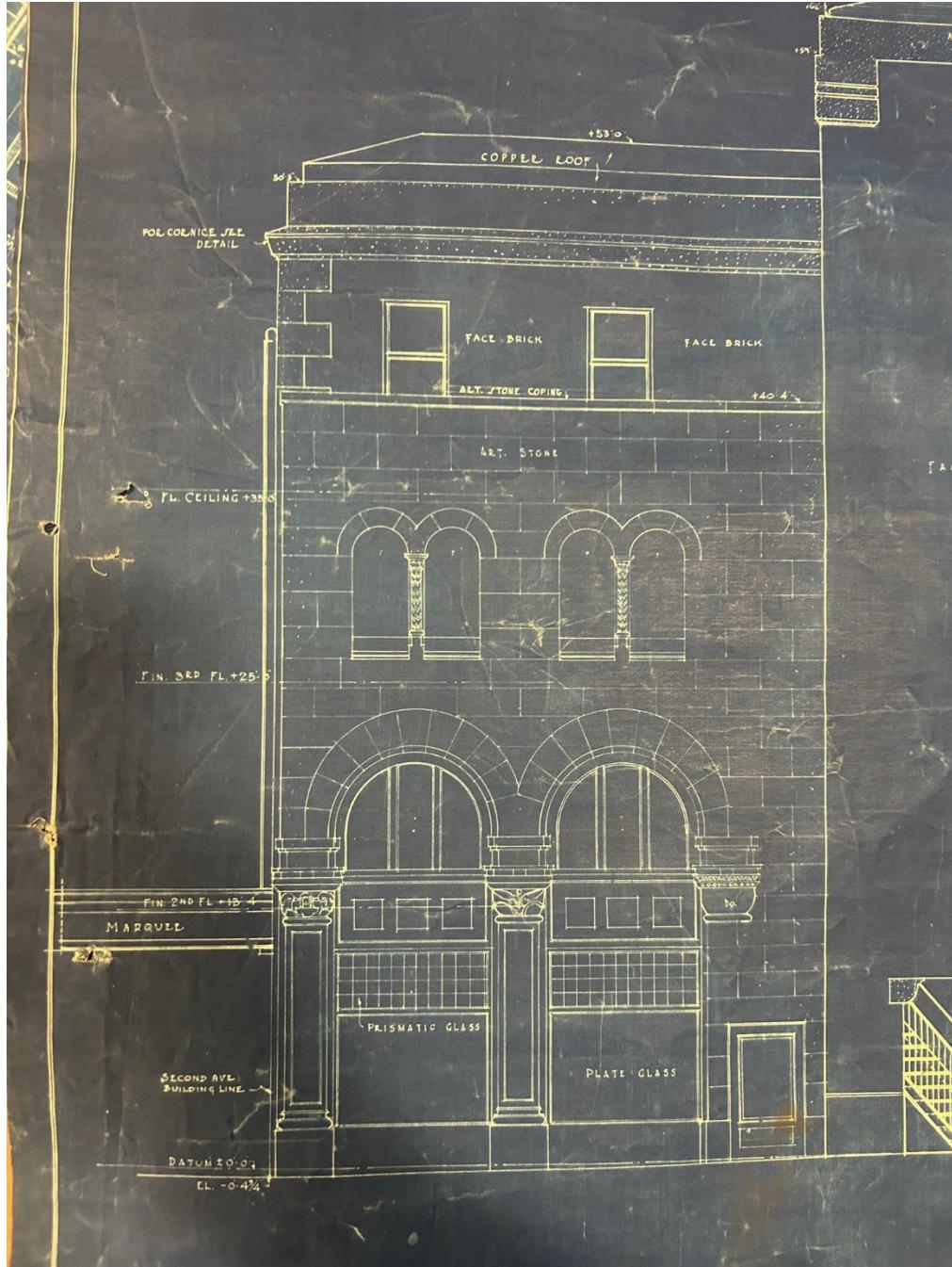


2nd Ave Elevation 1925

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
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NR Reference Number



12th St elevation 1925

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

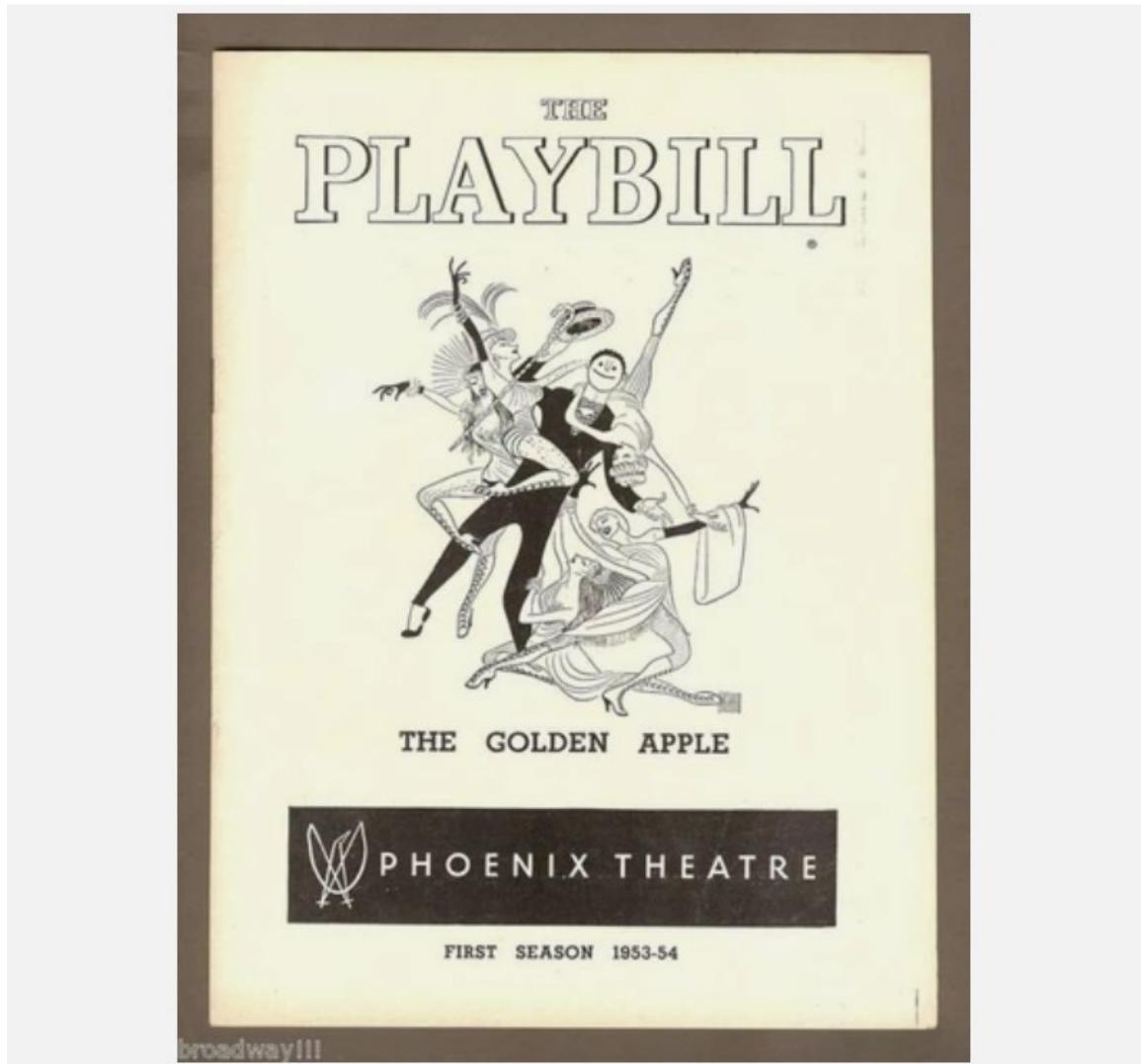
Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
Name of Property
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NR Reference Number



Club 181 drag king host and patrons 1951

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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Phoenix Theater Playbill 1953

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places
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Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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Loft Interior 1 – courtesy of Wojnarowicz Foundation

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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County and State
85002427
NR Reference Number

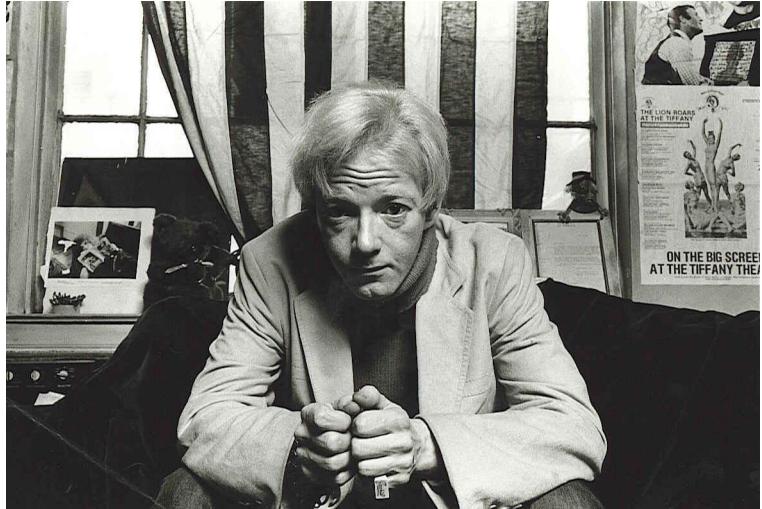


Loft Interior 2 – Courtesy of Wojnarowicz Foundation

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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Jackie Curtis



Jackie Curtis by Peter Hujar, 1970

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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NR Reference Number

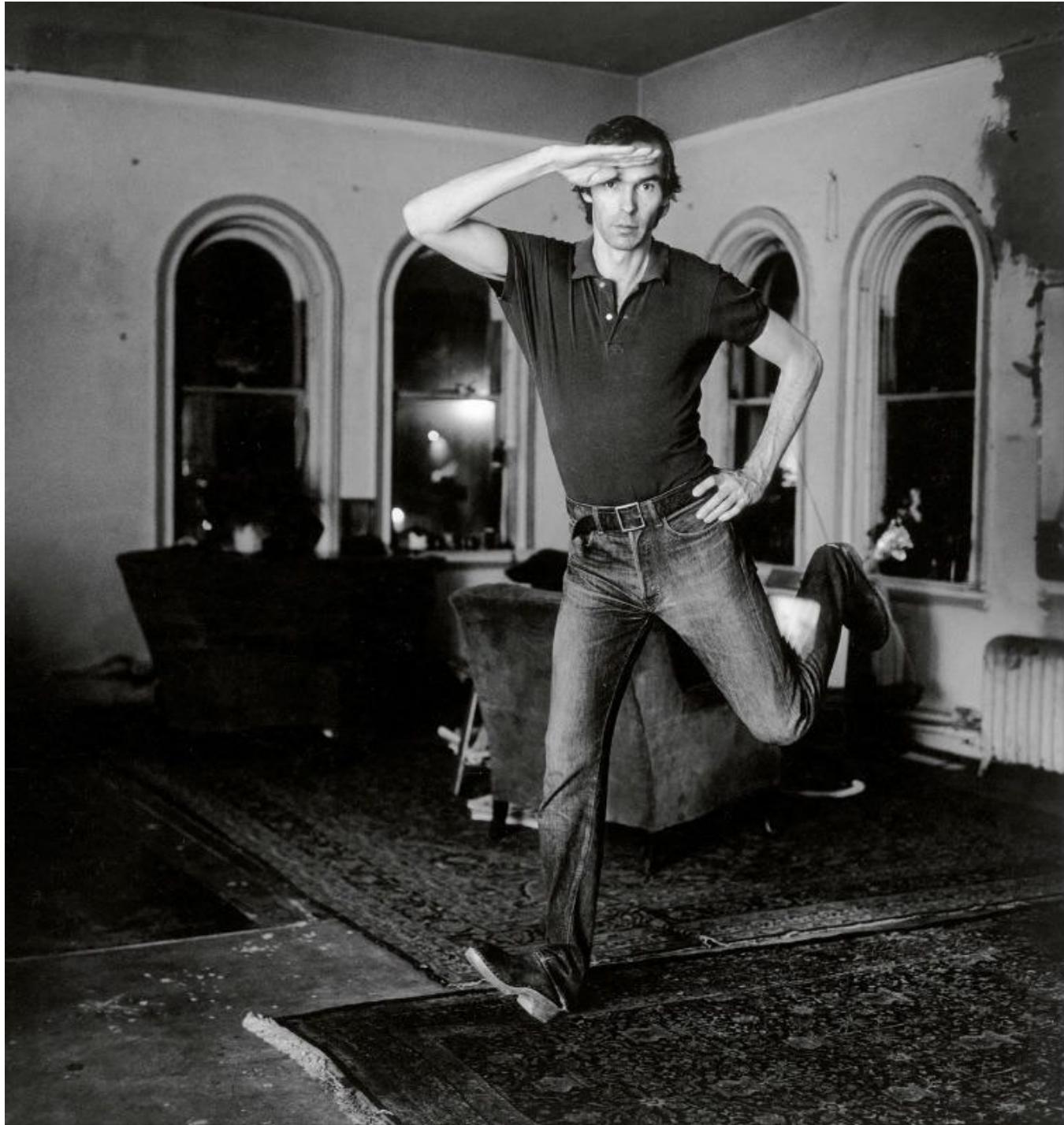


Peter Hujar – self-portrait in the loft

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
(Yiddish Art Theatre AD, name Change)
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County and State
85002427
NR Reference Number



Peter Hujar - Self Portrait in loft – 1974

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Louis N. Jaffee Art Theater Building
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County and State
85002427
NR Reference Number



David Wojnarowicz by Peter Hujar



David Wojnarowicz, self-portrait, in the loft



1:1,200

0 50 100 ft

 Nomination Boundary (0.28 ac)



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

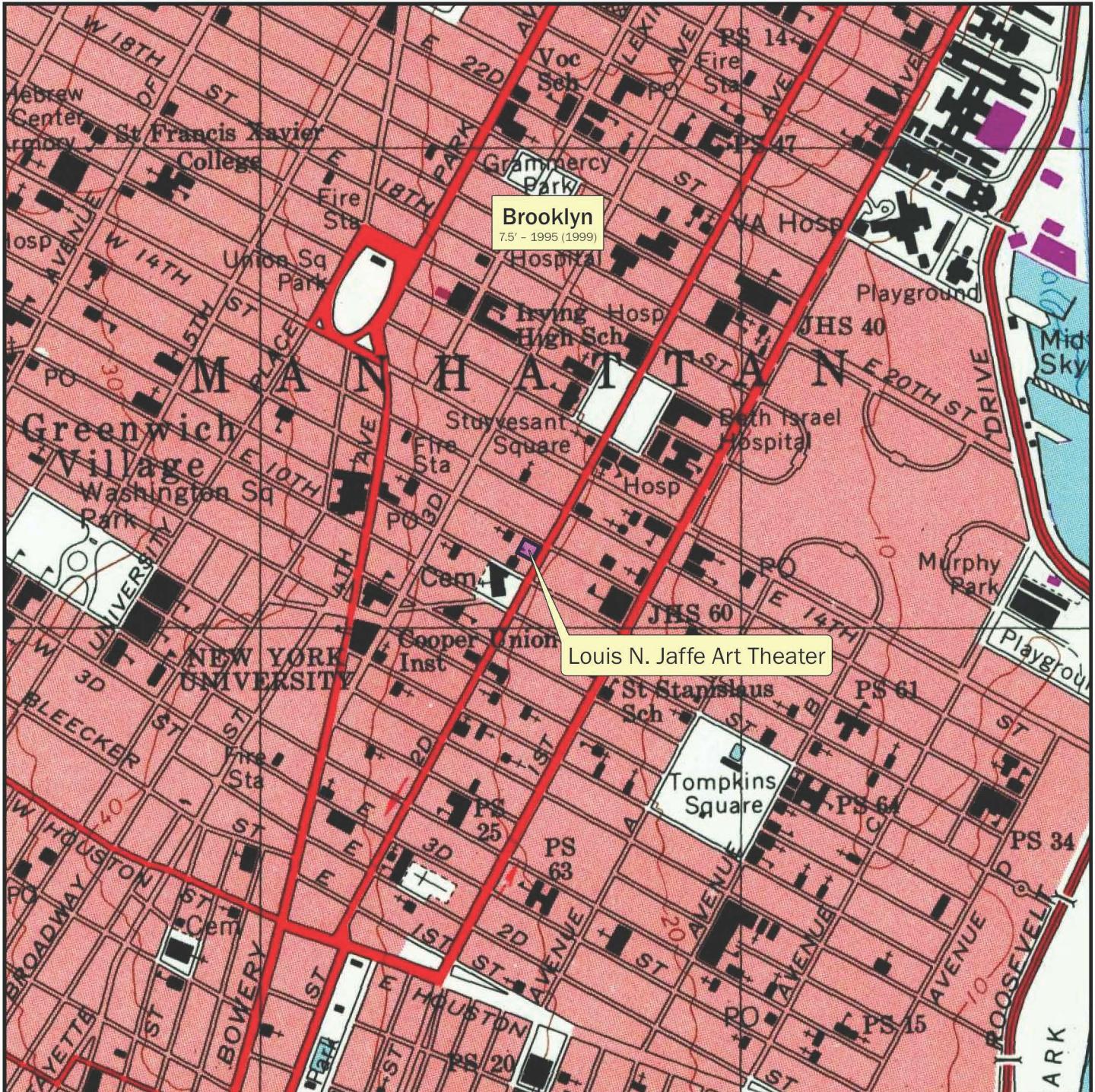


1:1,200

0 50 100 ft

-  Nomination Boundary (0.28 ac)
-  Tax Parcels





O

D Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater



New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

NYC **Landmarks Preservation**
Commission

Sarah Carroll
Chair

June 6, 2025

R. Daniel Mackay
Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: Yiddish Art Theatre, 181 Second Avenue, Manhattan (Block 467 Lot 31)

Dear Deputy Commissioner Mackay:

I am writing on behalf of Chair Sarah Carroll in response to your request for comment on the additional documentation for the Yiddish Art Theatre, listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Commission supports the modification of the nomination to include the additional information about the property's significant LGBTQ associations, as well as the update of the name of the property to the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building. On February 9, 1993, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate this building as an individual and interior landmark. Therefore, based on the Commission's prior review and designation of this building, the Commission has determined that the modified nomination for the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,



Lisa Kersavage
Executive Director



THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Environmental Conservation

COMMITTEES
Governmental Operations
Rules
Ways and Means

DEBORAH J. GLICK
Assemblymember 66TH District
New York County

June 10, 2025

R. Daniel Mackay
Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation and
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188

Re: Louis N. Jaffe Theatre (Yiddish Art Theater) Nomination
189 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10002

Dear Deputy Commissioner Mackay,

I'm excited to learn that the nomination of the Louis N. Jaffe Theater will be considered by the New York Board for Historic Preservation for inclusion in the National and State Registers of Historic Places. I understand that these registers officially recognize properties significant in history, architecture, engineering, landscape design, and culture. Being listed not only honors our national, state, and local heritage but also helps to preserve it.

The Louis N. Jaffe Theater, at 189 Second Avenue, has a rich history in Lower Manhattan. Named after the prominent early 20th-century Jewish civic leader and philanthropist Louis N. Jaffe, the theater was a cultural hub, famously associated with Maurice Schwartz ("Mr. Second Avenue") who founded the Yiddish Art Theatre - which became one of the most respected and influential American Yiddish theater companies on Jewish heritage expression and cultural life of immigrant communities in New York City in the early 20th century. Beyond its significance in Jewish immigrant cultural expression and assimilation, the theater also holds important social history ties to the LGBTQ+ community.

In February 1993, the New York City Landmark Preservation Commission officially recognized the theater for its contribution to preserving Yiddish cultural history and noted its significance to the LGBT community in New York City. The theater served as a vital social and cultural space for LGBTQ+ artists and audiences when queer spaces were limited in the East Village and Lower East Side. In this way, the Louis N. Jaffe Theater is not only an architectural and Jewish cultural landmark but also a symbol of LGBTQ+ visibility and heritage within the fabric of New York City.

I strongly support this nomination and hope the New York Board for Historic Preservation will include Louis N. Jaffe Theater in the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely,


Deborah J. Glick
Assemblymember

Appendix A: Yiddish Theater at the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building

Maurice Schwartz and the Yiddish Art Theatre¹

In 1918, Maurice Schwartz (1890-1960), a prominent young actor, joined a group of talented young Yiddish actors, including Jacob Ben-Ami, Celia Adler, and Ludwig Satz, in establishing the Yiddish Art Theatre troupe. Their “manifesto,” consistent with the aims of the global “art theater” movement and published in 1918 in the *Forward*, included the following goals:

1. The theater must be a sort of holy place, where a festive and artistic atmosphere will always reign
2. A company of young artists who love beauty must strive to bring the Yiddish theater to a beautiful fulfillment
3. To play good dramas, fine comedies, worthy farces, and nice operettas. If a melodrama must be played, it must have interest and logic
4. Every play must be put on as it should be, and the author should also have something to say about his play...²

The troupe’s production of Peretz Hirschbein’s *A favorn vinkel* (*The Forsaken Nook*) in October 1918 is considered the first performance in New York of a Yiddish “art theater” piece. Ben-Ami broke away from the company the following year and attempted to form another “art theater,” the Jewish Art Theater, though it was short lived. And despite periodic attempts to form other Yiddish “art theaters” over the years, Schwartz’s Yiddish Art Theatre company was the only one which had a lasting success. It was, as well, one of the longest surviving Yiddish theater companies in the world. The Yiddish Art Theatre performed up until 1950, with an additional attempted revival of the company in 1955. Author David Lifson considers Schwartz “the leading figure in the professional Yiddish theatre in New York from 1918 to 1950.”³ Schwartz remained devoted throughout his career to the Yiddish language and theater despite his occasional forays into film and Broadway.

The Yiddish Art Theatre, despite its name and original goals, actually steered a course between traditional Yiddish theater and “art theater.” It was, after all, a company built around the figure of Maurice Schwartz, who not only remained the star actor of the company, but frequently produced and directed its productions. The company staged more than 150 productions, many of them original Yiddish contemporary works, as well as adaptations and translations, and it was noted for its seriousness of purpose and variety of presentations. The Yiddish Art Theatre moved many times from theater to theater throughout its existence, and also toured around the world.

Louis Nathaniel Jaffe (c. 1884-1944) was a Russian-born Brooklyn lawyer, prominent Jewish civic leader, and philanthropist, who was a devotee of Schwartz, and vowed to construct a theater for his group. The Yiddish Art Theatre company, however, only performed in the Louis N. Jaffe

¹ Jay Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report* (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1993).

² Cited in Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Harper & Row, 1977), 262.

³ David S. Lifson, *The Yiddish Theatre in America* (Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), 313.

Art Theater Building during four theater seasons: the inaugural two seasons of the new building in 1926-28, and two later seasons in 1932-34.

Although the theater building was not yet fully completed (the official date was January 8, 1927), the opening performance took place on November 18, 1926. The audience, including a host of invited Jewish dignitaries, beheld, aside from the splendid new theater, the most elaborate production thus far of the Yiddish Art Theatre. *Dos tsente gebot (The Tenth Commandment)*, Schwartz's musical adaptation of Abraham Goldfaden's *Thou Shalt Not Covet* with a cast of seventy-five, featured a ballet by Michel Fokine, avant-garde scenery and costumes by Boris Aronson, and an orchestra conducted by Lazar Weiner.

The opening program notes further delineated one of Louis Jaffe's main goals for his theater:

Of the many reasons which prompted my building the Yiddish Art Theatre, one strikes me as the most significant. It had occurred to me that a certain phase of Jewish life in America was disintegrating. Everyone admits that the intimate contact between the Old World and the New as seen in the United States is gradually disappearing. Those Jews who immigrated to this country find themselves vastly separated from their sons and daughters and their grandchildren. The theatre, usually recognized as a bond in the community, has certainly not been a factor in establishing contact between father and son, mother and daughter. It is my hope that the Yiddish Art Theatre will in a certain sense reconcile the new and old generation.⁴

Later programs included the statement that "this building is owned and was erected by Louis N. Jaffe and leased to Maurice Schwartz, as a home for Yiddish Art and Drama." Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre performed at least another fourteen productions here in 1926-28. Schwartz severed his connection to the Jaffe Art Theater Building, however, purportedly since he considered the stage inadequate for his very ambitious programs, but he was seriously financially strapped and was squabbling with a major financial backer and the theater's manager over the type of productions that Schwartz should put on, to be financially viable.⁵

The Yiddish Art Theatre did return to its "home" during the two theater seasons from 1932 to 1934. Their second production, I.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*, became one of the greatest successes in the history of Yiddish theater, playing over 300 performances over the course of the two seasons, and later traveled to Broadway in an English-language version. Brooks Atkinson, in his review of the play, remarked "After drifting from pillar to post during the past five years... Maurice Schwartz is back at the Yiddish Art Theatre on Second Avenue, and a Saturday evening in his company is like a house-warming."⁶ The troupe put on at least another eleven productions here.

⁴ Yiddish Art Theatre, The Tenth Commandment Program (Nov. 1926).

⁵ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 6, 1938, 40; Martin Boris, *Once a Kingdom: The Life of Maurice Schwartz and the Yiddish Art Theatre*, <https://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/mschwartz-ok-ch16-19.htm>.

⁶ Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, December 18, 1932, 3.

Other Yiddish Theater Companies and Performers at the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building⁷

Yiddish theater was performed at the Jaffe Art Theater Building for nearly the entire period between its opening in 1926 (at the height of Yiddish theater in New York) and 1945 (at the end of the Yiddish theater heyday). The theater changed its name numerous times, and housed as many different Yiddish theater companies. Many of the biggest stars and honorable veterans of the New York Yiddish stage, many of them once associated with the Yiddish Art Theatre, appeared here: Boris Thomashefsky, Joseph Buloff, Celia Adler, Bina Abramowitz, Lazar Freed, Anna and Abraham Teitelbaum, Berta Gersten, Isidore Cashier, Luba Kadison, Anna Appel, Ludwig Satz, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Baruch Lumet, Leah Naomi, Molly Picon, Bertha Kalish, Tillie Rabinowitz, Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnick, Gustav Schacht, Isidore and Hannah Hollander, Jacob Mestel, Zvee Scooler, Anatole Winogradoff, Ben Basenko, Ola Lillith, Edmund Zayenda, and Jacob Ben-Ami. Performances spanned the range of Yiddish theater, from serious dramas by some of the leading Yiddish playwrights, to musical comedies, operettas, and revues.

After the first two seasons of the Yiddish Art Theatre, two English language plays were performed here. By September of 1928, the theater was known as the Yiddish Folks Theater. Five Yiddish productions were led by actors Misha and Lucy German and Menasha Skulnick. Misha German (d. 1947) was a Russian-born actor/producer who came to the U.S. during World War I and later worked with the Yiddish Art Theatre. There were also visiting performances by Benjamin Zemach of Moscow Habima, a dance recital, Michal Michalesko, and the famous Vilna Troupe.

In 1929-30, it was operated as the Satz Folks Theater. Ludwig Satz (1891-1944), born in Polish Galicia, arrived in America around 1911, and was one of the original founders of the Yiddish Art Theatre in 1918 with Maurice Schwartz. He starred in and directed three musical plays here.

In June 1930, comedienne Molly Picon (1898-1992), one of the biggest stars of the Yiddish stage, leased the theater and the name was changed to the Molly Picon's Folks Theater. She appeared here for one season, in the successful musical *Di meydl fun amat* (*The Girl of Yesterday*), and also in a special performance of the musical *Ganeyvishe libe* (*The Love Thief*).

During the 1931-32 season, the theater was leased by Misha and Lucy German, and was called the Germans' Folks Theater. They produced six plays in Yiddish, including the first Yiddish translation of Eugene O'Neill's *The Long Voyage Home*. After Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre company's two return seasons here in 1932-34, its name reverted to the Yiddish Folks Theater, as Schwartz retained the sole rights to the name Yiddish Art Theatre. Of the two plays that completed the season, *All in a Lifetime*, by Harry Kalmanovitch, was a huge success.

In 1934, the "New York Art Troupe at the Yiddish Folks Theater" was another attempt to establish a Yiddish "art theater." It was formed "for the purpose of carrying on the traditions of the better things in the Yiddish theatre and to create a permanent home for our finer artists and a haven for the discriminating theatre-patron... [in] one of the most beautiful and convenient

⁷ Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report*.

theatres in New York.”⁸ The New York Art Troupe, which lasted only one season, was directed by Joseph Buloff, along with fellow actors Lazar Freed and Jacob Mestel. Buloff (1899-1985) born in Lithuania, began acting with the Vilna Troupe, and was brought to New York by Schwartz to perform with the Yiddish Art Theatre in 1926 in its new home. Buloff's career spanned nearly the entire history of Yiddish theater in this building, with his performances here as late as 1976. The New York Art Troupe put on at least ten productions, including the quite successful *Mechutonim (In-Laws)*, by Chone Gottesfeld. The theater season in the Spring of 1935 was rounded out by a Yiddish play, a musical, the revue *Kibbetzers, Inc.*, and an interlude in May 1935 as a Yiddish movie theater. A newspaper announcement claimed that this was the first all-Yiddish motion picture theater in the world.

The Yiddish Folks Theater was leased in April 1935, by Menasha Skulnick and Joseph M. Rumshinsky for the following two fall seasons, for musical comedies. Skulnick (1898-1970) was a very popular Yiddish comedian who had first appeared with the Yiddish Art Theatre in 1919, and had performed with many companies across the country, including that of Misha and Lucy German in this theater in 1932. Rumshinsky (c. 1882-1956) was a popular and prolific Russian-born composer who created over 100 Yiddish operettas, at least eight of which were performed in this theater by various companies. Skulnick starred in five Rumshinsky musicals, including the very popular *Fishel der gerutener (The Perfect Fishel)*. In addition, there was a special performance with the famous “father” of Yiddish theater in New York, Boris Thomashefsky, *Di chazente (The Cantor's Wife, or The Singing Rabbi)*; a revue with a Yiddish translation of a Clifford Odets play; productions by branches of the WPA Federal Theater Project's Municipal Theater; and plays by the Folksbiene and the politically leftist Theatre Collective.

In April 1937, the theater was leased to the Saulray Theatres Corp.; foreclosure proceedings were initiated in September, with the building held by the Greater New York Savings Bank. It became a movie theater known as the Century. Despite the effects of the Depression, the Jaffe Art Theater Building had been successful thus far in attracting Yiddish theater companies and patrons. Yiddish theater was, however, going through a period of decline in the 1930s. This decline has variously been attributed to the end of the era of massive Jewish immigration to New York in 1924; the decline in usage of the Yiddish language; the association of Yiddish theater with older generations of Jews, and the assimilation of younger generations into American culture; the move of many Jews from the Lower East Side to other areas such as Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx; and the popularity of movies, and the closings and subsequent conversions of Yiddish theaters into movie theaters (the Public and Second Avenue Theaters were converted around 1930).

In June 1940, the theater was leased for the 1940-41 season, again as the Yiddish Folks Theater, under the direction of Jacob Wexler, a noted Yiddish actor and founder of the Hebrew Actors Union (who died soon after in January 1941), and the management of actress Ola Lillith. They were joined by actors Edmund Zayenda and Ludwig Satz in the Rumshinsky musical *Sunrise*.

⁸ New York Art Troupe, letter (n.d., c. 1934), Yivo Institute.

Molly Picon returned to appear with them in the “musical cavalcade” *60 Years of Yiddish Theater*, which was a special performance in honor of Rumshinsky. And Maurice Schwartz returned for a special performance of *A favorn vinkel (The Forsaken Nook)*, as a tribute to Satz’s 30-year career.

The Century Theater was “remodeled” and re-opened in March 1941, as a first-run, single-feature English language movie theater. *Gone With the Wind* played here soon after.⁹ The New York Civic Opera Company, the oldest American touring grand opera company (founded 1916), performed here in March 1944. In September 1944, the theater building was purchased by the M.H.R. Realty Corporation under Julius Raynes, and Raynes family interests have continued to own it to today.

Its final season as a Yiddish theater during its heyday was in 1944-45 as the New Jewish Folk Theater, under the direction of Jacob Ben-Ami (1890-1977). A prominent Russian-born actor of both the Yiddish and English-language stages, Ben-Ami had been one of the original founders of the Yiddish Art Theatre in 1918. Profoundly affected by the wartime destruction of the European Jewish peoples and their culture and theaters, Ben-Ami decided to return to the Yiddish stage because:

I feel very strongly moved to do my part in the perpetuation of Jewish drama and culture... I believe that by producing the best Jewish plays in the Jewish idiom, our theatre can likewise contribute its share to the world's theatrical culture.¹⁰

The New Jewish Folk Theater performed two topical plays, H. Leivick’s *Der nes in geto (The Miracle of the Warsaw Ghetto)*, and David Bergelson’s *Mir vein lebn (We Will Live)*, the latter the first Russian play on Jewish life there.

By March 1946, the theater again became a movie theater, named the Stuyvesant Theater; it remained the Stuyvesant until 1953.

Other Organizations

Directories listed a number of organizations at this address in its earlier years, including the Jewish National Workers’ Alliance of America, Jewish Folk Schools, and the Yiddisher Kultur Farband (YKUF), a communist-oriented organization which sought to advance secular Jewish culture in Yiddish.

⁹ Though the movie premiered in December 1939, it was only seen in a limited number of theaters with advance ticket sales until its general release in 1941.

¹⁰ Jacob Ben-Ami, "A New Jewish Theatre," *New York Times*, October 1, 1944, II, 2.

LGBT Associations with Yiddish Theater at the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building¹¹

Note: The names of LGBT people are in **bold**.

Just three years before the opening of the Jaffe Art Theater Building, there was a scandal involving a Yiddish play in New York. *Got fun nekome (God of Vengeance)* was a play in Yiddish created in 1906 by a young Polish-Jewish writer, Sholem Asch. The story was about a Jewish brothel owner whose daughter has a lesbian relationship with one of his prostitutes. Opened in Berlin in 1907, it ran for six months, then was translated and performed in a dozen languages. The play in Yiddish was first brought to New York by David Kessler in 1907, where it sparked a press war among Yiddish newspapers, due to various aspects of its subject matter. An English language version was later presented in 1922 without incident at the Provincetown Playhouse and then at the Greenwich Village Theater, both in Greenwich Village.

From February 19 to April 14, 1923, it was performed in an altered English language version for Broadway at the Apollo Theater on 42nd Street. This was quite significant in LGBT theater history as the site of the first lesbian love scene depicted on Broadway. Reaction from moralists in the city, however, was swift. Arthur Hornblow in *Theater Magazine* fumed:

A more foul and unpleasant spectacle has never been seen in New York... the audience is treated to a nightgown scene in which the women make overtures to each other which goes so far beyond the pale of what is permissible that I can only voice my astonishment at the authorities allowing a thing of this sort to be continued before heterosexual audiences.¹²

The New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, a group of self-appointed moralists that closely monitored the New York stage, lodged a complaint. Rabbi Joseph Silverman of Temple Emanu-El led the fight to shut down the play. Adolph Ochs, publisher of the *New York Times*, deemed it immoral and concurred in its closing. A grand jury, convened in secret, indicted the entire cast and producer on March 23 for “presenting an obscene, indecent, immoral and impure theatrical production,” and they were arrested the following day. The American Civil Liberties Union declined to assist. Acclaimed actor Rudolph Schildkraut and producer Harry Weinberger were convicted on charges of obscenity on May 23 and fined \$200 each, while the rest of the cast received suspended sentences. This was the first conviction of a performer in a play for immorality by an American jury. The Court of Appeals eventually overturned the conviction.

¹¹ Jay Shockley, “Apollo Theater (42nd Street),” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, June 2019, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/apollo-theater-42nd-street>; Digital Yiddish Theatre Project, “A Timeline of Yiddish Drag,” <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/a-timeline-of-yiddish-drag>; Eve Sicular, “Gender Rebellion in Yiddish film,” December 9, 1995, <https://lilith.org/articles/gender-rebellion>; David Mazower, “10 Things You Need to Know About *God of Vengeance*,” February 28, 2017, <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-god-of-vengeance>; Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, “Top 10 Queerest Moments in the Yiddish Theatre: An Illustrated List in Honor of Pride Month 2019,” June 25, 2019, <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/top-10-queerest-moments-in-the-yiddish-theater-an-illustrated-list-in-honor-of-pride-month-2019>. The author wishes to thank Eve Sicular and Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel for their guidance and resources on this subject.

¹² Arthur Hornblow, “Mr. Hornblow Goes to the Play,” *Theater Magazine*, April 1923, 68.

As this indicates, early 20th-century censors, excited about “controversial” subjects being explored in New York’s theaters, focused mainly on sexuality – in particular, homosexuality and interracial relationships. In 1927, the New York Legislature passed the Wales Padlock Law, which made it illegal “depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion,” and offending theaters could be closed. (Similarly, Hollywood movies were subjected to the infamous Motion Picture Production (Hays) Code of 1930.) Although the New York law was not often enforced, and was protested by the theater community, it remained on the books until 1967 and had a huge and censorious effect on the Broadway stage and theaters elsewhere in the city.

The time period of the heyday of Yiddish theater, this scandal, the Wales Padlock Law, censors and moralists, as well as the (perhaps) closer ties of Yiddish theater to a religious audience, made it highly unlikely that LGBT subject matter, or publicly, openly LGBT performers and creators, would appear at the Jaffe Art Theater Building. There are, however, some LGBT-related associations here.

Interestingly, the Yiddish Art Theatre troupe performed *God of Vengeance* for one night in New York (not at the Jaffe) in April 1929, “to the cast of which nearly every Jewish Theatre in New York will contribute,” and once later that year in Philadelphia.¹³ Maurice Schwartz appeared as the father, with Luba Kadison as the daughter. Kadison performed in many other plays at the Jaffe (1926 to 1936, and 1975). Leah Naomi, who played the mother for a production by the Vilna Troupe, also performed in many other plays at the Jaffe (1931-35).

Yiddish theater has always employed the tradition of “gender-bending” performers – men and women in “drag” - playing roles of, and dressed as, the “opposite sex.” One of the most famous examples is Abraham Goldfaden’s 1879 *Di kishefmaherin* (*The Sorceress, or The Witch*) in which the lead role is traditionally played by a man. Most sources list the first Yiddish theatrical presentation in New York City as *Di kishefmaherin* at the Turnverein at 66 East 4th Street on August 12, 1882. The Russian teenager Boris Thomashefsky was pressed into service to fill in for an actress who was scheduled for that role. This play was presented at the Jaffe by Misha and Lucy German in 1929.

Molly Picon (1898-1992) was the American Yiddish actress with the longest history of “trouser roles” (women playing young men), especially as mischievous boys, starting at least as early as 1918 in *Yankele*, a role she played many times. Her most famous film in that regard was *Yidl mitn fidl* (*Yiddle with his Fiddle*), a hit in 1938. While she doesn’t appear to have performed any drag characters at the Jaffe, she had a great success with *Di meydl fun amol* (*The Girl of Yesterday*) there as the Molly Picon’s Folks Theater, in 1930-31. She was in other productions at the theater in 1931 and 1941.

Other women who were famous for playing male roles also appeared at the Jaffe, though not in drag characters. Bertha Kalich, the only actress to be favorably compared to Sarah Bernhardt in the 1890s as Hamlet, played the lead in *Sappho* at the Jaffe in 1935 (it had no lesbian content).

¹³ “The God of Vengeance,” *Brooklyn Standard Union*, April 27, 1929, 12; “Yiddish Art Theater Sets Dates for Pacific Coast,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 9, 1929, 64.

Chana Spector, who played a male role in *Der dibuk* in 1925 at the Amphion Theater in Brooklyn, was in the cast of *Zayn vayb's lubovnik* (*His Wife's Lover*) at the Jaffe in 1929.¹⁴ Freydele Oysher, who became known for playing Yeshiva boys and performing cantorial repertoire in male religious wear on stage, made one appearance at the Jaffe (Eden Theater) in 1976. Nellie Casman, also known for male roles, was in the cast of *The Laugh Maker* at the Eden in 1971.

One famous Yiddish actor, Michal Michalesko (1886-1957), is little remembered today as “the only female impersonator on the Yiddish stage.”¹⁵ Born in Ukraine/Russia, he first appeared on the Yiddish stage at the age of 12 and was brought to the U.S. in 1920 by Boris Thomashefsky, making his debut in 1921. He became known for Yiddish operettas on the Lower East Side and in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Michalesko was so popular that William Rolland built a theater as a showcase for him - the Rolland (later Parkway) Theater (1929-33, Harrison Wiseman), 1768 St. John’s Place, Brownsville, Brooklyn. At the Jaffe (Yiddish Folks Theater), Michalesko played the male and female leads in the Freiman-Secunda musical *Senorita* in April-May 1929.

Newspaper ads for the play even billed him as “the Yiddishe **Julian Eltinge**.”¹⁶ In the 1910s and ‘20s, Eltinge (born William J. Dalton; 1881-1941), often considered one of the greatest female impersonators in history, was a big star on Broadway and in vaudeville. He also became a popular and wealthy star in a dozen films. Theater historian Kaier Curtin called Eltinge “a serious artist, playing female roles in straight dramas and musical comedies,” with a performance style that created the illusion that he was actually a woman, rather than a broad burlesque caricature.¹⁷

YIDDISH THEATER PRODUCTIONS AT THE LOUIS N. JAFFE ART THEATER BUILDING¹⁸

YIDDISH ART THEATRE 1926-28

¹⁴ Zachary Baker, “Khonen in Drag: Cross-Dressing in Two Productions of *The Dybbuk* during the 1920s,” August 23, 2021, Digital Yiddish Theatre Project, <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/khonen-in-drag-cross-dressing-in-two-productions-of-the-dybbuk-during-the-1920s-plus-a-review-of-one-of-these-productions>.

¹⁵ *New York Daily News*, January 20, 1929, 109.

¹⁶ *New York Daily News*, April 25, 1929, 89.

¹⁷ Jay Shockley, “AMC Empire 25 Theater (originally Eltinge Theater),” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, June 2019, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/amc-empire-25-theater-originally-eltinge-theater>.

¹⁸ *The Best Plays of [Annual]*, Louis Kronenberger, ed. (later Henry Hewes) (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1953 through 1987); *The Biographical Encyclopaedia and Who's Who of the American Theatre*, Walter Rigdon, ed. (James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966); David S. Lifson, *The Yiddish Theatre in America* (Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), Appendix A, 576-581; New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection; *New York Times Theatre Reviews 1920-70* (Arno Press, 1971); *Theatre World [Annual]*, Daniel Blum, ed. (later John Willis) (Greenberg Publisher, 1953 through 1987); Yivo Institute for Jewish Research files; Newspapers.com; Old Fulton Postcards historic newspapers; Yiddish Theater online websites, collections, and resources (1926 to 1945).

Dos tsente gebot (The Tenth Commandment), by Abraham Goldfaden; adapted/directed, Maurice Schwartz; music, Joseph Achron; ballet, Michel Fokine; sets and costumes, Boris Aronson; conducted, Lazar Weiner

with Schwartz, Joseph Buloff, Celia Adler, Bina Abramowitz, Lazar Freed, Abraham Teitelbaum, Berta Gersten, Anna Teitelbaum, Ben-Zvi Baratoff, Pincus Sherman, Jacob Greenberg, Abraham Kubansky, Minnie Paulinger, Baruch Lumet, Sonia Radina, Wolf Goldfaden, Boris Weiner, Anna Appel, Abraham Fishkind, Morris Silberkasten, Isidore Cashier, Michael Rosenberg, Jacob Cone, Eugene Sigaloff, Isaac Rothblum (Nov. 18, 1926)

Mendele Spivak, by Semeon Yushkevich; translation, Lazar Freed; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Bina Abramowitz, Celia Adler, Anna Appel, Miriam Bobrov, Joseph Buloff, Isidore Cashier, Bernard Gailing, Berta Gersten, Mrs. Goldberg, Wolf Goldfaden, Ruth Goldstein, M. Greenberg, Luba Kadison, Abraham Kubansky, Minnie Paulinger, Sonia Radina, Michael Rosenberg, Leah Rosenzweig, Pincus Sherman, Anna Teitelbaum, Boris Weiner (Dec. 23, 1926)

Ir farbrekhn (Her Crime), by Moissaye Joseph Olgin; sets, Boris Aronson; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Berta Gersten, Joseph Buloff, Lazar Freed, Isidore Cashier, Wolf Goldfaden, Luba Kadison, Abraham Teitelbaum, Jacob Cone, Anna Teitelbaum, Abraham Kubansky, Morris Silberkasten, Boris Weiner, Abraham Kubansky, Baruch Lumet, Jacob Greenberg, Philip Sherman, Mordechai Yachsen, Abraham Fishkind, Michael Rosenberg, Sonia Radina, Miriom Bobrov, Philip Sherman (Feb. 4, 1927)

Rags (Feb. 10, 1927)

Reverend Doctor Zilber, by Sholem Asch; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz; with Schwartz, Celia Adler, Anna Appel, Lazar Freed, Wolf Goldfaden, Abraham Teitelbaum, Anna Teitelbaum, Morris Silberkasten, Sonia Radina (Mar. 3, 1927)

Yoske musicanti, by Ossip Dymov; sets, Boris Aronson; directed, Joseph Buloff with Maurice Schwartz, Buloff, Berta Gersten, Luba Kadison, Bina Abramowitz, Anna Appel, Isidore Cashier (Mar. 17, 1927)

Vilki (The Wolves), by Romain Rolland; adapted, L. Blumenfeld; music, Peter Engels; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Isidore Cashier, Joseph Buloff, Lazar Freed, Morris Silberkasten, Ben-Zvi Baratoff (Mar. 18, 1927)

Menschen shtoib (Human Dust), by Ossip Dymov; music, Vladimir Heifitz; sets, Boris Aronson; scenery painted by Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Joseph Buloff, Celia Adler, Bina Abramowitz, Lazar Freed, Berta Gersten, Ben-Zvi Baratoff, Pincus Sherman, Abraham Kubansky, Baruch Lumet, Sonia Radina, Wolf Goldfaden, Anna Appel, Morris Silberkasten, Isidore Cashier, Isaac Rothblum, Luba Kadison, Simeon Ruskin, Jeanette Zemell, Esther Latainer (Mar. 25, 1927)

Greenberg's Daughters, by Morris Aderschleger; sets, Joseph Siegfried; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Anna Appel, Berta Gersten, Lazar Freed, Bina Abramowitz, Anna Teitelbaum, Morris Silberkasten, Jechiel Goldsmith, Wolf Goldfaden, Rebecca Lesh, Jacob Goldstein, Henrietta Schnitzer, Morris Strassberg, Bernie Mishbin, Morris Lipschitz (Sept. 5, 1927)

The Gardener's Dog, by Lope de Vega; adapted/directed, Boris S. Glagolin; translated, Harry Bransky; sets, A. Soudeiktin

with Maurice Schwartz, Lazar Freed, Berta Gersten, Wolf Goldfaden, Abraham Teitelbaum, Ben Zion Katz, Morris Silberkasten, Morris Strassberg, Ben Zion Katz, Jacob Goldstein, Yechiel Goldsmith, Samuel Lehrer, Armuta Berg (Oct. 20, 1927). First U.S. production of Glagolin's "Moscow Revolution Theater."

Di goldgreber (The Gold Diggers), by Sholom Aleichem; adapted, I.D. Berkowitz; music, Herman Zaretzky; sets, Sam Ostrowsky; directed Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Bina Abramowitz, Berta Gersten, Lazar Freed, Anna Appel, Wolf Goldfaden Berta Gersten, Wolf Goldfaden, Anna Teitelbaum, Morris Silberkasten, Yechiel Goldsmith, Benny Mazbin, Morris Strassberg, Jacob Mestel, Rebecca Lesh, Abraham Teitelbaum, Jacob Goldstein, Ben Zion Katz, Michal Gibson, Israel Shein, Jacob Malinowsky (Dec. 2, 1927)

On Foreign Soil, by Areas des Santos [Saint Andrea]; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Berta Gersten, Bina Abramowitz, Lazar Freed, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Yechiel Goldsmith, Henrietta Shnitzer, Morris Strassberg, Bina Abramowitz (Dec. 23, 1927)

Di groyse gevins (The Great Fortune), by Sholom Aleichem; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Berta Gersten, Lazar Freed, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Yechiel Goldsmith, Morris Strassberg, Anna Appel, Abraham Teitelbaum, Sophie Nadolsky, Jacob Goldstein, Rebecca Lesh, Jacob Sobel (Jan. 17, 1928)

Alexander Pushkin, by Valestino Carrera; translated, Abraham Armband; sets, M. Salzman; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Berta Gersten, Anna Appel, Lazar Freed, Wolf Goldfaden, Yechiel Goldsmith, Morris Silberkasten, Morris Strassberg, Abraham Teitelbaum, Jacob Goldstein, Rebecca Lesh, Henrietta Shnitzer, Anna Teitelbaum, Michal Gibson (Jan. 26, 1928)

American Chasidim, by Chone Gottesfeld; directed, Maurice Schwartz
with Schwartz; Yechiel Goldsmith, Abraham Teitelbaum, Bina Abramowitz, Lazar Freed,
Anna Appel, Morris Silberkasten, Berta Gersten, Wolf Goldfaden, Rebecca Lesh,
Henrietta Shnitzer, Lazar Freed, Morris Strassberg, Jacob Goldstein, Mordecai Gibson,
Zvee Schooler, Sam Lehrer, P. Sherman, B. Mizbin, D. Stein, I. Berezin, Theodore
Kaminker, Samuel Cohn, Max Malinovsky (Mar. 16, 1928)

White Cargo, by Leon Gordon, English language production (June 1928)

They Knew What They Wanted, by Sidney Howard (Pulitzer Prize for Drama, 1925), English
language production
with Frank Thomas, David Newell, Seth Arnold, Marguerite Merrill (June 1928)

YIDDISH FOLKS THEATER 1928-29

Naye negidim (Newly Rich), by Zalmon Libin
with Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnik (Sept. 1928)

Benjamin Zemach of Moscow Habima, dance recital
in *Beggar Dance* by Satz, and *Three Generations*, by A. Ellstein; Michio Ito, oriental
dance; and Jacob Ben-Ami, dramatic reading (Sept. 25, 1928)

Di eybige name (The Eternal Mother), by Harry Kalmanovitch; music, Harry Lubin; lyrics,
Israel Rosenberg; directed, Misha German
with Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnik, Wolf Goldfaden, Yidl Dubinsky, Helen
Blay, Zvee Scooler, Mina Birnbaum, Luther Adler, Julia Adler (Oct. 19, 1928, to March
1929)

Di zibn gehangene (The Seven Who Were Hanged), by Leonid Andreyev
with Misha and Lucy German, Zvee Scooler (Nov. 8, 1928)

Sonim (Enemies)
with Misha and Lucy German (Dec. 10, 1928)

Di kishefmakherin (The Witch), by Abraham Goldfaden
With Misha and Lucy German (Feb. 13, 1929)

Senorita, by Louis Freiman; music, Sholom Secunda
with Michal Michalesko, “the Yiddishe Julian Eltinge,” “the only female impersonator
on the Yiddish stage,” playing the male and female leading roles; and Lucy Levine, Jacob
Rechtzeit, Annie Lubin, Chana Levin, Louis Birnbaum, Isidore Friedman, Harry

Hochstein, Jacob Wexler, Ray Schneier, David Baratz, Pauline Hoffman (April 26-May 1929)

Parnose (Livelihood), by Chone Gottesfeld
performed by the Vilna Troupe (May 1929)

SATZ FOLKS THEATER 1929-30

Zayn vayb's lubovnik (His Wife's Lover), by Sheyne Rokhl Semkoff; music, Abe Ellstein; lyrics, Boris Rosenthal; dances, Charles Adler; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Ludwig Satz
with Satz, Fanny Lubritzky, Miriom Belavsky, Regina Zuckerberg, Peter Graf, Rebecca Weintraub, Joseph Shoengold, Leon Gold, Morris Belavsky, Harry Hochstein, David Weinrich, Chana Spector, Breine Braunstein, Charles Banks (Oct. 20, 1929)

Az der rebe vil (If the Rabbi Wants), by Nahem Stuchkoff; music, Abe Ellstein; directed, Ludwig Satz
with Satz, Fanny Lubritzky, Dinah Goldberg, Joseph Shoengold (Dec. 22, 1929)

Narishe tates (Foolish Fathers), by Sholem Perlmutter; music/directed, Abe Ellstein; lyrics, Isadore Lillian
with Joseph Shoengold, Ludwig Satz, Peter Graff, Leon Gold, Fanny Lubritzky, Rebecca Weintraub, Regina Zuckerberg, Mary Wilensky (February 21, 1930)

MOLLY PICON'S FOLKS THEATER 1930-31

Di meydl fun amat (The Girl of Yesterday), by Harry Kalmanovitch and Jacob Kalich; music, Joseph Rumshinsky
with Molly Picon, Harry Feld, Tillie Rabinowitz, Sam Kasten, Paul Burstein, Leon Gold, Lucy Levine, Charles Cohan, Emily Adler (Sept. 26, 1930) (100+ perf.)

Ganeyvishe libe (The Love Thief), by Benjamin Ressler; music, Joseph Rumshinsky; lyrics, Nahem Stuchkoff and Molly Picon; directed Jacob Kalich
with Picon, Harry Feld, Sam Kasten, Tillie Rabinowitz, Leon Gold, Paul Burstein, Charles Cohan, Lucy Levine, Sam Levin (Jan. 17, 1931).
Special performance as testimonial to Joseph Rumshinsky, in honor of his 50th birthday and 50th operetta (April 9, 1931).

GERMANS' FOLKS THEATER 1931-32

Azoy iz dos lebn (Such Is Life), by Harry Kalmanovitch
with Misha and Lucy German, Celia Boodkin, Misha Boodkin, Isidore Cashier, Goldie Lubritzky, Mark Schweid, Sonia Nadolsky, Menasha Skulnik, Leah Naomi, Zvee Scooler, Sara Skulnick, David Yanover (Sept. 21, 1931)

One Woman, by Menachem Baraisho; directed, Misha German
with Misha and Lucy German; Isidore Cashier, Mark Schweid, Sonia Nadolsky (c. Dec. 12, 1931)

In a Tenement House, by Harry Kalmanovitch
with Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnik, Celia Budkin, Isidore Cashier, Mark Schweid (c. Jan. 23, 1932)

Pioneers, by Peretz Hirschbein
with Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnik, Celia Budkin (Feb. 25, 1932)

The Long Voyage Home, by Eugene O'Neill (first Yiddish translation) (March 2, 1932)

Wedding Chains, by Harry Kalmanovitch; directed, Misha German
with Misha and Lucy German, Menasha Skulnik, Isidore Cashier, Celia Budkin, Mark Schweid, Goldie Lubritzky (c. Mar. 26, 1932)

YIDDISH ART THEATRE 1932-34

The New Man, by Florencio Sanchez; trans. I. Kovensky; directed, Maurice Schwartz
with Schwartz, Luba Kadison, Helen Zelinska, Judith Abarbanel, Anatole Winogradoff, Anna Teitelbaum, Lazar Freed, Wolf Goldfaden, Leon Seidenberg, Rebecca Weintraub, Jacob Mestel, Sidney Shlessner (April 22, 1932)

Yoshe Kalb, by I.J. Singer; music, Maurice Schwartz; dances, Lillian Shapero; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz
with Schwartz, Helen Zelinska, Gustav Schacht, Isidore Cashier, Michael Rosenberg, Lazar Freed, Noach Nachbush, Anna Appel, Charlotte Goldstein, Judith Abarbanel, Julius Adler, Joseph Schwartzberg, Saul Fruchter, Eli Mintz, M. Schtrommer, Solomon Krauze, Michael Gibson, Anatole Winogradoff, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Mark Jury, S. Pincus, S. Lioff, Zelda Ludwig, Ida Garber, A. Belov, L. Bergweiss, A. Margolies, Albert Stone, Sonya Gursky, Liza Varon, K. Urki, Eli Mintz, Rosetta Bialis, S. Merkur, Leah Naomi, R. Schweid, A. Nemson, M. Misich, F. Sherr, M. Belavsky, Michael Rosen, N. Steinfeld, Michael Gibson, S. Krause, L. Eisenberg, Pincus Sherman, M. Swerdluff, Uri Kagar, Rose Weiss, S. Berl, Leah Kauffman, S. Lazar, R. Rose, S. Bergman, L. Weisberg, Zelda Gould, Hyman Buchvald, Isaac Rothblum, H. Franko, Morris Strassberg (Oct. 1, 1932 – Feb. 1934) (300+ perf.) - considered the greatest production in the history of Yiddish theater

Chaim lederer (Modern Children), by Sholem Asch; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Lazar Freed, Anna Appel, Gustav Schacht, Michael Rosenberg, Morris Silberkasten, Isidore Cashier, Anatole Winogradoff, Judith Abarbanel, Isidore Rothblum, Helen Zelinska, Charlotte Goldstein, Liza Varon, Isidore Swerdloff, Zelda Gold, Wolf Goldfaden, Ida Garber, Rosetta Bialis, Ervin Deerman, Selwyn Golub, Pincus Sherman, Sam Johnson (Nov. 3, 1932)

The Legend of the Jewish King Lear, by Jacob Gordon; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Leah Naomi, Anna Appel, Rosetta Bialis, Helen Zelinska, Isidore Cashier, Noah Nachbush, Lazar Freed, Michael Rosenberg, Isaac Swerdloff, Saul Fruchter, Wolf Mercur, Eli Mintz, Gustave Schacht, Isaac Rothblum, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Michael Gibson, Philip Sherman, Sol. Krause, Morris Belavsky, H. Buchwald, Leon Bassin, Abraham Margulith, Sol. Fruchter (Nov. 30, 1932)

Sabbatai Zvi, by I.J. Singer (Dec. 1932)

Bread, by Ossip Dymov

with Maurice Schwartz, Isidore Cashier, Wolf Goldfaden, Noach Nachbush, Zelda Gould, Wolf Mercur, Anatole Winogradoff (Dec. 13, 1932).
Special performance in honor of Dymov.

Motke ganef (Motke the Thief), by Sholem Asch; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Zelde Gould, Isaac Samberg, Morris Strassberg, Leah Naomi, Gustave Schacht, Charlotte Goldstein, Wolf Goldfaden, Morris Silberkasten, Michael Rosenberg, Anna Appel, Anna Teitelbaum, Anatole Winogradoff, Sonya Gurskaya, Liza Varon, Rosetta Bialis, Philip Sherman, Solomon Krause (Dec. 29, 1932)

Oyfshtand (Revolt), by I.B. Zipor; music, Leo Koutzen; sets, Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Isidore Cashier, Morris Silberkasten, Lazar Freed, Leah Naomi, Gustav Schacht, Charlotte Goldstein, Michael Rosenberg, Wolf Goldfaden, Anatole Winogradoff, Louis Weisberg, Philip Sherman, Morris Bilawsky, Robert H. Harris, Morris Strassberg, Solomon Krause, Noach Nachbush, Isaac Rothblum, Isaac Swerdlow, Uri Kagar, Hyman Buchwald, L. Isenberg, M. Baisin, A. Bernatzky, Michal Gibson, Abraham Margolit, Eli Mintz, Wolf Mercur, M. Steinfeld, Sol Fruchter, N. Erlich, B. Zion, Liza Varon, Sonia Gurskaya, Zelda Gould, Ida Garber, Taobi Stenman (Jan. 11, 1933). American premiere

Lillian Shapero, dancer (April 1933)

Wise Men of Chelm, by Aaron Zeitlin; music, Leo Koutzen; dances, Lillian Shapero; sets, Robert Van Rosen and Alexander Chertov; directed, Maurice Schwartz

with Schwartz, Lazar Freed, Michael Rosenberg, Anna Appel, Helen Zelinska, Isidore Cashier, Julius Adler, Wolf Goldfaden, Judith Abarbanel, Rosetta Bialis, Isaac Rothblum, Charlotte Goldstein, Eli Mintz, Wolf Mercur, Isaac Swerdlow, Pinchus Sherman, Morris

Bilawsky, Yasha Rosenthal, Michal Gibson, Solomon Krause, Moshe Strassberg, Anatole Winogradoff, Liza Varon, Julius Adler, Reuben Wendorf, Morris Silberkasten, Robert Harris, Albert Stone, M. Rosen, H. Robert, Ida Garber, Clara Deutschman, Mrs. Wendorf, Nina Herzen, Mrs. Goldberg, R. Zlatkin, Ben Basenko, Helen Appel, Lily Caplan, Valma Saff, Estel Cummins, Clara Landay, Harold Miller, Benjamin Fishbein, S. Eisenberg, B. Trachtenberg, B. Bassin, N. Malkin, S. Zeiden, S. Leon, M. Feuer, S. Cohn, Estelle Cummins, Elaine Barzel, Harold Miller, S. Steinfeld, M. Nachman, I. Steinberg, Moses Federman, B. Wortsman, Jacob Fine, Abraham Ginsburg, M. Osherman, P. Weisman, I. Weisman, B. Gendelman, M. Greenblatt, Bina Abramowitz, F. Fogel, S. Teichman (Oct. 17, 1933)

Josephus, by Lion Feuchtwanger; music, Leo Koutzen; dances, Lillian Shapero; sets, Robert Van Rosen; costumes, Alexander Nemeroff and Saul Raskin; directed, Maurice Schwartz with Schwartz, Lazar Freed, Isidore Cashier, Helen Zelinska, Anatole Winogradoff, Wolf Goldfaden, Michael Gibson, Morris Strassberg, Julius Adler, Judith Abarbanel, Ben-Zvi Baratoff, Morris Silberkasten, Michael Rosenberg, Miriam Goldina, P. Sherman, Charlotte Goldstein, Isaac Swerdlow, Albert Stone, Rubin Wendorff, Benjamin Fishbein, Eli Mintz, R. Thall, Mark Uri, Robert H. Harris, S. Pincus, G. Michael, Morris Belafsky, Y. Rose, William Goldberg, Lilie Caplan, Morris Silberkasten, S. Krause, Ben Basenko, M. Honig, H. Harris, L. Weintraub, Yasha Rosenthal, I. Kauffman, Isaac Rothblum, Wolf Mercur (Nov. 30, 1933)

Stempenu the Fiddler, by Sholom Aleichem; directed, Maurice Schwartz with Schwartz, Lazar Freed, Charlotte Goldstein, Anna Appel (Jan. 1934)

Di zibn gehangene (The Seven Who Were Hanged), by Leonid Andreyev (Jan. 25, 1934)

Kiddush hashem (Martyrdom), by Sholem Asch

YIDDISH FOLKS THEATER 1934

He, She and the Ox, by Luigi Pirandello; translated, Joseph Buloff with Buloff, Ben-Zvi Baratoff, Bella Bellarina, Jacob Mestel, Chaim Schneuer, Frances Weintraub, Maxi Schechter, Ben Basenko, Benjamin Fishbein, Anna Erber, Yasha Rosenthal (Feb. 19, 1934)

All in a Lifetime, by Harry Kalmanovitch with Nathan and Rose Goldberg, Isidore and Hannah Hollander, Tania Polland, Leon Colker, Sarah Krohner, Gus Goldstein, Jeanette Deutschman, Motel Brand (March 31, 1934) (300+ perf.)

NEW YORK ART TROUPE AT THE YIDDISH FOLKS THEATER 1934-35

The Verdict, by Sophia Levitina; translated, Z. Fishberg; directed, Joseph Buloff
with Buloff, Luba Kadison, Hannah Hollander (Sept. 19, 1934)

Dr. Bernhardi, by Arthur Schnitzler (Sept. 28, 1934)

Mechutonim (In-Laws), by Chone Gottesfeld; directed, David Herman
with Joseph Buloff, Anna Appel, Lazar Freed, Jacob Mestel, Judah Bleich, Leah Naomi,
Louis Weisberg, Ben Basenko, Michael Gibson, Isidore and Hannah Hollander, Rubin
Wendroff, Chaim Shnayer, Helen Appel, Helen Blay (Oct. 23, 1934) (100+ perf.)

Der oytser (The Treasure), by David Pinski
with Reuben Wendorf, Luba Kadison, Lazar Freed, Anna Appel (Dec. 7, 1934)

Jealousy, by Mikhail Artsybashev; translated, Mark Schweid; directed, Joseph Buloff
with Buloff, Luba Kadison, Isidore and Hannah Hollander, Judah Bleich, Leib Kadison,
Ben Basenko (Dec. 19, 1934)

60 toyznt giboyrim (60,000 Heroes), by Benjamin Ressler; directed, Joseph Buloff
with Buloff, Luba Kadison, Lazar Freed, Ben Basenko, Jacob Mestel, Louis Weisburg,
Isidore Hollander, Michal Gibson (Jan. 24, 1935).
Opening night was a benefit for the Hebrew Actors' Relief Fund.

Isa Kremer, balladist, concert (Feb. 1935)

Parnose (Livelihood), by Chone Gottesfeld; directed, Leon Kadison
with Joseph Buloff, Jacob Mestel, Hannah and Isidore Hollander, Anna Appel, Leah
Naomi, Ben Basenko, Reuben Wendorf (Feb. 15, 1935)

Der koich vos boit (The Power That Builds), by David Pinski; dances, Dvora Lapson; directed,
Leib Lapson
with Joseph Buloff, Lazar Freed, Luba Kadison, Ben Basenko, Helen Bley (Mar. 8, 1935)
Benefit for Jewish Folk Schools and Jewish National Workers Alliance.

Motke Ganef and *The Talmud Jew*, by Sholem Asch
with Joseph Buloff, Luba and Leib Kadison, Wolf Barzel, Hannah Hollander, Leah
Naomi, Helen Bley, Helen Appel, Chaim Schneyur (Mar. 17, 1935)

Sappho, by Jacob Gordon; directed, Isidore Cashier
with Bertha Kalish (March 21, 1935)

YIDDISH FOLKS THEATER 1935-37

Der bronxviler zayde (The Brownsville Grandfather), by Abraham Blum
with Baruch Lumet, Bessie Mogulesko, Abe Karp, Sidney Lumet (April 18, 1935)

Two Hearts, by Chaim Tauber; music, Sholom Secunda
with Tauber (May 3, 1935)

Kibbutz, Inc. (revue)

with Joseph Buloff, Luba Kadison, Jehudah Bleich, Zvee Scooler, Jacob Bergren, Wolf Barzel, Ben Basenko, Leon Hoffman, Folks Quintet, Meyer Steinwurzel and The International Street Singers (May 12, 1935)

Yiddish movie theater (May 1935)

Fishel der gerutener (The Perfect Fishel), by Louis Freiman; music, Joseph Rumshinsky; lyrics, Isidor Lillian; dances, Senia Rusakoff; sets, M. Saltzman; directed, Leo Kadison
with Menasha Skulnik, Ola Lilith, Dinah Goldberg, Irving Grossman, Paul Burstein, Betty Budanoff, Sarah Skulnik, Frances Weintraub, Benny Seidman, Isaac Lipinsky, Luba Kadison, Morris Novikoff, Leon Kadison, Israel Rosenberg, Mona Ash, Rumshinsky's Ladies Orchestra (Sept. 28, 1935, to March 1936) (100+ perf.)

Di chazente (The Cantor's Wife, or The Singing Rabbi), by Boris Thomashefsky
with Thomashefsky, Regina Zuckerberg, Marty Baratz (Jan. 28, 1936).
Special performance as testimonial to Joseph M. Grossman, theater manager.

Of All Good Things (revue)

including **I Can't Sleep**, by Clifford Odets (Yiddish translation, Mark Schweid), with actors from all of the Yiddish theaters (March 3, 1936)

WPA Federal Theater Project's Municipal Theater, productions by branches:

Yiddish Intimate Theater, **Gelebt und gelacht (We Live and Laugh)**, a vaudeville revue; One Act Theater; Yiddish Drama; Anglo-Jewish Theater; and Children's Theater (March 1936)

Province, by Leo Robbins; sets, Yudzhin Dunkel; directed, Michael Razumny
performed by the Folksbiene (April 3, 1936)

Bivouac, Alabama, by Paul Peter; **Private Hicks**, by Albert Maltz; and **You Can't Change Human Nature**, by Philip Stevenson
performed by the politically leftist Theatre Collective (May 10, 1936)

Shlemiel, by Harry Kalmanovitch; music, Joseph Rumshinsky; lyrics, Isadore Lillian; dances, Lillian Shapero and Marty Baratz; sets, Laurants & Dunkel
with Menasha Skulnik, Fania Rubina, Tillie Rabinowitz, Leon Gold, Goldie Eisman, Paula Kleida, Marty Baratz, Sara Skulnick, Victor Marcus, Moishe Feder, Isaac Lipinsky, Leib Kadison (Sept. 17, 1936)

Der shtroyener held (The Straw Hero), by Louis Freiman; music, Joseph Rumshinsky
with Menasha Skulnik, Fania Rubina, Tillie Rabinowitz, Paula Klida, Leon Gold, Goldie
Eisman, Marty Baratz, Isaac Lipinsky (Nov. 24, 1936)

Senor Hershel, by Louis Freiman; music, Joseph Rumshinsky; lyrics Isadore Lillian; dances,
Marty Baratz, Lillian Shapero, and Bella Fox
with Menasha Skulnik, Leon Gold, Fania Rubina, Marty Baratz, Isaac Lupinsky, Tillie
Rabinowitz, Moses Felder, Sarah Skulnik, Goldie Eisman (Dec. 23, 1936)

Dos galitsianer rebele (The Galician Rabbi), by Louis Freiman and Shlome Steinberg; music,
Joseph Rumshinsky; directed, Menasha Skulnik
with Skulnik, Tillie Rabinowitz, Goldie Eisman, Marty Baratz (Feb. 12, 1937)

CENTURY THEATER 1937-40

Movies (Sept. 9, 1937); Movies with variety and vaudeville acts (Sept. 15, 1939); Movies with
vaudeville acts and popular bands (Nov. 23, 1939)

YIDDISH FOLKS THEATER 1940-41

Sunrise, by Abraham Blum; music, Joseph Rumshinsky; lyrics, Isidore Lillian; dances, Marietta
Alva; sets, Michal Saltzman; directed, Ludwig Satz
with Satz, Ola Lilith, Edmund Zayenda, Esther Field, Irving Honigman, Michael
Wilensky, Paula Klida, Rose Greenfield, Tillie Rabinowitz, Abraham Lax, Seymour
Rechtzeit, Boris Auerbach, Charlotte Goldstein (Oct. 17, 1940)

Mirele Efros, by Jacob Gordin
with Berta Gersten (Dec. 17, 1940)

Sixty Years of Yiddish Theater, a “musical cavalcade”
with Ola Lilith, Ludwig Satz, Edmund Zayenda, Molly Picon (Jan. 9, 1941).
Special performance as testimonial to Joseph Rumshinsky.

A favorn vinkel (The Forsaken Nook), by Peretz Hirschbein; directed, Maurice Schwartz
with Schwartz, Ludwig Satz, Celia Adler, Samuel Goldenburg (Feb. 1941).
Special performance as testimonial to Satz for his 30 years of performing.

The Outcast
with Bella Bellarina (Feb. 1941)

CENTURY THEATER 1941-44

First-run English-language movies (March 14, 1941); *Gone With the Wind* (Apr. 1941)

New York Civic Opera Company, dir. William Reutemann; cond. Antonio Paganucci

La Traviata, with Era Del Monte, Alice Mack, Helen Lawrence, Michael Edwards, Fague Springham (March 17, 1944)

Carmen (March 24, 1944)

Founded in 1916, it was the oldest American touring grand opera company

NEW JEWISH FOLK THEATER 1944-45

Der nes in geto (The Miracle of the Warsaw Ghetto), by H. Leivick; music, Sholom Secunda; sets, H.A. Condell; directed, Jacob Ben-Ami

with Ben-Ami, Isidore Cashier, Menachim Rubin, Michael Goldstein, Abraham Teitelbaum, Berta Gersten, Dina Halpern, Jacob Mestel, Dora Weisman, Muriel Gruber, Isaac Rothblum, Julia Laurence, Morris Strassberg, Goldie Lubritzky, Misha Fishzon (Oct. 10, 1944)

Mir vein lebn (We Will Live), by Dovid Bergelson; music, Sholom Secunda; sets, H.A. Condell; directed, Jacob Rotbaum

with Jacob Ben-Ami, Isadore Cashier, Michael Gibson, Dina Halpern, Berta Gersten, Muriel Gruber, Abraham Teitelbaum, Menachim Rubin, Yudel Dubinsky (Dec. 20, 1944)

STUYVESANT THEATER 1946-53

Movies

Appendix B: Revival of Yiddish Theater at the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building¹

Note: The names of LGBT people are in **bold**.

By the 1960s, the Jaffe Art Theater Building was one of the only venues along the former “Yiddish Rialto” of Second Avenue that was extant and still operating as a theater. Thus, when there was a revival of interest in Yiddish and Jewish-themed productions from the 1960s to the 1980s, it was a logical place for them. As the Casino East Theater, the first was an Israeli Yiddish revue called *Gezunt un meshuga (Hale and Crazy)*, that opened in December 1961.

A decade later, the re-named Eden Theater was the home of a number of popular Yiddish theater productions for six years. I.J. Singer’s *Yoshe Kalb*, which had been performed in this same theater to such acclaim in 1932-34 by the Yiddish Art Theater troupe, was revived in October 1972, and featured Jacob Ben-Ami in his last stage appearance. Jewish Nostalgic Productions, Inc., followed this with three more Yiddish plays (all successful): Sholom Aleichem’s *Hard To Be a Jew* and *Dos groyse gevins (The Big Winner)*, and the musical *The Fifth Season*, by Sylvia Regan. These, and two other productions, were performed by veteran Yiddish actors including Joseph Buloff, Miriam Kressyn, David Opatoshu, Jack Reichzeit, and Bruce Adler.

The “gay writer and ethnographer”² **Sh. An-sky** created one of the most classic Yiddish plays, *Der dibuk (The Dybbuk)*, that launched the fame of the Vilna Troupe in Europe in 1922. In the play, the spirit of a deceased young man takes over the body of his female lover. Pearl Lang’s dance version of *The Dybbuk*, called “The Possessed,” opened the Entermedia Theater in October 1977, with dancer **William Carter**.

As the Second Avenue Theater, it was the site of the last Yiddish revival production in this building, the very successful *The Golden Land*, performed 295 times beginning in November of 1985, with Bruce Adler in the cast. The Jewish-themed musical, *The Chosen*, in November 1987, ended live performances in the Jaffe Art Theater Building.

REVIVAL OF YIDDISH THEATER PRODUCTIONS AT THE JAFFE ART THEATER BUILDING

CASINO EAST THEATER 1961-65

Gezunt un meshuga (Hale and Crazy), Israeli Yiddish musical revue, music/lyrics/sketches by Moses Nudelman; directed, Shimen Dzigan
with Dzigan, Shmuel Fisher, Shmuel Goldstein, Shifra Lehrer (c. Dec. 9, 1961)

EDEN THEATER 1969-76

¹ Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report*.

² Amanda (Miryem-Khaye) Seigel, “Top 10 Queerest Moments in the Yiddish Theatre: An Illustrated List in Honor of Pride Month 2019,” June 25, 2019, <https://web.uwm.edu/yiddish-stage/top-10-queerest-moments-in-the-yiddish-theater-an-illustrated-list-in-honor-of-pride-month-2019>.

The Laugh Maker, by/directed, Jacob Jacobs; music, Alexander Alshanetsky
with Jacobs, Leo Fuchs, Miriam Kressyn, Leon Libgold, Thelma Mintz, Nellie Casman,
Seymour Rexite, Janece Martel (Oct. 19, 1971)

Yoshe Kalb, by I.J. Singer; adapted/directed, David Licht; music, Maurice Rauch; choreography,
Lillian Shapero
with David Opatoshu, Jacob Ben-Ami [last stage appearance], David Ellin, Miriam
Kressyn, Jack Rechtzeit, Raquel Yossiffon (Oct. 22, 1972) (95 perf.)

Hard To Be a Jew, by Sholom Aleichem; adapted, Joseph Buloff and David Licht; directed,
Licht
with Joseph Buloff, Jack Rechtzeit, Miriam Kressyn, Bruce Adler, Stan Porter, Raquel
Yossiffon (Oct. 28, 1973) (161 perf.).
Obie Award, Licht; Drama Desk Award, Buloff.

Dos groyse gevins (The Big Winner), by Sholom Aleichem; adapted/directed, David Opatoshu;
music, Sol Kaplan; lyrics, Wolf Younin; choreography, Sophie Maslow; scenic/costume design,
Jeffrey B. Moss
with Opatoshu, Bruce Adler, Miriam Kressyn, Jack Rechtzeit, Stan Porter, Diane Cypkin,
Elia Patron (Oct. 20, 1974) (119 perf.)

A Wedding in Shtetel, by William Siegel; music, H. Wohl; directed, Pesach Burstein;
with Pesach Burstein, Mike Burstein, Geri-Ann Frank, Karol Latowicz, Lillian Lux (Feb.
9, 1975) (12 perf.)

The Fifth Season, by Sylvia Regan; adapted, Luba Kadison; music/lyrics, Dick Manning;
scenic/costume design, Jeffrey B. Moss; directed, Joseph Buloff;
with Buloff, Miriam Kressyn, Stan Porter, Jack Rechtzeit, Evelyn Kingsley (Oct. 12,
1975) (122 perf.)

Raisins and Almonds of the Yiddish Theater

with Joseph Buloff, Stan Porter, Miriam Kressyn, Jacob Jacobs, Freydele Oysher (Feb. 1,
1976). Benefit for the Hebrew Actor's Union.

ENTERMEDIA THEATER 1977-85

Dance Umbrella. *The Possessed*, a dance version of *The Dybbuk* by S. An-sky, choreography,
Pearl Lang
with Lang, **William Carter**, Alexander Mintz (c. Oct. 18, 1977).

SECOND AVENUE THEATER 1985-88

The Golden Land, by Zalmen Mlotek & Moishe Rosenfeld; musical staging, Donald Saddler; scenic design, Lindsey Decker; costume design, Natasha Landau; directed, Jacques Levy
with Bruce Adler, Joanne Borts, Phyllis Berk, Marc Krause, Avi Hoffman, Neva Small
(Nov. 11, 1985) (295 perf.)

The Chosen, by Chaim Potok; music, Philip Springer; lyrics, Mitchell Bernard; choreography, Richard Levi; scenic design, Ben Edwards; costume design, Ruth Morley; directed, Mitchell Maxwell
with George Hearn, Gerald Hiken, Rob Morrow, Richard Cray, Mimi Turque, Lynette Perry, Daniel Marcus, Michael Ingram (Nov. 15, 1987) (58 perf.)

APPENDIX C: PRODUCTIONS AT THE PHOENIX THEATER (1953-1961)¹

Note: The names of LGBT people are in **bold**.

Madam, Will You Walk, by Sidney Howard; choreography, Anna Sokolow; scenic/lighting design, Donald Oenslager; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Hume Cronyn & Norman Lloyd

with Cronyn, Jessica Tandy (Dec. 1, 1953) (48 perf.)

Coriolanus, by William Shakespeare; scenic design, Donald Oenslager; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, John Houseman

with Robert Ryan, Mildred Natwick, **Will Geer** (Jan. 19, 1954) (48 perf.)

The Golden Apple, by and lyrics by **John Latouche** & Jerome Moross; choreography, Hanya Holm; scenic design, William & Jean Eckart; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Norman Lloyd

with Kaye Ballard, Jonathan Lucas, Bibi Osterwald, **Barton Mumaw** (Mar. 11, 1954) (48 perf.)

The critically acclaimed *The Golden Apple* (1954) was later called by the *Daily News* “an instantaneous cult item” – especially among the gay community.² Even opening night was an event, with **Gore Vidal** and **Marlene Dietrich** in attendance. It was a show with several important firsts - first non-Broadway musical to win the New York Drama Critics Award for Best Musical (1953-54), first Off-Broadway show to transfer to Broadway (to the Alvin Theater), and first Off-Broadway show to have a cast album recording.³

The Seagull, by Anton Chekhov; scenic design, Duane McKinney; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, **Norris Houghton**

with **Montgomery Clift**, Kevin McCarthy, Mira Rostova, Maureen Stapleton, **Will Geer**, Sam Jaffe (May 11, 1954) (40 perf.)

Sing Me No Lullaby, by Robert Ardrey; directed, Paul Stewart

with Beatrice Straight, Richard Kiley, Jack Warden, Jessie Royce Landis (Oct. 14, 1954) (32 perf.)

¹ Jay Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report* (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1993); Internet Broadway Database; Internet Off-Broadway Database; *Playbill*.

² Bill Zakariasen, “‘Golden Apple’ Is Back in Town,” *New York Daily News*, July 2, 1988, 109.

³ Matt Weinstock, “The Cult of John LaTouche’s *The Golden Apple* and Its Long-Awaited Encores! Debut,” *Playbill*, May 10, 2017, <https://playbill.com/article/the-cult-of-john-latouches-the-golden-apple-and-its-long-awaited-encores-debut>; Peter Filichia, “The Golden Apple – At Last,” May 2, 2017, <https://www.masterworksbroadway.com/blog/golden-apple-last-peter-filichia>.

Sandhog, by Earl Robinson & Waldo Salt (after Theodore Dreiser); choreography, Sophie Maslow; production/lighting design, Howard Bay; costume design, Toni Ward; directed, Howard Da Silva

with David Brooks, **Jack Cassidy, Alice Ghostley, Betty Oakes, Eliot Feld** (Nov. 23, 1954) (48 perf.)

The Doctor's Dilemma, by George Bernard Shaw; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Sidney Lumet

with Geraldine Fitzgerald, **Roddy McDowall** (Jan. 11, 1955) (48 perf.)

The Master Builder, by Henrik Ibsen; production design, Boris Aronson; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Oscar Homolka

with Homolka, Gene Saks (Mar. 1, 1955) (40 perf.)

Phoenix '55 (musical revue), concept, Nicholas Benton & Stark Hesseltine; music, David Baker; lyrics, David Craig; sketches, Ira Wallach; choreography, Boris Runanin; scenic design, Eldon Elder; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Marc Daniels

with Nancy Walker, Harvey Lembeck, Marge Redmond (May 23, 1955) (97 perf.)

Marcel Marceau [U.S. debut] (Sept. 20, 1955) (32 perf.)

The Carefree Tree, by Aldyth Morris; scenic design/directed, Jack Landau; dance, Patricia Birch; costume design, **Alvin Colt**

with **Farley Granger, Alvin Ailey, Blanche Yurka, Larry Gates** (Oct. 11, 1955) (24 perf.)

The Terrible Swift Sword, by Arthur Steuer; directed, Fred Sadoff

with Conrad Janis, Bob Heller, Richard Shepard (Nov. 15, 1955) (8 perf.)

Six Characters in Search of an Author, by Luigi Pirandello; adapted, Tyrone Guthrie & Michael Wager; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Guthrie

with Whitfield Connor, Katherine Squire (Dec. 11, 1955) (57 perf.)

The Adding Machine, by Elmer Rice; directed, Bill Butler

with Sam Jaffe, Margaret Hamilton, Ann Thomas, Howard Da Silva (Feb. 9, 1956) (6 perf.)

Miss Julie and ***The Stronger***, by August Strindberg; adapted/directed, George Tabori; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**

with Viveca Lindfors, James Daly, Ruth Ford (Feb. 21, 1956) (32 perf.)

A Month in the Country, by Ivan Turgenev; adapted, **Emlyn Williams**; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, **Michael Redgrave**

with Uta Hagen, Luther Adler, Mary Morris, Alexander Scourby (Apr. 3, 1956) (48 perf.)

The Littlest Revue, concept, **Ben Bagley**; music/lyrics, **Vernon Duke** & Ogden Nash; music orchestrated by **John Strauss**; musical direction, Will Irwin; choreography, **Charles Weidman**; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, **Paul Lammers**
with Tammy Grimes, Charlotte Rae, Larry Storch, **Joel Grey** (debut), Beverley Bozeman, Dorothy Jarnac, George Marcy, Tommy Morton (May 22, 1956) (32 perf.)

Saint Joan, by George Bernard Shaw; scenic/lighting design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Robert Fletcher**; directed, Albert Marre
with Siobhan McKenna, Dennis Patrick (Sept. 11, 1956) (77 perf.)
Moved to the Coronet Theater.

Diary of a Scoundrel, by Alexander Ostrovsky; adapted, Rodney Ackland; scenic design, Klaus Holm; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Alan Cooke
with Margaret Hamilton, **Roddy McDowall**, Jerry Stiller, Robert Culp, Howard da Silva, Blanche Yurka, Peter Falk (Nov. 5, 1956) (24 perf.)

The Good Woman of Setzuan, by Bertolt Brecht; adapted/directed, **Eric Bentley**; scenic/costume design, Wolfgang Roth
with Uta Hagan, Albert Salmi, Zero Mostel, Nancy Marchand (Dec. 18, 1956) (24 perf.)
New York premiere.

Measure for Measure, by William Shakespeare; music, **Virgil Thomson**; scenic/costume design, **Rouben Ter-Arutunian**; production/lighting design, **Jean Rosenthal**; directed, John Houseman & Jack Landau
with Nina Foch, Richard Waring, **Richard Easton**, Jacqueline Brookes (Jan. 22, 1957) (32 perf.)

Taming of the Shrew, by William Shakespeare; music, Irwin Bazelon; scenic design, **Rouben Ter-Arutunian**; additional décor/lighting design, **Jean Rosenthal**; costume design, Dorothy Jeakins; directed, Norman Lloyd
with Nina Foch, Pernell Roberts, **Richard Easton** (Feb. 20, 1957) (23 perf.)

The Duchess of Malfi, by John Webster; music, **Lee Hoiby**; festival staging, **Rouben Ter-Arutunian**; production/lighting design, **Jean Rosenthal**; costume design, **Saul Bolasni**; directed/scenic design, Jack Landau
with Pricilla Morrill, Jacqueline Brookes, Earle Hyman, **Hurd Hatfield**, **Richard Easton**, Pernell Roberts, Joseph Wiseman (Mar. 19, 1957) (24 perf.)

Livin' the Life, by Dale Wasserman & Bruce Geller (after Mark Twain); music, Jack Urbont; lyrics, Geller; choreography, John Butler; scenic design, William & Jean Eckart; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, David Alexander

with **Alice Ghostley**, Richard Ide, **Timmy Everett**, Lee Charles, Edward Villella (April 27, 1957) (25 perf.)

Mary Stuart, by Friedrich Schiller; adapted, Jean Goldstone & John Reich; scenic/lighting design, Donald Oenslager; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; directed, Tyrone Guthrie

with **Eva Le Gallienne**, Irene Worth, Max Adrian (Oct. 8, 1957) (56 perf.)

The Makropoulos Secret, by Karel Capek; adapted/directed, Tyrone Guthrie; scenic design, **Norris Houghton**; costume design, Patton Campbell; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**

with Eileen Herlie, Karel Stepanek (Dec. 3, 1957) (34 perf.)

The Chairs and *The Lesson*, by Eugene Ionesco; music, John Addison; scenic design, Jesse Beers; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**; directed, **Tony Richardson**

with Eli Wallach, Joan Plowright, Max Adrian (Jan. 9, 1958) (22 perf.)

The Infernal Machine, by Jean Cocteau; adapted, Albert Bermel; scenic design, Ming Cho Lee; costume design, **Alvin Colt**; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**; directed, Herbert Berghof

with June Havoc, John Kerr, Jacob Ben-Ami (Feb. 3, 1958) (40 perf.)

Transposed Heads, by and music by Peggy Glanville-Hicks (after Thomas Mann); scenic/costume design, **Ed Wittstein**; directed, Bill Butler (Feb. 10, 1958) (2 perf.)

Two Gentlemen of Verona, by William Shakespeare; music, Louis Applebaum; design, Tanya Moiseiwitsch; directed, Michael Langham

with **Roberta Maxwell**, Diana Maddox, Eric House, Lloyd Bochner (Mar. 18, 1958) (28 perf.)

The Broken Jug, by Heinrich von Kleist; adapted, Donald Harron; music, Louis Applebaum; design, Tanya Moiseiwitsch; directed, Michael Langham;

with Amelia Hall, Eric Berry (Apr. 1, 1958) (12 perf.)

La Malade Imaginaire, by Moliere; music, Clermont Pepin; scenic design, Robert Prevost; directed, Jean Gascon

with Le Theatre du Nouveau Monde of Montreal (Apr. 29, 1958) (8 perf.)

An Evening of Three Farces, by Moliere; scenic design, Robert Prevost; directed, Jean Gascon and Jean Dalmain

with Le Theatre du Nouveau Monde of Montreal (May 6, 1958) (8 perf.)

The Family Reunion, by T.S. Eliot; scenic design, **Norris Houghton**; costume/lighting design, Will Steven Armstrong; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with Florence Reed, Lillian Gish, Fritz Weaver (Oct. 20, 1958) (32 perf.)

Britannicus, by Jean Racine; scenic design, Roger Dornes; costume design, Nirva Nirvana & Manuel Sierra; directed, Raymond Gerome
with Le Theatre du Vieux-Colombier, Paris (Nov. 28, 1958) (4 perf.)

The Power and the Glory, by Denis Cannan & Pierre Bost (after Graham Greene); scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with Fritz Weaver, Eric Berry, Robert Gerringer, Jerry Stiller (Dec. 10, 1958) (71 perf.)

The Beaux Strategem, by George Farquhar; scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with June Havoc, Patricia Falkenhain, Eric Berry, Barbara Barrie (Feb. 24, 1959) (16 perf.)

Once Upon a Mattress, by Jay Thompson, **Marshall Barer**, and Dean Fuller; music, Mary Rodgers; lyrics, **Barer**; musical staging, Joe Layton; dance arrangements, Roger Adams; scenic/costume design, William & Jean Eckart; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**; directed, George Abbott
with Carol Burnett, Joe Bova, Jane White, Jack Gilford (May 11, 1959) (216 perf.).
Moved to the Alvin Theater, etc. (470 perf.).

Lysistrata, by Aristophanes; adapted, Dudley Fitts; choreography, John Waller; scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; directed, Jean Gascon
with Nan Martin, Donald Madden, Gerry Jedd (Nov. 24, 1959) (24 perf.)

Pictures in the Hallway, by Sean O'Casey; adapted, Paul Shyre; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with Mildred Dunnock, Donald Madden, Gerry Jedd, Eric Berry (Dec. 26, 1959) (11 perf.)

Peer Gynt, by Henrik Ibsen; translation, Norman Ginsbury; choreography, John Waller; scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; lighting design, **Tharon Musser**; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with Fritz Weaver, Joanna Roos (Jan. 12, 1960) (32 perf.)

Henry IV, Part 1, by William Shakespeare; scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; lighting design, **Jean Rosenthal**; directed, Stuart Vaughan
with Fritz Weaver, Eric Berry, Donald Madden, Edwin Sherin (Mar. 1, 1960) (65 perf.)

Henry IV, Part 2, by William Shakespeare; scenic/costume design, Will Steven Armstrong; lighting design, **Jean Rosenthal**; directed, Stuart Vaughan

with Fritz Weaver, Eric Berry, Gerry Jedd, Edwin Sherin, Patricia Falkenhain (Apr. 18, 1960) (31 perf.)

H.M.S. Pinafore, by Gilbert & Sullivan; adapted/directed, Tyrone Guthrie; musical direction, Louis Applebaum; choreography, Douglas Campbell; production design, Brian Jackson with Campbell, Irene Byatt (Sept. 7, 1960) (55 perf.)

She Stoops to Conquer, by Oliver Goldsmith; music/songs, **Lee Hoiby**; scenic/costume design, Peter Wingate; directed, Stuart Vaughan with Gerry Jedd, Donald Madden, Patricia Falkenhain (Nov. 1, 1960) (47 perf.)

The Plough and the Stars, by Sean O'Casey; scenic/costume design, Peter Wingate; directed, Stuart Vaughan with Robert Blackburn, Gerry Jedd, Donald Madden (Dec. 6, 1960) (32 perf.)

The Octoroon or, Life in Louisiana, by Dion Boucicault; music/vocal arrangements, **Lee Hoiby** and Jared Reed; scenic/costume design, Peter Wingate; directed, Stuart Vaughan with Robert Blackburn, Gerry Jedd, Juliet Randall (Jan. 27, 1961) (45 perf.)

Hamlet, by William Shakespeare; scenic/costume design, Peter Wingate; directed, Stuart Vaughan with Donald Madden, Joyce Ebert, Patricia Falkenhain, Ray Reinhardt (Mar. 16, 1961) (102 perf.)

The Pirates of Penzance, by Gilbert & Sullivan; adapted, Tyrone Guthrie; musical direction, Louis Applebaum; choreography, Douglas Campbell; scenic/costume design, Brian Jackson; directed, Guthrie & Norman Campbell with Irene Byatt, Harry Mossfeld, Andrew Downie, Marion Studholme (Sept. 6, 1961) (55 perf.)

Appendix D: Later Theaters in the Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater Building (1961-1987)¹

Following the departure of the Phoenix Theater company in 1961, live theater performances, of widely differing types, were presented in the Jaffe Art Theater for another twenty-six years, the name of the theater changing frequently. As the Casino East Theater, it opened in December 1961 with the Yiddish revue *Gezunt un Meshuga* [see Appendix B]. Changing format, the Casino East presented the most popular show in the Jaffe Theater's entire history: Ann Corio in *This Was Burlesque*, which lasted here for a full three years and over 1,500 performances between March 1962 and March 1965 (prior to its move to Broadway). The success of this show clearly inspired the theater's next incarnation as the Gayety Theater (1965-69), which was Manhattan's first burlesque house since the shuttering of venues under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in the 1930s.

Burlesque was followed by nudity at the (again renamed) Eden Theater, with the opening in June 1969 of the then-controversial musical *Oh! Calcutta!* It played for over a year and a half (it had the second highest number of performances at the Jaffe), before traveling to Broadway and becoming one of the longest-running shows in New York theater history. The wildly successful musical *The Man of La Mancha* played here for three months in 1971, between runs at Broadway houses. *Grease*, the Eden's next successful new musical production in February 1972, also went on to Broadway. For five years the Eden Theater was the home of Yiddish revival theater productions [see Appendix B].

After two less well-received English language shows in 1972-73, the theater remained vacant for several years. In March 1975, the building's ownership was officially transferred to the Senyar [Raynes] Holding Company, under Martin Raynes; the Raynes family interests have held the property continuously since 1944. In 1976-77, it was used as a movie theater, the 12th Street Cinema.

Again renamed in 1977 as the Entermedia Theater, it was managed by the Entermedia company, which was formed initially with the eclectic goal of producing dance, experimental theater, films, and other events. This reflected the diverse cultural ascendancy of its neighborhood, which became known as the "East Village" in the early 1960s. In its first four seasons, the Entermedia presented *Dance Umbrella*, with many smaller dance companies, as well as live music, including jazz, opera, and soul, several international troupes, and benefits. Two musicals which had success on Broadway, following their creation at the Entermedia, were *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* in 1978, and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 1981. *Taking My Turn* opened in June 1983 with Margaret Whiting, Cissy Houston, Marni Nixon, and Sheila Smith, and was one of the longest in terms of total number of performances at this theater venue.

M Square Productions leased the theater in 1985 and renamed it the Second Avenue Theater. The last Yiddish revival and Jewish-themed productions at the Jaffe were *The Golden Land* and *The Chosen* in 1985 and 1987 [see Appendix B]. Two other musicals here were *Have I Got a Girl for*

¹ Shockley, *Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater/ Yiddish Folks Theater) Building Designation Report*.

You! (The Frankenstein Musical) in October 1986, and *Staggerlee* in February 1987, the latter a success with musical legends Ruth Brown and Allen Toussaint.

The theater closed in 1987. The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission held public designation hearings on the exterior and interior of the theater on December 12, 1989.² The interior was subsequently converted, under the guidance of the Commission, into a complex of seven movie theaters by John Averitt Associates, architects. It re-opened in 1991 as the Village East City Cinemas, which continues in operation. In February 1993, the Jaffe Art Theater Building, and portions of its historic interiors, were designated New York City Landmarks.

PRODUCTIONS AT LATER THEATERS IN THE LOUIS N. JAFFE ART THEATER BUILDING AND THEIR LGBT ASSOCIATIONS³

Note: The names of LGBT people are in **bold**.

CASINO EAST THEATER 1961-65

This Was Burlesque, by/directed, Ann Corio; costume design/choreography, Pal Brandeaux with Corio (later Sally Rand), Steve Mills (Mar. 1, 1962) (c. 900 perf.). New edition (Dec. 4, 1963) (609 perf.). Closed on March 7, 1965.
Moved to the Hudson Theater.

Young Abe Lincoln, a children's musical on the life of President **Abraham Lincoln**, by Richard N. Bernstein and John Allen; music, Victor Ziskin; lyrics, Joan Javits; directed, Jay Harnick with Darrell Sandeen, Janet Comstock (March 1962)

GAYETY THEATER 1965-69

Burlesque, including *Hello, Burlesque* (1965), *Burlesk-a-Pades 1968*
with Blaze Starr, Tempest Storm, Jeri Archer, and Rose La Rose
Becki L. Ross, in her article “Bumping and Grinding on the Line: Making Nudity Pay” (2000), cites several articles and studies that assert that there is a high percentage of female strippers who identify as lesbian or bisexual.⁴

The movie *The Night They Raided Minsky's* (1968) had its theater scenes filmed at the Gayety. Actor **Denholm Elliott** was in the cast.

EDEN THEATER 1969-76

² The Commission had previously held public hearings on December 10, 1985, and March 11, 1986.

³ Shockley; Internet Broadway Database; Internet Off-Broadway Database; *Playbill*; Newspapers.com.

⁴ Becki L. Ross, “Bumping and Grinding on the Line: Making Nudity Pay,” *Labour/Le Travail* (Fall 2000), 245-247.

Oh! Calcutta!, concept by Kenneth Tynan; music/lyrics, Robert Dennis, Peter Schickele, and Stanley Walden; choreography, Margo Sappington; scenic design, **James Tilton**; costume design, Fred Voelpel; directed, Jacques Levy (June 17, 1969) (704 perf.).

Moved to the Belasco Theater on Feb. 25, 1971.

The Man of La Mancha, by Dale Wasserman; music, Mitch Leigh; lyrics, Joe Darion; choreography, **Jack Cole**; scenic/lighting design, Howard Bay; costume design, Bay and Patton Campbell; directed, Albert Marre (opened in 1965 at ANTA Washington Square Theater, then moved to the Martin Beck Theater)

with Gideon Singer, Ray Middleton, Robert Rounseville, Rudy Tronto, Emily Yancy (March 2, 1971).

Moved to the Mark Hellinger Theater on May 25, 1971. Winner of 5 Tony Awards.

Grease, book/music/lyrics by Jim Jacobs & **Warren Casey**; music/dance numbers staging, Patricia Birch; scenic design, Douglas W. Schmidt; costume design, Carrie F. Robbins; directed, Tom Moore

with Barry Bostwick, Adrienne Barbeau, Carole Demas, Katie Hanley, Jim Borelli, Marya Small, Walter Bobbie, Dorothy Leon (Feb. 14, 1972) (128 perf.).

Moved on June 7, 1972, to the Broadhurst Theater. Drama Desk Awards for Birch and Robbins.

Crazy Now, by/lyrics by Richard Smithies and Maura Cavanagh; music, Norman Sachs; directed/choreography, Voight Kempton; costume design, Margaret Tobin; (Sept. 10, 1972)

Smith, by Dean Fuller, Tony Hendra, & Matt Dubey; music/lyrics, Dubey and Fuller; choreography, Michael Shawn; scenic design, Fred Voelpel; costume design, **Winn Morton**; directed, Neal Kenyon

with Don Murray, Virginia Sandifur, Mort Marshall, Carol Morley, Michael Tartel, Louis Croseuolo, Ted Thurston, Guy Spaull (May 19, 1973) (18 perf.)

12th STREET CINEMA 1976-77

Movies

ENTERMEDIA THEATER 1977-85

Dance Umbrella. Rosalind Newman & Dancers, Marcus Schukind Dance Co., Michael Sullivan Dance Co., Sara Rudner Dancers, Don Redlich Dance Co., Harry (Oct.-Nov. 1977).

Dance Umbrella. **Remy Charlip** and **Andy DeGroat** & Dancers and Musicians, Viola Farber Dance Co., May O'Donnell Concert Dance Co., Rachel Lampert & Dancers, Laura Dean Dancers, Elizabeth Keen Dancers (Feb.-March 1978)

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, by Larry L. King & Peter Masterson; music/lyrics, Carol Hall; directed, Masterson & **Tommy Tune**; musical numbers staged by Tune; associate choreography, **Thommie Walsh**; scenic design, Marjorie Bradley Kellogg; costume design, Ann Roth

with Carlin Glynn, Henderson Forsythe, Joan Ellis (Apr. 17, 1978) (85 perf.).

Moved to the 46th Street Theater on June 19, 1978. Tony Awards, Glynn and Forsythe; Drama Desk Awards, Masterson/Tune and Hall.

Dance Umbrella. May O'Donnell Concert Dance Co., Annabelle Gamson & Dancers (Nov. 1978)

San Francisco Mime Troupe (Nov. 1978)

The Marriage Proposal, a Caribbean musical version of Anton Chekov, performed by the Family Repertory Ensemble (Dec. 16, 1978)

Harlem Opera Company, *Hodges & Co.* and *Solomon & Sheba* (Dec. 1978)

Benefit for the Save St. Mark's Campaign, after the fire at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery with **Allen Ginsberg**, Kenneth Koch, **Meredith Monk**, **Andy DeGroat** & Dancers, Mettawee Theater Co. (Jan. 1, 1979)

Carolyn Lord & Co., dance (Jan. 1979)

Sky High, a revue by and directed by **Brian O'Hara (George Harris/ Hibiscus)**, had sets and costumes by **Angel Jack (Jack Coe)** (Feb. 1979). George E. Harris III (1949-1982) took the name Hibiscus in 1967 when he moved to San Francisco. He was an original member of the glittery, gay psychedelic drag theatrical troupe the Cockettes in 1970. After the Cockettes disbanded in 1972, Hibiscus moved to New York City with his boyfriend, Jack Coe (Angel Jack). According to the *New York Times*, his "Lysergic Liberace persona charmed Manhattan's creative community."⁵ He also began using the stage alias Brian O'Hara. An early AIDS casualty, he died in 1982 at St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village.

Douglas Dunn & Dancers (Feb. 1979)

Jazz at Entermedia

with vocalist Jeanne Lee, trumpeter Don Cherry, saxophonists Anthony Braxton and Archie Shepp, David Eyges Quartet, pianist Dave Burrell (March 1-3, 1979)

1000 Years of Jazz, musical revue

with vocalist Denise Delapenha, trumpeter Andrew Blakeney, trombonist Louis Nelson, clarinetist Sam Lee, The Hoofers (March 27 to April 8, 1979)

Umabatha, a Zulu version of *Macbeth*, performed by the Phe Zulu Troupe (April 1979)

⁵ Horatio Silva, "Karma Chameleon," *New York Times*, August 17, 2003.

Benefit for the 1979 Gay Rights March on Washington featured **Tom Robinson**, along with Novella Nelson (Oct. 12, 1979). Robinson (born 1950) is a British singer and LGBT rights activist, who formed the Tom Robinson Band in 1976. Two of his songs from this period with gay themes were “2-4-6-8 Motorway,” with a reference to a gay truck driver (1977), and “Glad to Be Gay” (1978).

God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater, by/directed/lyrics, **Howard Ashman** (after Kurt Vonnegut); music, Alan Menken; scenic design, Edward T. Gianfrancesco; costume design, **David Graden** with Frederick Coffin, Janie Sell, **Jonathan Hadary** (Oct. 14, 1979) (49 perf.)

Action, by Sam Shepard, and ***You Can't Judge a Title by Its Play***, by Gary Rohwer (Aug. 14-24, 1980)

Wilson Pickett, soul singer (Oct. 4, 1980)

Black Elk Lives, by Christopher A. Sergel (after John G. Neihardt); scenic design, Julie Taymor; costume design, **David Murin**; directed, Tom Brennan with Manu Tupou, Carlo Grasso, Carl Battaglia (Mar. 12, 1981) (6 perf.)

The interior of the Entermedia was a filming location in 1980 for scenes in the movie ***The Fan*** (1981).

El Bravo!, by Jose Fernandez & Thom Schiera; music/lyrics, John Clifton; directed, **Andre Ernotte** and Patricia Birch; choreography, Birch; scenic design, Tom Lynch; costume design, Carrie Robbins with Aurelio Padron (June 16, 1981) (31 perf.)

Garbage, with Jango Edwards, clown (Oct. 1981)

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, music, Andrew Lloyd Webber; lyrics, Tim Rice; directed/choreography **Tony Tanner**; scenic design, Karl Eigsti; costume design, Judith Dolan

with **Bill Hutton**, Laurie Beechman (Nov. 18, 1981) (77 perf.).

Moved to the Royale Theater.

Richard II, by Shakespeare, and ***The Great Grandson of Jedediah Kohler***, by John Bishop; scenic design, Karl Eigsti; costume design, Laura Crow; directed, **Marshall Mason** and John Bard Manulis

performed by the Circle Repertory Co., with William Hurt, Lindsay Crouse, Richard Cox, Michael Ayr, **Lou Liberatore** (March 10, 1982) (8 perf.)

Looking-Glass, by Michael Sutton & Cynthia Mandelberg; scenic design, John Arnone; costume design, Jeanne Button; directed, David H. Bell

with John Vickery, Tara Kennedy, Nicholas Hormann, Richard Peterson, Innes-Fergus McDade (June 14, 1982) (11 perf.)

Lennon, by/directed, Bob Eaton; scenic design, Peter David Gould and Sue Mayes; costume design, Deborah Shaw

with David Patrick Kelly, Robert LuPone, Gusti Bogok, Katherine Borowitz, Bill Sadler, Greg Martyn, Vincent Irizarry, Lee Grayson, John Jellison (Oct. 5, 1982) (25 perf.)

Goodnight, Grandpa, by Walter Landau; scenic design, David Potts; costume design, Robert Wojewodski; directed, Jay Broad

with Milton Berle, Lee Wallace, Maxine Taylor-Morris, Laurie Heineman (Mar. 2, 1983) (6 perf.)

Taking My Turn, concept/directed, Robert H. Livingston; music, Gary William Friedman; lyrics, Will Holt; scenic design, Clarke Dunham; costume design, Judith Dolan

with Marni Nixon, Cissy Houston, Margaret Whiting, Sheila Smith (June 9, 1983) (345 perf.)

More Sex, Love, Violence and Death, performed by La Gran Scena Opera Co. di New York, all-male opera troupe *en travesti*

with **Ira Siff, Philip Koch, Keith Jurosko, Bruce Hopkins, Luis Russinyol, Ross Barentyne** (Jan. 22, 1984)

The much-beloved La Gran Scena was conceived and formed in 1981 by its artistic director Ira Siff, who performed as the diva Mme. Vera Galupe-Borszh. He was inspired by **Charles Ludlam** and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. They were to opera what Les Ballets Trocadero de Monte Carlo were to ballet. The other troupe members here were Philine Wanelle (Koch), Sylvia Bills (Hopkins), Gabriella Tonnoziti-Casseruloa/ Fodor Szedan (Jurosko), Russinyol, and Maestro Francesco Folinari-Soave-Cogliani (Barentyne). The company lasted until 2001, though Mme. Vera continued in recital until 2009.

Sixth Annual New York Gay Film Festival

including “Forty Deuce,” directed by Paul Morrissey and starring Kevin Bacon and Orson Bean; “Whoever Says the Truth Shall Die,” a documentary on the death of Italian film director **Pier Paolo Pasolini**; “La Triche,” a French police drama; and “Der Sprinter,” a German comedy (Nov. 28, 1984)

Surf City, the Beach Boys Musical, by Danny Jacobson and Barry Vigon; music/lyrics, Beach Boys; directed/choreography, Dennis Rosa (March 31, 1985)

SECOND AVENUE THEATER 1985-88

Have I Got a Girl for You! (The Frankenstein Musical), by Joel Greenhouse & Penny Rockwell; music/lyrics, Dick Gallagher; choreography, Felton Smith; scenic design, Harry Darrow; costume design, Kenneth M. Yount; directed, **Bruce Hopkins**

with Walter Hudson, Semina DeLaurentis, J.P. Dougherty, Angelina Fiordellisi, Gregory Jbara (Oct. 29, 1986) (86 perf.)

Staggerlee, by/directed, Vernel Bagneris; music/lyrics, Allen Toussaint; choreography, Pepsi Bethel; scenic design, Akira Yoshimura; costume design, JoAnne Clevenger

with Toussaint, Ruth Brown, Adam Wade, Juanita Brooks, Marva Hicks, Reginald Vel-Johnson, Carol Sutton, Alfred Bruce Bradley, Angeles Echols, Christie Godet, Bernard J. Marsh, Kevin Ramsey, Leon Williams (Feb. 27, 1987) (150 perf.)

Outer Critics Circle Award – Best Off-Broadway Musical

Tabu Tableaux, a memorial for **Charles Ludlam**, with a collection of scenes from his plays, directed by Lawrence Kornfeld

with **Lola Pashalinski, Everett Quinton, Black-Eyed Susan, Bill Vehr, John Brockmeyer, Georg Osterman**, Charlotte Forbes, **Ira Siff**, Katy Dierlam, Joseph Papp, Geraldine Fitzgerald, **Eric Bentley**, Judith Malina, Madeline Kahn (July 13, 1987)

This memorial for Charles Ludlam, who died of AIDS, included a number of actors who had worked with him, as well as Ira Siff of La Gran Scena Opera Co., and critic/playwright Eric Bentley. Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company, founded in 1967, was one of New York's most innovative and influential Off-Off-Broadway theater troupes. The *New York Times* in 2003 noted that "Playwright, actor, and director, iconoclast among iconoclasts, Charles Ludlam was revolutionizing downtown New York culture in the 1970s with his gender-bending and outrageous theatrical sendups long before terms like 'gender bending' were common."⁶

[Theater closed 1987-90]

VILLAGE EAST CITY CINEMAS 1991- present

Movies. Since 2021, it has been named Village East by Angelika, operated by the Angelika Film Center.

⁶ Bevva Rosten, review of David Kaufman's *The Theatrical Life and Times of Charles Ludlam*, *New York Times*, February 16, 2003; Jay Shockley, "Ridiculous Theatrical Company," NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, November 2017, revised May 2021, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/cafe-society-ridiculous-theatrical-company>.