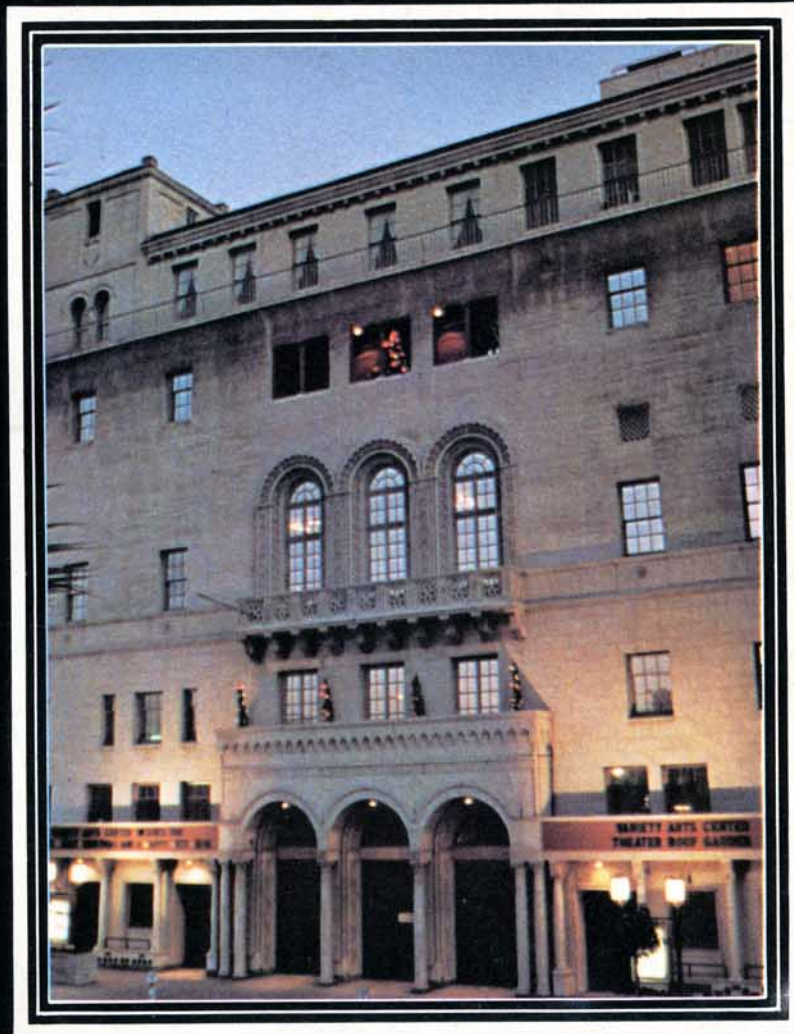




THE VARIETY ARTS CENTER



A Cultural Heritage Entertainment
Complex In Downtown
Los Angeles



Commemorative Edition





A LETTER OF WELCOME

Welcome to the Variety Arts Center...a unique theatre club complex where you may relax and enjoy both the comfort and elegance of yesterday and the bright promise of tomorrow in the world of live entertainment.

As President and Founder of the Society for the Preservation of Variety Arts (SPVA), it has been my continuing goal for the Society to save for future generations the priceless heritage which exists in books, films, music, recordings, scrapbooks and gag files from the golden era of vaudeville, burlesque, theatre, radio and early television.

It has also been our dream in SPVA to someday provide a home base for the live entertainers of the future, where they could learn from the past and apply that knowledge in performance for the general public.

We realized both our goal and our dream in 1977 when SPVA acquired this complex and opened the Variety Arts Center. It serves concurrently as headquarters and clubhouse for SPVA and as a public theatre, museum and library.

As now restored and operated, the Variety Arts Center recalls that time many years ago when a select group of variety artists would gather to relax and dine and perform in the gracious ambience of their private club.

Thanks to the hard work of a host of SPVA patrons, who have given unselfishly of their time and talent, that era lives again in the heart of downtown Los Angeles---with the difference that now appreciative members of the general public may also enjoy a glimpse of that glorious entertainment heritage...combined with a promise of a brighter tomorrow for the world of variety arts.

It may be that future redevelopment plans for downtown Los Angeles will necessitate a change in the physical structure of the Variety Arts Center. In this instance, however, the new building will contain essentially the same floorplan and, most assuredly, all the original vintage decor.

Our operation and goals will remain the same, as will that wonderful feeling of ambience with both the past and future of variety entertainment. Consequently, we have chosen to call this program our "Commemorative Edition," to celebrate what our Variety Arts Center has been, as well as what it shall become.



Thank you for your patronage.

Milt Larsen
President
Society for the Preservation
of Variety Arts

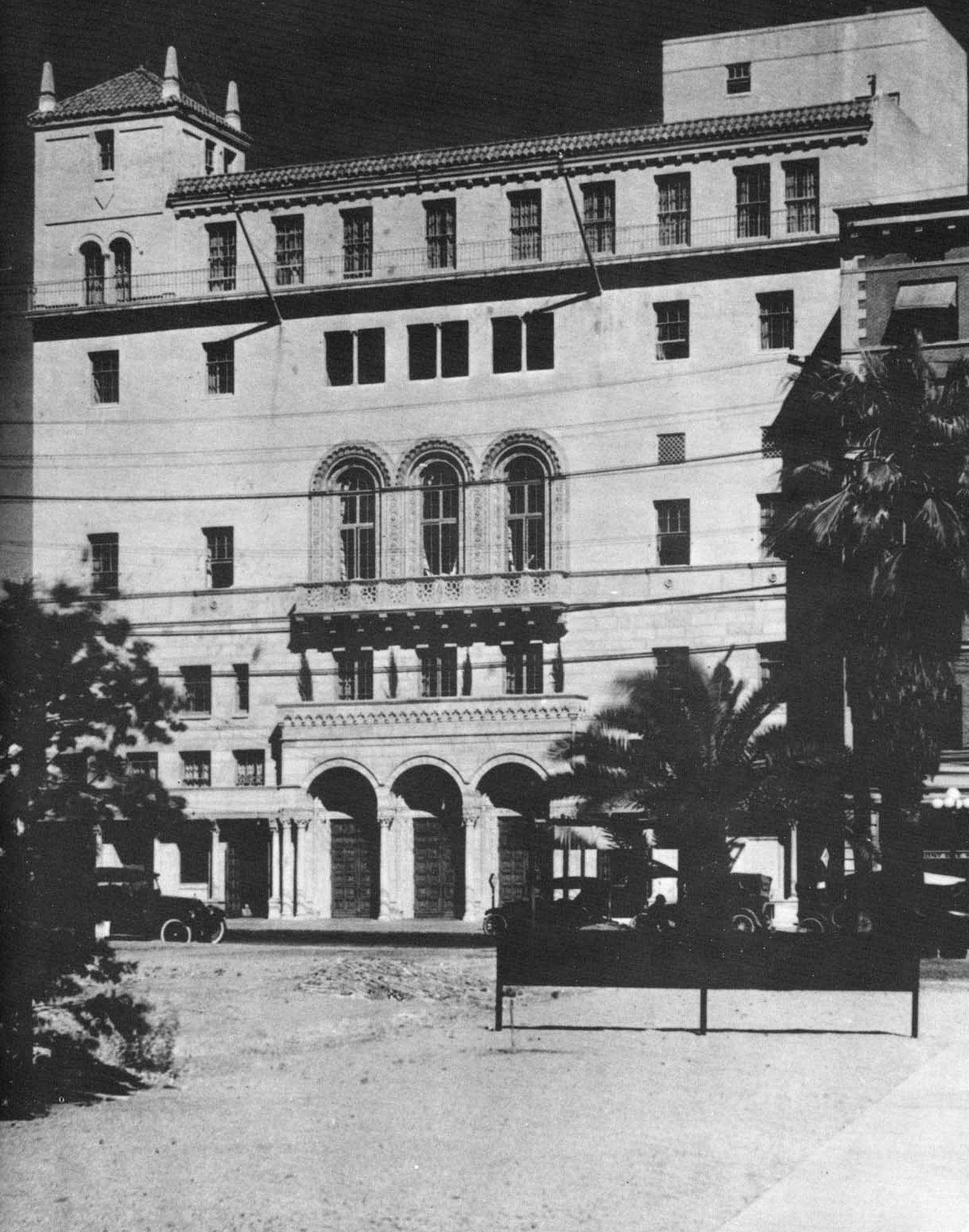
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THE VARIETY ARTS CENTER
A Cultural Heritage Monument
In Downtown Los Angeles

CREDITS

EDITOR/Ray Herbeck, Jr. • ART DIRECTOR/John Ernsdorf
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR/Barbara Kerr
PRINTING & ART PRODUCTION/Earl Witscher, Modernage





HISTORY OF THE CENTER

A story recently related by a patron of the Variety Arts Center epitomizes the need for what we are trying to do here through the auspices of SPVA---the Society for the Preservation of Variety Arts.

It seems that a young actress from New York City re-located to Los Angeles to pursue her career. She shared an apartment with a longtime friend who was a Los Angeles native. But after only a few months, the New Yorker packed up and returned "home."

Asked by her surprised friend why, the New Yorker replied sadly, "I've tried to listen, but I hear no voices. Nobody from the past talks to you here. And, as an artist, where else can you turn to for inspiration...and strength?"

At SPVA, we like to feel that such a place now exists in the form of the Variety Arts Center where, if you listen very closely, you can indeed "hear" the voices of showbiz greats from vaudeville, burlesque, theatre, radio, film and early TV.

And because we are a "living" establishment, you'll hear those voices mingle with the new in the form of showcase theatre productions for upcoming performers, re-created early radio dramas, revues and even rock 'n' roll concerts---all comprising an ongoing, vibrant, exhilarating tribute to the past greats of the variety arts and to the future greats, as well.

THE FRIDAY MORNING CLUB

In the beginning was a need, perceived by Madame Caroline Severance in 1891, to offer the civic minded ladies of Los Angeles an outlet for their good intentions. She founded the Friday Morning Club that year to foster charitable activities by its distaff membership.

The idea caught on and, in 1899, the group built its first clubhouse on this lot on what was then called Pearl Street. It was a mission-styled stucco building which was moved to Adams and Hoover Street in 1922, to make way for the "new" Friday Morning Club building due to open in 1924.

Their building would be a five-story Italian Renaissance structure designed by the noted architectural firm of Allison & Allison, which was credited with the Edison Building, the original UCLA campus and more. The Winters Construction Company built the structure for the then (1924) sizable sum of \$375,000.

Combined with the extensive real estate which then surrounded the premises (offering room for about 1200 parked cars), the total value of the proposed new club was nearly \$1 million. Add to this the fact that this was the 1920s, a period when women scarcely asserted themselves in matters of business or finance, and the situation could have presented virtually an insurmountable task to any commonplace group of ladies.

But these were extraordinary women, more than 3,000 of them in 1924, in fact. And they were the elite of Los

Angeles, most married to the city's wealthier men of business. Due to his wife's membership in the club, the president of Security Pacific Bank personally helped arrange finances for the project.

Though no other women's club in the nation had built its own building, these ladies would not be dissuaded from their chosen course. After all, they had a tradition of breaking new ground, so to speak, in Los Angeles. The Friday Morning Club originated the idea of establishing kindergarten and also launched the first mobile libraries, anywhere. And, they were extremely active in the women's suffrage movement. Their founder, Caroline Severance was a close friend of Susan B. Anthony and was consequently the first woman to cast her vote in the State of California. She was picked up at the clubhouse by a state carriage and driven to the polling place.

And so, the ladies would have their own clubhouse, though paying for it over the years would present its share of problems. One happy result, however, was the need to generate more income other than dues, which would lead to creation of a theatrical centerpiece for Los Angeles. (Note: The ladies achieved their ultimate goal in 1948 when, after 24 years of effort, the Friday Morning Club became the first women's group in the country to own its own building...and they celebrated that year at a meeting by literally burning the mortgage.)

Before the auditorium was even finished, a local enterprising showman, Louis O. MacLoon, recognized in the rough what would later be called "the most acoustically perfect theatre in Los Angeles." He offered the ladies \$25,000 for the first two years and \$27,000 for the remaining three of a five-year lease to operate the auditorium as "The Playhouse," independently of their uses for it as an auditorium. The ladies, always in need of funds now with their new five-story "clubhouse," readily agreed.

THE PLAYHOUSE BOWS

MacLoon capitalized on Los Angeles' thirst for recognition as a city of culture

The PLAYHOUSE

In the Friday Morning Club Building

On Figueroa at Ninth Street
Los Angeles

Operated by

LOS ANGELES PLAYHOUSE, INC., Lessee

LOUIS O. MACLOON, President ARCH SELWYN, Vice-President
A. H. WOODS, Director
LILLIAN ALBERTSON MACLOON, Secretary-Treasurer

THE Playhouse will be devoted to the exclusive presentation of the latest and best New York stage plays: the appearance of recognized stars in their most popular vehicles and for the production, from time to time, of new, untried comedies and dramas that give exceptional promise of merit and worthy of Los Angeles approval before New York.

The Playhouse is the most modern of the many in this highly theatrical city and was built and erected with great civic pride by the Friday Morning Club as a fitting tribute to the Arts of Drama and Music.

PLAYHOUSE NOTES

A Lounge for ladies and gentlemen is located under the balcony stairs. A check room for your convenience is located in the Lounge.

The management will appreciate the report of discountery from any of the employees.

The management desires you to take for granted that the first thought is for the welfare, comfort and convenience of its patrons.

Evenings at 8:30

Matinees, Wednesday and Saturday, 2:30

Seats on sale two weeks in advance Tel. VAndike 7344





by booking, for his opening night Doris Keane, starring in the revival of the smash drama she had played three years in London, "Romance."

The Los Angeles Times crowed loudly on the morning of opening night, May 5, 1924, "The glory that is Los Angeles will reach its highest climax tonight when Louis O. MacLoon opens the new playhouse at Ninth and Figueroa Streets with Doris Keane in 'Romance.' So much importance is attached to the new home of the best drama that A. H. Woods, New York theatrical producer, has journeyed all the way from the east to be present at the opening. Will Rogers has volunteered to be toastmaster and to make the dedicatory speech."

Woods and Rogers were joined that memorable evening by a curious mix of Los Angeles notables from theatre, records, vaudeville and that ever-growing new industry, film. Present were Sid Grauman, the Carter De Havens, Pauline Frederick and her mother, Theda Bara, Maurice Tourneur, Blanche Sweet, Marshall Neilan, Nita Naldi, George Fitzmaurice, Ernest Lubitsch, Eric von Stroheim, Lewis Stone, and Norma Talmadge.

Also, Joseph Schenck, Rupert Hughes, Laurette Taylor, J. Hartley Manners, Corinne Griffith, Walter Morosco, Sid Chaplin, Adolphe Menjou, Colleen Moore, John McCormick, Ivan and Adela Rogers St. Johns, Robert Edson, Cecil B. DeMille, Monte Blue, Sam Goldwyn, Betty compson, Claire Windsor, Carl Laemmle, Bebe Daniels, Estelle Taylor, Constance Talmadge, Ruth Roland, Sidney Franklin, Pola Negri, Fred Niblo, Mae Murray, Charlie Chaplin, and more.

Seating capacity then was 1500, due to smaller seats than those of today (the theatre now seats 1158). And through subsequent years, virtually every one was sold for the succession of hit shows booked by MacLoon. Prices were \$1.50 for the entire main floor, and 50¢ and \$1.00 for the balcony.

Following Keane's "Romance" was Johnny Arthur in "The Whole Town's Talking," trailed by Avery Hopgood's mystery, "The Bat."

SUBSEQUENT YEARS

The year 1925 saw Peggy Wood with Trixie Friganza in the musical comedy, "The Clinging Vine;" Pauline Frederick in two shows, "The Lady" and "Spring Cleaning;" George Sidney in "Welcome Stranger;" Gilmor Brown's staging of "The Goose Hangs High;" and Jane Cowl in "Romeo and Juliet," which featured Jessie Ralph as the nurse and found a young Clark Gable playing Montague's servant, Abram.

In fact, the tireless Gable appeared quite regularly in Playhouse Productions.



Eddie Cantor (right) and other CBS Radio stars broadcast from the theatre's stage in its heyday.

He portrayed Cpl. Kiper in a 1925 production of "What Price Glory," with Hale Hamilton and Mitchell Lewis as Qüirt and Flag, and Nanette Vallon as Charmaine; Gable was an "additional character" sharing the boards with Lionel Barrymore in a 1926 production of "The Copperhead," which also featured Douglas Montgomery; and Gable turned up with Sidney Toler in "The Lullaby" and Pauline Frederick in "Madame X."

The Los Angeles Repertory Theatre took over in 1928 and The Playhouse became The Figueroa Playhouse. The first production was "The Silver Cord," starring Nance O'Neill and Kay Johnson. The following year saw Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coburn in "The Yellow Jacket."

The Figueroa Playhouse acquired a reputation as one of Los Angeles' oldest continuously operating legit theatres, adding to its credits the Theatre Guild's touring show, "The Doctor's Dilemma;" the Repertory Theatre's production of "The Guardsman," starring Lowell Sherman and Doris Lloyd; and John Gay's "The Beggar's Opera."

THE 1930s

Legitimate theatre began to decline in the downtown area and the shows were neither being booked in as often nor drawing as many patrons. Movies were the big thing, now, and the ladies of the Friday Morning Club decided to augment their income with two new activities.

Between legit theatrical productions, the theatre began running Chinese films and, during radio's heyday, booking live broadcast shows.

These included in the 1930s The

Burns & Allen Show, The Al Jolson Show and Dick Powell and Louella Parsons in "Hollywood Hotel," all on CBS radio. Eddie Cantor also used the facilities for broadcasting.

Others who spoke from the stage in this era included Eleanor Roosevelt, Randolph Churchill, Lowell Thomas and Dorothy Parker. And, prophetically, Pierre Monteaux held a benefit concert for the now struggling philanthropic Friday Morning Club, owners of the building.

DECLINING YEARS

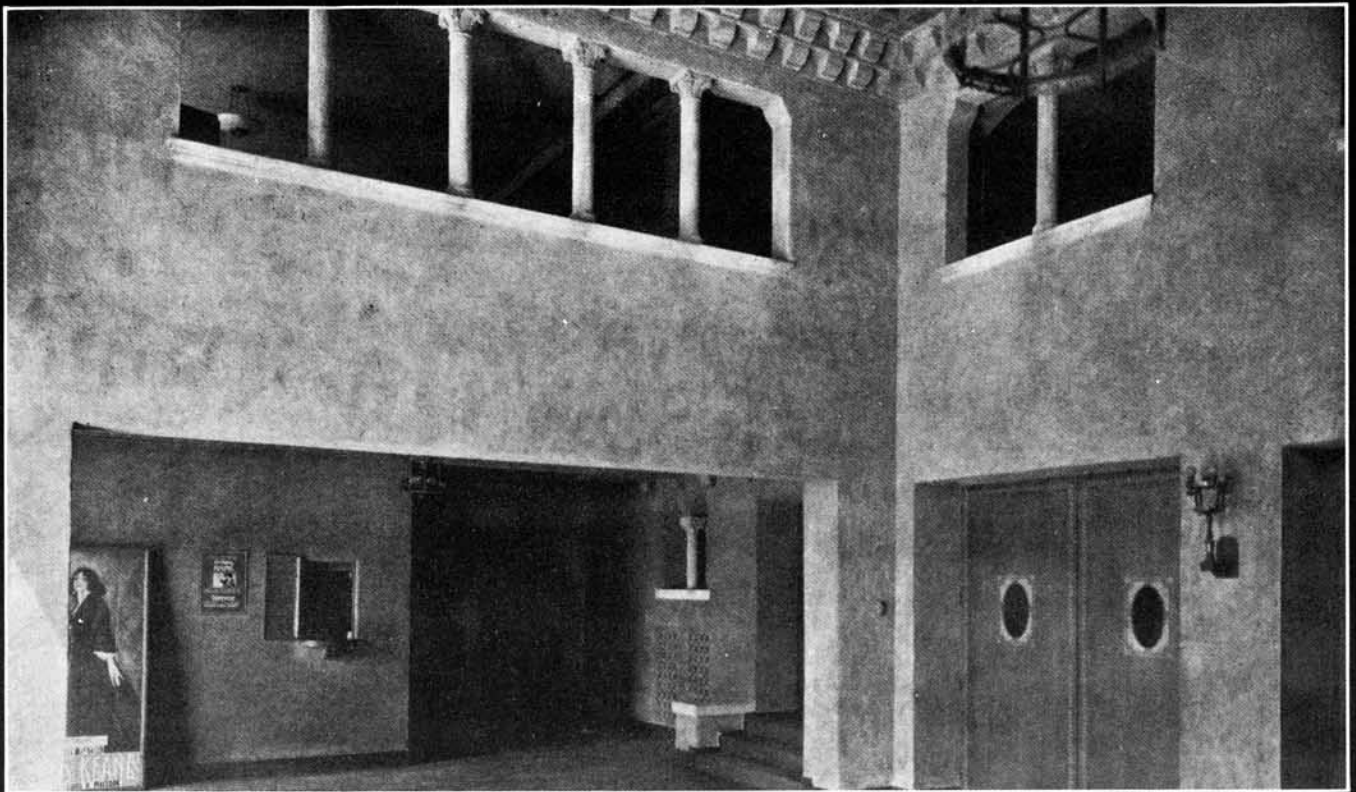
After television brought an end to the era of variety radio entertainment, the ladies of the Club relied more and more on their Chinese movie audience to help pay the upkeep on their now hopelessly extravagant "clubhouse."

But it remains to their eternal credit that, in spite of all odds, they managed to preserve the building in a condition similar to that of its years of splendor, the '20s and early '30s.

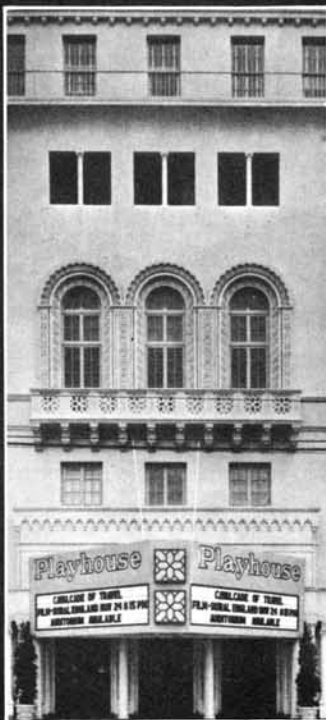
The Friday Morning Club voted as far back as the early '50s to try to sell the building, but they really didn't try very hard. They found that few buyers wanted to preserve the building and continue its rich civic and cultural role in the community.

SPVA OWNERSHIP

In 1975, Milt Larsen and the present Board of Directors formed the SPVA with the idea of creating a permanent institution to further public interest in the neglected folk art of the live variety theatre in America. Larsen was seeking a home for his own extensive collection of rare memorabilia that was considered



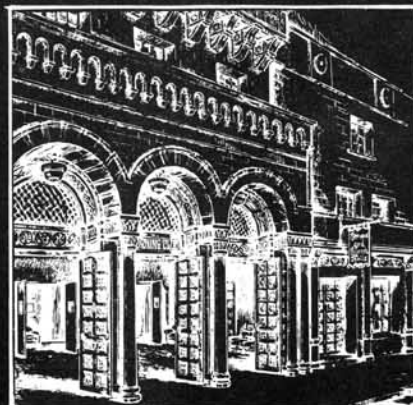
Theatre lobby just prior to opening in 1924.

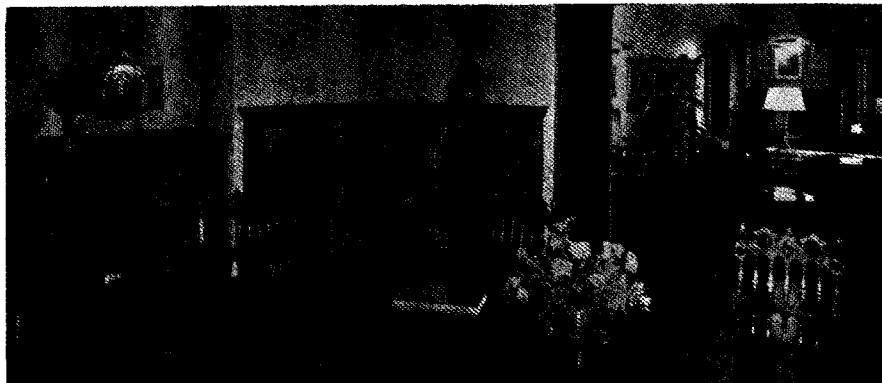


Travel films helped pay overhead in declining years.



Another view taken in the 1920's.





A 1924 view of the main library.

one of the most expansive specialized private "museums" in the country.

Larsen had already proven an ability to do "the impossible." He, his brother Bill, and art director John Shrum had brought elegance and a new life to the art of magic through the creation of The Magic Castle in Hollywood and the Annual "It's Magic!" shows. They had taken an old rundown movie theatre in Santa Monica and restored it to the now famous Mayfair Music Hall. But Larsen's impossible dream was yet to come -- a Smithsonian of showbiz -- a building big enough and grand enough to house the multi activities of a center devoted to the past and future of the variety arts.

At first it appeared that the venerable Pasadena Playhouse would be the new home for the SPVA. After two years of frustrating negotiations, Larsen was clearly not happy with the progress. Time was his enemy. It was then that Larsen found out about the availability of the Friday Morning Club building on Figueroa. This historic building was perfect for the future needs of the SPVA.

In 1977, Larsen, President of SPVA, finally saw his dream become reality when the redoubtable ladies of the Friday Morning Club sold SPVA their "clubhouse."

However, in selling the building, they also leased back from SPVA the entire fifth floor. So, the Club was able to rid itself of the tremendous burden of maintaining a 58,000 square foot building, and yet continue to have its weekly meetings and special events in "their" home.

Almost immediately (as finances would permit), Larsen began the slow, ongoing and, most probably, endless job of restoration and remodeling to return the structure to its original opulent

state, yet to make it functional as a living theatrical center, as opposed to a museum of a bygone day.

THE VARIETY ARTS CENTER

With the major restoration now completed (the "fine tuning" continues), the "clubhouse" on Figueroa Street now offers the following configuration:

THE VARIETY ARTS THEATRE: A 1,158-seat proscenium arch theatre built in 1923 and dedicated in 1924 as The Playhouse, later re-named The Figueroa Playhouse. It was re-named, restored and re-opened in 1977 for the purpose of presenting shows, events and concerts. These are booked into the theatre under rental agreements between the Variety Arts Center and the producers.

THE ED WYNN LOUNGE: Located one floor directly below the Variety Arts Theatre, the lounge is used as a cocktail bar for before-the-show and intermission patrons during productions. Between shows, it is used by the Center as a cocktail facility for banquets and parties.

VARIETY ARTS MUSEUM & THEATRE LIBRARY: This includes collections of playbills, gag files, memorabilia and personal items of many entertainers, plus videotapes of all performers and interviews with famed personalities who have appeared at the Variety Arts Center. A film archive holds collections which date back to the silent days. Some of the personal items were donated by friends and family of W. C. Fields, Ed Wynn, Earl Carroll, Eddie Cantor and Bing Crosby, among others.

TIN PAN ALLEY LITTLE THEATRE: This intimate cabaret can seat 150 comfortably for "revue" style performances, with cocktails and light food

available throughout the evening. It is also home of our weekly Variety Arts Radio Theatre productions, which recreate live dramatic broadcasts using original scripts of the era. This room also is available for banquets and parties with full food service at hand from our upstairs kitchen.

VARIETY ARTS ROOF GARDEN THEATRE & RESTAURANT: Here we can seat up to 300 comfortably in banquet style arrangement, or about 200 with our usual seating style. Our regular dining menu has three entrees plus an optional "billboard buffet" instead of the salad course. Our banquet menus offer a wider selection of main courses at varying prices. Entertainment varies weekly with live shows and "big band" orchestras as the staple. Our evening dress code (after 7 pm) is jacket and tie for gentlemen and dress or slacks suit for ladies. During the day, dress is casual and the Roof Garden is open for lunch (except Mondays).

THE W.C. FIELDS BAR: This ornate cocktail bar adjacent to the restaurant offers libations amidst "inspiring" memorabilia of W. C. Fields, on loan from the Fields family.

THE EARL CARROLL LOUNGE: Adjacent to the W. C. Fields Bar, this comfortable area can be used for cocktail and hors d'oeuvre parties or before-show and after dinner drinks amidst memorabilia from the famed Earl Carroll Theatre (now, The Aquarius Theatre) in Hollywood.

THE SCREENERY: Our screening room can seat a party of 50 comfortably for viewing films (which we offer weekly now from our vintage collection) or for lectures, slide shows, videotape presentations, etc.

The SPVA is a non-profit, tax exempt organization, with our sole means of support being membership fees, donations and yearly dues, which are tax deductible.

However, non-members are welcome to use our facilities at the Variety Arts Center during the day without an entrance donation and during the evening for \$5.00 per person, which entitles them to all the privileges of being a regular member for one evening.

The Variety Arts Center is now a historical monument and our library is classified as a public library, with most of the materials being available "on reserve," due to their delicate condition.

We hope you will return often to the "clubhouse" on Figueroa Street which, under the auspices of the SPVA, is now devoted to both the history and the future of variety entertainment.



Restoration underway as a "modern" marquis is removed in favor of 1924 appearance.



A WALKING TOUR OF THE VARIETY ARTS CENTER

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Variety Arts Center, literally a cultural heritage monument alive and well in downtown Los Angeles. Virtually every corner and alcove of this historic building offers something unique, something rare, something precious from the wonderful era of vaudeville, burlesque, theatre, radio and early television. The best way of acquainting yourself with our many treasures is to plan several visits to our facility...and take your time on a walking tour.

This guide will cover many of the interesting items on display or available for research purposes in our several libraries, as well as acquaint you with the function of our varied rooms, lounges and theatres.

We suggest you start your tour on the Fourth Floor (The Variety Arts Roof Garden), and walk down the stairs to inspect other levels at your leisure.

Please note that areas of the Variety Arts Center are constantly under restoration. So, as you tour the building, please do not enter any machinery rooms, "Employees Only" rooms, or any unlit areas. Visitors touring our facilities without an authorized guide do so at their own risk...and, please, watch your step.

NOTE: The entire Fifth Floor of the building remains the Friday Morning Club offices, library and clubrooms, carrying on the traditions started when civic minded ladies of Los Angeles founded the club in 1891.

Their Fifth Floor areas house a number of priceless antiques, a collection of period costumes worn by famous women of Los Angeles, valuable paintings (including a scenic oil executed in 1891 by the sculptor of Mt. Rushmore), and rare antique furniture.

However, their facilities are not part of our walking tour.

THE FOURTH FLOOR ELEVATOR LOBBY:

The GENE FOWLER HAT COLLECTION (donated by Gene Fowler Jr.). This great biographer of John Barrymore (*Goodnight, Sweet Prince*), Mayor Jimmy Walker of New York (*Beau James*), and the Hollywood clique, Barrymore, Fields Carradine, etc., (*Minutes of the Last Meeting*) collected hats from his friends. The hats on display include the famous chapeaus of Walter Winchell, Jimmy Durante, Hedda Hopper and many others.

The JACK BENNY COLLECTION (donated by Mary Livingston Benny and Mr. Benny's manager Irving Fine). Many rare pictures of Jack Benny with his cast and guest stars and an old Philco console radio circa 1940 which plays Jack Benny Radio excerpts when you push the button on the dial.

The spectacular round art glass window, visible through the cloakroom portal, dates back to 1860 and was originally in a church in Cleveland, Ohio.

The oak paneling forming a background for the SPVA's many plaques and citations is actually two former sliding doors from the largest house ever built in Los Angeles, the Phillips Mansion on Western Avenue at Berkeley Square (both donated by Mr. Ernie Evans).

THE EARL CARROLL LOUNGE:

The EARL CARROLL COLLECTION was purchased at the estate auction in 1968 by the SPVA President, Milt Larsen. In addition to the fascinating memorabilia displayed on the walls of the lounge there are the original scripts from all the Earl Carroll Vanities and Sketchbook revues and the great show-

man's personal files, scrapbooks, and photos in the main library. The collection was donated to SPVA in 1979 by Mr. Larsen.

The EARL CARROLL THEATRE WALL OF FAME: Carroll started the tradition of having stars sign huge slabs of concrete in 1939. Two of the first blocks signed were those of his star showgirl Beryl Wallace who died in the same plane crash as Carroll in 1948, and a young star of the day, Ronald Reagan. These two are displayed with a cement block which our Patron Member Cary Grant re-signed for us in 1980 to replace his original block which was stolen from the wall on Sunset Boulevard. The original cement blocks were found in the basement of the old Earl Carroll Theatre Restaurant, which is now the Aquarius Theatre, when it was purchased by the Music Center's Center Theatre Group. They loaned the blocks to the SPVA where they are duplicated in lightweight material for display in the Carroll Lounge. It is interesting to note that Mr. Gene Autry purchased the original collection of blocks for his planned Autry Museum and they are, therefore, displayed with his permission. The oil painting of Mr. Earl Carroll is by the famous actor/painter John Decker. The pastels of Beryl Wallace are by Earl Moran.

THE W. C. FIELDS BAR:

Beyond the frosted glass art deco divider, designed by John Shrum, you will find a vintage mahogany bar which came from an old saloon in San Pedro, California. The very rare posters of W. C. Fields are on loan to the SPVA by the W. C. Fields family. The oil painting of Fields was done by member Carl Babcock.

Next to the Fields Bar you will find the EDDIE CANTOR ALCOVE. The Eddie Cantor Collection was purchased

EARL CARROLL LOUNGE



(Left) The late Jack Albertson and SPVA President Milt Larsen in the Earl Carroll Lounge; (Above) Richard Sherman and SPVA staffers gather at the Lounge piano.

W. C. FIELDS BAR



The W. C. Fields Bar (right) features Fields memorabilia and, on special occasions, the bartending services of a fellow bearing uncanny resemblance to the gentleman in the painting behind him.



VARIETY ROOF GARDEN





from his secretary in 1971 by Milt Larsen and donated to the SPVA in 1980. The collection, which is primarily housed in the main library on the 2nd floor, includes all of Cantor's personal writings, papers, radio scripts, gag files, photos, etc.

THE LADIES ROOM:

The photographs of the lovely ladies displayed on the walls of the powder room and vestibule are primarily the Earl Carroll showgirls. They date from the first Vanities in 1924 to his last show in Hollywood in 1948. Also displayed are the costume sketches for the Carroll shows and scenes and plans from the Fanchon and Marco shows that played on the West Coast in the '20s and '30s. Over the glass showcase displaying original scripts and other Carroll memorabilia are 15 frames containing the elaborate "backers portfolio" which gives us a clue to the salesmanship and flair of the great showman. Above the entrance to the vestibule hangs Carroll's famous greeting, which originally graced his theatre, "Through these portals pass the most beautiful girls in the world."

THE VARIETY ARTS ROOF GARDEN:

Entering the main ballroom you will notice tall art deco torchieres in the entry niches. These once graced the downtown Swellodom store. The "three sheets" in huge frames on the walls are part of the Strobbridge Lithograph collection which had been collected by Ed Wynn's father-in-law, the great actor Frank Keenan. They are on display at the SPVA through the courtesy of Tracy Keenan Wynn and the University of Southern California. The autograph blocks gracing the walls of the ballroom are the club's continuation of the tradition started in 1939 by Earl Carroll. Celebrities visiting the club are asked to sign a new block to be added to our own "Wall of Fame". Our "new" names range from Rudy Vallee, Jack Albertson and Buddy Ebsen to Emmy Lou Harris, Ricky Lee Jones and Kim Carnes.

The paneled walnut screen at the rear wall of the ballroom was part of the original building. It is flanked by the two cannister torchiere lamps that were once on each side of the main stage in the auditorium. The beautiful cut and beveled crystal windows were rescued from a Westlake Park home. The base of the screen forms a buffet and service area and the movie buff will recognize the ornate staff plaster as the "Harmonia Gardens Bar" in the 20th Century Fox film "Hello Dolly."

The six iron 24-lamp chandeliers are part of the 1924 architecture, as are the hand stenciled beam ceilings throughout the building. Although some of the beams appear to be wood, they are steel reinforced concrete; the building meets today's seismic standards and is on the Civil Defense list of registered fallout shelters.

THE JOHNNY CARSON "TONIGHT SHOW" SET:

The largest single show business artifact to be found on display at the Variety Arts Center is probably the most familiar television set ever built. At 90 minutes a night and five shows a week, you could have logged in 30,000 minutes of your time watching Johnny Carson interview his guests in this famous "home base" set. It was originally designed by NBC Art Director John Shrum, who is a member of the SPVA Board of Directors and supervised the installation of the set in the Roof Garden. When the Tonight Show changed to a one hour format at the beginning of 1981, NBC donated the entire set to the SPVA. Mr. Carson is a member of the SPVA and is invited to come downtown and use his old chair anytime he likes!

It is interesting to note that the Roof Garden Ballroom is directly over the main auditorium separated by a huge attic. The kitchen for the Roof Garden is located over the scenery fly loft of the theatre stage. This is a very unusual design for a theatre on the West Coast; it is more typical of New York playhouse architecture.

Future plans call for a greenhouse type enclosure for the north veranda, which would provide a more quiet and intimate dining area for members and their guests.

THE BOAT ON THE ROOF:

The second biggest artifact at the Variety Arts Center is the rather controversial 52 foot scale model of the Italian luxury liner Contessa di Conte, which was built by MGM in 1947 for the then astronomical cost of \$17,000. The picture it was used in was "Luxury Liner" starring George Brent, Lauritz Melchior and Jane Powell. It was purchased at the MGM Studio auction by Milt Larsen and now is "docked" on the roof of the building awaiting a workable plan for a permanent "berth." According to President Larsen, this is the only boat in the world that has spent more time on land and in the air than on the water!

THIRD FLOOR MEZZANINE THE VARIETY MUSIC LIBRARY:

When the Variety Arts Center opened in 1977 there was only one library. Now there are four separate libraries---the general library, the library of sound archives, the film and video library and the music library.

It is fitting that the music library should be on the mezzanine overlooking the Tin Pan Alley little theatre, which is largely devoted to original and nostalgic musical revue presentations.

The collection includes the "Sounds of Silents" film music library, which contains many of the most important anthologies of orchestration arranged to accompany the silent films of the '20s such as the Sam Fox Moving Picture Music Series, the Schirmer Photoplay, the Hawks Cinema Music Series, the Carl Fischer Moving Picture Folio and many others. In addition, there are dance band arrangements from the '20s, film background music scores catalogued by subject (Chase Music, Nocturnal, Carnival, Indian, Eccentric, etc.), and classical orchestrations as they were arranged for silent films. This collection was the house music file of the Rialto Theatre in Casper, Wyoming. When Milt Larsen purchased it in 1966, each bundle was carefully wrapped in 1929 newspapers!

The library includes a large representative collection of the songs of the famed popular songwriter, Al Sherman ("Pretending", "Dew Dew Dewy Day", "Potatoes Are Cheaper", "No, No, A Thousand Times No", etc.), donated by his songwriter son, Richard M. Sherman, who is also on the SPVA Board of Directors.

THE THIRD FLOOR ELEVATOR LOBBY RADIO MUSEUM:

The items on display in this area are largely the FRANK BRESEE "GOLDEN DAYS OF RADIO" archives donated to the SPVA by Mr. Bresee. Although the majority of this priceless collection is on file in the Library of Sound on the second floor, this Radio Museum is a favorite with nostalgic buffs.

Judging from the collection, Frank Bresee must have eaten every box of breakfast food sold in the '40s in order to get his Little Orphan Annie and Jack Armstrong the All-American Boy decoder rings. Here you'll find wonderful radio memories from Captain Midnight to Lum and Abner, pages from the original scripts of the most famous radio shows ever broadcast, pictures of the

JOHNNY CARSON "TONIGHT SHOW" SET



The original Johnny Carson "Tonight Show" set as presented in the Roof Garden.

THE BOAT ON THE ROOF



Milt Larsen "launches" the "boat on the roof" following its purchase at the MGM auction.



THE MAIN LIBRARY



The spacious Main Library (above) regularly presents Bob Chatterton's Film Chats (right).



radio performers, and you'll even hear some of the shows playing through the speakers of the vintage radios displayed in the museum.

The SPVA Radio Players, under the direction of Roger Rittner, incidentally, re-create vintage radio shows every Wednesday night at 8pm in the Tin Pan Alley Little Theatre.

TIN PAN ALLEY LITTLE THEATRE CABARET:

This was "Gibson Hall", the original recital hall of the Friday Morning Club. Now a rare Wurlitzer juke box from the '40s shines its neon bubbler light down on the floor below. The walls are decorated with framed song sheets representing the great hits of Tin Pan Alley over the years. Each table bears a blow-up photo of a rare phonograph record, the original of which may be found in the SPVA Sound Archives.

Most of the Society's educational programs and classes are held in this room.

The shows presented in Tin Pan Alley usually include young professionals trying out new material in original musical revues. A new show is presented every six weeks.

THE SECOND FLOOR MAIN LIBRARY & SOUND ARCHIVES LIBRARY:

One of the most remarkable things about the Variety Arts Center is that its use of the historical landmark building is almost identical to the use for which it was designed almost 60 years ago. The library floor is a very good example of this fact. The warm walnut woodwork donated to the library in the '30s by the well known Los Angeles Sartori family gives the room a comfortable elegance.

The imposing fireplace is considered a masterpiece use of Tiffany designed Batchelder Tile. The ship model on the mantel of the fireplace is "The Eagle", one of the perfect scale models used in the MGM picture "Mutiny On The Bounty" (donated to the SPVA by Board Member Dr. Thomas Heric).

The original glass bookcase doors are so perfectly fitted that a suction is created when they are opened. Each case is individually locked.

The billiard table in the center of the main library is the trick table used in the Ziegfeld Follies and Vaudeville by W. C. Fields (on permanent loan to the

SPVA by the same W. C. Fields family).

Some of the "one-of-a-kind" collections housed in the SPVA library include the personal files of Ed Wynn, Eddie Cantor, Earl Carroll, Joe Weber and Lew Fields, and Billy House. A humor section dedicated to the late comedian Jack Oakie houses joke books, vaudeville and burlesque sketches, radio scripts and three complete "gag files" cataloging by subject more than 100,000 gags.

The Norman Carroll Memorial Circus collection (donated by Mrs. Shirley Carroll) contains more than a thousand 8x10 photos of circus acts, magazines, papers and letters, and rare books on the circus and its performers.

More than 4,000 original copies of *Weekly Variety* covering virtually its entire 75 year history are on file in the library, donated to SPVA by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

The collections include personal belongings of Buster Keaton, including his silver button hook and shoe horn, and a scrapbook covering Keaton's early career in the family vaudeville act.

Comedian Joe Roth's scrapbooks cover a half century of vaudeville.

George M. Cohan's cane and Jimmy Durante's hat are among the personal items on display in the library.

THE BING CROSBY ROOM SOUND ARCHIVES LIBRARY:

Adjacent to the main library is the former Board of Directors Room of the building. This room has been dedicated to the late Bing Crosby and houses the sound recording archives of the SPVA. In addition to commercial recordings and tapes of radio broadcasts, there are also interviews with veteran stars through the SPVA's own S.A.V.E. project (Sound Archives of Variety Entertainers). When funding is available, the entire sound archive library will be transferred to cassette tape for more convenient access. Right now, you may hear recordings by requesting at least 24 hours in advance.

Note: The glass front oak lawyer's bookcases in the library were donated by members of the SPVA whose names appear on each bookcase.

FIRST FLOOR MEZZANINE THE SCREENERY & FILM AND VIDEO ARCHIVES:

The milk glass letters making up the sign in the elevator lobby are original

"Larson Letters." These letters could be found on every theatre marquee in the country in the '20s and '30s. They are now very rare and our name, "The Screenery," was coined simply because we didn't have enough letters to spell "Screening Room," "Film Library" or "Theatre."

Of the many cameras and projectors on display, the floor model 35mm Zenith projector is of particular interest. It was one of the first "portable" incandescent film projectors and was made circa 1927. It was used by Norma Talmadge for private screenings of her films.

The Screenery is equipped with 16mm movie and 35mm slide projectors, and videotape players.

One of the most important collections donated to the SPVA by President Milt Larsen is the Vaudeville Encores film archives. If you wanted to watch film for 250 hours non-stop, that's how long it would take you to view the half million feet of film in the collection. The titles include early "talkie" vaudeville act short subjects featuring stars like Smith and Dale, Lillian Roth, Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and the first appearance of a young actor named Cary Grant; early musicals and comedies that starred variety performers; rare newsreel footage of variety performers taken in New York's most famous night clubs and theatres; films of famous entertainers made for the movie jukeboxes of the '40s; and kinescopes (film taken from the TV tube) of early variety and comedy television shows.

Included in the collection are the films of Ed Wynn. About 40 of his half-hour 1949-50 TV shows, one of the first major variety shows on television, make up the majority of the Wynn collection, but there are also guest appearances with Red Skelton, informal footage of Wynn adlibbing for the animators as the Mad Hatter in Walt Disney's "Alice In Wonderland," and as the surprise subject on Ralph Edwards' "This Is Your Life."

The preservation and maintenance of the SPVA film library is made possible through a grant from the Texaco Philanthropic Foundation, Inc. in memory of the original "Texaco Fire Chief," Ed Wynn.

A huge collection of rare negatives of early television films also has been donated to the SPVA Film Archives. It

TIN PAN ALLEY LITTLE THEATRE



Before re-modeling.



After re-modeling.

VARIETY ARTS THEATRE



ED WYNN LOUNGE



Milt Larsen and John Shrum flank Keenan Wynn at dedication of the Ed Wynn Lounge.



must remain in storage until funding is obtained to have prints or videotapes made of the material.

It is the goal of the SPVA to have videotapes made of most of the rare material in the film library. In this way, researchers can view the films without risk of damaging the original prints which, in many cases, are the only copies known to exist.

THE FIRST FLOOR

THE CLUB LOBBY:

Note the unusual use of two adjoining lobbies, providing total separation of club and theatre events or the combined use when needed.

The club lobby's directory board will tell you what is going on in the various areas of the building any given day. You are requested to sign in at the reception desk either as a member or as a guest visitor.

The framed photographs on the wall of the club lobby represent the SPVA Headliner Hall of Fame. Each of these entertainment names has been a part of our ongoing series of lectures, classes and seminars. Some of these great people are no longer with us, but their knowledge lives on through the videotapes of their appearances at the Variety Arts Center. Because of these tapes, future generations will be able to hear the show business advice of people like Edgar Bergen, Jack Haley Sr. and Effie O'Connor.

The porcelain statue of a harlequin on the stair landing was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Sherman.

The elevators are a museum piece in themselves. They are the original Otis self-leveling, gum-paneled, manually-operated cars installed in the building in 1924. Young people of today think it's a wonderfully luxurious idea to assign an employee to operate an elevator. John Shrum's brother Max and nephew Bill Shrum of the Coast Elevator Company have donated a great deal of time keeping these elevators in safe running order.

THE VARIETY ARTS THEATRE:

THE THEATRE LOBBY:

When you say "Meet me under the clock" at the Variety Arts Center, you mean "meet me in the theatre lobby." The "clock" is about 200 years old and originally told Londoners the time as they passed a jewelry store on Bond Street. As you go downstairs from the lobby, you will notice another wrought iron relic from London, the "Saloon Bar" sign which warned of the presence of a pub in Knightsbridge. It now leads the way to the intermission bar!

There are hundreds of lithographs, playbills and photographs framed on the walls throughout the building. We won't attempt to describe them all within these pages. We would like to point out the display of memorabilia of the theatre itself in the inner lobby. Of particular interest is the opening night playbill of 1924. Note the caricatures of the notables attending that evening -- Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, Wallace Beery, Al Jolson, Will Rogers etc. etc.

THE MAIN THEATRE:

The theatre has been called "the most acoustically perfect theatre in Los Angeles." It remains basically unchanged from the night it opened in 1924. The gold leaf and hand painted ceiling would be virtually impossible to reproduce for any amount of money in the world of today.

The two cherub torchieres on each side of the stage were seen in many MGM movies, including "The Great Waltz." They were donated to the SPVA by designer and Board Member John Shrum.

Backstage is not without its relics. The theatre was originally a "hemp house," the expression used for flying stage scenery with hemp ropes on pulleys counterweighted by bags of sand. The original "pin rail" can still be seen high above stage right. When the SPVA saved the theatre in 1977, the old Ritz Theatre at Wilshire and La Brea was not so lucky and was demolished to make room for a parking lot. This proved to be our good fortune because the Ritz had an up-to-date 30 line counterweight system which could be obtained for scrap iron prices, a probable saving to the club of about \$60,000.

The stage floor is of 2-inch thick wood construction (sprinklered above and below). Along the back wall is a "painter's bridge" used for painting theatre scenery on the theory that it was easier to raise and lower the scenery than to raise and lower the painters. The stage left wall still has the long horizontal window where the radio directors would cue their actors in the '30s when Columbia Broadcasting System used the theatre as its radio playhouse.

In addition to the required asbestos fire curtain (hand painted to match the paintings in the ceiling) there is also a modern "water curtain" over the proscenium for your added safety. Incidentally, the antique electrical switchboard on stage is used only as a movie prop. There are still two fully operable 35mm arc projectors in the projection room.

Each of the nine dressing rooms on the upper floors has a window overlooking the stage.

THE LOWER FLOOR

THE ED WYNN LOUNGE:

This is a fully licensed refreshment bar and lounge serving the patrons of the Variety Arts Theatre. It is also a museum honoring the life of one of America's great clowns. (According to Wynn's son Keenan: "A comedian is an actor who says funny things...a clown is an actor who says things funny!")

This amazing collection includes photographs ranging from his first Broadway show in 1910 to his Emmy winning performance in "Requiem For A Heavyweight" and his many Walt Disney films. The huge 24 sheet poster was a billboard for his revue, "Boys And Girls Together," which opened at the Broadhurst Theatre in New York October 1, 1940. The glass cases contain many of Wynn's comedy props and, by pressing a button, you can hear radio broadcasts of the Ed Wynn Texaco Star Theatre of the '30s and '40s through the speaker of an old Atwater Kent radio.

One of the fascinating items on display in the Ed Wynn lounge is his first check from the Texaco Company issued a half century ago in the amount of \$5,000, an astronomical salary for a radio personality in 1931. In 1980, the Texaco Philanthropic Foundation donated twice that amount to the SPVA to maintain the collection in memory of "The Texaco Fire Chief" and to help in the establishment and preservation of our film library.

The Wynn collection contains more than a thousand photographs; dozens of posters and awards; 48 radio shows which have been transferred to cassette tape from metal and glass disks by our radio historian, Roger Rittner; and 39 half hour TV kinescopes. The original collection was purchased in 1972 by SPVA President Milt Larsen and donated to the SPVA to create the Wynn museum.

THE CIRCUS LOUNGE:

This adjacent lounge houses the more displayable treasures of the NORMAN CARROLL MEMORIAL CIRCUS COLLECTION, which is on permanent loan to the SPVA by Carroll's widow and son, Shirley Carroll and Kevin O'Conner. Norman Carroll was ringmaster and later publicist for the Ringling Brothers Circus. Most of his amazing circus collection may be found on file in the second floor main library. However, the original and reproduction circus posters



Board member Richard Sherman makes a point with Librarian Carl Flemming using one of W.C. Fields' trick pool cues at Fields' table. In back is the massive Tiffany designed Batchelder Tile fireplace, topped with the Eagle miniature ship from "Mutiny On The Bounty."



and memorabilia on display in the circus lounge are priceless. A Circus Bar, for soft drinks only, is maintained in the Circus Lounge.

THE LADIES LOUNGE:

You must remember that the building was built as the Friday Morning Club, a women's club. Ladies are a bit surprised to find a huge marble ladies room in the theatre: 1,800 square feet of ladies lounge! (Compared to a 340 square foot men's room!) If you figure about half of our nearly 1,200 seat capacity in the theatre as ladies, that works out to three square feet per lady. They thought of everything back in 1924.

UNDER THE THEATRE:

These machinery rooms were designed as the last word in heating and air conditioning technology in 1924. The SPVA's building engineer, Ralph Camden (who came with the building when it was purchased by SPVA in 1977), does battle with these antiquated machines on a daily basis. In an energy conscious world, this is the one time when the Society does not want to preserve something old. We look forward to a time when these huge machines can be replaced with modern compact units, thereby conserving energy and creating many rooms of needed space within the building.

THE WARDROBE COLLECTION:

The SPVA maintains an extensive wardrobe and costume collection under the volunteer supervision of motion picture and TV wardrobe designer Arlene Zamara. Arlene and her company "Zam" donated the original collection of hundreds of costumes to the Society. Since then other major donors have included Gary's Formal Wear and Chris Bearde Productions.

SCENIC SHOP:

There is a complete woodworking and machine shop which was designed for the building of scenery for the plays in the theatre. Today it is used for the constant restoration projects of the SPVA.

THE UNDER STAGE AREA:

Contains a make-up room, orchestra rehearsal hall, and four dressing rooms, all of which tends to flood when a kitchen employee, more than 100 feet above, pours hot grease in the kitchen drain.



The Society for the Preservation of Variety Arts (SPVA) has more than 3,000 members, every one of whom is a valuable asset in helping us preserve the past and build the future in variety entertainment.

HALL OF FAME

However, as with every organization, there are always a few members whose position in their chosen career has elevated them to a point of prominence receiving ongoing attention from the media. Some of our members have



VINCENTE MINNELLI



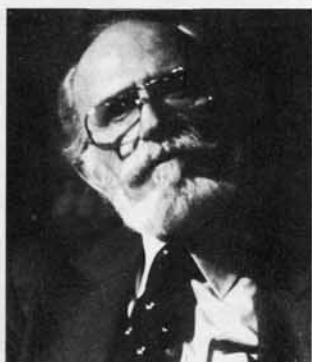
NICK LUCAS



ROBERTA SHERWOOD



MILTON BERLE



KEENAN WYNN



EFFIE O'CONNOR



BILL DANA



JOE ROTH



FIFI D'ORSAY



GENE BELL



CARY GRANT



DONALD O'CONNOR



been blessed with this kind of success, and they have been gracious enough to, when appropriate, allow some of that media attention to work through them for the benefit of SPVA and the Variety Arts Center.

As a non-profit organization, we have few methods available to us through

which to adequately thank those members for their assistance. One which has proven popular and enduring is our Member Hall of Fame, which appears on the following pages and consists primarily of recipients of the Variety Arts Headliners Award, bestowed in conjunction with USC's School of Continuing

Education.

What cannot appear but nevertheless must be stated is our boundless gratitude for what these members have contributed to SPVA and the tradition of variety arts we strive to uphold.



BENNY RUBIN



BETTY GARRETT



AL MARDIO



HAL KANTOR



GLADYS AHERN



JACK HALEY



EDGAR BERGEN



WILLIE COVAN



EDDIE PARKES



ROSE MARIE



BUDDY EBSEN



EVA PUCK



VARIETY ARTS AS A VENUE

While the heart of the Variety Arts Center remains our nostalgic ambience and preservation of the great showbiz traditions, our pulse keeps pace with the beat of today's entertainers, ranging from legit theatrical production, through rock and jazz, to our own shows and revues. It's all a part of our "living history" concept, where we revere the past but also help build the future of variety entertainment.

Our homegrown productions have included "The Whoopee Kid" and "Smash Flops," both with tunes penned by Oscar-winning songster Richard M. Sherman and SPVA President Milt Larsen, and "Goodbye Dear, I'll Be Back In A Year," a zesty revue of World War II songs.

Our shows offered on an ongoing

basis include the Variety Arts Radio Theatre, (under the direction of Roger Rittner), which sports our own troupe of radio players who perform original scripts from that bygone era as if actually broadcasting.

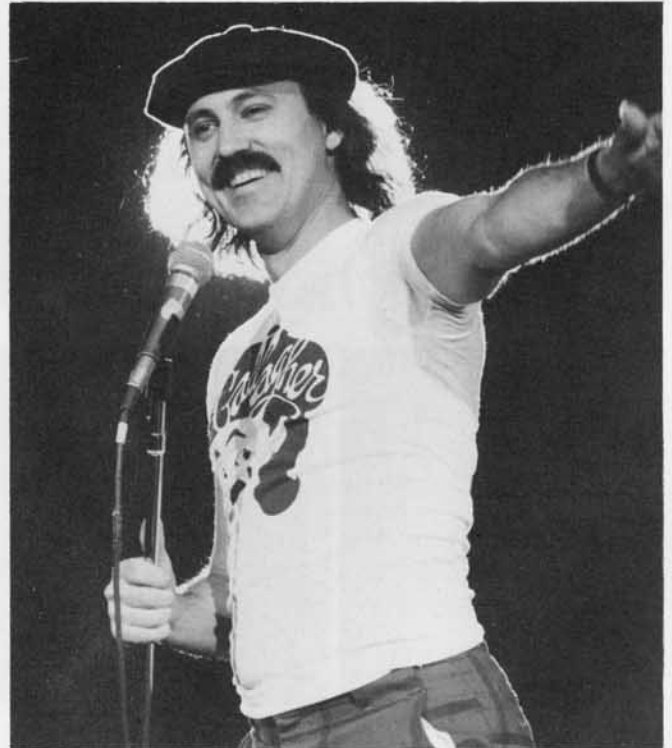
And, of course, our main stage plays host to the annual "It's Magic!" extravaganza, a legerdemain tradition initiated in 1956. Every year the world's finest magicians appear on one stage to help celebrate the Halloween season in Los Angeles with nearly two weeks of performances.

Among the traveling shows which have been booked into our main theatre is the hit musical, Vinnette Carroll's "Your Arms Too Short To Box With God." This soaring celebration of gospel

song left theatregoers from coast-to-coast dancing down the aisles and shouting for more. Its engagement here at the Variety Arts Theatre was no exception.

Music concerts have become staple fare at the theatre as well. We launched our concert series with several soldout bookings of jazz performer Ricky Lee Jones. This has been followed with a wide spectrum of top acts, ranging from the new wave beat of The Police to the sensuous rock of Kim Carnes and her "Bette Davis Eyes."

After all, variety entertainment is our watchword, and it seems appropriate that a variety of productions has found the Variety Arts Center a successful venue.



Kim Carnes ("Bette Davis Eyes") and comedian Gallagher have performed in the acoustically perfect, intimate surroundings of the theatre.



"Smash Flops" featured forgettable "hits."



World famed Richiardi (above) and Shimada (below) have mesmerized patrons of "It's Magic!".



"Goodbye, Dear, I'll Be Back In A Year" recalled tuneful memories of World War II.



SPVA President Milt Larsen accepts country artist Emmy Lou Harris' addition to our growing "wall of fame."



Variety Arts Radio Theatre "on the air," directed by Roger Rittner.





VARIETY ARTS AS A STAR



Film, television and commercial production companies love to shoot on location at Variety Arts Center. While production managers cite the authentic decor, reasonable shooting fees and extreme cooperation offered here, the hard working crew members usually lick their lips and recall our famous barbeque rib bones.

The Center offers them a "package deal" which few production companies can refuse. Not only will the Variety Arts Center assist them in true showbiz style ("You need that wall removed?... Sure!"), but the Center will feed cast and crew in the Roof Garden Restaurant as part of the service. This becomes a morale factor with crews, who are more often fed from mobile catering trucks. (One lighting grip was heard to remark, "My God! Real cloth napkins!...").

Among the films and TV shows which have shot here are "The Gangster Chronicles," "Eight Is Enough," "Valley Of The Dolls - 1981," "Dark Room," "Charlie Chan And The Curse Of The Dragon Queen" and "The Next Sting." Commercials lensed here include The Mills Brothers for American Express and a spot for Gilbey's Gin.



Production rolls at Variety Arts Center with (top left) "Valley Of The Dolls - 1981" and (left) "The Gangster Chronicles." At right, American Film Institute students shooting in the Main Library.





OUR THANKS

Your patronage in visiting the Variety Arts Center and your purchase of this souvenir booklet are greatly appreciated. We hope your nostalgic excursion into both the past and the future of the live entertainment form has proven to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

If so, we earnestly hope you will entertain the thought of joining us in the SPVA to help continue our ongoing restoration of the Center, and help support living theatre in downtown Los Angeles.

Listed at right are honored members of SPVA as well as our hardworking staff, without whose loyal support and patience none of what you've enjoyed during this visit would have been possible. Thanks again.



SPVA Board of Directors (from left)
Dr. Thomas Heric, Richard Sherman, Milt Larsen, John Shrum, Bill Larsen
(Not pictured are Directors Roger Rittner and John Kaznetsis.)

**Diamond Circle
Patron Members**
Dr. Thomas Heric
Geri Jaffe
Milton Larsen
William Larsen
Richard M. Sherman
Frank Sherwood
John Shrum

Patron Members
M.F. "Mickey" Bach
Ray Beardsley
Carl E. Bergstrom
J. Wm. Birdsall
Gerald Blount, Jr.
Rober G. Bottoms
Jeanne St. Pierre Boudreau
Hilda W. Clay
Frank M. Cunningham
Julia C. Davis
Henry. O. Eversole, Jr.
Dr. Bernard Gavron
Cary Grant
Austin Green
R.L. Huffman
Dr. Lawrence A. Johannsen
Barry J. Katz
John T. Kehoe
Howard Klausner
Shirley F. Knopf
Harold B. Kotkin
Larry Madick
Arthur Mintz
William P. O'Neill
Whitney Roberts
Hal Pettijohn
Pearl L. Rapp
Jerry Rosen
Dr. Alan Ross
Kenneth L. Rounds
Tom Ruston
D.J. Sandler
Lawrence Scalia
Lou Scott
Stanley Segil
Florence Smestead
Dr. Dale Stewart
Joseph Stoddard
Elaine Swanson
Wilford A. Swanson
Wallace Wong

Director of Club Activities
Richard Mentzer

Director of Club Facilities
Kevin O'Connor

Director of Education
Robert Dwan

Legal Advisor
Gerald M. Singer

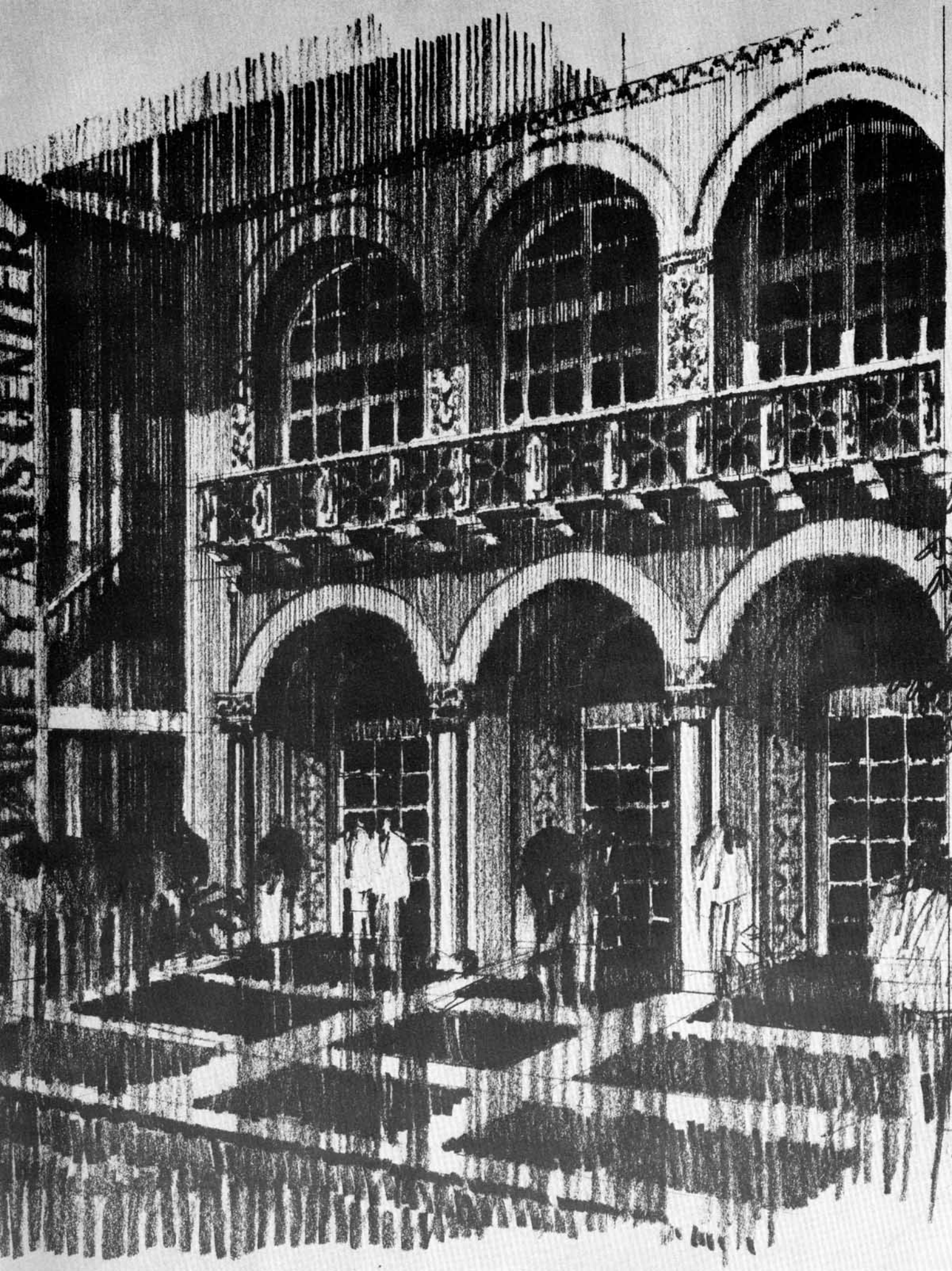
Financial Advisors
Lewis P. Horwitz
Edna Bruce

Librarian
Carl Flemming

Film Archivist
Robert Chatterton

Film/Video Librarian
Nisan Eventoff

Music Archivist
Vincent Hauser



THEATERS - LOS ANGELES -
VARIETY ARTS CENTER
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