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**ENTERTAINMENT** State and Orpheum manager eyes third venue

# Krohn aims to stage Mann theater rehab

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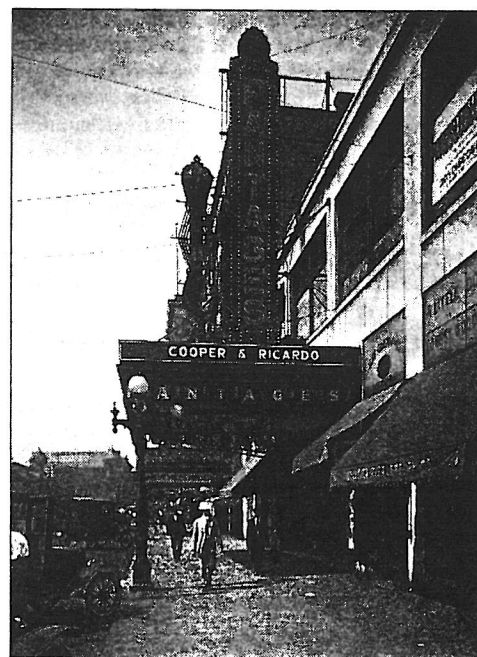
The manager of the State and Orpheum theaters in downtown Minneapolis wants to purchase an 80-year-old building, renovate it, and add it to his roster of playhouses.

Fred Krohn is gathering investors to try and purchase the old Mann movie theater at 708 Hennepin Ave., which he thinks would complement the two city-owned stages his Historic Theater Group operates a few blocks to the west.

"One more theater of about 1,000 seats would allow us to do just about anything," he said Thursday.

Krohn, whose firm manages the State and Orpheum for its owner, the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA), faces several obstacles to rehabilitating the Mann into a theatrical stage. Chief among them is the fact that building owner Ted Mann would like to tear down the building and replace it with a parking lot.

Krohn will also need to put together a financing package to pay for the renovation, which he estimates will cost around \$4 million, in addition to the cost of the land itself. MCDA officials have already told Krohn they're not interested in  
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Fred Krohn wants to rehab the Mann theater, Seventh and Hennepin, shown here in 1920.

## THEATER

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purchasing the building, but said they might be willing to help issue bonds for the rehab work.

And in addition, there's the question of whether downtown Minneapolis can support another major theater on Hennepin Avenue. In addition to the two stages Krohn manages, the city also owns the building that houses the Hey City Stage at 824 Hennepin Ave.

"I think [Krohn] should sell out [shows in] his other theaters first" sniped Kevin McCollum, president of St. Paul's Ordway Music Theatre. Both Krohn and McCollum have expressed interest in having their respective groups eventually purchase the State and Orpheum from the MCDA.

Krohn said he envisions using the theater, which would be less than half the size of the 2,100-seat State theater or the 2,600-seat Orpheum, to produce smaller, off-Broadway

shows that don't or can't make use of the larger playhouses' facilities. The theater could also be used to host shows for some of the Twin Cities' smaller nonprofit theater groups, he said.

"I have some ideas about how it may be financed, and about how it may be used, but I'm still working on them," he said, adding that he plans to have a more formal proposal within 90 days.

Krohn has been pondering the renovation project since last August. Not coincidentally, that's about the same time that Mann began publicly expressing his interest in demolishing the structure.

That's pitted Mann against City Council president Jackie Cherryhomes, who wants to save the building and has begun shepherding the building through the process designed to grant the building's interior historic status. That designation is now in limbo, waiting to be taken up by the city's zoning and planning commission.

In the meantime, however, Cherryhomes

has asked the city attorney's office to draft a moratorium on the creation of downtown parking lots, which would also effectively halt Mann's plans. Cherryhomes did not return phone calls for this article.

That action, in turn, rankles Jerry Brill, Mann's attorney, who said the moratorium will force his client to continue operate an unprofitable venture. Simply bringing the building up to code will cost between \$500,000 and \$600,000 he said.

"What we're really upset with is the idea that we're going to sit there and spend half a million to fix that up, which we're not going to spend, and that we can't replace it with something profitable," he said.

Mann's property originally opened as the Pantages Theater in 1916, operating as a vaudeville stage.

It closed in 1930 and reopened as the RKO Pan Theater movie house in 1946. Mann bought the building in 1961. Hennepin County assessors now value the property at just over \$1 million. ■