

Hennepin Theatre Trust hosts historic theater tours

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The newest State Theater marquee is a compilation of all the previous marquee designs
Photo by Michelle Alimoradi

In order to share the historic achievements in theatre construction and production that have occurred within the landmark State, Orpheum and Pantages theatres, Hennepin Theatre Trust offers historic theater tours monthly to the general public.

Hennepin Avenue today retains only a small portion of its theatrical glory as Minneapolis' "Theatre Row." Previously home to over 70 different theaters, the blocks between 10th Street and 4th Street still holds onto three major gems: the Orpheum, the State and the Pantages. Nearly a century after the row's oldest theatre, the Pantages, was erected as a vaudeville house in 1916, the Hennepin Theatre Trust is bringing to a close more than a decade of renovation projects to restore the ornate charm of Theatre Row's most memorable stages.

A historic theatre tour will lead you through the lush lobbies to the dark catacombs of each of the three major theatres, enlightening each tourist to the many nuances of the architecture as well as history of each building's role in the theater community over the past 80 plus years. During the renovation process, small museums of each theatre's artifacts have been created within each space to pay tribute to the old production methods. Renovators took care to preserve the spectacular ambiance of the early 20th century theatre experience when people came to the theatre to escape their drab realities. To supplement those efforts, the row has undergone additional street renovation including ultra bright LED street lamps to illuminate theatre row's widened sidewalks and manicured treescape.

The State Theatre, which opened in February of 1921 is perhaps the most lavish of the historic trio. Built in the style of Italian Free Renaissance, the building is characterized by intricate wall cover and gold leafed terracotta moldings. Featuring a monstrous film screen, the State was known a "movie palace" in the early days of motion pictures, but now the theatre is now primarily used for live productions.

Backstage at the Orpheum Theatre, the halls double as a production scrapbook for big names such as Robert Plant, B.B. King and Jerry Seinfeld who each left their respective signatures upon the walls. Minneapolis proved its dedication to theater greatness when the city opted to move 10th Street over in order to accommodate a larger Orpheum stage house. This move made the Orpheum stage the biggest in Minneapolis and one of the biggest in the country, keeping Minneapolis among the top five cities to receive Broadway touring productions.

Down the street at the Pantages, the lobby gives no indication of the ornate Beau Arts style performance space that awaits each patron inside the hall. The mezzanine is lined with plaster faces keeping a constant eye on the stage as they sit serenely above the audience. This ornate component became part of Alexander Pantages signature slogan "meet me at the mezzanine." This was during his push to turn the theater into the social meeting place of the day rather than just a place to catch a show.

Tourists can find even more fun facts on a tour of the [Hennepin Theatres](#) on the last Monday of each month at 1 p.m. More information on private and public tours, as well as group rates for educational tours can be found on the [tour webpage](#).