

FILE NO. 090318

ORDINANCE NO.

1 [Planning Code—Landmark Designation of 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater).]  
2

3 **Ordinance designating 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater), Assessor's Block No. 0541,**  
4 **Lot No. 018, as a Landmark under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code; and**  
5 **adopting General Plan, Planning Code 101.1(b) and environmental findings.**

6 NOTE: Additions are single-underline italics Times New Roman;  
7 deletions are ~~strike through italics Times New Roman~~.  
8 Board amendment additions are double-underlined;  
9 Board amendment deletions are ~~strikethrough normal~~.

9 Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

10 Section 1. Findings.

11 (A) A resolution initiating landmark designation of 2055 Union Street (Metro  
12 Theater), Board Resolution No. 672-07, which is on file with the Clerk of the Board in File No.  
13 071215 and incorporated herein by reference, was passed by the Board of Supervisors on  
14 December 4, 2007 and referred to the former Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board and  
15 the Planning Commission for their recommendations on the proposed landmarking pursuant  
16 to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

17 (B) Under Planning Code section 1004.3, the former Landmarks Preservation  
18 Advisory Board and the Planning Commission together had 90 days to hold public hearings  
19 and recommend approval, disapproval, or modification of the proposed landmark designation  
20 to the Board of Supervisors. Several extensions of this 90-day period were granted by the  
21 Board of Supervisors pursuant to section 1004.3. The last extension, made by Board  
22 Resolution No. 0393-08, which can be found in Board File No. 081206, expired on December  
23 12, 2008. Under Planning Code section 1004.3(b), the Landmarks Preservation Advisory  
24 Board and Planning Commission's failure to act before the expiration of the review period  
25 constituted approval.

1 (C) After the expiration of the review period, on December 17, 2008, the former  
2 Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board held a public hearing on the proposed designation  
3 and recommended approval of the proposed landmarking by Landmarks Preservation  
4 Advisory Board Resolution No. 630 which resolution is on file with the Clerk of the Board in  
5 File No. 090318.

6 (D) Also after the expiration of the review period, on March 18, 2009, the Historic  
7 Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation and was unable  
8 to obtain a majority vote to either recommend approval or disapproval of the proposed  
9 landmarking.

10 (A)(E) Pursuant to Planning Code Section 302, the Board finds that the proposed  
11 landmark designation of 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater) will serve the public necessity,  
12 convenience and welfare.

13 (B)(E) The Board finds that the proposed landmark designation of 2055 Union Street  
14 (Metro Theater) is consistent with the City's General Plan and with Planning Code Section  
15 101.1(b) for the reasons set forth in the document entitled "Board of Supervisors of the City  
16 and County of San Francisco, General Plan Policies and Planning Code Section 101.1—  
17 General Plan Consistency and Implementation, 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater)," which is  
18 on file with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in File No. 090318 and is  
19 incorporated herein by reference. The Board finds that the proposed landmark designation is  
20 consistent with the City's General Plan and with Planning Code Section 101.1(b) for the  
21 reasons set forth in said document.

22 (C)(G) The Planning Department has determined that the actions contemplated in this  
23 Ordinance are in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (California Public  
24 Resources Code section 21000 et seq.). Said determination is on file with the Clerk of the  
25 Board of Supervisors in File No. 090318 and is incorporated herein by reference.

1           (D)(H) The Board of Supervisors hereby finds that 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater)  
2 on Lot 018 in Assessor's Block 0541 has a special character and special historical,  
3 architectural, and aesthetic interest and value, and that its designation as a Landmark will  
4 further the purposes of and conform to the standards set forth in Article 10 of the San  
5 Francisco Planning Code.

6           (I) Additionally, the Board of Supervisors finds that the Heinsbergen Design  
7 Company murals, the Ionic columns, the grilles, and the urns located inside the auditorium are  
8 important interior features of the theater, which the property owner is committed to retaining.  
9 Although these features are not part of this landmark designation and are not hereby  
10 designated under Article 10 of the Planning Code, the Board understands that the property  
11 owner has represented to the community and to this Board that they are committed to making  
12 the protection of the murals and other interior features a condition of any future conditional  
13 use permit granted for the property.

14  
15           Section 2: Designation. Pursuant to Section 1004 of the Planning Code, 2055 Union  
16 Street (Metro Theater), in Lot 018 of Assessor's Block 0541 is hereby designated as a San  
17 Francisco Landmark under Article 10 of the Planning Code.

18           Section 3. Required Data.

19           (A) The description, location, and boundary of the Landmark site consists of the City  
20 parcel located at Lot 018 in Assessor's Block 0541, with the street address of 2055 Union  
21 Street (Metro Theater).

22           (B) The characteristics of the Landmark that justify its designation are described and  
23 shown in the Landmark Designation Report, adopted by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory  
24 Board on December 17, 2008, and other supporting materials contained in Planning  
25 Department Case Docket No. 2007.1401L. In brief, the National Register of Historic Places

1 characteristics that justify the Landmark's designation are as follows: (1) under Criterion A  
2 (Event) for its association with the development of single-screen neighborhood theaters in  
3 San Francisco and for its association with the San Francisco International Film Festival; (2)  
4 under Criterion C (Design/Construction) for embodying the distinctive characteristics of the  
5 neighborhood theatre building type constructed in San Francisco during the first decades of  
6 the 20th century.

7 (C) The particular exterior features that shall be preserved, or replaced in-kind as  
8 determined necessary, are those generally shown in photographs and described in the  
9 Landmark Designation Report, which can be found in Planning Department Docket No.  
10 2007.1401L and which is incorporated in this designation by reference as though fully set  
11 forth. Specifically, the following exterior features shall be preserved: the multi-story form and  
12 massing; projecting marquee with neon lighting; vertical blade sign with neon lighting; and the  
13 Spanish Colonial Revival and Art Deco period façade elements, including the pilasters,  
14 parapet, and plaster ornamentation.

15 Section 4. The property shall be subject to further controls and procedures pursuant to  
16 the San Francisco Planning Code and Article 10.

17 APPROVED AS TO FORM:  
18 DENNIS J. HERRERA, City Attorney

19 By:

  
20 Mariena G. Byrne  
21 Deputy City Attorney



# City and County of San Francisco

City Hall  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102-4689

## Tails Ordinance

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**File Number:** 090318

**Date Passed:**

Ordinance designating 2055 Union Street (Metro Theater), Assessor's Block No. 0541, Lot No. 018, as a Landmark under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code; and adopting General Plan, Planning Code 101.1(b) and environmental findings.

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July 7, 2009 Board of Supervisors — PASSED, ON FIRST READING

Ayes: 11 - Alioto-Pier, Avalos, Campos, Chiu, Chu, Daly, Dufty, Elsbernd, Mar, Maxwell, Mirkarimi

July 14, 2009 Board of Supervisors — FINALLY PASSED

Ayes: 11 - Alioto-Pier, Avalos, Campos, Chiu, Chu, Daly, Dufty, Elsbernd, Mar, Maxwell, Mirkarimi

File No. 090318

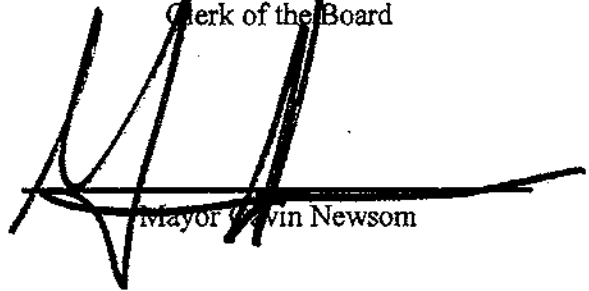
I hereby certify that the foregoing Ordinance was **FINALLY PASSED** on July 14, 2009 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.



Angela Calvillo  
Clerk of the Board

7/21/2009

Date Approved



Mayor Gavin Newsom

**LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD**

Case No. 2007.1401L  
2055 Union Street  
Assessor's Block 0541, Lot 18  
Resolution # 630

SAN FRANCISCO

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

RESOLUTION # 630

**ADOPTING FINDINGS RELATED TO AN INITIATION OF LANDMARK DESIGNATION AND A RECOMMENDATION OF APPROVAL OF THE LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF THE METRO THEATRE (A.K.A. METROPOLITAN THEATRE) LOCATED AT 2055 UNION STREET.**

1. **WHEREAS**, on December 4, 2007, the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco adopted Resolution No. 672-07 (File No. 071215) initiating the designation of the Metro Theatre (a.k.a. Metropolitan Theatre), located at 2055 Union Street, as a Landmark pursuant to Section 1004.1 of the San Francisco Planning Code; and
2. The Landmarks Board, at its regular meeting of December 17, 2008, reviewed the draft Metro Theatre Landmark Designation Report prepared by Katherine Petrin and the draft Metro Theatre Landmark Designation Report prepared by Jim Abrams, which included supplemental materials prepared by Page & Turnbull, for the property at 2055 Union Street; and
3. The Landmarks Board finds that both of the Metro Theatre Landmark Designation Reports describe the location and boundaries of the landmark site, describe the characteristics of the landmark which justifies its designation, and describe the particular features that should be preserved and therefore meet the requirements of Planning Code Section 1004(b) and 1004(c)(1). The Designation Reports are fully incorporated by reference into this resolution; and
4. The Landmarks Board reviewed and endorsed the description, location and boundary of the landmark site (the entire lot on which the building is located, Assessor's Block 0541, Lot 018); and
5. The Landmarks Board, in considering the proposed landmark designation, employed the National Register of Historic Places criteria and found that the Metro Theatre is significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of single-screen neighborhood theaters in San Francisco and for its association with the San Francisco International Film Festival. The Landmarks Board also found that the Metro Theatre is significant under Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics of the neighborhood theatre building type constructed in San Francisco during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
6. The Landmarks Board reviewed and endorsed the following description of the characteristics of the landmark that justify its designation:

## LANDMARKS PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

Case No. 2007.1401L  
2055 Union Street  
Assessor's Block 0541, Lot 18  
Resolution # 630

*The Metro Theatre is significant for its association with the development of single-screen neighborhood theaters in San Francisco, for its association with the San Francisco International Film Festival, and as an intact example of the neighborhood theatre building type constructed in San Francisco during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The period of significance for the Metro Theatre is 1924-1957, encompassing the date of original construction through the establishment of the San Francisco International Film Festival.*

7. The Landmarks Board reviewed and endorsed the following particular features that should be preserved:

### **Exterior Features:**

- (a) Multi-story form and massing
- (b) A recessed entry
- (c) Projecting marquee with neon lighting
- (d) Vertical blade sign with neon lighting
- (e) The Spanish Colonial Revival and Art Deco period façade elements, including the pilasters, parapet, and plaster ornamentation
- (f) The 2nd story window openings

### **Interior Features:**

- (g) Regular rectangular plan and volume divided into principal spaces of lobby and auditorium
- (h) Heinsbergen Design Company murals located inside the auditorium (1941)
- (i) The Art Deco ceiling mural and decorative molding in the lobby (1924)
- (j) The ceiling beams in the auditorium (1924, with 1941 painting)
- (k) The ceiling beams in the foyer (1924)

8. The Landmarks Board has reviewed documents, correspondence and oral testimony on matters relevant to the proposed landmark designation, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 17, 2008.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the **Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board hereby initiates** landmark designation of the Metro Theatre (a.k.a. Metropolitan Theatre), 2055 Union Street, Assessor's Block 0541, Lot 18, pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board hereby recommends** that the Planning Commission approve the landmark designation of the Metro Theatre (a.k.a. Metropolitan Theatre), 2055 Union Street, Assessor's Block 0541, Lot 18, pursuant to Article 10 of the Planning Code.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board hereby directs** its Recording Secretary to transmit this Resolution, the Metro Theatre Landmark Designation Reports, and other pertinent materials in the case file 2007.1401L to the Planning Commission.

Final

<b>LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT</b>	<b>LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>APPROVED:</b>
<b>CASE NO.:</b>	<b>PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:</b>
	<b>APPROVED:</b>
<b>PAGE: 1 of 15</b>	<b>PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:</b>

**HISTORIC NAME** Metropolitan Theatre, later Metro Theatre  
**POPULAR NAME** Metro Theatre  
**ADDRESS** 2055 Union Street, San Francisco, CA 94123  
**BLOCK & LOT** 0541-018  
**OWNER** Ehrman Properties  
**ORIGINAL USE** Theatre  
**CURRENT USE** Vacant  
**ZONING** Union Street NCD, 40-X Height and Bulk Classification  
**PRIMARY CONTACT:** San Francisco Neighborhood Theatre Foundation  
 Katherine Petrin, 415.421.1680  
**RESOURCE DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:** 1924  
**DATE(S) OF ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS TO RESOURCE:** 1941, remodeled; 1998, renovated.

**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

Check all National Register criteria applicable to the significance of the property that are then documented in the report. The criteria checked is (are) the basic justification for why the resource is important.

- (A)  Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- (B)  Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- (C)  Embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- (D)  Has yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

**Period of Significance**

The period of significance of the Metro Theatre is 1924-1957. The period of significance begins with the date of construction and continues through the year of the first San Francisco International Film Festival.

**Characteristics of the landmark that justify its designation**

The building at 2055 Union Street, the Metro Theatre, is significant under:

Criterion A (Buildings that are associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.)

Originally known as the Metropolitan, the Metro Theatre is located at 2055 Union Street. It opened on 23 April 1924. The work of prominent San Francisco architects James and Merritt Peid, the Metro was built for owner Samuel H. Levin as part of Levin's San Francisco Theatres Inc. chain. The chain originally consisted of the Alexandria,

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****DATE:****CASE NO.:****PAGE: 2 of 15****LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:****APPROVED:****PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:****APPROVED:****PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:**

Coliseum, Metro, Harding, Balboa and Vogue theatres. This building is associated with the development of single-screen neighborhood theaters in San Francisco. ✓

The Metropolitan Theatre, as part of the "Daylight Block", was significant in the commercial development of Union Street in the period following the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. ✓

The Metro is highly significant for its association with the renowned San Francisco International Film Festival. ✓ Continuously running since 1957, the San Francisco International Film Festival's first venue and the site of the festival's Opening Night on 4 December 1957 was the Metro Theatre.

Criterion B (*Properties associated with the lives of person significant in our past.*) Not applicable.

Criterion C (*Buildings that embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values.*)

Built in 1924, the Metro Theatre is the work of San Francisco's most prolific theatre architects, brothers James and Merritt Reid. The building represents a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era. The building exhibits distinctive design details associated with an architect-designed building. The design of the tiered seating was a Reid Brothers innovation and the Metro is the only remaining movie theatre in San ✓ Francisco that retains its original tiered layout. The Metro Theatre has excellent overall design quality and detailing, especially on the interior, and solid and noteworthy design values. It is in excellent condition and remains the most intact Reid Brothers theatre interior in San Francisco.

The Metro was remodeled in 1941 and rehabilitated in 1998, yet retains original elements and features of the first design. The extant material at the Metro represents a graceful melding of these separate building campaigns, renovations and restorations. Original materials such as plasterwork, decorative painting, and other details dating to 1924 co-exist with 1941 improvements and repainting done during the 1998 renovation. Architecturally significant original features, such as the proscenium, Ionic columns and capitals, urns and grillwork, remain behind walls that were constructed in 1941. The Metro Theatre murals (1941) are the work of the nationally known Heinsbergen Decorating Company. The Heinsbergen name is linked to theater décor and the firm was responsible for over 750 theaters nationwide during America's golden age of theater construction. A. B. Heinsbergen collaborated with the most prominent architects of his day. Overall, the Metro Theatre is an outstanding example of early 20th century theatre architecture that combines elements of the Neo-classical and Art Deco architectural styles.

Criterion D (*Buildings that have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.*) Not applicable.

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****DATE:****CASE NO.:****PAGE: 3 of 15****LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:****APPROVED:****PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:****APPROVED:****PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:****Description of the particular features that should be preserved:****Character-Defining Exterior Features:**

- Multi-story form and massing as typical of theater design of the era
- Pilasters, parapet and plaster ornamentation on the north façade
- Windows in north facade (4) *replacement*
- Projecting marquee with neon lighting, pre-1941
- Vertical blade sign with neon lighting, c. 1941
- Aluminum display cases set in mosaic tiled walls *new*
- Recessed entry *altered*
- Façade that rises above the structure
- Location along prominent commercial corridor, integrated with other commercial spaces

**Character-Defining Features Interior:**

- Regular rectangular plan divided into principal spaces of lobby, projection booth and auditorium
- ★ • Auditorium ceiling beams and coffers, in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, painted (1924) *altered*
- Sloped auditorium floor with fixed seating (1924) *altered*
- Tiered seating arrangement separated by partial height wall (1924) *altered*
- ★ • Wall and ceiling murals in lobby (1924) *altered*
- ★ • Entrance foyer ceiling, original stencil pattern and detail (1924) *altered*
- Decorative plasterwork, including moldings with egg and dart and swag detail (1924) *new*
- Parts of original proscenium, including Ionic columns in auditorium, painted gold (1924)
- Organ chamber with open grillwork and urns (1924) *hidden*
- Lobby ceiling, curved, tiered, now overpainted
- Auditorium murals (1941)
- Auditorium light fixtures
- Decorative metal railings in auditorium *some new*
- Projection booth *partic*
- Shallow stage

**Methodology**

This report relies on historical background information presented in the 2007 Historic Resource Evaluation by Page & Turnbull, Inc., the 2006 San Francisco Neighborhood Movie Theatre Draft Historical Context Statement prepared by the City and County of San Francisco, and documentary research using primary and secondary sources.

**Significance of Proposed Landmark:****Criterion A****Development of Union Street "Daylight Block"**

Development of San Francisco neighborhoods occurred between 1910 and 1930 and was accelerated by streetcar lines and the introduction of the automobile. Theatres became central elements in San

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****DATE:****CASE NO.:****PAGE: 4 of 15****LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:****APPROVAL:****PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:****APPROVED:****PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:**

Francisco neighborhoods, situated within walking distance from homes and often accompanied by neighborhood amenities such as markets banks, schools, and churches.<sup>1</sup>

The Metro Theatre is located within the Marina and Cow Hollow districts of San Francisco, which developed rapidly after the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Prior to 1915, the area was known as "Golden Gate Valley," referring to its largely pastoral setting and for the vegetable and dairy farms that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In comparison to the wealthy residential area of Pacific Heights located to the south, this district, known today as the Cow Hollow District, was the location of more modest residential development. The Exposition brought crowds of tourists and business to the neighborhood, and after 1915, it became enlivened with various commercial establishments such as garages, groceries, drug and hardware stores.<sup>3</sup> Union Street became the commercial backbone of the Cow Hollow and Marina neighborhoods and its streetcars connected them directly to the downtown area.

Following the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, the land was sold to the Marina Development Corporation, who subsequently partitioned 634 residential lots from this portion of the city. In response to the rising activity from the development of the Exposition grounds, theatre owner and investor, Samuel H. Levin, recognized the Cow Hollow neighborhood, and Union Street in particular, as a prime location for commercial development. Plans for what was to be a million dollar project encompassed the whole south side of Union Street between Webster and Buchanan streets, and would be comprised of "a modern market, containing eight or ten departments, a drug store, candy store, restaurant and twenty-six other stores on both sides of Union Street suitable for various shops that make up a complete business district."<sup>4</sup>

Dubbed the "Daylight" block, the project was to be spectacular, illuminated in the evenings by hidden floodlights in order to bring attention to its architectural detail.<sup>5</sup> Inspired by the Spanish Revival style, with the use of warm colors, heavily beamed ceiling, and decorative tile roofing,<sup>6</sup> the theatre was to be the central and dominant feature of this business block. Its lavish use of colorful marble throughout the interior would "rival in beauty and comfort any of the other motion picture palaces" in the city.<sup>7</sup> In addition to providing a musical venue, equipped with its own orchestra, the Metropolitan Theatre was to be equipped with the latest in motion picture equipment and technology.<sup>8</sup> The Theatre's design was also to be noteworthy for its seating arrangement that eliminated the use of balconies, and, with seating organized on an incline to accommodate 1800 persons, would allow unimpeded view of the stage from all seats in the Theatre.<sup>9</sup>

The project was Levin's most ambitious to date, and the location of the business block along Union Street was a strategic choice, as the area was serviced by the Union Street dual car system, while also close to the Fillmore hill line.<sup>10</sup>

**Planning, Design and Construction of the Metropolitan Theatre**

On March 16, 1923, Theatre builder Samuel H. Levin announced his plans for the development of the south side of Union Street between Buchanan and Webster streets. Anticipating the needs of the neighborhood given the rapid development of the area with flats and apartment buildings<sup>11</sup> was one of the main reasons Levin sought to invest in this area of San Francisco. The planning of the design of the Metro Theatre began in tandem with the design of the entire business block along the south side of Union Street between Buchanan and Webster streets.

The Metropolitan Theatre was designed in 1924 by the Reid Brothers, as a part of a Levin's larger business block. Of the buildings constructed on the south side of Union Street between Buchanan and Webster streets, the theatre was meant to "hold a dominant position on the block" and situated in the

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****DATE:****CASE NO.:****PAGE: 5 of 15****LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:****APPROVED:****PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:****APPROVED:****PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:**

center, flanked by a bank, market, drug store, candy store, restaurant, and other various shops.<sup>12</sup> Pre-inaugural promotion of the Metropolitan Theatre stated that its exterior would be entirely different from that of any other picture palace in San Francisco, "completely atmospheric of Spain, with that touch of originality that has made Levin successful in his past efforts."<sup>13</sup> Levin had already been established as a prominent developer in the Theatre industry, known for his investment in the construction of the Alexandria Theatre (1923), the Coliseum Theatre (1918), and the Balboa Theatre (1926).

The theatre's interior design and layout was innovative, employing construction of the newest form of seating, pioneered in San Francisco by the Reid Brothers. Instead of using balconies, seats were arranged on an incline of tiers, "permitting a full view of the stage at every tier."<sup>14</sup>

The Metropolitan Theatre and the Daylight Block were one of the most important business ventures in the Marina/Cow Hollow neighborhoods since the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition.<sup>15</sup> The opening night on April 23, 1924 included the participation of San Francisco violinist, Carol Weston, to conduct the Metropolitan Theatre orchestra,<sup>16</sup> and a screening of James Cruze's picture, "The Fighting Coward."<sup>17</sup> The dedicatory speech of the evening made by Acting Mayor, Ralph McLeran.<sup>18</sup>

**1941 Renovation of the Metro Theatre**

While architect Timothy L. Pflueger (1892-1946) has long been associated with the 1941 renovation of the Metro Theatre, his involvement is less clear than that of architect Otto A. Deichmann (1890-1964). A city permit, dated 1941, for interior work and plumbing lists the name of the architect as Otto Deichmann, 321 Bush Street. Historical consultants involved with the 1998 renovation of the theatre believe that Deichmann worked with Timothy Pflueger during the renovation. Research has not confirmed that Deichmann worked in the offices of Pflueger's firm, Miller and Pflueger, but the two men were associates and overlapped on important projects, most notably the Golden Gate International Exposition, 1939-1940, where Deichmann designed the Shasta-Cascade Building. The well-known mural by Diego Rivera, *Pan American Unity*, now located at the main campus of City College of San Francisco, was commissioned for the Golden Gate International Exposition. The mural depicts both Pflueger and Deichmann. Pflueger, friend and patron of Rivera, collaborated with him on the mural.<sup>19</sup>

In keeping with the fashion of the day, the goal of the 1941 Metro renovation was to update the style of the theatre from Spanish Colonial Revival to Art Deco. The façade changed dramatically to a more simplified style and telltale roof tiles were removed and marquee and blade sign were replaced. While a dramatic change in the interior aesthetic occurred, the renovation philosophy was not to "gut" and replace but rather to re-face by adding sumptuously painted new walls. Economic efficiency dictated that the original elements be left in place and covered over. New murals, executed by the nationally renown firm of Heinsbergen Decorating Company of Los Angeles, filled the side walls of the auditorium and depicted fanciful, dancing fairy-like figures floating over tree-tops.

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**

DATE:

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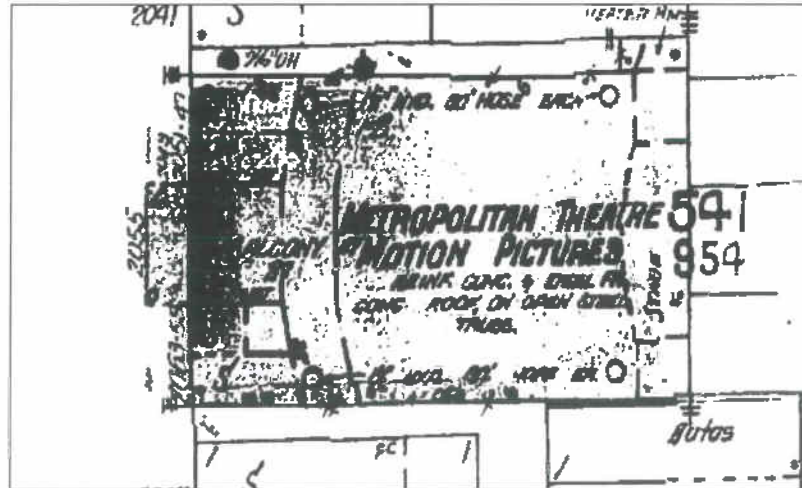
LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:

APPROVED:

PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:

APPROVED:

PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:



Sanborn maps, 1950, vol 3, sheet 248.

**The 1957 First San Francisco International Film Festival**

The Metro is the original home of the San Francisco International Film Festival, the oldest international film festival in the United States. The groundbreaking event, was hosted by Samuel Levin's son, Irving M. "Bud" Levin, also the Festival's director.<sup>20</sup> Levin felt that San Francisco had unique potential to support an international film festival and he sought to establish a festival comparable to those held at Cannes, Venice, Berlin, and Edinburgh, then the most notable of international festivals. In the 1950s San Francisco had proven itself to be receptive to international cinema and a number of neighborhood theatres including the Vogue, Bridge, and Clay Theatres had already been showing foreign films. Despite the fact that crowds were often small, Levin felt the City would respond well to a festival.<sup>21</sup>

On December 4, 1957, the festival's first opening night was held at the Metro and the inaugural festival ran 14 days. It featured films from 12 countries attracted 11,500 attendees. The festival was attended by notable film luminaries of the day including Hollywood director Frank Borzage and actor Franchot Tone.<sup>22</sup>

The Metro was eventually upgraded to a first-run venue, with bookings usually carefully chosen so as to maintain its image as one of quality and prestige. Throughout many decades, the Metro was far better maintained than most neighborhood theaters elsewhere in San Francisco.<sup>23</sup>

**Criterion C**

The building is significant for design quality and detailing which are such that it represents a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era. The building exhibits distinctive design details associated with an architect-designed building. The Metro Theatre has good overall design quality and solid and noteworthy design values. The Metro's interior and exterior were remodeled in 1941 and represent an outstanding example of early twentieth century theater architecture that combines elements of the Neo-classical and Art Deco architectural styles. The extant material at the Metro represents a mixture of different building campaigns, renovations and restorations. Original materials such as plasterwork and other details co-exist with repainted surfaces done during the 1998 renovation.

**LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****DATE:****CASE NO.:****PAGE: 7 of 15****LANDMARKS BOARD VOTE:****APPROVED:****PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE:****APPROVED:****PROPOSED LANDMARK NO.:**

Architecturally significant original features, such as the proscenium, Ionic columns and capitals and grillwork and urns, remain behind walls that were constructed in 1941.

Despite the predominance of the Art Deco style inside the Metro, it is important to recognize that essential elements of the original Reid Brothers' designed interior exist throughout the building - often left intact behind the new walls of subsequent remodels. Elements of the original Reid Brothers' interior include a large portion of the original lobby ceiling that remains intact and was uncovered during the 1998 remodel. A portion of the original staircase leading from the theatre lobby to the theatre's mezzanine lounge also remains and is marked by a decorative arch located behind walls that were likely added during the 1941 remodel. The mezzanine is located behind the second story windows visible on the theatre's façade and it retains many original details. The public mezzanine was converted to private offices at an unknown date. The original mezzanine provided a direct connection to the auditorium via an abandoned vomitory that had been located near the upper cross-aisle of the tiered, rear section of auditorium.

Inside the auditorium, numerous remnants of the original Reid Brothers design remain. The Spanish Colonial Revival style ceiling has survived every renovation and retains the bold, painted beams of the Reid Brothers' original design. The original proscenium that includes ionic columns flanking the stage also remains intact behind the wall-to-wall screen that was installed during the 1998 renovation. Finally, the innovative, tiered seating plan of the original design also remains. Replacing a true balcony with tiered seating became a hallmark of many Reid Brothers theatre designs. It also became a popular layout for new theatres throughout San Francisco including the Alexandria (Reid Bros., 1924), Roosevelt (Reid Bros., 1924), Balboa (Reid Bros., 1926), Marina (1928), Avenue (Reid Bros., 1927), Presidio (1937) and Coronet Theatres (1949). The modern "stadium-seated" auditorium is a refinement of the tiered seating plan that was first employed in theatres like the Metro. The Metro is the only remaining movie theatre in San Francisco that retains its original tiered layout.

Collectively the remnant interior elements of the original Reid Brothers' design at the Metro constitute the most intact Reid Brothers theatre interior remaining in San Francisco. The Reid Brothers are arguably the most prolific theatre architects in San Francisco history.

**Art Deco Style**

Art Deco (also referred to as "moderne") is a style that was popular roughly between 1920 and 1939, modernizing many styles and themes of the past. The term Art Deco was not actually coined until the mid-1960s, to describe the exuberantly ornamented, highly geometric design style that exploded on the scene in the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs Industriels et Modernes* in Paris. Art Deco is divided into two phases, Zigzag Moderne of the 1920s and Streamline Moderne of the 1930s. Zigzag Moderne developed from classical designs, vertical Gothic works, and the forms and ornamentation of the Paris Exposition. Streamline Moderne was an expression of the machine aesthetic and the International Style.

The characteristics of Zigzag Moderne include smooth surfaces with sunken windows; the elimination of classical termination at the top of buildings; symmetry and balance; a flat roof with parapets; tendency towards the monumental, heavy, and formal; and ornamentation of zigzags, sunbursts, spirals, and stylized animals. The characteristics of the Streamline Moderne, which most people associate with Art Deco, include rounded corners and parapets; emphasis on the horizontal and bands; glass brick; round windows; steel railing; and brightly colored vitreous.

The new style made its way to the U.S. beginning immediately after the Paris Exposition, and exerted considerable influence on American architects such as Timothy Pflueger. The American version

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emphasized scale, bold form, and distinctive colors, all of which were considered vulgar by many traditional architects. With Pflueger's designs, San Franciscans developed a deep affection for that style that continues today. The style was admired early on by the American critic Louis Mumford, who recognized that the days of the elaborately ornamented period revival movie houses were drawing to an end, predicted that they would be succeeded by the Deco, with its stripped-down, classical style that featured precision, cleanliness, and illumination. As the architectural embodiment of glamour and sophistication, Art Deco became the style of choice for architecture and design in the motion picture industry until WWII. The large Deco Theatres of the period are among the most lavishly decorated structure ever built in this country. Timothy Pflueger took the style to new heights with the Paramount Theatre in Oakland (a National Historic Landmark) as well as many other well-known buildings.

**Reid Brothers**

The Reid Brothers architectural firm in San Francisco, a partnership between James and Merritt Reid, became one of the most respected and prolific of architectural firms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, James Reid was the principal designer, having studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. One of his most renowned projects completed prior to forming a partnership with his brother was the 1888 Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. After forming the partnership in 1889, the Reid Brothers played a crucial role in shaping the commercial nature of San Francisco, particularly after the 1906 Great Earthquake and Fire. Some of their most notable buildings in the downtown area include the Call Building (1898), the Fairmont Hotel (1905), the Cliff House (1908), the First Congregational Church (1914), exemplifying a classical, Beaux-Arts inspired design approach. The movie theatre building type allowed the Reid Brothers the opportunity to explore a variety of architectural vocabularies including Neo-gothic Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Egyptian Revival, and Moorish inspired styles. Theatre designs in San Francisco include the Balboa Theatre (c.1926), the Alexandria Theatre (c.1923), the Apollo Theatre (c.1928), the Coliseum Theatre (c.1918), the Embassy Theatre (c.1907), the Harding Theatre (c.1926), Fillmore Theatre (c.1917), New Mission Theatre (c.1916), and Royal Theatre (c.1916). The Balboa Theatre (c.1926) is the last of their theatres still in operation.

**Samuel H. Levin**

The Metro Theatre was one of a chain of theatres commissioned by Samuel H. Levin, San Francisco's most prominent theatre builder and operator. His chain of second-run movie Theatres in San Francisco included the Vogue, Alexandria, Coliseum, Coronet, Balboa, El Rey, and Harding Theatres.<sup>24</sup> The Balboa and Vogue Theatres are the only remaining movie Theatres of Levin's chain still in operation. An immigrant from Russia, Levin first arrived to San Francisco via New York in 1903, opening a penny arcade shooting gallery before embarking on his neighborhood theatre empire, later known as The San Francisco Theatres, Inc.<sup>25</sup> In 1948, Levin moved to Palm Springs, and his son, Irving Levin, took over as president of the corporation.<sup>26</sup> Irving Levin would continue his father's pioneering legacy in the movie industry by bringing the first international film festival to North America at the Metro Theatre.

**Architect Otto A. Deichmann**

Biographical information on Otto A. Deichmann (1890-1964) contained in the Page & Turnbull Historic Resource Study reads as follows:

Otto A. Deichmann was born in Germany in 1890. Not much is known about his background or personal life, but he appears in the San Francisco City Directories from

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1930 to 1968 as "O. A. Deichmann, architect," during which time he had a variety of office locations. Deichmann was known as one of a handful of Bay Area architects who specialized in movie theatre construction in the 1930s and 1940s. Some of his commissions include the El Rey Theatre, Manteca (1937); the Tower Theatre, Roseville (1940); the Garden Theatre, San Jose (1949, converted to mall); and the Roseville (New Roseville) Theatre, Roseville (remodel 1949).<sup>27</sup>

The photo of Otto Deichmann that follows is a detail from the mural *Pan American Unity* (1940) by Diego Rivera.

**Anthony Heinsbergen**

The Metro Theatre murals that were completed in 1941 were the work of the Heinsbergen Decorating Company. Based in Los Angeles, the firm had local offices at 145 Natoma in downtown San Francisco at the time of the Metro renovation.<sup>28</sup>

Anthony (Antoon) B. Heinsbergen (1894-1981), nationally acclaimed Dutch-born muralist, was born in Holland on December 13, 1894. He began his craft as an apprentice in Holland before emigrating to Los Angeles in 1906. Heinsbergen continued his art education in Los Angeles while working five years in the trades and studying at the Chouinard Art Institute. In 1922, after traveling and working throughout the U.S. and Canada to gain practical experience, Heinsbergen founded the A.B. Heinsbergen Decorating Company in Los Angeles. Over the next six years, he captured an impressive catalogue of commissions including architectural ornamentation and mural contracts for Elks Clubs in Los Angeles and San

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Francisco; the Pacific Coast Club, Long Beach; Gables Club, Santa Monica; Union Trust & Savings Bank, Los Angeles; Tower Theatre, Los Angeles; Roosevelt Hotel, Hollywood; the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel and, most notably, the new Los Angeles City Hall in 1928. Other San Francisco work included the Persian Room at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel (1936).<sup>29</sup>

During this period of tremendous artistic output, Heinsbergen's firm often employed a work force of more than one hundred artists and artisans. Throughout his career Heinsbergen collaborated with the most prominent architects of his day on buildings of all types, but his artistic reputation is indelibly linked to theater decors. Legendary impresario Alexander Pantages presented the 30-year-old artist with his first theater commission in 1924, and Heinsbergen went on to decorate over 750 theaters nationwide during America's golden age of theater construction.

Heinsbergen completed other theater commissions in the 1940s, including the Lorenzo Theater in San Lorenzo, California. During the latter years of his career, Heinsbergen participated in the restoration of a number of fine theaters, including the Oakland Paramount during the early 1970s. Anthony Heinsbergen died on June 14, 1981, at age eighty-six. His son subsequently assumed management of the firm as A. T. Heinsbergen & Company, specializing in the restoration of historic buildings and, quite fittingly, historic theaters. The junior Heinsbergen coordinated the restoration of his father's Fresno Tower Theatre murals in 1989-1990. The firm also completed restoration of the historic Orinda Theater in 1989.<sup>30</sup>

**Chronology**

- 1924 Metropolitan completed and 47ft. vertical electric sign and 10ft. wide marquee installed.<sup>31</sup>
- 1933 Marquee changed from letters to neon.<sup>32</sup>
- 1941 extensively remodeled to update the style of the theatre from Spanish Colonial Revival to Art Deco; façade altered; roof tiles removed; marquee and blade sign were replaced; interior work included new walls, plastering and changing doors, some plumbing work and painting and decorations; name of theatre shortened to "Metro."<sup>33</sup>
- 1948 Repair of fire damage, installation of new platforms and new seats.<sup>34</sup>
- 1957 the first U.S. International Film Festival premiere
- 1958 removal of present doors and installation of glass doors, removal of ticket booth and installation of new counter.<sup>35</sup>
- 1960 work on 4 lower floor aisles, wooden floors removed and substituted with cement flooring.<sup>36</sup>
- 1969 installation of new soffit over existing stucco soffit on marquee and install 34 lighting fixtures.<sup>37</sup>
- 1970 wood floor to be removed and replaced with poured concrete.<sup>38</sup>
- 1993 parapet safety program requirements included bracing for marquee and trusses.<sup>39</sup>
- 1995 accessibility upgrades<sup>40</sup>

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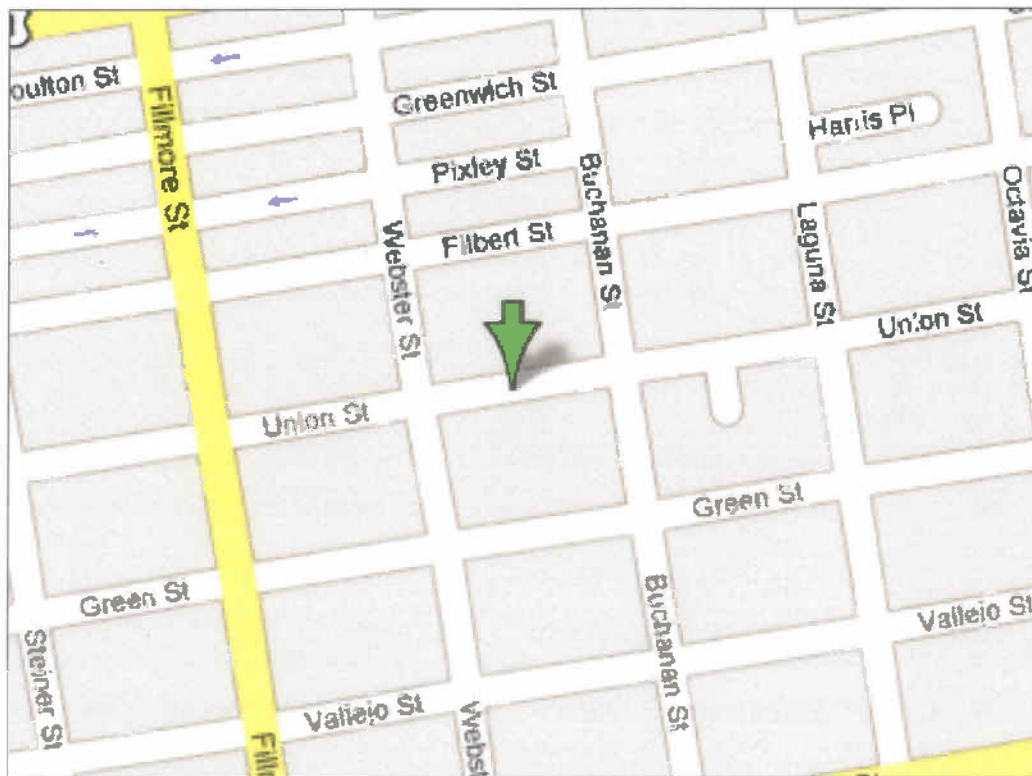
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- 1998 complete renovation in the amount of approximately \$3 million included: all system upgrades, electrical, heating, plumbing, installation of voice evacuation fire alarm system,<sup>41</sup> lobby upgrades including painting, new carpet, and new box office.<sup>42</sup> Murals and decorative paint schemes refurbished.
- 2006 theatre closed and boarded up with plywood<sup>43</sup>



Source: Google Maps

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**DATE** 25 January 2008

**PREPARED BY** San Francisco Neighborhood Theater Foundation

**ADDRESS**

**ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix of Images

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<sup>1</sup> Tillmany, 89.

<sup>2</sup> Woodbridge, 77.

<sup>3</sup> San Francisco Convention and Visitor's Bureau, "Cow Hollow," (San Francisco: unpublished pamphlet, 1967), in San Francisco Public Library History Room Vertical Files: "SF Districts—Marina."

<sup>4</sup> "Union-St. Building To Cost Million," in San Francisco Chronicle, 17 March 1923, 10.

<sup>5</sup> "Innovations in Lighting Architecture Included," in The San Francisco Examiner, 28 March 1924, 15.

<sup>6</sup> "Innovations in Lighting Architecture Included," in The San Francisco Examiner, 28 March 1924, 15. "New Theatre on Union St. Opens Easter," in San Francisco Chronicle, 29 March 1924, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Innovations in Lighting Architecture Included," in The San Francisco Examiner, 28 March 1924, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. "New Theatre on Union St. Opens Easter," in San Francisco Chronicle, 29 March 1924, 10.

<sup>10</sup> "Metropolitan Theatre and Daylight Block Open Tonight on Union Street," in San Francisco Chronicle, 23 April 1924, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Sanborn Maps, 1950, vol. 3, sheet 248; "New Business Block to go up on Union," in The San Francisco Examiner, 9.

<sup>12</sup> "New Business Block to go up on Union: Chief Feature to Be Theatre of Old Spanish Castle Type of Architecture," in The San Francisco Examiner, 17 March 1923, 9.

<sup>13</sup> "Big Enterprise for Union Street," in The Bulletin, 19 March 1923, 7.

<sup>14</sup> "New Theater on Union St. Opens Easter," in San Francisco Chronicle, 29 March 1924, 10.

<sup>15</sup> "Metropolitan Theatre and Daylight Block Open Tonight on Union Street," in San Francisco Chronicle, 23 April 1924, 13.

<sup>16</sup> "Metropolitan Theatre and Daylight Block Open Tonight on Union Street," in San Francisco Chronicle, 23 April 1924, 13.

<sup>17</sup> "New Metropolitan To Open Tonight," in San Francisco Chronicle, 23 April 1924, 15.

<sup>18</sup> "City Officials Join In Opening of Metropolitan," in The Bulletin, 24 April 1924, 10.

<sup>19</sup> The Diego Rivera Mural Project, <http://www.riveramural.com/> (Accessed: 11 January 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Gomez.

<sup>21</sup> San Francisco International Film Festival, [http://history.sffs.org/our\\_history/how\\_sfff\\_star\\_ed.php](http://history.sffs.org/our_history/how_sfff_star_ed.php) (Accessed: 11 January 2008).

<sup>22</sup> "A First for San Francisco: International Film Festival On," in San Francisco Chronicle, 3 December 1957.

<sup>23</sup> Gomez.

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<sup>24</sup> "Theatre Man Samuel H. Levin," in San Francisco Chronicle, 24 September 1969, 41. Theatre Context Statement, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Page & Turnbull, p. 26

<sup>28</sup> San Francisco City Directory, 1940.

<sup>29</sup> "Persian Room at the Sir Francis Drake Architectural Treatment without Precedent, Murals by A.B. Heinsbergen" in Architect and Engineer, December 1936.

<sup>30</sup> Firm and biographical information summarized from <http://historicfresno.org/bio/heinsberger.htm> (Accessed 11 January 2008)

<sup>31</sup> Building Permit #124714, 23 February 1924; Building Permit #135096, 18 February 1925.

<sup>32</sup> Building Permit #3043, 24 August 1933.

<sup>33</sup> Building Permit #59775, 20 February 1941.

<sup>34</sup> Building Permit #104112, 14 January 1948.

<sup>35</sup> Building Permit #216301, 17 October 1958.

<sup>36</sup> Building Permit #227118, 15 June 1960.

<sup>37</sup> Building Permit #378309, 16 December 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Building Permit #379340, 22 January 1970.

<sup>39</sup> Building Permit #9314598, 22 September 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Building Permit #9507249, 24 July 1995.

<sup>41</sup> Building Permit #9807207, 24 April 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Building Permit #9810863, 4 June 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Building Permit #1101076, 11 October 2006.



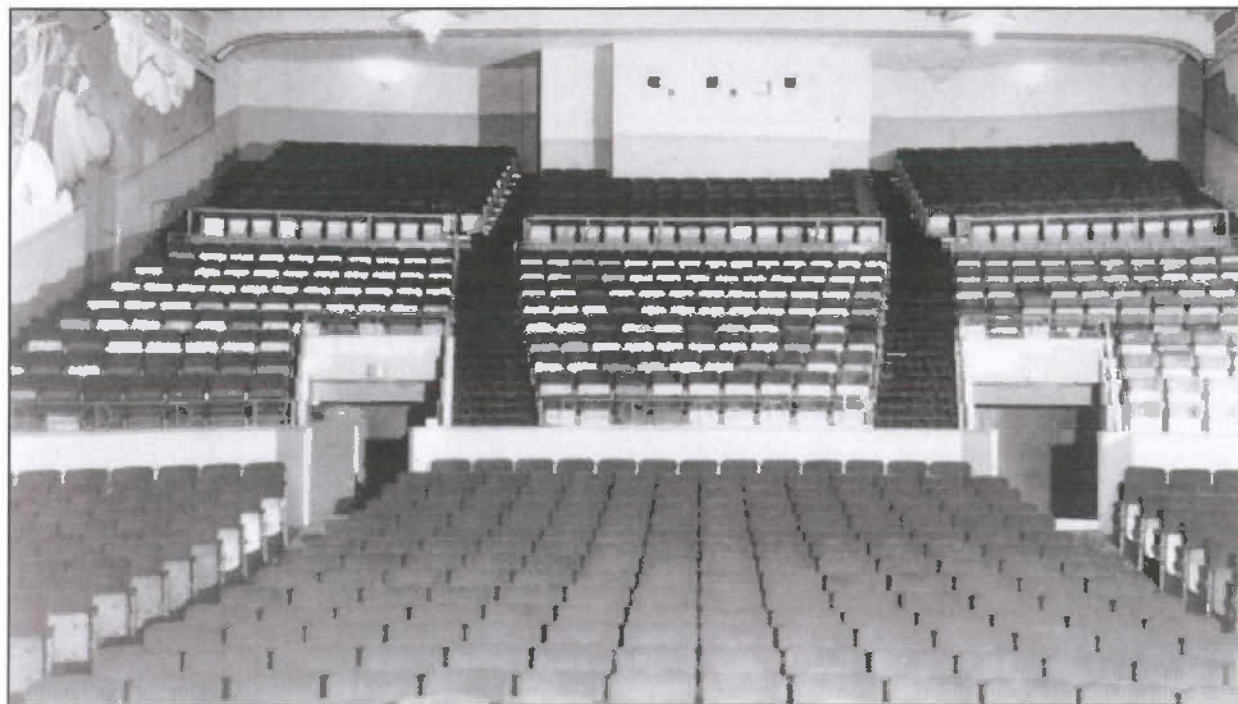
View of Metro Theatre on opening night of the 7th San Francisco International Film Festival, 31 October 1963. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph Collection, #AAA-8922).



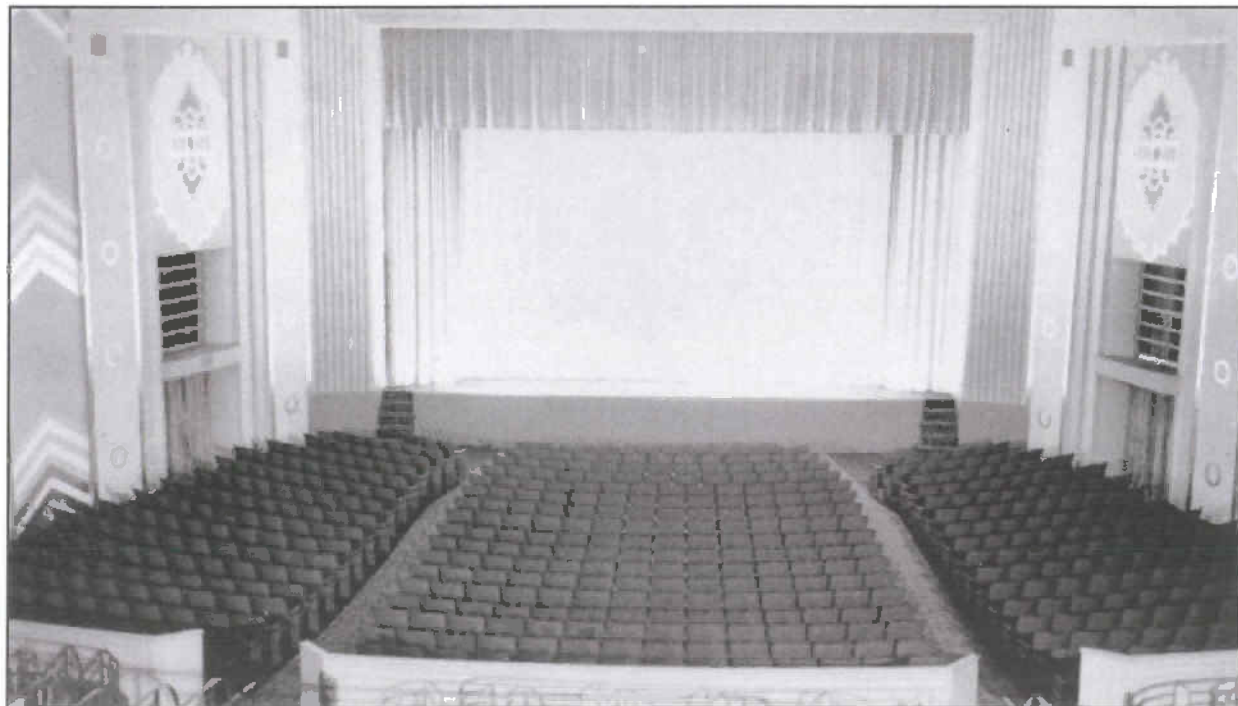
View of Metro Theatre. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph: Collection, #AAA-8924).



View of Metro Theatre, 1964. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph Collection, #AAA-8923).



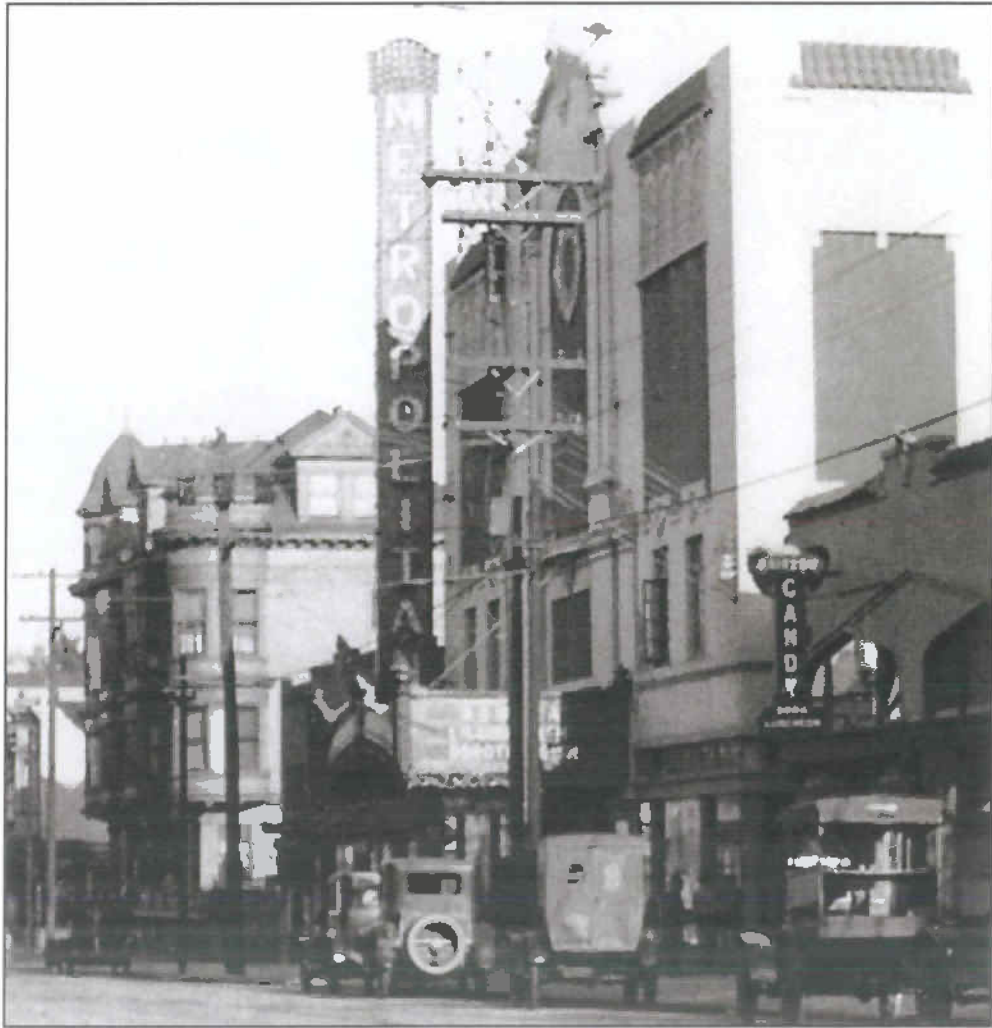
Interior view of auditorium of Metro Theatre, 1942. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph Collection, #AAA-8925).



Interior view of auditorium stage of Metro Theatre, 1942. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph Collection, #AAA-8926).



View of Metro Theatre, 1942. (Source: San Francisco Public Library History Room, Photograph Collection, #AAA-8927).



View of Metro Theatre; note original name "Metropolitan" spelled out on marquee.  
(Source: Jack Tillmany, *Theatres of San Francisco*, Charleston, Arcadia Publishing, 2005, 97).



View of Metro Theatre at opening night of the first San Francisco International Film Festival, then one of San Francisco's leading first-run venues. (Source: Jack Tillmany, *Theatres of San Francisco*, Charleston, Arcadia Publishing, 2005, 97).



View of original 1924 Ionic columns in auditorium behind 1941 renovations prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Park, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail view of capital in auditorium, prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail view of capital in auditorium prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Exterior view of Metro Theater at night prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Martin Schmidt, date unknown, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lowardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail view of finishes at ceiling of lobby prior to 1998 renovation.. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail of finishes at ceiling and wall of lobby prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail view of finishes at lobby wall prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Detail view of finishes at ceiling of mezzanine prior to 1998 renovation. (Source: Gary Parks, 1998, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/howardbhaas/285871917/>).



Interior view of auditorium and murals undergoing renovation in 1997. (Source: <http://flickr.com/photos/kentia/89760221/>).