

Alliance Letter

Emerson's Majestic Theater

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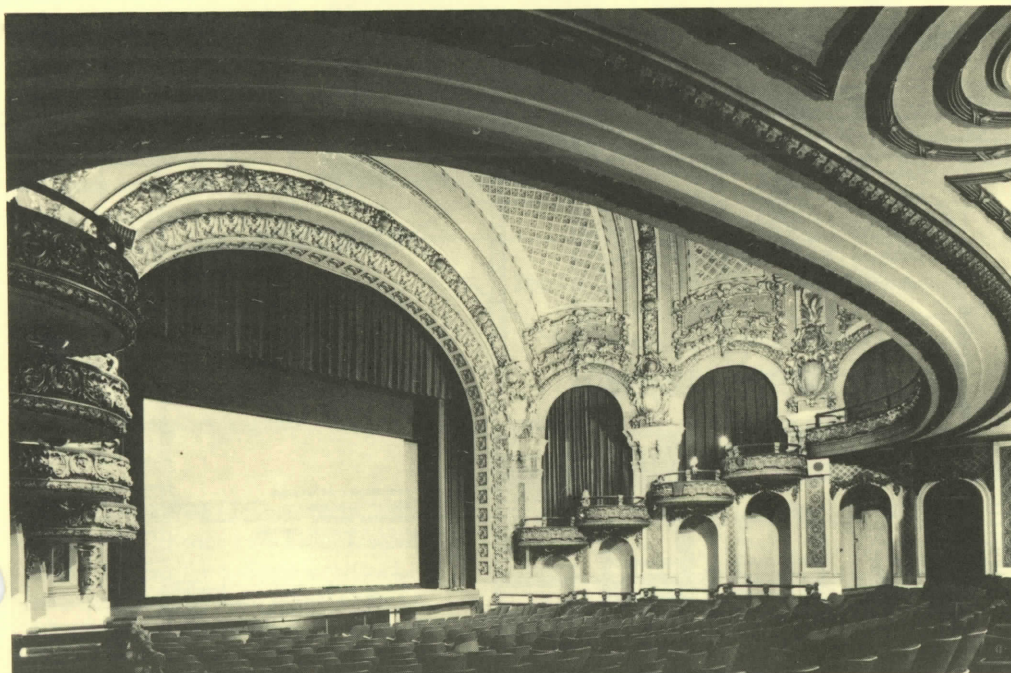
On February 16, 1903, the Majestic Theater opened its doors to the public for the first time. The next day, the *Boston Globe* praised it as, "The most beautiful playhouse Boston has yet seen." Designed by John Galen Howard in the highly unusual Beaux-Arts style, the Majestic was notable for its ornate design, commanding presence on the street, and innovative features. It was the first theater to integrate electrical fixtures into the architectural fabric, and the first theater to be constructed without balcony support columns, thus ensuring unrestricted views of the stage. The auditorium's distinctive curved shape, likened to the inside of a megaphone, accounts for its superior acoustics.

For the next half century, the Majestic operated as one of Boston's most elegant theaters,

featuring such luminaries as Ethel Merman, Harry Houdini, Lena Horne, the Marx Brothers and W.C. Fields. In 1956, it was sold to the Sack Cinema chain and converted into a movie house. The ensuing decades were not kind to the theater: unable to sustain itself as a first-run cinema, it began to show horror films to smaller and smaller audiences. Alternations were made to the lobby which covered much of the original design, and the entire structure suffered from neglect and misuse.

In 1983, Emerson College purchased the Majestic to provide its Performing Arts program with a large theater for major productions, as well as space for all-college events. Emerson is the nation's only private college devoted exclusively to communication and performing arts education, with The Division of Performing Arts presenting over 30 productions on campus each year. Emerson is now embarking on a major effort to restore the Majestic to its former beauty, as well as upgrade its facilities to meet modern professional standards. A comprehensive analysis has determined the cost of accomplishing this goal, including acquisition, to be \$7 million. Emerson committed \$3 million to purchase the theater and perform the structural renovations required to make it operational. This phase is now complete and the Majestic opened in April 1989.

Once restoration is complete, the Majestic will make a significant contribution to the cultural life of Boston. The Theater's location in the heart of Boston's newly designated Midtown Cultural District makes it highly desirable to performing arts organizations, many with national reputations. ■



The Majestic Theater, Boston
Photo: Courtesy of Emerson College