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The Auditorium Theatre officially opened on December 9, 1889. Designed by **Louis Sullivan** and **Dankmar Adler** at the behest of Chicago businessman **Ferdinand Wythe Peck**, the theatre was immediately hailed as one of the most beautiful in the world, with its gilded elegance and graceful design. Today, it remains **one of the most important performance venues** in the world, hosting hundreds of musical, dance, theatre, and special events each year.

Chicago in the late 1800s was a leading center for political idealism and labor activism. One violent and fatal demonstration for the eight-hour work day at an open market near Des Plaines Ave. and Randolph St. occurred on May 4, 1886. This incident, which became known as the Haymarket Riot, **further inspired Ferdinand Peck to create a venue that embodied the democratic ideals that he believed could bring art to all of the people in Chicago.** Peck charged the renowned architects with creating a **distinctly American design** for the theatre, differing from European opera house models in that the **best seats were available to the average Chicagoan, not the elite.**

In 1889, the theatre was deemed **a marvel of cutting-edge technology**, featuring the prominent display of an astounding **3,500 light bulbs** (only publicly seen for the first time in 1879), **unrivaled acoustics**, air conditioning (which called for the delivery of 15 tons of ice daily), **26 hydraulic lifts** that could easily raise and lower sections of the stage, and an expansive **95-foot loft** above the stage for flown scenic elements. The gala opening night performance was the social event of the year, attended by **President Benjamin Harrison** and **Vice President Levi Morton.**



During its early decades, the Auditorium stage was the venue of choice for leading entertainers of the era, including **John Philip Sousa**, **Sarah Bernhardt**, and the **Ziegfeld Follies**, as well as political figures including **Theodore Roosevelt**, **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, and **Booker T. Washington**. It was also the home to the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** and the **Chicago Grand Opera Company**, and even hosted **indoor baseball games.**

In 1942, the Auditorium was taken over by the City of Chicago to be used as a **World War II servicemen's center.** The stage and front rows of the theatre were converted to a bowling alley and much of the ornate stenciling,

plasterwork, and art glass was covered over. More than **2.2 million servicemen** were housed, fed, and entertained between 1941 and 1945 at the theatre and its adjacent hotel complex.

In 1946, Roosevelt University acquired the building, but, as it was lacking the money required to renovate the theatre, kept it dormant for two decades. In 1963, Beatrice Spachner, working as a trustee of Roosevelt University, undertook a campaign to restore and reopen the theatre, raising nearly \$3 million to renovate the structure. Architect Harry Weese oversaw the refurbishment of the theatre, and the **Auditorium Theatre officially reopened Oct. 31, 1967** with a gala performance of New York City Ballet's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



Beginning in the late 1960s, a host of rock and pop performers took to the stage, including **Jimi Hendrix, The Who,**



Janis Joplin, Bruce Springsteen, Prince, Aretha Franklin, and James Taylor, among others. The Auditorium earned a reputation as Chicago's home for the musical superstars of the day. Elton John was quoted saying he knew that he "truly made it" when he stepped onto the Auditorium's stage. The theatre is still a stop for many of today's high-profile acts – within the last few years, **Jack White, Radiohead, Elvis Costello, Andrew Bird,** and **Wilco** have all played the Auditorium.

Upon reopening in 1967, the theatre also began to host some of the world's premier dance companies – many of which continue to perform here today – including **The Joffrey Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Bolshoi Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre.**

Broadway musicals also found appreciative audiences at the Auditorium Theatre, with long-running engagements of ***The Phantom of the Opera, Les Misérables, Miss Saigon, Show Boat, Hello Dolly!, The King and I, Sister Act,*** and many more taking place at the theatre.



In the spring of 2015 and 2016, the theatre hosted the **first three rounds of the NFL Draft**, marking the first time the draft was held outside of New York in over 50 years.

In 1975, the U.S. Department of the Interior declared the Auditorium Theatre a **National Historic Landmark**. A second phase of renovations was undertaken in 2001 led by architects **Laurence Booth and Daniel P. Coffey,** modernizing the backstage areas.

To this day, the management of the Auditorium Theatre continues to lovingly preserve and restore Adler and Sullivan's masterpiece, while delicately updating various areas to meet the demands of contemporary artists and audiences. Typically, more than 250 performances and events — ranging from dance, theatre, and music, to educational programs and religious services — attract **more than a quarter of a million people every year** to Chicago's landmark theatre making, it a true staple in Chicago and the rest of the world.