

The image shows the interior of a grand, ornate theater. The stage is covered with a large, vibrant red curtain. The theater's architecture is highly detailed, featuring gold leaf accents, intricate carvings, and a large, decorative chandelier on the left. The seating area is filled with rows of red seats, some of which have small blue and white signs with letters 'A' through 'F' attached to them. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and elegance.

# Restoring **Historic** **Theaters** in the 21st Century

Jersey City, NJ | February 1, 2019

APTNE **19**

Annual Meeting & Symposium

## The Last Act: Temporary Plaster Removal and Salvage as a Conservation Measure

*Presented by*

**François Furieri and Marie Ennis**

**Plasterwork is one of the most** character-defining interior features of America's historic theaters. Whether applied directly on masonry, expanded metal lath or other substrates, three-coat plaster and cast ornaments were for decades the preferred material to embellish interiors, dazzle new audiences and draw them into the endless possibilities held by these new palaces of entertainment and wit. The unique combination of sculptural work, stylized ornamentation and refined historic finishes have made ornamental plasterwork in historic theaters a significant material to be preserved and protected.

But, what happens when protection efforts fail, or when physical decay, the historic theater's functional obsolescence or increasingly complex production requirements for theatrical performances make it impossible to retain ornamental plasterwork at its original location? Temporary plaster removal and salvage for off-site storage and reinstallation is an intervention that has been used in several historic theaters as a way to preserve historic plasterwork. This presentation will draw from the presenters' experience with temporary plaster removal and reinstallation at various historic theaters in NYC. Five case studies to be presented include: Plaster removal and salvage at the former Lyric and Apollo theaters on West 43rd Street to combine them into the current Lyric theater; Plaster removal and salvage for reinstallation at the Empire (originally



Plaster removal at the Lyric Theater



Plaster removal at the Lyric Theater

Eltinge) Theater on West 42nd Street before the building was moved westwards and the theater was rehabilitated as the current AMC 25; Multiple plaster removal, salvage and reinstallation campaigns at the Lyric to allow for complex theatrical productions such as Spider Man and Harry Potter; The ongoing plaster removal at the former RKO Keith's lobby in Flushing to prevent further decay and allow for adjacent demolition and new construction; as well as the planned removal and salvage of selected plasterwork at the Times Square Theater for reinstallation at a non-original location. The presentation will outline critical practice points for temporary plaster removal and salvage to ensure plaster protection and safe removal and reinstallation procedures. Key issues to be discussed include documentation of both the plasterwork and the supporting black iron prior to removals; plaster protection and stabilization prior to removals; approach for determining location of cut out lines as they relate to size, weight and feasibility of handling and transporting each plaster piece; supplemental structural framing design and installation prior to plaster cutting and removal; structural monitoring prior and during removals; cataloguing and crating prior to transportation, shop work and storage; as well as other requirements for restoration, reinstallation and refinishing. ●

## About the Presenters ...

**Jean-Francois D. Furieri**, Master Plasterer, Iconoplast Designs Inc. Jean-Francois D. Furieri is the third generation of master plasterer and architectural sculptor, and training the fourth generation with daughter Magali. Mr. Furieri's experience with temporary plaster removal and reinstallation includes the Empire (formerly Eltinge) Theater on West 42nd Street; dismantling, storage and re-installation at the Lyric to accommodate the production of Spiderman the Musical and for the ongoing musical "Harry Potter", to be re installed at the end of the show; and temporary plaster removal and salvage at the Times Square Theatre. ●

**Marie Ennis**, PE, Principal, Old Structures Engineering, PC (OSE). Ms. Ennis' experience with removing, salvaging and restoring historic plasterwork includes: the Lyric and Apollo Theaters; St. James Theater (protection during construction); the Lyric Theatre for the Spiderman production (removal, monitoring and reinstallation) and for the Harry Potter production (removal, monitoring, and physical protection of finishes to remain); RKO Keith's Theater Lobby in Flushing (ongoing design of armature structure for removal and reinstallation of elaborate plaster elements); and the Times Square Theater. ●

**Jay Cardinal**, Jay Cardinal Preservation Consultants (JCC). Architectural conservator Jay Cardinal has worked on many of the historic theaters of the 42nd Street Development Project, including the Lyric, New Victory, New Amsterdam, Biltmore, Empire/AMC, Selwyn theatres, as well as the Public Theatre and Carnegie Hall in midtown Manhattan, the RKO Kings in Brooklyn, the RKO Keith's in Flushing, the Apollo Theatre in Harlem, and temporary removal and salvage at the Times Square Theater. ●

**Angel Ayón**, AIA, LEED AP, Principal, AYON Studio Architecture, Preservation, P.C. Angel Ayón experience with historic three-coat plaster removal and salvage includes the design and contract administration of the ongoing temporary removals for off-site storage and reinstallation at the remains of the lobby of the former RKO Keith's in Flushing (an interior Landmark); conditions assessment and recommendations for repair of historic plaster and decorative finishes at Emerson Colonial Theater in Boston, MA; and temporary plaster removal and salvage for reinstallation at the Times Square Theater. ●