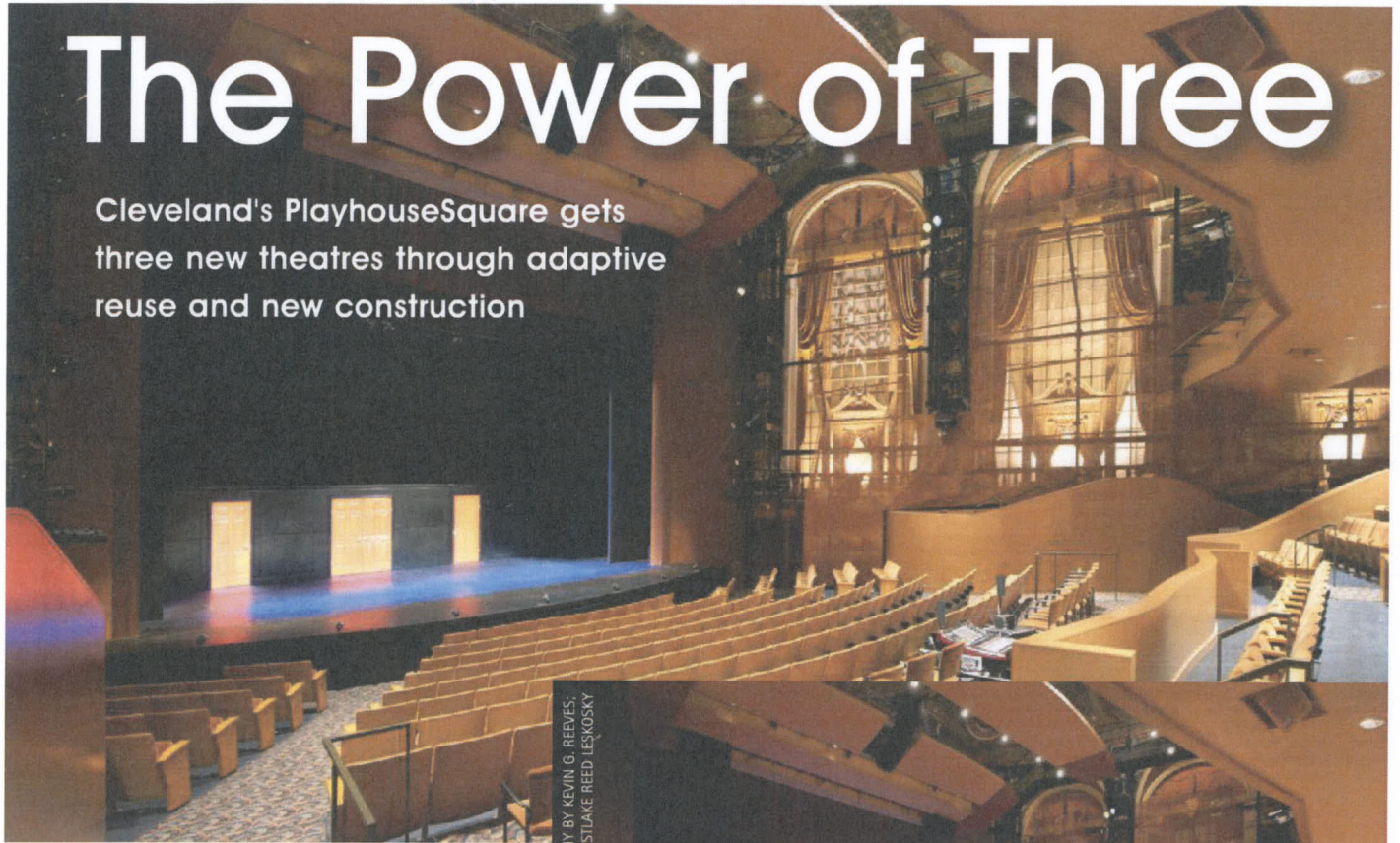


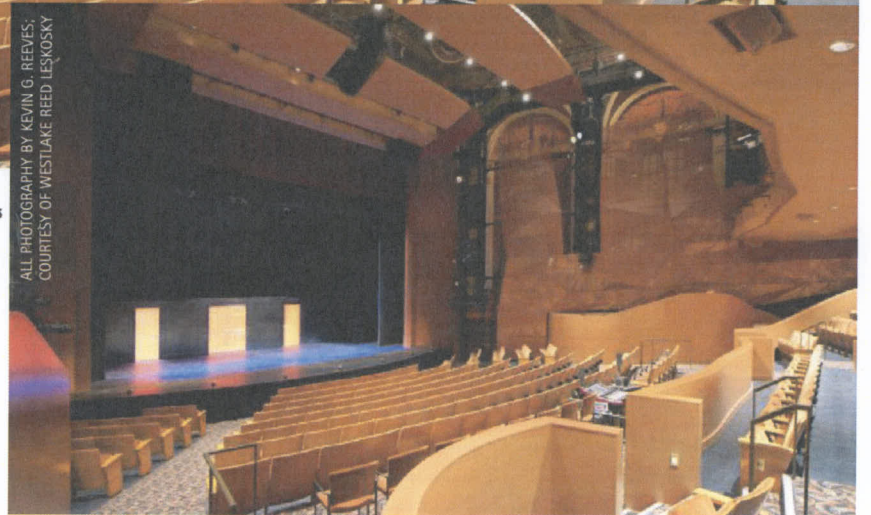
The Power of Three

Cleveland's PlayhouseSquare gets three new theatres through adaptive reuse and new construction



A scrim of perforated metal (in the right of these photos) lets patrons enjoy the historic architecture at the Allen Theatre preshow, but as the lights fade for the show the scrim helps adjust acoustics in the re-shaped space.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN G. REEVES,
COURTESY OF WESTLAKE REED LESKOSKY



The transformation of the historic Allen Theatre, a part of Cleveland's renowned PlayhouseSquare, is the culmination of a partnership among the PlayhouseSquare Performing Arts Center, Cleveland Play House (CPH), and Cleveland State University (CSU). PlayhouseSquare is the country's largest performing arts center outside of New York City. The Allen Theatre, originally opened in 1921, will now be the new home for both the Cleveland Play House, the oldest regional theatre in the U.S., as well as the CSU's Theatre and Dance Department. In a creative collaboration, which could be used as model for future performing arts centers, these three entities have partnered to create an innovative arts and education initiative.

Designed by the architectural firm Westlake Reed Leskosky, the \$30 million renovation and expansion project

is based around the 1998 restoration of the Allen Theatre, which had created a new stage house and infrastructure, as well as the restoration of its historic rotunda, marquee, and public amenities. The recently completed new adaptive reuse included significantly renovating the audience chamber—all in a historically sensitive manner—and new construction on an empty lot between the Allen and Ohio Theatres.

The Allen Theatre Complex today houses the original Allen mainstage space renovated down to a 512-seat proscenium stage and the new construction portion, which includes the 348-seat Second Stage and the 150-seat Helen Rosenfeld Lewis Bialosky Lab Theatre. With the completion of the Allen Theatre project, the PlayhouseSquare District now has 11 performance venues. "We're very proud of our theatres in PlayhouseSquare," says Paul E. Westlake Jr., FAIA, managing principal and a lead designer, WRL. "We've been involved with each of the PlayhouseSquare theatres."

Timing and financial considerations brought the Allen Theatre project together. Westlake's firm was designing a performance facility for CSU, which was going to cost close

ONLINE BONUS

One of the most distinctive parts of the Allen Theatre renovation was the metal scrim over the walls. For more info about how it helps the acoustics, head over to

www.stage-directions.com/allenacoustics





The view of the house from the stage in the Allen Theatre

to \$100 million. Around the same time, Cleveland Play House needed to find a new home as their theatre spaces were in real need of updating and the operating costs had skyrocketed. By bringing CSU and CPH into contact with PlayhouseSquare, WRL was able to create a program where the three entities could share a common set of theatres and contain costs.

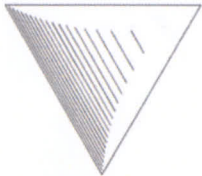
New Life for the Allen Theatre

The Allen Theatre, with its proscenium stage, was con-

ceived as a contemporary venue that is constructed within the historic shell of the original Allen without removing any of its historic façade. By using a unique perforated metal wall structure—referred to as the veil—and clever lighting, the audience can still enjoy the beauty of the original architecture yet be seated in an intimate theatre environment. The walls are lit so prior to the performance there is a mix of the contemporary and the historic. As the houselights fade down, the wall materials act as a scrim and the historic structure fades away. “With 3,000 seats, the Allen was a shoebox; basically a movie theatre, very long and narrow,” explains Westlake. “For years it was considered not to be viable, and was slated to be demolished.” It was renovated in 1998 to become a venue for Broadway touring shows but unfortunately the economics of touring changed and the theatre was only sporadically used since.

“The great outcome of the 1998 renovation was they built an entirely new stagehouse and infrastructure, and the audience chamber was fully restored,” Westlake continues. “At first we started to put all three theatres inside the existing Allen space, but we felt that it was better to develop two of the spaces in new construction.” The renovated Allen mainstage theatre has been created entirely within the original lower orchestra level with the original balcony mothballed for future development. A new seating plan was developed for the

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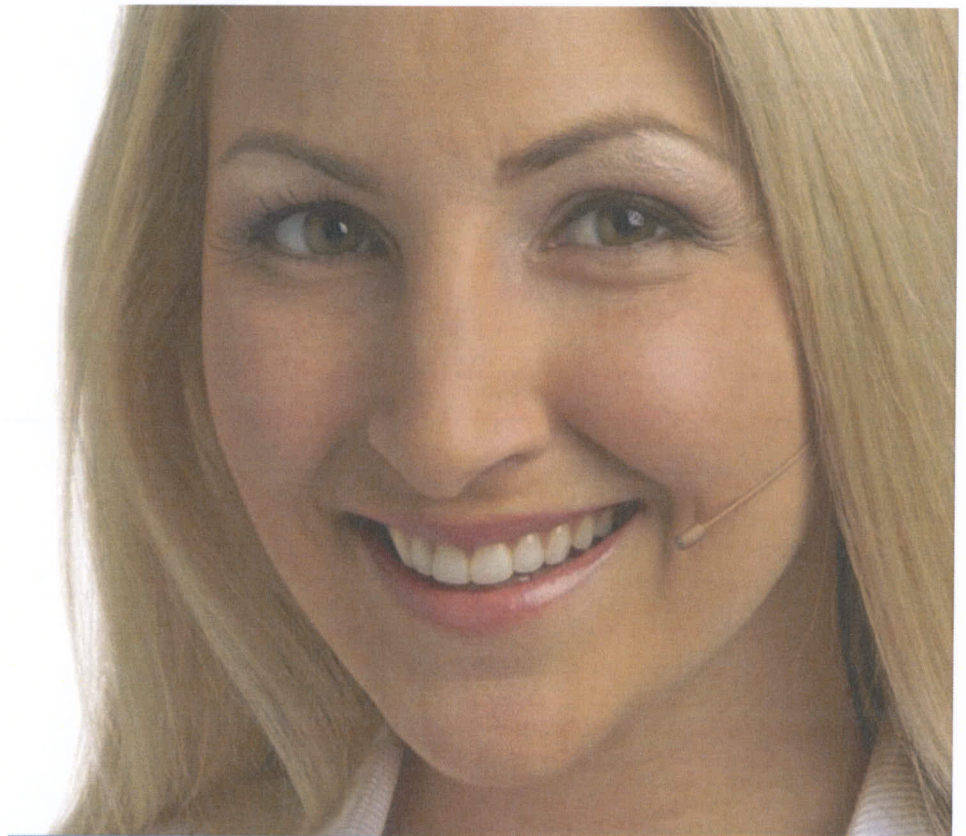
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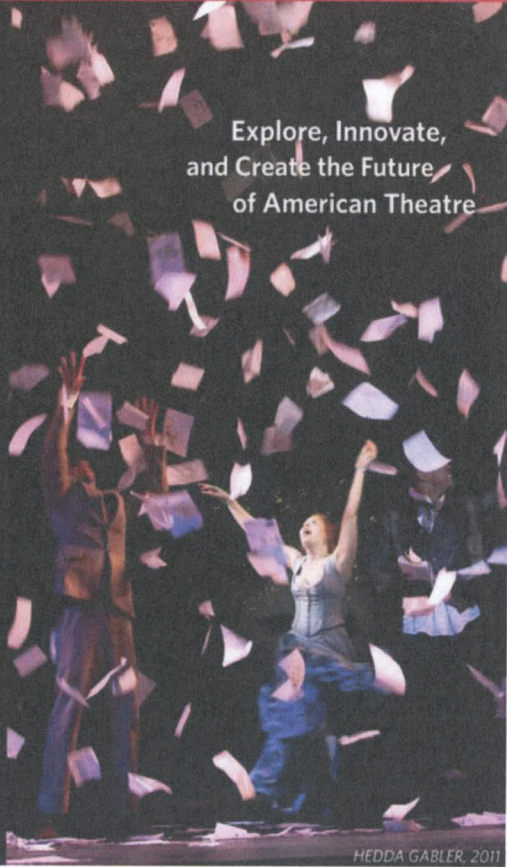
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Theatre Space

newly formed orchestra and balcony level, which allows for sightlines no further than 55 feet to the stage. It is now an intimate feeling space with a realistic seating capacity of 483, which can increase to 512 seats when the orchestra pit is raised to house level.

The lighting control system got significantly revised in this transition from a touring venue to a resident theatre. "We added permanent dimmer racks where touring racks would have gone," explains Darrell R. Ziegler ASTC, Associate Principal Theatre Technical Specialist with Westlake Reed Leskosky. "We added three ETC Sensor dimmer racks with three existing Strand CD80 dimmer racks for a total of 576 dimmers. We reused multicabled drop boxes from the 1998 renovation that run out to the stage battens to create electrics. The drop boxes used to connect to portable dimmers now connect to new multipin receptacle boxes hardwired at the permanent dimmers. For control data distribution we put in a full Ethernet system with an ETCNet3 system and an ETC Eos console." Cleveland-based Perovsek Engineering handled the installation and retrofit of the dimming and control systems.

"For lighting control, we have an ETC Eos in the Allen, an ETC Ion in the Second Stage, and an ETC Element in the Lab Theatre," explains Joe Martin, Cleveland Play House Director of Production. "We wanted to make ETC the standard for our professional designers but we also wanted different consoles for CSU to use for teaching purposes. Students will also have the opportunity to work also in the Hanna theatre which has a Strand 520i console."

The Allen and Second Stage got new sound systems with DiGiCo digital audio consoles.

Second Stage

Acoustics play an important part of the brand new 348-seat flexible Second Stage since it doesn't have fixed seating arrangements. Richard H. Talaske, FASA, president and principal acoustics consultant Talaske Sound Thinking explains how they handled this challenge. "First we recognized the room was a little too wide so we introduced sliding panels into a soffit that effectively narrows the space. The nature of those sliding panels is that they will slide into a location behind audience

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members and will be kept out of the areas where aisles are. Also there was a soffit developed over the promenade walkway where the audience enters into the seating area and has been shaped so that sound can be reflected across the room. Certainly the configurations that are possible include a thrust arrangement and an arena style arrangement. The shaping of the soffit reflects sound to patrons seated behind the performers since those theatre forms result in audience members being located behind a performer and we seek to distribute the sound democratically within the room and these surfaces and the soffits serve to distribute that sound effectively."

For Westlake, the Second Stage was the most interesting of the three theatres. "In my view, it's going to be one of the most flexible theatres that you will find," he says. "What's unique about it is that all of the seating is portable. We designed seating sections on rolling wagons that are essentially four seats wide and six rows tall that are fairly steeply raked. The seating wagons can be moved



The Second Stage space at the Allen Theatre in an arena configuration for the Cleveland Play House production of *Ten Chimneys*.

entirely out of the venue, or they can be arranged so that they can be coupled together. You can arrange it end-stage; in the round; runway; three-quarter thrust; and any permutations of those arrangements. They can do a matinee in the

round and then do an evening performance as an end-stage." Depending on the arrangement, the seating can vary from 207 to 348 seats. The seating wagons use tri-wheel turtles to aid in moving them around the room. Some of the

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wagons have only seats and some have aisles and seats. There are sliding panels on the gallery level to create entrances. SECOA built the seating wagons with seats from American Seating.

Ziegler explains the technical equipment in the Second Stage. "For dimming, there are five racks of ETC Sensor dimmers; a total of 475 dimmers, of which 396 are stagelighting circuits," he describes. "For distribution, there are pipe-mounted six-circuit boxes as well as the use of six-circuit multicables; the electricians are all flexible. The lighting control system is all networked using ETC's NET3 and the primary console is an ETC Ion. The catwalk hanging positions all include outriggers to allow for mounting moving lights to the catwalk."


The space does have a fly loft, with 15 single purchase counterweights at one end, and lighting positions in five catwalks around the space. Tiffen Scenic Studios handled the rigging here and in the Lab theatre. "If you play end-stage you can define it as a proscenium with the use of curtains and so on," says Westlake. "Or you can essentially play in the round and use the center of the theatre as your stage. All of the lighting, catwalks, and control positions relate to all of those nodes. It's really great for the professional company, but it also allows for the university to experiment with all of these different configurations." Also, the whole Second Stage is trapped. "We tried to build in flexibility as well as think ahead so we included power for automation systems," comments Martin. "We also included a video distribution network so we can plug in monitors and projectors like we can in the Allen."

Lab Theatre

The third space is the new 150-seat Lab Theatre, a flexible space for experimental or smaller programs. The Lab has a pipe grid for lighting, which Tiffen installed along with drape and drape tracks. Technical equipment in this space includes 96 ETC Sensor dimmers for stage lighting and 24 for house lighting. Power distribution consists of connector strips and surface mount boxes. The control here is an ETC Element console. Lighting fixtures consist mainly of refurbished equipment that CPH had used in its previous theatres. Seating in the lab theatre consists of Wenger portable chairs and platforms that were moved from the Baxter Stage at CPH's former location.

The Power of Three

"One of the big challenges on this project was coordinating three different entities," concludes Westlake. "But

this was what we kept referring to as the power of three—we had three institutions and there are three theatres. This project builds on the 30-year continuous redevelopment of PlayhouseSquare. It should serve as a national model for arts development in urban centers. PlayhouseSquare is unparalleled in its offerings of national-caliber repertoire theatre, Broadway touring shows, university arts, community arts, broadcast, shared production assets, and all of the amenities about which patrons and new generation audiences might dream. The Allen's three additional performance spaces are designed as contemporary venues designed and equipped for superb production capabilities, and audience experience." 

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