



THE NEW VICTORY THEATER
A project of The New 42nd Street

Administrative Offices
229 W. 42nd Street, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10036-7299

ABOUT THE NEW VICTORY THEATER

About The New Victory Theater

The New Victory Theater is New York City's first and only full-time performing arts theater for kids and their families and classmates. Since it opened in 1995, The New Victory has quickly become an integral part of the cultural landscape in New York City, presenting a 10-month season of adventurous multidisciplinary works from both around the globe and close to home.

The New Victory Theater seeks out sophisticated, thought-provoking professional productions that are as artistically rich as they are entertaining. From the very start, tickets to the public have been made affordable and now cost an average of \$18, with seats available for as little as \$8.75.

Intrinsic to The New Victory mission is that its performance season and education programs combine to create a unique artistic and learning experience that complements student development by using the performing arts as an educational resource. New Victory presentations inspire students of all ages to explore their imaginations and the world around them; many of these students experience their first ever, live performance in The New Victory Theater.

"Since its opening in 1995, The New Victory has radically altered the very way we think of children's entertainment...the New Vic's essentially reclaimed kids from decades of saccharine, intellectually offensive offerings. This is theater – in the widest sense of the word – that's challenging for all because it doesn't talk down to anybody."

Elisabeth Vincentelli, *Sunday Arts*, April 2008

A Brief History

What is now called The New Victory Theater was built in 1900 by Oscar Hammerstein and called the "Theatre Republic." In his own words, Hammerstein described it as the "perfect parlor theater...a drawing room of the drama dedicated to all that is best in dramatic and lyric art." Hammerstein's architects designed a Venetian-styled façade with a grand exterior staircase on the front sidewalls, leading to the first of two balconies, and illuminated by cast and wrought iron lamps. Inside, a large dome with plaster angels (or *putti* in Italian) perched on its rim crowned the elaborately decorated interior. The Republic's opening production, *Sag Harbor*, starred Lionel Barrymore.

In 1902, the impresario David Belasco took over the theater's stewardship. Belasco gave the theater his name and made extensive alterations to the interior. A string of hits followed its opening, showcasing such talents as George Arliss, Tyrone Power, Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish. When Belasco decided to re-title the Stuyvesant Theater on 44th street after himself, he returned this house to its original name, the Theatre Republic, in 1910. The Theatre Republic continued to mount plays and vaudeville acts at the theater, enjoying its biggest hit ever in 1923 with *Abie's Irish Rose*, one of Broadway's longest running productions.

Legitimate theater at the Republic finally ceased in 1931, when Billy Minsky turned it into Broadway's first striptease house. Minsky accelerated the structure's already radical facelift. By that time, the front staircase had been demolished; a large marquee replaced Belasco's iron and glass outdoor canopy; and a showy sign concealed the front upper level doors. Minsky painted a brash checkerboard pattern on the façade, juxtaposed with the faces of his leading ladies – including the famous stripper Gypsy Rose Lee – and installed a double runway down the middle of the auditorium.

Mayor LaGuardia banned burlesque in 1937, but Minsky kept his shows running until 1942, when the theater was finally closed down. In a burst of World War II patriotism, the theater was renamed the Victory and ran second-run motion pictures over the next several decades. When 42nd Street's decline reached new depths in the 1970s, the Victory became the block's first XXX-rated movie house.

By the early 1980s, 42nd Street and Times Square had become a blighted stretch of urban decay. The mission of The New 42nd Street -- the independent nonprofit entity established to assume long-term responsibility for the street's mid-block theaters -- was clear: it had to recreate the theaters as places of popular art and entertainment for New York City residents and visitors of all ages, races and classes, seeing to it that they resounded with life both day and night. Imagination and tenacity had to be brought to bear.

In the early 90s, with the real estate market at its lowest point in more than a decade and the nation's economy in steep decline, the Board and staff of The New 42nd Street elected to prove that change was possible on 42nd Street. Aware of the risks involved, The New 42nd Street bravely chose the least desirable property under its aegis -- the double-balconied Victory Theater -- and set out to create a theater for young people. The New 42nd Street conceived, constructed, and on December 11, 1995, opened New York's first theater for kids, their classmates and families, which upon its reopening, became the oldest operating theater in the City.