



STATE THEATRE SYDNEY PALACE OF DREAMS TOUR

(Many thanks to Carole Ritchie for this report and more of Chris Warner's photos are on our website)

On 15th September 2022, 16 Members of the Travel Club met at the historic State Theatre to enjoy a guided tour by Stuart Greene who has been with the theatre for 25 years. He had so much knowledge about the theatre and was very interesting to listen to. He took us through the many sections of the State Theatre and we can all say now that we have been on stage at the State Theatre.

We went through the stars dressing rooms and backstage areas. There were many posters of various famous stars and some copies of advertisements from newspapers which a lady had found under the linoleum when she renovated her home. They were well preserved and in excellent condition. Thankfully she donated them to the theatre.

The State Theatre is a heritage-listed theatre, located in Market Street, Sydney. The theatre was designed by Henry Eli White with assistance from John Ebersson and built between 1926 to 1929. It hosts film screenings, live theatre and musical performances. Since 1974 it has been the home of the annual Sydney Film Festival. It goes deep underground so patrons sitting in the front seats are a few floors below ground level. It has many levels so there were lots and lots and lots of stairs. There is no lift in the State Theatre. It has three tiers of seating with 2034 seats.



The theatre incorporates eclectic elements of architecture such as Gothic, Italian and Art Deco design. The theatre opened on 7th June 1929 and was the vision of Stuart Doyle, owner of the Union Theatres and architect Henry White. It was considered "The Empire's Greatest Theatre" and was designed as a picture palace when such monuments to movies were at their grandest and most spectacular. During its first week, patrons were offered "entertainment of unparalleled magnificence". The first picture to be shown was *The Patriot* accompanied by Price Dunlavy who was billed as a "debonair genius" playing the mighty Wurlitzer organ. The first sound picture screened was Paramount's *A Dangerous Woman* on 29 June 1929. The last all-silent film screened (before later revivals) was United Artists' *Evangeline* on 6 December 1929.

A newsreel theatre, the first in Australia, was opened in the basement of the building in 1932. It later became a screening room.

Like many cities, Sydney has lost many historic live music venues as the property developers moved in and converted them to commercial and residential uses. However, the State Theatre was saved from the developers and continues to be among the leading venues. This position was reinforced with additional renovations undertaken in the early 1990s. Performers in this period included Shirley Bassey, Whoopi Goldberg, Harry Connick Jr, Rudolph Nureyev, Shirley MacLaine etc. Shows such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *The Secret Garden* and *Anything Goes* were a great attraction to theatre patrons.



The theatre is privately owned and was added to the New South Wales Heritage Register on 2nd April 1999. In 2012-2013 plans were made to renovate the theatre to create an orchestra pit and backstage area to increase capability for live shows. The plan did not proceed when the owners did not buy the shop behind the stage to build the proper stage.

A magnificent cut crystal chandelier which is the second largest on earth, weighing over four tonnes, hangs in the centre of the theatre. It is cleaned on a regular basis and is lowered very slowly so that the various arms & pieces do not crack. There are smaller chandeliers positioned along the back wall. The theatre also contains paintings by William Dobell and Julian Ashton and has many other interesting decorations. It once displayed a fish tank which they are considering reinstalling.



Its architectural composition is unique in Australia. The architectural and spatial progression from the introductory gothic imagery on the street frontage, through the 14th century Gothic Hall and Robert Adam inspired Empire Room to the Baroque drama of the Rotunda and French Empire decorated foyers into the splendour of the main auditorium is an experience unparalleled in any 19th or 20th century building in New South Wales.



The interior of the main public areas contains one of the largest applications of scagliola or reproduction of marble finishes in Australia. The quality of the plaster work, particularly in the Auditorium and Proscenium Arch and other decorative items such as light fittings, is of the highest standard of 1920s design and craftsmanship. The emergency diesel generator in the depths of the building is said to have been salvaged from a German submarine.

Because the stage is quite small, the theatre cannot accommodate some of the larger live shows. It also only has room for a 30-piece orchestra. The Ladies rooms are hidden away, as in those days ladies did not like to be seen entering a toilet area. There was a smoking room for ladies which was attached to the Ladies Toilets.



The front of the theatre has undergone many changes over the years and the mosaics on the foyer floor are currently being restored to their original beauty.

After an interesting and informative morning at the theatre, the members from the Travel Club then had lunch at the York Club to finish off a really lovely and enjoyable outing.

