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# **BROADWAYSF'S GOLDEN GATE THEATRE CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL**



**San Francisco's Premier Theatre Opened its Doors  
on March 26, 1922**

## **Visual Timeline Captures Entire History**

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA (March 28, 2022)**— **BroadwaySF**, part of the Ambassador Theatre Group, today celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the landmark Golden Gate Theatre. The theatre, located at 1 Taylor Street in San Francisco, opened its doors on March 26, 1922. To celebrate, BroadwaySF has released a [visual timeline](#) that tells the story of the historical theatre's birth, it's days as a movie palace, a home for touring acts and its eventual re-birth as a theatre for touring Broadway productions. **The timeline is viewable [here](#).** BroadwaySF will celebrate the Golden

Gate's Centennial throughout the year including a series of exclusive videos created by Adam Savage ("Mythbusters"; Tested.com) about some of the lesser-known areas of the theatre and of the many technical crafts that contribute to the theatrical experience.

"Happy Birthday to the Golden Gate. It remains one of the City's premier venues and we are enormously proud of its long and storied history," stated BroadwaySF Managing Director Rainier Koeners. "It has served as a microcosm for the history of American popular entertainment over the past 100 years. It has witnessed the merging and eventual demise of the vaudeville circuits; it challenged the very concept of a movie "palace" as audiences turned to suburban multiplexes for their entertainment; and it survived the numerous renovations that destroyed much of the theatre's signature detail work before the theatre was lovingly restored and found a new purpose: to bring the best of Broadway to Bay Area audiences. As the neighborhood has changed, the Golden Gate has served as an anchor, bringing millions to enjoy entertainment under its iconic 4-story neon sign, giant stage and ornate lobby. It has served as a home for touring Broadway shows now for more than four decades and its future is bright."

San Mateo-born G. Albert Lansburgh designed the Golden Gate to be as "spacious as the outdoors," according to the *San Francisco Examiner*. Other notable Lansburgh designs include the War Memorial Opera House and libraries in the Mission, Sunset, North Beach and Presidio. The Gate was his first theatre commission, but other notable Lansburgh theatres include Broadway's Al Hirschfield, and the El Capitan, Shriner's Auditorium, Wilton and Orpheum, in LA.

The Gate's opening night program consisted of a silent feature starring Gloria Swanson and a 7-act stage show featuring Orpheum Circuit star James H. Cullen as "the Man from the West." The audience was in formal gowns and top hats.

The Gate was integrated from its earliest days, both in terms of the auditorium and backstage. A photo, dated from the late 20s, shows William "Bill" Hamm, an African American stagehand from the Gate at an I.A.T.S.E. gathering. Several decades later, famed African American chanteuse Josephine Baker became the first performer to be extended by popular demand into a second week of performances. Baker played only theatres whose audiences were integrated.

Throughout its first decades, the Golden Gate played host to the biggest stars of the day – everyone from Frank Sinatra to Rin Tin Tin - as it still featured stage shows along with feature films. The practice ended in 1949 when billionaire Howard Hughes bought the RKO circuit of theatres. From then forward, the Golden Gate offered either performers or movies but not the combined experience.

By the early 1950s, with Americans increasingly moving to the suburbs, the idea of a grand movie palace had faded. In 1953, in a desperate move to continue operations, the Golden Gate was transformed into a Cinerama theatre. To make room for the giant wrap-around Cinerama screen, RKO destroyed a significant amount of the original detail of the auditorium and by 1966, finances required the Gate to be split into 2 separate theatres, with the Penthouse Theatre occupying what had been the theatre's mezzanine. To accomplish this, more damage was done to the interior, including adding a dropped ceiling and escalator in the grand lobby.

By 1970, the theatre's owner was bankrupt. Sam Perlman, the Gate's manager at the time told *The Examiner*, "There are no more good pictures to show in them anymore. The so-called fine arts pictures, which are mostly concerned with sex and mental aberration, have taken over the market."

Although the Golden Gate continued to present movies – including a record-breaking 88-week run of "2001: A Space Odyssey", by 1973, it had seen its final days. The owners, hoping for another success, booked the movie musical "Man of La Mancha" onto both of the Gate's screens, but when the movie bombed and United Artists refused to let the owner out of the contract, the doors were shut for almost 7 years.

In 1979, the company now known as BroadwaySF purchased the Golden Gate and immediately set out a plan to restore the theatre to much of its original glory, removing the false ceilings, restoring the auditorium as a whole and removing the eyesore of an escalator. They also updated the stage so that modern productions could call the Gate their home while in San Francisco. The Gate officially reopened on December 29, 1979, with what was the hottest Broadway musical of the time: *A Chorus Line*.

The theatre has been in near-continuous operation ever since. A who's who of entertainment have graced the Gate's stage since that time including Madonna, Diana Ross, Angela Lansbury, Darren Criss, Dick Van Dyke, Richard Burton, Joel Grey, Carol Channing, and Betty Buckley. The theatre has seen its share of world premieres, including the Broadway try-out *Legally Blonde* and was one of only a handful of venues to present the Lincoln Center Theater revival of *Falsettos* and the musical *The Last Ship*, starring rock superstar Sting.

In 2018, with the tech boom transforming the Bay Area—and companies such as Twitter and WeWork moving into the neighborhood surrounding the theatre—it became clear that new upgrades were necessary to keep the Golden Gate relevant.

Once again, a team of designers and architects—this time led by ELS Architecture and Urban Design—was faced with a daunting challenge: to assess how to stay true to Lansburgh's vision while making state-of-the-art modifications. And because the Golden Gate Theatre is a culturally significant building, it was critical that all the updates were grounded in historical research.

The team began by gathering as much information as possible about the building's history. It oversaw a comprehensive refresh that included a lighter color palette, customized light fixtures, enlarged restrooms (including the addition of all-gender facilities), and upgraded electrical and air-conditioning systems. A new burgundy stage drapery was installed, as was a red-and-gold carpet that incorporates stylistic flourishes—such as scrolling leaves and rosettes—that refer to design elements found elsewhere in the theatre. The team also added digital signage but left the theatre's iconic 4-story marquee intact.

**Upcoming Presentations at the Golden Gate include:**

*RAIN – A TRIBUTE TO THE BEATLES* – April 30

Daryl Hall and Todd Rundgren – May 14  
*CATS* – June 1 – June 12  
Professor Brian Cox – June 14  
“Weird Al” Yankovic – June 15 – June 16  
Ben Folds – June 18  
*THE PROM* – June 21 – July 17  
*OKLAHOMA!* – August 16 – September 11  
*Harper Lee’s TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*, starring Richard Thomas September 13 – October 9  
*AIN’T TOO PROUD -THE STORY OF THE TEMPTATIONS* – November 9 – December 4

**Direct link to Golden Gate Theatre Timeline:**

<https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/embed/1816917/4674132723/>

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**About BroadwaySF:**

BroadwaySF, part of the Ambassador Theatre Group, is the preeminent theater entertainment company in the Bay Area, bringing live theatrical experiences to the Orpheum and Golden Gate Theatres in San Francisco. BroadwaySF presents current hits fresh from Broadway, original Broadway cast productions, pre-Broadway premieres and one-of-a-kind events that are at the forefront of the national theater scene.

**About The Ambassador Theatre Group:**

**Ambassador Theatre Group** is the world’s number one live theatre company with the vision of helping great shows to find the largest audiences. ATG operates 58 venues globally; is an award-winning theater producer and provides leading ticketing platforms.

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