

Architectural Design by B. Marcus Priteca, America's Preeminent Theater Architect

The Fourth Avenue Theatre is also historically and culturally important because Cap Lathrop commissioned B. Marcus Priteca to be its principal architect. Mr. Priteca was the preeminent movie theater architect in North America during the coming-of-age era of the movie industry and movie theater entertainment in the United States, from 1915 to 1950, the Golden Age of Hollywood.¹³ Elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Priteca was called "the 'dean' of theatrical architects in America."¹⁴ The Fourth Avenue Theatre was one of the last movie theaters he designed.

Mr. Priteca began designing theaters around 1915 for Alexander Pantages, developer of one of the largest movie theater chains in North America. He reportedly designed over 150 theaters in his career, including 22 for Pantages.¹⁵ Most are now lost to history, casualties of downtown development and the suburbanization of America when movie theaters became box-like multiplexes in or around suburban shopping malls.

Among the theaters designed by Mr. Priteca are The Coliseum Theatre in Seattle (1915), advertised when it opened as "the world's largest and finest photoplay palace"¹⁶ and later called "the first of the world's movie palaces" by the Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects;¹⁷ the Pantages Theatre in Tacoma, Washington (1918); the Pantages Theatre in downtown Los Angeles (1920); the Pantages Theatre in San Diego (1924); the Pantages Theatre in Fresno, California (1928); the Paramount Theater in Seattle (1929); the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood (1930),¹⁸ the last and largest of the Pantages theaters. He also designed the Warner Theater on Pacific Boulevard in Huntington Park (1930); the Washoe Theater in Anaconda, MT (1931-36);¹⁹ and the Orpheum Theater (1927)²⁰ in Vancouver, Canada. Of these, only a few have survived. Those that have survived and been restored are magnificent and are considered architectural jewels in the cities where they exist.²¹

13 Eric C. Flom, "Priteca, B. Marcus (1899-1971), HistoryLink: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State

History, <http://www.historylink.org/File/8815> (accessed February 27, 2017)

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Eric L. Flom, "Coliseum opens in Seattle on January 8, 1916," HistoryLink: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, <http://www.historylink.org/File/2538> (accessed February 25, 2017).

17 "Coliseum Theater" Seattle: A National Register of Historic Places Itinerary, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/seattle/s13.htm> (accessed February 25, 2017).

18 Pantages Theatre, Los Angeles Conservancy, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/pantages-theatre> (accessed

February 25, 2017).

19 See <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/4332> (accessed February 27, 2017).

20 Quoted from Orpheum (Vancouver), Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheum_\(Vancouver\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheum_(Vancouver)) (accessed February 25, 2017): "In 1973, for economic reasons, Famous Players decided to gut the inside of the Orpheum and change it into a multiplex. A 'Save the Orpheum' public protest and fundraising campaign was launched, which even Jack Benny flew in to help with, and the Orpheum was saved. On March 19, 1974, the City of Vancouver bought the theatre for \$7.1 million, with \$3.1 million coming from the city itself, and \$1.5 million from each of the provincial and federal governments. The Orpheum closed in November 1975 and a renovation and restoration was done [...]. Tony Heinsbergen, a U.S. designer who originally chose the color scheme for the interior (ivory, moss green, gold and burgundy) was brought back, fifty years later, for the renovation." The theatre was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1979. Id.

21 See e.g., Chuck Davis, History of Metropolitan Vancouver, The Orpheum Theatre/Tony Heinsbergen

<http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/orpheum2.htm> (accessed February 27, 2017);

<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/4332> (accessed February 27, 2017); <http://www.grandvision.org/warner-grand/history.asp> (accessed February 27, 2017);