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## Former Victory Theatre



B7165 Victory Theatre  
Exterior



B7165 Victory Theatre  
Upstairs



B7165 Victory Theatre Stage



B7165 Victory Theatre  
Upstairs foyer

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### Location

20 Carlisle Street., ST KILDA VIC 3182 - Property No B7165

### Municipality

PORT PHILLIP CITY

### Level of significance

State

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2092

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO74

### Heritage Listing

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - May 24, 2006

What is Significant? The Victory Theatre was initially constructed in 1920-21 to a design by the architect Cecil F Keeley. It was the second biggest cinema in Melbourne at the time with capacity for an audience of three thousand; the exterior was extremely grand. It was one of the first of the grand 1920s picture palaces in Melbourne. It is now one of Melbourne's oldest surviving picture theatres, and still operates occasionally as a cinema. In the late 1920s the theatre was owned by a consortium that included film entrepreneur Frank W Thring, who became the managing director of Hoyts and later set up his own company Effttee Films. In 1928 the theatre directors commissioned extensive alterations to designs by the architect C H Ballantyne. These reduced the seating capacity to 2,550 and made the cinema more luxurious, perhaps to compete with the newly built Palais on the St Kilda foreshore a short distance away. The works included a grand entrance foyer with panelled walls and mosaic tiled floor, a barrel vaulted mezzanine promenade and an upper lounge, and a new proscenium arch. A central marble staircase replaced the two original side staircases.

In 1971 the theatre was purchased by the National Theatre Movement for use as its permanent home, and opened again in 1974. The National Theatre was established in 1935 by Soprano Gertrude Johnson (1894-1973) to provide greater opportunities for Australian artists by fostering training in drama, dance and opera and to form professional companies to undertake national tours. The changed use required substantial changes to the theatre: the stalls were converted into studios, with the original balcony being extended down towards a new stage area, a new orchestra pit and a fly tower were constructed, the auditorium and foyers were refurbished and backstage facilities were completed. Since 1974 the theatre has operated continuously as a live venue, though films are shown on an irregular basis.

The Victory Theatre is a symmetrical Classical Revival building, and is a fine example of monumental Beaux Arts theatre design. The walls are rendered with banded rustication and on the first floor are giant columnar screens and an entablature, both in the Ionic order. The theatre is on a corner site, and on both Carlisle and Barclay Streets are the two similar principal facades, with a cantilevered canopy sheltering the shops and entrances. The external side walls have exposed brick keying for stucco treatment which was never completed. The main hall inside is aligned on the diagonal axis, and in the triangular entrance foyer a grand marble staircase ascends to a coffered barrel vaulted mezzanine lounge and promenade. The front of house section is the most prominent, intact, and architecturally important part of the building, while the main hall is largely intact though divided by the 1970s mezzanine floor structure. Objects of note housed in the building include an early carbon arc slide projector; two c1940 Gaumont-Kalee carbon arc projectors transferred from the Regent Theatre in the 1950s; and a rare collection of seats from the Tivoli Theatre, Melbourne, which were acquired by the National Theatre Company after the theatre burned down in 1967.

How is it Significant? The Victory Theatre is significant for architectural, historical and social reasons at a State level.

Why is it Significant? The Victory Theatre is historically significant as one of Melbourne's most celebrated picture theatres during the 1920s and because of its association with the early Australian film industry. It is of historical significance for its associations with the National Theatre Movement, and its founder, Gertrude Johnson, a significant figure in the arts in Victoria both as a performer and a pioneering arts administrator. The theatre also has associations with national broadcaster John Cargher AM, general manager of the company from 1969 to 1989, who oversaw the alterations to the building and a major re-organisation of the company. As a pioneering professional arts company, the National Theatre has important associations with the history and development of the performing arts in Australia. Many significant performing artists, directors and writers have been associated with the company throughout its history.

The exterior of the Victory Theatre is architecturally significant as a fine example of a cinema designed in the monumental Beaux Arts style. The most notable elements of the interior are the entrance foyer, promenade, upper lounge and dress circle with their elaborate fibrous plasterwork and early decorative features and light fittings.

The Victory Theatre is historically and socially significant for its associations with one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment, the cinema, during its boom years of the interwar period. The 1928 alterations reflect the influence of the more luxurious picture palace style of cinema. The collection of movable objects is significant for assisting in an understanding of the technology, history and development of cinema. The building is valued by the wider community as a venue for films, festivals and theatrical performances over a long period of time. It is also

valued as the home of the National Theatre Movement, recognised as a significant cultural institution in the Victorian and Australian arts scene.

Classified: 01/05/2006

Other Names      National Theatre,

Hermes Number    66375

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

The Victory Theatre is a heavily modelled Classical Revival building, with its two identical principal facades hinged about a rotunda at the corner. The column screens and entablature are in the Ionic order. Its symmetrical planning and monumental classical elevations and interiors are typical of the fashionable Beaux Arts architecture that re-emerged in the 1910s and 1920s, a style of classicism that, by the late 1920s, owed as much to Hollywood as it did to the French academy, and which characteristically incorporated distinctly modern design motifs amongst its more or less correct classical elements. In the theatre, these later motifs include the simplified, squared-off heavy banding of its planes and piers, and the flat modern versions of traditional cartouche emblems. The patterns of the window glazing are distinctly 1920s.

The building permit drawings of the original 1920 design by Keeley show a cavernous rectangular hall with brick walls, reinforced concrete floor, steel framed balcony and truss roof, and reinforced concrete columns and entablature around the walls. The diagonal axis meant that that the theatre hall was sited at 45 degrees to both streets and the front of house section was triangular in plan. Large volume fresh air ducts were installed under the floor and a section of roof could slide open for further ventilation. The theatre's stylised classical decor was then applied to the walls and shallow vaulted ceiling in elaborate fibrous plasterwork.

The present broad marble staircase to the upstairs lounge rises from the front lobby directly on the main axis, while the original scheme had two opposing staircases from the lobby to the lounge aligned on a cross axis. This original configuration produced a central lounge area aligned on axis above the lobby, whereas now the lounge reaches crossways behind the main hall's balcony seating under its magnificent transverse coffered ceiling vault. The original scheme also featured upstairs three open air spaces, one open-air lounge above the front entrance, and two roof gardens in the corners to each side. These spaces were more like porches, situated within the form of the building, under cover, and looking out through the giant colonnades. The colonnades are still a major feature of the building but immediately behind them the spaces have been enclosed with walls and windows.

Downstairs, the original scheme included six small shops, three on Barkly Street and three on Carlisle Street, with access to the theatre only through the corner entrance doors. These shops have made way for an expanded entry and lobby space.

## Intactness

There were major changes to the fabric of the building with the 1972-4 alterations and refurbishment for the National Theatre: the hall was divided horizontally, with the upper hall continuing to serve as a diminished theatre, and the stalls area was refitted to house the Drama and Ballet school studios. The original balcony front of the auditorium has been retained and forms part of the orchestra pit rail. The proscenium and side boxes were removed.

The exterior decorative scheme is largely intact. The large VICTORY sign on the roof has been removed. Of the two Hoyts signs, adapted to read National Theatre, the Carlisle Street sign was lost in a fierce storm in the early 1990s. The fly tower at the rear was part of the modernisation of the backstage areas. The exterior was repainted in 1996 to highlight architectural features of the building. Some of the windows have been painted over.

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