

**THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY**

November 13, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE
PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO 425 LAFAYETTE STREET, THE JOSEPH PAPP
PUBLIC THEATRE, AN INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK LOCATED WITHIN THE NOHO
HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Good day, Chairman Tierney and Commissioners. I am Colleen Meagher, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Joseph Papp Public Theatre holds a unique place in New York's history. It started its life as the Astor Library, making books accessible to the public, and for the last 40 years it had brought theater to a mass audience. In preservation history, it also has a revered place, as an early and successful example of adaptive use, following Giorgio Cavaglieri's successful restoration in the late 1960s. This building has always served the people of the City, so one can see the interest in focusing attention on its entrance and directing visitors to its front door.

The Conservancy appreciates the restoration work that has preceded this phase and recognizes that a grand new entrance might be the element which connects this building to a 21st century audience; however, we cannot support this proposal. The Commission's own designation report from 1965 calls 425 Lafayette Street "one of the most important Victorian public buildings remaining today in New York City." This Rundbogenstil building has an imposing presence, with its prominent brick and terra cotta façade stretching across a good section of a block. Yet the proposed design is a lost opportunity to create an entrance that complements a magnificent structure.

While documentation shows that there is precedent for a stoop at this entrance, the proposed design overall is so minimal and mild that it is jarring against the rich, vivid façade. We cannot support a canopy, as there is no precedent for one, and, like the stoop, this one looks harsh and cold against the warmth of the building. Additionally, we have concerns that the canopy, although it is shown to attach at only two locations, could damage the historic material of the building. Finally, while the doors shown in the proposal improve on the existing, we would prefer that they resemble the original doors more closely, including installation of the fan light transoms.

The Public Theatre has been a grand architectural and cultural landmark for 150 years; it only seems fitting that it has the grand entrance it deserves, but this is not that entrance. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.