

## YIDDISH THEATRE

A number of different East End venues were used for the presentation of Yiddish Theatre:

**Prince's Street Yiddish Theatre** (Hebrew Dramatic Club) (q.v.)

Opened 1883. Closed around 1900.

**Vine Court Hall**, off Whitechapel Road

Used in the 1890s for Yiddish theatre and opera under the direction of the composer and conductor Yarichowsky. The same hall later became the Vine Court Synagogue.

**Standard Theatre**, Shoreditch High Street (q.v.)

Used occasionally for Yiddish plays between 1896 and 1906

**Pavilion Theatre**, Whitechapel Road (q.v.)

From the 1890s used for matinees of Yiddish Theatre. From 1906-1934 there were highly popular annual seasons of Yiddish Theatre.

**Princess' Hall**, Commercial Road

Opened as a Jewish music hall in 1907

**Feinman Yiddish People's Theatre** (Temple), Commercial Road (*See under Palaseum*)

Opened as a Jewish "Temple of Arts" in 1912 and lasted just six months. It then became a cinema.

**Adler Hall**, Adler Street, off Commercial Road

Used by Meier Tzelniker and Fanny Waxman for their Jewish National Theatre between 1936 and 1939. It was then used for services after the Philpot Street synagogue was bombed. From 1943 to 1947 it was used by the New Yiddish Theatre Company.

**Grand Palais**, Commercial Road (q.v.)

Used for Yiddish Theatre occasionally from 1926 onwards, then used regularly from 1935 to 1970.

There were three main waves of Yiddish Theatre in London's East End. The first was between 1883 and 1900 and was associated with Jacob Adler's Yiddish Theatre Company. This was centred at the **Prince's Street Yiddish Theatre** (q.v.).

The second serious attempt to create a "Temple" for Yiddish culture came in 1912 when a purpose built theatre was created at 226, Commercial Road. The opening attraction was a Yiddish opera, "King Ahaz". The venture failed after six months and the building became a silent cinema called the **Palaseum** (q.v.)

The third—and longest lasting wave—was from 1926 onwards. The **Tower Hamlets Grand Palais** (q.v.) was used as a regular venue for Jewish culture and entertainment, much of it in Yiddish. Just prior to the Second World War two Jewish theatre companies flourished in the East End: in 1936 the Jewish National Theatre was founded by Fanny Waxman and Meier Tzelniker and performed at the Adler Hall in Commercial Road; and in 1939 another company, under the direction of husband and wife team, Mark Markov and Etta Topel performed regularly at the Grand Palais.



"King Ahaz", a Yiddish opera onstage at the Feinman Yiddish Theatre, 1912

Over the next seven years the Jewish National Theatre gave seasonal performances in the Adler Hall, in Commercial Road. In 1943 the company relaunched itself as the New Yiddish Theatre in permanent residence of the Adler Hall. From 1943 to 1947 the New Yiddish Theatre found success, but its success was generally of the artistic rather than the commercial variety. The company staged a wide repertoire such as a modernised version of Goldfaden's Purim play King Ahasuerus, in which Joseph Sherman was made up to look like Hitler. One of the company's most imaginative steps was to engage Robert Atkins, then director of Regent's Park

Open Air Theatre, to stage *The Merchant of Venice* with Meier Tzelniker playing Shylock and his daughter, Anna, playing Portia. This was the last Yiddish-language production of the play in London.

In 1947 the New Yiddish Theatre Company moved to the **Alexandra Theatre, Stoke Newington** (q.v.) The two following years were among the most exciting periods for Yiddish theatre in London, with visiting stars such as Leo Fuchs, who played in “*The Galician Cowboy*” to full houses for several weeks - in a theatre with a capacity of over 2000. However, by 1951 the New Yiddish Theatre Company had ceased to perform regularly, leaving the Grand Palais as the only Yiddish theatre in London - one of the few places in the world where there were regular seasons of Yiddish plays.



*Meier Tzelniker as Shylock, Anna Tzelniker as Portia, with director Robert Atkins. The New Yiddish Theatre Company's 1946 production at the Adler Hall,*

There were still a large number of elderly people, mostly living in the East End, who were regular patrons. The artistic director Harry Ariel, who was also a talented actor and playwright, displayed great ingenuity ensuring that the company had a ready supply of new material, frequently reworking plays to suit the available cast. The repertoire consisted mostly of musical comedies, but also the classics of Gordin and Goldfaden and dramatisations of works by Sholom Aleichem. By 1961 London's Yiddish-language theatres had all but disappeared.

Anna Tzelniker and her company continued to give occasional performances during the next twenty years—though these were mostly one-night stands at various synagogue halls and Jewish social functions. One of the last known Yiddish-language performances in a proper theatre was at the Kenneth More Theatre, Ilford (q.v.) in 1975.

In 1986 Sidney Vauincez, theatre critic for “*The Stage*”, reviewed a performance at the Sternberg Centre, Finchley. He wrote: “*The Yiddish Theatre is still alive....but just. It is on its last six legs. They belong collectively to a trio of elderly performers, Anna Tzelniker, Harry Ariel and Bernard Mendelovitch. When these three die, the Yiddish Theatre is dead.*”

Harry Ariel died in 1989, Bernard Mendelovitch died in 2004, Anna Tzelniker (born 1922) is the sole survivor.

*Information and illustrations from: “Yiddish Theatre in London” by David Mazower, published 1987 by the Museum of the Jewish East End*

## YORKSHIRE STINGO

- 1770c A tea gardens built at the rear of a tavern known as the Yorkshire Stingo.
- 1836 The Apollo Saloon built as a music hall
- 1848 Renamed the Albion Saloon
- 1855 Closed and demolished

This was a tavern on the junction of Chapel Street and Marylebone Road. As one of the very early music halls it occupies an important place in theatre history. “*Stingo*” was the name for strong beer. A tea gardens and bowling green were added behind the tavern before 1770. In 1790 a special attraction in the form of a cast-iron bridge (only the second to be built) was brought from Rotherham and put on display—with a small admission charge - for a short while.



*Yorkshire Stingo, c. 1770*

Music concerts were given in the tea gardens in the early years of the 19th century, and by 1836 a hall was built to house regular entertainments. This hall was called the Apollo Saloon at the Yorkshire Stingo. Between 1848 and 1855 the hall was licensed under the name of Albion Saloon.

The premises were closed in 1855 and demolished. The County Court and the Municipal Baths were later built on the site.

## YOUNG VIC, The Cut, Waterloo

- 1970 Opened
- 2004 Plans for major rebuilding
- 2006 Re-opened after major re-development

This was constructed on a bombsite close to the Old Vic and was specifically designed to stage shows for young audiences at low prices. The theatre was founded by Frank Dunlop and was an offshoot of the National Theatre. It was officially opened by Dame Sybil Thorndike on 11 December 1970 with a production of Moliere's "The Cheats of Scapino".



Haworth Tompkins

When the National Theatre left the Old Vic in 1974, the Young Vic became an independent company. The premises consist of a 484 seat theatre and a studio seating 68. It was originally intended to be a temporary building with a life of around 5 years. Nearly 35 years later it was in urgent need of redevelopment. Plans were made for the company to perform in temporary venues whilst the original premises were extensively rebuilt.

In October 2006 the new, rebuilt Young Vic opened with a production of "Tobias and the Angel". One newspaper described it as looking like a "Lebanese nightclub". Another commented on the fact that the walls were unplastered and there was no ceiling, suggesting that it looked unfinished. He was re-assured that this was an intentional part of the design.

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