

285 Spadina Avenue: Standard Theatre

Description

The property at 285 Spadina Avenue is worthy of designation under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its cultural heritage value, and meets the criteria for municipal designation under the three categories of design or physical value, historical or associative value, and contextual value. Located on the northeast corner of Spadina Avenue and Dundas Street West, the Standard Theatre opened on August 18, 1921 as a Yiddish theatre associated with the Jewish community in the neighbourhood along Spadina Avenue. In 1935, it was converted to a movie house named The Strand. After World War II, the premises became the venue for the Victory Burlesque and, in the 1970s, were converted to a Chinese language theatre.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The cultural heritage value of the property at 285 Spadina Avenue relates to its design or physical value as a representative example of a post-World War I movie theatre. Its design features the abstracted Classical detailing associated with the Art Deco style, which was particularly popular for theatres during this period.

Historically, the Standard Theatre is directly associated with the cultural and political development of Toronto's Jewish community. Described as one of the finest Yiddish theatres in North America (Donegan, Spadina Avenue, 1985), the Standard Theatre hosted theatrical productions with its own stock company and welcomed touring companies from New York City. The theatre was also the setting for political meetings, including a well-publicized gathering in 1929 to commemorate the death of Lenin that resulted in a police raid.

The Standard Theatre reflects the work of Benjamin Brown, one of Toronto's first practicing Jewish architects. Brown's other commissions on Spadina Avenue included the Tower Building (1927) at #110, the Balfour Building (1930) at #117 and the Fashion Building (1926) at #126, which are recognized on the City's heritage inventory.

The Standard Theatre contributes contextually to Spadina Avenue where it occupies a prominent location at the northeast corner of Dundas Street West.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the Standard Theatre relating to its design or physical value as a representative example of a theatre from the post-World War I era are found on the principal (west) façade and south elevation, the roof above the latter walls, and on the interior as described below, consisting of:

- The three-storey structure, which is clad with buff brick and trimmed with brick and cast stone
- Beneath the flat roof, the narrow cornice that extends along the principal (west) façade and wraps around the south elevation
- The organization of the principal (west) façade, which is divided into three parts by a central frontispiece with pairs of brick piers, decorated cast stone capitals, a dentilled cornice, and a brick parapet
- On the west façade, above the first-floor storefronts (where the entrances and fenestration have been altered), the flat-headed window openings in the upper stories with brick flat arches and stone sills
- The south elevation, which is blank above the first-floor storefronts (this wall is included in the Reasons for Designation because of its prominent location on Dundas Street West)
- On the interior (which was altered in the 1970s according to the designs of Toronto architect Mandel Sprachman), the auditorium with the stage, the side walls with the Classical decoration, and the recessed ceiling (the tiered seating is not included in the Reasons for Designation)

Concealed by the neighbouring buildings, the north elevation and rear (east) wall are not included in the Reasons for Designation.