



Olde Globe Theatre

History

Balboa Park, San Diego, California

The Old Globe Theatre was built in 1935 as part of the California Pacific International Exposition for the presentation of abridged versions of Shakespeare's plays. In 1937, after the exposition's conclusion, a non-profit producing corporation, the San Diego Community Theatre, leased the theatre and adjacent buildings from the City of San Diego (an arrangement that continues to the present) and renovated the theatre for ongoing use.

On December 2, 1937, the remodeled Old Globe Theatre opened with a production of John Van Druten's *The Distaff Side*. In the cast was a young actor named Craig Noel, whose presence as an actor, director, and artistic leader would guide the theatre's growth through more than five decades of continuous production, and whose role as Executive Director continues to this day.

In 1969, the original restaurant facility adjacent to the Old Globe Theatre, known as the Falstaff Tavern, was remodeled to become the 225-seat Cassius Carter Centre Stage, an intimate space devoted to the production of new and experimental theatre.

On March 8, 1978, an arson fire destroyed the 43-year-old landmark Old Globe Theatre. Fortunately, the administrative offices, rehearsal hall, dressing rooms, scenery and costume shops, and the Cassius Carter Centre Stage were spared from the flames. While plans to rebuild the Globe were put into action, the immediate need for a space to produce that summer's San Diego National Shakespeare Festival resulted in the construction of the Festival Stage, an award-winning outdoor theatre.

In January 1981, the Old Globe Theatre's board of directors established the artistic/administrative triumvirate to lead the newly created three-theatre complex. Craig Noel was named Executive Producer; nationally acclaimed Jack O'Brien, who already had staged many productions at the Globe, was named Artistic Director; and Thomas Hall was named Managing Director. At that point, the board committed to establishing a year-round professional company, initiating a decade of extraordinary growth. In 1982, the new 581-seat Old Globe Theatre opened with a production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. After the original Festival Stage was destroyed by another arson fire in 1984, the new 612-seat Lowell Davies Festival Theatre opened in 1985. A major reconstruction and remodeling project completed in 1993 unveiled an enhanced administrative complex, box office, gift shop, pub, and landscaped plaza.

In 1984, San Diego's acclaimed Old Globe Theatre received American theater's highest accolade: the special Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award for excellence. Other highlights in the theater's recent history include a 1983 visit from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the 1984 live telecast of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and the 1989 presentation of the Maly Drama Theater of Leningrad/St. Petersburg's internationally acclaimed *Brothers and Sisters* in its American premiere.

Currently, the Globe annually produces a minimum of twelve mainstage productions from all periods and styles, ranging from Shakespeare to an increasing emphasis on the development and production of new works. The theater has always enjoyed a reputation for quality and professionalism and has gained further recognition as the birthplace of outstanding new works, among them Neil Simon's *Jake's Women* and *Rumors*, A.R. Gurney's *The Snowball* and *The Cocktail Hour*, Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's *Into the Woods*, Tom Dulack's *Breaking Legs*, the Sheldon Epps and Cheryl L. West musical, *Play On!* which featured the songs of Duke Ellington and Tina Howe's *Pride's Crossing*, featuring Tony Award-winning actress Cherry Jones. Many of these productions went on to Broadway and off-Broadway.

With a current operating budget of approximately \$8.5 million, the Globe is San Diego's largest arts institution, its leading arts employer, and among the nation's top-ranked regional theatres. More than 300,000 people annually attend Globe productions and participate in the theatre's education programs and outreach services.