

ARTS

Jay Handelman, editor
941-361-4931
jay.handelman@heraldtribune.com



MODERNS THAT MATTER

Lists prioritize buildings worth preserving

Jay Handelman Sarasota Herald-Tribune | USA TODAY NETWORK

In a rapidly changing community where old buildings often make way for new ones, Architecture Sarasota invited Sarasota area residents to help determine which structures they view as most important and distinctive. It's the first step toward preserving our built past. • "You can't preserve or advocate for what you don't know exists," said Morris (Marty) Hylton, president of Architecture Sarasota, which set up the Moderns That Matter project. Over the course of months, residents voted on their favorites in 10 different categories. • "Our goal was really to have this list of priorities that was informed not only by research and scholarship and our own assessment working with outside experts, but also hearing from the community," he said. • The top 100 is featured on architecturesarasota.org/moderns-that-matter and in an exhibit at the Architecture Sarasota's downtown headquarters in the McCulloch Pavilion (which is on the list). It was "intended to identify iconic structures that give Sarasota a sense of place and character." • There were 580 nominations during the initial period from November to January. **See BUILDINGS, Page 2E**



TOP LEFT: The Sarasota Opera House, designed by Roy Benjamin, opened in 1926 as the A.B. Edwards Theatre. PROVIDED BY SARASOTA OPERA
TOP RIGHT: The Women's Resource Center was designed by Carl Abbott in 1989. PROVIDED BY CARL ABBOTT
From 1958 to 1969, Victor Lundy designed several buildings for St. Paul Lutheran Church. PROVIDED BY ARCHITECTURE SARASOTA

Should 'Twelve Angry Men' be a musical?



Behind the Scenes
Jay Handelman
Sarasota Herald-Tribune
USA TODAY NETWORK

Whatever else it may have achieved, the Asolo Repertory Theatre's production of "Twelve Angry Men: A New Musical" certainly had the Sarasota community talking.

It's been quite a while since I've heard as much conversation from theater fans wondering about everyone else's reactions to a particular a show. That's what happened with this musical adaptation of the classic 1950s Reginald Rose play about 12 jurors deliberating the fate of a teenager charged with kill-

ing his father.

People have long known it as a play – Asolo Rep presented a stellar and memorable production of the play in 2011 directed by the late Frank Galati – or as the 1957 movie that starred Henry Fonda, E.G. Marshall, Lee J. Cobb and more.

In the last two months, I've had many friends and strangers reach out to ask what I thought and to express their own wide-ranging views. I've been surprised by some of those reactions. There were some who loved it, others who thought it didn't work and still more, like me, who leaned one way or the other.

Having seen it opening night, I went back for a second viewing before it closed June 9 to try to determine exactly

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From left, Matt Riehle, Marc Cedric Smith, Alexander Swift, Conor McGiffin and Curtis Bannister in "Twelve Angry Men: A New Musical" at Asolo Repertory Theatre. SORCHA AUGUSTINE PHOTO/PROVIDED BY ASOLO REP

Buildings

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“Someone said ‘I drive by this building every day and it makes me smile.’ Some people wrote very passionately about the history of a place,” Hylton said.

The Sarasota Art Museum got 12 nominations, while Rosemary Square and the Sarasota Bayfront/Island Park got 10 each. The newest structure was built in 2021.

Residents pick the winners

Votes were cast in 10 categories – civic, commercial, culture and arts, educational, multi-family residential, neighborhoods and districts, recreational, single-family residential, spiritual and public space. Each category has its own page on the website with a photo, a brief description and a map to help visitors locate them.

In the Civic category, the oldest structures are the Nokomis and Venice jetties, created in 1937. One nominator said they represent “the natural beauty that makes this town so special at its core.”

Payne Park Auditorium (1962), the downtown U.S. Post Office (1964), Roberts Arena (1966), Sarasota City Hall (1966) and Women’s Resource Center (1990) also are on the civic list, along with four fire stations Sarasota, Longboat Key and Venice built in 2020 and 2021.

John Ringling’s mansion Ca’ d’Zan and the Ringling Museum of Art are among the oldest buildings in the Culture & Arts category, along with the Sarasota Opera House (1926), the Sarasota Art Museum (the former Sarasota High School building built in 1926 and 1960 and renovated in 2019), the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe complex, part of which dates back to 1926.

Architecture Sarasota is giving special attention to the Victor Lundy-designed former Galloway’s Furniture Store, which is part of the Sarasota Art Museum complex. It was built in 1959 as a round glass building but was covered up during a renovation in the 1980s that turned it into a Visionworks store. A special exhibit at the museum about the history of the building and hopes to restore it opens July 28.

Restaurants, hospitals, churches and schools on the list

Among commercial structures are the recently shuttered Hob Nob Restaurant, which dates back to 1957 and the Golden Host Resort and Bahi Hut bar, which opened in 1954. Mel-O-Dee Restaurant, which has been closed for years, is a distinctive building from 1964. The Sarasota Memorial Hospital building in Venice, which opened in 2021, is the newest building on the list. Educational buildings include the now-problematic I.M. Pei dormitories at New College of Florida, built in 1965; the Out-of-Door Academy that opened in 1924; and Paul Rudolph’s 1960 addition to Sarasota High School. The Pei buildings were closed last year because of mold issues and the school is working with architects on ways to repurpose them.

Spiritual buildings include the Greater Hurst Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church which opened in 1949 and the St. Thomas More Catholic Church Complex from 1984.

“We’re not saying these are the most important places, but this is a fair representation of our built heritage here in Sarasota,” Hylton said.

Single-family residential buildings are arranged in groups, including seven designed by Paul Rudolph (the Umbrella House, Cohen House, Martin Harkavy House among them) along with homes built during different decades.

A downtown area worth noting and preserving

Public spaces include several buildings on Main Street in downtown Sarasota. Among them is the for-



Architect Paul Rudolph designed new buildings for Sarasota High School that opened in 1960. The interiors and exteriors were restored in 2015. PROVIDED BY SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD



The Sarasota Art Museum is housed in the original Sarasota High School building. ROD MILLINGTON PHOTO



The recently closed Hob Nob opened in 1957. CARLOS R. MUNOZ/HERALD-TRIBUNE PHOTO

‘Moderns That Matter’

An exhibition coordinated with the selection of the 100 Moderns That Matter list is on display through November at the Architecture Sarasota headquarters in the McCulloch Pavilion, 265 S. Orange Ave., Sarasota. 941-364-2199; architecture Sarasota.org

mer Herald-Tribune Media Group headquarters that is now home to Sarasota Memorial Hospital offices (opened in 2006) and the Truist Bank building next door, as well as the 1927 Sarasota County Courthouse.

Hylton said with the list of 100 buildings and spaces “we have our marching orders of where we put our attention and advocacy.”

He said the organization didn’t want to create an endangered list. “This should be a celebration of our built environmental, our architectural heritage.”

However, there are structures on the lists “where the future is a little uncertain, such as the Jack West buildings at Warm Mineral Springs.” The city of North Port, which owns the property, voted in March to raze the structures, but in May reversed that vote and decided to restart talks on ways to preserve them. Hylton said the Sarasota Alliance for Historic Preservation has taken the lead on those efforts.

Change has been a constant concern in Sarasota

At the McCulloch Building exhibit, visitors can see a timeline starting in 1920, with quotes tied to each period.

“In every decade they were lamenting the change

that’s happening in Sarasota. Every two years it seems to reinvent itself,” Hylton said. “Change is good and transformation is good, but it can be done sensitively and with respect to history and our heritage.”

He notes a Herald-Tribune story from Nov. 11, 1956, under the headline “Sarasota skyline changes daily.” The story said, “Busy, busy, busy Sarasota continues to resound daily with the thud of hammer on nail... as Sarasotans awaken each day they might look at the city skyline and note changes.”

A major goal of the project, he said is “to be proactive, not reactive. Some things are already at risk, but there are other things that are not. I’ve been doing this for 27 years. I’ve seen advocacy work. Riverview High School is a perfect example, even though in the end it was demolished.”

The exhibit continues on display through mid-November when Architecture Sarasota hosts its annual MOD Weekend, which includes parties, trolley tours of spiritual spaces, kayak tours of Sarasota School buildings on north Siesta Key, self-guided driving tours of homes in the South Gate neighborhood, a discussion on preserving modern architecture and design and more.

Contact Jay Handelman at jay.handelman@heraldtribune.com.

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what was holding me back from embracing the show more fully, from feeling more involved in the musical. I’ve let it sit for a few weeks hoping I would have more clarity.

I thought seeing it a second time would allow me to focus and pinpoint the moments where my attention

or my emotions got diverted, but I got wrapped up in the story, watching the production come together and listening to the music and lyrics. Did that mean I liked it more than I realized or stated? I don’t think so.

I can’t say exactly when it happened, but I know I felt some kind of detachment overall, even though I really enjoyed many aspects of it, particularly the cast and Michael Holland’s 1950s-flavored jazzy score with its vibrant harmonies.

I appreciated how the sometimes frenetic sounds suited the drama and the individual characters who were struggling with the facts of the case and personal issues in their own lives. The harmonies were often astonishing, both from the orchestra led by musical director Jenny Kim-Godfrey and from the cast members. The music served to elevate how at odds some of the jurors are with one another as one individual after another shifts his view on the guilt or innocence of the young man.

David Simpatico’s libretto closely follows the original plot by Rose, which begins with one juror, Juror No. 8, as the lone holdout in the initial vote, encouraging the other jurors to explain to him why he should join their side and allow them to leave that hot, sweltering jury room. But from the start, he believes he needs to explore his doubts.

Singing or speaking a story

It’s strange how some stories seem to naturally fit the idea of a musical and others may seem more unlikely. One of my friends who has long been involved in producing theater sent me a long message in response to my review to repeatedly ask, “Why?”

Why did they turn the play into a musical? Why does it need to be a musical? What do the songs add? Does the story gain anything with music?

I perfectly understand that reaction and those questions. The basic philosophy behind musicals is that people start singing when words alone can no longer fully express what they’re feeling. That’s even more true of opera, which may explain why after seeing this musical I kept thinking of a couple of American operas based on American theater classics that left me wanting.

I remember seeing the Sarasota Opera productions of “The Crucible” and “Of Mice and Men” and feeling that neither opera conveyed the power and substance of the original play. I’d rather watch the plays again.

Then I thought about last year’s Tony Award-winning musical “Kimberly Akimbo.” I loved the quirky, charming, touching and funny play by David Lindsay-Abaire about a young woman from a highly dysfunctional family who has a disease that makes her age faster than normal. At age 17 she looks more like 70.

Lindsay-Abaire worked with composer Jeanine Tesori to turn it into a musical. I never questioned it the way I initially did with “Twelve Angry Men.” I didn’t think it was an odd or ridiculous idea. I am still not sure why. Curiously, I think the musical is even better than the play, without invalidating the original work.

Maybe Galati’s production of the play ruined me for the musical. It was so well done and so gripping with wonderfully committed performances. There are moments when the musical flows along, naturally mixing song and dialogue, and then I feel this subtle shift and wonder “Why are they singing? Wouldn’t this scene or that be more powerful if the arguments came without music?”

The show, which has been in development for years, had its world premiere two years ago at Theatre Latté Da in Minneapolis, where Asolo Rep’s Producing Artistic Director Peter Rothstein worked as co-founder and artistic director before moving to Sarasota last year. He brought the same basic production he previously staged in Minneapolis to Sarasota with some of the same actors, though the creative team made revisions to the script and score for Sarasota.

Maybe this is a musical best appreciated by those who don’t know the earlier versions, but I believe a musical should work for every potential audience member. And I wish, as I work out my thoughts in this column, I could say what I think it needs. Perhaps another production at a different theater will provide the answers.

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