

April 25, 2023

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New York, NY 10007

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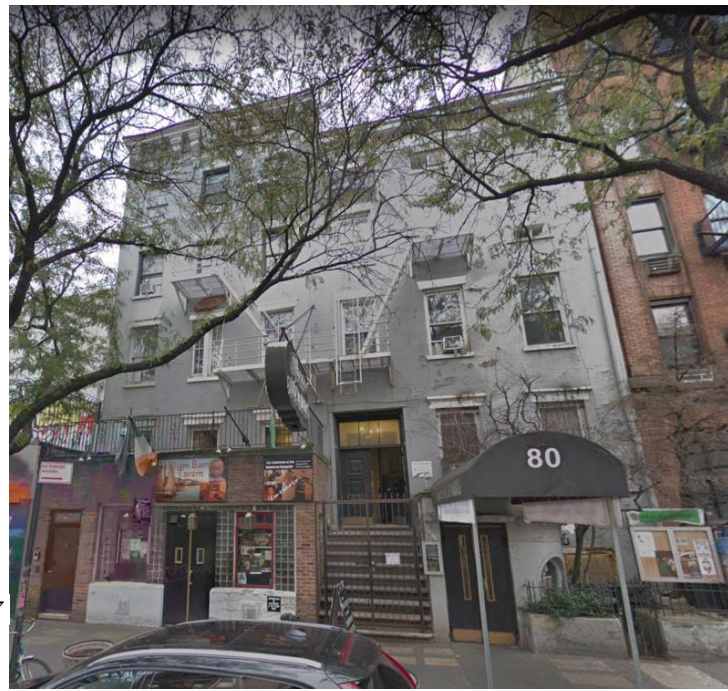
Hon. Sarah Carroll, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**RE: Urgent Request for Evaluation for Theatre 80/78-80 St. Mark's Place,
Manhattan**

Dear Mayor Eric Adams and Hon. Sarah Carroll,

I write to urgently request that the Landmarks Preservation Commission consider 78-80 St. Mark's Place in Manhattan for landmark designation. These 180 year old buildings are connected to the earliest stages of New York's development, and have for much of the last century been home to exceptionally culturally significant institutions, including the beloved Theatre 80. With these buildings slated to be auctioned off on May 9th, it is imperative that the City move quickly, in terms of landmarking and hopefully in other respects, to save these buildings and the history and culture attached to them.

Nos. 78-80 St. Mark's Place were built c. 1845 as two row houses in the Greek Revival style by owner William Bollman. Most likely both were originally built to the appearance of No. 78, with a shallow pitched roof, small attic windows, and a dentiled cornice. The full story at the top and the bracketed cornice with a shield at the center at No. 80 was a later alteration. Today the stoop at No. 78 remains in place, while there have been changes to the first floor including a one story addition at No. 80, reflective of its use as a music club and later a theater during the twentieth century. Still intact at the sidewalk is a mini "walk of fame" with handprints, footprints and signatures from some celebrated 20th-century actors and actresses, including Joan Crawford, Myrna



78-80 St. Mark's Place ca. 2017



Loy, Gloria Swanson, Joan Blondell and Dom DeLuise.

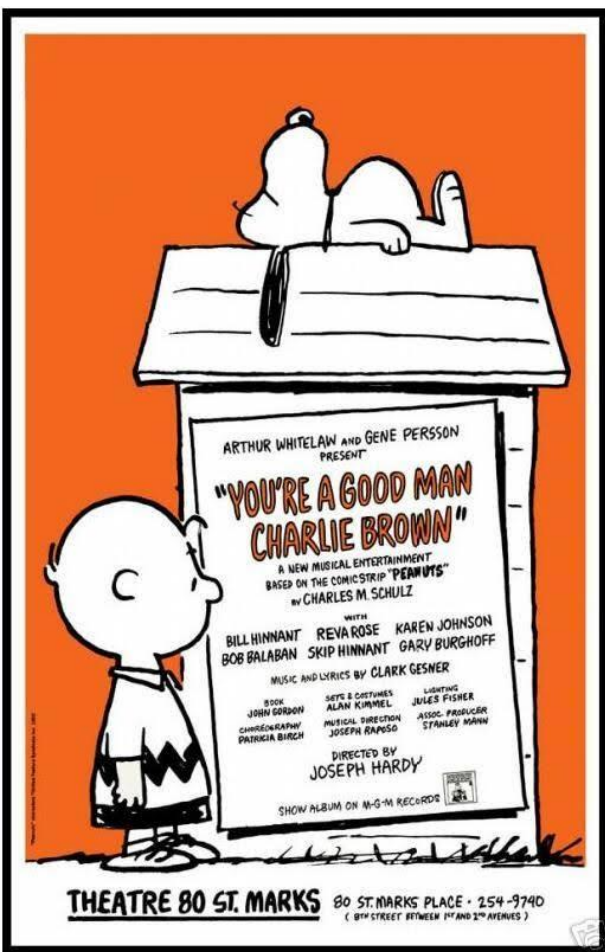
St. Mark's Place was originally part of the farm of the last Dutch Director General of New Netherland, Petrus Stuyvesant (1592-1672). The land was passed onto his heirs, who would be responsible for some of its initial development beginning in the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. St. Mark's Place was first developed by the speculative builder Thomas E. Davis, between Second and Third Avenues, in 1831. Davis erected large commodious townhouses for New York City's emerging merchant class, and St. Mark's would become one of the city's most fashionable and wealthy sections.

Through the Civil War, the houses served as single family homes to merchants and professionals. But as early as 1870, No. 80 was serving multiple families, and by 1880, No. 78 was as well, reflecting the waves of immigration and vast social change washing over the area. The censuses from 1880 and 1900 show nearly all the residents of the two homes are either German-born or of German descent. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, Germans migrated to America and many made their home in the East Village, which came to be known as Kleindeutschland, or "Little Germany." This became the largest settlement of German speakers outside of Berlin and Vienna during the second half of the nineteenth century. This community would migrate north to Yorkville and other immigrant groups would take their place. By the time of the 1910 census, the houses were home to German, Russian and Italian immigrants and their descendants, and the 1920 census shows people of Russian, Austrian, Polish and Italian birth or descent here.

While the 1930 and 1940 census show continued residential use of these buildings, it was at this time that they took on the commercial uses which have come to define them for much of the last century. An article from the New York Times in 1938 tells that the owner of No. 80, Walter Scheib, bought No. 78 with plans to expand his restaurant and cabaret. Scheib had run a speakeasy in the building during Prohibition known as "Scheib's Place." By 1940, the single story addition had been added to No. 80, and in 1943 permits were filed for



Theatre 80 Walk of Fame



an alteration to the two buildings to create a dining/entertainment establishment.

Following World War II, the East Village would undergo another metamorphosis, as it became an experimental center the arts, including music, painting, and theater. In 1959 the Jazz Gallery opened at 78-80 St. Mark's Place. This music club was owned by brothers Iggy and Joe Termini, who also owned the Five Spot, another renowned East Village jazz club. Musicians who performed at the Jazz Gallery included Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Frank Sinatra, and Horace Silver. In 1960 the hipster monologist and performance artist known as Lord Buckley gave his last performance at the Jazz Gallery, which closed in 1964.

In 1964, Howard Otway (1920-1994) purchased the houses from Scheib, and with architect Miller Breslin converted the ground floor space into a theater. Known as Theatre 80, this Off-Off Broadway venue premiered the musical *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, written by Clark Gesner. It starred Gary Burghoff as Charlie Brown and Bob Balaban as Linus, and ran for 1,597 performances, closing in 1971. A young Billy Crystal worked there as an usher. According to [the Village Alliance](#), *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* brought

some big-name audience members to Theatre 80, including the families of presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon as well as other politicians, from Mayor John Lindsay to Indira Gandhi.

After *You're A Good Man's* run, Otway converted Theatre 80 into a revival movie house. Before the days of video cassettes, these revival houses were the only way of seeing old Hollywood films. In 1994, Otway passed away, and his family leased the theater to the renowned Pearl Theatre Company, which performed Shakespeare, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Molière, Ibsen, and Shaw here. Originally founded in 1984, the Pearl was located at 78-80 St. Mark's Place until 2009. Following this, the theater re-opened as Theatre 80, operated by Lorcan Otway, Howard's son, showing a variety of theatrical fare. Lorcan Otway also opened the Museum of the American Gangster here and the William Barnacle Tavern, celebrating and perpetuating the site's illicit as well as legitimate history.

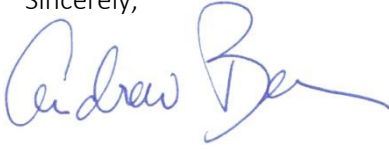
Theatre 80 and 78-80 St. Mark's Place embody so much of the rich history connected to this neighborhood and New York City, from its earliest and most rarified citizens, to its abundant story of immigration; from the arts to its gritty underside, and everything in

78-80 St. Mark's Place ca. 1940



between. The loss of these buildings and this institution, which is virtually guaranteed if the city does not act swiftly, would be a major loss to New York that generations of our fellow citizens would regret.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Preservation League of New York State
Municipal Art Society
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council
Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
City Councilmember Carlina Rivera
State Senator Brian Kavanagh
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
Community Board 3, Manhattan