

Doubler, Peter Mansoor, and Robert Rush, as he argues that “the American Army was an institution with a steep learning curve during combat and that it fought skillfully” (7). Divisions learned from their early mistakes, American soldiers and commanders were flexible, and the army became a rather effective fighting force as it gained combat experience. Like Mansoor and Doubler, Weaver shows that the United States did not win solely because of a massive application of firepower; rather, Americans were skilled fighters, particularly during the Battle of the Bulge.

Weaver has written an excellent account of the Pennsylvania National Guard’s role in the European campaign. He has also demonstrated that there is still much important work to be done on the U.S. Army’s participation in the “good war.”

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America’s Longest Run: A History of the Walnut Street Theatre. By ANDREW DAVIS. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. 424 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95.)

In this lavishly produced, beautifully illustrated, extensive study of Philadelphia’s famous Walnut Street Theatre, Andrew Davis offers scholars of American theater history, architecture, and drama a detailed account of more than two hundred years of survival and transformation in the nation’s oldest standing playhouse. The sixteen chapters trace the Walnut’s complex history. Among other things, the space has been a circus (before it was the Walnut Street Theatre), the acme of middle-class respectability in the mid-nineteenth century, a Yiddish theater in the 1930s, and the host to such stars as Edwin Forrest, Fanny Kemble, Edwin Booth, Lillie Langtry, Katherine Hepburn, Marlon Brando, and Sidney Poitier. *America’s Longest Run* brings the history of the Walnut Street Theatre from the eighteenth century up to the present day, closing with the theater’s bicentennial on February 2, 2009.

It is beyond the scope of such a sweeping study to provide detailed historical context for each transformation, so Davis anchors his work in an exploration of the personalities that shaped the playhouse’s history, from star performers to artistic directors. The result is a narrative history that infuses personality and interest into what might otherwise be a simple chronicle of events. For example, the first third of the book (chapters 1 through 5) focuses on the theater’s rise to legitimacy, following various managers whose dreams of financial triumph ended in disaster as the nation was overtaken by a series of economic and political crises. Chapters 6 through 8 examine the theater’s changing audiences. By the 1840s, managers turned their attention to capturing an audience with “the disposable

income necessary to support the playhouse” (99)—the rising middle class. Chapters 9 through 13 document another century of growth, during which the shifting structure of theatrical touring circuits and managerial monopolies repositioned the playhouse as a more national venue (even while it retained a strong local character). In chapters 14 through 16, Davis turns his attention to the Walnut’s struggle for survival in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Intriguingly, central to the theater’s vision of its future was its understanding of its past. The restoration of the Walnut Street Theatre, launched in 1970, initially promised to reconfigure the space as a site for community engagement. Within a decade, however, that mission was imperiled. As Davis recounts, consultants analyzing the theater’s challenges determined that it suffered from “the lack of a defined purpose and programming” as well as a lack of leadership in key artistic positions (305). In 1982, the arrival of a new artistic director dedicated to building a strong subscriber base kept the theater afloat. While debates over art versus commerce would remain, the increased financial stability allowed the theater to extend its educational mission into the community (310–11).

Throughout the study Davis considers the changes made to the theater’s architecture. While this aspect of the study may be of greatest use to scholars of playhouse and American architecture, it is important to understand how the theater kept pace (or at times failed to keep pace) with the trends of the day. It is also impressive to contemplate just how many changes the structure has weathered over the centuries. As Davis notes, “Older theatres . . . have a way of looking dowdy a few years after they were built . . . [as] ideas about what is stylish and chic change” (4). Davis adds that, despite rich décor, theaters have been “treated more like factories,” seen as “utilitarian” spaces for the manufacture of entertainment (4).

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Walnut Street Theatre’s history is its mission. Davis claims at the outset that the Walnut Street has always been a “populist” theater (2), and he closes with the sentiment and the hope that the playhouse will continue to express the *vox populi* (363). Yet, as his history makes clear, the Walnut Street has followed trends as often as it has led them. Perhaps as Davis suggests, it is this very adaptability that accounts for the theater’s longevity.

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