

FINSBURY PARK
ASTORIA

FROM COLMAN TO COSTELLO

Rainbow

A HISTORY OF THE ASTORIA CINEMA AND RAINBOW THEATRE, FINSBURY PARK

The Finsbury Park Astoria, later renamed the Rainbow Theatre, began life as an 'atmospheric' cinema in 1930, bringing entertainment and luxury to a densely populated part of Islington, north London.

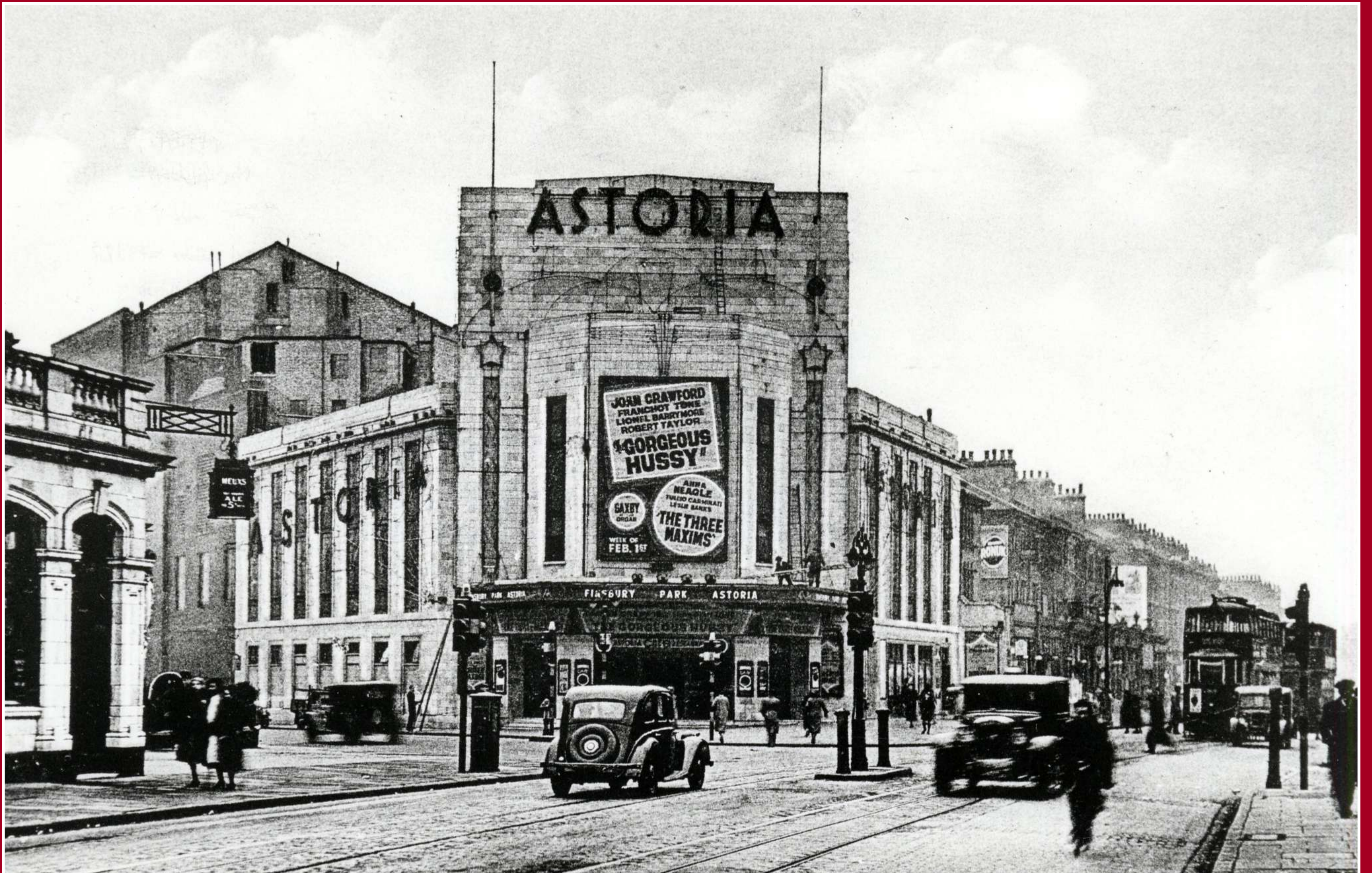
The Astoria's opening feature film was *Condemned* starring Ronald Colman, who was one of the era's most popular screen idols. By the 1960s the Astoria had developed a dual role both as a picture house and as a music venue. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Nat 'King' Cole, Sarah Vaughan, Frank Sinatra and Jimi Hendrix all played there. Its final picture show in September 1971 featured a double bill of *Gorgo* and the Boulting Brothers' *Twisted Nerve*. However, the building was not to remain dark for long and, a little over six weeks later, at time when many cinema theatres throughout Britain were being converted to use as bingo halls or being demolished, the Astoria reinvented itself.

In November 1971, and rebranded as the Rainbow Theatre, it was to become legendary as a rock music venue, attracting some of the biggest names in contemporary and popular music. The Who, Frank Zappa, Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Miles Davis, Rory Gallagher, Queen, Liza Minnelli, The Jacksons and Bob Marley all performed at the Rainbow. Notable acts from the decade's burgeoning reggae, punk and new wave scenes also appeared on the theatre's famous stage. Elvis Costello headlined the final concert at the Rainbow in December 1981.

In spite of being designated Grade II-listed status for its architectural importance, the building's future remained undecided for many years. During the mid-1990s it was taken over by the Brazilian based United Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), which set about restoring the auditorium and foyer. The former cinema is now the main centre for the UCKG in Britain.

From Colman to Costello takes a trip down movie and music memory lane to revisit the halcyon days of the Finsbury Park Astoria and Rainbow, and to recall a selection of major cinematic and musical moments and events from this world famous cinema and concert venue.

The Astoria cinema, Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, 1936.



A CINEMA IS BORN

FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA

Luxury In Finsbury Park

In the weeks leading to the grand opening of the Astoria Finsbury Park, advertisements in the local press eagerly announced the event to the public. Readers were informed of the coming of the "World's mightiest wonder theatre", the "largest and most luxurious [cinema] in the World", and the "theatre you have been waiting for!" And these extravagant claims did not disappoint.

Grand Opening

There was great public interest upon the opening of Astoria on Monday 29 October 1930. Those lucky enough to attend the sell-out 'Grand Gala' occasion were treated to a veritable feast of film and stage entertainment.

The Mayor of Islington, Alderman William Manchester, was in attendance and, presented with a gold key, he formally declared the establishment open:

"We welcome this addition to the buildings of our borough as being unequalled, for its purpose, by any other in the Metropolis, or, indeed, in the whole of the country."

Ronald Colman

British film star Ronald Colman, lead actor in the evening's feature presentation sent the following message:

"I am very delighted to think that *Condemned* has been chosen to open the Astoria. With my sincerest and warmest wishes for a great and continued success."

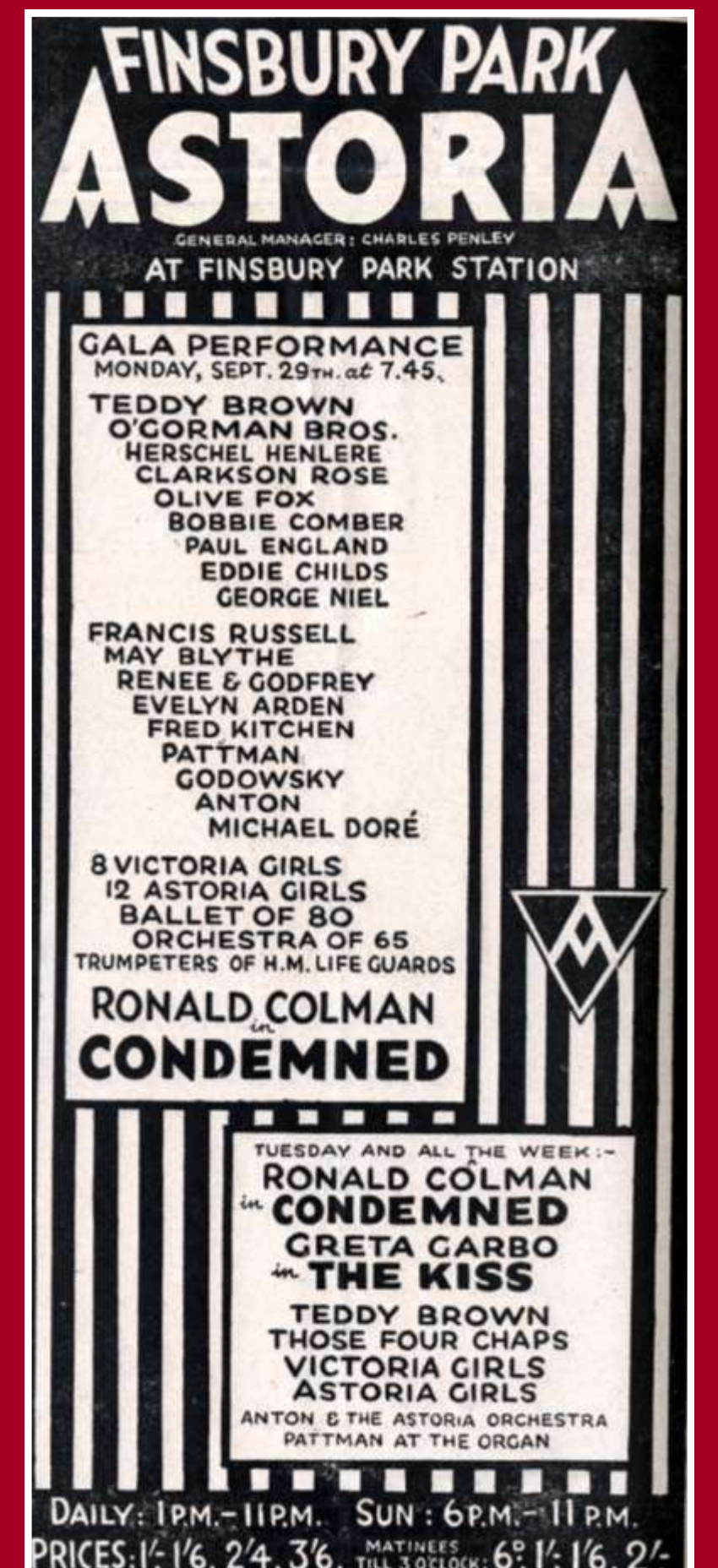


With proceedings overseen by the Astoria's General Manager, Charles Penley, others present included the mayors from neighbouring boroughs, Members of Parliament and representatives of the film industry.

Gala Performance

Heralded by a fanfare of trumpets, *Condemned* was first on the bill. This was followed by performances from the massed orchestras, corps de ballet and dancing troupes of all four London Astorias, together with turns from the entertainers due to appear at those cinemas during the week. An impressive conclusion was provided by 'Spectacle of Empire', a colourful pageant in which all countries of the British Empire were represented by the 200 performers taking part.

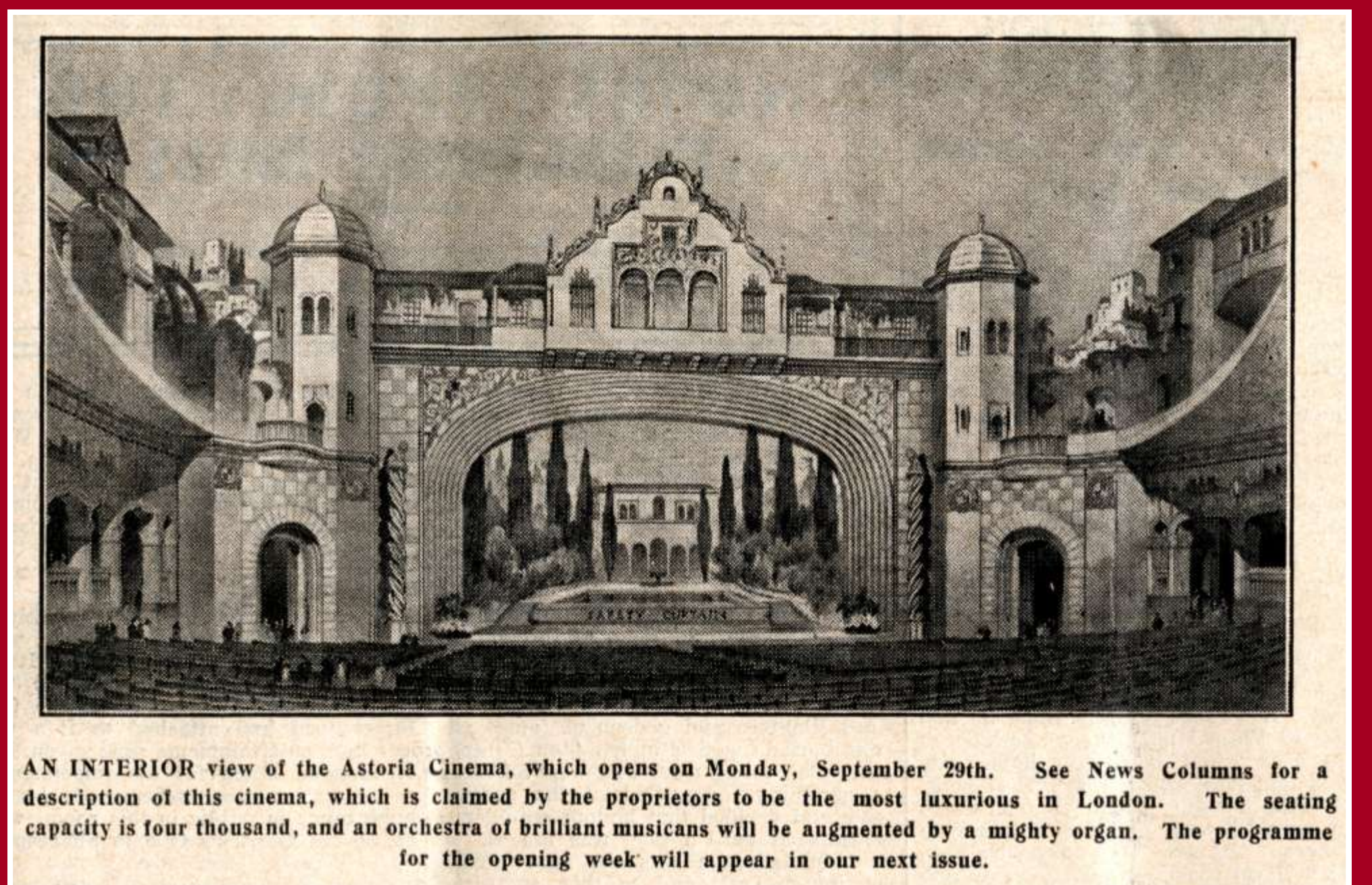
Throughout the 1930s, a full stage show in support of films was to be a regular feature at the Astoria, making cinema-going in this part of north London a truly unique and memorable experience.



Press advertising of the opening of the Astoria, Finsbury Park.

Above left: Islington and Holloway Press, 20 September 1930.
Above right: Islington and Holloway Press, 27 September 1930.

Below: Islington and Holloway Press, 30 September 1930.



AN INTERIOR view of the Astoria Cinema, which opens on Monday, September 29th. See News Columns for a description of this cinema, which is claimed by the proprietors to be the most luxurious in London. The seating capacity is four thousand, and an orchestra of brilliant musicians will be augmented by a mighty organ. The programme for the opening week will appear in our next issue.

Below: The full programme of opening events at the Astoria cinema, 29 September 1930.

MEMBERS of the ORCHESTRA		Programme of a Gala Performance		THE SPECTACLE OF EMPIRE	
<p>CONDUCTORS:</p> <p>"ANTON" Finsbury Park Astoria. FRED KITCHEN, Boston Astoria. GODOWSKY, Old Kent Road Astoria. MICHAEL DORÉ, Streatham Astoria.</p> <p>Instrumentals:</p> <p>VOLIA: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>SAXOPHONES: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>FRENCH HORN: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>TRUMPET: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>FLUTE: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>CLARINET: A. Bostons, B. C. Clark, C. Smith, D. D. Dore, E. J. Dore, F. J. Dore, G. J. Dore, H. J. Dore, I. J. Dore, J. J. Dore, K. J. Dore, L. J. Dore, M. J. Dore, N. J. Dore, O. J. Dore, P. J. Dore, Q. J. Dore, R. J. Dore, S. J. Dore, T. J. Dore, U. J. Dore, V. J. Dore, W. J. Dore, X. J. Dore, Y. J. Dore, Z. J. Dore.</p> <p>PATTMAN at the Organ</p>		<p>MONDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 29th, 1930.</p> <p>THE NATIONAL ANTHEM</p> <p>OPENING CEREMONY BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF ISLINGTON, ALDERMAN W. E. MANCHESTER, J.P.</p> <p>VOTE OF THANKS BY DR. ETHEL BENTHAM, M.P.</p> <p>FANFARE OF TRUMPETS</p> <p>GAUMONT SOUND NEWS</p> <p>"CONDEMNED"</p> <p>"AUTUMN"</p> <p>THE DIRECTORS OF PICTURE HOUSE TRUST, LTD., Present</p> <p>CHARLES PENLEY'S</p> <p>FOURTH ASTORIA ENSEMBLE</p> <p>A Gala Stage Spectacle introducing to Astoria the Massed Orchestras, Corps de Ballet, and Dancing Troupes of the Astorias.</p> <p>1930. With the assistance of the Finsbury Park Astoria, every corner appearing upon the stage in the permanent memory of the Management.</p> <p>ORCHESTRAL OVERTURE</p> <p>THE ASTORIA GIRLS</p> <p>RENEE AND GODFREY</p> <p>THE O'GORMAN BROS.</p> <p>"FIDDLERS FOUR"</p> <p>FRED KITCHEN</p> <p>VICTORIA GIRLS</p> <p>CLARKSON ROSE AND OLIVE FOX</p> <p>HERSCHEL HENLRE</p> <p>ORCHESTRAL OVERTURE</p> <p>THOSE FOUR CHAPS</p> <p>TEDDY BROWN and his Xylophone</p> <p>FRANCIS RUSSELL AND MAY BLYTHE</p> <p>LOVE DEET and FRILE, ACT I</p> <p>THE SPECTACLE OF EMPIRE</p> <p>Produced by CHARLES PENLEY</p> <p>Dances and Ensembles by Mrs. Rodney Hudson. Musical Score by Fred Kitcher. Costume entirely by Charles. Stage Setting designed by Charles Penley and the Management are indebted to Mr. Willie Chalkin for the loan of many greater articles of State and Commercial Regalia from his private collection.</p> <p>THE KING</p> <p>FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA ADMINISTRATION:</p> <p>GENERAL MANAGER: CHARLES PENLEY HEAD OFFICE: 10, FINSBURY PARK STATION, LONDON, N.7.</p> <p>HEAD OFFICE ADMINISTRATION:</p> <p>GENERAL MANAGER: CHARLES PENLEY HEAD OFFICE: 10, FINSBURY PARK STATION, LONDON, N.7.</p>		<p>PRINCIPALS:</p> <p>THE VICTORIA GIRLS</p> <p>THE ASTORIA GIRLS</p> <p>NATIONALS</p> <p>SCOTLAND</p> <p>IRELAND</p> <p>Wales</p> <p>Malta</p> <p>WEST INDIES</p> <p>NEW ZEALAND</p> <p>AFRICA</p> <p>INDIA</p> <p>CANADA</p> <p>AMERICA</p>	

THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST WONDER THEATRE

FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA

Island Life

Dominating an 'island' location at the junction of Seven Sisters and Isledon Roads, and bounded by Coleridge Road, the Finsbury Park Astoria was designed by Edward Albert Stone, with interior design by Tommy Somerford and Ewen Barr and decoration carried out by Marc-Henri and G Laverdet.

It was not the first cinema to open in Seven Sisters Road. At numbers 228 and 269, respectively, were the Electric Vaudeville (1909-16) and Finsbury Park Cinematograph Theatre (1909-58), later the Rink / Gaumont cinema. Stone's Astoria was, however, the largest and most luxurious to have been erected in the area. A number of small businesses, including an umbrella maker, a milliner and a furniture dealer, were demolished to make way for the new super-cinema.

Atmospherics

Boasting a seating capacity of 4000 (later revised to 3030), the Finsbury Park Astoria at 232-236 Seven Sisters Road, was built for the Picture House Trust (PHT). Edward Stone was the PHT's chairman and principal architect. He was previously responsible for designing three other London Astorias: Brixton (1929), Old Kent Road (1930) and Streatham (1930). These spectacular cinemas all built by the PHT were made possible because of money from the American Paramount Corporation, and from 1931 they became known as the Paramount Astorias. The Astorias were the most important group of early London 'atmospheric' cinemas. With their lavishly themed interior scenic effects, they ushered in a new era of British picture houses.

Spanish Nights

While the entrance block of the Finsbury Park Astoria was imposing in cream and green frontage, its general exterior was functional, with simplicity of line and a plain tiled and brick finish. It was however the magnificent atmospheric interior decoration that caught the imagination of cinema goers. The illusion of being outdoors on a balmy Mediterranean night was an essential part of the design. Audiences could feel that they were seated in a Spanish-Moorish courtyard and this was made complete with a ceiling of twinkling stars, a safety screen depicting an ornamental garden and, to the left and right of the proscenium arch, an uneven line of quaint old fashioned houses.

Art Deco

Away from the auditorium, Art Deco swirls and zigzags could be witnessed in the spectacular vestibule, its centrepiece being a fountain in a star-shaped pool that mirrored the octagonal form of the balconied space above; a similar fountain at Brixton was removed as too many cinema goers apparently fell in! The Astoria also featured a 64-foot (19m) wide proscenium with a 35-foot (10.5m) deep stage and 12 dressing rooms, with 200 staff employed to entertain and oversee performances.



The Astoria's magnificent proscenium arch.



Architect Edward A Stone.

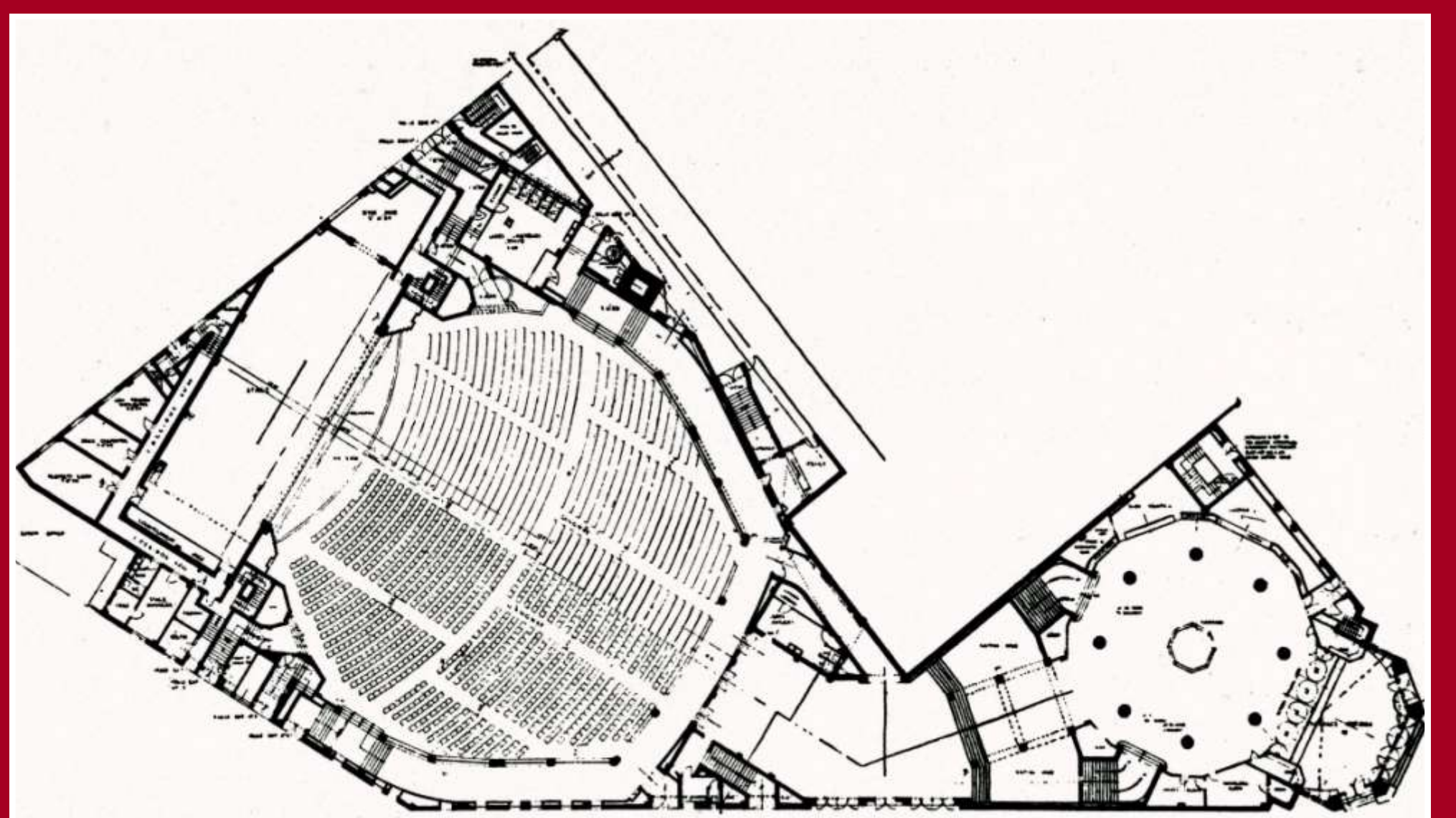


The Astoria's auditorium, 1930.

The Fountain Court.



Edward Stone's ground floor plan for the Astoria.



MUSIC AND MOVIES

FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA

The Odeon Astoria

By November 1939 staging the Astorias' live support shows became too costly and Paramount could no longer afford to continue running the chain. As a result, the Astorias were taken over by Oscar Deutsch's Odeon cinema empire. The Finsbury Park Astoria was to be renamed the Odeon Astoria. The Wurlitzer organ interludes were kept but the stage shows were abandoned and the number of screenings was increased to ensure profit. This practice made money but it took away some of the 'atmospheric' magic.

The Astoria survived enemy raids during World War Two, even though adjacent buildings and streets, including Isendon and Seven Sisters roads, suffered heavily from bomb damage. However, its pre-war sparkle briefly returned for the Astoria's 25th Anniversary celebrations in 1955.

Silver Screen Anniversary

To celebrate 25 years in business, the cinema ran some classic films as supports to the main feature, including *The Blue Lamp*, *A Night at the Opera* and *The Cruel Sea*. These special anniversary programmes also featured Louis Mordish at the organ. On anniversary day, 29 September 1955, Sir William Manchester, who had attended the original opening as Mayor of Islington, was there to welcome British actor Jack Hawkins to the Astoria. After his speech Jack presented members of staff with long service awards.

Concerts

From the early-1960s, the Astoria began to be used for concerts and it was these that drew the audiences rather than film; the best available films went to its sister Odeon on nearby Holloway Road. In April 1960, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent & The Wild Cats appeared on the Astoria's stage. Tragically, less than two weeks later, Cochran would die in a car crash in Wiltshire.

Many famous acts were to play the venue throughout the decade, including Frank Sinatra, Nat 'King' Cole, Ray Charles, Cliff Richard, The Beach Boys, Duke Ellington, Gene Pitney, The Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix. It was here, on 31 March 1967, that Hendrix first set fire to his guitar on stage. It was, however, The Beatles who took to the stage at the Astoria more than any act, especially during the group's legendary Christmas shows in 1963-64.

The Young Ones

The Astoria was also beginning to be used as a film location during this period. The cinema appeared in singer Cliff Richard's third feature film, *The Young Ones* (U.S title: *Wonderful to be Young*), released in 1961; the film was the second most popular movie at the British box office that year, after *The Guns of Navarone*.



The Odeon Astoria, 1947.

The Stones roll into Islington amidst Police concerns for safety. Islington Gazette, 1 September 1964.



The countdown has begun. Police officials are anxious. Fans are warming up for the hysteria to come. And the artists are nervous. All are waiting.
 What's happening?
 Why, haven't you heard?
 The Rolling Stones are coming to Islington on Saturday for a one-night stand at the Finsbury Park Astoria. The show is the start of a five-week tour throughout the country presented by Robert Stigwood Associates Ltd. Their press officer told the Gazette: "I understand the Rolling Stones are making special arrangements with the police. What they are I don't know."
 There is little doubt that extra police will be needed. At recent Stones' concerts ugly scenes have been caused by troublemakers.

Music at the Finsbury Park Astoria. Donovan appeared in 1965, Dusty Springfield in 1966 and Gene Pitney in 1970.

HAROLD DAVIDSON & TITO BURNS PRESENT
DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
 with the ECHOES
 LAVE BERRY * LOS BRAVOS * THE MINDBENDERS
 BOZ & HIS GROUP DAVID & JONATHAN THE SETTLERS
 EPISODE SIX
THE ALAN PRICE SET

FINSBURY PARK
ASTORIA SATURDAY AUG 14th
 Manager: W. L. WEBB Tel: ARchway 2224
 JOE COLLINS & MERVYN CONN present
DONOVAN
 CHARLES DICKENS CAMERON
 SPECIAL GUEST STARS - DIRECT FROM THE U.S.A.
THE BYRDS
 "Mr. Tambourine Man"
 JOHNNY B. GREAT ELKIE BROOKS
 QUOTATIONS THEM KENNY LYNCH
 IRELAND'S TOP GROUP "WILL STAY BY YOU!"
 PRICES: 12/6 10/6 8/6 6/6 4/6 BOOK EARLY!

ASTORIA FINSBURY PARK
 Manager: W. L. WEBB Phone: ARchway 2224
6.40 - FRIDAY, 20th MARCH - 9.10
 TWO PERFORMANCES ONLY
ON THE STAGE
 (INSTEAD OF THE USUAL FILM PROGRAMME)
FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY
 ARTHUR HOWES presents
AMERICA'S INTERNATIONAL SINGING STAR
THE DYNAMIC!
GENE PITNEY
BADFINGER
 SATISFACTION
JOHNNY HACKETT
 SPECIAL GUEST STAR
CLODAGH RODGERS
 PRICES 20/- 16/- 14/- 11/- 8/-
 All seats may be booked in advance.
 BOX OFFICE ASTORIA FINSBURY PARK
 POSTAL BOOKING FORM Gene Pitney & Co. Date: _____
 Please forward: SEATS 20/-, 16/-, 14/-, 11/-, 8/-
 for the 6.40 / 9.10 performance on Friday, 20th March, 1970.
 I enclose stamped addressed envelope & P.O. / Cheque value _____
 (Please make issue and price not required)
 NAME: Y. A. 786. 185. 185 (Block letters)
 ADDRESS: _____ Telephone: _____
 Use this form if convenient to call. The best available seats will be allotted to you.
 Printed by Elliott (Maiden) Printing Co. Ltd., Maidenhead, MK4 8AB

BEATLEMANIA

FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA

Beatlemania In Finsbury Park

The first performance by The Beatles in Finsbury Park was not at the Astoria but at the nearby Majestic Ballroom, the former Rink/Gaumont cinema. Two thousand fans saw the 'Fab Four' perform at the venue on 24 April 1963, as part of manager Brian Epstein's *Mersey Beat Showcase*. The other acts on the bill were Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Big Three and Billy J Kramer and the Dakotas, all of whom were managed by Epstein. But, it was at the Astoria where Beatles John, Paul, George and Ringo were to regularly perform in the area, bringing with them all the hysteria associated with 'Beatlemania' that swept across the nation and beyond in the next few years.

The Beatles' Christmas Show

The Beatles' manager Brian Epstein, who himself previously had theatrical aspirations, conceived *The Beatles' Christmas Show*, a variety stage production featuring the group. It ran at the Astoria from 24 December 1963 until 11 January 1964.

Tickets had gone on sale on 21 October 1963 and by 16 November all 100,000 had sold out. There were 30 shows altogether, with two performances on each day except for 24 and 31 December, when only one took place. Other acts on the bill included the Barron Knights, Billy J Kramer and The Dakotas and Cilla Black. The Beatles were each evening's final act, with performances lasting 25 minutes and consisting of nine songs, including *She Loves You* and *Twist and Shout*.

In between the support acts The Beatles took to the stage for a number of light-hearted sketches, giving the night a pantomime feel. The group's performances were greeted with a display of uncontrolled excitement from the fans.

The Final London Concerts

The Beatles returned to the Astoria a further two times. The first of these occurred on 1 November 1964. The group performed two concerts on this night (6.00pm and 8.30pm) and each set contained 10 songs, for which they were paid £850.

The second date and the final two concerts that The Beatles ever played in London was 11 December 1965. The group performed 11 songs, with *Help!* and *Yesterday* being amongst the set-list. After playing the shows, Beatle George Harrison commented:

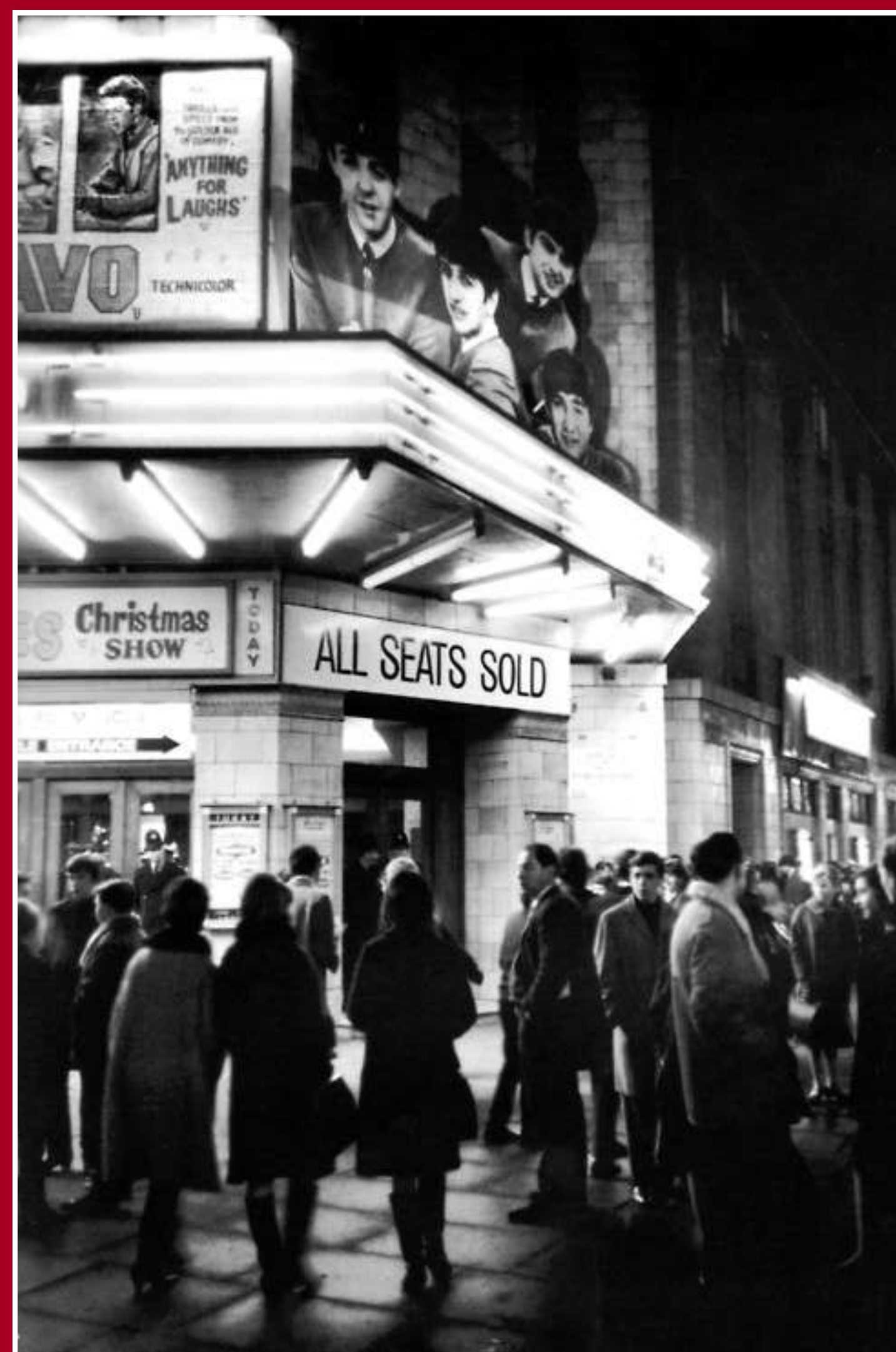
"This is one of the most incredible shows we've done. Not just because of the audience, but because they're Londoners. This is the funny thing. It's always been the other way round - fantastic in the North but just that little bit cool in London. It's incredible. It seems like the Beatlemania thing is happening all over again."

The Beatles Return

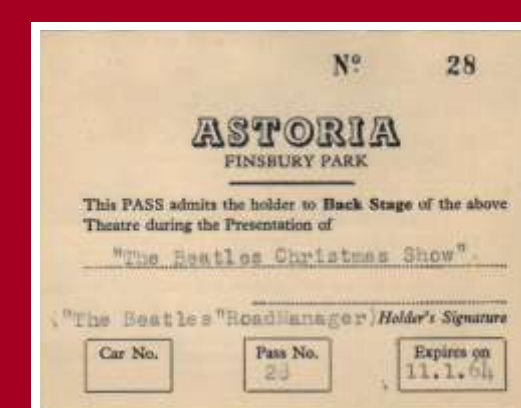
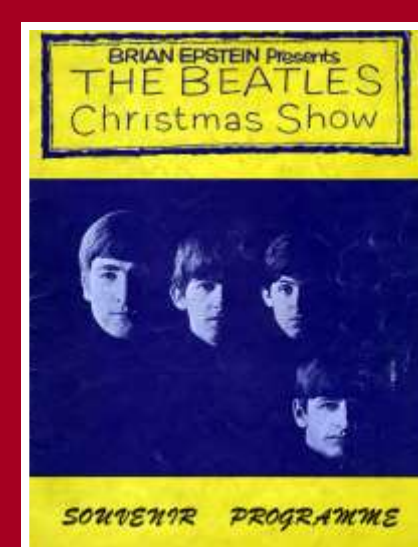
Ex-Beatles Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr were to return to the venue (as the Rainbow) during the 1970s. In September 1972, Starr appeared in a performance of Pete Townsend's rock opera *Tommy*, which also featured The Who, Rod Stewart and Steve Winwood. McCartney's band Wings played the Rainbow in December 1979 on what was the group's final tour.



Left: The 'Fab Four' - (top to bottom) Paul, John, George and Ringo.



Right: 'Sold Out'. The Beatles' Christmas Show, 1963.



Ephemera from The Beatles' Christmas Show, 1963-64.



'Beatlemania'

Above: Islington Gazette, 3 January 1964.



Right: Islington Gazette, 25 October 1963.

TRUMPHANT after a patient wait lasting about 26 hours, these three 15-year-old local girls show off the 27 tickets for "The Beatles' Christmas Show" which they had queued to buy. Their all-night vigil outside the Astoria Cinema, Finsbury Park, started at 8 a.m. on Sunday and ended, in pouring rain, when the box-office opened for the first time a little after 10 a.m. on Monday.

The girls were at the head of a queue of more than 1,400. They were first into the cinema and their tickets are the first of 80,000 plus which will be sold for the show.

Left to right: Anne McKeivry, of Coronation Avenue, Stoke Newington; Iris Wheatley, of Hems-worth Court, Shore-ditch; and Maureen Morris, of Mapledene Estate, Hackney. The girls said the tickets were for themselves and their school friends. Which school? Said one: "We'd better not say—we're supposed to be there!" They admitted they were "real squealers." The girls, expecting the cinema doors to open at 11 a.m. had only just returned from coffee break when the doors were opened. The hundreds of teenagers kept in an orderly queue, and the presence of several police officers was not really necessary.

DOWN AT THE ASTORIA

FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA

The Swinging Sixties

An eclectic mix of music and movies continued throughout the 1960s and into the early-70s at the Astoria. Top acts from all musical genres were to play the Astoria's stage during the 'swinging sixties', especially those from America. Audiences were treated to performances by, amongst others, The Byrds, The Beach Boys, Chuck Berry, Johnny Mathis, Louis Armstrong (his last in the UK), Roy Orbison, Sonny and Cher and Jimi Hendrix, as well as home grown talent in the form of The Rolling Stones, Tom Jones, Dusty Springfield, Cliff Richard and Shirley Bassey.

Fire

Playing support on the Walker Brothers tour of 1967 was the Jimi Hendrix Experience. It was on the night of 31 March at the Astoria that Hendrix set fire to his guitar on stage for the first time. The event occurred at the end of his set, when performing the song *Fire*, that the astonished audience witnessed the guitarist burning his Fender Stratocaster; in 2009 the guitar fetched a remarkable £280,000 in auction.

Decline

While music was to take the Astoria into the 1970s and early-1980s, the building's role as a cinema was to end in 1971. Cinema attendance across the country was in decline, with many picture houses closing or converting to use as bingo halls or music venues. In 1949 Britain boasted 4800 cinemas but, by 1970, this figure had fallen to just over 1500.

Down At The Astoria

Pete Townshend was to comment on the decline in cinema going in his song *Long Live Rock*, recorded by The Who:

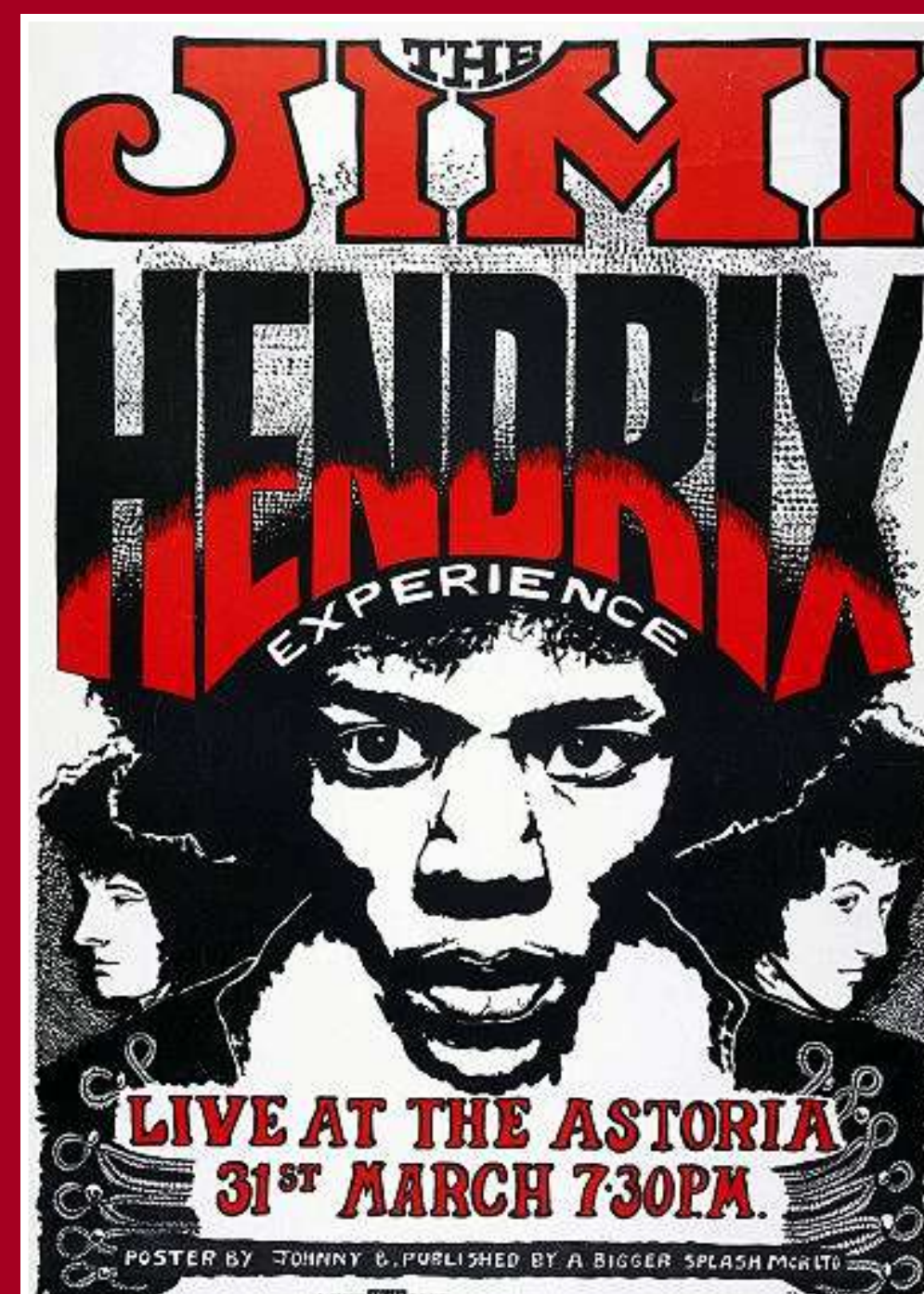
**"Down at the Astoria the scene was changing,
bingo and rock were pushing out X-rating."**

Ironically, Townshend and The Who were shortly to be very much part of the changing scene 'down' at the Astoria!

On 8 November 1970 the Astoria was renamed the Odeon but closed less than a year later. On 14 August 1971 The Byrds were the last band to perform before its closure as a cinema, and its last film screenings were *Gorgo* and *Twisted Nerve* on 18 September 1971. However, in just under two months, the Astoria re-emerged as the Rainbow Theatre, destined to become one of the country's top rock music venues.



The Odeon (formerly the Astoria) in 1970, when its days as a cinema were numbered.



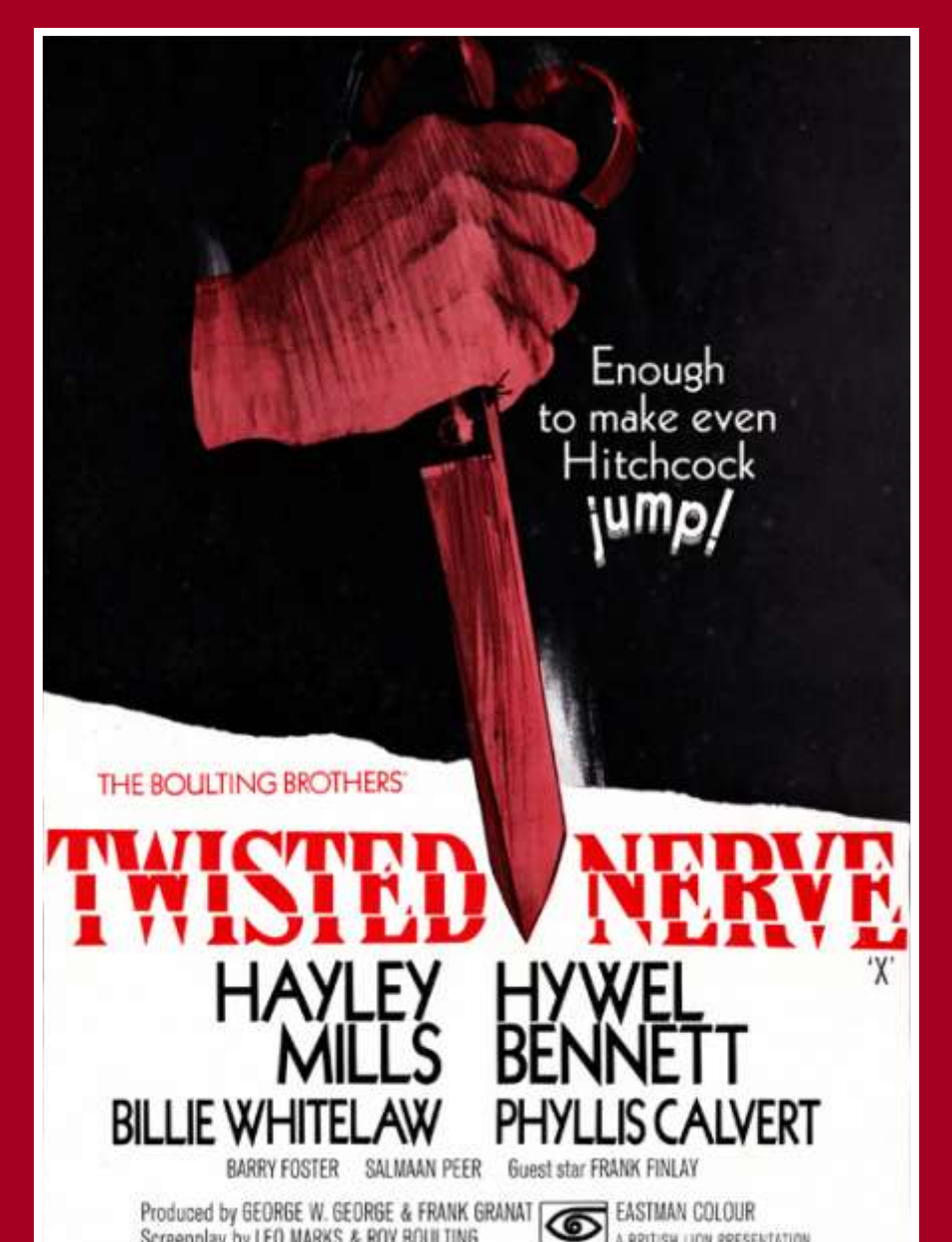
Publicity poster advertising Jimi Hendrix at the Astoria in 1967. Top of the bill at the concert were The Walker Brothers.



Louis Armstrong at the Astoria, 29 October 1970. It was to be his last performance in Britain.



Publicity posters for the final films to be shown at the Odeon (Astoria) on 18 September 1971.



RAINBOW RISING



Britain's First Rock Music Venue

In the autumn of 1971 the Astoria had undergone alterations costing £150,000. Now renamed the Rainbow Theatre, its leasehold was acquired by Sundancer Theatre Company Ltd, overseen by music promoter John Morris. His experience of stage-managing the Woodstock Festival in 1969 and co-founding the Fillmore East venue in New York would be influential when promoting the former Astoria as Britain's first dedicated rock music venue.

Who's Next

With daily film shows consigned to past, rock band The Who opened the new theatre on 4 November 1971, having first appeared at the venue five years earlier. The band's guitarist Pete Townshend wore a silver lamé jump suit with the famous Rainbow logo embroidered on its back to mark the occasion.

Concerts by Alice Cooper, Barclay James Harvest, Joan Baez, Wishbone Ash, Mott the Hoople, Family, Freddie King and, controversially, Frank Zappa & The Mothers of Invention were to quickly follow. Even Chipperfield's Circus was in-house for shows over the Christmas and New Year period.

Zappa Takes A Fall

Frank Zappa was due to play the Rainbow on two consecutive nights in December 1971. The show on 11 December was cancelled due to Trevor Howell, the jealous boyfriend of an enthusiastic female Zappa fan, pushing Zappa off the stage into the orchestra pit the previous night. Zappa sustained injuries during the attack, including a fractured leg. His attacker later received a sentence of 12-months imprisonment for grievous bodily harm. Cancellation of the Zappa concert was also a set back to John Morris, whose company went into liquidation in early-1972.

The Rainbow Reborn

In mid-1972, following a brief closure period, the lease on the premises has been acquired by Biffo, a company formed by Chrysalis organisation bosses, Chris Wright and Terry Ellis. Artists and groups recording for the Chrysalis label were to be among the first attractions featured at the reborn Rainbow: Jethro Tull, Ten Years After, Procol Harum, Cat Stevens, Black Sabbath and Edgar Broughton. Performances that year also included concerts by Free, Slade and Yes, as well as David Bowie's legendary 'Ziggy Stardust' shows. The Osmond Brothers' appearance at the Astoria brought 'Osmondmania' to Finsbury Park, reminiscent of the fan hysteria created by The Beatles a decade earlier.



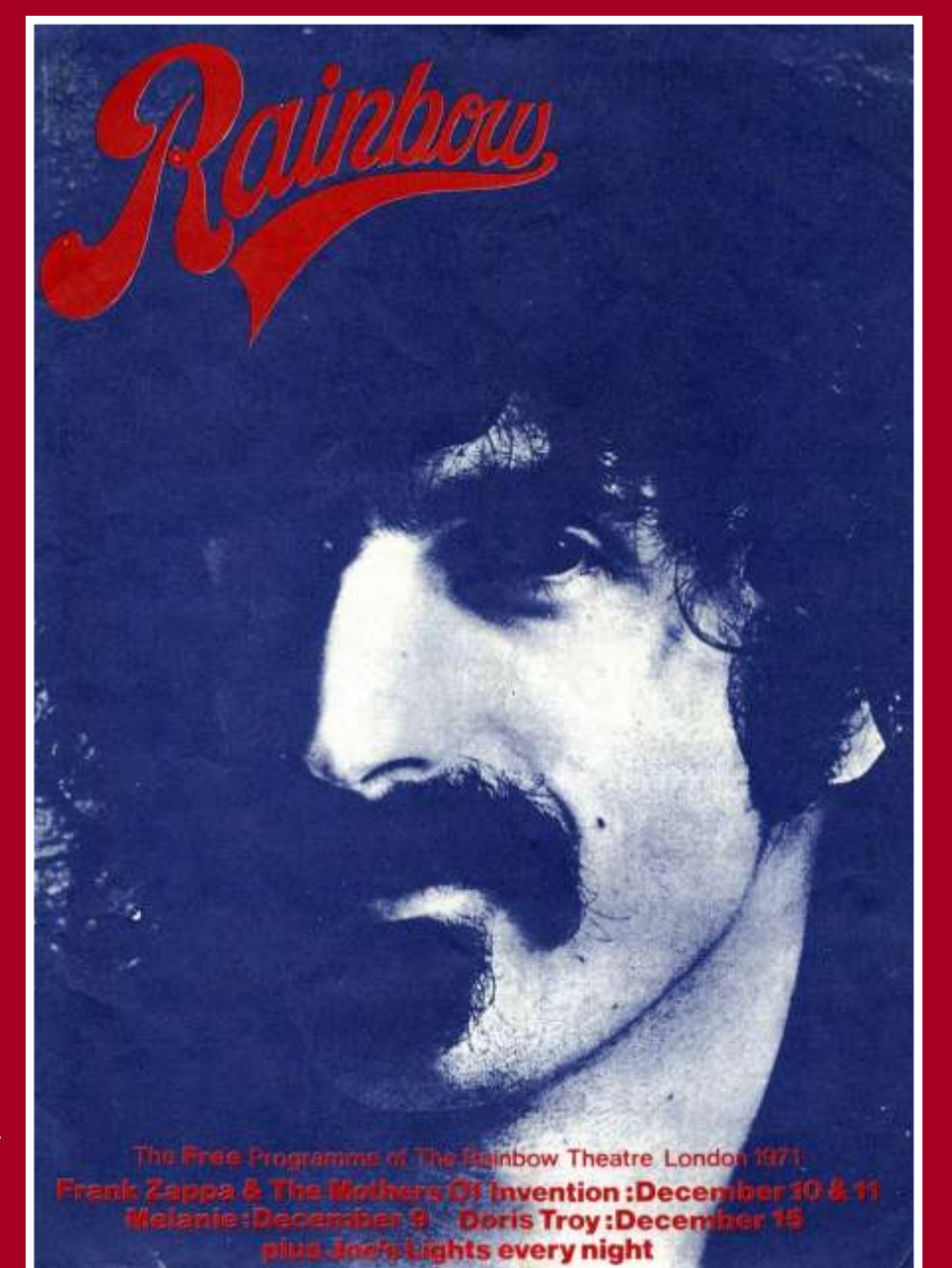
The Who opened the Rainbow with two concerts on 4 & 5 November 1971. Images from the Camden Journal (12 November 1971).

Rainbow

FUTURE ATTRACTIONS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2nd	LEON RUSSELL
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3rd	THE GREASE BAND AND
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4th	FREDDIE KING
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10th	FRANK ZAPPA AND
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11th	THE MOTHERS OF HEAVEN
* * *	
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17th	JOAN BAEZ
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18th	
* * *	
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19th	CENTPEDE
MONDAY, DECEMBER 20th	JOAN BAEZ AND MIAMI FARINA
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23rd	CURVED AIR, SKID ROW, NATIONAL HEAD BAND AND NICK PICKETT
* * *	
MONDAY, DECEMBER 27th TO SATURDAY, JANUARY 8th	CHIPPERFIELDS CIRCUS
* * *	
WITH A SURPRISE NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY ON DECEMBER 31st	
* * *	
PLUS JOE'S LIGHTS WITH EVERY PERFORMANCE	
232 SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, N.4	
BOX OFFICE OPEN 12 noon - 10 p.m. seven days a week (Tel: 01-272 2224)	
DOORS OPEN 7.30 p.m. - PERFORMANCES START AT 8 p.m.	

The Rainbow attracted some of the biggest names from the American music scene, as well as the best in home grown talent.



Cover programme for Frank Zappa's concerts at the Rainbow in December 1971. The musician suffered extensive injuries when thrown from the stage.

The Free Programme of the Rainbow Theatre, London 1971.
Frank Zappa & The Mothers Of Invention: December 10 & 11
Melanie: December 9
Oris Troy: December 18
plus Joe's Lights every night

Rainbow presents **THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT**

CHIPPERFIELDS CIRCUS

The International Show that has everything

- CHIPPERFIELDS **African Lionesses**
- FROM FRANCE **Les Gambys**
- Zira and the Nile Crocodiles*
- The Royal BENGAL TIGERS**
- FROM SPAIN **LOS JUANITOS**

FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME IN ANY CIRCUS IN THE WORLD THE FANTASTIC PROJECTED LIGHTING EFFECTS **JOE'S LIGHTS**

PERFORMING TIMES

MONDAY, 27 DEC.	2 p.m., 5 p.m., 8 p.m.
TUESDAY, 28 DEC.	2 p.m., 5 p.m., 8 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, 29 DEC.	5 p.m. and 8 p.m.
THURSDAY, 30 DEC.	5 p.m. and 8 p.m.
FRIDAY, 31 DEC.	SPECIAL SHOW
SATURDAY, 1 JAN., 1972	2 p.m., 5 p.m., 8 p.m.
MONDAY, 2 JAN.	5 p.m. and 8 p.m.
TUESDAY, 3 JAN.	5 p.m. and 8 p.m.

FROM FRANCE	Le Famille SANTUS
CHIPPERFIELDS	ELEPHANT TROUPE
FROM AUSTRALIA	The incomparable BRIAN ANDRO
THE HUNGARIAN	Spotted Stallions
CHARMIAN	

ADMISSION PRICES

Stalls	£1	75p	50p	40p	30p
Circle	80p	50p	40p	30p	25p

SPECIAL RATES FOR BLOCK BOOKINGS MAIL ORDERS ACCEPTED

RAINBOW THEATRE
(FORMERLY FINSBURY PARK ASTORIA)
2 WEEKS ONLY 27 DEC. 1971 to 8 JAN. 1972

BOOK AT CIRCUS THEATRE BOX OFFICE, 232 SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, N.4 TEL: 272 2224 AND AT USUAL BOOKING AGENCIES

The circus comes to town!

OVER THE RAINBOW



Down But Not Out

In 1974 the Rainbow was designated a Grade II listed building (later elevated to II* status). However, the fabric of the venue had seen better days and none of the various leasing companies who arranged the concerts or owners Rank were prepared to spend the sort of money necessary to maintain the theatre in good order. The Spanish palace was slowly becoming a slum.

Over The Rainbow

Concerts continued for another year until the theatre ran into financial trouble. Following a show by Procol Harum on 16 March 1975, and billed as 'Over the Rainbow', the theatre closed. Leaseholders Biffo were faced with a bill for £180,000 to keep the building in a preserved state, although the company claimed that they already had spent £60,000 on repairs to the building. For the remainder of 1975 and throughout the whole of 1976, the theatre was to remain dark and its future uncertain.

Rainbow Reprise

In 1977 the Rainbow was to rise once more, launching on New Year's Day with shows by Genesis. For the next five years, Strutworth Ltd, under the guidance of Allan Schaverien and partners, steered the Rainbow through a relatively unbroken run of rock concerts and other events, including a pantomime, boxing nights, film shoots and screenings and a stage production of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

It also began attracting artists from the emerging reggae, punk rock and new wave scenes, often with established acts being supported by up and coming bands and artists, themselves often going on to become household names.

The Year Punk Rock Exploded

Not only was 1977 the year the Rainbow re-established itself as London leading rock venue but it was also hailed the year that punk rock exploded, capturing the imagination of many of the country's youth. And, not to miss out, the theatre was to witness the short-lived musical movement in all of its disaffected glory!

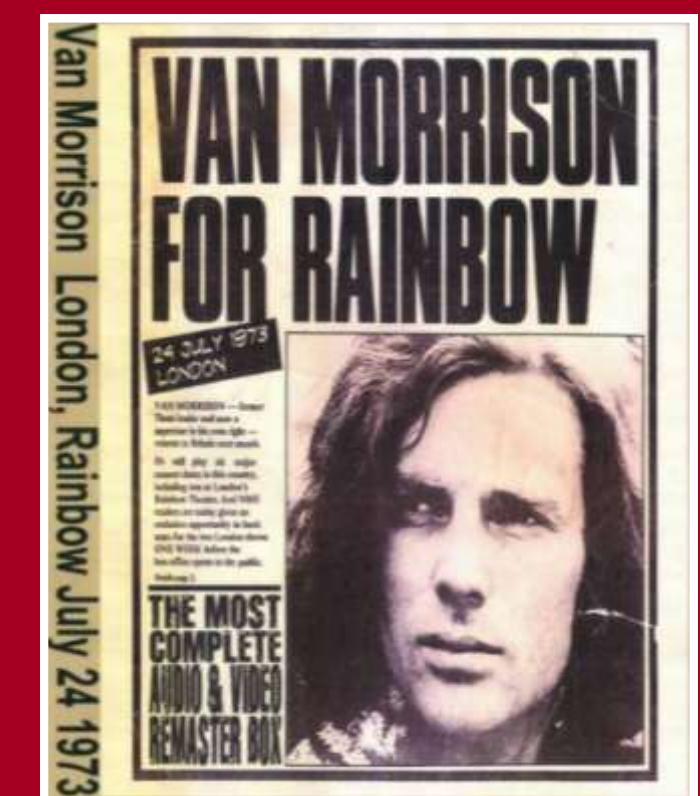
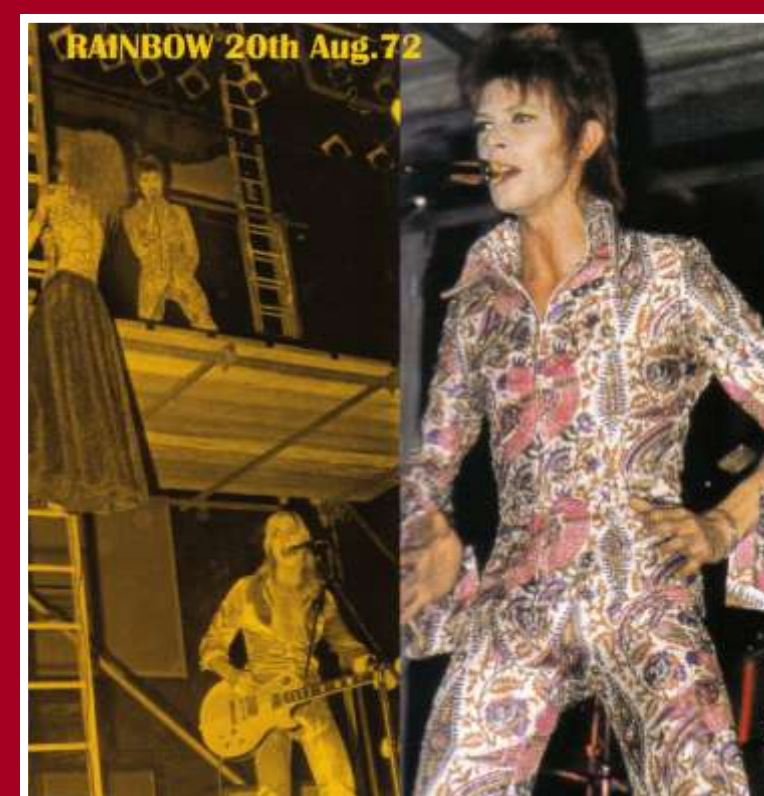
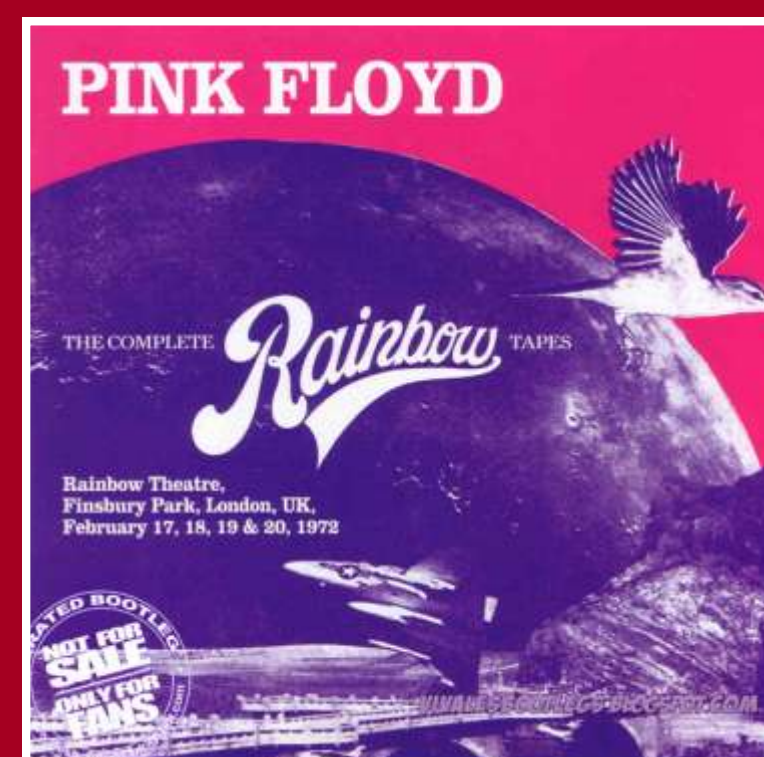
Conventional Meets Unconventional

For the first few months of '77 conventional rock acts shared the Rainbow with the unconventional upstarts of the burgeoning punk rock scene. Genesis, The Kinks, Fleetwood Mac, The Small Faces, Eric Clapton, Elton John, Marc Bolan (his last London show before his death later in the year) and even legendary rock 'n' roller Jerry Lee Lewis all played to packed audiences. But, so did the likes of Eddie and the Hot Rods, Ultravox, The Damned, The Stranglers and the Vibrators. The full energy of punk however finally exploded at the Rainbow when The Clash played the venue on 9 May 1977.

The 'Unconventional'. Eddie and the Hot Rods (1977) and the Stranglers (1979) at the Rainbow.

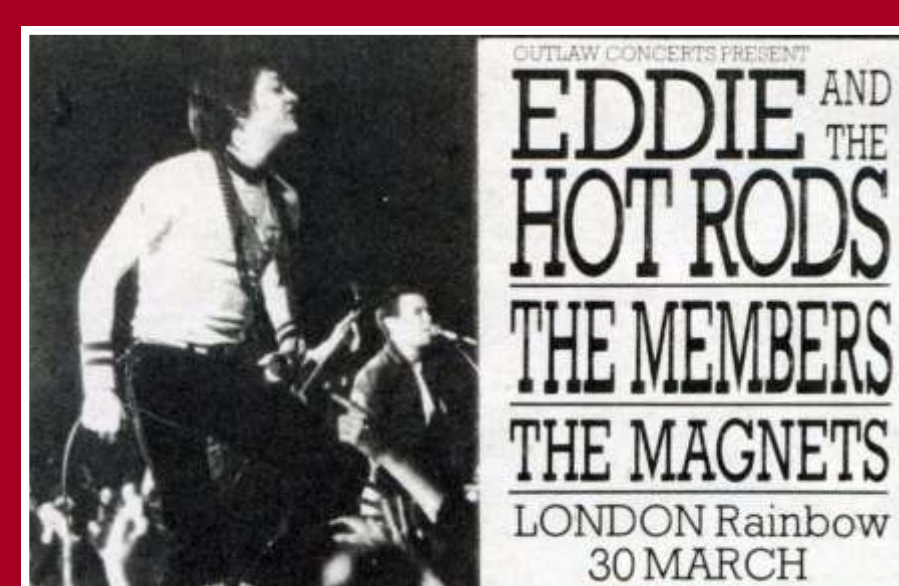
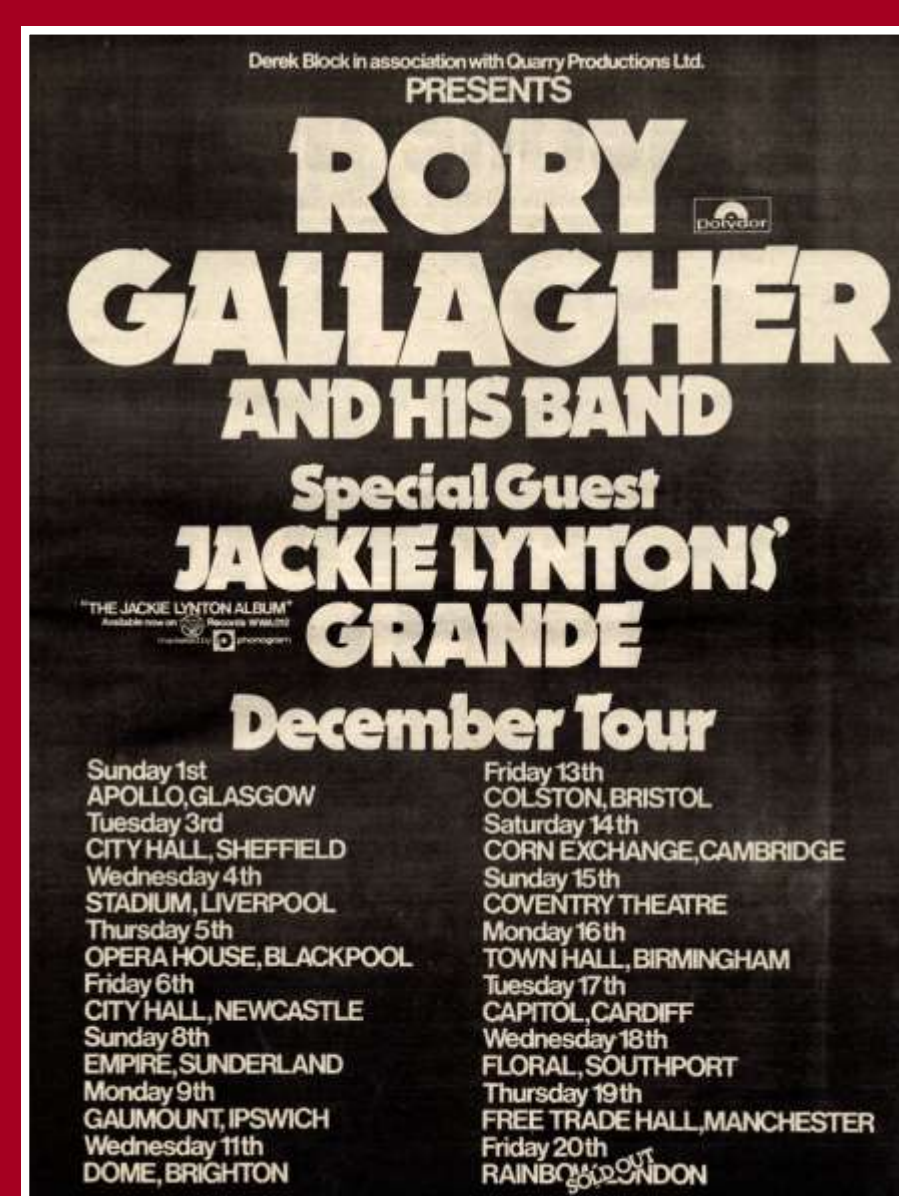


Rock band Genesis to reopen the Rainbow in January 1977. Sounds, 13 November 1976.



Above: The Rainbow was a favoured venue for live recordings, both official and bootleg. A selection of well-known 'unofficial' releases during the 1970s.

Below: Major rock acts continued to play the Rainbow in the 1970s, including Queen and Rory Gallagher's sold out concert in 1974.



RIOT, REGGAE AND ROCK

Rainbow

White Riot At The Rainbow

The Clash's *White Riot Tour* was the band's first headline tour. Support was provided by The Jam, The Buzzcocks, Subway Sect and The Prefects. This four-hour show was to become a milestone in British punk history. Not only was it the largest punk gig to be held in London to date but the song *White Riot* led to fans tearing out 200 seats and throwing the wreckage onstage.

Natural Exuberance

It was estimated that £1000 of damage was caused by Clash fans but the Rainbow's director, Allan Schaverien, remained philosophical about the incident:

"It was not malicious damage but natural exuberance...we expected some damage and arrangements were made to cover the cost of it... we shall have more punk concerts soon."

He was true to his word. With punk and new wave bands like Johnny Thunder & The Heartbreakers, The Ramones, Blondie, Siouxsie & The Banshees, The Rezillos, Sham 69, Generation X and, again, The Clash all appearing before the end of the year.

Exodus: Bob Marley & The Wailers

By the time Bob Marley and his band, the Wailers, played the Rainbow (1-6 June 1977), the singer was in self-imposed exile in England - a decision taken after he was shot in an assassination attempt at his home in Jamaica seven months earlier.

Marley's Rainbow performances were hailed as his finest in London and amongst the most memorable witnessed at the theatre. He performed several new songs from his latest album *Exodus*, which was recorded in the capital, including *Natural mystic*, *Jamming* and the title track. He also played established favourites such as *Trenchtown rock*, *I shot the sheriff* and *No woman, no cry*. The Rainbow shows were recorded and released as a video, *Bob Marley & the Wailers Live! at the Rainbow*.

And The Music Played On

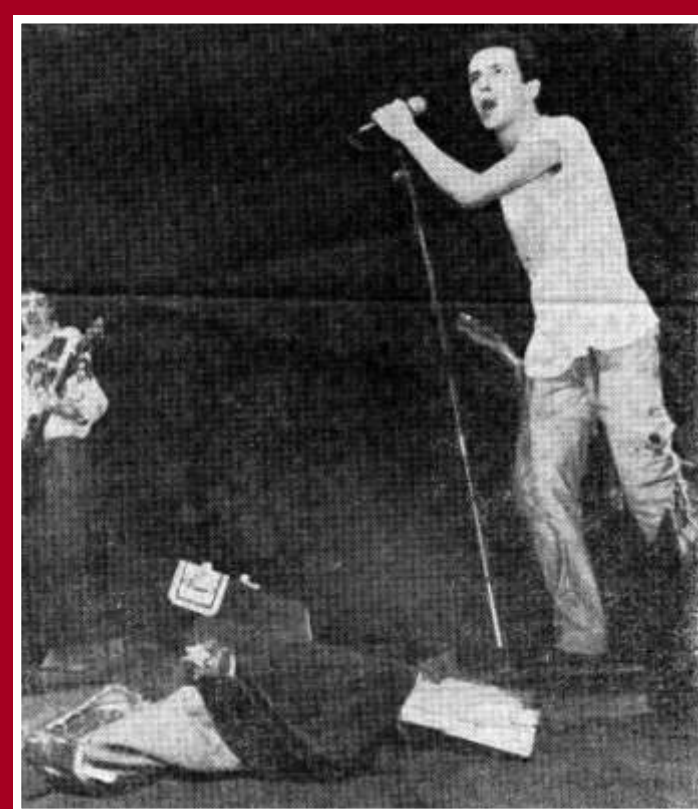
In the next few years, and as the decade came to a close, a veritable who's who in popular music played at the Rainbow: Thin Lizzy, Burning Spear, The Who, Queen, The Grateful Dead, Mighty Sparrow, Third World, Muddy Waters, PIL, The Jacksons (with Michael Jackson), Wings, Dire Straits, Marvin Gaye, The Police, The Specials and Black Uhuru, to name but a few.

On 29 September 1980, the theatre celebrated its 50th anniversary with a concert by Elvis Costello & the Attractions. In a little over a year, a performance by Costello was to mark a sadder occasion in the building's history.

I wanna riot! Fans smash 200 seats at punk show



Above: Clash fans at the Rainbow enjoying the 'riot'!



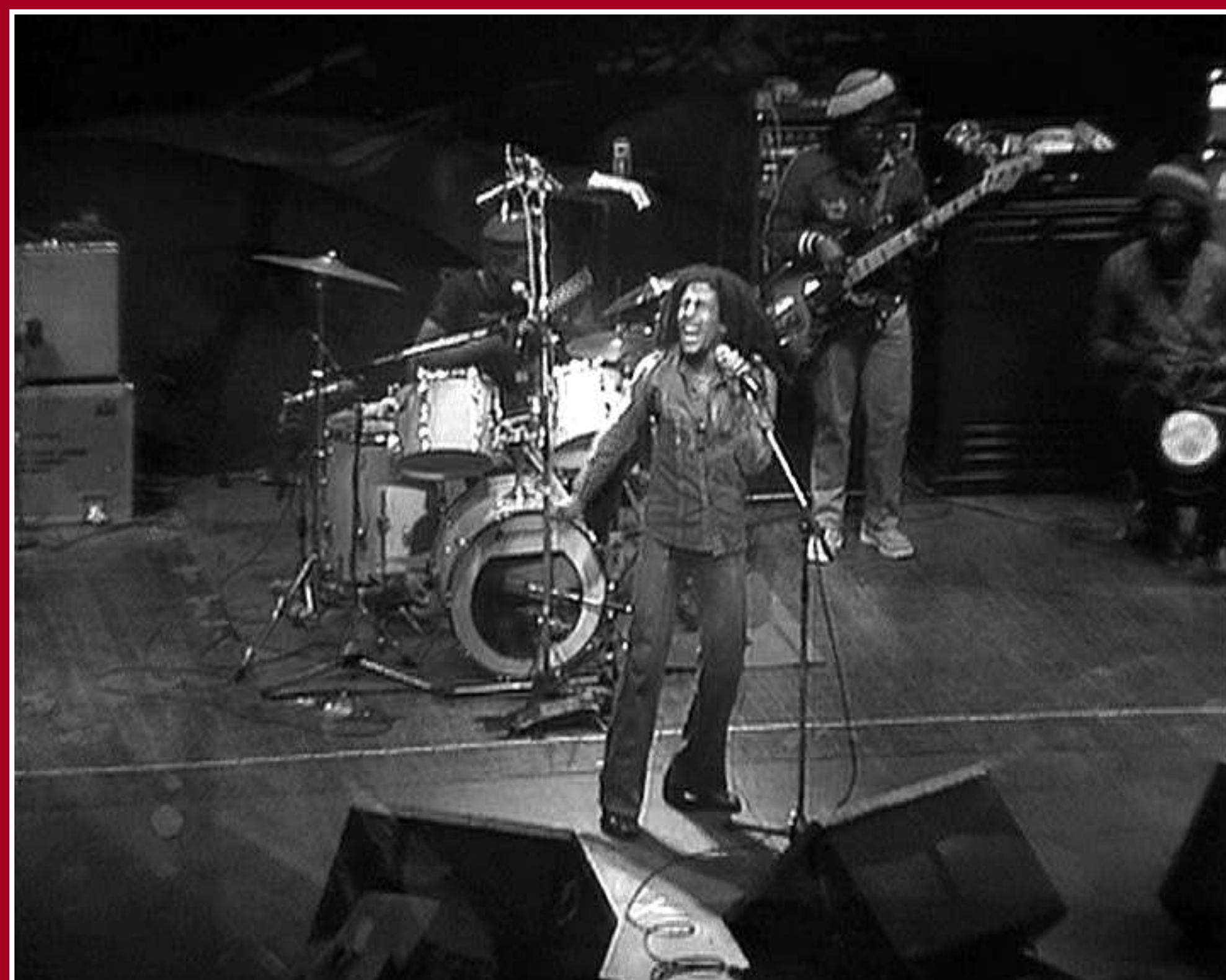
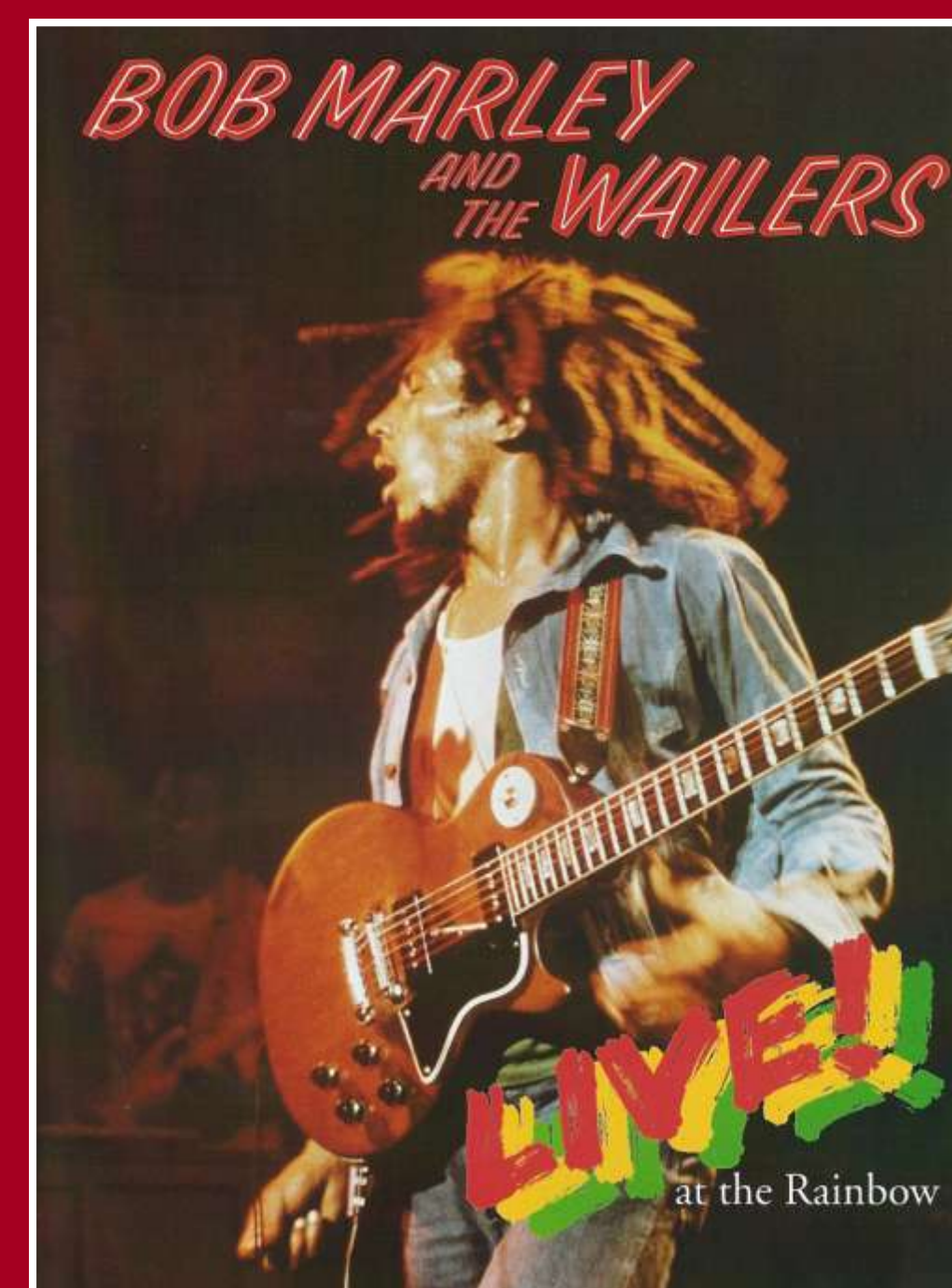
Left: Joe Strummer of the Clash performing at the Rainbow.

Images from the Evening Standard, 10 May 1977.



Bob Marley & the Wailers appeared at the Rainbow in June 1977. The six sell-out concerts were filmed and passed into music folklore.

Below: Marley at the Rainbow.



ELVIS HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

FINSBURY PARK
ASTORIA
Rainbow

Elvis Has Left The Building

By 1981 time was running out for the Rainbow. In spite of a full concert itinerary throughout the year, financial issues were to cause the venue's premature closure. A show by Elvis Costello & the Attractions on 24 December 1981 proved to be the last concert ever performed at the theatre.

The Dream Is Over

The Rainbow's lease, due to expire in October 1982, was put up for sale by leaseholder, Strutworth, for £150,000. The company blamed the Greater London Council for insisting on unreasonable works on the building, as well as an increase in the annual music licence from £500 to £6,000. With the help of owners Rank, Strutworth claimed to have spent £100,000 in renovations but, in spite of this, the dream was over.

Boxing And Bowie

In 1984 a proposal by Rank to convert the Rainbow into a bingo hall was withdrawn and plans to reopen as a music venue never materialised. For the most part the building remained dark for the next ten or so years. The occasional event took place, including unlicensed boxing matches, most notably in April 1986 when Lenny McLean beat Roy Shaw in a dramatic first round knockout. David Bowie also hired the building for a press conference to announce his 1990 *Sound and Vision Tour*. Four years later the Rainbow was used briefly as a place of worship by the Elim Pentecostal Church.

Universal Church Of The Kingdom Of God

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) acquired the building in 1995 and began restoring the auditorium and foyer to its former 1930s glory. On 28 February 2004 to celebrate the restoration, and in conjunction with the Cinema Theatre Association, the church screened Billy Wilder's film *Sunset Boulevard* – its last showing at the venue was in 1950.

In 2013, the UCKG continues its tenancy at the Astoria / Rainbow. Although today movies and music are distant memories, its restored interior is a reminder to worshippers and visitors that it was once, cinematically, the 'World's mightiest wonder theatre' and the country's most famous rock music venue.



The Rainbow, Finsbury Park, 1986.
(Photo: Dusashenka)



The Rainbow Theatre's proscenium arch and stage, 1986.
(Photo: Dusashenka)



'Restoration'. UCKG, Finsbury Park, 2000s.
(Photo: UCKG)



The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) Finsbury Park, 2013.

Acknowledgement
Islington Heritage Services would like to thank Rick Burton for his help with the preparation of this presentation.

All images sourced from Islington Local History Centre unless otherwise stated.

MUSIC HALL OF FAME



With over 750 concerts performed between 1960 and 1981 at the Astoria and Rainbow Theatre, here is a small selection of those musicians and groups who took to the stage during this time.

Astoria

Aretha Franklin
The Beach Boys
Bert Weedon
Bill Haley & The Comets
Carl Perkins
Chuck Berry
Cliff Richard & The Shadows
Count Basie & His Orchestra
Dave Brubeck Quartet
The Dave Clarke Five
Dusty Springfield
Eddie Cochran
Ella Fitzgerald
Errol Garner
Frank Sinatra
Gene Pitney
Gene Vincent
George Shearing
Johnny Kidd & The Pirates
Jimi Hendrix Experience
Johnny Mathis
Kenny Baker
Louis Armstrong & His All Stars
Matt Munro
Miles Davis
Nat King Cole
Oscar Peterson
Ray Charles & his Orchestra
Roy Orbison
Sarah Vaughan
Scott Walker
Shirley Bassey
Stan Kenton
Sonny & Cher
Teddy Johnson & Pearl Carr
The Animals
The Beatles
The Byrds
The Duke Ellington Orchestra
The Hollies
The Jeff Beck Group
The Kinks
The Rolling Stones
The Small Faces
The Who
The Yardbirds
Tom Jones
Traffic

Rainbow

AC/DC
Adam & The Ants
Alice Cooper
Aswad
B B King
Bad Company
Black Uhuru
Blondie
Bob Marley
Burning Spear
Can
Canned Heat
Captain Beefheart
Curtis Mayfield
David Bowie
Deep Purple
Dennis Brown & The Professionals
Desmond Decker & The Aces
Dire Straits
Donna Summer
Duane Eddy
Eddie & The Hot Rods
Elton John
Elvis Costello & The Attractions
Eric Clapton
Fela Kuti
Frank Zappa &
The Mothers of Invention
Freddie King
Free
Genesis
Gregory Isaac
Hawkwind
Human League
Humble Pie
Iggy Pop
Iron Maiden
Isaac Hayes
Jerry Lee Lewis
Joan Baez
Joy Division
Judas Priest
King Crimson
Little Feat
Liza Minnelli
Lou Reed
Lynyrd Skynyrd
Marc Bolan & T Rex

Rainbow

Mighty Sparrow
Mike Oldfield
Muddy Walters
Misty in Roots
Neil Young
Osibisa
Peter Tosh
Matumbi
PIL
Pink Floyd
Queen
Rainbow
Rod Stewart
Rory Gallagher
Roxy Music
Roy Harper
Slade
Status Quo
Steel Pulse
Steve Hillage
Stevie Wonder
Tangerine Dream
The Bay City Rollers
The Chieftains
The Clash
The Eagles
The Jam
The Buzzcocks
The Faces
The Grateful Dead
The Jacksons
The Jam
The Kinks
The Moody Blues
The Osmonds
The Police
The Ramones
The Specials
The Stranglers
The Who
Thin Lizzy
Third World
UB 40
Van Halen
Van Morrison
Wings
XTC
Yes