

Theories of Haunted Theaters

By Kathryn Wickham

Urban legend says that all theaters are haunted. It seems that there are a lot of stories passed around about strange events occurring at old theaters including shadows, voices, apparitions in period clothing and even empty seats extended open with a depression in the cushion as if a patron were sitting in the seat. There are many theories as to why it seems ghosts are often found in theaters.

One thought is that theaters are a place of drama and emotion that is captured by the elaborate environment or that a spirit had an emotional connection to the theater. Perhaps, it is the structure of the building's acoustics that leads to amplification of every sound in a quiet theater. A scavenging mouse could potentially be misinterpreted as an actor's spirit traveling the stage, or creaks from old wood structures could be thought of as a deceased stage hand hammering away at a set project. Perhaps there is even a scientific explanation.

Understanding a haunting in the scientific sense would require knowledge of the electrical impulses of the body. All systems of the body are controlled by electrical impulses sent to and from the brain. A general law of physics states that the total amount of energy in an isolated system remains constant over time. Energy can transfer itself from one form to another, but it cannot be created nor destroyed. Therefore, when someone dies the energy has to go somewhere and it then gets released into the atmosphere.

Electromagnetic field (EMF) meters are a tool used for paranormal research designed to measure changes in electromagnetic energy. High levels can be detected on investigations at theaters that can be caused by high voltage electrical systems or old poorly insulated wiring. EMF can be the cause or the effect of paranormal phenomenon. Debate among paranormal researchers continues with regard to whether EMF is a source of energy that allows intelligent spirits to communicate in some form or whether it is the result of some spiritual energy at the detected location.

Theory suggests that surrounding electromagnetic fields trap the energy that is released at a person's time of death. Theatres have high voltage electrical systems in them to support the sound and lighting equipment used for shows and therefore is the source of a large electromagnetic field. Theaters have been known to be dangerous places at one time. It was common to have lighting equipment fall down and kill someone and others would fall to their death from a catwalk high above the stage. Such traumatic events within an environment that is already encapsulated by a large electromagnetic field would be the likely place for residual energy to become trapped... and now you have a ghost!

Whether paranormal phenomenon in an historical theater is caused by EMF entrapment or if the theater itself is the source for manifestation of an emotionally attached spirit, it is likely that one might experience the unexplained while visiting such an icon of artistic culture.

Some popular theaters in the paranormal community are as follows.



Ford's Theater on 511 Tenth St, NW in Washington where President Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865 took place by John Wilkes Booth during the play *Our American Cousin*.



The Bird Cage Theater in Tombstone, AZ, opened in 1881 by William "Billy" Hutchinson. It served as a theater, saloon, brothel and gambling house until about 1889. At least 26 murders were committed on the property.



The Ritz Theater in Shawnee, OK, originally built as a dry goods store in 1897 and became a theater in 1913. It is believed to be haunted by the theater's projectionist who worked in the building from 1913 and later lived in the building until his death in 1965.