

Netflix reopens Hollywood's 'Egyptian' movie palace

November 8 2023, by Andrew MARSZAL



Hollywood's Egyptian Theatre first opened its doors in October 1922.

The Egyptian Theatre, which hosted Hollywood's first-ever red carpet premiere in its faux hieroglyph-adorned courtyard more than a century ago, reopens this week under the new ownership of Netflix.

Steeped in silver screen lore, the venerable Los Angeles movie palace may seem an unlikely investment for a streaming giant that has made a fortune convincing viewers to watch films on their TVs, laptops and even phones.

But for Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, the chance to save a crumbling Tinseltown institution—and showcase his company's rapid ascent from tech disruptor to a key player at the very heart of the entertainment industry—was a no-brainer.

"Hollywood is all about symbols," he told AFP.

"The Hollywood Sign and this [theater](#) are probably the two most iconic symbols of Hollywood... this one, unfortunately, was falling down."

The theater first opened its doors in October 1922, with the world premiere of Douglas Fairbanks' "Robin Hood." Previously, Los Angeles' burgeoning entertainment industry had been focused on the downtown area, a few miles away.

Organizers installed dazzling lights to lure a crowd, and rolled a red carpet across the theater's courtyard for VIP guests including Charlie Chaplin. That innovation, intended to emulate the etiquette of European royalty, would set the model for showbiz premieres for a century to come.



Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos attends the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre, in Hollywood, California on November 6, 2023.

Over the following decades, the Egyptian Theatre fell on harder times, and it suffered major damage in Los Angeles' 1994 earthquake.

It was taken over by the nonprofit American Cinematheque, which repaired the building, but had difficulties funding its upkeep—until Netflix came along.

The deep-pocketed streamer agreed to bankroll work to renovate the theater once again. It has not disclosed the cost, but estimates put it around \$70 million.

"We, as an aptly named nonprofit, were struggling," said Rick Nicita, chairman of the American Cinematheque.

"They came in and just formed a terrific partnership with us. They understood what we were trying to do."

Under the deal, Netflix will host its own screenings during the week, starting with David Fincher's "The Killer" this Thursday, while the American Cinematheque will showcase classics such as "Lawrence of Arabia" at the weekends.

"We rent [movie theaters](#) all the time, in New York and LA, to do our premieres and our events," said Sarandos.

"So the idea that we can put that effort into something that results in the preservation of something great? It just felt like a win-win."



Hollywood's Egyptian Theatre hosted tinseltown's first-ever red carpet premiere in 1922.

'Next 100 years'

With its sand-colored walls and columns, colorful hieroglyphs and a giant, metallic scarab beetle hanging above the stage, the theater was originally designed to cash in on the 1920s mania for all things Ancient Egyptian.

Ushers at the original "Robin Hood" premiere were dressed in Egyptian costumes. In a stroke of marketing fate, Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered just two weeks later.

While undergoing the theater's latest restoration, Netflix redesigned the building and courtyard to closely mirror its 1922 specifications, albeit with state-of-the-art audio and visual installations.

The move is the latest statement of intent from a company that has invested heavily in recent years to lure the silver screen's top directors and stars to its films, and consolidate its position as a company at the center of the Hollywood ecosystem, with respect for its traditions.

The streamer also took over New York's historic Paris Theater a few years ago.

"We've been making original movies for under seven years... we haven't contributed much to the whole overall 100 years [of Hollywood history]," said Sarandos.



Visitors attend the press preview for the reopening of the Egyptian Theatre, in Hollywood, California on November 6, 2023.

"But this is like a down-payment on the next 100 years."

Of course, the prospect of Netflix dominating the film industry for a century ahead is likely to trouble some theater owners.

While rivals such as Apple have recently put movies like "Killers of the Flower Moon" on big screens for extended runs before streaming, Netflix has irked movie theater bosses by refusing to do the same.

But Sarandos rejects "all this talk about whether or not streaming has been good or bad for the entertainment industry," pointing to the reopening of the Egyptian.

"In so many ways, streaming has saved the entertainment industry. And this is a symbol of that, too."

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Citation: Netflix reopens Hollywood's 'Egyptian' movie palace (2023, November 8) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-11-netflix-reopens-hollywood-egyptian-movie.html>

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