

THE AMERICAN MUSICAL

Teacher Handbook 2025-2026



This show is being updated for 26-27. This is available as a reference until our updated show and handbook are complete.

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Know-Before-You-Go 2025-2026

Buses and Parking Book your bus to arrive at The Sheldon 20 minutes before showtime, and to leave The Sheldon 1 hour after show time. We recommend your bus approaches from Spring Avenue. Staff will be waiting to help your bus park in the appropriate place and give further instructions. Please stay on the bus until you have those instructions. Buses park for free on the street in front of The Sheldon and in the lot. Cars park for free in the West Lot, on the right side of The Sheldon if you are facing the steps. Cars park on the perimeter to allow buses space on the interior of the lot.

Tickets & Payment Physical tickets will not be sent, but the seats reflected on your invoice will be reserved together, and you will be seated by ushers in the concert hall when you arrive. Your payment is due 30 days before the show. Payment online with a credit card is the preferred method, but your school can also send a check. Please contact the Director of Education if you have unusual circumstances. A Ticketing and Payment Policies Document is included with your invoice.

Concert Manners Please coach your students in good concert manners before coming to The Sheldon Concert Hall. Good audiences love to listen to music and show their appreciation with applause, usually at the end of an entire piece and occasionally after a good solo by one of the musicians. Food and drink are prohibited in The Sheldon Concert Hall. Any device that makes noise is a distraction for both the performers on stage and your fellow audience members and should be put away. No photos or video are allowed during the performance. Restrooms are on the same level as the concert hall near the Art Galleries. Please encourage students to use restrooms at school or to use Sheldon restrooms before the concert begins. If a student does need to use the restroom during the performance, the best time to get up is between musical numbers.

Art Galleries The Sheldon Galleries will have on view the exhibition *We Each Hold Stories* from November 7, 2025 – May 2, 2026. *We Each Hold Stories* features 16 established and emerging Indigenous American artists co-curated by Tom Jones of the Ho-Chunk Nation and Paula Lincoln, The Sheldon Gallery Director. The work in the exhibition explores themes of personal experience, family, history, and current social issues. The artists reimagine their Native identity through storytelling, addressing land, community, and human behavior with a focus on healing and connection between past and present.

You are invited to contact The Sheldon and add a 30-minute visit to the galleries after the concert when you attend a Sheldon Education Program. Tours are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and we can accommodate 40 students at one time, 3rd grade and older. Groups with 80 students can be divided into two consecutive tours, totaling 60 minutes. Groups of more than 80 students exceed our capacity.

Health + Safety Please visit our website for the most up-to-date information on health and safety measures. To communicate the need for accessible seating, please indicate so on your reservation form. The Sheldon staff can direct you toward elevators. We recommend students that might have sensory or stimulation issues bring their own noise-cancelling headphones, but if you are surprised by a need for them, we have some in the box office.

Show Description and Curricular Connections

About the Show

The American Musical takes the audience on a journey through musical history, the making of a musical, and careers and opportunities in music theatre. Made of a medley of classic and trendsetting excerpts, a cast of five St. Louis theatre professionals sing and dance in a variety of styles to showcase the many ways music theatre can tell a story.

Recommended Resources

www.backstage.com offers several practical resources for people getting started in musical theater.

[How to Break Into Musical Theater](#)

[Key Musical Theater Terms to Know Before Your Audition](#)

Leonard Bernstein

An excellent resource on the composer, featuring his work on [West Side Story](#).

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History and Hamilton Education Program Online

[The Hamilton Education Program Online](#) helps students in grades 6–12 see the relevance of the founding era by using primary sources to create a performance piece (e.g., a song, rap, poem, or scene) following the model used by Lin-Manuel Miranda to create the musical Hamilton.

The Kennedy Center's Musical Theater in America

A [multi-part audio series](#), Heather Nathans, Associate Professor of Theatre at the University of Maryland, introduces you to musical theater using examples from Broadway, the history, structure and elements of musical theater, musical theater's role in making social commentary, its legacy, and how you too can create a musical.

The Arts as Culture, History, and Connectors

from National Core Arts Standards on Artistic Literacy

Philosophical Foundations

Throughout history the arts have provided essential means for individuals to express their ideas, experiences, feelings and deepest beliefs. Each discipline shares common goals, but approaches them through distinct media and techniques. Understanding artwork provides insights into individuals' own and others' cultures and societies, while also providing opportunities to access and express, and integrate meaning across a variety of content areas.

Lifelong Goals

Artistically literate citizens know and understand artwork from varied historical periods and cultures, and actively seek and appreciate diverse forms and genres of artwork of enduring quality and significance. They also seek to understand relationships between the arts and cultivate habits of searching for and identifying patterns, relationships between the arts, and other knowledge.

The Sheldon's Goal

We provide access to age-appropriate concert experiences that engage and inspire the student audience to pursue artistic literacy and all the benefits it offers.

Performers



Cameron Jamarr Davis

A proud member of SAG-AFTRA and the Actors Equity Association, Cameron is a trained actor with regional experience including St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, the Hangar Theater, Hudson valley Shakespeare Festival, and the Celebration Theater, among others. He moved to Los Angeles in 2015 after achieving his Equity card in New York City, also working as a guest artist and substitute teacher. A series of journeys in between both cities would push, challenge, awaken, then eventually inspire the creation and philosophy of Soul Siren Playhouse, which Cameron founded in 2019.



John Flack

John has been a professional actor for more than twenty five years - and is based right here in his hometown, St. Louis. During that time he has performed from coast to coast (and even in Hawaii - that was fun). Locally, he has worked at The Muny, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, The Black Rep, The New Jewish Theatre, (among others), and has been a member of the acting company at Stages St. Louis since 1991.



Steve Neale

Steve is an award-winning composer, conductor and pianist. With a degree in Film Scoring from the Berklee College of Music, Steve has written and produced music for film, video games, and live theater around the country. Steve directs the renowned choir at St. Margaret of Scotland parish, is adjunct faculty in the Leigh Gerdine Conservatory of Music at Webster University. He sings in the a cappella celtic group, The Wee Heavies and has music directed and done sound design for many local and national theater companies.

Steve composes music for media (KMOX in St. Louis, MO and WTMJ in Milwaukee, WI most recently), has worked on films and video games, music directs theatre and live events, does sound-design, conducts choirs, is a sought-after session pianist, accompanist and vocalist, works as a producer and video editor, has decades of teaching experience at the high-school and college level.



Eileen Engel

Eileen Engel holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Southeast Missouri State University and has performed at The Fabulous Fox Theatre, New Jewish Theatre, Variety Theatre, Playhouse at Westport Plaza, Stray Dog Theatre, Bluff City Theater, Blue Strawberry, The Midnight Co., Soul Siren Playhouse, St. Louis Actor's Studio, Fly North Theatricals, COCA, Little Theatre on the Square, New Line Theatre, Thin Air Theatre Company, McLeod Summer Playhouse, St. Louis Shakespeare, R-S Theatrics, & more. She has been nominated for St. Louis Theatre Circle Awards for her performances as Ocean (Ride The Cyclone) & Rosa Bud (The Mystery of Edwin Drood).



Zoe Vonder Haar

Zoe began her professional career touring in the 1st International Company of A CHORUS LINE and has since appeared in over 100 regional productions predominately at Stages St. Louis, The Repertory Theater of St. Louis, and The Muny. Favorite roles include Mama Rose in GYPSY, Mame Dennis in MAME, Dolly Levi in HELLO DOLLY, (Kevin Kline Award), Jeannette in THE FULL MONTY, (Theatre Circle Award), Mrs. Higgins in MY FAIR LADY, Jack's Mother in INTO THE WOODS, Old Lady in SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, Ms. Pennywise in URINETOWN: The Musical, Hattie in FOLLIES, Judy in IT SHOULD'VE BEEN YOU, and Louise in ALWAYS...PATSY CLINE (Theatre Circle Award). Zoe teaches acting and dance, and choreographs and directs at several area schools. She is a cast member of both THE AMERICAN MUSICAL and WINTER WONDERLAND performed throughout the year at the Sheldon Concert Hall.

A History of the American Musical

The musical is America's most popular form of live theater, combining drama, music and dance with dazzling spectacle. Drama and music have been performed together throughout history. In the 18th century, Europeans enjoyed opera, operetta and ballad operas, which incorporated popular songs of the day into a comic or serious play. In the 19th century, European and American theaters performed melodramas, plays with live background music that emphasized the emotions of the characters, much like today's film scores.

Most historians call *The Black Crook*, produced in 1866, the first American musical. A French ballet troupe was scheduled to appear at the Academy of Music in New York City in that year, but the Academy theater building burned down. In desperation, the producers approached the manager of another New York theater, Niblo's Garden. Niblo's was rehearsing a new melodrama set in the Alps, called *The Black Crook*. So, the ballet producers persuaded Niblo's manager to incorporate a series of ballets into the drama. The beautiful French dancers, the dramatic story, elaborate Alpine settings and costumes all combined to make a hit: the American musical was born.

The first full-length musical written and performed by African-Americans, *In Dahomey*, starring the comedy team of Bert Williams and George Walker, opened in 1903. By World War I, African-American-influenced music and dance forms such as ragtime, jazz, and tap dance, were incorporated into many musical theater productions composed by both blacks and whites.

Two distinct styles of musical theater began to emerge in the early 20th century, and continue to thrive today. The first style being that of a small cast contemporary show with a jazz-influenced score. An example of this style can be seen through the musical *Very Good Eddie*, a comedy of mistaken identities among honeymooners with a score by Jerome Kern that opened at the Princess Theatre in 1915. The other style, showing a European, operatic influence, can be seen

in shows like *The Student Prince* (1924) composed by Sigmund Romberg.

Although the musicals of the of this period had some sort of plot and characters, they were usually flimsy, and little attempt was made to integrate the music and dance into the drama. *Showboat*, by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, premiered in 1927 and was the first Broadway show to combine American forms of music with a serious plot and well-developed characters. Though *Showboat* was a long-running hit, this new integration of all the elements did not become a trend until 1943, when Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Oklahoma* opened on Broadway. Like *Showboat*, *Oklahoma* was an adaptation of a serious novel with well-developed characters. *Oklahoma*'s music and choreographer Agnes DeMille's dances advance the plot and reveal the characters' inner thoughts.

Small-cast, contemporary shows have continued in popularity, including the long-running favorite *The Fantastiks* (1960) and *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* (1967). At the same time, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera* (1986) continued the tradition of the large-scale, operatic spectacle. Shows like *Starlight Express* (1984) and *Miss Saigon* (1991) blend contemporary music with spectacular technical feats like rollerblading ramps and life-size helicopters.

Broadway was slow to join the rock music bandwagon. *Hair* (1968) was the first true rock musical to achieve mainstream recognition. *Jesus Christ Superstar* followed in 1971, *Grease* in 1972, and *Rent* in 1996.

Lion King (1997) is the longest-running in a successful line of 17 Disney musicals on Broadway, which includes *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), *Newsies* (2012), and *Aladdin* (2011). Musical theatre continues to evolve today including popular music styles like *Hamilton* (2015) by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Waitress* (2016) by Sarah Bareilles.

American Musical Vocabulary

adaptation- A different version, created for a new purpose. For example, a novel's characters and plot can be adapted to create a musical theater production.

ballad opera- A form of 18th century musical drama that combines a comic or sentimental play with repurposed, or adapted songs that were popular during that era.

book- The script and lyrics of a musical.

characters- The people in a play. They are defined by the stage directions, by their words, actions, and appearance, and by what others in the play say about them.

choreographer- The person responsible for creating the dances.

director (or stage director)- The person with primary responsibility for interpreting the script, rehearsing the actors, and coordinating all of the elements of a play or musical.

lyrics- The words of a song.

medley- In music, a medley is a piece composed from parts of existing pieces, usually three, played one after another, sometimes overlapping.

melodrama- A form of drama popular in the 19th century that tells a serious story pitting good against evil, in which justice triumphs in the end. Melodrama used live music to create mood and underscore the emotions of the characters.

musical director- The person responsible for training the singers and conducting the orchestra.

musical review- Performance of a series of songs and dances, sometimes loosely tied together with a plot or theme.

overture- An orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera, suite, play, oratorio, or other extended composition.

plot- The story of a play or musical. Usually presents a conflict: a problem, question or series of obstacles that the protagonist must overcome.

protagonist- The main character in a play or musical.

score- The music written for a musical.

spectacle- All the visual elements of a play including costumes, makeup, settings and props.

theme- The ideas in a play or musical, the view of human nature that the play presents.

The American Musical Set List

ACT 1

A Musical..... SOMETHING'S ROTTEN, Wayne Kirkpatrick and Karey Kirkpatrick
Cool..... WEST SIDE STORY, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim
One Hand, One Heart..... WEST SIDE STORY, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim
America..... WEST SIDE STORY, Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim

ACT 2

The Circle of Life..... THE LION KING, Elton John and Tim Rice
All That Jazz..... CHICAGO, John Kander and Fred Ebb
Loathing..... WICKED, Stephen Schwartz
Don Quixote..... MAN OF LAMANCHA, Mitch Leigh
On My Own..... LES MISERABLES, Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil and Jean-Marc Natel
Music of the Night..... PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, Andrew Lloyd Weber
What's Inside..... WAITRESS, Sara Bareilles
You Can't Stop the Beat..... HAIRSPRAY, Marc Shaiman, Scott Wittman
Brand New Day..... THE WIZ, Charlie Smalls
Prologue..... INTO THE WOODS, Stephen Sondheim
Oh What a Beautiful Morning..... OKLAHOMA, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II
Seasons of Love..... RENT, Jonathon Larson
The Room Where It Happens..... HAMILTON, Lin-Manuel Miranda
You Will Be Found..... DEAR EVAN HANSON, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul
Just Be/Beautiful..... KINKY BOOTS, Cindy Lauper

Classroom Activity: Musical Maker

Students will identify significant aspects of the musical theatre genre, and apply knowledge to imagine a musical production.

1. As a class, identify significant building blocks of a musical. (Plot, music/lyrics, dance, costumes, set)
2. Assign partners or small groups.
3. Allow students to select a book or existing story that could be adapted into a musical.
4. Provide the Musical Maker worksheet for students to imagine and plan a new musical, making choices to support the telling of the story. The goal is for students to make intentional choices that support the story line, setting, characters, and time period.
5. Extension: Each group designs a poster for the musical and shares their musical plan with the class.
6. Extension: Students re-write the lyrics of an existing song to create one of the songs in the musical. Students could perform these new lyrics with a karaoke track for the existing song. Students should consider the genre, tempo, and emotion of the song to make sure it is a good fit for their musical. In the same way, the new lyrics should help elaborate on the story line, strengthen the character development, and/or describe the scene.

Musicals often take existing stories and add music, lyrics, and dance to reach the audience in a new way. Pages 14-15 of this curriculum by PBS (paired with their 2012 series on Broadway that is no longer available) show connections of existing musicals to fiction and historical events.

[Link to PBS Broadway Materials](#)

Musical Maker

Story Inspiration:

Plot: Act 1

Plot: Act 2 (Resolves the story)

Description of set: (time, season, location)

Lead roles and descriptions:

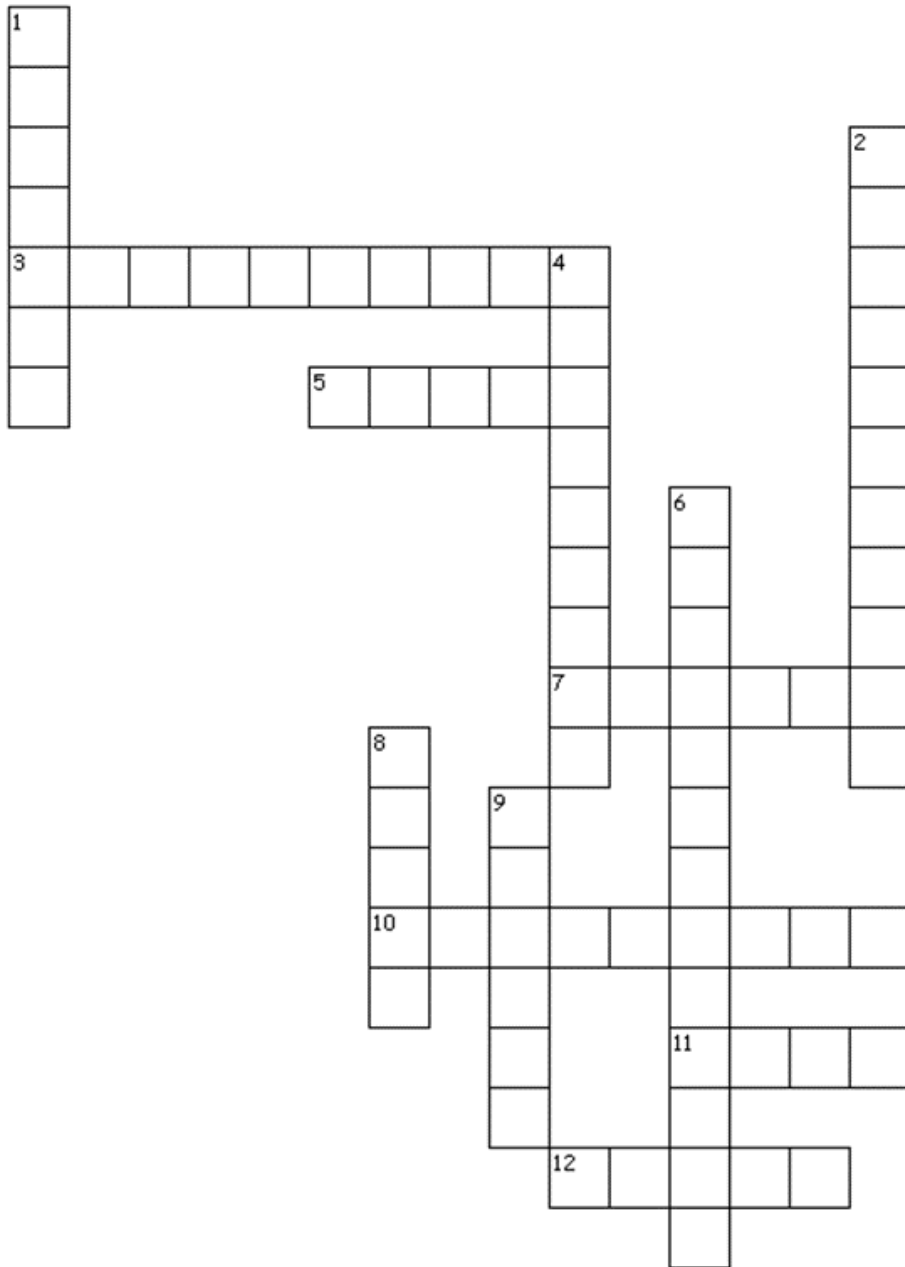
Musical genre/instruments used:

Costume needs:

Props needed:

Choreography style:

Classroom Activity: Musical Crossword



Across

- 3.** The people in a play.
- 5.** The written music for a musical
- 7.** The words of a song.
- 10.** A form of drama popular in the 19th century that tells a serious story pitting good against evil, in which justice triumphs in the end.
- 11.** The story of a play or musical.
- 12.** A drama set to music for singers and instrumentalists.

Down

- 1.** _____ Director. The person responsible for training the singers and conducting the orchestra.
- 2.** The main character in a play or musical.
- 4.** All the visual elements of a play including costumes, makeup, settings and props
- 6.** The person responsible for creating the dances.
- 8.** The ideas in a play or musical.
- 9.** _____ Opera. A form of 18th century musical drama that combines a comic or sentimental play with re-purposed, or adapted songs that were popular during that era.

Word bank: ballad, characters, choreographer, lyrics, melodrama, musical, opera, plot, protagonist, score, spectacle, theme,

Crossword Answer Key

Across

- 3. characters
- 5. score
- 7. lyrics
- 10. melodrama
- 11. plot
- 12. opera

Down

- 1. musical
- 2. protagonist
- 4. spectacle
- 6. choreographer
- 8. theme
- 9. ballad

Postcards Without Borders

Allow students to reflect on the performance by writing a postcard to a friend describing what they experienced at The Sheldon. Students can color the front and write a message on the back.
(Please hand deliver- the “stamp” is fake.)

Missouri ELA Standard

Example: 2nd Grade

Writing 2A. Write opinion texts that:

- a. introduce a topic or text being studied, using complete sentences
- b. state an opinion about the topic or text and provide reasons for the opinion
- c. use specific words that are related to the topic and audience
- d. use linking/transition words and phrases to signal event order
- e. provide evidence of a beginning, middle, and concluding statement or section

Writing 2B. Write informative/explanatory texts that:

- a. introduce a topic or text being studied, using complete sentences
- b. use facts and definitions to develop points in generating paragraphs
- c. use specific words that are related to the topic and audience
- d. use linking words and phrases to signal event order
- e. create a concluding statement or paragraph

Please share excellent student work with us!

Email photos to
educationboxoffice@thesheldon.org

Missouri Music Standard

Example: 2nd Grade

Responding.

8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

- a. Demonstrate knowledge of musical concepts and how the support creators'/performers' expressive intent.

9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. A. Apply personal and expressive preferences in the evaluation of music for specific purposes.

Connecting.

10. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

- A. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and other arts, other disciplines, varied contexts, and daily life.



Suggested American Musical Prompts

How does music theatre tell a story?
What are the building blocks of a musical?



To:



To:



To:



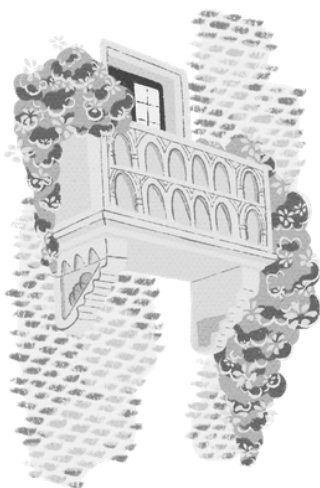
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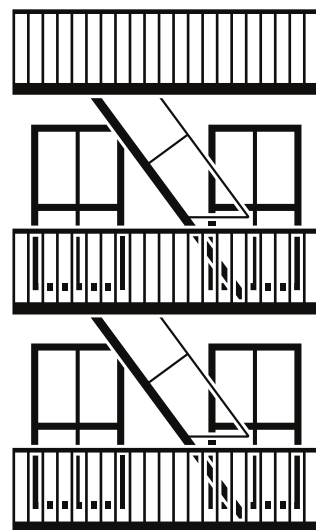
COMEDY



DRAMA



Romeo and Juliet
1597
Play by Shakespeare



West Side Story
1957
Music by Bernstein
Lyrics by Sondheim
Book by Laurents



About the Sheldon



The Sheldon Concert Hall is a historical building that was constructed in 1912 by the famous architect, Louis Spiering. It was originally home to the Ethical Society of St. Louis and is named after Walter Sheldon, founding member of the Ethical Society. It was purchased in 1991, becoming the Sheldon Art Foundation, with the first season presented in 1994. The education programs began in 1999 and continue to inspire young audiences today.



In 1998 The Sheldon Art Galleries were opened in the building next door to the concert hall, joined by a glass bridge. Interestingly, the building used to be a parking garage before it was renovated for the Sheldon galleries and event spaces.

Concert Hall Eye-Spy



Acoustic Materials

The Sheldon is known for having perfect acoustics, which means that sound travels really well – even without amplification! The architect of The Sheldon carefully considered **shape, size, and materials** used in order to make the perfect concert hall. Hard and smooth surfaces **reflect** sound back to the listener and soft surfaces **absorb** sound.

The wood floor beneath your feet acts like the belly of a REALLY large guitar, vibrating with the sounds from stage. What you *cannot* see is that under the floor is open space and a dirt floor. The open space allows the floor to freely vibrate and the dirt floor absorbs the extra vibrations that pass through.



Reappearing patterns

Louis Spiering, architect of The Sheldon, gave the room his own personal touch through this geometric pattern found on the concert hall doors. This pattern is also found elsewhere in the concert hall. See if you can find the pattern when you visit!



Stage extension

If you look closely you will notice a seam where an extension to the original stage was added. The first row of original seats was removed to make room for this stage.

Stained glass windows

When you walk in the concert hall you won't be able to miss the beautiful stain glass windows creating a kaleidoscope of colors! Do you notice the contrasting designs? The windows on opposite sides of the stage were created by different artists at different times.

