

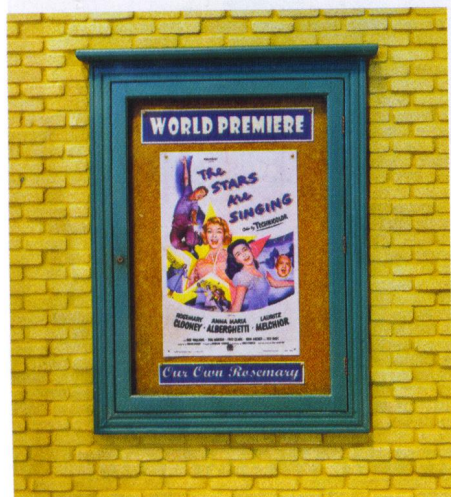
Premier performance

The Kentucky Gateway Museum Center rolls out the red carpet one special night to reveal the creation of an iconic theater in miniature.

By Sharon Doddroe

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM MCKISSON

Usually it's the actors who receive a standing ovation after a moving theatrical performance, but this time it was the theater itself that took center stage. Those attending The Russell Theatre Miniature Unveiling of the Interior at the Kathleen Savage Browning Miniatures Collection sat in anticipation as the curtain was removed from the art piece, which was two years in the making. Held at the Kentucky Gateway Museum Center where the collection is housed, the event introduced the extraordinarily detailed miniature interior of one of the United States' few remaining atmospheric theaters.



"I am honored to present this spectacular piece of art," said Kaye Browning at the unveiling event in April. She commissioned the work from Chicago artisans Allison Ashby and Steven



ABOVE AND BELOW LEFT: The exterior signs highlight a movie world premiere at the theater that Kaye Browning will never forget.

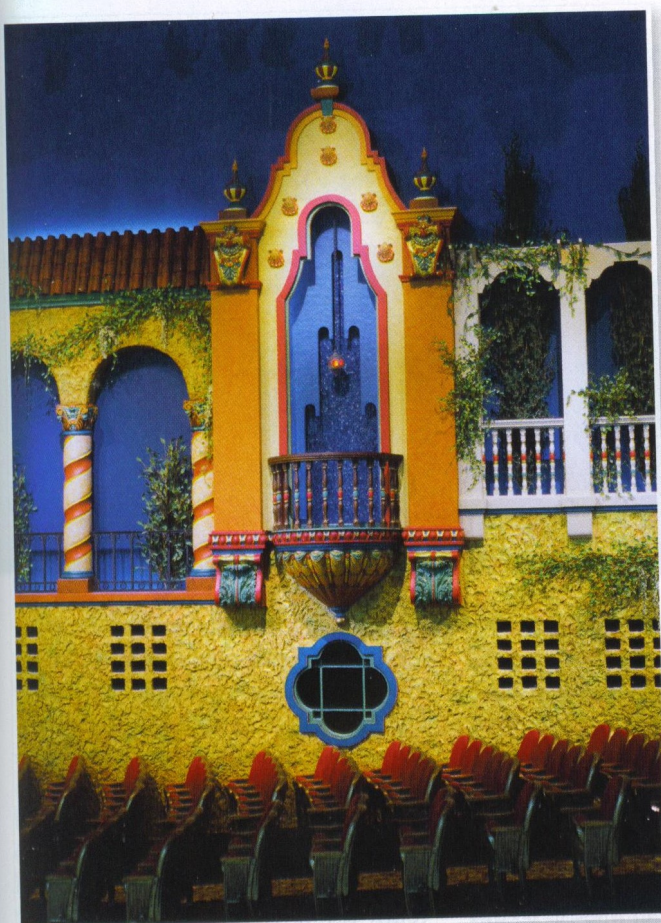
BELOW: The exterior of the Theatre is just as intricate and awe-inspiring as the interior.





ABOVE: The original Russell Theatre was built in 1929 in Spanish architectural style and designed to give theatergoers the illusion they were in an enchanted Mediterranean garden.

BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT: Golden statuary, private balconies, and elaborately painted ceilings were just a few features of the luxurious movie palaces of the past and shown here.



Jedd (of miniature business Ashby and Jedd), who four years earlier created the exterior of the Russell Theatre. It is one of three miniature structures they have produced that mirror historical properties in Kaye's hometown of Maysville, Kentucky, where the KSB Miniatures Collection resides.

The Russell Theatre holds special significance to Kaye, as she grew up across the street from the theater and attended countless movies there during her childhood. She commissioned the piece to commemorate a world premier held at the Russell—one she will never forget: "It was 1953 and Maysville native Rosemary Clooney was debuting her first film, *The Stars Are Singing*, at the Russell," recalls Kaye. "I was eight years old, I had chicken pox, and I felt like I was the only one in town not going to the theater that day. I remember longingly looking out the window just trying to grab a glimpse of Rosemary."

She may have missed the premier, but she's preserved that day in history



ABOVE: The Russell Theatre miniature interior features several private balconies, illustrative ceiling paintings, and ornately carved Spanish décor. It's truly a masterpiece.

for everyone by recreating the theater in 1:12 scale as it looked in 1953, complete with *The Stars Are Singing* advertised brightly on the mini marquee. The interior, says Allison, was the most labor-intensive project they have completed to date. The interior features private balconies, illustrative ceiling paintings, and ornately carved Spanish décor. Ashby and Jedd created hundreds of custom molding pieces to replicate the theater's original jewel-toned color scheme and used more than 1,000 pieces to handcraft and upholster the 100 theater chairs. The artists scraped through layers of paint at the theater to verify the original color palette and relied heavily on research, old photographs, and news articles to preserve the historical integrity of the piece. They also listened intently as Kaye described her childhood experiences at the theater. One, in particular, stood out.

"Kaye told us one of her earliest memories of the theater was that she lost a ring there," explained Allison to the guests and artists in attendance. Motioning jewelry artist Lori Ann Potts to the podium, she presented Kaye with a selection of miniature rings. "There was some dispute as to whether it was a garnet ring or an amethyst ring, but we will be hiding one in the theater."

Lori Ann was one of about 20 notable artists who presented demonstrations throughout the two-day event.



Many have several items on display in the KSB Miniatures Collection, a 3,300-square-foot gallery showcasing thousands of art pieces in its more than 100 room boxes, houses, and vignettes. The collection features historically accurate recreations from hundreds of artisans and 25 whimsical interpretations of fairy tales by Hanna Kahl-Hyland. Many items are rare and one-of-a-kind

pieces. The gallery is especially noted for its 1:12-scale replica of Spencer House, the ancestral home of Princess Diana. Created by artists Kevin Mulvany and Susie Rogers, the structure is filled with three floors of fine furnishings and decorative arts objects all true to the mid-1700s era. Many items are exact miniature replicas of items currently displayed in the palatial London



townhouse and made with the same gold, silver, porcelain, and silks that would have been used at the time.

While Kaye's collections represent scenes from all time periods and locations around the world, she can't help but favor those depicting memories of her childhood. The Cox Building houses her father's doctor's office and the former Kilgus Drug store just as

it was when Kaye sat at the counter as a girl. That structure, along with miniature reproductions of Maysville's Bethel Baptist Church and the Russell Theatre, were all created by Ashby and Jedd. "Because they love what they do, and because I love what they do, I feel a tremendous heart connection to them," says Kaye. "I always will whenever I look at these buildings." **DHM**

ABOVE: More than 1,000 pieces were used to handcraft the 100 theater chairs in the miniature Russell Theatre. For the design of the miniature version, Ashby and Jedd utilized multi-layered paint glazing techniques to replicate the jewel-toned style of classic circus wagons and carousels in order to recreate the Russell Theatre's interior. Elaborate minarets and statuary, as well as hanging vines and evergreens, grace the walls of the Spanish atmospheric auditorium.