

Parramatta's Spanish styled Roxy Theatre, with its magnificent arcaded forecourt, was opened in February 1930. Seating 2,000 people, it brought Parramatta to a standstill on its opening night as thousands thronged to see the new theatre.

The Roxy is unique to Australia as a theatre building, and is subject to five major heritage listings: the NSW State Heritage Register, the National Trust, the National Register of Australia, the Royal Institute of Architects and Parramatta City Council LEP. For a building so highly regarded to be partly demolished and a tower built above it, is not in the interests of anyone.

To be listed on five such registers already makes it a unique, important, and irreplaceable heritage building, not only to Parramatta and Sydney but to the nation itself.

Hoyts acquired the Roxy in 1944 and operated it as their Parramatta flagship. In 1976 they subdivided it into three screens, in keeping with the economic viability of the time. The huge dress circle became the main auditorium, with two smaller cinemas built in the former stalls area. The latter involved the demolition of the huge and ornamental proscenium arch and some side wall grilles. While this was not desirable, it did at least allow the Roxy to have a new lease of life as a three screen cinema. Hoyts finally sold the Roxy in 1991, but continued to lease it back until 1995, when Village Roadshow took over. The Roxy closed as a cinema in 2002 and was converted to a hotel and restaurant.

The latter failed after several years and today the theatre stands disused. It is now the subject of a "Concept Development Application" which allows for a 33 storey commercial tower to be built behind and above the theatre, by demolishing the rear of the building from the dress circle back. The tower would be supported on legs driven through the side walls of the theatre, according to the DA. The foyers would become an entrance to the tower and its function rooms. The roof would be removed and replaced with a flat roof, but retaining how much of the auditorium decoration we do not know. The existing dress circle theatre would be retained.

It is the National Trust's position, and that of the Parramatta Branch and also other groups, that the Roxy be acquired from the developer in a land swap deal, to bring it into public ownership. The theatre should then be fully restored as a world class facility with 1,500 seats [by re-instating the stalls] and a new stage and flytower. There are several examples of this in other Australian cities where the restored theatre has revitalised the area around it. Toowoomba took its derelict Empire Theatre, fully restored it as a live performance venue, and built two more live theatres adjacent. Subiaco in Perth has taken the Regal, a former cinema, and revamped it with a new stage and flytower. Newcastle restored its magnificent Civic Theatre with new stage facilities, and at present the 130 year old Victoria Theatre is about to be restored, which has been disused for some 30 years.

The Trust encourages the NSW State Government and Parramatta City Council to show vision and leadership, and acquire this irreplaceable building for the people of Australia and restore it to world class performing arts standards. To build a 33 storey tower behind and above it would destroy this fabulous theatre and remove an once only opportunity to provide a centrepiece for Parramatta itself.