



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated December 19, 2019, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley (Block 830, Lot 8), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on December 10, 2019 (Designation List No. 516/LP-2629), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of any designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement or renewal of the area involved.

On December 10, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the 53 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley, (Block 830, Lot 8) as a City landmark. The landmark site is located on the north side of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, in the Madison Square North neighborhood, within Manhattan Community District 5. The landmark site was designated as part of a row of 19th-century buildings (47, 49, 51 and 55 West 28th Street) associated with the significant history of “Tin Pan Alley,” which occupied the block of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, at the turn of the 20th century.

From the 1890s until about 1910, West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue became home to the most significant and substantial concentration of sheet music publishers then known in New York City and was given the name Tin Pan Alley. Drawn by the proximity to theaters near Madison Square Park and less formal entertainment venues in the Tenderloin, music publishers began to relocate to West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue in 1893. The location of Tin Pan Alley was convenient for publishers, who could deliver their sheet music to numerous entertainment venues in the area; the concentration of publishers on the block, in turn, meant that songwriters were able to offer up their talents door-to-door in the hope that one firm or another could publish their work. Among other attractors to the block were the office of the venerable *New York Clipper*, the premier theatrical and entertainment magazine of the time, at 47 West 28th Street from 1900-1916, and the abundance of saloons, hotels, and other forums for entertainers, agents, and publishers to meet.

The term “Tin Pan Alley” seems to have had numerous influences, the most direct of which was the colloquial term “tin pan” as a metaphor for a tinny-sounding, inexpensive, or out-of-tune piano. While music publishers’ offices on both sides of West 28th Street and the bookend of the elevated IRT station at 28th Street and Sixth Avenue might have given the sense of an “alley,” the term was perhaps also an allusion to the block’s location in the back spaces of theaters and in the Tenderloin, with its reputation for more subversive forms of entertainment.

The intimate scale of Tin Pan Alley’s row houses was a boon for publishers to advertise their work to theater crowds and passersby on 28th Street: “Old- fashioned, high-stooped houses, converted now into office and store buildings, line its sides; and the sides of those in turn are lined with enormous, garish signs which inform you, in letters a couple of feet high,” about the latest hits to be published by the firms inside. The structures’ size further made the sonic experience from which Tin Pan Alley took its name possible, with piano music audible on the street from the multiple offices in each modest structure, and made sheet music publishers’ offices accessible to creative hopefuls eager to capitalize on their talent.

Tin Pan Alley represents many milestones for the participation of African-American and Jewish artists in mainstream music production. It arose about a decade after immigration of Jewish refugees from persecution in Eastern Europe to New York City began in the early 1880s, and a notable proportion of Tin Pan Alley’s music publishers, songwriters, and pluggers were of German or Eastern European Jewish descent or were immigrants themselves. At the same time, significant numbers of African Americans began to migrate to New York City in search of work and opportunities unavailable in the Jim Crow-era South, and the prominence and valuation of African-American creators’ contributions to the music business underwent significant growth on Tin Pan Alley. Along with the adjacent row at 47, 49, 51, and 55 West 28th Street, 53 West 28th Street represents Tin Pan Alley’s significant contributions to American culture and popular music.

53 West 28th Street was built in 1859 as an Italianate-style four-story row house; intact elements of which include its bracketed cornice, fenestration pattern, and projecting stone lintels and sills. Like other structures on the block, it underwent a conversion to accommodate a retail storefront during the Tin Pan Alley era.

The building's Italianate character features a brownstone facade. The entrance enframing features a segmental-arched, pedimented door hood supported by foliate brackets and channeled pilasters with paterae; molded panel reveals; and a molded, segmental-arched door frame with an egg-and-dart-molded transom bar and single-paned transom light. The second, third, and fourth stories feature rectangular window openings with molded enframements and projecting molded lintels; some openings feature historic wood-framed double-hung one-over-one windows. The building is crowned with a pressed metal cornice with a dentil course, foliated modillion course, and foliated console brackets. Fire escapes were added in 1919, after the Tin Pan Alley era.

The landmark site is located within a C6-4X zoning district. C6-4X districts allow residential, commercial and community facility uses up to 10.0 floor area ratio (FAR). With a maximum allowable floor area ratio of 10.0 FAR, the 1,461-square-foot lot could be developed with approximately 14,610 square feet of floor area. The existing building on the lot contains 5,539 square feet (3.79 FAR), resulting in 9,071 square feet of unused development rights available for transfer to eligible receiving sites under the existing zoning.

Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, a landmark building may transfer its unused development rights to a lot contiguous to the zoning lot occupied by the landmark building or one that is across the street and opposite to the zoning lot occupied by the landmark building, or in the case of a corner lot, one which fronts on the same street intersection as the lot occupied by the landmark. There are four potential receiving sites available for the transfer of the landmark's unused floor area, as all eligible receiving sites are currently underbuilt.

Pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution, landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers upon application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. In addition, the Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation and projected public

improvements on any plans for development, growth, improvement or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark building.

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