



## CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

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August 23, 2023 / Calendar No. 7

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**IN THE MATTER OF** a communication dated July 6, 2023, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Hotel Cecil & Minton's Playhouse Building, 206 West 118th Street (Block 1923, Lot 38) by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on June 27, 2023 (List No. 534/LP No. 2671), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 10.

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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 June 27, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the Hotel Cecil & Minton's Playhouse Building an individual New York City landmark. The landmark designation consists of Block 1923, Lot 38 and is located at 206 West 118th Street at the southeast corner of West 118th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue between St. Nicholas Avenue and Adam Cayton Powell Jr. Boulevard in Harlem, Manhattan Community District 10.

Minton's Playhouse opened in the Hotel Cecil's former dining room in 1938 or 1939. Named for the club's owner, Henry Minton. The Harlem nightclub Minton's Playhouse flourished in the Hotel Cecil for more than three decades in the middle of the 20th century. Famous for hosting important house bands, star headliners, and informal jam sessions, it was here that the pivotal jazz style known as "bebop" emerged in the 1940s, transforming American music. From this period forward, the hotel attracted many noteworthy guests, including leading jazz, blues, gospel, and soul performers.

Hotel Cecil occupies a trapezoidal lot at the southeast corner of St. Nicholas Avenue and West 118th Street in central Harlem and was designed by Harlem architect Julius F. Munckwicz (1830-1902) who also built hotels in Greenwich Village and on the Upper West Side and was constructed in 1895-96. Designed in the Renaissance Revival style, the understated exterior is clad with light gray or buff brick, limestone, and terracotta. It featured modest classical details,

including an Ionic entrance portico on West 118th Street, balconies on both facades, and windows highlighted with keyed surrounds and splayed lintels. Five stories tall, Hotel Cecil was completed by December 1896. During the Harlem Renaissance, the owners were slow to welcome Black guests. By 1940, however, the hotel's policy had changed. the hotel was listed in consecutive editions of *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a popular guide that identified businesses that were friendly to Black travelers, from 1941 to 1961. During this period, many Black jazz musicians who performed at Minton's Playhouse, which opened on the first floor in 1938 or 1939, also stayed at the hotel.

This Harlem nightclub is recognized in many jazz histories as the "birthplace" or "cradle" of bebop, a style that changed the course of American music in the 1940s. Located the east side of the hotel's first floor, the club occupied the former dining room and was named for its owner, Monroe Henry Minton. Teddy Hill became the club's long-time host and managing director in late 1940 or 1941 and assembled a small, salaried house band. This band, led by the innovative jazz drummer Kenny Clarke, also included trumpeter Joe Guy, bassist Nick Fenton, and pianist Thelonious Monk. Though Monk left before the end of 1941, jazz journalist Bill Gottlieb would later describe him as the "George Washington of Bebop." On Monday nights, when other music venues were closed, open jam sessions were encouraged at Minton's. When trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie was in New York City, he frequently joined these jam sessions.

Low-fi recordings of jam sessions at Minton's made during spring 1941 capture the beginnings of bebop, when jazz was transitioning away from dance music and swing. The term bebop probably originated in the early 1940s. Though Kenny Clarke did not remember giving the music played at Minton's a name, he believed it was Hill who "put the word out to journalists." Trumpeter Miles Davis, who moved to Manhattan to study at the Julliard School in 1944, would later write, "I wanted to come to New York in the first place, to get into the jazz music scene that was happening around Minton's Playhouse . . . the Black jazz capital of the world . . . I could learn more in one session at Minton's than it would take me two years to learn at Julliard." Teddy Hill remained associated with the club until about 1969, though business had begun to decline. In August 1973 a columnist for the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that Minton's had been converted to a "discotheque."

Throughout the 1940s into the early 1970s, many significant Black jazz musicians were guests of the Hotel Cecil. Musicians' memoirs make frequent reference to the Hotel Cecil, which was

within walking distance of the Apollo Theater and less expensive than Hotel Theresa. The building was badly damaged by fire in 1974 and Minton's Playhouse closed. Three years later, in April 1977, New York City became owner of the building. Minton's Playhouse (and the Cecil Hotel) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on September 18, 1985, in recognition for the Playhouse's role in transforming the course of jazz. The hotel now provides supportive housing, with commercial spaces on the first floor that preserve and reflect the building's history and cultural significance.

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 which 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. The landmark site has 9,377 square feet of lot area, a built floor area of 39,992 square feet, and a floor area ratio (FAR) of approximately 4.2 FAR. The landmark's built FAR exceeds the maximum FAR of the underlying R7A medium-density residential district (4.0 FAR). Consequently, the subject landmark does not have any unused development rights available for transfer.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. The Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation and projected public improvements or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark.

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