

SHORT HISTORY, SURE FUTURE: THE 57 THEATRE

New kids on the august blocks of Boston usually need a long time to muscle their way into acceptance, especially in the tight ranks of the Theatre District. Not so the 57 Theatre: after only three years in the neighborhood it was steeped in the light of publicity this fall when Broadway in Boston's presentation of the glam-rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* opened in late September. Though the 57 Theatre's history of live performance is short, there are good reasons why its future should be long.

Let's start with location. The theater began life in 1970 as a cinema accompanying the 57 Restaurant and Howard Johnson's hotel built by its owners, JPA Management Company, at 200 Stuart Street. In 1996 the hotel became part of the Radisson chain; the old cinema went through a transformation of its own. Spurred by the downtown theater revival of the 1990s, the prescient JPA Management turned it into a venue for live performance that was well positioned to grab a piece of the theater-going

action. After debuting with *Definitely Doris: The Music of Doris Day*, the nascent stage put itself on the map with the remarkably long run of Robert Dubac's one-man comedy *The Male Intellect: An Oxymoron*, which sold out the 57 Theatre for several months during the 1997–98 season.

Striking the proverbial hot iron, JPA Management last summer decided to go ahead with renovation plans for the 57 Theatre that had originally been plotted as part of a five-year campaign. The company hired theater architect Thomas Bakalars, who improved sight-lines and acoustics. The refurbishment paid off: when the presenter Broadway in Boston was seeking a home for *Hedwig*, it chose the 57 Theatre. The attention afforded by that show seems likely to raise the 57 to the next plane of prestige among its older neighbors in the Theatre District. Whatever happens, its career will be eyed with interest. —**Matt Simon**



Male server: *Robert Dubac's The Male Intellect: An Oxymoron*, which ran during the 1997–98 season, was the first big hit under the 57 Theatre's roof.

Theater by number: *The 57 Theatre*, seen here in its quieter days.