

# ON STAGE

March/April 2012

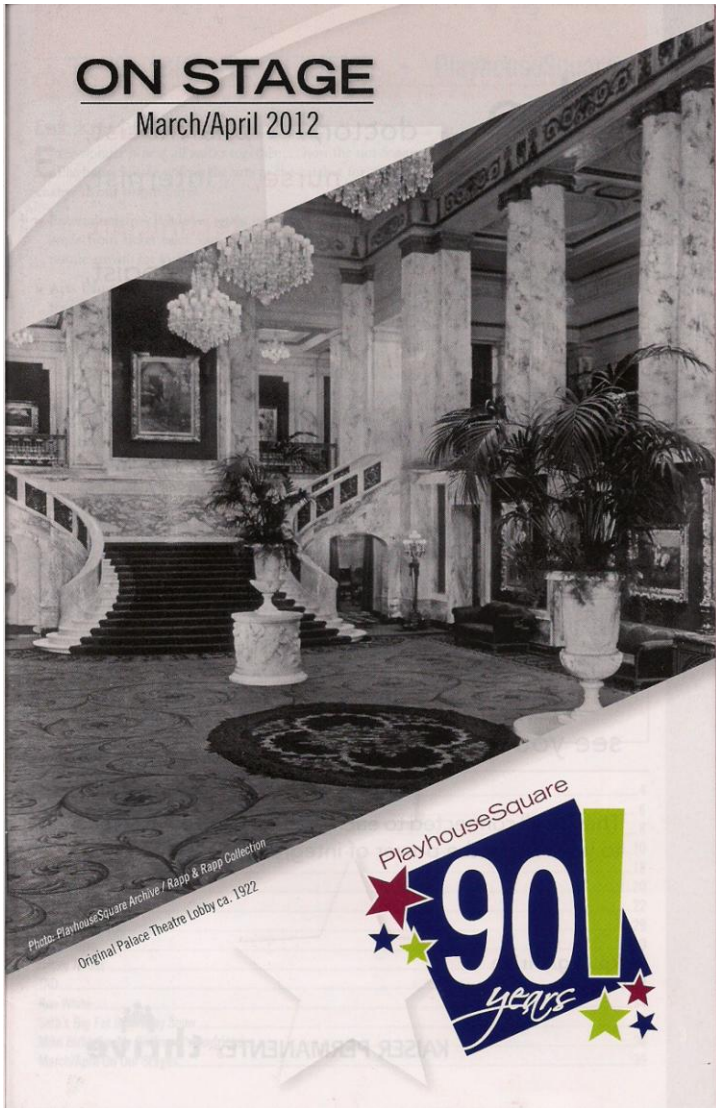
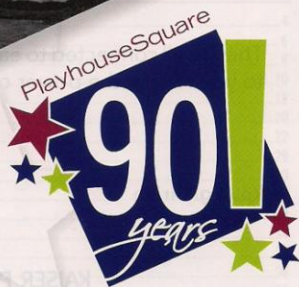


Photo: PlayhouseSquare Archive / Rapp & Rapp Collection  
Original Palace Theatre Lobby ca. 1922



## THE IRISH ROVERS • 3.2 Ohio

The story of The Irish Rovers (aka The Rovers) is one for the big screen: They have hosted three award-winning television series, topped the music charts again and again, made several appearances as musical bank robbers on *The Virginian* and have spent more than 46 years making international recordings and touring around the world.

Although band members hail from Ireland — George Millar and his cousin Ian from Ballymena, original member Wilcil McDowell from Larne, Sean O'Driscoll from Cork, and John Reynolds and percussionist Fred Graham from Belfast — the story of The Irish Rovers begins in Toronto, Canada, in 1963. It was there where then-16-year-old George Millar and 23-year-old Jim Ferguson — both new emigrants from Northern Ireland — met at an Irish function and sang together 'til dawn. And so the Irish Rovers were launched, as the other band members joined the group.

In 1966, The Rovers released their debut album, appropriately titled, *The First Of The Irish Rovers*, recorded live at The Icehouse in Pasadena. The success of their first release led to a second. Which included a sweet little song with words written by Shel Silverstein, that they had been playing in the clubs. That little song, "The Unicorn," became a multi-million seller, beloved by a generation. For five young adventurers from Ireland, life was about to change. In 1968, The Irish Rovers were named Canada's Folk Group of the Year, and they received a Grammy nomination



for Folk Performance of the Year in 1969. Their spin on an unknown ditty written by Randy Brooks, "Grandma Got Run-Over By A Reindeer," soared to the top of the charts in 1982 and remains a favorite holiday anthem today.

The hits continue to follow. Since 1995 alone, The Irish Rovers have released *Come Fill Up Your Glasses*, *Down by the Lagan Side*, *Still Rovin*, *Gracehill Fair* and two double-album greatest-hits compilations. Recently, their recording of "Drunken Sailor" reached a younger generation with more than 5 million hits on various YouTube sites.