

From Broadway to off-Broad Street, the Art of Al Hirschfeld

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

When the Prince Theater moved to its permanent home in 1999, the theater commissioned for its lobby a four-panel mural by Al Hirschfeld, an American caricaturist famous for his black and white drawings of theatrical figures. The mural, the last of Hirschfeld's career, consists of 51 famous figures from 20th century American musicals.

Hirschfeld was well known for his pen-and-ink drawings, which appeared in *The New York Times* for 66 years each time a Broadway show opened. For more than 70 years, while sitting in an antique barber chair in his Upper East Side townhouse in Manhattan, he drew caricatures of more than 7,000 Broadway personalities, film stars and jazz and rock musicians. He worked seven days a week and attended almost every Broadway opening from the late 1920s until his death at age 99. Hirschfeld would hide his daughter Nina's name in his drawings and place a small number next to his signature indicating how many NINAs were in the drawing. Fans in the know would spend hours trying to find all the NINAs. His work appeared in many other publications and in movie posters, album covers and even postage stamps and is in the collections in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.



Above is one of the four panels of the Al Hirschfeld mural at the Prince Theater. All of the panels can be viewed at the Al Hirschfeld Foundation's website <http://www.alhirschfeldfoundation.org/news/musical-monday-american-musical-theatre-mural>