

MARE STREET E8
 (west side)
 No 291 (The Hackney
 Empire Theatre)

II* (star)

Variety theatre. 1901, by Frank Matcham for Oswald Stoll's "Empire" circuit. Red brick with buff terracotta dressings. Victorian Baroque style. 2-storey, 3-bay front. Half-glazed entrance doors set in square-headed architraves with engaged columns framing centre bay and mannerist piers to outer bays. Central first-floor bay has a pair of semi-circular arched windows set in recess framed by 4-centred mannerist arch with scrolled ends set on squat, bulbous Ionic columns and with balustrade to front; pilasters rise from arch to blank balustraded parapet; wreath and musical trophies to tympanum of swan-necked open pediment surmounted by female figure. Slightly-projecting outer bays each have semi-circular arched openings with decorative head over a pair of circular and vertical windows; each outer bay is surmounted by extraordinary twin domes set on octagonal drums; lower drums have tall slit openings, and upper domes are formed of circular balustrades with scrolled brackets to Flambeaux. Other elevations are treated more simply with classical terracotta dressings. Interior: in flamboyant Rococo Baroque style. Mosaic floor and decorative plaster frieze to porch. Foyer of 3 x 3 bays has marbled wood piers and walls, wreathed cornice and large quatrefoil panel to coffered ceiling; painted panels of cherubs and composers set in oval frames hung with festoons; decorative tile dados to passages leading to stalls. Marbled balustrades to 2 flights of stairs continued to upper foyer which has painted panels set in elaborate plaster ceiling; 3-bay semi-circular arched arcades to front (mirror flanked by doorways to stairs) to rear (framing stained-glass windows set in wood frames) and to side bays which have Rococo ceilings and Art Nouveau plaster friezes. Fine auditorium; painted panels set in Rococo frames above proscenium arch which is flanked by winged cherubs holding urns and by onion domes set in curved recesses. 3-tiered auditorium with elaborate Rococo plasterwork to front of cantilevered balconies, which have decorative plasterwork beneath. 3-bay arcades flank proscenium to second floor, with fluted Ionic piers separating tall central arch flanked by painted panels above lower flanking arched with turned balusters to arcaded balcony fronts; first-floor boxes framed by console brackets and decorative plaster friezes, with semi-circular arched exit doors flanking proscenium. Decorative plaster frieze and coved cornice with shell niches to panelled plaster ceiling. Noted as one of the most exuberant Matcham interiors in Britain. (B M Walker (ed), Frank Matcham. Theatre Architect, 1980).