

The Fabulous Fox Theater

527 North Grand Boulevard

St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 534-1678

<http://www.fabulousfox.com>

Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)

Overall Rating: 4.9 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 4.5 stars
- Usher Staff: 4.75 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 5 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 stars

This evaluation was last updated on June 17, 2014 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Aleece Vogd, Director of Visitor Services at the Fabulous Fox Theater, Ms. Karen Cullen, the Fox's Multi-Media Designer, and Ms. Angie Yorke, the Lighthouse's Blind Community Enrichment Programs Manager.

St. Louis' Fabulous Fox Theater is one of the city's great cultural and theatrical treasures. Originally conceived in the 1920's as a movie house, the Fox now serves as a professional theater and concert venue that sponsors performances of touring Broadway musicals, acclaimed entertainers, and top-rated concerts. The facility's close proximity to Metro stops and its well-trained team of hospitable ushers make accessing and navigating the theater very manageable for blind or visually impaired individuals. Furthermore, additional accommodations such as the regular offering of live descriptive audio and the increased accessibility of the Fox's website further enhance blind and visually impaired patrons' enjoyment and appreciation for Fox performances.

For individuals relying on public transportation, there are multiple options for reaching the Fox Theater. Cabs, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers are able to make stops directly in front of the theater's main entrance. Metro's Number 70 bus also has a stop on the opposite side of Grand Boulevard, just outside Powell Hall. This leaves theater patrons with only a two block southward walk to the Fox. Assistance may be necessary in order to safely cross Grand Boulevard, but in all other aspects, the route is very straight-forward.

Navigating the theater is relatively simple, thanks to audio cues and the ability to easily solicit sighted assistance. Upon entering the Fox, the sound of the beeping ticket scanners help to guide sight-impaired individuals in the correct direction, and the bustle of activity in the main lobby enables blind and visually impaired individuals to quickly inquire about locating an usher. Ushers are stationed at key locations throughout the facility, and they are eager to offer whatever assistance may be necessary. Upon request, ushers will return to the individual's seat if further Sighted Guide assistance is desired during intermission or after the conclusion of the performance. This can be especially helpful after the final curtain call when everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exit. Since crowds are especially dense during this particular time, it is highly advisable for sight-impaired individuals to solicit Sighted Guide assistance from an usher or other sighted companion when exiting the theater. As the auditorium is moderately lit, low-vision individuals should always bring their canes in order to safely and efficiently navigate the facility.

If traveling independently, the elevator on stage left (the right side as one faces the stage) provides the easiest way to access the upper and lower balconies, as it is situated just off of the north end of the main lobby. The hallways tend to have a fairly logical layout, and a blind or visually impaired individual should be able to navigate them reasonably well if given clear instructions by an usher or sighted individual. Many of the rows of seats do not have enough leg room to accommodate a guide dog. Therefore, when purchasing tickets, guide dog users should be sure to request a seat on an aisle or in a wheel chair section. Both options work much better to accommodate service animals.

Currently, the Fox does not offer programs in blind-accessible formats (i.e. large-print, Braille, or downloadable digital copy). Low vision individuals may wish to bring a flashlight and magnifying glass to more closely examine their program, but this can get somewhat complicated to properly juggle one's program, flashlight, and magnifying glass at the same time. Totally blind individuals who may be fortunate enough to own a pocket scanner should be able to scan a clear copy. Headphones are strongly recommended if talking pocket scanners are to be used. Also, if flashlights are utilized, these should be turned off during the performance so as not to disturb other nearby theater patrons. If such technological solutions are not available or practical, a sighted companion should be able to easily relay the important information from their own program.

The Fox's seasons offer a wide selection of shows that should appeal to all age groups. Broadway favorites, including *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Les Misérables*, have all appeared on the Fox stage, many of which have returned multiple times by popular demand. Renowned musicians and entertainers, including Celtic Woman, Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes, comedian Bill Cosby, and story teller Garrison Keillor, have also toured at the Fabulous Fox Theater to great acclaim. The music, the singing, and even the tap dancing are incredible to witness from an auditory perspective.

To take in the equally impressive visual aspects of the performance, blind and visually impaired visitors have two options. If a patron still has an adequate degree of usable sight, binoculars or monoculars will yield a slightly better view of the stage, but this may vary, depending on the location of one's seat. If such strategies are still not sufficient, the Fabulous Fox Theater is pleased to announce the continued seasonal offering of live descriptive audio for the blind for all US Bank Broadway series musicals. The described performances can

accommodate up to thirty blind or visually impaired patrons per show and will be offered at the second Friday evening performance of each run, the same performance at which the signing for the deaf is offered. Those familiar with the descriptive audio service at the Muny will note the same high quality of audio description at Fox performances, thanks to a small team of committed describers and state-of-the-art equipment that deliver the service with remarkable clarity. The descriptions offer a new level of enjoyment and appreciation to the musical performance by helping the listener to visualize the impressive and meticulously coordinated array of sets and costumes, lighting and special effects, and choreography of professional Broadway Theater. They also alert the listener to key non-verbal actions, movements, and expressions that allow the blind patron to more easily follow the story's chain of events. Further details on the specific show titles, dates, and times of described Fox performances may be found under the "ADA Accessibility" link on the Fox's homepage.

As an added incentive and to aid those who may not be able to afford regularly-priced Fox tickets, blind or visually impaired individuals interested in attending a described Fox musical have the option to purchase up to two half-priced tickets for all described performances through the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, thanks to the Lighthouse's generous support of the program. This offer applies to any seating section. Tickets reserved through the Lighthouse will be available for pick-up at the Fox's indoor box office window the day of the performance. Although described performances are not presently scheduled for the Fox's off-series musicals, the service may be requested by contacting the Fox's Visitor Services Department.

As the Fabulous Fox Theater used to serve as an old movie palace, the facility itself is equally as impressive as the shows that perform there. Weekly group tours are offered at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. These tours provide an excellent opportunity for blind and visually impaired individuals to explore the building's elaborate decor and fascinating history. All tours depart from the box office and explore many of the key locations inside the theater, including the main lobby, amphitheater, on stage and back stage areas, the old screening room, and a hallway commemorating the many stars and shows that have appeared on the Fox's stage. Access to the on stage and back stage areas depends on whether the stage is in use by a visiting show, but the rest of the tour remains the same throughout the year. The guides are both informative and descriptive, and visitors are at liberty to ask to carefully touch anything within arm's reach, allowing blind and visually impaired individuals to more fully comprehend and appreciate the ornate design of the theater. Saturday tours feature an extra treat that will be enjoyed by both sighted and non-sighted visitors, for the tour includes a live performance on one of the theater's original Wurlitzer organs. Once again, this is under the stipulation that the stage and orchestra pit are not being used by a visiting show. All around, the tour is an amazing experience, regardless of a visitor's vision status, and the price of admission is very affordable, costing only five dollars during the week and eight dollars on Saturdays.

In recent years, the Fox's web design team has made significant improvements to the theater's website's compatibility with screen reading and screen enlarging software by clarifying and reformatting the site's alternative text and pop-up menus. Additionally, any pop-up videos, particularly those found on the homepage have been either adjusted or eliminated altogether, so as not to impair the ease of navigation by Jaws for Windows users. Regrettably, the absence of headings will make navigating the website slightly tedious for Jaws users, but

these recent changes over the past years have nevertheless drastically improved the ability of blind and sight impaired computer users to independently and efficiently navigate the website.

St. Louis is very fortunate to have such a terrific theatrical venue, and individuals with an interest and appreciation for theatrical and musical performances will find their visit to the Fabulous Fox Theater a truly unique and phenomenal experience.

Basic information regarding show times and ticket prices may be obtained by calling Metrotix at (314) 534-1111.

For any questions regarding the services listed above, please contact Ms. Aleece Vogd, Director of Visitor Services at the Fox Theater.

Phone: (314) 657-5049

E-mail: aleecev@foxstl.com

To reserve a pair of half-priced tickets, please contact:

Ms. Angie Yorke, Blind Community Enrichment Programs Manager for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind

Phone: (314) 423-4333, extension 132

E-mail: ayorke@lhindustries.com