Mayor in production to fight departure of Grand Central

By ROBERTA B. GRATZ

Mayor Beame and a number of performers—including Jerry Ohrbach, Tammy Grimes, Kay Medford and Bobby Short—gathered at the statue of Commodore Vanderbilt in front of Grand Central Terminal to reaffirm their hopes the 1913 landmark is preserved.

"Grand Central stands as a universal symbol between the city's past and present," said Jacqueline Onassis, honorary chairman of the Sponsoring Committee to Save Grand Central. "It has held its own for 64 years. It would be a tragedy to let it be desecrated now," she added.

The committee was organized by the Municipal Art Society to gain public support for the city's lawsuit to save the Beaux Arts terminal.

8-YEAR CASE

Next week the New York State Court of Appeals in Albany — the state's highest court — will hear oral arguments in the eight-year-old case brought by the terminal's owner, Penn Central Corp. The railroad wants the city landmark status removed so it can partially demolish the facade and build a 59-story office tower above it, effectively destroying the celebrated building.

In December, 1975, the Appellate Division upheld the 1967 designation of Grand Central as an official landmark. The court reversed a lower-court ruling which termed the designation a "taking of property for public use without just compensation."

In their 3-2 decision, the judges affirmed the constitutionality of the city's 1965 Landmarks Preservation Law and its specific application to the terminal. The court noted that "Grand Central is unquestionably one of New York City's best-known buildings and along with the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, the image of its facade symbolizes New York City for millions of visitors and residents."

If the city were to lose this suit, its preservation efforts would be crippled. The case has national implications as well, since states and municipalities are expected to use it as a guideline for how vigorously they run their landmark preservation programs.