EXHIBITORS HERALD

VI

May 26, 1923

Defies Ancient Theatre Building Tradition



Panorama of auditorium of the Majestic, Houston, Tex., designed by John Eberson. On the left the proscenium represents an Italian palace and pergola. On the right is represented a terraced garden and temple. Graduated colored lighting effects, casting light from coves up to ceiling and properly placed automatic cloud machines together with electrical twinkling stars create a perfect illusion of a Mediterranean sky going from bright daylight to a soft moonlight.



Proscenium on right showing terraced garden and temple

Proscenium on left showing Italian palace and pergola

BETTER THEATRES

Architectural Tradition Is Defied in Houston Theatre Design

EVOLUTIONARY developments in theatre design have been few since R the beginning. Unquestionably the most innovational is the Majestic, Houston, Texas., designed by Architect John Eberson, Chicago. Here is introduced a daring auditorium treatment-separate and distinct treatment having been applied to each side of the proscenium. Acoustics, a major problem, has been solved, according to Mr. Eberson, who states that the type of structure he has designed in the Majestic is less costly than the more conventional theatre building and several months' operation have proved it entirely successful. Views of the Majestic are published on another page. Following is Mr. Eberson's description of the theatre, the concluding installment of which, dealing with constructional phases of the house, will appear in the next issue of BETTER THEATRES.



VII

May 26, 1923

BY JOHN EBERSON

THE new Majestic theatre is located on the southeast corner of Rusk and Travis streets, Houston, Texas, and occupies a lot facing 124' on Rusk street and 153' on Travis street. The theatre proper is 96' wide and 153' deep. Store and office portions of this building face Travis street and are 28' deep.

A seating capacity of approximately 2200 seats, of which 1400 are on the main floor and the balance in the balcony has been provided. The stage is 83' wide and measures 30' from the curtain line to the back wall.

The proscenium opening is 42' wide and 31' high with the riggin loft 63' above the stage floor level. The entire structure is fireproof, executed in concrete steel and brick masonry with a terra cotta facade.

Revives Roman Architecture

Architectural treatment is in Italian Renaissance and due to the character of arrangement and equipment, this auditorium is suitable for all kinds of theatrical entertainments, legitimate vaudeville and picture play. The conception and plan of the architectural treatment is a strictly Italian Renaissance exterior executed in glazed pulsichrome terra cotta for main body and rich polychrome glaze in ornament and enrichments, strictly representative of modern revival and rebirth of antique and classic Roman architecture."

typical of the work introduced by S. Miniato and Nicollo Pisano.

The auditorium proper represents a conception of an Italian garden under Mediterranean sky, featuring a moonlight night.

History of Renaissance

Italian Renaissance, or as the Italian calls it, "Rinascita," is a distinct development in human culture, especially in the building art, and it is the Italian artist and architect who first established the rejuvenation of antique art and Roman architecture. The remains of old Rome, such as the Coliseum, the Pantheon and the Colonades, form the quarry from which much of the material for the Renaissance buildings were extracted.

During the fifteenth century the popes were temporal princes and great patrons of art and learning, and splendid new palaces and churches were erected, and the decoration of old ones was carried on by famed and eminent painters, such as Perruzi, Raphael and Michael Angelo. A school was created for artists and workmen who afterwards spread abroad the style of Renaissance in other parts of Italy and beyond.

Entrance lobby of the Majestic, showing faience tile floor, violet marble wainscoting and richly ornamented coffer ceiling.

Urbino. Like designs are carried out in the exit lobby.

The art gallery has a faience tile floor with marble base. A coffered and paneled ceiling is decorated in flat ornament in motifs found in buildings in Southern Italy where Moorish Spanish influences have made themselves felt during certain periods of the development of the Italian Renaissance.

In the main reception tunnel of the balcony is a plain vaulted ceiling and handsomely decorated pilasters with panel ornament taken from a fifteenth century portal of a building at San Bernardino.

Lobbies and foyers are executed with modified replicas of ornament and shape,



Modern Treatment Introduced

True to this style and school of architecture, and studying the many splendid examples of this art, the Majestic was designed with a facade using largely the classic orders in an attempt to conform to the correctness and ideas of Roman architecture. The classic character of the front elevation, however, is softened by an adoption of the more modern Italian tile roof and cornice treatment, now found so commonly in Florence.

Decorations, such as carving and sculpture in collected masses, were executed in color reflecting the custom' of artists during the Renaissance period and reviving Fresco paintings and the application of color of the outside of buildings.

John Paulding, sculptor, prepared the model for the frieze design.

Outlines Decorative Motifs

Proscenium Treated in Variety

The men's smoking room is executed with a mosaic tile floor and wainscoting and a vaulted ceiling modified from faience style.

An unique feature of the auditorium treatment is the treatment of the proscenium arch. The proscenium arch proper was conceived as a triumphal arch supported on columns and roofed with a Roman tile roof and stone balustrade. The arch is shaped by the use of spandrels and the soffit of the heavy tile roof is richly ornamented with polychrome carvings.

The two sides of the proscenium arch are not treated symmetrically, which is an unusual feature. Acoustic properties of the auditorium and the necessary symmetry have been taken care of however, by the sweep of the main ceiling and the background of the proscenium arch and the building treatment given same.

Auditorium Sides Differ

You will find on the left side of the auditorium an Italian palace facade with a grilled roofed shelter on top. On the right hand side you will find a terraced roof garden with a small temple building. The flat pitch tile roof of the palace on the left is typical of the Renaissance in Florence. The balustrade effects of the terrace garden and the roof over the triumphal arch were borrowed from samples of palatial architecture in Venice. The cupola of the temple and its treatment were modeled after the many examples of architecture found at Milan,

Foyer of the Majestic showing vaulted ceiling and circular arches

The entrance lobby has a faience tile floor, imported violet marble wainscoting and a richly ornamented coffer ceiling with motifs taken from the Villa Cambiaso, and doorheads from one of the big galleries of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome.

The foyer has a vaulted ceiling and circular arches resting on pilasters all very highly ornamented and executed in. motifs of design found in the portals and corridors in the ducal palace at

EXHIBITORS HERALD

May 26, 1923

Pavia and Certosa. Openings to the boxes, representing entrances through the palace garden walls, are Ponzello arches, and the doorheads of the stone gateways through the garden walls which form the side of the auditorium, both in the balcony and on the lower floor, have cornice and pilaster treatments similar to those found in the palace of Gambaro at Genoa.

The inside of the soffits, and all of the little temples and garden houses, are executed in richly carved stucco highly colored. The little temple on the sunken garden was suggested by the holy vault of the Cathedral in Lucca.

Grilles at the windows of the palace on the left again show Spanish-Moorish influences.

Famous Works Reproduced

Consoles and brackets, used as supports for various doorheads and arches, show details which are exact replicas of stucco and carved stone brackets found in Florence in the palace of Gondi. Pilaster ornament of the great columns, and pilasters supporting the triumphal arch, are reproductions of carvings of a collection of reproduced pilasters of the Academy of Fine Arts in Verona. Door friezes of main auditorium doors were copied from the friezes of the doors of the palatial palace at Urbino. The same palace facade also furnished motifs for spandrels and shields shown in the terra cotta elevation of the theatre. Beyond the study of examples of architectural art mentioned above, the writer did not deviate or wander, and to one who is inclined to study detail, it will be interesting to find the co-relation of detail as adapted to the exterior and interior of this building, which detail was carried down to the treatment of faience floor design, hardware and painted ornament.

palace interiors and the temple, and a perfect system of lighting stairs and aisle floors for the use of special floor lights without disturbing the general lighting effects.

The small temple in the terrace garden has a ceiling treatment which is a miniature reproduction of the ceiling of the Pantheon in Rome.

Modified caryatides, sculptured human female figures are used as column supports for the pergola which houses the two main ramps leading from the art gallery to the balcony.

Caryatides are traditional, and are taken to represent the women of Caria who stood with the Persians against the Greeks and were made slaves.

Organ Chimes in Peristyle

The peristyle which is a range of columns surrounding the small temple and supporting its roof, contains the chimes belonging to the organ equipment, and also has provided a singer's platform. Rustications of the stonework of the palace and garden walls, are formed with recess joints, all as found in Renaissance buildings in Florence. The rich red background of the spandrel, which is the triangular space between the curve of the triumphal arch and its square enclosure, is a King color of the stone decorations of all of the exterior buildings. The entire decorative scheme of the exterior ornaments on buildings is attempted in Fresco style, a term applied originally to painting on a wall while the plaster is still wet.

Better Theatres Advisory Staff

In order to render its readers assistance on various problems of equipment and construction that arise from time to time, BETTER THEATRES has obtained the cooperation of the individuals and associations listed following in this work.

Through the cooperation of this advisory staff this department feels that it has allied itself with sources of expert knowledge on virtually every phase of theatre building and furnishing and is able to offer theatre owners a valuable service in providing information and answers on a wide range of subjects of a general nature.

All of the theatre interiors were decorated in rich polychrome, and the structural features of the interior of the auditorium which was designed to represent an exterior, has been cleverly high-lighted to make the illusion perfect.

(This is the first of a series of two articles on the Majestic Theatre. The second will appear in BETTER THEATRES for June.)

Building Costs High In Chicago and N.Y.

Projects which it is estimated entotal an outlay of \$75,000,000 in Chicago and approximately \$100,000,000 in New York are being held up because of the high cost of labor and materials, according to a survey made at these points. Wages of labor has been found one of the big items in construction costs in these cities. It is generally believed, however, that prices of materials have reached their peak. The steel situation is cited by several prominent architects and builders as being the most serious factor.

FRANK CAMBRIA, Director of Art and Production, Balaban & Katz Theatres.

E. B. CRESAP, Secretary, National Association of Fan Manufacturers.

LEO E. DWYER, President, Motion Picture Equipment Dealers of America.

JOHN EBERSON, Architect.

- W. S. HAYS, Secretary, National Slate Association and The National Federation, Construction Industries.
- F. J. HUSE, Chief Engineer, Hollow Building Tile Association.
- JOSEPH KAUSAL, Chief Electrician. Maintenance Division, Balaban & Katz Theatres.

A. C. LISKA, Remodeling.

- E. M. LURIE, Assistant to Commissioner, Associated Metal Lath Manufacturers.
- VIRGIL C. MARANI, M. Am. Soc. C. E., Chief Engineer, The Gypsum Industries. HENRY L. NEWHOUSE, Architect. FRANK E. PLOWMAN, Theatre Lighting.

GEORGE L. RAPP, Architect.

GEORGE W. REPP, Service Division, American Face Brick Association.

R. L. SIMMONS, Architect.

- NORMAN M. STINEMAN, Assoc. Mem. American Society of Civil Engineers, Portland Cement Association.
- MAX Y. SEATON, Technical Director, National Kellastone Company.

Ceiling Represents Sky

The installation of a very elaborate and special lighting system has made it possible to add to this illusion the deep blue sky; the glowing firebrands and urns resting on doorheads; wall copings; balustrades; the slow moving clouds; the stereopticon effect moonrise; the twinkling stars; the sunset effect up over terrace garden; the warm glow coming from the interior of garden houses,



WESLEY TROUT, Projection Engineer.

Tells How He Cut Light Bill \$20

R. G. Ledbetter, manager of Saenger's Yazoo theatre, Yazoo City, Mississippi, in a communication to this department tells how he reduced his lighting bill \$20 per month. His suggestion follows:

"I will start off by saying that I was an operator for seven years, and in my travels I found that most every theatre had a bad system of wiring. That is, they had the machine room motors and house lights hooked up together.

"Some do not know it but if you put the motors on a separate circuit from the house lights you will find a big difference in the lighting bill. Just recently I changed mine and it reduced the light bill on an average of \$20 monthly.

Dainty and comfortable furniture has been installed in the women's rest room at the Majestic, Houston, Tex.

"Just ask your light plant if it isn't cheaper to have your arc and motors on a separate circuit, using two meters, one for each circuit."

> R. L. LEDBETTER, Saenger's Yazoo, Yazoo City, Miss.

June 23, 1923 EXHIBITORS HERALD

Architectural Tradition Is Defied in Houston Theatre Design

(Continued from the May issue of Better Theatres)

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the BETTER THEATRES section of EXHIBITORS HERALD which appeared in the issue of May 20 was published the first of this series of articles describing the Majestic theatre, Houston, Tex., which, because of its unusual auditorium design, has attracted country-wide interest. Concluding details of the structure are described herewith by Mr. John Eberson, its designer.

By JOHN EBERSON, Architect

An hydraulic plunger type elevator of big capacity has been installed to carry all of the balcony patrons to the various tunnel and balcony floors. In addition to the feature of easy riding, this type of public elevator offers maximum degree of safety in operation.

Many Things in Sub-Stage

The sub-stage floor of the Majestic theatre contains a large boiler room equipped with oil burning apparatus and oil storage; a room for five pumps; an animal room to house traveling performing animals; a room to be used as a clubroom for the stage help; a large storeroom; a music room; a private office for the leader; a heating and refrigerating room; concrete vaults for the large lighting transformers; a room containing the elevator machinery; a room containing the remote control stage switchboard, The main foyer is 10 feet wide and offers a spacious arcade distributing the crowd through four 5-foot aisle openings on the main floor. At the right hand end of the foyer you will find the exit lobby which also answers as an elevator lobby. There patrons can take the elevator to the balcony tunnel floor.

XI

Double aisle doors separate the main foyer from the main floor auditorium. Four extremely wide aisles running from orchestra pit direct to exit doors offer easy access to the seats located on the main floor. These aisles are very richly carpeted and are lighted by special floor lights. Rich gilt lighting bracket fixtures and handsome floor rugs add to the atmosphere of the elegant foyer. The main floor contains six roomy boxes with convertible vestibules and oversize stairs leading to the balcony. Side exits are provided to lead the audi-

THE Majestic theatre has a reinforced concrete foundation and its close proximity to the tall Carter Building and the Bender Hotel, caused certain earth pressures to interfere with the deep excavation required for the mechanical equipment of this structure. Very intricate and interesting cantilever reinforced concrete footings were used to combat this earth pressure and to provide independent supports for the structure without infringing on property lines and without extending bearing footing courses beyond same.

Building Is Entirely Fireproof

The structure proper is a fireproof steel frame with steel trusses, brick curtain walls and a pre-cast reinforced concrete slab roof. The balcony is supported on a main bridge girder and with the aid of fantail cantilever beams. All of the stairs are reinforced concrete, and the floor constructions represent reinforced concrete joists built on non-removable steel arch forms with permanent lath bottoms. Partitions are executed in brick and burnt clay tile. Ceilings in auditorium corridors and rooms where not plastered against floor construction, are suspended metal lath ceilings. The canopy has a steel frame and book tile roof and a cement plastered ceiling. The facing is pressed and hammered copper. The main auditorium and balcony have super-imposed on a damp proof concrete base, a hard maple floor which will improve acoustic properties and will offer comfort to the patrons as compared with the usual cement finished floor.



Heating, Ventilating System

A complete, scientifically controlled, heating and ventilating plant is installed, containing a refrigerating feature, whereby fresh, temperate and treated air is delivered to all portions of the building; warm washed air in winter time and cooled washed air in summer time. Distribution of this air is accomplished both by side wall and floor openings, and an automatic controlled system will assure patrons at all times of proper atmospheric conditions in this auditorium. In addition to the distribution of fresh air by mechanical equipment, represented by the heating and refrigeration plant, a very large number of paddle fans has been installed to aid the comfort of the public during the hot summer.

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Exterior of Majestic theatre, Houston, Texas, described in accompanying article.

and a special room for the blower apparatus of the organ. Easy access to all of these rooms is arranged for by two complete sets of independent stairs.

In addition to all these service rooms, this floor also contains a very complicated network of heating ducts, pipe tunnels, plenum chambers and drain pits. The main entrance lobby is subdivided by a series of brass rails guiding patrons in easy routine to the box office which serves the public through two large ticket selling windows: Entrance lobby opens directly into the main foyer. On the left of the main entrance lobby you will find a public telephone room and the doorman's room containing switchboard controlling signs, emergency lighting, and all front, house and display lighting. ence to Travis street through handsomely furnished fireproof tunnels.

Chairs Are Staggered

The main auditorium floor is a doubled bowled floor, and special attention is called to the scientific layout of this floor, offering exceptionally good sight lines and having seating so arranged that chair rows are built up in staggered fashion, thus no patron will be sitting just exactly behind the man in front of him, but is able to get a clear view of the stage by finding himself placed between the heads and shoulders of those who sit in front of him. Under the balcony the ceiling is handsomely decorated and contains various (Continued on page XXIV)



BETTER THEATRES SECTION OF June 23, 1923



Another view of Majestic theatre auditorium, described in this and previous article by John Eberson.



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Architect Tradition Defied in Playhouse

(Continued from page XI.)

ventilating inlets and outlets designed to change the air and function as a sounding board. The orchestra pit is exceptionally roomy and accommodates a large orchestra as well as a console of the main organ. There are located on the main floor on the stage spacious quick change rooms, property rooms, scene docks and entrance halls well vestibuled to eliminate noise, and two marble stairways connect the main foyer with the art gallery floor, which contains the retiring rooms and forms an intermediate feeder for the balcony. A completely furnished nursery with sound-proof walls, an elegant ladies' parlor, a Pompeian smoking room and toilets, with Roman splendor have been provided. The art gallery and all of the rooms on this floor are very handsomely furnished with Italian furniture, rich in gilt fixtures, rugs and paintings.



Our Art Titles in

"Little Old New York" "The White Rose" "Enemies of Women" "The Bright Shawl" "When Knighthood Was in Flower" "One Exciting Night"





NEW YORK CITY



Dressing Rooms in Annex

The six upper boxes find easy connection through a set of broad stairs and ramps to this art gallery and retiring room floor.

A three-story annex adjoining the stage on the Travis street side houses in hotel room fashion all of the dressing rooms to be used in connection with this theatre. There are fourteen dressing rooms, two large chorus rooms and a green room. Special attention has been given to the equipment and furnishing of these rooms. They contain dressing tables, chiffoniers, mirrors, fans, special lighting fixtures, washstand accommodations, carpets and wardrobe fittings designed to serve the artists for their comfort and convenience. Showers and toilet accommodations are furnished on a liberal scale. All of the retiring rooms on the art gallery floor have outside light and air and are heated by direct radiation. A set of marble stairs connects the art gallery floor with the balcony tunnel floor.

The tunnel floor or main reception room for the public using the balcony has been featured in this building, and has been furnished lavishly, offering a comfortable lounge to balcony patrons. A special convenient entrance and box office has been designed to accommodate and cater to colored patrons of the theatre. The tunnel floor also contains large storage spaces and very elaborately furnished dressing rooms for ushers and the house staff. A specially built and designed organ loft is located on this tunnel floor and houses an organ which was

and do into

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June 23, 1923

EXHIBITORS HERALD

specially designed and built for this theatre.

Nine Exits from Balcony

The balcony floor has by actual count, and including the substantial fire escapes on Travis street, nine spacious exits. This balcony has a very easy pitch and the sight lines are exceptionally good. This fact, together with the convenience of the elevator service, and the splendid view which one can gain from the balcony of the entire house, promises to make this balcony eminently popular.

The operator's booth and machine room together with motor generator room and operator's retiring room, are located on the top of the balcony fioor. This room is equipped with the very latest apparatus and current transformer machinery and enjoys the benefit of direct outside light and air.

Rigging loft and fly floor is entirely constructed of steel and iron, and contains the very latest and most complete apparatus to handle, shift, lift and house modern equipment.



Fire Protective Phases

A tested wire woven asbestos curtain traveling in smoke grooves creates a fire unit at the proscenium arch. An automatic stage ventilator of substantial construction has been installed in accordance with regulations of the fire prevention bureau, and a complete system of standpipes affords further guarantee to the public that every precaution has been taken to protect them against any discomfort or danger.

\$3,500,000 Theatre Building Program Is Underway on Coast

Theatre construction activities of West Coast theatres, Inc., Los Angeles, an organization operating nearly 100 theatres on the West Coast, calls for an expenditure of \$3,500,000 for the first eight months of 1923. Seven houses now under way will be completed by September, it is expected. A 1,800-seat house is being erected at San Pedro at an estimated cost of \$500,-000. In Pomona a 1,500-seat theatre, which represents an investment of \$200,-000, is being built. A 1,000-seat theatre and office building is under way at Hermosa Beach. Other playhouses being erected are located at Santa Monica, Hollywood, Los Angeles, while negotiations are pending for three more theatres which the company will announce in fall and which will entotal an outlay of \$750,000.

READ WHAT HE SAYS -

Litchfield, June 2nd, 1923.

XXV

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> Litchfield Theatre Co., Earl Stout, Mgr.

New B. & K. House

In connection with the announcement that Balaban & Katz, Chicago theatre owners operating the Chicago, Tivoli, Riviera, and other Chicago theatres, would erect a new playhouse on the north side of the city to seat 5,600, it is stated by an executive of the organization that no definite date has been set for this project nor have plans been started. It will be months and probably a year or so before further action is taken, he said. With a seating capacity of 5,600 the proposed Balaban & Katz theatre would give Chicago the largest cinema house in the world.



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Note to Architects:

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BETTER THEATRES SECTION OF July 21, 1923



In America's Foremost Theatres

THE same care and thought that directed the planning and selection of the essential items of equipment for the new Majestic Theatre, Houston, Texas, were exerted in the selection of the theatre chairs. As in every other detail, only the last word in theatre chair perfection would do.

The one selected was a handsomely upholstered theatre chair of American Seating Company manufacture, roomy

and comfortable, built to last a generation.

As further aid to audience convenience, the chairs in their placement were slightly staggered so that each occupant is just a trifle to the side of and a little higher than the one in front of him. This is a detail readily understood and appreciated, but is only one of the many that mark the completeness of this new theatre of the South.

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