

THROUNGS ATTEND OPENING OF BEAUTIFUL PLAYHOUSE

Hicks Scores Personal Triumph at Initial Performances in Balboa Theatre; Telegrams and Flowers Give Evidence Of Appreciation; Action Moves Freely.

There was not a hitch occurred last night in the opening of San Diego's newest and most beautiful motion picture theatre. From the moment that the doors of the Balboa opened to admit the crowd that awaited the first show until the end of the second performance the program went off with a finish that gave evidence of long and careful drilling. There was no delay, and the personal appearance of the screen celebrities were not overly prolonged. It was the kind of a performance that patrons of the Balboa theatre can expect to have regularly in that artistic and supremely comfortable playhouse.

The occasion was a personal triumph for Bob Hicks, who was largely responsible for the creation of the Balboa. Sheafs of telegrams were thrust into his hands from time to time by hurrying messengers, and greetings and congratulations from out-of-town celebrities, most of whom already had sent magnificent baskets and bunches of flowers that filled the foyer from end to end.

TRIBUTE TO HICKS

But chiefly the opening performance was a tribute to the long hours of work that Mr. Hicks has spent in preparation for the event. The program, scheduled to start at 6:30, started at 6:30. And it ended at 9:15, in time to admit another capacity house before the second performance began at 9:30. Some 2000 persons were seated in record time by corps of usherettes that proved to be as efficient as they were decorative, which is saying a good deal, for they fitted their environment as perfectly as the seeds in a pomegranate.

Both of last night's audiences were given full opportunity to enjoy the beauties of the new theatre before the lights were dimmed for the feature picture. The finest theatre orchestra yet heard in San Diego gave a splendid 30 minute concert before the start of the formal program, while the electricians gave a demonstration of the lovely ever-changing softly tinted lighting system, with which the theatre is equipped, and the miniature waterfalls on either side of the proscenium murmured a soft obligato to the music of the orchestra.

A feature of the opening concert was the exhibition of the beautiful metallic cloth curtain which seemed to stand at one moment like a rocky precipice, then to change to a blue ice wall, then a scintillating screen of crimson fire as the lights played a color symphony over its lustrous surface. The audience frequently applauded some particularly lovely combination of colors.

Suddenly the music of the orchestra ceased and music began to creep in from another source. The metallic curtain crinkled softly aside and revealed a peppy jazz band of girls who played for an exquisitely dainty toe dance. The Fanchon and Marco revue was a distinct success, with pretty dances, catchy songs and a rhythmically melodic orchestra.

PRINCIPALS APPEAR

The feature picture, "Lilies of the Field," was followed by brief personal appearances of the stars of that production. Charles Murray, acting as master of ceremonies, introduced Conway Tearle and Corinne Griffith. Mr. Tearle spoke briefly, congratulating San Diego

on possessing such a beautiful theatre as the Balboa, and apologizing for the absence of his wife, Adele Rowland, who was scheduled to appear and sing. He explained she was suffering with a severe cold and was not able to make the trip from Los Angeles to San Diego. Miss Griffith merely bowed her acknowledgement to the applause that greeted her appearance.

Mr. Murray apologized for appearing in "alredales," but explained that he was raising them for another picture part. He offered his congratulations to San Diego for having the Balboa theatre, and urged that the people of this city show appreciation by their patronage, assuring them that neither Mr. Hicks nor the West Coast Theatres, Inc., with which he is affiliated, will spare expense or effort in giving San Diego the best pictures that can be made.

The feature picture of the evening was a rather hackneyed story of the dual life which most young millionaires, and old ones, too, for that matter, are supposed to lead. There was nothing particularly inspiring about the picture, which seemed to begin on a note of sullen pain, continue through a rather sordid story of accepted, if not respectable, demi-monde existence, and end in a frenzied retribution for the cruelly faithless husband, while the wronged wife regains her darling child and marries the woman-hating millionaire who decided that she was the first woman he had ever met who preferred books to dancing. The action was wholly indecisive, Miss Griffith and Mr. Tearle seeming to saunter hesitantly instead of striding through the picture.

The baby was adorable and the Negro was a splendid example of the type, while neither of them posed or postured in front of the camera or registered pained acquiescence by the linear foot.

GETS PERSONAL GIFTS

In addition to a large number of floral offerings from his friends, Mr. Hicks had the pleasure of receiving a number of appropriate gifts with which to furnish his office on the mezzanine floor of the theatre. A light fixture of special design, a tall floor-lamp, a desk lamp, unique ash trays, and other welcome additions to the office furnishings were presented by William Wheeler, architect of the theatre; Carl Heilbron, the electrical contractor, and others of Mr. Hicks' friends.

There is no doubt that the Balboa theatre is an addition of which San Diego can be proud. It is rich in coloring, yet restful. It is real Spanish, as befits its name. It is comfortable to a degree that merits not only special mention, but to such a degree that its impression on the audience last night was distinctly visible. There was a look of surprised pleasure on their faces as they sank into the comfortable seats, deep, soft and wide.

There is a great airy spaciousness to the auditorium, due to the height of the ceiling, a credit to the architect, and to the work of J. R. Comly, construction engineer who worked out the great span with Mr. Wheeler. And despite the surprising vastness of the interior, the acoustics are about perfect. The orchestra in its fortissimo efforts was not deafening, and the softest spoken words of the screen celebrities could be heard to the extreme back of the balcony.