

A FAREWELL TO LOEW'S OHIO

by Frank Babbitt and Denny Richards

As you read this, Loew's Ohio Theatre in Columbus may be only a memory. As it is being written, however, valiant efforts are being made by Central Ohio Chapter ATOE'ers and many other civic minded citizens to save this beautiful structure.

Within its walls is a 3100 seat auditorium of Spanish-Moorish design that still retains its pristine splendor, thanks to stage manager Joe Worman and Loew's city manager, Sam Shubouf. This fabulous theatre boasts such accoutrements as two stage elevators, equipment to fly 44 sets simultaneously, orchestra, grand piano and organ lifts, a perfectly maintained 4-20 Robert Morton theatre organ, stereophonic three dimensional projection equipment, a preview screening room on a lower level and many other features reminiscent of the golden era of the movie palace.

Plans have been submitted to the realty company that purchased the site for a new office building, to erect their structure around and over the theatre with the auditorium itself becoming a community play-house. Whether or not this will be successful is highly doubtful. As a final tribute to Loew's Ohio,

HBG Enterprises (composed of Central Ohio ATOE'ers Tom Hamilton, Frank Babbitt and Neil Grover), presented a farewell program there on February 16.

Roger Garrett, a long time favorite at the Ohio, now manager of a television station in Clarksburg, West Virginia, returned to Columbus to play the farewell concert. His popularity and the public's general interest in the theatre were attested to by the complete sell-out a week before the concert. Last minute arrangements were made for 45 seats on the orchestra lift and accommodations for some 100 standees elsewhere in the theatre. When the additional tickets were placed on sale the day of the concert, devoted fans stood in 15 degree cold as long as 3 hours in order to obtain them and when they were gone, people were turned away.

The interest generated was further demonstrated by the large volume of record sales at three booths set up in the lobby. These recordings were of Roger Garrett and the Ohio's first organist, Bill Dalton, made at Loew's Ohio during previous concerts. Numerous copies of the pictorial souvenir

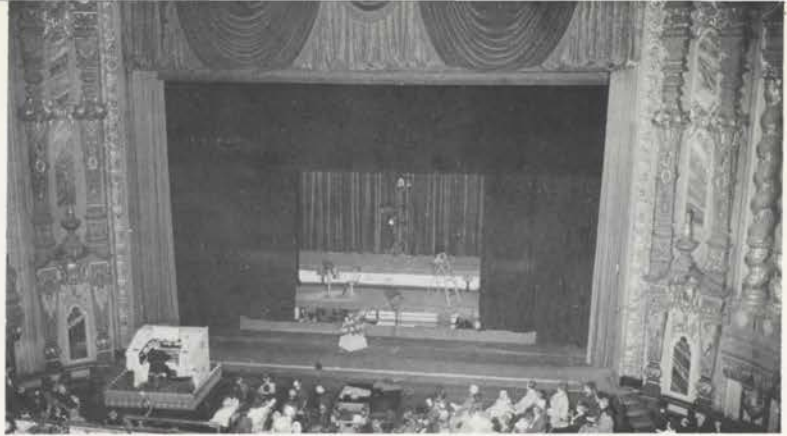
booklet about the theatre have been sold to those unable to attend. Copies of the records (\$5.00 each) and the booklet (75c) all postpaid may be obtained from Neil Grover, 5567 Crawford Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43229.

Prior to Roger's Concert, the many features of the theatre's stage and pit lifts were demonstrated to the audience which included many radio, television and press personalities. To the strains of "Romance," Roger's theme song, the gleaming white console of the Mighty Robert Morton rose into view for the last time. A standing ovation followed a varied program of classical and old time popular favorites. As part of his encore, Roger played several Ohio State University songs, reminiscent of his football rally days at the theatre.

All of this was only a prelude to the grand finale. As the curtains slowly parted revealing the 2 stage elevators at different levels, a step ladder, music stand, chair and spot light came into view — a silent reminder of the theatre's past. A dimmed spotlight illuminated a basket of red carnations, Ohio's official state flower.

The hour arrived that everyone had so long been dreading. The button was pushed and the console slowly started to descend into the pit and from both organ chambers rolled the notes of the song that is used at both glad as well as sad affairs — "Auld Lang Syne." As the console descended, the spotlight grew dimmer, the house lights gradually faded and by the time the last notes sounded, and the console touched bottom, the theatre was completely dark and the huge crowd was so silent you could have heard a pin drop. For several seconds not a soul stirred, nor a light flickered. When the house lights finally came up, several tear-filled eyes were seen and even a few wet cheeks. Slowly and reverently, the huge crowd melted through the exits and the theatre emptied.

Thus came to an end, a concert, a theatre and an era in Columbus leaving behind only memories of Loew's Ohio, "THE THEATRE BEAUTIFUL."



— Photo by Tom Hamilton

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— Photo by Tom Hamilton

ROGER GARRETT at the Console of the 4-20 Robert Morton at Loew's Ohio.