

JOLIET'S FAMOUS

"Wonder Theatre"

The Rialto Theatre in downtown Joliet, Illinois, was known as one of the nation's ten wonder theatres when it was built in 1926. Today it still is a "wonder theatre" and on October 7 celebrated its 50th Anniversary with a program of live stage talent and a concert on the Barton Grande Organ.

The event brought back memories to a full house attendance, and there were ushers on hand who had been there for opening day on May 24, 1926. The "Remember When" evening presented Rob Calcaterra at the Barton Grande Organ in a program of nostalgic songs. Rob is a student at the School of Music at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. His classical organ studies are with the famed Dr. Oswald Regatz. He is also a member of the Singing Hoosiers, a touring group of vocalist/dancers (under the direction of Mr. Robert Stole) who perform in all styles of music. Besides his usual playing out, teaching, arranging, composing, accompanying, vocalizing and practicing, Rob was back home to help make the 50th Anniversary program a "Remember When" time for the audience.

The event was sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, Joliet Park District, Joliet Township, Caterpillar Tractor Company, First National Bank of Joliet and Andrew Barber. Organizations responsible for the event were the Will County Cultural Arts Association, Greater Joliet Council and Joliet Area Theatre Organ Enthusiasts.

The 50th Anniversary had a two-fold objective — celebrating the occasion and projecting the possibilities inherent in the theatre. The theatre is now for sale with no plans for immediate destruction or plans for its future. The Will County Cultural Arts Association has initiated landmark proceedings. The theatre is a Rapp & Rapp designed theatre and one of the few remaining which could become a civic and cultural center with minor changes. It is also

located in the center of town and is part of a business and office complex.

The Rialto also features excellent acoustics, ample dressing rooms and has seats so arranged that all have equal command of the stage. The stage is 105 by 32 feet and can be increased by another 14 feet when hydraulic jacks bring the pit to stage level.

ATOS will tour the Rialto during the Chicago convention next July. □



Rob Calcaterra. He played the 50th anniversary program at the Rialto in 1976. (Bill Lamb Photo)

The 2000-seat Rialto Theatre was designed by Rapp and Rapp and was first opened to the public on May 24, 1926.

