

**A New Name, A New Role...**

# THE CHICAGO THEATRE TRUST

Since the founding, in July, 1978, of ChicagoLandMarks, Inc., by ATOS members Bill Barry and Doug Christensen, this group has been working to preserve the Chicago Theatre and its famous Wurlitzer pipe organ. THEATRE ORGAN readers have followed the progress of the group in other stories on these pages. Here is an update on the story.

Demolition of the Chicago Theatre has been averted. The City of Chicago Department of Planning has indicated that the building is to remain on that site as redevelopment goes on around it in the seven blocks of the North Loop project. A new neighbor in the next block will be a \$200 million Hilton Hotel. An umbrella performing arts group hopes to convert the Michael Todd and Cinestage theatres back to legitimate use. Those two houses opened as the Harris and Selwyn, one block west of the Chicago. Another part of the plan calls for a "Theatre Row" with

A late night practice session at the Chicago Theatre found Barbara Sellers, manager Stanley Hightower, and ATOS Hall of Fame member Edna Sellers at the Wurlitzer. Edna played the house in the twenties.

(Chicago Theatre Trust Photo)



a Galleria of shops, restaurants, and cinemas to connect the Harris/Selwyn project with the Chicago.

The first role played by CLM was to marshal public support for a decision not to demolish the Chicago. It was able to do so successfully. Its second role is to become the preservation/development organization for the oldest existing movie palace in the world.

Guidelines for this new role are based upon the results of a consultant study by Jared Shlaes & Co., Chicago, with partial funding by a National Trust grant. CLM has changed its name to Chicago Theatre Trust, Inc., to avoid confusion with other local preservation groups and to more clearly identify it with the building. The Shlaes' study has some interesting conclusions — that the Chicago is architecturally and historically worth preserving; that it is in basically sound condition with no irreversible modifications having been made to it; that it is better designed as a theatre, with better sightlines and acoustics than other downtown auditoriums; that the thirty-foot stage depth is not a barrier to large live productions because the huge stage wings can be opened up by demolishing dressing rooms; that the economics will require a non-profit operation to raise capital funds and to operate the house.

The Chicago Theatre Trust Board has evolved a four-part plan for the future of the Chicago. First, to acquire an ownership interest in the building. Second, to lease back the theatre for it to be operated as a first-run film house through a 5-to-8-year transition period. Third, during that period to introduce live programming and begin capital improvements and restoration work. Fourth, at the end of the period, when the market for another large theatre has changed in the Loop, to operate as a



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full-time live house. CTT is currently seeking seed money for a first year's operating budget for a full-time staff to implement the plan. Continued membership support through the changeover period from all volunteer to a paid staff organization is vital to the success of the plan and the future of the Chicago and the last remaining original installation played to fame by Jesse Crawford.

During 1980 a number of live events supplemented the Chicago's role as a film house that runs seven days a week from 9 a.m. until midnight. In April, the American Film Institute presented its "Best Remaining Seats" program with Dennis James accompanying *Broken Blossoms* and a live appearance by the

film's star, Lillian Gish. On October 12th, CATOE hosted over 2,100 people for an all-star revue, with five acts on stage, a 15-man band, and Lin Lunde at the console. On November 7th, the Chicago hosted the opening night program for the 16th Chicago International Film Festival. Jack Olander was at the console of the 4/29 Wurlitzer, courtesy of CATOE. During Thanksgiving weekend, Dennis James is to return to play a silent film during the CATOE sponsored "Chicago Weekender" regional convention.

Chicago Theatre Trust, Inc. has renamed its newsletter *Intermission* to indicate its interest in providing its membership with information while the Chicago Theatre is "between acts." Interested ATOS members may write for a complimentary copy of *Intermission*, now edited by Bill Benedict, to Chicago Theatre Trust, 3051 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60657. □

## NEW CATALOGUE

The Organ Literature Foundation, established 30 years ago, is the largest supplier of organ books, recordings, etc., in the world and offers the most diversified stock that can be found anywhere. Their new Catalogue "N" offers more than 1,150 items. Well over 150 of these were not previously listed in the former catalogue. Catalogue "N" is available for \$1.00, refundable with the first order, from: The Organ Literature Foundation, 45 Norfolk Road, Braintree, Massachusetts 02184. Telephone: (617) 848-1388. □

## WELTE ORGAN TAPES AVAILABLE

Since the article in the August/September issue concerning the Welte player organ appeared, many requests have been received for information on the availability of recordings.

Author of the article, Dr. John Landon, informs us that tapes of the Welte are available from Ken Clark and Nelson Barden.

Please address your inquiries to: Welte Recordings, 292 Shawmut Avenue, Boston, Mass. 02118.

It is suggested that the cost, \$8.00 each, be verified. □



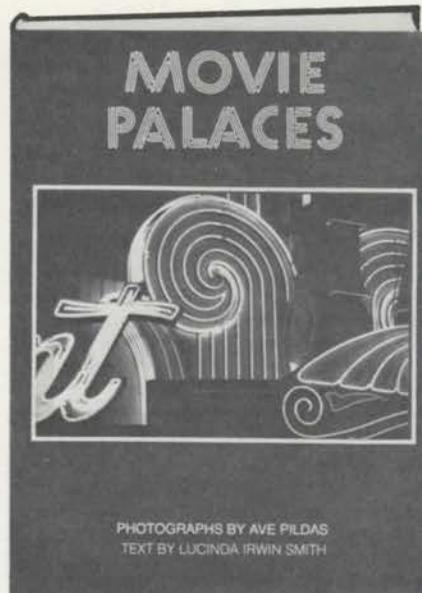
# BOOK REVIEW

by Lloyd E. Klos

**MOVIE PALACES, SURVIVORS OF ELEGANCE.** By Ave Pildas. 128 pages. Available from Vestal Press, Box 97, Vestal, NY 13850. Price: \$17.95 plus \$1.50 shipping charge. New York State residents add 7% sales tax.

Since the late Ben Hall's *The Best Remaining Seats* was published in 1961, there have been several other efforts to capture the glory of the motion picture palace. The most recent is a 128-page, beautifully illustrated picture book whose release comes just in time for the Christmas gift season. Not only is it a must for theatre buffs, but it is a handsome subject for display on any coffee table.

The author, Ave Pildas, a well-known Los Angeles designer and photographer, has lent his talents to this treatment of movie palaces still existing. There is a forward by King Vidor in which he traces the development of the sumptuous theatres through the eyes of a great director. A majority of the book's 196 pictures show scenes of West Coast the-



The introduction, entitled "Before the Final Curtain," contains the idiom's history, the entrepreneurs, the architecture and the entertainment, each in a separate section. Then comes the main body of the book: 182 scintillating pictures in living color. Specific parts of the picture palace are treated in separate groupings: 34 views of marquees and signs, 25 of box offices, 17 of exterior terrazzos, the remainder of interiors with their specialized designs and gee-gaws.

Views of the following theatres are included: Loew's Kings, Brooklyn; Columbus' Ohio; Erie's Warner; Richmond's Byrd; Aurora, Illinois' Paramount; Atlanta's Fox; Kansas City's Midland; Pasadena's Crown (with its famous curtain advertising an automobile); Catalina's Avalon and Mann's Chinese in Hollywood (inside and out, including the famous forecourt of footprints).

If we could offer a minute criticism, it would be that more eastern Movie Palaces should have been included. Syracuse's Loew's State (Thomas Lamb-designed); Shea's Buffalo (Rapp & Rapp); Radio City Music Hall (only a facade picture was included); Birmingham's Alabama and New Orleans' Saenger, to mention a few, are examples of theatres which have been refurbished in the past decade or so and we feel should have been included.

But, our hat is off to author Pildas for his superb effort which should be on the shelf of every theatre aficionado's library. □

*We Hope Y'all Have  
An Extra Nice  
Holiday Season*



**NORTH  
TEXAS  
CHAPTER**