

“An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor”

St. Louis Theatre / Powell Symphony Hall

St. Louis, Missouri

Architect: C.W. & George L. Rapp

Opened: November 23, 1925 / January 25, 1968

Organ: Kimball 4/29

This handsome house, the Orpheum outlet in its prime, is celebrated today for having been the pioneer movie-palace-to-performing-arts-center project, for which we all should be thankful. Somebody had to be first: the success and low cost of the St. Louis Symphony Society's conversion inspired many more nationwide, saving dozens of significant theatres from certain oblivion.

As it looks somewhat different today, Powell cannot be called a true restoration, but most of the original theatre has been preserved. The lobby is particularly fine. Powell is strictly a concert hall, with a fixed orchestra shell on the stage.

Offices now occupy the former fly space above. The Kimball, with its rare four-manual console, was removed prior to the renovation and broken up. Always painted in the theatre, the console found its way to the Colonial Theatre, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, while losing its paint job. A nice photograph of the console in natural wood can be seen on the cover of *THEATRE ORGAN*, (July/August '89).

In this well-assembled view, the house's general similarity to the Palace, Chicago, another Orpheum venue, is quite apparent, despite many differences in ornament. Few theatre photographs from this era do justice to the house's own lighting scheme: here is an exception, with Rapp & Rapp's characteristic cove-lit proscenium especially well-captured.

Photo Credit: TSHA Archives

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**THEATRE HISTORICAL
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2215 West North Avenue
Chicago, IL 60647

