

# “An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor”



## Alabama Theatre Birmingham, Alabama

Architects: Graven & Mayger

Opened: December 26, 1927

Organ: Wurlitzer 4/20 Publix I opus 1783



Stan Malotte at the Alabama Wurlitzer.

Here is something special! From every angle, this (mostly) Spanish-Moorish concoction merits the attention of any serious movie palace buff. The design is remarkably efficient: as if to spite the compact, L-shaped site, the architects skillfully endowed the Alabama with trappings enough for two ordinary theatres, including inner and outer lobbies, foyers and stairways galore, a pair of wildly eclectic lounges, a horseshoe loge and exotic light fixtures beyond counting.

Happily, an encouraging amount of this has survived intact: the house is among the best-preserved anywhere. Excepting the marquee and stage draperies, very little has been subjected to pointless modernization or badly conceived “restoration.” Nor is the Alabama threatened. Purchased in 1987 by Birmingham Landmarks, an offshoot of the ATOS chapter, it is already host to a broad assortment of attractions, both live and screen. A major fund-drive is presently underway to guarantee the future.

The largest Wurlitzer shipped to Dixie, “Big Bertha” is laid out like the Seattle Paramount’s, with Main and String chambers stacked on the left and a two-level Solo in a single chamber opposite. Delicate gold tracery on a ground of red and black covers the console, Wurlitzer’s most elaborate Moorish number. Played between 1931 and 1953 by Stan Malotte, Bertha has been recorded in recent years by Tom Hazleton and Jim Riggs.

*Auditorium photo: THS Archives. Organ Photo: Gary Jones*

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