

# "An Acre of Seats in a Palace of Splendor"



## Paradise Theatre Chicago, Illinois

Architect: John Eberson

Opened: September 14, 1928

Demolished: 1956-1958

Organ: Wurlitzer Op. 1942 5/21

Regarded by many as Eberson's magnum opus, the Paradise was nevertheless among the least successful and shortest-lived of great movie palaces. It was started by others, then acquired and completed by Balaban & Katz to rival the Marks Bros. nearby Marbro. After B & K got control of the larger Marbro, the Paradise assumed secondary status and was closed for about two years during the Depression. In the permanent slump of the '50s, it was sacrificed to strengthen the Marbro, which outlived it by seven years.

The Paradise had remarkable street presence, with a towering Mansard-roofed facade and massive, spectacular, electric signs anticipating the wonders inside. Beneath the Mansard was an atmospheric entrance lobby similar in character to the auditorium. Underneath the grand lobby and on the mezzanine was an international assortment of lounges, including a children's playroom. Seating capacity was 3606.

The five-manual Wurlitzer, clearly an answer to the Marbro's, was not highly regarded in the theatre. Removed to southern California by Richard Vaughn, it found its true calling as a recording organ, particularly as a vehicle for George Wright. The console, an embarrassment of plaster busts and cherubs, was given an attractive modern treatment by Vaughn. A cornerstone of the theatre organ revival, the Paradise organ is now in the Phoenix home of Bill Brown.

A 36-page publication devoted to the Paradise is available from the Theatre Historical Society.

For membership information write:  
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