

History of The Majestic Theatre

Recognized as one of the most ornate facilities in the country, the Majestic Theatre in San Antonio, Texas has long held a special place in the archives of Texas theatrical and architectural history.

Located in the heart of downtown San Antonio, the Majestic was designed and built in 1929 by John Ebersson for Karl Hoblitzelle's Interstate Theatres, and stood proudly for many years as the largest theatre in Texas and the second largest motion picture theatre in the country. It was intended to be the most modern and ornate building in South Texas - complete with new sound and projection equipment - and was the first theatre in the state to be totally air-conditioned.

The Majestic remains one of the finest atmospheric theatres ever built. Inspired by Spanish Mission, Baroque, and Mediterranean architectural traditions, theatre patrons are transported to a fantasy villa. Walls become towers with windows of colorful glass. A rare white peacock perches on a balcony railing as doves are caught in mid-flight. Grape vines creep along the walls and luscious foliage flourishes. The vaulted "sky" comes to life as stars twinkle while drifting clouds pass by overhead. Balconies, tile roofs, arches, and columns, railings, elaborate ornamentation, statues, and a bell tower all aid in the transformation of the theatre into a mystical village.

On December 31, 1974, changing entertainment habits forced the Majestic Theatre to close its doors "forever." The next year, the theatre was listed on the National Register of Historical Places, and in 1976 was donated by the Hoblitzelle Interests to the newly formed Majestic Foundation. For the next decade, a wide variety of concerts, performing arts events, and touring Broadway productions continued to entertain South Texans from the Majestic stage.

Las Casas Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of historic buildings for cultural use, ensured that the Majestic would continue to flourish. Las Casas raised \$4.5 million to restore the theatre. Sixty years of dust and dirt were removed to reclaim the extensive, hand crafted, decorative plaster, statuary, and other ornate carvings. Upholstery and carpeting were woven to recreate the original 1929 design. New production sound systems and acoustical enhancements were installed. The Majestic reopened in 1989 as the home of the San Antonio Symphony, as well as a venue for Broadway touring attractions, performing arts events and concerts of all types. In 1993, the Majestic Theatre was designated a National Historic Landmark.

In 1995, with the acquisition of the Little Brady Building, located at 208 E. Houston Street, a 3.5 million dollar expansion of the Majestic stage house was undertaken. This expansion was completed in the fall of 1996, giving the Majestic a new 40 foot-deep stage, modernized theatrical rigging, a state-of-the-art orchestra shell, expanded dressing room facilities, and enlarged storage space, allowing the Majestic Theatre to continue to meet the changing needs of symphonic and theatrical productions. This expansion has allowed the theatre to hold mega-musicals, including Miss Saigon, Show Boat, The Phantom of the Opera, and Lion King.

Productions

June 14, 1929 drew excited crowds to Houston Street for the theatre's grand opening presentation of "Fox Movietone Follies of 1929." The Majestic was the second largest theatre in the country. Because of its size, the Majestic was not only utilized to show movies, but also featured entertainers from the Vaudeville circuit. Legendary stars that performed at the Majestic include Jack Benny, Mickey Rooney, Ann Miller, George Burns, and Bob Hope.

Today, the "new" Majestic is the home of the San Antonio Symphony and Broadway Across America San Antonio. Musical sensations such as Wicked, The Lion King, Miss Saigon, Les Miserables, Cats, Cabaret, and Ragtime have graced the Majestic stage, as well as such international classic artists as Itzhak Pearlman and Isaac Stern. Contemporary artists such as Lyle Lovett, B.B. King, Tony Bennett and Sting have performed in the theatre. Comedians Jerry Seinfeld, George Lopez and Chris Rock have also had their names in lights on the Majestic marquee.

Interesting Facts

- The Majestic was built in 1929 and designed by John Eberson
- The theatre seats 2264 people
- The theatre is owned by the City of San Antonio
- The theatre reopened after renovation in 1989
- The décor is described as "Mediterranean Style"
- A machine projects clouds that move across the ceiling of the Majestic
- The first film shown in the Majestic was "Movietone Follies"
- The theatre has three balconies, two of which are completely renovated and functional
- The Majestic Theatre has hosted over 4 million patrons
- In 1992, the Majestic was the host to President George Bush's Presidential State Dinner for the International Drug Summit