



A Libyan Sheik in long flowing robes paces methodically to and fro atop Grauman's Egyptian theatre.

LIFE o' the SHOW-HOUSE LIGHT

LIGHT is life, whether it be in the physical or commercial world and in the theatrical game I, for one—and I think I'm not alone in this—am convinced that this subtle actor is the life of both the show and the show-house. Show me the publicity man connected with any theatre who will not agree that a poorly illuminated house can do as much or more to kill box office receipts than anything else—a bum act, for example. The lights, incidentally, are the bait with which the public is lured into the theatre. If you can't win the eye, it seems, you can't rake in the dollars.

At present, according to Crain's 1926 Market Data Book, there are over 20,000 theatres in the United States, representing a \$1,100,000,000 investment trying to capture the eye and the pin money of potential theatregoers.

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Los Angeles now has 160 theatres with a seven percent annual increase. Information gathered from light and power companies and theatrical electricians shows that the smaller motion picture houses consume from 3,000 to 6,000 kw-hrs. per month for lighting, while the approximate amount used by the average larger houses, which do extensive outside advertising, is from

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10,000 to 12,000 with a few using as high as 20,000 kw-hrs. In addition to this, there are five or six big theatres using around 50,000 kw-hrs., and one claims to be consuming over 100,000 per month which, by the way, offsets the very few using less than 1,000. The power used in the projection room mounts even higher than these figures.

Artistic lighting seems to be the chief passion of the theatre builders today, and every house electrician strives for new and beautiful effects. Some go in for that which is weird, gorgeous, and exotic; while others strive for soothing and restful moods—according to the character of the theatre. Indeed, lighting is no longer merely a means of chasing away the darkness in the environs of Los Angeles, it has become an art with a technique suitable for every purpose.

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Perhaps the most compelling in its splendor of any of the Los Angeles theatres is Sid Grauman's Egyptian Theatre. Its ap-

proach from the street is a long spacious forecourt where patrons are entertained before the performance and during intermissions. It is brilliantly illuminated by forty-five spot lights partially concealed in lotus-lily fixtures. A Libyan Sheik in the long flowing robes of the desert paces methodically back and forth on the roof of the building, outlined in the glare of two spots. An artificial moon adds the romantic touch when the real man in the moon has sojourned to Shanghai. This bit of advertising is both splendid and unusual. Usherettes, dressed in the garb of slaves, stand in the foyer under an overhead spot. The playhouse is a replica of a palace of ancient Thebes. Hieroglyphics and symbols abound, clearly discernible under proper lighting. The main luminaire—a behemoth among fixtures—is of Egyptian design in colors of gold with golden iridescent rays emanating from an ingenious system of concealed lighting, giving the effect of a colored sunburst. About 3,000 colored lamps give a magical, mystic beauty to this theatre and during the prologues the color effects are marvelously alluring.

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Another of the gorgeous theatres is the new \$1,500,000 Orpheum. Over 9,000 lamps

outside give promise of a brilliant performance within where 17,000 lamps, reflected by the gold leaf ceiling, copper finished doors, and copper fixtures presents a spectacle of brilliant colorfulness. A thousand cove lights around the dome, changing from color to color, contrast or blend with the various set-ups which transfigure the auditorium. The ceiling is of gold and tan with walls of the same effect. Care has been taken not to have the coloring in drapes or decorations conflict with the lighting effects. By kaleidoscopic changes of colored light countless combinations are secured making of this theatre a splendid example of the electrician's art and technique.

By the use of mirrored reflectors on the border and foot lights, the Orpheum claims to obtain twenty percent more useful light for the wattage than any other stage on the coast.

In contrast to the sensational brilliancy of the Orpheum is the Forum Theatre of Greek architecture. Here is a place of restful charm—that is, if you crave languishment—accentuated by careful lighting that has prompted over 200 letters from enthusiastic patrons during the past year. Such expressions of appreciation certainly are a direct compliment paid to the pleasing illumination of the Forum.

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Out of the realm of light-therapeutics comes the tenet that blue is the most restful color in the treatment of nervous patients. Hence the blue lighting used during the showing of the pictures is believed to be restful to the eyes and nerves of the tired business man and shopping-worn woman at the show.

Concrete pillars and urns along both side walls give a feeling of space to the panorama of Grecian scenes painted upon the walls. The audience experiences the sense of looking between colonnades upon a vast

and beautiful country. Forty 1000-watt spots above the canopy ceiling illuminate these walls from above and a three-colored lighting system hidden behind a low baluster enables the electrician to obtain marvelous effects on these scenic walls. Colored lights in the urns give the appearance of burning incense. Four hundred 60-watt cove-lighting lamps and other sources and "spots" placed to judicious advantage, all operated by a splendidly equipped switchboard, help to make this show-house one of the show places of Los Angeles.

The new Circle Theatre boasts another excellent and up-to-date lighting system. For one thing it is fully equipped to throw the load on either of the two local power companies. The projection room, where the switchboard and dynamos are located has all the spic and span appearance of a hospital. They make the modest claim of being able to produce thousands of changes with this complete board and when you see the row after row of little buttons and switches it seems possible, particularly when you remember that the dictionary contains thousands and thousands of words made out of a combination of 26 letters. You change "night" into "light" by the simple process of throwing the switch from N to L and an electric switch changes night into light just as easily!

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The Circle theatre has a three-combination pre-set board with dimmers operated either by hand or by a 15 h-p motor, the latter giving a more even blending. A dual control makes it possible for the stage manager to operate the lights as well as the man in the projection room but set-ups must be made in the latter place.

With characteristic Los Angeles "unobtrusiveness," at least eight theatres claim to be the "finest in America." Notwithstanding and exteriorly at least. The Circle looks the part. Located in an exclusive residential district, its imposing pure white-

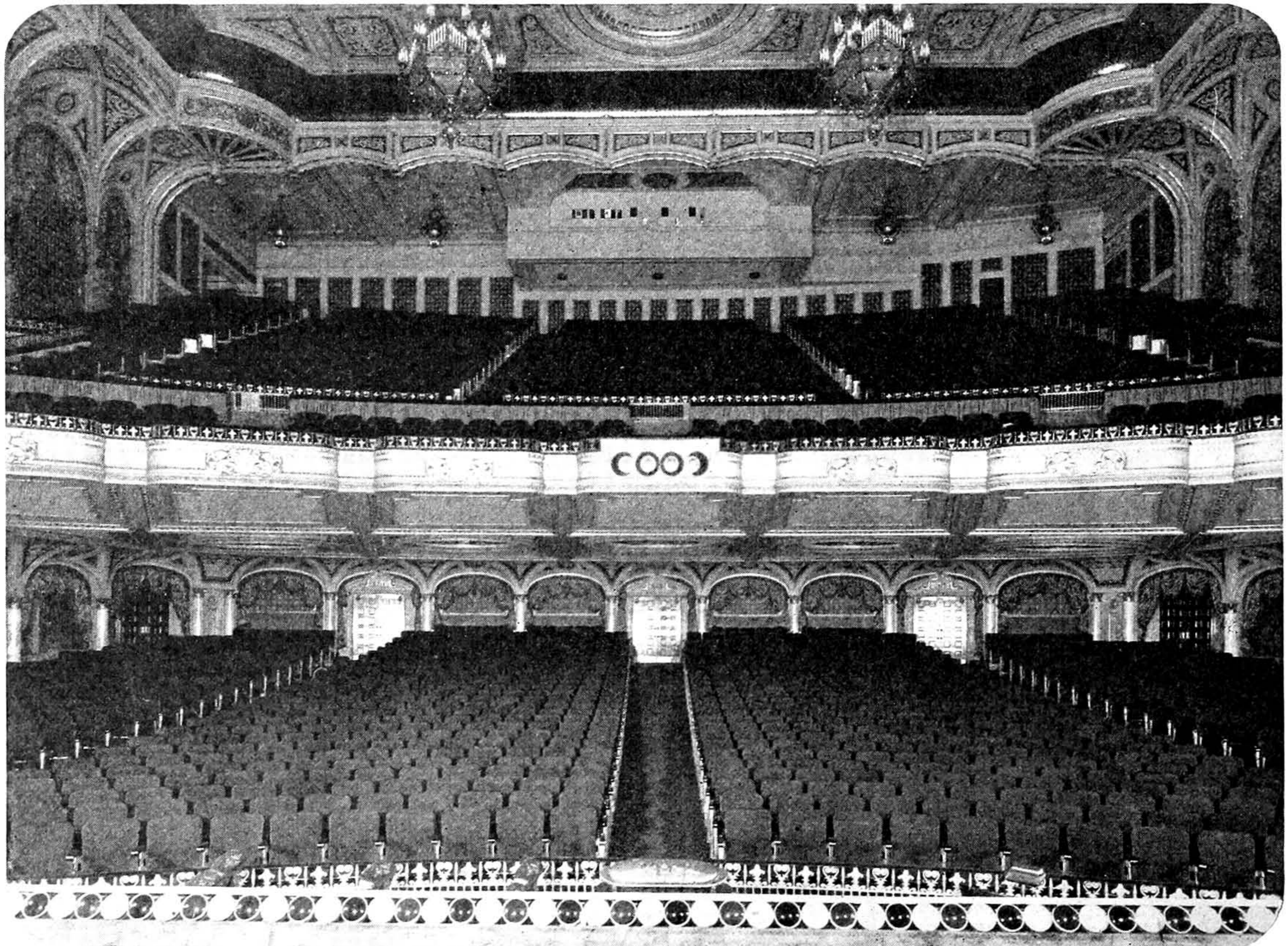
ness is an architectural and illuminating triumph. Claude D. Seaman, working in conjunction with Dwight Gibbs, the architect, from the inception of the idea, has achieved results which show the advantages of such co-operation. The architectural lines of the building have been carried out in light by the scientific placement of fourteen 250-watt powerful floodlights. The tower is surmounted by a 200-watt Mazda lamp on a rod. Two thousand lamps are used in the sign.

The lighting feature of the interior is a circular ceiling of Spanish wood incorporating in its design intricate filigree work, ornamental beams and central lighting fixture admirably adapted for artistic illumination. Four thousand three hundred and fifty-two lamps are used in the building, giving an effect which for a time was the talk of the town and echoed far across the high Rockies—eastward.

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Interesting reminiscences were told during the securing of data for this article. There were those who had watched the evolution of stage lighting from kerosene lamp times when a row of lamps wearing reflectors set along the front of the stage just in front of the bald heads, with no attempt of concealment of their unsightly appearance. Hanging lamps served for the rest of the lighting. Then about 35 years ago gas improved the situation. Next electricity entered the field, supplemented by the old calcium lights as one of the first improved methods of bright stage lighting. They hissed like angry snakes but they delivered the goods. Dimmers at that time consisted of rods rammed into a barrel of water and about 25 pounds of salt—an impromptu rheostat—and the depth of the submersion determined the brightness of the lights.

Theatrical lighting is a big game and it takes thousands of artistic artisans to keep the stage lights burning.



Gold leaf ceilings, coppered doors and metallic surfaces play an important part in reflecting the multi-colored effects obtainable in the Orpheum theatre, Los Angeles.