THE SPRECKELS THEATER AND OTHERS

It is the verdict of competent critics that the Spreckels theater is the finest in the United States. It is indeed a work of art, the finished product of a most pleasing conception.

The building fronts a full block of 200 feet on D street, fronts 235 feet on First street and 235 feet on Second street. It is six stories in height, with a basement, which has an area of 56,000 square feet. This basement contains stage pit, dressing rooms, machinery and fan rooms, four store basements and a large restaurant, with kitchen, storage rooms, toilet rooms and other appurtenances. This restaurant is reached by two wide marble and onyx stairways from the main entrance on D street.

On the first floor the theater space proper is in the center of the building, extending back the full 235 feet. The entrance lobby is 30x80 feet, flanked by two recesses containing the beautiful onyx box office and the three passenger elevators to the office floors above. Just beyond is the foyer, large and roomy, with two stairways leading to the balcony and one to the gallery. Immediately over the entrance doors to the foyer is a large art glass panel in full view from the lobby. Just inside these doors is a very large plate glass mirror set in the wall at the right side, balancing and reflecting the stairway to the gallery.

The entire lobby, including box office, elevator recess and stairways, are finished in Pedrara onyx on both walls and ceilings, making one of the largest single contracts ever executed in that beautiful stone. Some of the largest single slabs of polished onyx ever cut can be seen on the face of the pilasters in this lobby.

The box office has an entrance from the lobby and one from the foyer. Adjoining the box office is a small room containing a switchboard on which are mounted switches for all lights to be controlled from the box office. In the rear is the manager's office, with a large fireproof and burglarproof vault. A stairway from the entrance hall to these rooms leads to a mezzanine floor above, where there are private offices for the resident manager and visiting manager and a large poster room, all well lighted by skylights.

To the left of the foyer, under the balcony stairway, is the entrance to the men's retiring, lounging, toilet and check rooms. To the right, similarly located, are the same provisions for women.

The main auditorium is 70 feet deep and 88 feet wide—in contrast with the old style auditorium where the stage was placed at the end of an oblong room. The sight lines for this main floor have been worked out as carefully as for the balcony and gallery, giving a dished floor, higher in the rear than at the front, but with an ever changing pitch.

Large exits on each side near the boxes lead to separate and private passages to First and Second streets. In front under the footlights is the orchestra pit, with stairway to musicians' dressing and locker rooms under the stage.

The balcony is reached by two wide easy stairways from the main foyer, landing on a balcony foyer almost as large and impressive as the one below.

The front row of seats on the balcony is only forty feet from the stage. Two separate and private exits to First and to Second streets are provided for the balcony, in addition to the main foyer stairways. The family circle and gallery

is set well back from the balcony line, avoiding the cavernous appearance so often noticeable from the stage, and enabling the occupants of balcony seats to feel out in the open. The family circle and gallery is reached by one large stairway from the main foyer, and in addition has a large private exit on each side leading direct to the streets. These side exits have no openings into other parts of the building and afford safe and possible exit for the audience should an occasion arise making it desirable to empty the house quickly. There are separate toilet room conveniences accessible from the gallery foyer.

The number of seats in the new theater is exactly 1,915. In the dress circle there are 768 seats, in the balcony, 428, in the family circle 294 and in the gallery 425.

It should also be remembered that not a single column at any point interferes with the view of the stage from any seat. Both balcony and gallery are supported on cantilevers from columns at the rear of the auditorium and the auditorium roof and ceiling are supported by three steel trusses, each 88 feet long.

The auditorium is carpeted with cork carpet and all seats in the house are expensive upholstered armchairs.

The stage, with its mechanical and electrical equipment, contains the latest approved devices known to the stage manager's art and is large enough to properly accommodate any scenic production on the road. It is 88 feet wide and 52 feet deep. On each side is a fly gallery, supported on cantilever beams, but all high enough not to interfere with handling scenery below. High above the stage—above the sixth floor level of the offices along the street fronts—is a great framework of steel known among the profession as the gridiron. It is in reality a floor of three-inch steel T beams supported on heavy I beams, which in turn are suspended from the roof construction. These T beams are close enough together to make a good walking surface, but far enough apart to permit the stage manager to drop his ropes at any point he wishes over the entire stage. This gridiron, in area, is almost equal to the ordinary 50-foot residence lot and weighs 50 tons. It is reached by an iron ladder from the stage floor. The stage is quickly and effectively cut off from the auditorium by a curtain of solid steel plate, faced on the stage side with two inches of vitrified asbestos—certainly a combination equal to shutting out the scorching flames of Tophet. This curtain is operated by a hydraulic lift in the basement, and is equipped with emergency control, so that it can be operated from any one of a dozen points.

The electrical equipment constitutes one of the most important features in modern theater planning. The most commonplace lighting effects in any theater today were impossible only a few years ago, and are made possible now only by the rapid development of the last few years in electrical science.

The Spreckels Theater is provided with the best system now possible for producing stage lighting effects in any desired intensity, distribution or color. The stage switchboard is in the northeast corner of the stage, near the edge of the curtain. All switches are mounted on marble and are so arranged and connected that the stage electrician can control the lights quickly and in any way desired. Lights in any desired number can be dimmed, or by pulling two levers all lights can be dimmed. Certain emergency lights and all red exit lights are controlled from the box office switchboard.

The location of the theater, facing on three streets, enabled the architect to

introduce desirable features not often possible. A wide and high driveway leads from First street directly across the rear of the stage to Second street, so that all scenery, supplies, baggage, etc., can be carried on motor trucks directly into the building and there unloaded. Over this driveway is a mezzanine floor on which are sixteen dressing rooms, eight over each entrance.

The mechanical equipment of the theater is complete. It is heated and ventilated by fresh air which has been drawn from above the roof to the basement, then washed, heated by passing over steam coils, humidified, then forced through numerous outlets into the auditorium. The movement of air currents in an auditorium greatly complicates the acoustic problem. In this case that has been successfully solved without resorting to the deadly "forced draught" responsible for much of the noted Iroquois disaster in Chicago. None of the conditions actually responsible for that awful catastrophe can be found in the Spreckels Theater.

The remainder of the building has direct steam heat. All steam for heating the entire building is brought from the big power plant of the San Diego Electric Railway Company at the foot of D street, making any interruption of heating service highly improbable. Exhaust steam will be used, with emergency live steam, which can be turned into the heating system on a few minutes' notice. The entire building is equipped with vacuum cleaning service and is lighted with electric lights. Emergency gas lights in all corridors and lobbies have been installed.

In the fan room there is a large motor-driven fan for driving the air over steam coils and into the various rooms to be ventilated. Exhaust fans drive out the vitiated air. In addition to the auditorium proper the toilet and lounging rooms, basement toilet rooms, kitchen and basement dressing rooms have artificial ventilation.

All of the five elevators in the building are electric-driven, with magnetic cab control. In addition there are electric sidewalk elevators leading to the basement. The electric current of the building comes through from conduits under ground from the street into a transformer room in the basement of especially high fire-resisting construction. Here the voltage is "stepped down" from the high street potential to that customary for house use, and the heavy mains extended to the main house switchboard near by. On this switchboard are mounted switches controlling the feeders to each subsidiary switchboard in the entire building. All switchboards are of polished marble and all wiring is in lined iron conduits.

The plumbing installation is equally modern, all waste pipes being wrought iron screw pipe with Durham fittings and all tested under water pressure. All toilet rooms and all corridors have tile floors and wainscots, white and sanitary.

Structurally, the entire building is what it should be—fire-proof and earthquakeproof. The entire structure, footings, walls, columns, beams, floors, balcony, gallery, boxes, roof—all is of reinforced concrete designed and constructed in accordance with the most advanced practice.

The exits have been so arranged that persons leaving the auditorium, balcony and gallery will move in separate currents, with no conflict at any point. The balcony and gallery have each three separate exits properly distributed with regard to seating spaces, and entirely independent of each other. The balcony

and gallery crowds will therefor come into contact with each other only at the three street entrances, which are wide enough to accommodate the total number which can come down the various stairways. This arrangement prevents any overcrowding or local congestion at any point of exit, and eliminates unpleasant jostling during exit.

The widths of aisles, stairways and entrances have been proportioned so as to allow at any point a width of eighteen inches for each one hundred persons using them, a ratio that experience has shown ample under any circumstances. All stairways are broad and built to an easy gradient.

The exit doors all swing out and all are equipped with emergency bolts which open when any pressure is applied to the door from within. It is thus possible to lock the doors against persons coming in, but impossible for any one to lock or bolt any exit door against any one wishing egress at any time. The comfort and safety of the audience have been given the most careful consideration at every point in the theater design.

On the five upper floors there are 375 large, well lighted offices with steam heat, electric lights, lavatory, fireproof vault, vacuum cleaning service, telephones and A. D. T. messenger service in each room. This makes the largest single office building in the city and none in the city can offer better service.

In addition to the Spreckles theater, San Diego is well provided with other playhouses. Among these are the Savoy, Empress, Isis, Pickwick, Princess, Mirror, Queen, Grand and a score of moving picture houses.