

Free Time



"Snow White on Ice" opens Tuesday.
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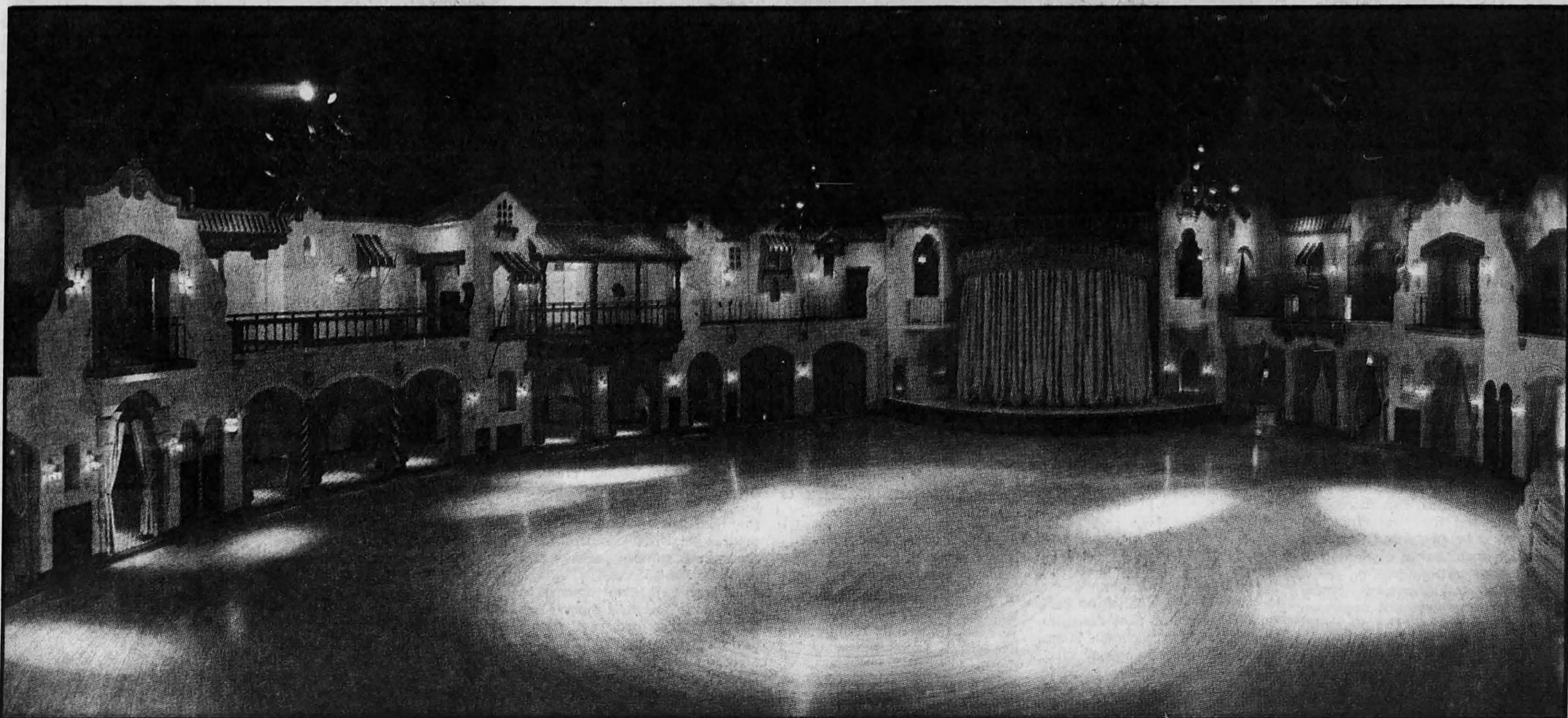
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The NEWS Photo, Joe Young

The renovated Indiana Roof Ballroom can hold 1,000 people for a sit-down dinner or 1,500 at a reception. The calendar is already filling up.

By DAVID MANNWEILER
The Indianapolis News

White-gloved waiters streaming onto the darkened dance floor, balancing desserts topped with spark-splattering sparklers.

Boom!

Like that, the Indiana Roof Ballroom will acquire a new visual tradition tonight.

Five hundred media representatives from throughout the Midwest will get the first peek at the \$6 million restoration of the legendary, 59-year-old Roof at a 7:30 dinner.

At the end of the meal, choreographed waiters will flow into the ballroom with their spark-shooting desserts, like something off a Broadway show.

"It will become a tradition — something we'll do at every sit-down dinner at the Roof," commented Cynthia Prime, a spokesman for Melvin Simon & Associates.

The Simon firm has spent \$5 million, plus another \$1.2 million from a federal grant, restoring the Roof on the sixth floor of the Indiana Theatre building to its original 1920s grandeur.

UP ON THE ROOF

With its reopening, the Roof becomes the largest public room in downtown Indianapolis other than the main halls at the Convention Center.

The Roof can hold 1,000 people for a sit-down dinner or 1,500 people at a reception.

More than just civic pride motivated the Simon firm to renovate this Indianapolis landmark.

With a walkway connection from the Roof to the adjacent Simon-owned Embassy Suites Hotel, the hotel's convention business is expected to soar.

When the Roof opened for public dancing on Sept. 2, 1927, Indianapolis was dazzled. The architects, E. O. Hunter and Preston Rubush, had created an authentic plaster Spanish village around the circular, 8,700-square-foot dance floor.

Lights in the domed ceiling twinkled like stars. Clouds moved magically across the sky. Seabreezes were created by blowing air over salt water.

The Roof survived the Depression and the departure of the male half of the dancing teams caused by World War II, but the decline of ballroom dancing in the 1950s doomed the hall.

The number of days the Roof offered dancing was gradually cut back. By 1958, they were gone. High school proms, political conventions, the annual Gridiron dinner and the 500 Festival's Queen's Ball still found a home at the Roof, but the building finally closed in 1971.

Today, it's just as splendid as it ever was. An elevator now connects directly to the Roof, eliminating the need to

walk up a flight of stairs from the fifth floor.

The new heating and air-conditioning vents are hidden behind original turned, wooden spindles. The fake grapes and flowers that wind around the pillars shine with fresh coats of paint.

The entrance hall is all new, and so is the semi-circular bar of walnut, marble and bronze in the anteroom off the dance floor.

The Roof now has twice as many sound speakers as Market Square Arena. There are 14 snow machines, plus machines to make fog, clouds and bubbles.

Friday night, 700 people are expected at a black-tie, invitation-only grand reopening. Tony Bennett will sing at the fund-raiser for the Indiana Repertory Theatre.

Also appearing tonight and Friday night will be the Nylons, four Canadian men who sing four-part harmony. They're famous for their song, "Up On the Roof."

"Up On The Roof." Get it?

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