

Thousands Turned Away When New Aztec Picture Theater Opens Its Doors to Public

Twenty public safety men were detailed to handle the crowd attempting to gain entrance to the Aztec Theater at its premiere Friday night. Although the dense crowd blocked St. Mary's and Commerce Streets and for a time extended to Houston Street no casualties were reported to police.

The crowd began forming before 6 p. m., more than an hour before the doors were to open and two hours before the show was scheduled to begin. Vehicle traffic was practically paralyzed for a time about 7:00 p. m. as police and firemen struggled to clear the crowd so that automobiles and street cars could pass. The theater was filled to its capacity of about 3,000 and 5,000 persons were turned away. The overflow filled all the other motion picture theaters.

But everyone who did gain entrance had his expectations of San Antonio's new playhouse more than fulfilled. The opening had the air of a reception with scores of baskets of flowers lining the lobby as evidence of good wishes of the community. The actors taking part in the opening program were showered with bouquets. Before the curtain rose, Albert Kronkosky, one of the owners, told of the founding of the new theater. Mayor John W. Tobin expressed the congratulations of the city, and Claude Birkhead gave a sketch of the building. Following the show William Epstein, managing director, and Jack Mason, producer, were introduced.

Interested in House.

The wisdom of the management in holding an open house for an hour prior to the first program was manifest when hundreds of guests spent the time in visiting almost every nook and cranny of the masterpiece of Aztec architecture. With their entrance into the massive arched lobby they were whisked into another land and

another age. They entered the portals of an authentic replica of an ancient temple of the Aztecs where every decorative design and motif is historically correct.

Then as members of the audience slipped into their seats and fastened their wondering eyes on the rich stage scenery, the curtains parted and the entertainment was on. First came a clever prologue of the 13 Broadway girls and other actors in the show, explaining by means of song and dance the nature of the forthcoming entertainment. The feature of this number, and in fact one of the outstanding stars of the entire show, was Olive May, petite star who is an unusually accomplished artist, both as a dancer and a soloist.

From the time of the parting of the first curtain, there was not a dull moment in the entire program, which was given under the direction of Jack Mason, veteran producer of Broadway, London and Paris successes. Snappy choruses in song and dances that were full of pep and rhythm, and costumes that were attractive and smart, made their offerings wholly pleasing. The dance feature of Lois Natalie and Sacha Piaton won well-merited recognition from an enthusiastic audience. Lois Natalie in particular offered a splendid performance, graceful, artistic and altogether beautiful. She was ably supported by her partner.

Much interest on the part of music-loving San Antonians as well as all theater-goers was centered in the appearance of Ralph Soule, for some years the leading tenor in Schubert's "Blossom Time." There was nothing in his initial appearance Friday night to prevent his extending his wide popularity to San Antonio. From his first appearance "on top of the world" to the final climax of the show he was a real triumph for whom the audience expressed its sincere appreciation. Ralph Soule, with Miss May, carried the heavy musical part of the show, and to them is due credit for a fine performance.

Soule's real triumph, where he combined dramatic acting with his singing, was in the "Court of Montezuma," a spectacular portrayal of the coming of Cortez to the court of the great Indian king, the dedicatory piece for the new theater. With the entire cast of the show as a background, amid a setting of barbaric royal splendor, the Spanish conqueror Cortez (Piaton) arrives and greets the great Montezuma (Soule). In the scene that follows the richness of Soule's voice, its satisfying beauty and warmth is well portrayed. Olive May, likewise, in this story had a fitting vehicle for her lyric soprano with its wide range and flexibility. Lois Natalie in her dancing in this scene carried much of the story wherein Cortez trifles with a court favorite and arouses the jealousy and ire of the Indian king. Natalie lives the story in her vivid dancing, crawls to the chiefman for forgiveness, then, repulsed, dances the dance of death with Cortez, only to be flung to destruction as a dramatic conclusion. Mabelle Leyon added to this act with her singing of "Pale Moon." This portrayal is in itself a fitting climax to the stage feature of the opening of the new theater. Through it all Kirk Frederick, with his symphony orchestra, contributes the life of the performance in music. Silvester Revueltas gave a violin solo and John Metz played the new Aztec organ.

The moving picture attraction for the opening night was "Other Women's Husbands," featuring Monte Blue and Marie Prevost. In view of the unusual stage offering, this short movie was selected in order to give a well balanced program.