

# The Civic Theater -- A \$4 Million Dream Come True

By CLYDE V. SMITH

A long-time San Diego dream came true in a physical expression of concrete and steel when city engineers and other materials-beautifully blended and put together by the hands and minds of men.

The new Civic Theater opening Tuesday is both the crowning and the moment in a struggle with problems that beset and often vexed the project from its gaining doors to the last posting of ticket orders.

The problems—mostly structural, some physiological—were faced and solved through an Operation Framework.

Physical characteristics of the new theater can be related in terms of 3,000 seats, of 10 items of structural steel, of 4,844 cubic yards of concrete, of miles of wiring and other power statistics.

It cost more than \$4 million.

It is air conditioned. The air conditioning is on a lift that is elevated to stage level, thus creating a forward stage.

Tower walls housing stage and lift rise 100 feet, with no intermediate floors. The

stage is 100 by 60 feet, about four times the Ross Auditorium size.

Because of the design of the theater is comparable with the best in the nation. Experts who have inspected it say:

"No patron seated in the top row of the upper balcony will be more than 140 feet from the performers below. And, according to acousticians, he will get the same clarity as those in choice seats. But 90 percent of the seating is within 100 feet of the stage."

The story of the building of Civic Theater, however, is much more than that. It is the story of the results of teamwork, evident in each program project.

It was teamwork on the part of civic-minded individuals that gave the impetus for a theater in the first place.

It was cooperation with city officials that put the project into official being. Again it was teamwork on the part of many groups that provided necessary financing.

It was three architects, working in a team, who were responsible for the aesthetic design, the difficult engineering

and the functional features of the theater.

And it was the contracting firm working in cooperation with the architects city officials and a Citizens Advisory Committee that finally created the building to which the public will be introduced Tuesday night.

Even the help of an electronic brain was a part of this teamwork. The relatively new "critical path method" which involves a computer to outline a highly technical schedule of building progress was used in the construction of Gordon Henry, construction superintendent on the job

from the ground breaking for the M. H. Golden Construction Co., designer the project as the "most difficult yet ever undertaken, but also the most exciting, the most challenging."

But let's begin at the beginning. Civic Theater faces 3 Street

between Second and Third Avenues and is on a site almost a full block acquired by the city for public ownership. Originally, a three-block area.

Problems were involved right at the start in financing the theater. The available downtown area from municipal ownership had an acquisition provided with annual \$100,000.

Various separate sales were involved. First, certain blocks in the summer of 1962 and the final parcel earlier in November 1962. However, the path was smoothed by court work—initial steps that require highly cooperative teamwork.

Earl Goodwin, one of the founders of San Diego Inc.,

and current chairman of the board, explained some of the real estate problems involved in the project.

"It was necessary, he said, to acquire the blocks in several city core sites were considered. The choice said that city blocks were the most ideal but it was the most practical from the economic standpoint. Other possibly better locations were already highly developed and thus would have been prohibitively costly.

"When it became apparent that any approval of the vast majority of the blocks in the same of an owner other than the city.

Risk was involved in this method," said Goodwin, "but it was important to obtain values on a basis of proper, not simply on the market. If the word was out, asking prices probably would have skyrocketed."

Goodwin said six options were available. He had on properties scattered in each of the blocks involved. However, the City Council gave the final call, approved.

(Continued on P. 3, Col. 1)



**CIVIC THEATER, under construction, shows heavy steel girders which support cantilevered mezzanine and balcony section. Biggest is 120 foot long, and weighs 13 tons. Photo was taken about one year ago.**

# The Civic Theater--A \$4 Million Dream Come True

(Continued from P. 1)

tions were exercised and negotiations began for the other properties.

In each case, it was necessary for the city officials to notify the owners of possible acquisition.

"This surprised us at first," said William Gerhardt, assistant to the city manager. "It shouldn't have."

But that most of the owners did not wish to cooperate. They did. They were part of the framework. But, tax considerations were involved. The seller is exempt from capital gain tax, providing he retains within a specified time.

Once this detail was accomplished, property acquisitions moved ahead. Gerhardt said all sales were negotiated, with two exceptions, where an agreement necessary to file an application with the city.

The total cost of all acquisitions was \$4,100,000.

Because of the community course, including buildings, is owned by the Board of Administration, the San Diego Employees Retirement System and the City of San Diego under a lease-purchase agreement, in option which the city has the right to buy.

The theater, along with the convention center, will be operated and managed, not owned, by the city. It is owned by the San Diego Civic Facilities Corp. the board of directors being the same. In addition, as the old Civic Center was sold, the name which was named in September, 1961, to guide the development of the center.

This board often met with the city and made recommendations for City Council action.

Long before the final enclosed work began on design. Harold H. Roster, who was to become supervising architect, started working on a series of preliminary sketches in the summer of 1961 and in the fall of 1962.

After a selection was made, three architects were chosen to design the theater. William Roster, Lloyd Ross and

engled quarter-inch steel plates which remain exposed in the theater to speed sound directly to listeners in back rows.

Here roof section is in place, with the 'steel clouds' suspended from ceiling. These are sound reflectors,

and the mechanics of the theater.

Russo said he was more interested in the design and the appearance, and thus devoted his efforts largely to the details of form.

Roster emphasized that each decision made as well as major, was made by all three, not just one man alone.

But where there were differences of opinion—and there were—made the decision, then.

"We did," said Roster. "Actually, we found we worked very well together. We could solve the problems with conferences. It was not a usual procedure to begin first with a design."

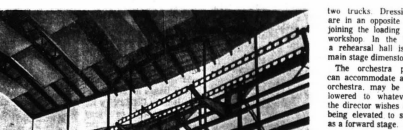
Because of Roster's previous experience with theater design—the practiced in New York several years ago—he fell his lot to lead primarily design the theater. Roster, however, Ross and

ment, the functional features of the theater.

And it was the contracting firm working in cooperation with the architects city officials and a Citizens Advisory Committee that finally created the building to which the public will be introduced Tuesday night.

Even the help of an electronic brain was a part of this teamwork. The relatively new "critical path method" which involves a computer to outline a highly technical schedule of building progress was used in the construction of Gordon Henry, construction superintendent on the job

from the ground breaking for the M. H. Golden Construction Co., designer the project as the "most difficult yet ever undertaken, but also the most exciting, the most challenging, the most challenging."



two trucks Dressing rooms are in an opposite wing. Adjacent to the loading dock workshop in the basement, a rehearsal hall is of exact main stage dimensions.

The orchestra pit, which can accommodate 100 orchestra, may be raised or lowered to whatever height the director wishes as well as being elevated to stage level as a forward stage.

Looking at the auditorium from stage viewpoints, the theater appears to have three main levels, although there are five tiers. Directly in front on the lower floor is the main orchestra section, with a 1,200-seat capacity. This is elevated to a sloping "dress section," divided by a raised mezzanine section.

Upper and lower balconies are on the third level, thus making five tiers. Large seating areas are at the sides of the theater. In the entry salon and balcony levels.

Roster said theater people have told him the new Civic Theater has "a sign less comparable to any in the country." There is full view from the stage.

Upper and lower balconies are on the third level, thus making five tiers. Large seating areas are at the sides of the theater. In the entry salon and balcony levels.

Roster said theater people have told him the new Civic Theater has "a sign less comparable to any in the country." There is full view from the stage.

Upper and lower balconies are on the third level, thus making five tiers. Large seating areas are at the sides of the theater. In the entry salon and balcony levels.

Roster said theater people have told him the new Civic Theater has "a sign less comparable to any in the country." There is full view from the stage.

to speed the sound directly back to listeners.

"A sound reinforcing system" of amplifiers will be used for plays, pop concerts, etc. The amplifiers will not be needed for symphony orchestras or classical music. Also included is an integrator, part of the stage is an orchestra shell of heavily lacquered plywood for concert use—also an orchestral feature. It is portable but built in a section that can be rolled away to the sides of the big stage.

Hamilton said acoustical tests, held last week, proved "highly successful."

Roster said the stage, open to the audience, is a cyclorama the first in town. This is a smooth drop floor which can extend the back stage. Through reflection of colored lights, it can create the background for a wide array of impressions, such as a blue sky.

There is a truck dock for unloading props directly on stage. It will accommodate

heavy steel beams. The largest of these is 120 feet long, and weighs 13 tons.

The foundation consists of a main of 154 reinforced-concrete columns, some going into 90 feet of bedrock. The largest of the piles are 24 inches in diameter and "bell" at the bottom to a depth of four feet for firmer footing.

Henry said the "critical path method" was to keep construction on schedule. By using a computer, it was possible to determine a day-by-day schedule of work for the entire job. The system employs "critical paths" and "sub-critical paths." The critical path involves key work that must be done by a certain date, else the project falls behind schedule. It also outlines a schedule for other work which will not necessarily delay the project if the timetable is not met.

"The sub-critical path," said Henry, "permits tomorrow, next week or next month. The chart also shows how, whether by it is on, ahead or behind schedule. It also provides him with a guide well in advance of the subcontractors to get busy.

Construction started on Civic Theater on next Monday. Tuesday night, just nine days more than a 18 months ago, the ground was the first, avoid visual obstruction of

tion or "eyebrow" of the mezzanine. The lights are controlled from the stage. In addition, there are powerful spots in the projection booth at the very top of the upper balcony. Here also are the projectors for motion pictures. The stage is equipped with a screen.

As for construction — Henry said the most difficult phase was the stage tower section. The walls, rising 100 feet, are poured-in-place reinforced concrete, varying from eight to 18 inches thick.

Henry said this is the first time he has supervised construction of such a high concrete wall without supporting intermediate floors. Staging was used around the outside perimeter as forms were raised to add each tier.

A 25-ton crane was stationed on the roof to move the forms and pour the walls from "concrete buggies" on the exterior. A tower lift was used on the steel roof is supported by steel girders.

However, provision was made in the orchestra section to remove the seats for some events which may want a procession into the audience. The capacity of the theater also will vary depending on the direction.

The first three rows in the orchestra section are re-arrangeable, but will stay out when the orchestra pit is used to create a forward stage.

A bank of colored spotlights at the curved end of the stage will accommodate

heavy steel beams. The largest of these is 120 feet long, and weighs 13 tons.

The foundation consists of a main of 154 reinforced-concrete columns, some going into 90 feet of bedrock. The largest of the piles are 24 inches in diameter and "bell" at the bottom to a depth of four feet for firmer footing.

Henry said the "critical path method" was to keep construction on schedule. By using a computer, it was possible to determine a day-by-day schedule of work for the entire job. The system employs "critical paths" and "sub-critical paths." The critical path involves key work that must be done by a certain date, else the project falls behind schedule. It also outlines a schedule for other work which will not necessarily delay the project if the timetable is not met.

"The sub-critical path," said Henry, "permits tomorrow, next week or next month. The chart also shows how, whether by it is on, ahead or behind schedule. It also provides him with a guide well in advance of the subcontractors to get busy.

Construction started on Civic Theater on next Monday. Tuesday night, just nine days more than a 18 months ago, the ground was the first, avoid visual obstruction of

Art

# New, Bold Forms For A New Theater

By DR. ARMIN KIETZMANN: The San Diego Union's Art Writer

Commenting on workmanship and meaning in the copper light reflectors and enamel reliefs he and his wife, Ellamarie, have done for the Civic Theater, Jackson Woolley recently said, "Except for the square light reflectors in the grand salon—which were stamped out according to our hammered copper prototype—Ellamarie and I formed each unit individually, bending and folding the sheet copper by hand, then further shaping it with mallets and hammers.

"The open, flowing, active forms of the design result from the natural characteristics of the copper when manipulated, so that the material was a full partner in every step of the creation."

And he added, that "if the results have some affinity with the forms of the plaster and gilt decor of old baroque theaters, this was not intentional, but a happy coincidence."

While the Woolleys consider the light reflectors and wall panels in the auditorium as "purely decorative," they attribute to the relief sculptures in the grand salon as additional quality of symbolism.

Speaking of them, Woolley said, "Each of the 10 by 16 foot reliefs over the stairwells is a sunburst in reference to San Diego's climate.

"In addition, the 'Creative Sun' over the east stairway, bursting with energy and the birth of protoplanets, and the 'Reflective Sun' over the west

stairway, reflecting the enameled units of the wave-like area, together symbolize the creative and imitative aspects of theatrical activity."

Work on this commission was begun in November, 1943, and took more than

a year. The Woolleys acknowledge that the architects—Lloyd Ruocco, William Rosser and Selden Kennedy—gave them an entirely free hand. Apparently both architects and artists saw the purpose of the reliefs not as "em-

bellishment" or "applied art," merely to fill an empty space, but as forms which while holding their own, should restate and give expression to the intention of the architect.

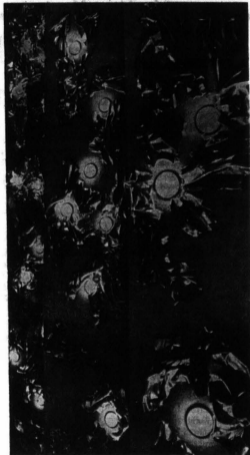
To judge the reliefs properly they will have to be seen in full context—that is not only in relation to walls and space but also under light and movement conditions during a performance. The reflectors' function begins when the auditorium is darkened and the stage lights are up. The reliefs in the foyer seem conceived to relate to the public's motion, its grouping and regrouping.

Taken together with their other characteristics—the folding, surging and receding forms, the mingling of relief, painting and sculpture, and of meaning and decor—the works' emphasis upon light and movement makes them a definite, not merely coincidental, interpretation of the idea of the theater in a "baroque" sense. As such they signal a departure on the side of the artists toward freer and bolder forms and a contact with newest trends.

Jackson and Ellamarie Woolley are too well known as enamellists to need much introduction. Other commissions include enamel murals for an educational building at San Diego's First Presbyterian Church, for restaurants in Coronado and San Francisco, for an office building in Los Angeles and for public libraries in Fresno and Whittier.



'CREATIVE SUN' over the east stairway of the new Civic Theater is one of two reliefs symbolizing San Diego's climate.



LIGHT REFLECTORS of copper were each molded by the artists, Jackson and Ellamarie Woolley.