

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

Hippodrome Theater

Described by New York vaudeville moguls as “a magnificent temple of amusement” when it opened 91 years ago, the Hippodrome Theater at the southwest corner of Eighth and Ohio streets once again will divulge its splendor to the public.

Now known as the Valley of Terre Haute Scottish



Rite Cathedral, the German Renaissance structure designed by celebrated Austrian-born theater architect John Eberson of Chicago will host live productions of *The Robe* daily from March 31 through April 2. The price of tickets is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. Tickets may be purchased at the box office or by calling 234-3761. Proceeds will be used for continued renovation of this Terre Haute treasure, which the public has seldom had an opportunity to see.

The vaudeville house was the brainchild of Theodore W. Barhydt, who came to Terre Haute as manager of the Grand Opera House in 1897. Construction began June 2, 1914, and the grand opening was Feb. 15, 1915. Charles W. Hoff of Terre Haute was the brick mason. Before erecting The Hippodrome, Barhydt built the Lyric and Varieties vaudeville theaters in the city. Architect Eberson, who expressed “unbounded satisfaction” with the edifice, along with Indiana Gov. Samuel M. Ralston and their respective spouses, were special guests at the premier event, seated in box seats draped with an American flag. The Hippodrome Theater Orchestra, conducted by Will Bryant and featuring pianist Leo Baxter, played “Hail to the Chief” and Paul Dresser’s “On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away” before Gov. Ralston made flattering extemporaneous remarks. Opening night features included Neptune’s Nymphs; Spencer & Williams Comedy Co.; Florence Bain; Nina Morris & Co.; the acrobatic Kimiwa Japs; Green, McHenry & Dean; and chanteuse Mademoiselle Evnette Asoria. Vaudeville barons Joseph M. Finn, Marcus Heiman and Asher Levy of the Finn-Heiman circuit were among the honored guests. Telegrams were received from other top vaudeville chiefs, including Edward Albee and Paul Keith.

Many of the world’s most celebrated entertainers appeared on The Hippodrome’s stage in its early years, including Jack Benny, Al Jolson, Valeska Suratt, Blossom Seeley and Ralph Bellamy. In 1920 Barhydt sold the theater to the The Hippodrome Amusement Co., formed by the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit, and collaborated with Eberson once again to build the Indiana Theater. As vaudeville’s popularity began to ebb after talking motion pictures were introduced in the late 1920s, Keith-Albee merged with the Orpheum Circuit. Between 1931 and 1948, the Hippodrome was home of the Community Theatre of Terre Haute and hosted legitimate stage performances and other special events. In 1949 it was transformed into the Wabash Theater, a motion picture venue.

Now one of fewer than 20 existing Eberson theaters in America, the former Hippodrome Theater has been maintained by the Scottish Rite since it was acquired in December 1956.



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