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17th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20006

111 - ARGENTINA COLON THEATRE

The National Congress of Argentina authorized the construction of the new theatre of Colon in 1887. Despite the death of Victor Meano in 1904, the architect who designed and completed the majority of the work, the building was completed in 1908 and inaugurated on May 25 of that year.

The statistics of the building are: 38,775 feet in length, 198 feet wide and 141.9' in elevation at its highest point. The entire building covers 45,460.8 square yards of space. The stage opening is 26.4' high and 59.4' in width. A plush curtain draws to the sides to reveal a stage of 116.33' in width and 113.85' in depth. It is built on an incline of .36 inches per foot and has a large circular disc in the center, 66.99' in diameter. The style of the building is French Renaissance and its monumental solidity is joined with a sober elegance and severe line.

The entrance of the theatre gives way to a grand hall with red marble from Verona as its base, ridged columns, and stained glass windows overhead in the form of a dome. Off to the side of the hall is a library, museum, press office and a room exhibiting ancient artifacts of Argentina. Ascending to the first floor, one sees the gallery of statues containing busts of the famed Verdi, Wagner, Beethoven, Mozart, Debussy, and many others. Further along the corridor are the White Room of French Renaissance decor and the Gilded Room.

The theatre itself seats a capacity of 2,478 persons in eight levels, with standing room for over 1,000 persons. The ornamentation of each tier varies but maintains an absolute unity of style. The over all colors of the interior are the warm red and gold found in the entrance hall of the building. A large chandelier, 231 feet in diameter, is located in the center of the auditorium and is the main source of illumination for the room combined with 105 bronze arms on the tiers, each surrounded by numerous lights, and the indirect light from the boxes. The Colon is composed of seven permanent artistic bodies, including two orchestras (one philharmonic), one chorus, one dance group, technical theatre personnel, conductors in residence, and performing artists.

The proportions of the theatre, materials used in its construction, elaborate decoration, the richness of the cloths used (entrance and stage curtains), and perhaps in the end, sheer luck has made the

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Theatre of Colon one of the most acoustically perfect theatres in the world.

From 1908 - 30, the theatre functioned by concessions from various promoters. In 1931, it began to work in official capacity, having its director named by a Municipal Supervisor and thereby necessitating that productions conformed with the whims of the changing governments. In 1960, a new method of direction was employed, appointing a Director's Council consisting of three members. For the first time, the directors of the theatre had a specific term assigned them (three years) and were not at the mercy of political activity in the selection of their productions.

The theatre of Colon maintains a tradition keeping three or four months of the year free for the production of an international ballet or opera company. Spring productions consist of symphonic and dance productions and in the summer, open air productions are given. The theatre usually produces over 200 functions per year of which approximately 100 are operas, 35 ballets and 65 concerts (45 symphonies). Most operas are sung in their native tongues (with the exception of Russian and Czechoslovakian opera). The repertory is constantly changing to accomodate all ages and styles of the Arts.

## Slides:

- A. The Colon Theatre, Buenos Aires. View of the front facade facing July 9th Avenue.
- B. Another view of the Colon Theatre in Buenos Aires. Note the lineal quality of this architecture of French Renaissance style.
- C. Interior of the theatre of Colon with a view of the orchestra seats and the first tier. Note the warm decor of red and gilded gold.
- D. Ascending tiers in the theatre of Colon. The lights are of bronze and are supplemented by a large chandelier in the center of the room.
- E. Chandelier in the theatre. It is 23.1 feet in diameter and lit by approximately 700 lights. A lovely painting encircles the chandelier on the dome of the room.
- F. Entrance hall to the theatre. Along this hall is a library, a museum, press office and a room exhibiting ancient Argentine artifacts.
- G. Stained glass window at the height of the entrance hall, the theatre of Colon.
- H. One of the workshops located above the theatre containing over 20,000 wigs. Others are filled with shoes, suits, and other elements of costume used in productions.
- I. A workshop located above the theatre. Here one finds various head and hair pieces.
- J. Theatre workshop. A young worker is constructing one of the pieces of a costume to be used in a production of the theatre.

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