

# The Golden Age Revisited

by Travis McGee

**B**uilt in 1927, the Coronado Theatre in Rockford, IL has hosted a variety of acts over the years, including the Marx Brothers, Frank Sinatra and Bob Dylan, and has gained landmark status because of its unique design and historical significance. However, in recent years, the theater began to lose some of its luster, and prominent entertainers began passing over the Coronado for bigger and better venues.

Last December, the renovation of the theater marked its return to prominence as a first-rate concert venue. The project took 18 months and, to meet the technical demands of today's entertainment, included a complete overhaul of the theater's audio system. The system, designed by acoustical consultant and audio system designer, the Talaske Group of Oak Park, IL, is comprised of two systems: a left-center-right reinforcement system, used to support day-to-day activities and local community arts groups; and an acoustic enhancement system, intended primarily for use by the Rockford Symphony Orchestra, which now makes its home in the Coronado Theatre.

The reinforcement system, comprised of EAW loudspeakers and XTA processing, consists of EAW AS625, AS660i, AS422 and AS460s in the center cluster, with EAW MK219 stacks providing left and right stereo imaging as well as localization of the performer. Because the Coronado Theatre is a landmark, the Talaske Group was not allowed to change the physical structure of the room. Since the dimensions of the theater are not conducive to the acoustical needs of a symphony orchestra, Jonathan Laney, senior audio consultant for the Talaske Group, opted for an enhancement system that would artificially create the desired acoustic dimensions. To do this, they used specialized signal processing by LARES (Lexicon Acoustic Reinforcement and Enhancement System). "Being

an old vaudeville theater, the room has a very large protruding balcony, which is usually pretty detrimental to orchestral acoustics, because people very deep under the balcony have a significantly different experience aurally," said Ian Hoffman, acoustical consultant for the Talaske Group. "And, at 2,300 seats, the room doesn't have the volume to create the reverberance or spaciousness appropriate for orchestral music."

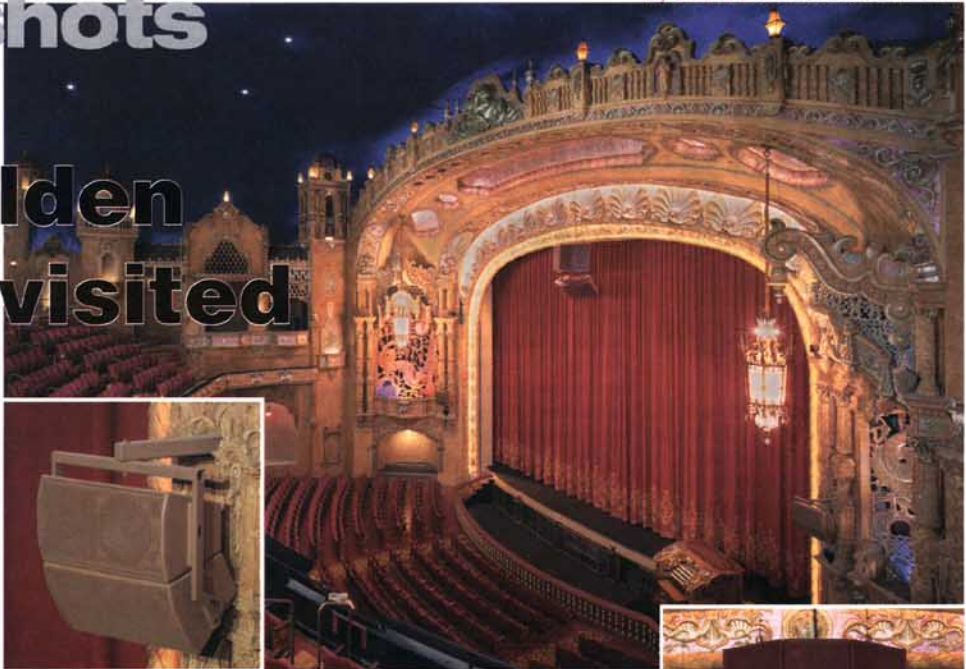
According to Scott Leonard, president of Pro Audio Designs, which did the installation at the Coronado, the LARES system is a cost-effective alternative to creating an acoustically efficient environment. "I think we're going to see a lot more acceptance of the LARES systems, because they work so well," Leonard said. "They're very cost-effective in terms of the costs of changing the wood and acoustics of the room, especially when you go into an existing room. It allows you to do things that you couldn't do before because it would be so far outside the budget."

Laney echoed this sentiment, although he said the utilization of the LARES system should be on a case-by-case basis. "From an acoustical consultant's standpoint, it's another tool that we

have in our bag of tricks that can be used in the appropriate situation. Particularly, if it's a renovation where you have an existing condition, I think it is a tool that is useful to the acoustician to achieve what that expected acoustic signature is for that performance type."

Aside from implementing a high-quality sound system, one of the biggest challenges was incorporating the equipment into the theater without drawing attention to it. Because of the multitude of loudspeakers, this was not an easy task. To do this, Paul Siemborski, project director for Cleveland, OH-based architects van Dijk Pace Westlake, collaborated with the project team to creatively incorporate the equipment into the building. This included hiding loudspeakers in windows, painting them to match their surroundings and installing the EAW SB525P subwoofers into plaster.

"My philosophy with regular performing arts sound reinforcement is that the loudspeakers need to be seen in order to be heard," Laney said. "I'm a big proponent of seeing your loudspeakers in Broadway and popular music and that type of thing. But when it comes to



▲ The LARES sound system was designed to blend with the landmark Coronado Theatre in Rockford, IL, avoiding a clash between modern technology and aged architecture. The center cluster consists of EAW AS625, AS660i, AS422 and AS460s.



enhancement, you really want that system to disappear into the room, to have as minimal impact on that orchestra and the listeners as far as the technology goes."

Hoffman added, "The discreet integration of those loudspeakers was important, because we didn't want the system to draw attention. I think the equipment was elegantly worked into the room so you don't walk in and realize there are 90-plus loudspeakers in the space."

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