

# *The Renaissance*

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## **The Renaissance Theatre: Yesterday and Today**

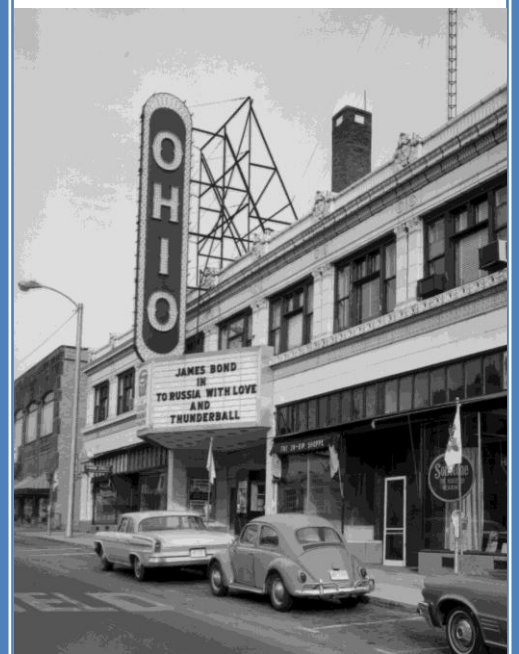
The 1920s ushered in the era of the grand movie palace. Magnificent theatres, reminiscent of Moorish castles, French chateaus and Egyptian temples, cropped up around the country. Mansfield, with a 1927 population of 30,000, seemed an ideal spot for Warner Brothers to build their \$500,000 Ohio Theatre. Designed in the Grand Baroque style, the theatre opened on January 19, 1928 and thousands attended the premiere, despite near blizzard-like conditions. Though it was enormously profitable for the first 20 years, by the early 1950s it had lost a good deal of its audience to television. For the next quarter century, the theatre limped along, barely maintaining operations. Finally, by 1979, the once-grand palace had become an x-rated movie house. After public outrage shuttered the theatre, a small group of concerned individuals banded together to save the building. On August 18th, 1980, the theater was purchased by Fran and Warren Rupp and a massive clean-up and restoration effort was begun. Because the revival represented a resurgence of interest in the theatre arts, the name was changed from the Ohio Theatre to The Renaissance.

As a result of the \$2.25 million capital campaign in 1984, the seats were refurbished, new lighting, sound and stage rigging was installed, water-damaged plaster was repaired, a new orchestra pit was dug, a glass-enclosed skywalk was built connecting the theatre to the new Holiday Inn next door and a Kearns Wurlitzer theatre organ was purchased and restored. In December 1991, the Board of Directors of the Renaissance Theatre received, as a generous Christmas gift, the deed to the property from the Fran and Warren Rupp Foundation. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

By June 1997, the Renaissance Theatre had merged with the Mansfield Symphony and changed its name to Renaissance Performing Arts Association whose mission is to serve north central Ohio with diverse, quality programming and enhanced community service, and to provide the region with a strong educational, cultural, entertainment and civic center.

On June 28, 2008, groundbreaking began on the Imagine II - a \$5.6 million construction project that will provide front of house improvements, larger lobby space, expanded rest rooms, an elevator, volunteer resource room, sound, lighting and stage improvements and new administration offices.

With the support of its corporate sponsors, the Renaissance Performing Arts Association presents the Mansfield Symphony season, the Renaissance Broadway and Beyond Series, Family Series, Comedy Series, Concert Connection, Neos Dance Theatre, lecture and educational events and the Renaissance Summer Musical.



**The Renaissance Theatre with the original Ohio Theatre marquee**

## **Big Name Stars in Mansfield**

The Renaissance has hosted a galaxy of stars over the years, including such luminaries as Will Rogers, Fanny Brice, Rosemary Clooney and Ray Charles. In 1939, the film "The Rains Came" – based on the novel by Mansfield's own Louis Bromfield, received its world premiere at the theatre. Over the next 60 years, its stage would be given over to the likes of Bill Cosby, Jay Leno, Andy Williams, Johnny Cash, The Three Stooges, Dorothy Lamour, Donny and Marie Osmond, The Smothers Brothers, David Copperfield, Mel Tillis, Doc Severinsen, The Fifth Dimension, The Kingston Trio and many, many more.

For more info on The Renaissance, go to: [www.mansfieldtickets.com](http://www.mansfieldtickets.com)



## Things That Go Bump in the Ren

### Ghosts of the Renaissance

Some people maintain that a theatre ghost portends good luck and that a manifestation during the run of a show is the highest of honors. If this is to be believed, then the Renaissance Theatre is surely one of the luckiest spots in Mansfield. A spectral audience applauding a long-forgotten vaudeville performance - a forlorn, hooded woman, pacing the stage - a shadowy figure looming in the darkest corners of the balcony. Cold spots, mysterious rappings and lighting fixtures that move of their own accord. A projectionist unwilling to relinquish his responsibilities, despite the fact that he's been dead for decades.

These are just a few of the eerie tales that have been told and retold over the years. Ghost stories at the Renaissance have a number of origins. Perhaps the hauntings can be attributed to the fact that the theater was built on the site of a mortuary. This might explain why several people have reported seeing dark, faceless figures clad in Victorian garb loitering in the shadows – fashions which predate the theatre by decades. However, many link the visitations to the theatre's most notorious and shocking episode which occurred on All Hallows' Eve 1929. Theatre manager Edward Rafter was shot to death by thieves during a showing of the film *The Green Murder Case*. The crime was never solved and, to this day, some say that Rafter's ghost still lingers about the Renaissance. If you ever find yourself alone in the theatre, perhaps you've caught a glimpse of him descending the grand staircase - or even heard his footsteps as he paces back and forth on the marble floors of the outer lobby.

So the next time you find yourself in the balcony, and you feel a cold hand on your shoulder or notice someone sitting next to you strangely attired in fashions from another era, think about how lucky you are that one of the ghosts of the Renaissance Theatre has deemed to pay you a visit.