

Thanks for the memory

● When Leo Ward of the Green Group rang me on Tuesday, February 7, 1989, within minutes of the signing of the contract which in effect ensures that Limerick will have a five screen cinema complex, all hopes of saving the Savoy as we have known it for the past half century ceased to exist.

● I have been associated with the Savoy since July, 1938, and handled the advertising and publicity for every show, film and concert staged there until the final night in March, 1983.

● The Savoy was less than three years old when I took over on behalf of this newspaper to tell readers all about the superb attractions which the management had laid on.

● In addition to the cine-variety shows, operatic seasons, concerts, celebrity concerts, midnight matinees and even a circus with wild animals, there were many innovations which are worth recalling.

● The Savoy gave audiences the bonus of double-features, plus two newsreels, full supporting programmes of cartoons, travelogues, serials, organ recitals on the Compton, the only surviving cinema organ now in Ireland.

● And there were the superb revues with Jimmy O'Dea, Jack Cruise, Cecil Sheridan, Cecil Nash, Harry Bailey and countless more entertainers.

● Cinemagoers who patronised the Savoy Cinema in Cork, the Savoy in Dublin, and the Dublin Theatre Royal were always of the opinion that the Limerick Savoy had all the best features, from decor to comfort, and from programming to value for money.

● There were hopes that the Savoy might have been saved but the pathetic efforts which were mounted from time to time proved that there was not that burning ambition to retain the theatre in its present form. It had become too costly to maintain. In its place five modern cinemas will rise to cater for the cinemagoers of the 1990's where long runs have become a way of life.

● As these cinemas will be housed in the superb new complex of restaurant, bar, disco and luxury apartments, perhaps it would not be too much to expect that they will have be named Savoy One, Two, Three, Four and Five.

● The five cinemas in the Savoy complex in Dublin have perpetuated the name in Upper O'Connell Street.

● From time to time I hope to recall memories of a half century of superb stage and screen entertainment which made the Savoy "The Showplace of the Nation."

● There will be many a silent tear to-night for the loss of the Savoy — for loss it is. But time marches on and we shall have to wait and see how it will all develop.

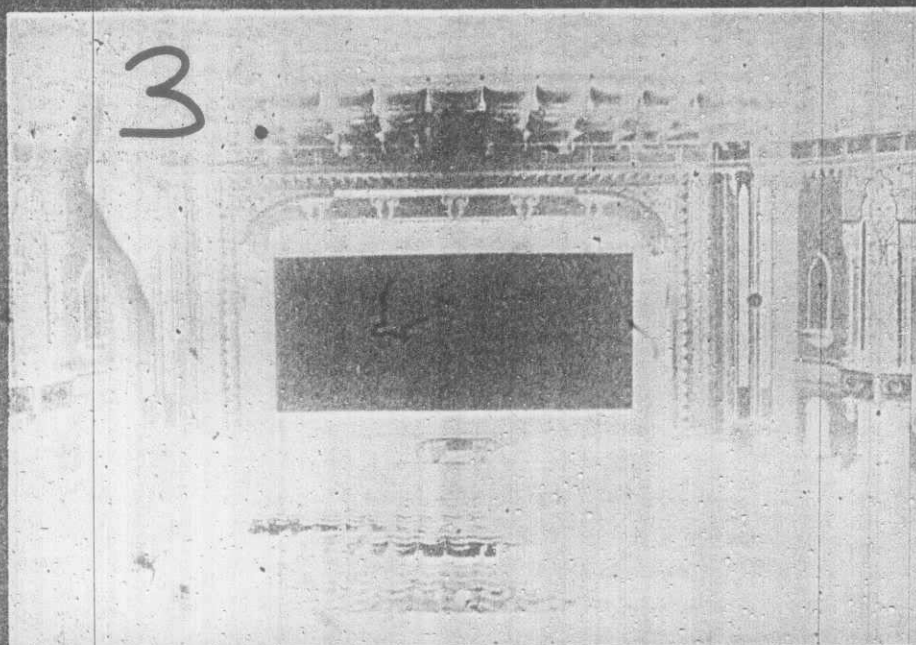
● I hope to be telling you about the many film attractions in this multi-screen complex which will hopefully open in the not too distant future.

● The Savoy introduced continuous performances in Limerick with programmes commencing each day around 2.30 p.m. and running non-stop until almost 11 p.m.

● They also brought CinemaScope to this city with a huge screen which I understand came from the Dublin Theatre Royal. The great showman, Louis Ellmann, was in the Savoy one Saturday well into the small hours as test showings of "The Robe" were run off. I was privileged to attend these screenings of the Fox invention which changed the shape of screens forever more.

● In the variety shows, acrobats, ventriloquists, singers, accordionists, bands, equilibrists and illusionists filled the star-laden bills. Among the later was the world-famous New Zealander Edgar Benyon, of "Bamboozle!" fame and, one St. Stephen's Day, the great Chung Ling Sen with his baffling array of great set pieces.

THE SAVOY: 1935 to 1989



The Savoy in its hey-day — following the installation of the giant wide screen in 1953.

● Among the managers there was the ever-smiling Jimmy Shiel, attired in evening dress, greeting patrons old and new in the huge lobby. He stayed eleven years before going on to the Dublin Theatre Royal. Other managers included Jack Cruise, Jack Nordell (who died tragically in London), "Uncle Cliff" Marsden, Tom English, Maurice Johnston and John Likely. The latter three are still happily with us today. I remember Tom English for his showmanship; Maurice Johnston for his organisational ability, and John Likely for his enthusiasm.

● Among the many cinema organists, I have happy memories of Alban Chambers, A. Gordon Spicer, Fred Bridgeman, Jack Courtney, Neville Turner, Pat Navan, Stanley Bowyer, Norman Metcalfe and John A. Enright, to name but a few.

● Backstage the Savoy was served loyally by (among others) the O'Farrell brothers, while the projection box was impeccably managed by Jimmy Carter. He came to Limerick from the Dublin Savoy in 1935 and never returned.

● Front of the house staff (chief ushers) included Michael Ryan (there were two Ryans on this assignment) and Paddy Stapleton. They greeted you as you arrived, and opened the many doors which adorned the Bedford Row entrance to the cinema-theatre.

● And there was the Dublin Theatre Royal-based publicity team whose assistance was invaluable down through the years.

● There was Eddie McSweeney (Maxwell Sweeney of RTE to-day); Oona McWhirter, Eilish McPhillips, and many more, whose tireless efforts made the Savoy in Limerick tick over with rare efficiency for over half a century.



● And there was dancing in the ballroom to Johnny McMahon, delicious meals in the various restaurants, and the great movies of five decades like *Gone With The Wind*, *Since You Went Away*, *Wuthering Heights*, and the dazzling parade of widescreen films which followed the installation of all the equipment in 1953.

● Many readers will have their own memories of the Savoy and the few lines I have penned this evening are only a fraction of the happy memories of the house which I shall treasure for many years to come.

● Savoy — it was nice knowing you — and being at your service.