

Theaters

I collect Theater covers as a conjunctive to my Movies collection. In one section of my album, I have the various Movie covers I've been able to find; in another section of the same album, I have my Theater covers. They go together well, and the Theater covers are often rather spectacular because they're usually quite old and they may have movie stars on them, such as the Tyrone Power cover we ran in an earlier issue. In fact, the same cover may be a Theater *and* a Movie cover, advertising both. It's an interesting category, especially for me. As a boy, during the summer, I'd often go to the theater three or four times a week. Those were the golden days of the Theaters.

In more recent times, the Theater industry's demise has been heralded more than once—first as a victim of the mushrooming popularity of TV in the 1950s, and then in the 1980s with the advent of home videos. Yet, not only have those predictions proven to be incorrect, but the industry has actually grown.

In 1974, there were 15,384 movie screens in the U.S. [*"screens" rather than "theaters" because some theaters have multiple screens*] Ten years later, that figure had jumped to 19,589 screens, and by last year there were 27,086! Correspondingly, box office receipts have steadily risen over the years, as well. And, from my long-time perspective as a theatergoer, so have ticket prices [*When I would try and get my father to go to the movies, he'd always say, "I'll wait until it comes out on TV;" now, I usually find myself saying to my own children, "I'll wait until it comes out on video."*].

In 1997, American moviegoers bought close to 1.3 *billion* tickets, which was 300 million more than

in 1974. Why are people continuing to flock to the theaters when they could eventually see the same movies later on video for a fraction of the cost...or even free on TV? Charles Shaw, spokesman for United Artists theaters, believes that home videos and cable movie channels have actually gotten *more* people to go to the theaters. He concludes that with the advent of the movie sequel, many viewers become acquainted with the story's characters on video or cable and then go to the theater to see the sequels as they are released.

Hence, we see movies such as *Die Hard II* and *Lethal Weapon II* making twice as much in theater receipts than their respective originals. And, of course, theaters still offer a number of advantages that videos and cable channels don't: the big screen panoramic view, stereophonic sound...and taking a date out to see a movie on tape just isn't the same!

Well, all this good news for the Theater industry, unfortunately, hasn't done collectors any good. You won't find today's theaters handing out matchcovers, but the older ones are still available. Don Marquette, AR, had 109 such covers as of this January.

