

# Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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## Strand Theatre Weekly Email: September 20, 2008

Written by David on September, 20 2008

This week we welcome Exit 113 back to the Strand. This popular local band will take the stage at 8:00pm on Saturday September 20th. We look forward to seeing you there!

Many things have happened to us as we have made this journey. This week I will discuss one of the more unusual things. 4 weeks ago the Strand received an inquiry from a preservation group located in North Carolina. They employ researchers to scour the country to find potential sites where old theatrical sound equipment might lurk. Imagine that, they found us! Thanks to our stout web site, they thought we were worth a call.

The researcher explained that they would like to purchase old sound equipment. She requested that we send digital pictures of everything we had so they could take a look. That is no small task. To be honest, we have LOTS of junk upstairs, and of that junk many things are sound related. There was just not enough time to haul everything out, catalog it, then send it to them on a hope and a prayer. When she e-mailed back, we told her that it was too large a task.

Much to my surprise, I received a phone call asking if they could send someone to take a look. I explained that we had junk, but they were more than willing to come if that's what they wanted. I thought it odd that they would deem our project significant enough to send someone to Shelbyville from North Carolina. I learned they are a bit better connected than I thought. They had a sound engineer in Chicago that was going to be in our area, so we arranged a meeting this week.

I had little hopes for anything, and to be honest I was quite leery. The gentleman arrived on time and as he looked at the outside of the Strand he said "I've been here before. I used to help maintain the projectors here. Do the Dewitts still have the business next door?" I said they sure do, lets go say hi. It was like old home week. They knew this fellow, and later were able to vouch for his integrity. That made me feel a bit more at ease.

We went into the theatre and looked around. In the offices he looked around. He pulled out 3 old speaker horn drivers and took a look at them. Then noticed an old amplifier and that was about it. It took all of 3 minutes. We had a good chat, he was very complimentary on what our volunteers have been able to do with the Strand. He said he would give me a call and left.

Later that afternoon my cell phone rang with a Chicago phone number. It was him. He stated that he was interested in purchasing the 3 old horn drivers, and the old tube amp. I said we would take it into consideration. I asked how much he was interested in offering. He said \$2500.00!! Needless to say I was dumbfounded. I asked if he could put it in writing. It sounded so good to be true. By the time I got back to my office, I had an email with the offer in black and white.

We convened a quick Board Meeting the next night to act on the proposal. In the mean time, we made sure of what we thought we had. Ron B. and Joey G., our sound gurus stated that the drivers were old and would not fit anything we owned. (Warning, tech talk ahead...) The drivers took separate power as well as the signal to be driven, hence 2 sets of terminals. Ron stated they were 5 Watt drivers, and the minimum we use is 40 Watts. They thread on them that mated to the horns was also a different thread than our drivers. They were rusty and corroded. Basically junk to us. I checked with some other people too, and they said that rebuilt and working perfectly they would be worth something, but the equipment they were designed to be used with was very old. Decision.....sell the drivers.

Now the amp. It was an old tube amp. From the shape of the capacitors, Ron surmised that it was from the mid 1930's. Steve F. did a patent check and it came back as 1933. This particular item was originally found by us back stage in a pile of junk. It was in a wooden box. We retrieved it from the dumpster at least three times! Ron and Joey said it had no value to us, and to be honest if we pitched it, we wouldn't miss it. Decision.....sell the amp.

We contacted the buyer, and they came back down this Thursday morning. The items were all in the cabaret area on a

table. We took lots of pictures of each. I had a prepared Bill of Sale. The sound engineer again took a look to see if we had anything else. He didn't find anything he could use, but he was a wealth of knowledge explaining many of the pieces and parts we had lying around. He and I signed the Bill of Sale and he asked if cash was OK. I said "of course." There before my eyes were 25 one hundred dollar bills. Before he left I asked what was so valuable. Here is the story.....

The speaker drivers are something they can always use for spares. 2 tested good, and 1 was bad. He said they will rebuild them to like new condition and use them for their projects. He said the real value was the amp. Yes, the one we threw away 3 times! It turns out that it was from 1938. Westinghouse, the manufacture, installed the sound system in the Strand. It only leased the equipment. By the end of WWII, the technology got better, and they replaced all the systems. Since they owned them, they just removed to old and replaced it with new. Somehow, this amp wasn't taken by Westinghouse in the early 40's. It just sat in a pile for the next 65+ years. Since most of these were discarded, they are very rare. He stated they have been looking for one of these for years. This amp will get completely rebuilt and mated with its original 1938 vintage sound equipment. Wow, what a story. We can certainly relate having found our pipe organ toy counter much the same way. They said when it is finished, they will send us a picture for our web site.

So there you have it. A windfall for the Strand as well as helping the right people preserve a part of our motion picture heritage. What will we find next?

Thanks for all the support.

**Images on this post:**

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