

I met Max Haus more than a year and a half ago at the Mall in Leblon. I came there to meet him and see his new theatre first hand. We entered into a construction site surrounded by a recently opened shopping mall. There were no seats in the house; no lights overhead and no stage floor. It was basically a concrete box. But Max knew what he wanted to build even if he didn't have definitive plans or the capital to complete his dream. While walking through his future theatre he asked my opinion about what I saw and what I would do with the space, if it were mine. We discussed several ideas about the method to get scenery on stage and how to use the backstage space as efficiently as possible.

18 months later Max has his theatre. And his first hit too because The Sound of Music is a successful production receiving both local critical acclaim and public approval. I'm also glad to report that many of my suggestions about the backstage area were taken seriously.

It has been more than a decade since Max's original Casa Grande burned to the ground at Rua Afrânio de Mello Franco 290 in Leblon. If not for his single-minded desire to rebuild the theatre, the entire property would be a mall. But now, because of him, it is much more. His audiences have a place to go before and after his shows and the mall benefits from his patrons who come to see each performance.

Of course to find the capital and build his dream, he first needed to find a partner or two. And he did. Through them the monies needed to complete the lobby, auditorium, stage and backstage areas of the theatre were found. And the rest, as they say, is history. Or at least it will be some day.

I have seen far too many theatres torn down over the years to build another modern hotel or office building in New York. So for me, saving even one theatre is miraculous regardless of where it happens because there is nothing more captivating than a live show.

The evening I saw The Sound of Music, everyone from the theatre owners (Max Haus, Moysés Ajhaenblat, Aniela Jordan, David Zylbersztajn, Gustavo Aichenblat, Leonardo Haus, Luis Calainho, and Silvia Haus) to the producing/directing company (Charles Möeller and Cláudio Botelho), cast and crew were genuinely proud of the work they had done in creating this new level of musical theatre, in Rio de Janeiro. And they should be proud because there are no other operating theatres in Rio that can boast of the technology and talent that is there all under one roof.

For example, this one show is using electric and hydraulic lifts under the stage and LEDs to light their cyclorama. The theatre also have a complete, modern counter-weight system (with plenty of spare stage weights) for the scenery and lighting that is held over the heads of the cast and crew. There are multiple flat-

screen monitors placed backstage for the cast to see the conductor to keep them in tempo with the music.

And this technology is just what the show brought to the theatre. Oi Casa Grande can boast about their technology too. The lobbies have multiple flat-screen monitors to see the on-stage performance from the time the curtain rises until it falls again at the end of the show. And touch screens that offer you information about the theatre as well as interactive panels which are just fun to play with. Oi Casa Grande also has free Wi-fi available throughout the building for patrons and employees alike.

Teatro Oi Casa Grande also has one of the largest orchestra pits in the city. I believe that only the Municipal Theatre has one that is larger. The biggest technological toys they have are two sets of LED panels on either side of the auditorium walls which dazzle the pre-show audience with shapes, symbols and advertising. While overhead there are two lighting catwalks which hold the front-of-house lights and the follow spots.

From my perspective it looks like musical theatre has a new home in Rio de Janeiro. Teatro Oi Casa Grande: where technology and audience comfort are giving the Carioca something to talk about.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. ...' with a stylized flourish.

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