

Arts & Entertainment

The State: still standing against the multi-screen assault

By Stew Magnuson
Staff Reporter

The State Theatre has sat empty, dark and alone at 1415 O St. for the past three months. One mask laughing, another frowning. "King Kong Lives," the sign reads, teasing bad-film lovers in Lincoln until the promised reopening on Dec. 19.

The State Theatre is one of the oldest movie houses in Nebraska. And it's definitely the most unique. Seeing a flick at the State is an experience totally apart from the usual multi-screen modern theaters with plastic seats and sound bleeding in from the Ramboesque movie next door. The whole exterior can be wonderfully confusing. When you walk in the theater, you're not at the top looking down at the available seats, you're somewhere in the middle.

What are those seats behind your head? Is it a balcony or just an unusual slope? The glittering murals of cowboys keep you entertained while waiting for

the film to start. Finding the restrooms can be a little perplexing. They're down some stairs and past the lounge with the Spiderman pinball machine.

The movie-going citizens of Lincoln have been denied access to this wonderful theater for the past three months. According to Richard Wytell, the district

'Other than the gaudy decor, it's a real nice theater with a great sound system.'

—Wytell

manager for Commonwealth Theatres in Kansas City, Mo., the company just couldn't book good movies for the State, so they decided to shut it down temporarily instead of putting in a "lesser product."

The State Theatre is one of the soon-to-be-extinct animals called single-screen theaters. Movie studios would

rather have their products showing in the multi-screen modern complexes like the Plaza 4 than in older one-screen houses.

"The State is hard to book on a strong basis," Wytell said.

The State shows an unusual mix of films not found anywhere else in Lincoln. A State film can be a big, popular movie like "Down and Out in Beverly Hills," already shown at the Cooper, another Commonwealth theater. For people who can't always make it to East O Street, the State will run these hits for a week before they leave town forever.

Smaller, ignored films like the cult hit "The Toxic Avenger" and the good, but ignored "Crossroads," also showed at the State this year.

What really does well in one-screen theaters like the State are trashy horror flicks, popular with teens. The failure of these horror-genre films to do well this past fall was one of the reasons the State closed, Wytell said.

"The original 'Nightmare on Elm Street' and the original 'Friday the 13th' did real well at The State in the past, but 'Elm Street II' and 'Texas Chainsaw Massacre' just didn't do well anywhere this fall, not just the State. . . . And the single-screen theater survives on that type of product."

What are the chances that the State will close down for good?

"There's always that chance," Wytell said. "It's the last thing I want to do. But it's just too early to make projections for next year."

"Other than the gaudy decor, it's a real nice theater with a great sound system," Wytell said.

The State Theatre reopens this Friday with "King Kong Lives." Lincoln's bad-film lovers are planning a celebration at the 7 p.m. showing on reopening night. So go check out a movie at the State, while there's still time.



Richard Wright/Daily Nebraskan

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