

## The End Of Another Baltimore Tradition?

By Larry Butcher

Remember when we went to the movies every week? Sometimes we were at the theater more often. Our antique cars were daily drivers back then and Baltimore's streets were filled with pedestrians and streetcars. We went to see double feature movies as children with our parents, later it was an affordable Saturday night date, and even later we took our own children to see the latest movie. On Saturday afternoons you could go to the matinee at a bargain price and see the weekly Buck Rogers serial and several cartoons in addition to the feature movie.

The best movie theaters weren't in some shopping mall or Cineplex. They were stand-alone theatres and were sometimes rehabbed from the days of vaudeville – big elegant places with high ceilings, chandeliers, and balconies.

The Senator theatre is an art deco design that opened to the public on October 5, 1939. The theater has a circular upper structure of glass blocks and limestone. Multicolored backlighting of the glass block was added to produce a dramatic effect at night. The lobby still features the original terrazzo floors, and art deco murals about the history of performing arts. A massive gold curtain still opens to dramatically reveal the screen before each performance. The theatre's interior is accented by a back lit sun-burst at the apex of the screen, and rainbow prisms in the recessed ceiling. The sidewalk in front of the theatre features a 'walk of fame' which highlights local cinematic accomplishments.

Up to about a year ago the Senator showcased first-run feature movies. Operationally, the theater is equipped with a modern 40 ft curved screen, state of the art projection systems, and Dolby Digital sound system. But, as a stand-alone movie house, the Senator has had a hard time gaining access to the top-rated first run movies.



*Larry Butcher's 1938 Lincoln Zephyr parked in front of The Senator theater on Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>*

As one of the unfortunate results of the current economy, the Senator theater stopped operating a couple of weeks ago. At this writing, we're not sure that the Senator will ever be in operation again. Because it's on the National Register of Historic Places, the building probably will survive under any circumstances, but the likelihood of future double features does not look good.

For all you movie buffs with a bad memory, Cabaret (the feature film on the theater's marquee) was the film version of a hugely successful Broadway play. The 1972 movie was also extremely successful, winning eight Oscars including, those for best actress (Liza Minnelli) and best supporting actor (Joel Grey). It's ironic that a cinematic success like Cabaret was possibly the last picture show at The Senator.

*combined with  
Orphan Car Tour*

## Chesapeake Region's Spring Overnight Tour June 6 and 7, 2009

The Chesapeake Region Spring Overnight Tour is combined with the Orphan Car Tour this year. On Saturday June 6<sup>th</sup> we will start in Thurmont, MD and travel over back roads to Chambersburg, PA for dinner. Our overnight motel is the Days Inn. On Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup> we will travel to the Swigart Automobile Museum in Huntingdon. We will return along a scenic route to Thurmont for an early dinner. You must register separately for the Orphan Car Tour and pay the \$8 tour fee. The Saturday dinner charge of \$17 per person must be paid in advance. There is a June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline to register. You must start the Saturday portion of the tour in Thurmont to receive the driving directions package and get your dinner tickets. The overnight and Sunday portion of the tour is on a pay-as-you-go basis. We have group discounts at the Days Inn (\$59.95 + tax) and Swigart's (\$3 admission per person).

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Orphan Car Tour  
Registration form and info is on  
the Chesapeake Region website  
[www.aaca.org/chesapeake](http://www.aaca.org/chesapeake)