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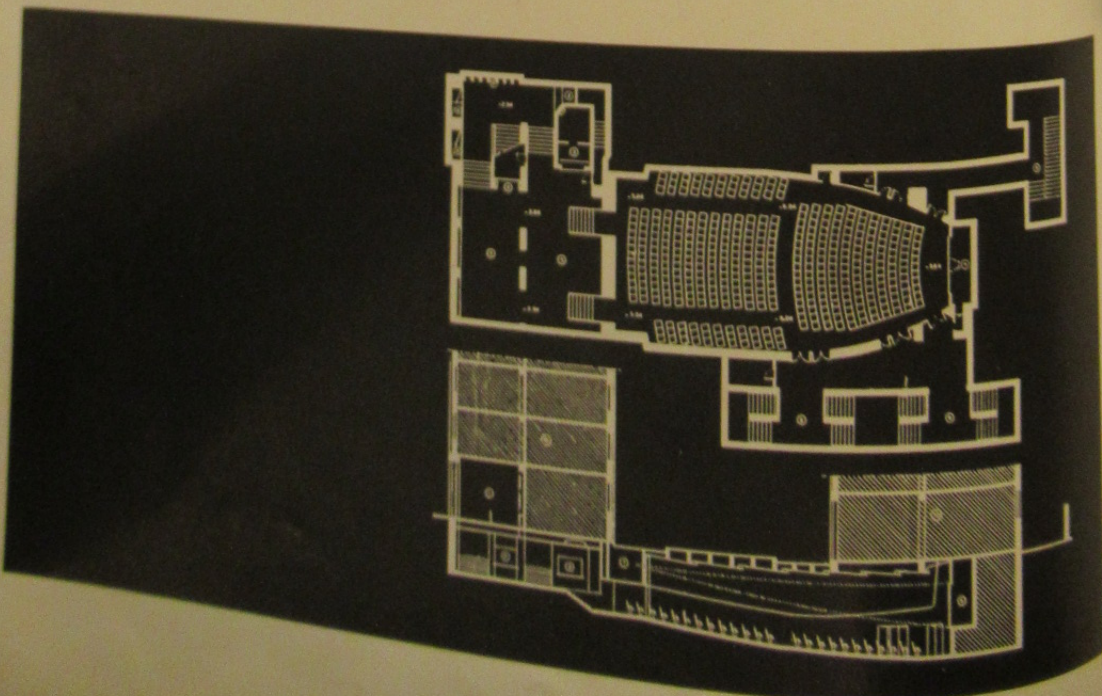
There is more justification for swank in Italian cinemas, however, for there, movie-going is more of a social event. Chit-chat in the lobby is almost as essential as in a legitimate theatre, and the house lights are long enough for the audience to examine each other's clothes and coiffures, not to mention the decor.

The cost of good interiors may, strangely enough, be easier for the owner to cope with in Italy, because he does not have to carry a heavy burden on the American owner: the building code ruling against rental space over the theatre—for either commercial or residential purposes, and the ruling against bars—potentially a far more lucrative source of income than the popcorn concessions which today are the main guarantee of profits in all too many American houses.

Cinema Arlecchino—Harlequin—in Milan is not exceptionally sumptuous, though its motif is expressed in original

harlequinade for a small cinema

MARIO BIGNARDI

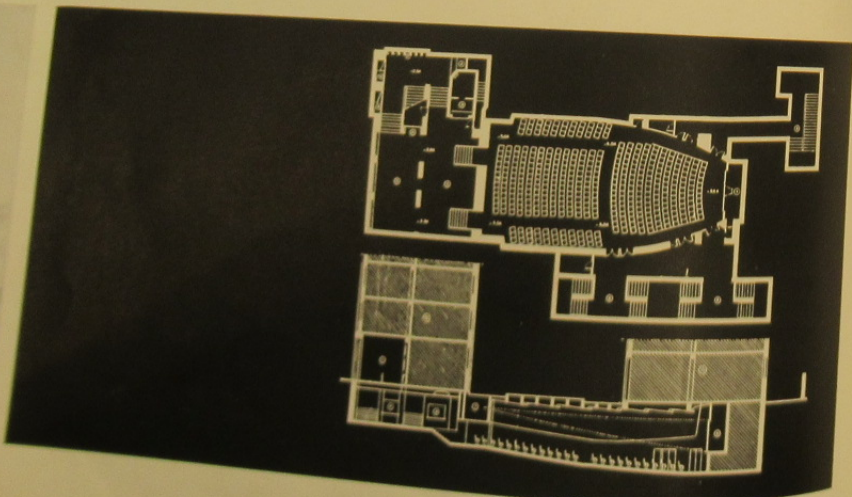




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MARIO RIGHINI



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There is more justification for swank in Italian cinemas, however, for there, movie going is more of a social event. Chit-chat in the lobby is almost as essential as in a legitimate theatre, and the house lights are turned on in the auditorium often long enough for the audience to examine each other's clothes and coiffures, not to mention the decor.

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works by leading artists and sculptors. Roberto Menghi, an architect associated with Mario Righini on the whole project, designed the three harlequins inlaid in pink, black, and white marble on the lobby floor; Pietro Fornasetti did murals, and Lucio Fontana, the energetic sculptor of lighting, ceramics, and other plastic substances, is represented by a bronze harlequin on the lobby ceiling and a long, pink, black, and white ceramic relief below the screen. That screen, incidentally is made of aluminum, and stands without fuss on frame in front of a dark green curtain.

Aside from this lively *objet d'art*, which



is the focal point of the space when a film is not being run, the auditorium is unusual both as a volume and in its color. In most auditoriums this element is located on the floor, by means of a brilliant, large-patterned carpet, or on the ceiling and walls, in one or another form of decoration. Here the color is in the seats themselves—their cotton upholstery and

enameled backs, each a solid color—black, white, vermillion, pink, green, peacock—a riot of hues with a controlling order of diagonal V lines. This central concentration of color helps to distract one's consciousness from the smallness of the space. Another device which counteracts a claustrophobic reaction are the lines of light which visually

separate the white stucco flaps from the wood walls, breaking these actual barriers into floating screens with a suggestion of space behind them. The light also gives the hard materials an illusion of cloudy, weightless softness, emphasized by the motion implied in the undulating ceiling. This, of course, has an acoustic purpose too.—O.G.



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Lounge behind the auditorium has the rich materials and period furniture characteristic of Italian interiors when they want to be impressive. Murals by Pietro Fornasetti are hand printed directly on the white-painted wood in his well-known (secret) process. Chairs and sofa are Louis Philippe reproductions upholstered in pink and black silk, and the modern coffee tables are topped with slabs of white travertine. Floor is black Racenna marble.

