



HPS-4000[®]

HIGH PERFORMANCE STEREO

Sound IS the Experience !™

THE CARIB

BY

DOUGLAS GRAHAM

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The Carib was designed by John Pike and built in 1937 and 1938. At that time, Pike was a young graduate of Boston University and his design was faithful to the magnificent halls of that period. In strict economic terms, one might criticize that it was wastefully designed and built; in retrospect we have found that the investment in things like insulation, has paid great dividends over the years in reducing heat loads and air conditioning costs. From an acoustic standpoint, it is the best hall in Jamaica, maybe in the West Indies. You can converse in a normal voice from the stage to someone standing at the back of the balcony 180 feet away. No classic performer that used our stage has ever had to be amplified.

The auditorium itself is 20 feet smaller than the outer shell, as there is a high 10 foot air cushion between the solid, reinforced poured concrete wall on the outside and the metal and wood frame inner wall.

The air conditioning return duct comprises the entire basement of the building, which varies from a height of 4 feet. in the vicinity of the stage, to 8 feet. in the back of the hall. It is such an enclosed and robust bunker that, with the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the

then Colonial Government commandeered it and sand-bagged it as a safe place from which the Government would operate, if Jamaica should ever experience an air raid. This is not as laughable as it might sound, since German U-boat activity in the Caribbean was often evident as they attempted to interrupt the flow of sugar and bananas from our shores to Britain.

Also, Jamaica stands in the mouth of the Windward Passage which is the main shipping channel into the Caribbean between Cuba and Haiti. Control of Jamaica could have controlled shipping in the Caribbean. But the war years were not to have proved as eventful as they might have anticipated.

Jamaica is ninety-five percent dependent on imported fuel, and so during the war gasoline was a severely rationed item. Many Jamaicans reverted to horse and buggy as they moth balled their cars for the winter of the war. The Carib had two parking lots; one for motorized traffic, and one for animal powered traffic - bicycles and buggies.

After the war, the Company was taken over by the J. Arthur Rank Organization of Britain. Early in the 1950's, major modifications took place to widen the proscenium to accommodate a wide screen for Cinemascope. However, it was still monaural analog sound which boasted 50 watts of amplifier power into one Altec stage speaker, which frankly delivered as much sound back stage as it did into the auditorium.

No further upgrades took place between 1952 and 1982, by which time Dolby Stereo had become an industry centerpiece. Neither the Carib nor its competition had the ability to decode 4-track stereo signals, or enjoy the improved dynamic range afforded by the noise reduction process. The whole industry lacked luster. Theatres in Jamaica closed in the 1970's. Grosses stagnated, and some film companies were quite happy to play their product with the competition. However, in the fall of 1981, the Palace CEO's went to the NATO Trade Show and submitted to the almost infinite choices that were presented, made valuable contacts, and started a process of reeducation. As a consequence, 1982 saw the complete overhaul of the projection and sound system. Four-channel Dolby Stereo equipment was installed, powered by 6000-watts of BGW amplifiers. In parallel, the Kintek stereophonic processor and sub-woofer were installed.

Modern sound technology seems to compensate for poor acoustics, so that any tunnel or match-box cinema can sound like a great hall. However, when this technology is mated with the good acoustics of a hall whose basic dimensions are 180 feet x 84 feet with a 60 foot ceiling, the results have to be heard to be believed.

The HPS-4000™ sound system with a surround array of 24 speakers, enhanced delay mechanism, and Klipsch TMCM-3 stage speakers, literally blew the doors off the competition. Grosses happened in Jamaica in 1982/83 that still leave onlookers gaping. For instance “Seven” starring William Smith, opened in the Carib against “Raiders of the Lost Ark” in the competition. In the second week of the run, “Seven” was replaced by “Dogs”, a European action-er about dobermans.

The cumulative gross of these two B-class pictures exceeded “Raiders of the Lost Ark” for starters. The competition never got off the canvas, or even found out what hit them; and not only did cinema grosses climb to unprecedented heights in Jamaica, powered by the Carib grosses, but that one screen made such a difference, that Jamaica became the highest single grossing country in the West Indies.

This has had enormous rippling effects on the industry, which in turn enhanced grosses even more, and we have now lost track of whether the grosses come from big pictures, or big pictures showing currently, or big pictures showing currently through a state-of-the-art cinematic system. All elements are critically important, especially since Jamaica is in the footprints of the North American satellites and our satellite receivers access all the scrambled and unscrambled channels.

Further, because there is no recent copyright legislation, video piracy thrives, and the cinema faces the competition of pirated tapes that sometimes are available long before the legitimate tapes become available in the U.S. But we are only as fast as our last race, or we are only as good as our last gross, so we keep a keen watch on what producers are putting on film, and what technology is available to transport it to the service of the audience.

In 1986, Klipsch, the maker of our speaker system, produced an improved tweeter and we replaced our stage speaker high range Immediately. In 1988, we installed Dolby SR.

Early in 1990, we beefed up the bottom end of the very considerable TMCM-3 speaker system by the installation of four TMWM Klipsch woofers powered separately with 900-watt BGW amplifiers each. This time we retired our CP-50 cinema processor to another stereo upgrade and replaced it with a state-of-the-art CP-55 cinema processor. We also took out of service the Kintek subwoofers which had not given satisfactory service.

Since then we have: changed our two-way surround speakers to 3-way; added the midrange split to convert our stage speakers to four-way; replaced our eight year-old amplifiers and our delay system with new BGW's to convert to single amplification.

All that is left of the 1982 remodeling are the three magnificent TMCM's backstage which, with upgraded modifications still have been unsurpassed. At this time we also: replaced the seats, reducing the seating capacity to increase leg room; remodeled and modernized the entrance and lobby areas; remodeled and modernized our rest-room facilities; renovated and upgraded our parking facilities; trained and re-suited our staff in preparation for the final decade of this century.

When producers begin to record films in digital stereo, all that will be needed at the Carib will be the addition of a digital processor.

For years we lagged behind industry standards and for that period we deprived ourselves of the potential to create maximum viewer satisfaction, and extract from the product available its revenue potential. The circuit is growing, but faster in terms of upgraded screens than in number of screens, and the Carib shines as a beacon to the rest of the industry in Jamaica as to what can be done and what richness of presentation can be achieved which, invariably is followed by bottom-line balance sheet enhancement.

There is no plan to split the Carib into two or three mini screens, but Kingston, our capital City, as well as Montego Bay and Ocho Rios, will have mini screens. It has frankly been an exciting adventure and, happily, a profitable one.

DOUGLAS GRAHAM October 1990.

Douglas Graham is the Managing Director of the Palace Amusement Company (1921) Ltd. in Jamaica.