

The Theater in Feira de Santana: Spaces and First Experiences

O teatro em Feira de Santana: espaços e primeiras vivências

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Abstract

This article analyzes existing records of the first theaters to operate in the city of Feira de Santana (Bahia) between the 1870s and 1950s, considering the context of their installation, their importance as a space for leisure and sociability, the uses of the theater, the types of shows and groups that performed in the city. It also addresses the population's level of access to this type of entertainment until the mid-20th century, when a new architectural and comfort standard put an end to the old theater model, remaining of the 19th century, and which had the Teatro Santana (Santana Theater) as the last example. The research was developed based on newspapers that circulated in Feira de Santana in the period studied, and also sought to establish parallels with other experiences and locations based on dialogue with similar studies.

Keywords: Feira de Santana; theater; Santana Theater; urban leisure

Resumo

Este artigo analisa os registros existentes acerca dos primeiros teatros a funcionar na cidade de Feira de Santana (Bahia) entre as décadas de 1870 e 1950, considerando o contexto de sua instalação, sua importância como espaço de lazer e sociabilidade, os usos do teatro, os tipos de espetáculos e de grupos que se apresentaram na cidade, bem como o nível de acesso da população a esse tipo de lazer, até meados do século XX, quando um novo padrão arquitetônico e de conforto põe fim ao antigo modelo de teatro, remanescente do século XIX,

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e que teve o Teatro Santana como último exemplo. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida com base nos jornais feirenses, do período estudado, e buscou ainda estabelecer paralelos com outras experiências e localidades a partir do diálogo com estudos similares.

Palavras-chave: Feira de Santana; teatro; Teatro Santana; lazer urbano

Presentation

The leisure and culture history in the context of hinterland in Brazil has not been fully investigated yet. Some studies have addressed the theme of leisure in the municipality of Feira de Santana, researching elements such as bullfighting, circuses, theaters, philharmonic concerts, cinemas, parties, and sports¹. This study aimed to understand the operation of theaters in Feira de Santana and their relationship with the cultural economy of the city in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. This is document research based on newspapers mainly published in Feira de Santana². Additionally, newspapers from other places found in the collection of the National Digital Newspaper Library were surveyed. Therefore, we considered the recommendation to use newspapers as historical sources and followed some specific procedures for the analysis of that printed material³.

¹ For further information see: SAMPAIO, Maria Izabel da Silva. *Dimensão social do teatro em Feira de Santana (1892-1912)*. 2000. Monograph (Specialization in History Theory and Methodology). State University of Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, 2000; SANTOS, Aline Aguiar Cerqueira dos. *Diversões e civilidade na “Princesa do Sertão” (1919-1946)*. 2012. Dissertation (History Master’s Program). State University of Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, 2012; SILVA, Aldo José Morais. Educação musical como projeto: 50 anos do seminário de música de Feira de Santana. *Metáfora Educacional*, n. 15, p. 48-76, 2013; Aldo José Morais. De terra sã a berço da micareta: estratégias constitutivas da identidade social em Feira de Santana. *Revista de História Regional*, [S. l.], v. 13, n. 2, 2009; SACRAMENTO, Beatriz Café. O cinema e as sociabilidades em Feira de Santana (1910-1919). *Anais... ENCONTRO ESTADUAL DE HISTÓRIA DA ANPUH-BA*. 8. Feira de Santana. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana, 2016; SACRAMENTO, Beatriz Café. *O cinema enquanto sociabilidades em Feira de Santana (1910-1920)*. 2017. Monografia (Graduação em História). Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, 2017; NUNES, Fábio Santana. “A los toros!”: as touradas em Feira de Santana (1893-1905). *Revista Caminhos da História*, Montes Claros, v. 26, n. 1, p. 54-79, 2021a.

² This material is part of the collection kept in Feira de Santana: Biblioteca Setorial Monsenhor Galvão, in the building of the Museu Casa do Sertão, at the Campus of the State University of Feira de Santana (UEFS) and in Salvador: Biblioteca Central do Estado da Bahia (Biblioteca dos Barris); and Instituto Geográfico e Histórico da Bahia, as well as at the Hemeroteca Digital da Biblioteca Nacional.

³ LUCA, Tânia Regina de. História dos, nos e por meio dos periódicos. In: PINSKY, Carla Bassanezi (Org.). *Fontes históricas*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2019. p. 111-153.

The Feira de Santana Scenery

Feira de Santana is a city in the state of Bahia located 108 km far from the capital, Salvador. It was founded in the 18th century as a result of the expansion of the livestock activity in the region. However, its economic and populational consolidation occurred in the late 19th century. In 1881, the city already occupied the third position among the most prominent cities in the interior of the state, with 102 businesses (the first was Cachoeira, with 189 commercial operations, and the second was Santo Amaro, with 104), according to Freire⁴. In 1916, the commercial activity in Feira de Santana already had 472 businesses, reaching 555 in 1923. These figures placed the city among the top three economies of the interior of the state in that period⁵.

Such blooming was directly, but not exclusively, linked to the road infrastructure in the region, since it was located at the crossroads of several commercial routes between the capital of the state and the Reconcavo region, and their interconnections with other states. In such context, between 1873 and 1913, at least nine projects were started, related to the opening of roads reaching Feira de Santana⁶. The construction of a branch of the railroad Central da Bahia was one of them and it started to operate in February 1875, linking that city to the municipality of Cachoeira⁷. With that railway, traveling to Salvador, which used to take three days to go and come back, started to take around one day, via Cachoeira. As a result of this improvement, only in the two first years of functioning (1875/76), the railroad transported around 36 thousand people⁸.

The relative economic thrive and easy access to the city made Feira de Santana attractive for newcomers, and consequently, a market of cultural goods such as books, music scores, musical instruments, and artistic and

⁴ FREIRE, Antônio. *Almanak da Província da Bahia*. Salvador: Litho-typographia de João Gonçalves Tourinho, 1881.

⁵ SILVA, Aldo José Morais. A Feira e o mercado: notas sobre a inserção de Feira de Santana na economia baiana. In: SILVA, Elizete da; NEVES, Erivaldo Fagundes. *Cultura, sociedade & política: ideias, métodos e fontes na investigação histórica*. Feira de Santana: UEFS Editora, 2014.

⁶ SILVA, Aldo José Morais. *Natureza sã, cidade e comércio em Feira de Santana: a construção de identidade social no interior da Bahia (1832-1937)*. 2000. Dissertation (History Master's Program). Federal University of Bahia. Salvador, 2000.

⁷ NUNES, Luiz Antonio da Silva. *Relatório à Assembleia Legislativa Provincial da Bahia no dia 1º de maio de 1876*. p. 145-146. Retrieved from: <<https://archive.org/details/rpebahia1876a/page/n147/mode/2up>>. Accessed on: 26th Dec 2022.

⁸ NUNES, Fábio Santana. *Pelos vapores e trens, do hipódromo ao stadium: esporte e lazer em Feira de Santana - BA (1875-1922)*. 2021. Thesis (Leisure Studies PhD Program). Federal University of Minas Gerais. Physical Education, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy School, 2021b.

sports shows, among other forms of expression. The atmosphere converted the city into the destination of several professional artists and boosted the flourishing of what is currently called culture economy⁹. There were several activities that beyond the cultural value, also intended to generate or efficiently generated economic value, as pointed out by Leitão¹⁰. For this reason, it was not a surprise when the existence of a theater in the city in the 1840s was mentioned, in an official letter that suggested that the space should shelter the meetings of the Municipal Council of Feira de Santana, which at the time did not own an office¹¹. Nor was it a surprise that it was a private enterprise, just like other theaters located in Bahia at the time were as shown by Robatto, Rodrigues and Sampaio¹² and Spinola and Marinho¹³, or the fact that just like in other cities of the country, it was a space managed by the City Council, which charged artists and companies regarding licenses, a type of tax, so that they could perform in those spaces, as reported by Bibbó and Rosa¹⁴.

In fact, Poppino suggested that in the second half of the 19th century, music had conquered local space, and emphasized that “individual talents usually performed at the theater”. That author added that the violin was a common musical instrument and the German traveler Julius Nacher “reported, before 1880, that there were pianos in the wealthier houses”¹⁵. He also mentioned the existence of frequent advertisements in the newspapers that circulated in Feira de Santana at the time offering the services of piano technicians¹⁶ and also private lessons one could hire to learn how to play that instrument, in addition to “[...] solfeggio, singing, etc.”¹⁷ as well as a “complete and varied collection of songs for the piano by the most accredited

⁹ LEITÃO, Sérgio Sá. Economia da cultura e desenvolvimento. *Revista Z Cultural*. Rio de Janeiro. Ano III, n. 3, 2015. Retrieved from: <<http://revistazcultural.pacc.ufrj.br/economia-da-cultura-e-desenvolvimento-de-sergio-sa-leitao/>>. Accessed on: 30th Aug 2022.

¹⁰ Idem, *ibidem*.

¹¹ POPPINO, Rollie E. Feira de Santana. Salvador: Itapoã, 1968.

¹² ROBATTO, Lucas; RODRIGUES, Clara Costa; SAMPAIO, Marcos da Silva. Os primórdios do Teatro São João desta Cidade da Bahia (1806-1821). *Revista da Bahia*, v. 32, n. 37, p. 62-67, 2003.

¹³ SPINOLA, Noelio Dantaslé; MARINHO, Isabel Cristina Alves. O teatro na Bahia: dos jesuítas a Glauber Rocha. In: CONGRESSO ASSOCIAÇÃO PORTUGUESA PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO REGIONAL, 24., Anais... Covilhã, 2017.

¹⁴ BIBBÓ, Caroline Bertarelli; ROSA, Maria Cristina. From theatre to streets: the dynamics of shows in Ouro Preto, Brazil (1870-1900). *Leisure/Loisir*, 47(3):1-23, set. 2022.

¹⁵ POPPINO, 1968. p. 287.

¹⁶ ANÚNCIO. *O Propulsor*. Feira de Santana. 29 nov. 1896. p. 3.

¹⁷ ENSINO de piano. *O Progresso*. Feira de Santana, 20 abr. 1902. p. 3.

and well known authors, containing all operas”, sold for the same prices as those charged in the capital of Bahia¹⁸.

The philharmonics *25 de Março* and *Vitória*, founded in 1868 and 1873, respectively, worked as spaces for the education of musicians, but they were mainly used by the local political groups, who also supported them financially. In exchange for this support, they promoted the political individuals and gave them visibility, by appearing in speeches and formal occasions. In general, the philharmonics provided public and private musical presentations, and were a constant element in the cultural life of Feira de Santana up to the mid-20th century. There was, as we could see, the frequent use of music in social events and activities, and a civilizer role was also ascribed to this form of artistic expression^{19, 20}. This explains the appearance of the first private music school in the city in 1937. It was located next to the Ginásio Santanópolis, directed by the conductor Georgina Erismam. That school was “linked to the Music Institute of Bahia, and the certificates they issued were valid all over the country” it followed the programs by the National Music School of Rio de Janeiro²¹ and operated until 1950.

The literary field also bloomed early in Feira de Santana. The local newspaper *A Parasita*, founded in 1876, had the subtitle “Literary and Recreational”, and dedicated part of its pages to publish chronicles and poems, a pattern that was kept in the newspapers of Feira de Santana up to the mid-20th century. The opening of the Municipal Public Library, on 6th November 1890²², reinforced such understanding since between March and May 1892, it recorded an average of 126 readers per month²³, even considering that in 1889, the urban population of Feira de Santana was estimated to be 4,454 inhabitants²⁴ and the illiteracy rate at the time was 82.6%, according to the 1890 Census²⁵. This means that in 1892, there were only around 775 literate

¹⁸ ANNUNCIOS. *O Esforço*. Feira de Santana, n. 14, 17 abr. 1887. p. 4.

¹⁹ SILVA, 2013.

²⁰ SILVA, 2013.

²¹ OLIVEIRA, Sandra Nívea Soares de. *Um modelar estabelecimento de ensino: o Colégio Santanópolis na cidade de Feira de Santana (1934-1959)*. 2014. Thesis (Education PhD Program). Federal University of Bahia. Salvador, 2014. p. 49.

²² MELLO, Carlos Alberto Almeida; BRITO, Carlos Alberto Oliveira (Orgs.). *Memórias: Arnold Ferreira da Silva*. Feira de Santana: Fundação Senhor dos Passos. 2018.

²³ BIBLIOTECA. *O Município*. Feira de Santana, n. [1?], [?] mar. 1892. p. 3; BIBLIOTECA. *O Município*. Feira de Santana, n. 9, 8 maio 1892. p. 3; BIBLIOTECA. *O Município*. Feira de Santana, n. 17, 5 jun. de 1892. p. 2.

²⁴ VIDA Feirense. *Folha do Norte*, Feira de Santana, n. 716, 1 nov. 1924. p. 1.

²⁵ FERREIRA, Ana Emília Cordeiro Souto; CARVALHO, Carlos Henrique de. *Escolarização e analfabetismo*

individuals in the urban area of Feira de Santana, and around 16% of them would go quite often to the library.

Cinema was also one attraction in Feira de Santana in the late 19th century. Those were itinerant companies that showed films. Before them, there were companies that brought *symphoramas*²⁶, such as the “important business located in the capital, Gallo Junior & C”, which opened a “ground floor saloon at the Santana Theater” exhibiting jewelry, silk items, and “modern and perfected devices by the immortal Edison [...]”²⁷. That company advertised “150 views of rare and admirable items coming from the cult Europe”, some of them, coming from the Louvre Museum²⁸. And soon after the first public film exhibitions were held in Paris, the population of Feira de Santana and visitors could already see them at the cinema. The *O Propulsor* newspaper, published a short note informing the start of the use of the Santana Theater as a space for the reproduction of films²⁹ in 1899, when they advertised “Tomorrow at 8p.m., a cinematograph will operate in this city’s theater, exposing to the public the most beautiful and appreciated scenes”³⁰, in the period defined by Costa as the First Cinema phase in Brazil, when

The first films were not concerned with showing a plot or developing ideas. Their objective was to introduce the film machine, that is, the novelty of its images, its unprecedented ability to reproduce movement and at the same time deceive the audience’s eyes. It surprised the spectators, shocking them with both the realism of images and the sudden disappearance and transformations that only cinema would allow at those times.³¹

no Brasil: estudo das mensagens dos presidentes dos estados de São Paulo, Paraná e Rio Grande do Norte (1890-1930). In: ENCONTRO DE PESQUISA EM EDUCAÇÃO DO CENTRO-OESTE, 12., 2014, Goiânia. Retrieved from: <https://sites.pucgoias.edu.br/pos-graduacao/mestrado-doutorado-educacao/wp-content/uploads/sites/61/2018/05/Ana-Em%C3%ADlia-Cordeiro-Souto-Ferreira_-_Carlos-Henrique-de-Carvalho.pdf>. Accessed on: 15th Sep 2022

²⁶ Symphorama, one of the machines that preceded the cinematograph. To learn more about the practices that characterized the commercialization of fixed views of the magic lantern exhibited in public shows of optical projections, see: TRUSZ, Alice Dubina. O cruzamento de tradições visuais nos espetáculos de projeções ópticas realizados em Porto Alegre entre 1861 e 1908. *Anais do Museu Paulista*. São Paulo, v.18. n.1. p. 129-178. jan.- jul. 2010.

²⁷ PHONOGRAPHO, gramophone e symphorama. *O Propulsor*. Feira de Santana, n. 47, 5 set. 1897. p. 2.

²⁸ Idem, *ibidem*.

²⁹ Some understanding was established from some research that the Santana Theater had its first film exhibition on at the end of the first decade of the 20th century.

³⁰ CINEMATOGRAFO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 164, 3 dez. 1899. p. 1.

³¹ COSTA, 1995.

Due to these characteristics, cinema presentations could occur at different venues such as the public library or even in some private homes (for smaller groups), but, undoubtedly, it was in the theater that the film exhibitions occurred more frequently, becoming part of the most usual attractions in those spaces. From 1910 onwards, that attraction became more constant, when the city had two cinemas opened, namely, the *Cinema Brasil* and the *Cinema Elo de Ouro*. In 1911, the *Cinema Alemão* was founded. In the following year, the *Cinema Vitória* was opened, and all of them used the facilities of the Santana Theater for their exhibitions³². Therefore, in that period, when different names of cinemas were mentioned, they did not refer to “physical spaces, but ‘only’ [the] companies”, whose owners bought “a (portable) film projector, and used this equipment to show the films”, as explained by Sacramento³³.

The lively city of Feira de Santana was also attractive for circus companies. The first mention to this type of performance, found in the newspapers of Feira de Santana, occurred in 1882. It advertised the arrival, from “[...] the capital of this province”, after having been in the “court” (Rio de Janeiro), of the equestrian and zoo, which owned “excellent animals”³⁴, but, certainly, similar groups had already been in the city before. According to Machado, in 1877, for example, the *O Monitor* newspaper announced the performance by the “Equestrian Circus: gymnastics company of Bahia” at the capital of the province³⁵, and due to the proximity of the cities, favored by the boats and the railway, this and other circuses surely went through Feira de Santana, even if their presence might not have been recorded. In 1896, the local newspaper *O Propulsor* published the first record of the arrival of a bull fighting show in the city³⁶, which announced that the bull fighting company would be presenting at the local hippodrome³⁷. At the same venue, “Great races were promoted at the local ‘Jockey Club’”, by the Philharmonic *25 de Março*³⁸. The said hippodrome was built in 1889, by a group of local

³² SACRAMENTO, 2016.

³³ Idem, *ibidem*. p. 5.

³⁴ NOTICIÁRIO. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 01, 8 jul. 1882. p. 3.

³⁵ MACHADO, Aline Gomes. *A ginástica como prática educativa na Bahia (1850-1920)*. 2018. Dissertation (Education Master’s Program). Federal University of Bahia. Salvador, 2018. p. 55-56.

³⁶ To know more about bullfighting in Feira de Santana, see Nunes (2021).

³⁷ TOURADAS! *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 6, 20 nov. 1896. p. 4.

³⁸ MELLO; BRITO, 2018. p. 43.

investors³⁹ and the existing records suggest that it worked until the end of the 19th century or beginning of the 20th century, when the area that sheltered it was turned into a football pitch⁴⁰.

These attractions also involved segments of the local microeconomy, mainly owned by the poorest. Those were sellers of sweets, popcorn, and other treats, who were always seen in large numbers in those entertainment areas of the city. They sometimes provoked complaints (mostly motivated by the prejudice against the labor of the lower classes) by the newspapers against their presence. One example is the *Folha do Norte*, which in 1909, complained: “Regarding the sellers of sweets at the theater door, we called the police’s and the theater management’s attention since the noise they make disturbs the listening of the presentations”⁴¹.

This set of aspects of the ludic, art-culture-sports experience in Feira de Santana and the variety of activities promoted, confirms, as previously mentioned, how the size and economic potential of the city made it so attractive to individual performers and groups who worked in the theater, and for this reason deserve a more thorough observation aiming to understand the leisure dynamics in the city.

The First Theater Experiences in Feira de Santana

In “*O teatro na Bahia: da colônia à república 1800-1923*” (The Theatre in Bahia: from the colony to the republic 1800-1923), Silio Boccanera Júnior⁴² regretted that “neither in libraries, nor in public files, we found the necessary data” related to the history of the theater in Bahia. That author referred to the first theater in Bahia, São João Theater, whose documents found in the State Public Archive go back to 1837, even if it is known to have existed since 1812⁴³, which could be confirmed by newspapers of that time⁴⁴.

While the challenges to recover the theater history in the capital of Bahia are concrete, they are even harder when trying to trace the history of theater in the interior of the state. The *Anuário Estatístico da Bahia* (Annual Statistics of Bahia) of 1924, for example, informed that 31 municipalities in

³⁹ ESTATUTOS da sociedade anonyma Jockey Club Feirense. *Diário da Bahia*, Salvador, n. 249, 7 nov. 1889. p. 2.

⁴⁰ SPORT. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 410, 22 dez. 1907. p. 1.

⁴¹ NOTA. *Folha do Norte*, Feira de Santana, n. 9, 13 nov. 1909. p. 2.

⁴² BOCCANERA JÚNIOR, Silio. *O Teatro na Bahia, da Colônia à República (1800-1923)*. Salvador: EDUNEB, 2008.

⁴³ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 51.

⁴⁴ BAHIA. *Idade d'ouro do Brasil*, [s. l.], n. 39, 15 maio 1812. p. 3.

Bahia, approximately 22% of the existing 144 cities in that period, had “Houses of Entertainment”, 55 (38%) did not, while there was no information about this theme for the remaining 58 (40%) cities. Among the facilities listed all over the state, 45 belonged to the theater, cinema, or cine-theater categories, which corresponded to 75% of the total number of entertainment venues, showing the relevance of such spaces where shows, exhibitions, parties, events, etc. were held. Feira de Santana had a little over 2% of those numbers (Graph 1), just like most of the other interior cities mentioned.

According to Faria⁴⁵, in the first half of the 20th century, in addition to houses of entertainment in Salvador, the following cities also had theaters: Santo Amaro, São Pedro Theater, which caught fire in 1910; Valença; Feira de Santana; Juazeiro, and Ubatuba. The city of Caetité, in the late 19th century, also gained this leisure facility⁴⁶. Regarding Feira de Santana, as previously mentioned, there is evidence of the existence of a theater in the early 1840s⁴⁷. However, the earliest reference to a proper theater event was only recorded in 1878, when the *Echo Feirense* newspaper advertised the performance by the company belonging to Mr. Bernardino in “our theater”⁴⁸.

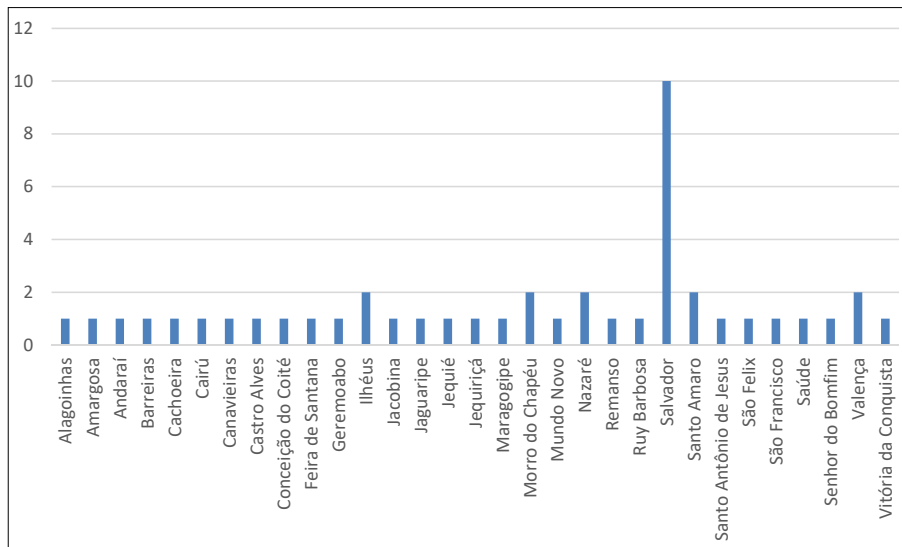
⁴⁵ FARIA, Karina de. *A saga de Celina: palco, picadeiro e rádio na trajetória de uma atriz nordestina*. Curitiba, CVR, 2020, p. 98.

⁴⁶ FERNANDES, Francielly Keyse Martins; REIS, Joseni Pereira Meira. O teatro como modo de educação e participação nas culturas do escrito em Caetité Bahia, no início do Século XX. *Revista Cocar*, Belém, v.15, n. 31, p.1-20, 2021.

⁴⁷ POPPONO, 1968.

⁴⁸ TEATRO. *Echo Feirense*, Feira de Santana, n. 4, 2 jul. 1878. p. 2.

Graph 1 – Number of cinemas, theaters, and cine-theaters per municipality in Bahia in 1924



Source: NUNES, 2021b. p. 108 (adapted)

The nominal identification of that venue as Santana Theater only occurred in a mention by the “Vida Feirense” column (Life in Feira de Santana), which referred to an event (the opening of a show in the venue by the “young guys of the drama congress”) which occurred in 1884.⁴⁹ It seems relevant to emphasize that the column “Chronicles of Feira de Santana” (aka “Life in Feira de Santana”), was produced between 1923 and 1952,⁵⁰ and recorded past events of the local life “in diary format”⁵¹. This specific issue of the column was published in 1940. Therefore, the Santana Theater was only identified indirectly. We do not know, precisely, whether it had already received this name. The data was provided by the memorialist who wrote the column in 1940 ‘calling’ that venue Santana. This means that either that was already the name of the space at the time of the event, or it was a mistake made by the author who wrote years later when the place was already known as Santana

⁴⁹ VIDA Feirense. *Folha do Norte*, Feira de Santana, n. 1607, 27 abr. 1940. p. 1.

⁵⁰ MORAIS, Ana Angélica Vergner de. *Sant’Anna dos Olhos D’Água: resgate da Memória cultural e literária de Feira de Santana (1890-1930)*. Dissertation (Master’s Program). Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, 1998.

⁵¹ CAMPOS, Juliano Mota. *Entre Tinteiros e Palanques: a trajetória intelectual e política de Arnold Ferreira da Silva em Feira de Santana-BA (1909-1930)*. 2016. Dissertation (History Master’s Program). State University of Feira de Santana, Feira de Santana, 2016. p. 27.

Theater. A direct mention of the Santana Theater was recorded in 1892, in the *O Município* newspaper, which presented the theater name as the headline of a dramatic presentation to be held in that venue⁵².

Figure 1: Santana Cine-Theater



Source: SANTOS, 2012. p. 103.

The issue proposed here refers to the doubt whether the existing entertainment venue in 1840 is the one later identified as Santana Theater, let's say in the 1880s. Although there are records that the different references belong to the same venue, it seems reasonable to infer that from some evidence. The first one refers to the physical characteristics of the building. The picture above shows the façade of the building some time in the 1920s as a cine-theater. At the time, the building was already old, and the finishing of the right side of the second floor can be seen to be broken. Another aspect to be observed refers to the architectural style marked by baroque elements (such as the pinnacles, the volutes, the three front doors and the pediment).

⁵² TEATRO Santana. *O Município*. Feira de Santana, n. 4, 21 abr. 1892. p. 2.

Those characteristics are expected to be found in a building dating from the first half of the 19th century, when the theater of Feira de Santana was first mentioned. That period was strongly influenced by that style that dominated in “the second half of the 18th century and early 19th century”⁵³. On the other hand, a building of the early 19th century would probably get to the end of that century in need for conservation measures. This is precisely what was verified in the records of the early 20th century, when the Municipal Council approved a “grant of three *contos de reis* (Brazilian currency at the time) to conclude the renovation work of the Santana Theater, belonging to the Santa Casa de Misericórdia (local charity hospital) [...]”⁵⁴.

Another indication of the time of existence of the Santana theater is the absence of any mention in the documents found to more than one theater in the city. Another relevant piece of data is that the Santana Theater was located on the corner of Rua Direita (currently, Rua Conselheiro Franco) and Rua 24 de Maio⁵⁵, which was known at the time as Travessa do Teatro⁵⁶ (Theater Street) or Beco do Teatro⁵⁷ (Theater Alley). Such urban toponym only makes sense in a context where, as observed by Faggion and Misturini⁵⁸, popular names offer a view of the city from their “landmarks” among other things. And a landmark is only functional if it can be recognized in its singularity. In other words, if there had been different theaters in town, there would not have been a street called the Theater Street. One must also consider that, if there had been another venue where plays were performed in Feira de Santana at that time, it would be reasonable to expect that one of them would be referred to as the “old theater” in some register, or even that the opening of a “new theater”. However, as already explained, records like these were not found. This is confirmed by the publication found in the local newspaper *O Vigilante* in 1885, which reported the “construction” of a theater in Feira de Santana, as follows:

Not long ago, there were many complaints about the insipid, apathic, unbearable life that dragged us down. One of the

⁵³ COSTA, Lúcio. A arquitetura dos jesuítas no Brasil. *ARS*. São Paulo, v. 8, p. 127-195, 2010. p. 157.

⁵⁴ LEI n. 42 de 13 de julho de 1900. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 197, 22 jul. 1900, p. 4.

⁵⁵ LAJEDINHO, Antônio do. *A Feira na década de 30: memórias*. Feira de Santana:[s.n.], 2004.

⁵⁶ INTENDENCIA municipal. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 90, 3 jul. 1898. p. 3.

⁵⁷ FEIRA DE SANTANA. Nomenclatura das ruas e praças da cidade de Feira de Santana. 1886-1902. Arquivo Público Municipal de Feira de Santana. Caixa 379. Feira de Santana, 1902.

⁵⁸ FAGGION, Carmen Maria; MISTURINI, Bruno. Toponímia e memória: nomes e lembranças na cidade. *Linha D'Água*, v. 27, n. 2, p. 141-157, 2014.

causes mentioned for such morbid state in Feira de Santana was the lack of a theater – the true and sumptuous cathedral that the progress and civilization built in all eras for teaching good costumes and moral. Finally, a group of well inspired and brave hearts proposed to put an end to this ruin, and with great sacrifice and disproportionate difficulties – a quite comfortable theater was built to shelter regular performances.⁵⁹

It seems relevant to note that the author wrote as if there was no theater in the city, but only seven years before (in 1878) the *Echo Feirense* newspaper had already advertised performances in “our theater”. Therefore, it seems reasonable to infer that the meaning of such report was in fact that there was no theater operating in that moment, maybe due to the failure of a preceding enterprise. One cannot forget that although there were public theaters in the 19th century⁶⁰, the ones reported here were private businesses at the time, and, therefore, depended on performers to become attractive and make profits. An only season without the performance of theater groups or other novelties in the city, despite its easy access, would be enough to terminate the activities of such business. For this reason, and the evidence points strongly in this direction, the author really refers to the “construction” of a new business, not the process of building the physical structure from scratch since the building already existed. Its restructuring might have involved some renewal and reopening, and at this time as the Santana Theater.

Moreover, that was a new private enterprise, accomplished by “well inspired and brave hearted” individuals, possibly locals that joined resources to buy shares and make the restructuring of the business possible, maybe in a similar process to that of the construction of the hippodrome of the local *Jockey Club*. The shareholders that invested in the business aimed at profits, but they planned to achieve this aim by offering the community a busy nightlife and also contributing to the population contact with something considered culturally civilized. These reports show that the city had at least two private businesses in the theater area throughout the 19th century, even if both might have operated in the same physical space in different moments, as indicated.

Despite having existed for several years, it is difficult to verify accurately the degree of financial success obtained by the Santana Theater and its predecessors, but it was certainly considered a business that was at least

⁵⁹ A NOSSA decadência. *O Vigilante*. Feira de Santana, n. 196, 16 ago. 1885. p. 1-2.

⁶⁰ Como o Teatro São João, na Capital baiana. Cf. BOCANERA JÚNIOR, 2008.

viable. This understanding is reinforced by the news published in 1888, in the *Cidade da Feira* newspaper, asking “the shareholders of the company Santana Theater to offer their shares in benefit of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia*”⁶¹. The *Santa Casa* was a charity institution, created in 1859, which just like others in the country, survived from the voluntary work of their associates⁶², and donations from individuals and other institutions (the charitable events reported in the newspapers of the time were countless⁶³), it also collected fees from the venues it managed such as the municipal cemetery and some buildings⁶⁴. Acquiring a “house of entertainment” (as they were called at the time) with potential to increase their finances was desirable, but such movement would only make sense if the enterprise was really profitable. The theater seems to be one of the successful cases, at least up to the late 19th century, when the *Santa Casa* became the owner of the building, after all the shares had been donated⁶⁵.

Regarding its physical structure, the Santana Cine-Theater, as it was named in 1919⁶⁶, had a wide front door used as the entrance to the place, and two other doors in the front, used as exit, between them was the box office. In the mezzanine, there were three windows in the upper part. However, when the cinema arrived, the two lateral windows were closed and the central one was transformed into loopholes, where the cinematograph was installed. Furbished with chairs, the space destined to the audience was divided close to the stage. On both sides, there were suspended cabins, and the special ones were located in the mezzanine area. All that occupied an area of about 600 to 800 square meters⁶⁷. The space adaptation to receive the cinema equipment shows well the diversity of activities developed at the Santana Theater. As previously mentioned, in its different phases, the theater hosted, in addition to the expected performances of drama groups, singers, musicians, lecturers,

⁶¹ VIDA Feirense. *Folha do Norte*, Feira de Santana, n. 1585, 25 nov. 1939. p. 1.

⁶² Those associated frequently contributed with Monthly values or larger lump sums as “Charitable Partners” and other distinctions.

⁶³ See SILVA, Aldo José Morais. A Beneficência Compulsória nas apresentações artísticas em fins do século XIX e início do XX. *História e Cultura*. v.12, n.1, jul, 2023.

⁶⁴ Ver: CERQUEIRA, João Batista de; SOUZA, Maria Lúcia. *Memorial histórico da Santa Casa de Misericórdia*. 1859-1954. Feira de Santana, Bahia: Print Mídia Editora, 2009; CERQUEIRA, João Batista de. *Assistência e caridade: a história da Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Feira de Santana - 1859-2009*. 2.ed. Feira de Santana, Bahia: Print Mídia Indústria Gráfica e Editora, 2009.

⁶⁵ CERQUEIRA; SOUZA, 2009.

⁶⁶ SACRAMENTO, 2016.

⁶⁷ LAJEDINHO, 2004.

and poets throughout the 19th century. The Santana Cine-Theater operated without competitors for the whole first half of the 20th century. During that period, the building went through two renovations, which could be noticed in the changes occurred in the architectural style of its façade that started to present characteristics of the different phases of *Art déco*⁶⁸, as shown in the pictures below (Figures 2 and 3) .

Figure 2: Façade of the Santana Cine-Theater in the 1930s



Source: <http://www.feiradesantana.ba.gov.br/secom/noticias.asp?idn=19410>

⁶⁸ CORREIA, Telma de Barros. Art déco e indústria: Brasil, décadas de 1930 e 1940. *Anais do Museu Paulista: História e Cultura Material*, v. 16, p. 47-104, 2008.

Figure 3: Façade of the Santana Cine-Theater in the late 1940s



Fonte: <http://www.feiradesantana.ba.gov.br/secom/noticias.asp?idn=19410>

The prevalence of the Santana Theater lasted up to March 1946, when a new business of the same kind, namely, Iris Cine-Theater opened. This fact also made the old theater obsolete since its structure (without restrooms and with an old sound system) no longer attracted the audience, as observed by Santos (2012). This led to its extinction in the early 1950s, after having been a reference for the artistic groups and activities in the city.

Theater groups in Feira de Santana

As previously mentioned, although there are records of theater companies performing in Feira de Santana since 1878, they must have performed there in previous decades, due to the existence of the theatre in that city. In 1885, after being in the capital of the state, the drama group Viera Villas arrived in the city, with their “important moral drama”⁶⁹ That was one of the itinerant companies that performed all over the country and also did it in Feira de Santana. This one, in particular, after having performed in Salvador, advertised that since “Feira de Santana was renowned in other provinces,

⁶⁹ TEATRO: Novidade! Novidade! *Correio de Notícias*. Feira de Santana, n. 16, 25 out. 1885. p. 4.

they could not leave the region without paying it a visit.”⁷⁰. In many Brazilian cities at that time⁷¹, receiving ‘companies that travelled all over the country’ was highly valued in the news because they gave the community the idea of receiving an attraction of national status, sometimes even international, so that when the Villas company was advertised as a group able to “provide us with lovely evenings”⁷², it was also identified as famous in other provinces, and for having in their cast the great Portuguese actress, Roza Manhonça”⁷³.

Several studies point to other events promoted by itinerant companies in Feira de Santana in that period. Sampaio⁷⁴, for example, indicated the presence of these groups in 1892 and 1912. Another presence recorded was “the drama company directed by the Portuguese actress d. Helena Balsemão”, in 1888⁷⁵. Moreover, the city was frequently visited by regional companies such as the “applauded drama company, whose director was the well-known and honored Mr. Hyppolito de Carvalho”⁷⁶, with performances in 1892⁷⁷, appearances in 1897⁷⁸, and exhibitions in 1898⁷⁹ and in 1906⁸⁰.

Below, more detailed information (Table 1) about the operation of theater companies in the city in the period investigated.

⁷⁰ COMPANHIA Dramática. *Correio de Notícias*. Feira de Santana, n. 16, 25 out. 1885. p. 1.

⁷¹ LIMA, Camila Imaculada Silveira. Nos palcos de Fortaleza: o teatro em seus aspectos culturais, sociais e políticos na capital cearense no início do século XX. ENCONTRO REGIONAL DE HISTÓRIA. 20. *Anais*. Franca (SP): ANPUH, 2010. Retrieved from: <<http://legacy.anpuh.org/sp/downloads/CD%20XX%20Encontro/PDF/Autores%20e%20Artigos/Camila%20Imaculada%20Silveira%20Lima.pdf>>. Accessed on: 31st Dec 2022.

⁷² COMPANHIA... 1885. p. 1.

⁷³ TEATRO... 1885. p. 4.

⁷⁴ SAMPAIO, 2000.

⁷⁵ MELLO; BRITTO, 2018, p. 49.

⁷⁶ ESPECTATULO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 67, 23 jan. 1898. p. 2.

⁷⁷ TEATRO... 1892.

⁷⁸ THEATRO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 19, 20 fev. 1897. p. 2; NOTAS Alegres. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 26, 10 abr. 1897. p. 1.

⁷⁹ ESPECTATULO, 1898; THEATRO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n.73, 6 mar. 1898. p. 2.

⁸⁰ THEATRAES. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 328, 13 maio 1906 p. 1.

Table 1 – Theater companies and shows held in Feira de Santana (1878-1922)

Register Nº	Year of Register*	Number of companies	Number of performances
1	1878	1	1
2	1884	1	1
3	1885	3	6
4	1888	1	1
5	1892	2	5
6	1896	1	5
7	1897	1	5
8	1898	1	6
9	1900	3	4
10	1902	1	7
11	1903	1	2
12	1905	1	1
13	1906	2	8
14	1907	2	2
15	1909	2	7
16	1910	1	1
17	1911	1	9
18	1912	3	6
19	1913	2	3
20	1920	1	4
21	1921	1	2
22	1922	2	2
Totais		34	88

*The years when there was no data available were omitted

Source: Newspapers (1878-1922): *Correio de Notícias, O Município, Echo Feirense, O Propulsor, O Vigilante, O Progresso, Folha do Norte.*

As observed, between 1878 and 1922, Feira de Santana had an average of 1.5 companies promoting shows every year. This resulted in an approximate average of 4 annual shows arriving in the city, at least since 1876, when the railway started to work. It seems relevant to mention that such indices indicate

only the minimum number of this activity since they result exclusively from the records found, considering that no records were found related to 22 years out of the 45-year period that mark the beginning and end of this survey. This occurred quite frequently due to the inexistence or the low number of newspapers to be surveyed in those specific years. In other situations, no advertisement or comments were found about the plays shown in the city.

Beyond the lack of register, however, the number of shows was surely higher also due to the fact that only shows considered suitable or edifying (those able to contribute to what was understood as improvement of the society moral conduct) had space in the press. Popular presentations, whose nature or theme were not aligned to the alleged civilizer role of the theater were ignored, or even targeted by condemnatory sentences by the authors. In other places of the country, the local cultural life was also driven by theater companies, from both other places and local, and their performances. In Ouro Preto/MG, for example, in the last three decades of the 19th century, the frequency recorded at least 66 groups, with an average of over two groups a year, and the number of performances was even greater due to the fact that they performed more than once, which was verified by Bibbó and Rosa⁸¹, according to the analysis of payment of fees to the Municipal Council.

However, only professional and itinerant theater groups whose performance was considered suitable were seen, waited for, and valued. But, due to their own nature, those companies could not support the theater activity longer than their brief stay in the city. This type of regular entertainment was provided by local amateur groups in Feira de Santana, within desirable moral standards, and according to the formative role ascribed to the theater at that time.

We could identify six local amateur groups, namely, Grêmio Dramático Familiar (1892), União Caixerai (1900), Grupo Dramático Taborda (1906), Grêmio Dramático Rio Branco (1910), Grêmio Arthur Azevedo (1912), and Grupo Dramático Salles Barbosa⁸² (1920)⁸³. These groups were seen and recognized as “local entities that exercised the theater art”⁸⁴. The excerpt from a chronicle by Eurico Alves Boaventura, modernist poet and chronicist from Feira de Santana, portrays the prestige that those groups had in the city:

⁸¹ BIBBÓ; ROSA, 2022.

⁸² Ou “Sociedade de Arte Teatral Sales Barbosa”, termo usado por um dos fundadores desta agremiação teatral, Elziário Santana. Cf. LIMA, Geraldo. *O teatro em Feira de Santana*. Feira de Santana: [s.n.], 2015, p. 19.

⁸³ SAMPAIO, 2000; SANTOS, 2012.

⁸⁴ FARIA, 2020, p. 95.

Was a theater performance advertised to be held today? A company from Rio? From Bahia? Not! The performing group was that directed by Miguel Santiago. [...] The Taborda's group show ended. And the audience left commenting about the acting of some locals⁸⁵.

This occurred according to Penna-Franca (2016). However, when analyzing amateur groups from the city of Rio de Janeiro, those private societies were more than socialization and solidarity spaces, there were also tensions, disputes, and diverse interests, thus resulting in a high turnover of people who belonged to different social groups. Part of the professional groups, as previously mentioned, and also those of amateurs presented, at least until the early 1920, their action shaped by a didactic perspective. The companies were introduced (and charged for that) as instruments for society's education, following desirable values and principles, frequently inspired by the European culture and standards. For this reason, Figueredo observed:

The stage should [...] reproduce the promotion of virtue, to fulfil its formative role teaching good costumes, good language, literature, and moral, against social dissolution. In the initial decades of the 20th century, dramatists were directly influenced by those principles. Modernity was strictly linked to the European dynamics (mainly of some countries such as France and Italy), and also the United States. The latter influenced the theater with its musicals and comedy. Even if in that period there was the street theater and the vaudeville (known as a fast and popular theater that appeared in the second half of the 19th century). Art was still linked to a cultural hierarchy and, in general, up to that time the theater was seen as a means to elevate society's spirits.⁸⁶

Unsurprisingly, the said Viera Villas company had their performance of “a Virgem do Mosteiro” (The Monastery Virgin), considered a moralizing drama, identified as obtaining so much “acceptance [...] in the civilized world”⁸⁷. As verified, the constant reference to the European origin or link continued giving *status* to the companies, as published by *O Propulsor*, in 1896, when it advertised the performance by an “European Company of Varieties”⁸⁸.

⁸⁵ BOAVENTURA, Eurico Alves. *A Paisagem Urbana e o Homem*. Feira de Santana: UEFS Editora, 2006. p. 89.

⁸⁶ FIGUEREDO, 2019. p. 7.

⁸⁷ COMPANHIA... 1885. p. 1

⁸⁸ TEATRO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 7, 29 nov. 1896.p. 2.

The defense of such values and civilizing references associated with them, was basically promoted by members of the wealthier classes of local society since those were the segments that insisted with the itinerant companies to bring new proposals of shows considered edifying to the community. Moreover, the children of individuals belonging to this social stratum usually took part in the local theater companies, always measured and evaluated by their moralizing action.

Taborda was one of these groups, and the profile of its amateur actors is shown below (Figure 4). It is particularly remarkable, the purpose that the company should be exclusively made of men, and even the character wearing female costume was a man.

Figure 4: Taborda Group



Source: *Folha do Norte* (8 jun. 1912. p. 1).

However, the theater space was not only used for this kind of artistic activity and its different genres (drama, horse/equestrian...), but also for festivals, competitions, lectures, balls, projections, and parties, joining musical, literary, film, scientific, illusionist activities, as shown, for example, in studies by Silva⁸⁹ (2018), and Bibbó and Rosa⁹⁰ when addressing the theater

⁸⁹ SILVA, Igor Maciel da. *Elas se divertem (Barbacena - MG, 1914 a 1931)*. 2018. Dissertation (Leisure Studies Master's Program), Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2018.

⁹⁰ BIBBÓ; ROSA, 2022.

in cities of the state of Minas Gerais, which broadened and diversified not only the mobilized cultural repertoire, but also the participant audience.

The Theater audience

Thinking about the audience of a house of entertainment, its number and profile, has a lot to do with recognizing the type and frequency of performances it willed to present. The audience that attended performances at the Feira de Santana Theater was varied since that was the only theater in town, during most of the period investigated, the shows were specialized in a specific style, which implies to say that its distinct attractions also attracted different audiences. Moreover, the theater was a commercial enterprise that depended on the largest number possible of paying audience to remain in business. Thus, even if there was a discourse associating the theater (and later on the cinema, in Feira de Santana⁹¹), and its program to a formative and civilizer role in society, within certain pattern of moral conduct, which was often conservative and Christian-Catholic, associated with the local elites, there was also a range of attractions aiming to entertain the larger popular segments, contrasting with the activities destined to the wealthier (fewer individuals), either regarding the theme, or the price charged, as a way of social affirmation and distinction.

There was some expectation that the moral theater would reach the masses though. In 1923, for example, in his monograph investigating the theater history in Bahia, Boccanera Júnior called the authorities' attention to the regulation of measures in this sense, mentioning the experience carried out by the *People's Institute* of New York. According to that author, "recognizing the efficient education provided by the theater, [managers of that institute] made a deal with the proprietors of the main theaters in New York, obtaining a 75% reduction in the ticket prices." With the price reduction, there was an extraordinary increase "in the theater audience, calculating that in 1909, a hundred and twenty thousand individuals, who bought cheaper tickets, could attend the performances". According to that author, the same strategy could be tested in Brazil "in favor of the proletariat"⁹². In Feira de Santana, in the 1920s, a similar strategy was adopted in relation to the exhibition of films for the large audience. Santos reported that:

⁹¹ In different cities, Spaces were called theatre, theater-cinema, cine-theater, cinema, etc., which implies the importance of also understanding the intersections between these artistic activities at the local level.

⁹² BOCCANERA JÚNIOR, 2008, p. 31.

On Mondays, there were sessions destined to the popular sectors of the city, in which adventure, police drama, horror, and cowboy films were presented as these were the preferred ones by the audience on that day. Since the 1920s, the Santana Cine-Theater made popular sessions available, so that elite individuals as well as people belonging to the other classes attended the same cinema. However, on Sundays, gala sessions were held, destined to the elite of Feira de Santana⁹³.

However, there was always certain concern with the quality of the audience and the performances shown in the theater. That concern, also noticed in the speech by Boccanera Junior, was related to the fact that, at least since the mid-19th century, the theater in Bahia was seen as “degraded, full of vice, and immorality”, according to Bastos⁹⁴. Such condition resulted from the incorporation of popular performances, such as the *lundu* dance. Regarding this fact, according to Bastos “for those that defended that the theater should have a formative purpose, being the school of moral and costumes, that dance was exciting and erotic, and was disapproved”⁹⁵.

There is no reason to infer that popular performances of this type, or at least that involved such elements, did not have their space in the theater of Feira de Santana, despite the dominant silence about them in the sources. However, it was probably these “reprehensible” activities that resulted in the note issued by the *O Progresso* newspaper, in 1901, which stated that there was little interest in the performances advertised by the J. Paulo theater company that was in town at the time. The writer ascribed this phenomenon to the fact that their performances had the “inconvenience of being rather free plays”, and some of them had already been forbidden by the capital police. Thus, that author concluded that Mr. J. Paulo was “abusing of the Feira de Santana audience”, and requested the police inspector to make sure those plays “were not performed”⁹⁶.

We found no news about the police intervention, and it seems unlikely that the markedly “free” performances of that company were in fact despised as suggested by the journalist. Neither was the behavior of the audience in

⁹³ SANTOS, 2012. p. 125.

⁹⁴ BASTOS, Fernanda Villela. *Quando os intelectuais “roubam a cena”: o Conservatório Dramático da Bahia e sua missão “civilizatória” (1855-1875)*. 2014. Dissertation (History Master’s Program). Federal University of Bahia. Salvador, 2014. p. 11.

⁹⁵ Idem, *ibidem*. loc. cit.

⁹⁶ TEATRO. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 65, 23 mar. 1901. p. 1.

Feira de Santana, regardless of the social class, so impeccable as desired by the local defenders of civility. Some episodes account for this contradiction. In one of them, for example, in 1897, registered by *O Propulsor*, a bookkeeper⁹⁷ launched a firework near the theater, which “injured a young lady who sold sweets there”, and some witnesses had to “remind him that in a place where the best representatives of society, mainly women, reunited, there should be respect”⁹⁸. On another occasion, in 1909, the newspaper *Folha do Norte* recorded the presentation of the show “Luiz, the painter, or, The adulterous woman”, about a female extramarital affair and the fight between the husband and his rival, who was killed by him, while the woman was abandoned to her regret. The journalist, however, emphasized thoroughly: “the whole plot was presented in good language, highlighting the punishment received and the regret the woman suffered for having deviated from the honor path, which she should never had left, no matter how difficult her life could have been”⁹⁹. But, despite all concern with securing the formative and moral role of such a delicate theme, the same issue presented an additional text identified as “Extra notes”:

Fulfilling our mission of being a civilizer and doctrinal press, we regret to inform that the audience started to exceed a little the limits of tolerance, and it required [...] the police inspector to demand order in the venue, which was reinforced firmly. Nevertheless, the audience found it excessive and started protesting.

That writer followed commenting about how the audience should behave in a theater to prevent episodes of “excessive behavior” just like the one reported. However, it seems relevant to observe that the audience reacted negatively to the police officer’s reprimand, indicating some degree of resistance to the ideal model of conduct set at the time. Sacramento pointed out that improper behavior was reported up to the 1920s. At that point, according to that author, Raul Silva, the administrator of the Santana Cine-Theater, relied on the police to control the audience of the theater. Sacramento reported that according to Raul the problem was

⁹⁷Bookkeepers were individuals who worked in the commerce managing businesses, “they were in charge of the finances of the business [...] many times they were as damned in the literature as the business’ owners”. Cf. POPINIGIS, Fabiane. *Proletários de casaca: trabalhadores do comércio carioca, 1850-1911*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2007. p. 35.

⁹⁸TEATRO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 36, 19 jun. 1897. p. 2.

⁹⁹NOTICIÁRIO: Teatro. *Folha do Norte*, Feira de Santana, n. 6, 22 out. 1909. p. 1.

[...] the indecent and revolting way some impolite young men behaved during the performances”, they smoked and were “noisy”, they would whistle and warble to emphasize or ridicule some scenes”. It was not the first time that the *Folha do Norte* newspaper requested the ban of this “type” of individuals from the audience.¹⁰⁰

Other examples could be added to these ones, but altogether they would only reinforce that, as previously said, despite the emphasis on the theater’s formative and transforming role, in practice, in Feira de Santana and other cities¹⁰¹, such space was much more an spontaneous field of leisure, flirting, and relaxation for several segments of society, than a formative site that confirmed the sociability standard desired by those who defended civility. In both, the gala nights reserved for the local elites (who also served to affirm the distinction and social prestige of that audience), and the popular sessions, pure entertainment gave the tone of the social dynamics.

We found no records, in the sources surveyed, which allowed us to assess the numbers related to the frequency to the theater in Feira de Santana. However, we found news reporting performances that had no audience and others that crowded the venue. A possible parameter to measure the audience was the cost of the tickets for different performances. Surely, different prices were charged depending on the attraction. In 1907, a theater company advertised a performance destined to raise funds for one of the local philharmonic groups, and the tickets cost one thousand réis (Brazilian currency at the time)¹⁰². In the same year, some months later, a Japanese theater company that visited the city, advertised their performance with tickets costing ten thousand réis for the cabin, and three thousand réis an individual seat¹⁰³. Such price variation made some programs reserved to the wealthier, but this only confirms that the theater had varied programs for different tastes and socioeconomic profiles.

Regarding ticket prices¹⁰⁴, several possibilities have been explored such as the influence of the duration of the performance or the company’s

¹⁰⁰ SACRAMENTO, 2017. p. 53.

¹⁰¹ See, among others, FERREIRA, 2019; SOARES, Priscila Goncalves. História das práticas corporais e diversão na zona da mata mineira: indícios a partir da imprensa de Cataguases/MG e Juiz de Fora/MG. *LICERE: Revista do Programa de Pós-graduação Interdisciplinar em Estudos do Lazer*, v. 21, n. 4, p. 405-428, 2018.

¹⁰² FILARMÔNICA 25 de Março. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 377, 5 maio 1907. p. 1.

¹⁰³ TEATRO Santana. *O Progresso*, Feira de Santana, n. 197, 22 set. 1907. p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ BIBBÓ; ROSA, 2022.

origin, which means that when they came from other cities/states, the ticket was more expensive. According to Souza, when mentioning the “happy theater”, or the plays that did not follow the moralizing values of the time, the aspect emphasized was not the formative action, but rather the profits made for those promoting them or acting in them, which could also have an impact on the ticket price. However, it seems relevant to ask the following questions: What was the relative cost of such tickets? Were they accessible to the majority of the population? The best way to answer it is to try and establish some comparison. The best parameter found for such comparison was in the “Feira” column, published by the *O Município* newspaper, on 30th June 1908, in which the periodical informed some of the prices charged in the open market that week, among which we highlighted the cost of some basic food items (Chart 1):

Chart 1: Cost of food items in Feira de Santana in October 1908

Food item / reference measure	Cost
Flour (20 liters)	2 to 3 thousand réis (or 100 to 150 réis per liter)
Beans (20 liters)	7 to 8 thousand réis (or 350 to 400 réis per liter)
Sweet corn (20 liters)	3 to 4 thousand réis (or 150 to 200 réis per liter)
Fresh meat (Kg)	500 réis
Jerked beef (Kg)	1 to 1.2 thousand réis
Eggs (dozen)	800 réis

Source: FEIRA. *O Município*, Feira de Santana. n. 6, 30 Jun 1908, p. 3.

Considering these prices, the cheapest theater ticket corresponded to two kilos of fresh meat or ten liters of flour, or about three liters of beans. Water could be considered another item for comparison, the absence of resources to purchase such a basic and essential item was reported in a note informing that the residents were “almost suffering from thirst, because not all the population could pay from a hundred to two hundred réis for a barrel of water in private springs”¹⁰⁵. The amount of \$100 (100 réis) charged for the water, was equivalent to 10% of the cheapest seat in the audience of a theater play, which would usually cost 1\$000 (one thousand-réis). Certainly, for most of the poor population, for whom hunger, and the lack of drinking water was

¹⁰⁵ SITE Pereunt. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 76, p. 1, 27 mar. 1898. p. 1.

always, historically, a possibility against which they had to fight every day, the inclusion of any superfluous item was impossible. However, there is evidence that, at least the cheapest performances were, in fact, possible consumer items even for the underprivileged, even if only sporadically.

This perception is reinforced if we consider the data available about the workers' earnings at the time. At the end of the 19th century, the local press published that the workers from the storehouses of the city received a daily wage between four and five thousand réis, which was considered very little. The *O Propulsor* newspaper informed about another category: "the poor employees of the central company receive the 1\$500 rs. (local currency) [...] while these unhappy workers have to work 12 hours a day, and many times at night"¹⁰⁶. This means that considering the monthly average of 22 workdays, salaries varied, in 1898, from thirty-three thousand to a hundred and ten thousand réis per month. For this group, the cheapest ticket price in 1907 would be equivalent to something between 0.9% and 3%, respectively, of their salaries, even if no adjustment was made to their earnings in the period of nine years that separate the data. If such salary conditions were verified among the commerce workers, which required basic education regarding literacy, and, as previously mentioned, around 80% of the population was illiterate between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, we inferred that not more than 20% of the population in Feira de Santana had resources to make the frequency to the theater a habit. However, it might be relevant to remember that, even the underprivileged could go to the theater less frequently, and that Feira de Santana was always a regional commercial center that attracted people from neighboring cities, and those certainly took part in the audience of the Feira de Santana theater.

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¹⁰⁶ DESENCARRILHAMENTO. *O Propulsor*, Feira de Santana, n. 72, 27 fev. 1898. p. 2.

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