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MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

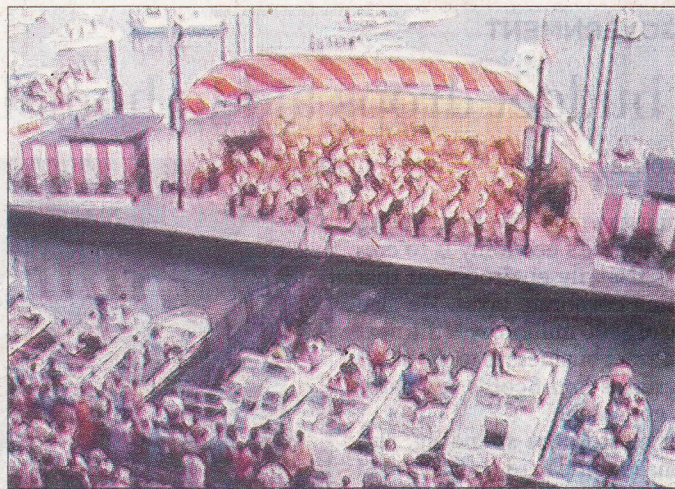
■ Proponents of rebuilding the Miami Marine Stadium's floating stage have launched a competition for its new design.

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Soon after Miami Marine Stadium opened, city officials realized boat races alone would not bring in enough money. So for \$62,000 they bought an old oil barge, moored it to the grandstand, and for the next 25 years the improvised floating stage hosted some of the greatest — and some of the craziest — musical shows Miami would ever see.

Today, the barge on which stars from Elvis to Fela performed rests on the bottom of the stadium basin, half sunk, near the foot of the vandalized and weather-beaten grandstand. But a group that has been slowly and patiently devising a plan to resuscitate the long-closed stadium now wants musical history to repeat itself.

It has launched an interna-



MIAMI HERALD FILE

BACK IN THE DAY: Crowds watch a performance. Today the barge rests on the floor of the stadium basin.

tional design competition for a new floating stage that backers hope will match the stadium's much-admired architectural daring. And the websites of Friends of Miami Marine Stadium and DawnTown, the group running the competition, have been drawing thousands of hits from around the world, a reflection of the stadium's increasing international profile.

"I'm really thrilled," said Don Worth, co-founder of the Friends organization. "This spectacular, one-of-a-kind building deserves a spectacular, one-of-a-kind stage. I can't wait to see what comes up."

The winning design, to be selected by a heavyweight jury that includes Marine Stadium architect Hilario Candela

• TURN TO STAGE, 2B

MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

Stage design is in your hands

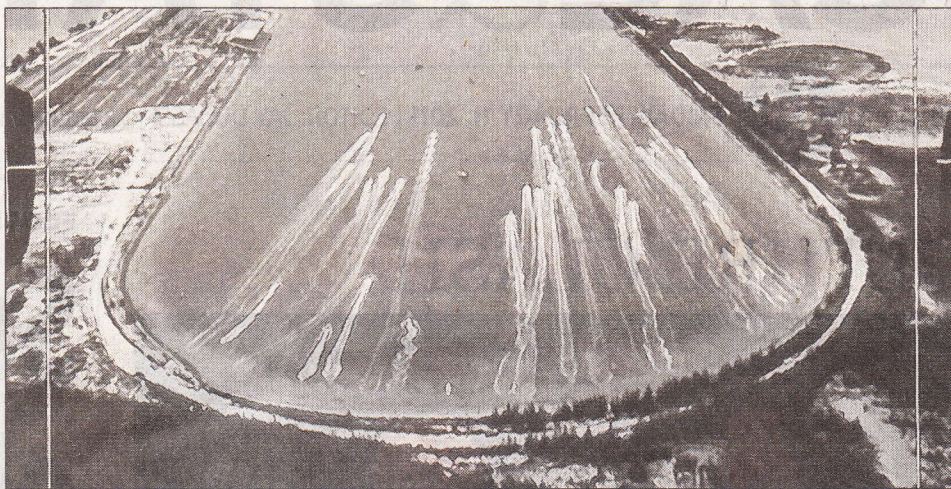
• STAGE, FROM 1B

and artist Michele Oka Doner, will be announced in early May. The deadline for submissions to be received by DawnTown is April 15.

Such design competitions don't always result in the winning entry actually getting built. But they can provide templates and concepts, and can generate considerable buzz - something Marine Stadium supporters have proven adept at, turning what once seemed like a lost cause into an international cause célèbre among fans of modern architecture.

The city closed the stadium, which had long been losing money, after it was damaged by Hurricane Andrew in 1992, and the structure was eventually earmarked for destruction. But the Friends group rallied broad support for saving it from design mavens who praised the facility as a dazzling feat of design and engineering without equal in the world, as well as from ordinary Miamians who fondly recalled the boat races, Easter sunrise services and concerts at the stadium.

And what concerts: Spanning the gamut from classical to pop and rock 'n' roll, the stadium shows often turned into rollicking, par-



MIAMI HERALD FILE

POPULAR EVENTS: Miami Marine Stadium foams with wakes of racing outboard motorboats. Weekend races were part of the finale of Orange Bowl festivities.

ticipatory spectacles, with concertgoers bobbing in the water under the stars aboard boats, rafts and anything else that floated. Jimmy Buffett, who performed frequently at the stadium, once dove off the barge mid-concert to join his fans in the water.

Citing its architectural distinction as well as its cultural history, the city's historic preservation board named the stadium a protected landmark, and Mayor Tomás Regalado made its renovation a key goal of his administration after assuming office in 2009.

Since then, engineering

studies have shown the structure to be fundamentally sound, although a study of the grandstand support pilings sunk into the bay bottom is only just now getting under way. A renovation budget has not been developed, though it's expected to run well into the millions of dollars. Stadium supporters have already raised several million in private and government grants and are quietly working on a plan to eventually reopen the stadium on a financially sound footing.

The competition, co-sponsored by the Miami chapter of the American In-

stitute of Architects and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has few parameters, but it requires that the new stage be mobile so it can be stored and also serve waterfront locations such as Vizcaya or downtown Miami.

Anyone can submit an entry for the competition, and there is no fee, said DawnTown Director Joachim Perez, whose group has run architecture competitions to dress up drab pieces of downtown Miami infrastructure like the Biscayne Boulevard sewage pump station and, most recently, the old Watson Island sea-

plane terminal.

The stadium competition has been generating more hits than any of its previous efforts, he said.

Such floating stages are relatively rare, Worth said, but one model is the modernist concert barge designed by famed 20th century architect Louis Kahn, which still sails around the world. Another: a floating soccer field in Singapore.

"We want something that really enhances the type and number of events that can be held there," Worth said. "You may say it's fanciful. But this is a place where creativity can play a vital role."

Design contest

• **How to enter:** Go to downtown.org/competition/

• **Cash prizes:** First place, \$5,000; second, \$2,500; third, \$1,000; fourth, \$500; fifth, \$250. Winning entries will be considered in renovation plans.

• **Deadlines:** Register by April 11; submit all materials by April 15.

• **Awards ceremony:** May 6