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# Radio City Music Hall

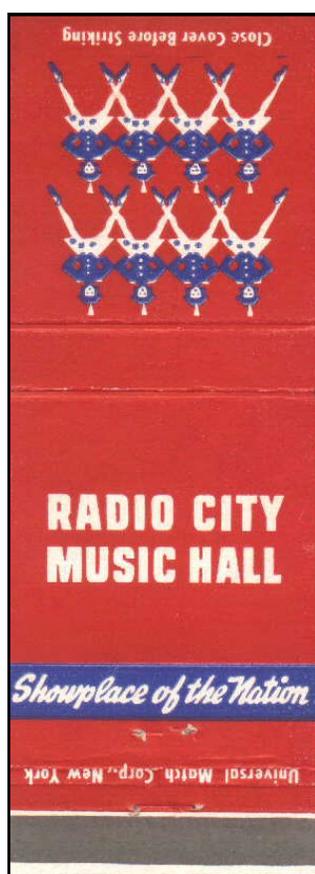
by  
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When the stock market crashed in 1929, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. held a \$91 million, 24-year lease on a piece of midtown Manhattan property properly known as "the speakeasy belt." Plans to gentrify the neighborhood by building a new Metropolitan Opera House on the site were dashed by the failing economy and the business outlook was dim. Nevertheless, Rockefeller made a bold decision that would leave a lasting impact on the city's architectural and cultural landscape. He decided to build an entire complex of buildings on the property—buildings so superior that they would attract commercial tenants even in a depressed city flooded with vacant rental space.

Together Rockefeller, RCA and S.L. "Roxy" Rothafel realized a fantastic dream—a theatre unlike any in the world, and the first completed project within the complex that RCA head David Sarnoff dubbed "Radio City." Radio City Music Hall was to be a palace for the people. A place of beauty offering high-quality entertainment at prices ordinary people could afford. It was intended to entertain and amuse, but also to elevate and inspire.

More than 300 million people have come to the Music Hall to enjoy stage shows, movies, concerts and special events. There's no place like it to see a show or stage a show. Everything about it is larger than life. Radio City Music Hall is the largest indoor theatre in the world. Its marquee is a full city-block long. Its auditorium measures 160 feet from back to stage and the ceiling reaches a height of 84 feet. The walls and ceiling are formed by a series of sweeping arches that define a splendid and immense curving space. Choral staircases rise up the sides toward the back wall. Actors can enter there to bring live action right into the house. There are no columns to obstruct views. Three shallow mezzanines provide comfortable seating without looming over the rear orchestra section below. The result is that every seat in Radio City Music Hall is a good seat.

The Great Stage is framed by a huge proscenium arch that measures 60 feet high and 100 feet wide. The stage is considered by technical experts to be the most



perfectly equipped in the world. It is comprised of three sections mounted on hydraulic-powered elevators. They make it possible to create dynamic sets and achieve spectacular effects in staging. A fourth elevator raises and lowers the entire orchestra. Within the perimeter of the elevators is a turntable that can be used for quick scene changes and special stage effects.

The shimmering gold stage curtain is the largest in the world. For more than sixty-five years audiences have thrilled to the sound of the "Mighty Wurlitzer" organ, which was built especially for the theatre. Its pipes, which range in size from a few inches to 32 feet, are housed in eleven separate rooms. The Hall contains more than 25,000 lights and features four-color stage lighting. And what's a show without special effects? Original mechanisms still in use today make it possible to send up fountains of water and bring down torrents of rain. Fog and clouds are created by a mechanical system that draws steam directly from a Con Edison generating plant nearby.

Radio City quickly became the favorite first-run theatre for moviemakers and moviegoers alike. Just two weeks after its gala opening, Radio City Music Hall premiered its first film, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*. Before long, a first showing at the Music Hall virtually guaranteed a successful run in the theatres around the country. Radio City's huge screen and widely spaced seats make it the ideal movie house. Since 1933 more than 700 movies have opened here. They include the original *King Kong*; *National Velvet*, the film that secured Elizabeth Taylor's hold on the silver screen; *White Christmas*; *Mame*; *Breakfast at Tiffany's*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, starring former Radio City usher, Gregory Peck; *Mary Poppins*; *101 Dalmatians*; and *The Lion King*. In the early years, a standard movie run lasted one week. Later, extended runs of five or six weeks became common. Cary Grant, Ginger Rogers, and Katharine Hepburn have taken Radio City box office prizes for the number of films screened here. All three had more than 22 of their films shown at the Hall. The popular movie-and-stage-show format remained a Radio City signature until 1979, when the mass showcasing of new films called for a new focus. Today, the Music Hall still premieres selected films, but is best known as the country's leading hall for popular concerts, stage shows, special attractions and media events.

Radio City Music Hall has been a magnet for celebrities since that first night more than six decades ago. Stars shine here. It's the ultimate destination for the brightest and the best. Future stars, including the budding new comedian, Ray Bolger, and Metropolitan Opera star-to-be, Jan Peerce, shone here first. Many others came to bask in stardom already won. During the golden years of the silver screen, film celebrities rarely missed an opportunity to make an appearance on opening day. It wasn't unusual to find the likes of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Merle Oberman, Mary Pickford, Barbara Stanwyck, Jimmy Stewart, Robert Taylor, Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell stopping by to greet fans.

For decades, America's most popular entertainers have thrilled audiences here. Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Linda Ronstadt, Bill Cosby, Liberace, Sammy Davis, Jr., Ann Margaret, Johnny Mathis, John Denver, The Count Basie Orchestra, Itzhak Perlman, Jose Carreras, Ray Charles and BB King have all appeared on the Great Stage. Today, the Music Hall continues to attract celebrities from the worlds of entertainment, sports, the media and national life. Shows starring Bette Midler, Stevie Wonder and Riverdance pack the house. Our reopening gala features Tony Bennett, Billy Crystal, The Eurythmics, Barry Manilow, Liza Minnelli, Sting, 98 Degrees, The Radio City Rockettes...and many others. Celine Dion stars in the first solo concert following the reopening. In the past decade, Radio City has hosted the Grammy's and the Tony's, The MTV Video Music Awards and the ESPY Awards. It has been the site for TIME Magazine's celebration of its 75th year, complete with a visit from the President, and a host of benefit events. It has remained a magical place for people in the spotlight. *[from Radio City Music Hall site]*