

NEW YORK CHAPTER HOSTS

A.T.O.E.'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

The New York Chapter was host to nearly 700 members and guests at a tenth anniversary meeting on February 7, 1965, held at Radio City Music Hall, the largest and most famous theatre in the world; a theatre which evokes more wonder and admiration than any other theatrical enterprise of modern times.

Buses started arriving shortly after 7:30 A.M., the first carrying 38 loyal A.T.O.E.s from the Potomac Valley Chapter who left Alexandria, Virginia, at 1:30 in the morning. Ninety-six arrived in two buses from the Connecticut Valley Chapter. The St. Louis delegation arrived by private plane. By 8:15 the line at the stage door was two-deep around the corner.

At 9:00, Howard A. Day, New York Chapter Chairman, stepped out onto the immense stage, greeted the guests, and the program opened. Those who took their turn at the console were Dr. Milton Page, organist one time of the Music Hall; Carl Weiss of Loew's Pitkin and Loew's Kings Theatres in Brooklyn; Bob Van Camp, musical director of Station WSB in Atlanta and organist at the Atlanta Fox; Ed Weimer, who has had a leading role in entertaining both the New York and Delaware Valley Chapters for many years; Dick Smith, a talented lad of 19 who has most recently been heard on the Stanton-Kimball in Baltimore; and Bill Floyd, last regular organist at the New York Paramount Theatre.

During a brief intermission, Carl Norvell, National A.A.T.O.E. President, spoke to the group.



Carl Norvell, National President, greeting the guests. Howard A. Day, New York Chapter Chairman, and Allen W. Rossiter, Sec./Treas. in background. (Courtesy of William M. Gage)

Exterior of Radio City Music Hall, New York.



Mr. John Jackson, Director of Stage Operation at the Music Hall, told of the many complexities of running the theatre. It is understood that the theatre will have sold its 200 millionth ticket sometime this month. Mr. Jackson made all the arrangements for the meeting and was presented an honorary membership in both the New York Chapter and National at this time.

Ben Hall gave a wonderful history of the theatre since its inception and introduced a taped greeting by Dick Simon-ton. Dick, one of the founders and first National President, told of the growth of the A.A.T.O.E. from the round-robin letter stage to the position the organization is in today.

No sooner was the console wheeled into its niche in the wall, when it was out again with regular Radio City Music Hall organist, Ray Bohr. This was a 25 minute concert preceding the overture for the first program which all A.T.O.E. members had been invited to attend.

At 1:10 P.M., after the lavish stage spectacular, a limited number of members were permitted to go to the seventh floor above the stage to the Plaza Sound Studios to hear and play the 3m/13r Plaza Wurlitzer. Radio City Music Hall, organist, Jack Ward, opened this part of the program. Fourteen members of New York, Delaware Valley, Potomac Valley, St. Louis, and Connecticut Valley Chapters took their turns at this famous organ.



Ben M. Hall (left) and John Henry Jackson, Director of Stage Operations of Radio City Music Hall. Taken Backstage. (Courtesy of William M. Gage)

The following is taken from a text prepared by Ben M. Hall and delivered at Radio City Music Hall on February 7, 1965 to the New York Chapter A.A.T.O.E. tenth anniversary meeting.

The Music Hall opened December 27th, 1932. S. L. Rothafel, the famous Roxy, had joined Rockefeller Center to operate the theatre as well as the Music Hall's smaller sister theatre, the late-lamented Center Theatre which was known in those days as the RKO Roxy. The Music Hall was to be the capstone of Roxy's fabulous career, and Roxy shot the works. The opening show ran for more than four hours and included everybody in show business from Martha Graham to Weber & Fields. There was no movie--just spectacle piled upon spectacle. At the twin consoles of the World's Mightiest Wurlitzer were Dr. C.A.J. Parmentier (who holds the distinction of also having opened the Roxy Theatre in 1927) and none other than Dick Leibert, who is still going strong as Music Hall first organist. Spelling Parmentier and Leibert was Betty Gould, one of the few women to play at the Music Hall.

Unfortunately, the all-the-show-on-the-stage policy was just too much for the public, and two weeks later the Music Hall switched to a movies and stage policy, with a film called "The Bitter Tea of General Yen" with Barbara Stanwyck. It turned out to be the Bitter Tea of General Roxy as well; he went to the hospital for a major operation soon after the theatre opened, and shortly thereafter retired from the Radio City staff. But many of the brilliant battalion of specialists that had come with him from the Roxy Theatre remained, and have been guiding the Music Hall's destiny ever since. Among them are Leon Leonidoff, the Senior Producer; Russell Market, Director of the Rockettes (he launched them first around 1925 at the Missouri Theatre in St. Louis calling them the Missouri Rockets; later they became the famous Roxy Theatre Rockettes, and they are still kicking, 36 strong, the most amazing precision dance team in the world.) James Stewart Morcom, the brilliant set designer; Eugene Braun, master of lighting effects; and a team of wardrobe mistresses, makeup experts and technicians. Today they are all joining forces under the leadership of John Henry Jackson, Director of Stage Operations, to turn out the magnificent shows that are famous around the world. There is also a pretty blonde lady; Nurse Anne Beckerle, who had dispensed aspirin, mercurochrome and Band-Aids at the Roxy Hospital in 1927 and who is still Chief Angel of Mercy at the Music Hall.

The majestic, twin-consoled 58 ranker is unique, and much has been written about it. When you try to tell a member of the uninformed public what a theatre organ is, the best bet is to say, "You know, like at the Radio City Music Hall." For most of them--the Music Hall is THE Theatre organ. Thanks to the tender loving care of Louis Ferrara, it stays in top shape always. Thanks to Dick Leibert, Jack Ward, and Ray Bohr, this Wurlitzer has more mileage on it

than any other organ in the country. Some of the other organists who have played it are, in addition to Cass Parmentier, Desioir D'Antalfy, Cecil Bentz, Milton Page, Joseph Surace, Edward Bebeko (who played under the nom-de-console of Eddie Baker,) and Mildred Alexander.

Last fall, for one extraordinary engagement, the Music Hall listed five staff organists; Leibert, Ashley Miller, Ray Bohr, Jack Ward and John Detroy, who thundered out "The Last Chord" on both consoles. Wow!

Long may its Wurlitzer roar!



Ed Weimer waiting his turn at the console. From left to right: Alfred Buttler, on the organ maintenance staff of the Music Hall; Gregg Anderson; John H. Jackson (partially hidden); Ed Weimer; Dick Haffer, head of the organ crew at the Stanton Theatre in Baltimore; Allen W. Rossiter, New York Chapter Sec./Treas. with back to camera. (Courtesy of William M. Gage)



Members looking over the console. (Courtesy of William M. Gage)



The delegation from the St. Louis Chapter arrived at the Radio City Music Hall bash via private plane. From left to right: Fred Pillsbury, Paul Coates, Alvin Baum, Virgil Söderquist, and Terry Clark, Jr.