

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL



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A Review by *Apprentice* by Ben M. Hall,
author of *The Best Remaining Seat—
The Story of the Golden Age of the Music Palace*

The "Showplace of the Nation" is its official title, but to me, and to more than six million other people who visit it each year, Radio City Music Hall is the showplace of the world. Five times a day its 6,200 seats are filled with visitors from east of here and west of everywhere. Stand in line with the throngs waiting patiently to buy tickets for one of the great holiday shows, and you might hear Russian spoken behind you and Texan spoken just ahead. And of course the queues are packed with New Yorkers, who take a home-town pride in the place.

A visit to the Music Hall is far more than just "going to the movies;" it is an experience—a happening, if you will—that involves music by a 55-piece symphony orchestra and the largest theatre organ in the world; the joyful, chattering unity of the Rockettes, whose 72 skirts tap as one; the elegant patterns of America's only full-time resident ballet company; spectacular scenic effects on one of the largest and most perfectly equipped stages ever constructed; motion pictures carefully selected from the best the studios have to offer and shown on a gigantic screen 70 feet wide; and courteous attention from a battalion of perfectly trained ushers. Combine all this with the thrill of exploring the great theatre itself, and you have a total adventure in entertainment that is unique.

I'll never forget my first visit to the Music Hall. My parents had taken me to New York in the mid-Thirties, about the time the "Showplace of the Nation" was four years old and I was fourteen. I remember standing in line (each step forward was a minor victory!) beneath the huge circular marquee and enamel plaques representing song, drama and dance that loom over the 50th Street marquee of the theatre. Already that day we had taken a tour of Rockefeller Center, of which the Music Hall is an integral part, and already I was goggle-eyed from the sights of the Observation Roof, the NBC studios (was that really Rudy Vallee in the elevator?), the fountains, the shop-lined labyrinth underground. But I was fidgeting with anticipation by the time we reached one of the big bronze box offices and Dad bought the tickets.

The Grand Foyer stopped me dead in my tracks. There was the biggest and most beautiful room I had ever seen. Six stories high, a city block long, it was lit by enormous crystal chandeliers whose reflections were multiplied to infinity in the gold mirrors that paneled the walls. At one end, a staircase worthy of a giant's castle swooped upward past a mural by Ezra Winter illustrating the legend of *The Author of Life*. Another broad flight—the thick carpeting made me feel as if I were floating—stretched beneath to the dimly-lit lounge below.

The show was about to begin. Through the gleaming stainless steel doors between the foyer and the auditorium I could feel, more than hear, the seismographical rumblings of the organ—a sound filled with the promise of excitement and wonder. Close inside, I knew that I had somehow stumbled on the end of the rainbow. A golden glow filtered over everything from lights concealed in arch after arch curving high overhead, giving a feeling of pure, soaring space unequalled by any other auditorium in creation. A spotlight shined down on the



