

The Music Hall

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The *Jumbo Auditorium* is alive and well and scattered across the United States. In particular, the jumbo auditorium forms an almost definitive component of university campus ecology. Big daddy of the species, however, is New York's 1932 *Radio City Music Hall* and as a piece of architecture it is something very very special indeed. It is a cathedral (no, *The Cathedral*) of Art Deco. A celebration of elegant restraint in movie palace construction. A hall for the big entertainment statement.

A statement has to be big to leap the 200 odd feet to the back row of this 6,000 seat hall. A leap that would be defeated if the walls were encrusted with an excess of twentieth-century hollywood baroque. But the simplicity of the auditorium is deceptive. The classical pitfalls in building a high-capacity pure-sightline house have been avoided. The balconies are shallow to avoid the illusion of isolation that is induced in an audience seated under any considerable overhang. The curves and contours of the ceiling overcome the bareness of the side walls and the choral staircases, which substitute for a possible shallow box layer, allow the formation of a controllable link between audience and performer. This link is further enhanced, in a fluid but controlled way, by the possibility of painting the entire auditorium ceiling curves with coloured light through to the auditorium.

The seating capacities are:

Orchestra	3,410
1st Mezzanine	944
2nd Mezzanine	841
3rd Mezzanine	687
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	5,882

That a *shallow* balcony can seat 944 – or even 687 – is surely an indication of the auditorium width!

To assemble such an audience requires an expanse of circulation space and the foyers are correspondingly huge – and simple. They are the very epitome of Art Deco: from the restrained grandeur of the Grand Foyer to the understated sophistication of the Grand Lounge and the elegant intimacy of the powder rooms – every 'ladies' and 'gents' room a treasure house of art deco furniture.

By contrast the entrance lobby and box-office area is small and functional. As well as making for efficient audience processing – and something like 85% of the seats are unreserved – the restricted lobby enhances



the scale of the Grand Foyer. Emerging from the ticketing tunnel into the Foyer acreage immediately gives one a sense of having got an instant return for one's money.

ROXY

Opened in 1932 and saved from destruction and redevelopment in 1978 by designation as a *Landmark*, the Music Hall was the concept

of S.L. 'Roxy' Rothafel, by general consent the master movie exhibitor of all time. Although representing the climax of cinema architecture, the Music Hall was intended, not as a showplace for films, but as a home for full length Vaudeville Spectaculars. The audience rejected this idea and in less than three weeks Radio City had adopted the formula which was to last for 46 years . . . continuous daily performances of a major feature film alternating with a 40-50 minute live spectacular. (4 shows per day).