

IF THIS HALL COULD TALK:

CARNEGIE HALL'S ROCK T-SHIRT

Gino Francesconi: You had kids, young people coming to the Hall for the first time.

RECORDING OF "AMERICAN PIE," PERFORMED BY DON HENLY.

Gino Francesconi: I mean, there were times where people would show up late, and the house lights were down, and people would sit in the wrong seats, and they were smoking cigarettes and pot.

And we would spend most of our time telling people to get back to their right seats or to put out the cigarettes, you know.

Alan Light: I think you have to start from what it is that Carnegie Hall represents...And how it is known, and how it is truly known worldwide as, you know, this premier, prestige center for music, for serious music and, you know, what that—what that represents.

Gino Francesconi: It was so cool when audience members were coming in, and you would—and they would say, "Wow, man, this is fricking Carnegie Hall, you know." And they were ready to party, and we were ready to show them their seats, and say, "Sit down and be quiet," you know? And so, I mean, that's what we were trained, and we weren't trained to tell people to put out their cigarettes, get back to your right seat. I mean, who comes to a concert and doesn't sit in the right seat?

Jessica Vosk: *Welcome to If This Hall Could Talk, a podcast from Carnegie Hall. I am your host, Jessica Vosk and in this series we'll look at the legendary and sometimes quirky history of the Hall. From momentous occasions to the eclectic array of world-renowned artists that have taken to the Hall's stages, in each episode, we'll explore unique items from our archives collection and travel back in time to relive incredible moments that have shaped the culture we live in today. In this episode, Rock and Roll at the Hall.*

Alan Light: I mean the, you know, "how do you get to Carnegie Hall?" joke is just part of the vocabulary, and it represents that sort of pinnacle of achievement and of sophistication and accomplishment. And I think that transcends just the classical music audience. Even if you don't know the non-classical history of the space, it has that aura around the world.

Gino Francesconi: I mean, imagine the staff at Carnegie Hall doing 300 shows a year, and classical and pop, and then you had meetings and religious events, and sandwiched in between was a new experience with these rock concerts, I just thought it was Carnegie Hall at its finest, you know.

Jessica Vosk: *When we think Carnegie Hall, we often think classical, the ultimate venue for more traditional music. But as we have been uncovering in this series, The Hall was much more than that. There were political events, fundraisers, legendary stand up comedy and, an era that cannot be forgotten, Rock and Roll. From 1964-1974, Carnegie Hall hosted hundreds of rock concerts. One of the first rock bands to play at Carnegie Hall was The Beatles, their first concert in NYC.*

RECORDING OF "ALL MY LOVING," PERFORMED BY THE BEATLES.

To have a band like the Beatles be the first set the bar.

Music critic, Alan Light.

Alan Light: I was just reading some of the coverage of, at the time, of The Beatles' first visit to the US, when they came to play *The Ed Sullivan Show*. And Sid Bernstein, a talent manager got The Beatles into Carnegie Hall for that show that they played in between the two *Ed Sullivan* performances, said, you know, he approached Brian Epstein, a promoter and booking agent, about putting on a show and, and Brian wasn't really interested, until he said, "Well, what if we do it at Carnegie Hall?"

Even at that moment, he was, you know, a little bit wary, a little bit uncertain about what to do in terms of presenting The Beatles for the first time in the United States. But when presented with the option of Carnegie Hall, for Brian Epstein, who came through the British theater, and was theatrically trained and everything else, you know, that was obviously the perfect solution. All of that was the weight and the magnitude that the venue carried with it. And that remains today.

Lee Loughnane: The Beatles came in and played, I think, one show, or one in the afternoon and one in the evening, and they did like 15-minute sets back then. They didn't play long engagements. [laughs] When they went—when they were playing live, they'd play like five or six songs, and they were done.

Jessica Vosk: *Lee Loughnane, founding member of the band, Chicago.*

Lee Loughnane: We played six days, we played eight shows within the six days, and it became *Chicago Live at Carnegie Hall*, our fourth album, and it was a compilation back then of like the best of what we did during the eight shows.

Alan Light: In the early '70s, when you talk about groups like Chicago bringing horn sections and jazz arrangements, when you talk about Emerson, Lake & Palmer doing this, you know, progressive rock that was bringing this classical element and this more sort of virtuosic element in their playing, then certainly, you know, for them to go on the best-known, the premier presenter of classical music - of traditional music in the country, you know, that's the statement that says we've arrived to do this kind of stuff and, you know, and be taken seriously, and be able to appear at that sort of altitude where, you know, that's the presentation that we've earned.

Gino Francesconi: I made a list. I couldn't remember them all in my head.

RECORDING OF "WHO DO YOU LOVE," PERFORMED BY BO DIDDLEY.

Jessica Vosk: *Gino Francesconi founded the archive at Carnegie Hall. At the time of the rock concerts, however, he was an usher. And with all the concerts at the Hall, he needed to remind himself of some of the people who graced the stage at that time.*

Gino Francesconi: Listen to this, going down: Savoy Brown; Quicksilver Messenger; Beach Boys; Crosby & Nash; and then Crosby, Nash & Stills; The Byrds; Led Zeppelin; The Rascals; Simon & Garfunkel; Steppenwolf; Donovan; Joni Mitchell; David Bowie; Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks; Elton John; The 5th Dimension; Neil Young; America; Mothers of Invention; Don McLean—oh my god, what a concert that was; Chicago, they were there for a week; The Doobie Brothers; The Allman Brothers; Seals and Crofts; The Doors.

Alan Light: Clearly that era that, you know, this clearly aligns with new directions that the music was taking, and new consideration that rock and roll was being given, you know, certainly through the sort of emergence of the album rock era in the late '60s, and what The Beatles, The Stones, Dylan, you know, that wave of sort of rock's greatest generation, what it is that they achieved in terms of being critically assessed in a different way, in terms of being presented and promoted in a different way.

Jessica Vosk: *One of the most legendary presenters and promoters of that time was the inimitable Ron Delsener. Most New Yorkers of a certain age have heard the line, "Ron Delsener presents". And it's true, he has promoted hundreds, if not thousands of acts, over his long career. And he certainly was behind many of the acts at Carnegie.*

Ron Delsener: I was kind of a snob because I love beautiful places, and to this day, whether it be clothes, cars, halls, paintings. I collect art. When you walk in, you go, wow. And these kids were teenagers...

Lee Loughnane: Basically we were young kids with a lot of energy...at that age when they come in.

Ron Delsener: They know they can't smoke. They can't do this. But they're awed by the internal façade—not the façade—the façade and the internal hall itself. Number one, they've heard of it. And then when they see it lit the way it is, in the gold and red, they calm down. They're not running around, most of the times. They're not throwing spitballs at each other. [laughs] They're not putting gum on the—on the—on the rug.

So they would stop and go chill. This is a different place.

RECORDING OF "THE WEIGHT," PERFORMED BY THE BAND.

Alan Light: It is a landmark in a career to say that you're, you know, rising to a stage like that. And certainly for rock and roll in the late '60s, early '70s, when it is coming of

age, getting taken more seriously, expanding the sort of esthetic ambitions, you know, nothing would secure that seal of approval more than an appearance at Carnegie Hall would.

Ron Delsener: It was a big thing for somebody to go to Carnegie Hall. When I saw that rock and roll should be elevated because some of this stuff was great, no one was dropping their pants, urinating on the stage, which I've seen happen. Hello? And it was a lady by the way; not a man. So when I get asked that, I thought, you know, I want to play them at Carnegie Hall.

The acoustics are great for it. Just the aura of it is great.

Jessica Vosk: *When Chicago first played at the Hall, it was before some of their biggest hits, like If You Leave Me Now. But they were already well known, and unique.*

Lee Loughnane: We were changing our set every night, and it would—it would vary as to what position in the set various songs would be in, and we were just sort of rolling the bones.

Ron Delsener: To get four days in a row or five days in a row was very hard to get at Carnegie Hall now.

Lee Loughnane: You can't get away with that kind of stuff now because there's so much production involved with every show, with the lights, and sound, and just movement on stage. And there's just so much stuff.

RECORDING OF "SPIRIT IN THE SKY," PERFORMED BY NORMAN GREENBAUM.

Alan Light: A Carnegie Hall appearance is a signature moment for someone like that to say, you know, this is the band who brought rock and roll to Carnegie Hall.

Jessica Vosk: *The list of rock stars that played the Hall reads like a who's who of the era. Truly the best of the best. People we listen to today, that have stood the test of time. And the Hall made some adjustments to meet the needs of both the audience and the Hall itself.*

Gino Francesconi: Somebody had the idea that if the staff, if the ushering crew was dressed like the patrons, they would respect them more, and maybe pay attention, you know? And so they, on the quick, designed these T-shirts.

Jessica Vosk: *And this is what we have as part of the archive. The T-Shirt. A wearable object that represents a dynamic era. The T-Shirt was Carnegie Red (of course), but the short sleeves were white, and the words 'Carnegie Hall' were written in a stylish white cursive (not unlike the iconic Chicago logo) across the front. To think that the ushers would transform out of their usual uniforms, a starched white shirt and tie, to dress for these concerts is remarkable. And it wasn't just the uniforms that were*

changing. It was the entire face of how rock and popular music was seen and appreciated that went through a sea change.

RECORDING OF "ALL RIGHT NOW," PERFORMED BY FREE.

Alan Light: It's a complicated moment. It's a moment that comes out of demographics and technology and politics, and there are so many things that, you know, had to come together to create that movement. It isn't something that you can just replicate, I mean, although like why doesn't, you know, why doesn't music—why isn't it important in the way that it was important at that time?

Well, there were a lot of reasons it was important at that time, and it was, you know, a population boom, and it was a war protest...

Ron Delsener: There was a lot of activists back then.

Alan Light: ...and it was, you know, transistor radios and different ways to be able to listen to and consume music, and it was the emergence of stereo, you know, the sort of democratization of stereo recording. And it's a lot of stuff that gets you to, okay, this is a force that's something more than just, you know, something that kids like to listen to, two and a half minutes at a time.

In a lot of ways, music tends to be the canary in the gold mine. Certainly, we've seen that in terms of technology. We saw that in the sort of digital revolution of the 21st century, right?

First it was music, then that became TV and movies, and you know that it shifts distribution, and it shifts piracy and how files, I mean, all of those things. But oftentimes, music does lead the way because it's in the space where those sorts of, you know, lightning in a bottle moments are happening.

Jessica Vosk: *You're listening to If This Hall Could Talk. I'm Jessica Vosk. We'll return to the show in just a moment. Stay with us.*

RESET:

Jessica Vosk: *Welcome back. You're listening to If This Hall Could Talk, a show about the history of Carnegie Hall. Let's get back to our discussion on rock concerts that have been held at the hall.*

RECORDING OF "ROCKET MAN," PERFORMED BY ELTON JOHN.

Gino Francesconi: Who thinks of The Beach Boys at Carnegie Hall, or Frank Zappa, or The Doors, you know, or The Stones? I mean, The Beatles made their splash in 1964 in February. But in June, The Stones came by, you know. And in between, we had The Dave Clark Five, I mean, the British invasion.

Jessica Vosk: *Speaking of the British invasion, looking back, of all the shows Ron promoted, his favorite was...*

Ron Delsener: David Bowie. First time over, they didn't know what to expect of him.

He was the—he was the guy who knew about how to look for—he studied, like Jagger did too, French movies—French movies, and those French guys who were brilliant—how they stage these things. For instance, one of the—the eye gets cut, and it looks like somebody takes a razor blade, and cuts the eye. He had this thing that would put him in a basket, you know, to put him in the sky and put him on the stage or put him down. But these guys were creative. They were brought up in England and in France and these other places, Romania, whatever, and they were very artistic. They were artistic people.

Gino Francesconi: When Neil Young came for that week...this was a series Ron Delsener produced...he had his guitars, and it was acoustical. And somebody said at one point, "We love you, Neil," something like you'd always have.

And he said, "I think they came to hear me." And after that, you could hear a pin drop, and it became like being in the most intimate cabaret, and it was just wonderful, you know.

Ron Delsener: Acoustic and electric. And he said, his manager said, "Look, his wife is very angry. She wants to go on vacation." Well, I said, "You tell Peggy"—that was the name of the wife—"that my wife is angry too, because she wants to go on vacation with me, but I can't go because we're doing, you know, we're doing the right thing. He's going to do five or four or five nights in a row at Carnegie Hall, acoustic, \$400 tickets sometimes, you know, \$300." They were getting a ton of money for the tickets, and it was a great event and everybody was very happy about the performance.

RECORDING OF "FEELIN' ALRIGHT," PERFORMED BY JOE COCKER.

Lee Loughnane: Carnegie Hall was a great experience for us, but as we were doing it, we didn't realize.

Again, Lee Loughnane.

Lee Loughnane: The biggest thing was when we saw the album and, you know, we would sign autographs for the Carnegie Hall album, there was always a negative connotation, that we didn't think that it went well. We didn't think the album sounded as good as it could have and, you know, we didn't think we played as good as we could have. And I was happy all those years later to find out that we were all mistaken, and I was happy to be able to put the concerts in a listening situation where everyone could hear the same thing that I was hearing. That was great. So now it's a positive memory.

Jessica Vosk: *Albums like Chicago at Carnegie Hall are a great example of how rock music and albums were in a moment of transition.*

Alan Light: As great as a lot of the early rock and roll records were, certainly they were not seen as great creative and artistic accomplishments in their moment. And in a matter of, as you look back, what seems like months, you know, at most, a few years, people are, you know, musicians are thinking about rock and roll albums as opportunities for expression, statement, personal statement, political statement, cultural commentary, that there's an ambition, that you're creating something in the way that artists create art.

You're doing something with the idea that you're going to change the world. You're going to change your audience. You're making something that's going to leave not just, you know, a couple of months on the pop charts but something that's going to last for, you know, forever or for a very long time. And, you know, everything around that changes. You have the emergence of rock criticism, of people like me who are writing seriously about popular music in the way that, you know, previously people would write about literature or about visual art or about ballet or classical music, that this was something that deserved to be thought about, considered, contextualized in that same way.

So the entire sense of ambition, you know, shifts in a very short period of time.

Lee Loughnane: It was very exciting. But we had no idea what kind of history we were making, or how long the music would last that, for any reason, that the stuff that we were doing in 1971, we'd still be able to do 50 years later. And now we're seeing that it's going to last way beyond that. So when the songs were being written, there was no clue that their longevity would be anywhere near what we're living right now.

Ron Delsener: I wanted to show them that there's more than rock and roll, heroin, throwing up, dressing like pigs. That—that's—you couldn't come in Carnegie Hall without going, "Oh my god, I look like an asshole. Look what these people look—they're looking nice. They look nice. They're who—they're not—oh."

Alan Light: That's the reputation that it's gained and that it's held. And so what do we do with that platform? How do we utilize that? There's different ways that you're going to think about that. There's different elements that'll factor into it.

Ron Delsener: Until they did something bad, which happened a couple of times in somebody's box, where they threw up or something because they were high.

Gino Francesconi: I remember putting a flashlight on someone, and saying, "Please put that cigarette out." And he put it out right on his chair.

RECORDING OF "YOU'RE PROBABLY WONDERING WHY I'M HERE," BY FRANK ZAPPA AND THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION.

Gino Francesconi: The next night, you have the Berlin Philharmonic. When do you have time to replace the seat, you know? I mean, people would get sick. There was

smoking, there was drinking, and drinking, you know, in the bars, and then you'd have to stop them from bringing the drinks in. Spills.

Jessica Vosk: *Eventually, it became clear that because of the rigorous schedule at the Hall, rock shows had to be more spread out. But in the meantime, Gino certainly witnessed some amazing moments that have stayed with him.*

Gino Francesconi: I would open the window, and just breathe in the air from outside, you know, because it's just sweating. One time I'm out—I'm out there with the cold air from winter and just breathing in because it's sweating. And I look out, and there's a guy sitting on our ledge. It was a rock concert. And I said, "What are you doing out here?" And he said, "Man, it's hot in there." And I said, "Could you come in?" He goes, "No, I don't want to." And I kept thinking, "Think fast. Think fast." And I said, "Listen, man, if you fall, they might fire me. Please come in, you know?" And so he said, "Oh, all right." And so he came back. We have a line of windows upstairs in the balcony. They have now since been sealed shut. [laughs]

Jessica Vosk: *Or that time on the Steinway.*

Gino Francesconi: So many people played on that piano, from Rubenstein to Mel Tormé, you know? And one time, I went in there, and a guy had a cigarette on the edge of the piano and a bottle of gin. And I said, "Excuse me," I said, "that's not our piano. It's rented from Steinway."

And the guy takes the cigarette, puts it in his mouth, takes the gin bottle down, and he said, "I'm sorry, man. We're not used to playing a joint like this." Isn't that wonderful? I just love it. I never forgot that because I thought, wow, that is so cool, you know? And yet others would look around. Others would look around, and just couldn't get over that they were in the Hall, you know? I always loved that.

Jessica Vosk: *Like so many things in life, you tend to remember it in a way that may not be so accurate. And this was the experience Lee Loughnane had when he revisited the concerts at the Hall.*

Lee Loughnane: I realized like I said that we had played a lot better than I had given us credit for. I learned more about myself, to accept myself now as I was then, rather than having some type of regrets, you know. It's always good to look back and say, "Oh, I guess I did a little—a few things right."

Jessica Vosk: *At the time, so many things were happening at the Hall, it could be hard to really take it all in.*

Gino Francesconi: There's an overall sensation that I'm trying to capture of night after night after night after night, and you never got immune. It was—you walked in the next day, and it was a new concert. And I remember telling the ushers sometimes, "These people today don't know what you went through last night. Start fresh," you know.

And the crazy thing is sometimes you would have an eight o'clock show, a midnight show, and then the next morning a rehearsal, and then an eight o'clock show, and a midnight show. So to have that, I mean, Andy Kaufman, Frank Zappa, and Birgit Nilsson, and Horowitz on the same stage, I don't think any other concert hall in the world can make that claim. I don't think so. Maybe Albert Hall in London. But I don't think the variety—certainly, the variety is unique.

RECORDING OF “YOUR SONG,” PERFORMED BY ELTON JOHN.

Alan Light: I think that we think of Carnegie Hall as a, you know, nearly as a sacred space as, you know, as a temple and a—and a testament to our highest aspirations for music and for culture.

Gino Francesconi: And what I love mentioning is that each one of them left a piece of themselves on that stage. So it becomes this kaleidoscope of our history. It's really remarkable, you know.

Jessica Vosk: *Looking back, Ron Delsener thinks of all the shows he put on at Carnegie Hall, the experiences he had doing so, and he feels so grateful.*

Ron Delsener: I say every day, God, am I the luckiest man in the world? I had the greatest parents who showered me with love.

They took care of me. They gave me their own car to use when they didn't—they didn't have a car. They fed me. They took care of me until I got married. I had the greatest parents. And then I found the girl of my dreams. Now, I call her the ayatollah because she came—became [laughs]—I'm a slave to her. [laughs] No, that's the wife. No, we've been married 58 years—no, 57 years. And I have one great, beautiful little daughter. She's the love of my life. Her name is Samantha. She calls me every day. She's a doll. She will never put me in a home. And I have two grandkids, who are waiting for me to die so they can get all my clothes and all my memorabilia. [laughs] But that's okay. Who else am I going to give it to? Carnegie Hall. [laughs]

Jessica Vosk: *Many thanks to Clive Gillinson and the dedicated staff of Carnegie Hall, as well as guests, Ron Delsner, Lee Loughnane and Alan Light. You've been listening to If This Hall Could Talk, a podcast from Carnegie Hall, where we take you on a journey through some of the most iconic pieces in our archives, the objects that set the foundation for what the Hall is today.*

For images of the artifacts and more information on Carnegie Hall's Rose Archives, please visit carnegiehall.org/backslash/history. If This Hall Could Talk is produced by Sound Maid Public with Tanya Katenjian, Philip Wood, Emma Vecchione, Sarah Conlisk, Alessandro Santoro, and Jeremiah Moore. Lead funding for the digital collections of the Carnegie Hall Susan W.

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And if you happen to come across some special artifact from the history of Carnegie Hall, let us know! You can reach us at ifthishallcouldtalk@carnegiehall.org. We're always on the lookout. Thanks for listening. I'm Jessica Vosk.

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