IF THIS HALL COULD TALK:

OPENING NIGHT TICKET

Carol Binkowski: I think Carnegie said over and over that this was a place for people. For the people, for everyone. And I think the gratitude that came through on that first night and also all the nights that came afterwards reflected that.

RECORDING OF “THE OLD HUNDREDTH PSALM TUNE” ARRANGED BY RALPH VAUGHN WILLIAMS

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.*

For this episode, we’re going back to the birth of Carnegie Hall: Opening Night. We’re using the ticket from that opening night in 1891 as a jumping off point to explore the climate in which the Hall was established, culturally, geographically and creatively.

From farmland to skyscrapers, the landscape of New York has certainly changed dramatically over the years. The Carnegie Hall Opening Night Ticket reminds us of what once was and how a chance encounter can revolutionize the cultural identity and significance of a major global city. So don’t take those chance encounters for granted! The Carnegie Hall Opening Night Ticket takes us back to a moment in time when NYC was still striving for its place on the global stage and becoming the city we know today.

Phillip Lopate is a film critic, essayist, author and professor. He is also a lifelong New Yorker and amongst his many books is Waterfront, A Walk Around Manhattan. He knows this city well.

RECORDING OF THE SONG “THE GOOD OLD USA” BY JACK DRISLANE AND THEODORE MORSE

Phillip Lopate: 1891. New York had already become a city of rich and poor. There was a period called the Gilded Age, and there were a lot of fortunes that had been made, a lot of money. And part of money went into Carnegie Hall. And it also went into the establishment of a lot of civic institutions, because that period around 1870 to 1880s, 1890s, saw an enormous increase of civic institutions: The Metropolitan Museum, Museum of Natural History. The two biggest acts of civic will were probably Central Park

and the Brooklyn Bridge. Brooklyn Bridge had been opened just a few years before Carnegie Hall.

Basically, the city fathers and mothers were trying to establish New York as an international powerhouse of culture, not just a place to make money.

Gino Francesconi: I often say that Carnegie was really important.

Jessica Vosk: *This is Gino Francesconi, the founder of Carnegie Hall's archives, reflecting that before Carnegie Hall was born, the culture in the US was coming from Europe.*

RECORDING OF "CINQ MÉLODIES "DE VENISE" OP. 58" BY GABRIEL FAURÉ

Gino Francesconi: It was an important anchor for America's growing cultural identity, because before it all had to come from over there, and furniture, art, they were taking apart palaces and reconstructing them here. Musicians were coming over by that time. It had to come from over there or it wasn't any good.

Phillip Lopate: New York always had a kind of inferiority complex, was considered vulgar. It was a home of the nouveau riche, the newly rich people who just were not that respected.

Gino Francesconi: The whole Downton Abbey syndrome where women would go over there and marry a duke or a count and come back here somebody else more cultured. And now with Carnegie Hall, people from over there wanted to make their debut here. And so this was really, to me, one of the most important anchors. Money, yes, we had everything, but culturally we were still very insecure and this helped us put it on the map.

Phillip Lopate: Now, one of the things about Carnegie Hall was it was so big, that it couldn't quite be so socially restricted. It had to allow middle class people as well as wealthy people there.

And this was in a part of Manhattan that wasn't yet glamorous. It wasn't yet that desirable. It was too uptown in a way. It was the edge of uptown. Of course, above 57th Street, a lot of the cities had already been gridded, but there wasn't much going on there. There were farms and empty lots.

Carol Binkowski: At the time, where Carnegie Hall was or was going to built, there were blacksmith shops and salons.

Jessica Vosk: *Carol Binkowski is the author of the book, Opening Carnegie Hall.*

Carol Binkowski: I saw some pictures and it was incredible. You tend to forget what things were really like, back in the day.

RECORDING OF “AMERICA” BY GEORGE GASKIN

Phillip Lopate: 57th Street was the northern point of the city's development in a way.

Carol Binkowski: I think that's what caused a lot of people to say that it was never going to work when Andrew Carnegie launched this purchase of the land and so forth for a musical, for a concert hall. Because, everything was centered down on 14th Street.

Phillip Lopate: And of course, Central Park, which was above 57th Street, was going to inspire a lot of building around its periphery. That was just beginning.

Carol Binkowski: A theater for everyone. It was basically, everyone's place, for all purposes. It was for music of course, but there were other things that it was used for. Public events and so forth. It was for everyone. Not just a performer or a group on stage with the audience separate.

Gino Francesconi: One night you could have Rosenthal or Horowitz performing, but then you would have Presidents running for reelection and people reading from their books.

Phillip Lopate: It had to be done just to make the project economically feasible.

Rob Hudson: Carnegie, he wanted this place to support itself.

Jessica Vosk: *Rob Hudson is an archivist at Carnegie Hall.*

Rob Hudson: He was thinking commercially more or less when he buit it and so the doors were open to everybody.

It became this kaleidoscope, very American.

And I think that, I don't know, I'd like to think that at least in its way had an effect on just the culture.

Phillip Lopate: Institutions should be for everybody. So, regardless of the fact that the city was turning into a real rich and poor polarity, it was also promoting a notion of democracy that the institution should be for free. Of course, Carnegie Hall, you still have to have a ticket but the Metropolitan Museum was free for a long time and many of the other institutions and the whole Brooklyn Bridge was a great cause of pride and it was for everyone. So, I think that this was a period when New York was celebrating its inclusiveness and diversity. And that was part of the growth of culture. And these institutions had a real impact on the artists.

RECORDING OF “PAVANE, OP. 50” BY GABRIEL FAURÉ

Jessica Vosk: *The way that Carnegie Hall came to be is pure serendipity.*

Andrew Carnegie was on his honeymoon. And a chance encounter planted the seed that became one of the most important cultural institutions in the world.

Phillip Lopate: The story went that Walter Damrosch was a conductor, and the son of the great conductor Leopold Damrosch, bumped into Andrew Carnegie on a boat, on an ocean liner where Andrew Carnegie was going to Europe on his honeymoon. And Andrew Carnegie's young wife was in the Oratorio Society, which Leopold Damrosch had started.

And Walter Damrosch was in his mid-20s, said, "Hey, Andrew, wouldn't it be nice if we had a home for the Oratorio Society and for classical music in general. Andrew Carnegie said, "I don't know. Sounds expensive to me."

Gino Francesconi: The Damrosches, Walter specifically had convinced or inspired Andrew to build a hall for the Oratorio Society. And then Andrew being Andrew, he took it a step further and built a hall for the city of New York.

Phillip Lopate: Eventually he forked over $2 million to buy the land and to build Carnegie Hall.

Jessica Vosk: *As Phillip Lopate and Carol Binkowski explain, this part of NY was not really developed and most of the arts and music was happening below 14th Street. So for Andrew Carnegie to open at 57th street meant that he would be opening the door to a whole part of NY to be shaped in a new way. And that's exactly what happened. Not only was opening night the talk of the town, but there was a whole week of opening festivities at Carnegie Hall. With six nights of concerts EVERYONE was so excited and the crowds didn't disappoint.*

RECORDING OF "PIANO CONCERTO OP. 17 (1888)-02" BY IGNACY JAN PADEREWSKI

Phillip Lopate: If you can imagine the opening of Carnegie Hall, try to envision all of those carriages, because this was before automobiles, and the carriages had to be held in readiness for when the patrons would leave. Try to imagine all the gowns and all the finery.

Kathleen Sabogal: I mean, I was thinking about this, just looking at the ticket.

Jessica Vosk: *Kathleen Sabogal is Director of the Rose Archives and Museum at Carnegie Hall.*

Kathleen Sabogal: Whenever we have like looking at something as an object, I'm always thinking about who held this ticket, what did they feel like when they were getting

ready to come to the hall? I mean it’s a ticket in the parquet so I think of the excitement, there's an etching from Harper's Weekly that shows people dressed up to go into the hall.

Gino Francesconi: And Ethel Peyser…A journalist and author…says that the carriages lined up for a mile to get inside.

Carol Binkowski: The carriages, evidently that were taking people to the Hall, they just were clogging the streets. People who were so enthusiastic to get there. Obviously it was a sellout, ticket wise. People were trying to bribe ushers and everything to get in.

Gino Francesconi: In the paper you read that the ushers were getting as much as a dollar to sneak people in. That's the equivalent of about $25 today.

Carol Binkowski: So there was a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of excitement. And just from what I've read in the contemporary accounts, in the newspapers, a lot of beauty. Because of all the lights and the people and the bustling of excitement.

Gino Francesconi: And it was electrically illuminated,

Carol Binkowski: And when they got inside, they were just in awe of all the beautiful cream and Salmon and gold decorations. And thousands of electric lights.

Gino Francesconi: So the diamond sparkled.

Carol Binkowski: That was just stunning I think to people. It was something 4,000 lights. I don't know if that was a bit of hyperbole. But there were a lot of lights. And people were just enchanted. And the enthusiasm was what struck me. There was such a buzz of energy in the crowd. And I wish I had been there.

Jessica Vosk: *Not to speak for all of us but I think we all wish we had been there for opening night or at least one of those first set of concerts. I mean can you imagine, an area of NY that was quieter than others, suddenly has this gorgeous building where arts and culture can have center stage and not only the creme de la creme of the city come but also just people lucky enough to get a ticket. I mean, hello, take me to Carnegie Hall!*

Carol Binkowski: The other thing is, when people, they got inside, they got seated, they looked around, all these lights emphasize the fact that even before the concert started, the Oratorio Society, they were on stage, they had a gathering, there 300 women dressed in white and they were on five different risers on stage and there were 200 men behind them, I believe it was, and the orchestra in a semicircle around the conductor's podium, and can you imagine that with all the lights? What a spectacular picture this was. Awe inspiring even by today's standards, but by then, it was magnificent.

RECORDING OF “THE OLD HUNDREDTH PSALM TUNE” ARRANGED BY RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

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.*

BREAK

Jessica Vosk: *Welcome back. You’re listening to If This Hall Could Talk, a show about the history of Carnegie Hall. Today, we’re going all the way back to opening night, in 1891.*

Jessica Vosk: *One of the featured performers for the opening week of concerts was the Oratorio Society of New York. This choir still performs regularly in New York, over 125 years later, and their current musical director, Kent Tritle, radiates with pride about their deep connection to Carnegie Hall. On that opening night, the Oratorio society started the festivities with a traditional hymn.*

Kent Tritle: Old Hundredth, I grew up with this. Picture a farm family, a mile down the road at the grandparents with aunts and uncles and cousins. And it's time for us to have our Thanksgiving meal together and we would all stand and hold hands and sing, praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye, heavenly host, praise Father, son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. We would sing it in the four part harmony. Well, that is an old Dutch tune called Old 100th because it was the setting of the 100th Psalm was frequently sung to that.

So, they called the tune Old 100th. And people really knew this probably when they sang Old 100th, I can imagine at that moment, and by the way, of course Carnegie had a pipe organ at this time. And I can imagine that the organist was involved in probably doing some interpolations that the orchestra probably played this, would've been thrilling for the house to be able to sing it. If they were used to singing it, those who were say Christian church members were probably singing it in church with organ, but maybe not with orchestra. And to have the whole hall singing, I can imagine that was pretty glorious.

Gino Francesconi: And what always tears me up is when I hear the theme Old Hundred. It's an extraordinary rendition of old 100th. And I can only imagine everybody standing and singing that hymn and what an extraordinary moment that must have been.

Jessica Vosk: *And then, true to the spirit of Andrew Carnegie’s vision, a speaker came to the podium onstage.*

Carol Binkowski: An Oration they called it. By Bishop Potter. He was very involved in many things in New York and he did inaugurate the Hall officially.

He gave a very long speech. Many people and even the newspapers mentioned this. He had a good audience there and he was going for it. And he talked about the history of the Oratorio Society. And he brought in Leopold Damrosch and just about every conductor and everyone.

And he said now there was a beautiful place for the Oratorio Society and the Symphony Society and other groups to perform.

Of course, people were anxious to hear the concert. But Bishop Potter was on a roll and he kept speaking. And some of it was humorous too. And so he spoke for a while. And eventually he yielded the stage.

Gino Francesconi: And then they sang America the Beautiful.

RECORDING OF “AMERICA, THE BEAUTIFUL” BY KATHARINE LEE BATES AND SAMUEL A. WARD.

Carol Binkowski: And again, people stood up in the audience and sang right along with everyone.

Gino Francesconi: Walter Damrosch came out and conducted the Leonore Overture Number Three.

RECORDING OF “LEONORE OVERTURE NO. 3” BY LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Carol Binkowski: And it was the Overture "Leonore" no. 3 by Beethoven. And at the end, of course Walter Damrosch bowed to the audience and to everyone but what was so sweet about this, was that he especially bowed to Andrew Carnegie in gratitude for all that he had done.

Gino Francesconi: And then there was a pause and Tchaikovsky came out.

Carol Binkowski: Well Tchaikovsky is such an interesting character and so is his story. So great to follow him coming to New York and becoming acquainted. And everybody was so excited to welcome him. He came to Carnegie Hall opening night and you would've figured he would've come in an elegant carriage or something.

But no, Morris Reno's son-in-law came and got him. And they took a trolley to Carnegie Hall. And he got a chance to see everyone crowding the streets with their horse-drawn carriages. And see the lights and just see it from afar.

It was interesting that he came that way. And when he went in, he sat the whole first half of the concert in one of the boxes and listened. And he only went on stage afterwards for the second half to conduct his March Solennelle and everyone was anticipating this.

Gino Francesconi: Can you imagine? He was the most famous and the wealthiest composer of his day. In fact, he was overwhelmed that he says in his diary, "They know my music here, as well as they do in my own country."

RECORDING OF “MARCHE SOLENNELLE” BY PETER ILYCH TCHAIKOVSKY

Jessica Vosk: *Emanuel Ax is a world renowned pianist and has participated in many a season’s opening night at Carnegie Hall and at venues around the world.*

Emanuel Ax: It's actually unimaginable, the idea of actually having Tchaikovsky in the flesh doing this piece. It's an incredibly wonderful piece. I know one hears it all the time, but every time I hear it I'm astounded by it.

Carol Binkowski: He was a very humble man on stage, not at all flamboyant. Although he was very confident with his conducting with everything he was also humble and even a little worried that everything was going to go well. And he was in awe of the evening and all the people. And their generosity towards him.

The audience in turn loved Tchaikovsky's. He was the hero of the evening.

RECORDING OF “TE DEUM - TE DEUM OP. 22” BY HECTOR BERLIOZ

Gino Francesconi: After intermission, everybody performed the New York premiere of the Berlioz: Te Deum. We had a premiere opening night, and that set the tone for the rest of our history where we've now had what, over 20,000 premieres since then? I've lost count.

Kathleen Sabogal: And that was a big deal because Leopold Damrosch was a big champion of Berlioz's music, and he died before he saw this hall built. So for Walter to conduct that must have been a great tribute and very moving to his father.

Kent Tritle: The Te Deum is amazing for so many reasons. It is about 50 minutes in length, so it’s a major work, it’s not like the Requiem which is much longer, of Berlioz but it’s a good solid 50 minutes, and it features the chorus divided into three chorus as it were. Although the chorus can end up singing everything, but you have the treble chorus, which could also be children's choir, and then you have a male chorus, and then you have the combined chorus. So, you've got this element going on throughout.

What is remarkable about it, and I think one of the reasons that it may not be done so frequently in New York concert halls now, the role of the organ is huge. Huge. You have

a huge orchestra chord at the beginning, a bar of silence. The organ speaks and it has to be powerful, silence, and this goes on a couple of times, and then later the organ bursts in and then the orchestra takes over. It's a very dramatic piece. So on the one hand, I can imagine the program meeting for that opening night, what are we going to do? Well, if you wanted to blow the ceiling off of Carnegie Hall, the beginning of the Te Deum and several times throughout would be the way to do that. And it's really, really dramatic. Also incredibly tender moments. It just must have been an unbelievable closing piece for that concert.

Carol Binkowski: People were in awe of the beautiful architecture, the salmon, gold and white colors, the beauty of it all, just the grandeur of it all. It's that people were hustling and bustling outside, but when they got inside, no matter how many there were, and they are trying to bribe their way in or whatever, there were ticket holders, there were others, but there was a dignity about it because they were in awe. Again, the theme of gratitude just runs throughout the entire evening and the entire week.

RECORDING OF “ELIJAH - HELP LORD! WILT THOU QUITE DESTROY US?” BY FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Kent Tritle: The first time I walked on the stage to conduct, I literally felt like my feet were moving, but they were not touching the floor. It was like, here's the audience. This is my chorus. We're doing this thing together. And I always feel that, and evermore, I feel more of a connection with the spirits, the spirits of the past, the incredible continuum that we're all a part of, what a privilege, what an honor it is, what a responsibility we have to further this incredible tradition, and then to open it up doing new works. There's all of that.

Carol Binkowski: I can't imagine anyone on the stage doesn't feel gratitude. For being there, for having an audience.

Jessica Vosk: *As for the ticket itself, it’s a touchpoint to bring us back to that remarkable night and week, one that changed the cultural landscape of New York City.*

RECORDING OF “PIANO CONCERTO OP. 17 (1888)-02” BY IGNACY JAN PADEREWSKI

Kathleen Sabogal: The ticket actually says, "Please retain this check." So I wonder if they didn't rip them back then.

Carol Binkowski: "Oh, my gosh. It's like a ticket we might see today." They connect to the past.

Emmanuel Ax: I think Carnegie probably represents the beginning and the Alpha and Omega in music history in the United States. I think everyone has passed through the place.

Carol Binkowski: Audience members even now are grateful to be there and hear a beautiful concert, and have the opportunity to sit in this magnificent hall that's been around over 125 years.

Jessica Vosk: *It's hard to imagine my life without Carnegie Hall. As so many people say, when you enter, you feel the presence of all those who stood on that stage before you. Much like the ticket, you're taken to a different time and place, where the past meets the present. The many times I stood on that stage, the way it made me feel, shaped me as a performer, as a musician, and as a human being. I am so grateful it exists and I hope we can continue to breathe life into the arts because the world is so much richer with music and song and love and life.*

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.

Many thanks to Clive Gillinson and the dedicated staff of Carnegie Hall, as well as guests Carol Binkowski, Philip Lopate, Emmanuel Ax and Kent Tritle. For images of the artifacts and more information on Carnegie Hall's Rose Archives, please visit carnegiehall.org/history.

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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.