

Radio City Music Hall

History

When the stock market crashed in 1929, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. held a \$91 million, 24-year lease on a piece of midtown Manhattan property properly known as “the speakeasy belt.” Plans to gentrify the neighborhood by building a new Metropolitan Opera House on the site were dashed by the failing economy and the business outlook was dim. Nevertheless, Rockefeller made a bold decision that would leave a lasting impact on the city’s architectural and cultural landscape. He decided to build an entire complex of buildings on the property—buildings so superior that they would attract commercial tenants even in a depressed city flooded with vacant rental space. The project would express the highest ideals of architecture and design and stand as a symbol of optimism and hope.



The search for a commercial partner led to the Radio Corporation of America, a young company whose NBC radio programs were attracting huge audiences and whose RKO studios were producing and distributing popular motion pictures that offered welcome diversion in hard times. Rockefeller’s financial power and RCA’s media might were joined by the unusual talents of impresario S.L. “Roxy” Rothafel. Roxy had earned a reputation as a theatrical genius by employing an innovative combination of vaudeville, movies and razzle-dazzle decor to revive struggling theatres across America. Together Rockefeller, RCA and Roxy realized a fantastic dream—a theatre unlike any in the world, and the first completed project within the complex that RCA head David Sarnoff dubbed “Radio City.” Radio City Music Hall was to be a palace for the people. A place of beauty offering high-quality entertainment at prices ordinary people could afford. It was intended to entertain and amuse, but also to elevate and inspire.

An American People’s Palace

Donald Deskey wasn’t the most celebrated interior designer to enter the competition for design of the Music Hall’s interior spaces. In fact, he was relatively unknown. But from the moment opening night visitors passed through the lobby and entered the Grand Foyer, his popular legacy was secured. In his design for the Hall, Deskey chose elegance over excess, grandeur above glitz. He designed more than thirty separate spaces, including eight lounges and smoking rooms, each with its own motif. Given general theme, he created a stunning tribute to “human achievement in art, science and industry. He made art an integral part of the design, engaging fine artists to create murals, wall coverings and sculpture; textile designers to develop draperies and carpets; craftsmen to make ceramics, wood panels and chandeliers.

Deskey himself designed furniture and carpets, and he coordinated the design of railings, balustrades, signage and decorative details to complement the theatre’s interior spaces. He used a brilliant combination of precious materials (including marble and gold foil), and industrial materials (including Bakelite, permatex, aluminum and cork). The strength of his achievement is reflected in how well the theatre has maintained its character over time. It was a remarkable example of contemporary design in its day and it still has the power to take the breath away. It remains an elegant, sophisticated, unified tour de force. The house steals the show. Donald Deskey’s masterpiece of American Modernist design gets rave reviews. One New York critic reports approvingly, “It has been said of the new Music Hall that it needs no performers.”

Showplace of the Nation

More than 300 million people have come to the Music Hall to enjoy stage shows, movies, concerts and special events. There’s no place like it to see a show or stage a show. Everything about it is larger than life. Radio City Music Hall is the largest indoor theatre in the world. Its marquee is a full city-block long. Its auditorium measures 160 feet from back to stage and the ceiling reaches a height of 84 feet. The walls and ceiling are formed by a series of sweeping arches that define a splendid and immense curving space. Choral staircases rise up the sides toward the back wall. Actors can enter there to bring live action right into the house. There are no columns to obstruct views. Three shallow mezzanines provide comfortable seating without looming over the rear Orchestra section below. The result is that every seat in Radio City Music Hall is a good seat.

The Great Stage is framed by a huge proscenium arch that measures 60 feet high and 100 feet wide. The stage is considered by technical experts to be the most perfectly equipped in the world. It is comprised of three sections mounted on hydraulic-powered elevators. They make it possible to create dynamic sets and achieve spectacular effects in staging. A fourth elevator raises and lowers the entire orchestra. Within the perimeter of the elevators is a turntable that can be used for quick scene changes and special stage effects.

The shimmering gold stage curtain is the largest in the world. For more than sixty-five years audiences have thrilled to the sound of the “Mighty Wurlitzer” organ, which was built especially for the theatre. Its pipes, which range in size from a few inches to 32 feet, are housed in eleven separate rooms. The Hall contains more than 25,000 lights and features four-color stage lighting. And what’s a show without special effects? Original mechanisms still in use today make it possible to send up fountains of water and bring down torrents of rain. Fog and clouds are created by a mechanical system that draws steam directly from a Con Edison generating plant nearby.

The Premiere Theatre for Film Premieres

Radio City quickly became the favorite first-run theatre for moviemakers and moviegoers alike. Just two weeks after its gala opening, Radio City Music Hall premiered its first film, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*. Before long, a first showing at the Music Hall virtually guaranteed a successful run in the theatres around the country.

Radio City’s huge screen and widely spaced seats make it the ideal movie house. Since 1933 more than 700 movies have opened here. They include the original *King Kong*; *National Velvet*, the film that secured Elizabeth Taylor’s hold on the silver screen; *White Christmas*; *Mame*; *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, starring former Radio City usher, Gregory Peck; *Mary Poppins*; *101 Dalmatians*; and *The Lion King*. In the early years, a standard movie run lasted one week. Later, extended runs of five or six weeks became common. Cary Grant, Ginger Rogers and Katharine Hepburn have taken Radio City box office prizes for the number of films screened here. All three had more than 22 of their films shown at the Hall. The popular movie-and-stage-show format remained a Radio City signature until 1979, when the mass showcasing of new films called for a new focus. Today, the Music Hall still premieres selected films, but is best known as the country’s leading hall for popular concerts, stage shows, special attractions and media events.

From: <https://www.msg.com/radio-city-music-hall/history>



From the New York Preservation Archive Project:



The threat to the nationally-significant Radio City Music Hall in the late-1970s caused New Yorkers to rally to achieve landmark designation for the Art Deco masterpiece.

Radio City Music Hall was completed in 1932 as part of the larger development of Rockefeller Center. It was designed by architect Edward Durell Stone and interior designer Donald Deskey in the Art Deco style, with Samuel Lionel Rothafel, or “Roxy,” a leading expert on movie palaces, as a primary advisor. The public areas of the music hall feature murals, sculpture, and other work by prominent artists of the time. These interiors are considered some of the most impressive in the history of modern theater design, with no equal in America in terms of scale or variety of architectural, artistic, and decorative elements. As one of the principal achievements of the Art Deco style and as one of the finest theater designs in the country, the interior of Radio City Music Hall is of unique importance to the history of American architecture. The Hall opened on December 27, 1932, with a lavish variety show and continued to feature films and stage productions until 1979. At this point plans were made to convert the theater into office space, but a combination of preservation and commercial interests resulted in the

protection of Radio City Music Hall and in 1980, after a renovation, it reopened to the public.

The interiors of Radio City Music Hall were designated a New York City Interior Landmark on March 28, 1978, and its exterior was designated a New York City Landmark as part of Rockefeller Center on April 23, 1985.

Key Dates in Preservation Activity

1977: Plans to close Radio City Music Hall are announced

January 1978: A “rescue committee” for Radio City Music Hall is formed

March 1978: The interiors of Radio City Music Hall are designated a New York City Interior Landmark

1980: Radio City Music Hall reopens to the public

April 1985: The exterior of Radio City Music Hall is designated a New York City Landmark as part of Rockefeller Center

Preservation History

By the late 1970s, because the venue was not financially successful, Radio City Music Hall came under risk of demolition. The president of Rockefeller Center at this time, Alton G. Marshall, announced that the hall would close in 1978 because of a \$2.3 million deficit in 1977. Reportedly there were plans to transform the building into office space.

In response to this announcement, efforts were launched to protect the building. On January 8, 1978, Lieutenant Governor Mary Anne Krupsak proclaimed her commitment to preserve the building, and also announced the creation of a “rescue committee” of business, government, labor, and cultural group representatives that would join forces to save the hall. During a meeting of these groups, several suggestions were made to improve the profitability of the music hall and increase its chances of survival; the plan that sounded like “an immediate possibility,” according to Krusak, was to designate Radio City Music Hall as a New York City Landmark, which would offer significant tax savings. Among those who supported this effort were Senator Jacob J. Javits, Mayor of Economic Development Robert J. Milano, President of the New York Convention and Visitor’s Bureau Charles Gillett, Chairman of the State Economic Development Board Richard Ravitch, Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts Kitty Carlisle Hart, restaurateur Vincent Sardi, publicist and representative of the Association for a Better New York (ABANY) Howard Rubenstein, and Lewis Rudin (also of ABANY). Rosemary Novellino, captain of the Radio City Music Hall Ballet Company and president of The Showpeople’s Committee to Save Radio City Music Hall, motivated colleagues, friends, and media and political allies to support the cause. The Rockettes, the famous company of dancers that performs in Radio City Music Hall, also petitioned to help save the building, at one point joining schoolchildren with placards.

However, there was some opposition to designation of Radio City Music Hall’s building and interior. The most vocal opponent was Alton Marshall, the president of Rockefeller Center at this time, who at a hearing before the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission on March 14, 1978, stated that giving landmark status to the hall “may well be the last nail in the Music Hall’s coffin.” If the Hall was landmarked, Marshall said, “it will leave me no choice but to apply for a permit to demolish the structure the day after designation goes into effect, so that at the end of 305 days I will be free to act.” He added that landmark status would make it harder for a future owner of the hall to propose an alternative use for the building, but he also declared that if there is an “economically viable entertainment use” that can be found for the hall, Rockefeller Center will search for a different use for the building. Instead of landmark designation, Marshall stated he would agree in writing not to alter the interior of the hall in any way until November 1978, but attorney Whitney North Seymour, Sr. strongly advised the Commission to not accept this offer, since it would just lead to more negotiating and more threats to destroy the hall.



The Art Deco lobby of Radio City Music Hall; Courtesy of Robert Berenholtz



A costumed Rosemary Novellino, captain of the Radio City Music Hall Ballet Company and president of The Showpeople’s Committee to Save Radio City Music Hall, collects signatures on a petition to preserve the historic Hall in 1978. This was one of many publicity stunts that she arranged to keep Radio City Music Hall in the news and in the public eye to prevent the closing and possible demolition of the Art Deco masterpiece; Courtesy of Flashbak.com

Despite this opposition, on March 28, 1978, Radio City Music Hall's interior was designated a landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. On March 29th of that same year, the New York City Board of Estimate cast a majority of votes, 16 of 22 votes, to uphold landmark designation for the hall's interiors. However, Rockefeller Center still requested the option of applying for a demolition permit if the "rescue committee" failed to improve profitability. The hall closed on April 12, 1978, which led the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) to take over its management for a trial period. Although Rockefeller Center predicted large deficits, the UDC managed to minimize financial losses, eventually turning a profit and returning management to Rockefeller Center.

On February 28, 1979, Rockefeller Center announced that Radio City Music Hall would reopen, but diversify its entertainment. On April 19, 1979, plans were officially announced to implement a "master plan" to make the music hall a successful entertainment venue again, which included live stage performances, special shows aimed at diverse age groups, retaining the Rockettes, and occasionally showing films. In this plan, the first objective was to restore the hall to its former Art Deco grandeur, including new wallpaper and carpets that mimicked the originals and a new sound system. The hall reopened to the public in 1980.

By December 1997, another renovation was planned to further restore and modernize the venue. Completed in 1999, the renovation was led by architect Hugh Hardy of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, and involved the installation of 6.5 miles of new gold, blue, and red neon for the block-long marquee of the music hall, covering the ceilings with 720,000 sheets of aluminum and gold leaf, and installing 5,901 new plush salmon-pink seats. In addition, the restoration team either replicated, cleaned, or repaired artwork, appointments, lighting fixtures, wall fabrics, carpets, and furniture throughout the entire building.

From: <http://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/radio-city-music-hall/>

The Rockettes

The Twenties

The Rockettes began kicking up their shoes since Russell Markert, the Rockettes' chief choreographer, image-preserver and resident "father figure" of the famous troupe until he retired in 1971, founded the exemplary American chorus line—an exciting precision dance company with great style, flair and glamour—in 1925.

Inspired by the British dance troupe formed by John Tiller ("The Tiller Girls" performed in a 1922 Ziegfeld Follies production), Russell wanted to achieve absolute precision and ultimate uniformity in the movements of the dancers. Originally, a Rockette had to be between 5'2" and 5'6 ½", but today, she is between 5'6" and 5'10 ½" and has to be proficient in tap, modern, jazz and ballet. Starting with just 16 women, over the years the troupe grew to a line of 36 dancers.



The dancers known as the "Missouri Rockets" made their show debut in St. Louis. That same year, the troupe traveled to New York City to perform in the Broadway show *Rain or Shine*, and were discovered by showman S.L. "Roxy" Rothafel. The "Missouri Rockets" were such an instant hit, that Rothafel was loath to let them leave after their performances at the Roxy Theatre, and pleaded with Markert to form another line to replace the departing dancers.

The Thirties

While there were three separate dance troupes performing in New York City in the early '30s, Rothafel moved two of the troupes to Radio City Music Hall for opening night on Dec. 27th, 1932. Described as "the hottest ticket in town," more than 100,000 people requested admission, but only 6,200 could be obliged. Rothafel first dubbed the troupes as the "Roxyettes," who performed a routine to the song "With a Feather in Your Cap" on opening night, but in 1934, the "Roxyettes" officially became the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes.

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a successful run in theatres around the country. Since 1933, more than seven hundred movies have opened at the Music Hall; like the original King Kong, National Velvet, White Christmas, Mame, Breakfast at Tiffany's, To Kill a Mockingbird, Mary Poppins, 101 Dalmatians and the Lion King. Radio City featured a new movie every week accompanied by a lavish and unique stage production starring the Rockettes.

The Forties

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered World War II. The Rockettes were among the first entertainers to volunteer for the United Service Organizations (USO). They entertained our troops abroad and were involved in wartime shows at the Copacabana, the Army Air Corps base in Pawling, New York and at the Stage Door Canteen. The Rockettes and Eleanor Roosevelt even hosted a War Bond Rally at the World's Most Famous Arena, Madison Square Garden.



The Fifties

Radio City was showing world premiere movies together with stage shows, sometimes as many as five a day. The movies kept playing as long as there was demand for tickets, and the shows changed every time the movies did. If a film failed at the box office, the Rockettes suddenly had to rehearse the new show at dawn, at midnight, and in between. Because of their demanding schedule, Radio City Music Hall became their home away from home. They worked, played, ate and often slept within its walls. Facilities including a 26-bed dormitory, cafeteria, recreation area, tailor shop and hospital with medical staff, were provided to support and sustain what many recall as an extended family.

Americans in the '50s increasingly turned to television for their entertainment, so it was inevitable that television would feature the Rockettes. They made their first TV appearance on Wide, Wide World, and also performed for the first time in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 1957. Like so many events the Rockettes took part in, it became a New York City tradition.

The Sixties

The '60s were a time of social change and political activism, so it's no surprise that the Rockettes broke new ground for women in those early years. In a salute to both Feminism and the Space Age, the Rockettes danced as astronauts on the Great Stage. Their production numbers also reflected an incredible variety of music, dance and costuming (after the bikini craze that entered the fashion world in the '60s, the Rockettes raised their kicks and hemlines!). They appeared as Geisha girls, hula dancers, bull fighters, chimney sweeps and even can-can dancers. In 1961, Eastman Kodak, created a color photomural featuring the Rockettes. It was the largest mural of its kind ever made, and was hung in New York City's Grand Central Terminal.

While Radio City was a popular venue for filmmakers to premiere a movie, it wasn't uncommon for the stars to make an appearance before the showing. In 1962, none other than Cary Grant surprised the Rockettes when he came to promote his new movie, That Touch of Mink. One of the most awesome productions in the history of Radio City took place with a salute to Walt Disney. Sections of the theme park's famous Main Street, Frontierland, Tomorrowland and Fantasyland were recreated right on the Great Stage, all under the personal supervision of Walt Disney himself.

The Seventies

Radio City management began closing the theatre for weeks at stretch, leaving the once busy Rockettes with time on their hands. The troupe petitioned for the right to take the show on the road when Radio City was dark. In 1977, the Rockettes appeared at Harrah's in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Their precision dancing took the west coast by storm as they went on to play to sold-out crowds in Las Vegas. (They even opened for Liberace at the Las Vegas Hilton in 1979!).

In 1978, Radio City was slated to close due to financial problems. The Rockettes lead the crusade to save the theatre. In 1979, Radio City was designated a New York City landmark, saving it from the wrecking ball. The movie-and-stage-show format remained a Radio City signature until 1979, when the mass showcasing of new films called for a different focus.

The decade ended on a wonderful upbeat note. The Rockettes starred with Swedish-American actress, singer and dancer Ann-Margret in a two-hour television special, A Holiday Tribute to Radio City Music Hall. (Ann-Margaret even joined the Rockettes in their iconic “Parade of the Wooden Soldiers” number!).

The Eighties

The Rockettes led the fitness movement that swept the country. The dancers were arguably the fittest women in America. Radio City had moved to a new format: it no longer showed movies, but presented 90-minute stage shows. The Rockettes danced four or five numbers in each of them, four times a day, seven days a week, for four weeks straight. Then each woman got a week off.

During the '80s, the Rockettes performed with Ginger Rogers in a show called, A Rockette Spectacular with Ginger Rogers, and also worked alongside Carol Lawrence and Liberace. They appeared as themselves in the movie Annie, starred in the 1988 Super Bowl halftime show and made a commercial for L'Eggs pantyhose, singing and dancing in praise of “a great pair of L'Eggs.”

They went on the road, too, and performed in Vegas and Lake Tahoe. There, Sammy Davis Jr., a great admirer of theirs, watched their show night after night. On their closing night, without warning, he stepped out on stage and joined the line (Former Rockette Leslie remembers him being one of the sweetest men she has every met!).

To celebrate the 50th birthday of Radio City in 1982, producer and choreographer Bob Jani presented a lavish show featuring 50 years of Rockettes costumes. Another memorable event throughout the '80s was a series of three television specials in honor of the centennial of the Actors' Fund of America. They were called The Night of 100 Stars, but actually over 200 of the most famous performers in the world took part; if you were a star of stage, screen or television, you were there. And it all took place at Radio City, so of course the Rockettes welcomed the audience, danced the big opening number and even got to share the stage with talent like Dick Van Dyke, Lara Turner, Grace Kelly and Muhammad Ali.

The Nineties

The Rockettes continued to present their ever-popular Christmas Spectacular and Easter Extravaganza. Choreographers and designers created new routines and new costumes for them, but the historic Radio City Music Hall was beginning to show its age. Radio City's parent company, decided that the world's greatest theater was in need of the world's greatest restoration. The vision? To restore Radio City to its former glory, to recapture the magnificence that made people gasp on that opening night back in 1932.

Every bit of gold leaf was repainted. Every one of 6,200 seats was recovered, with exactly 269 fewer seats. The company had surveyed the sightlines and ordered that seats be removed because they did not have an adequate view of the stage. They approved the purchase of a huge, 50,000-pound LED screen, which can be raised and lowered. It is the largest of its kind in the world. The projections from the screen's “light emitting diodes” make all kinds of scenery possible, and take the audience on magical journeys.

Another innovation was the sound system. Radio City wasn't satisfied that the audience was hearing the Rockettes' pre-recorded taps; they wanted the real thing. The company wouldn't settle for the dancers to wear wired microphones and belt packs; they were too bulky, and slowed down costume changes. So they challenged the best engineers to come up with a solution. Today, when the Rockettes are doing a tap number during the Christmas Spectacular, they wear custom dance shoes that have a special cavity within the heel for a sound transmitter, so what the audience hears is the actual rhythmic tapping of 72 feet.

When the Rockettes appeared in the Christmas Spectacular at the newly re-opened Radio City in 1999, one of the new numbers featured Santa Claus and his workshop. Greg Barnes, the Tony Award-winning designer who's known for his costumes for Follies, Flower Drum Song and the revival of Bye Bye Birdie, created many outfits for the Rockettes, but perhaps his most memorable idea was to dress them as reindeer, complete with antlers. At every performance, when they pranced on stage pulling Santa's sled, they brought down the house.

The Two-Thousands

Radio City Music Hall marked the 75th Anniversary of the Rockettes, with more than 10,000 women having shared in the legacy by performing as a Radio City Rockette. In 2001, the Rockettes were invited to perform at 43rd president of the United States George W. Bush's inauguration in Washington D.C., where they danced their way down the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. In 2005, the Rockettes performed their second presidential inauguration.

Linda Haberman became the first woman named solo director and choreographer for the Rockettes in 2006. Trained at the School of American Ballet, Haberman was in the original cast of Bob Fosse's *Dancin'*, then went on to become his assistant choreographer. Her vision for the Rockettes was to transform them into a contemporary dance company. Haberman's amazing choreography brought the troupe to new heights, and demanded superb dance technique as well as true athleticism.



On the Radio City stage, her productions combined dance with the ground-breaking technology and called for the Rockettes to interact with 3D effects. For the "New York at Christmas" number, Haberman put the Rockettes on a full-scale double-decker bus, which moved in sync with images of the city projected on the 90-foot LED screen. Haberman created the first touring productions of the Christmas Spectacular, which visited more than 80 cities in the United States during their time. The tour ended after the 2014 season, as new approaches were explored to best showcase the Christmas Spectacular and the Rockettes.

This decade saw an important new Rockettes dance education program: The Rockettes Summer Intensive, which offers aspiring professional dancers the unique opportunity to train with the Rockettes and learn their world-famous precision dance technique. More than 1,000 young dancers from across the country audition each year. Those who are accepted spend a week in New York, where they rehearse and learn the Rockettes'

disciplines and dance routines. To date, more than 60 Rockettes have come from this training program.

The Two-Thousand Tens

Since the 1990s, the Rockettes have only performed at Radio City Music Hall from November to January in the Christmas Spectacular. However, that changed in Spring 2015 when the Rockettes starred in a new eight-week production, *The New York Spring Spectacular*, alongside Tony Award-winner Laura Benanti and *Dancing with the Stars'* Derek Hough. In June 2016, the Rockettes performed on the Great Stage to celebrate New York City in *The New York Spectacular*. Centered around the trip of a lifetime for two kids, who, while on a vacation in New York, are separated from their parents, the city magically comes to life to show them its many splendid wonders.

The Rockettes have been busier and more in the public eye than ever. They have performed on the Great Stage with Oprah, Heidi Klum, Michael Bublé, and have made numerous appearances on *The TODAY Show*, *The Chew*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, *Project Runway* (a costume was designed during a special Rockettes-themed episode by finalist Christopher Palu!) and *America's Got Talent* (2013, 2014 and 2015!). From the moment they first appeared in 1925, the Rockettes have been American icons. They are symbols of what you can achieve if you move with passion, dream big, work hard and most importantly, believe in yourself.

From: <https://www.rockettes.com/history/>

How much money does a Rockette make per year?

Rockettes make between \$1,400 to \$1,500 per week. Rockettes only perform seasonally, so the annual salary of a Rockette is between \$36,400 to \$39,000. Though Rockettes do not get year-round work, the dancers do receive year-round benefits.

How many Radio City Rockettes are there?

There are **80** women who are Rockettes. So we have two separate casts, each cast has 36 women on stage at a time.

What is the age limit to be a Rockette?

Well, auditions are usually held in New York City and are open to anyone at least **18 years** of age. There's technically no age limit, but unless you're exceptionally fit (and you look it) and have the stamina and endurance to dance six times a day at the height of the Christmas season, you probably should take a pass.

Top 10 things you didn't know about the Rockettes

Each holiday season, more than 2 million people make the pilgrimage to see the world famous Rockettes kick up their heels during the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. Some 6000 people fill the seats of the historic Manhattan theatre five times daily to watch Santa, his reindeer and, of course, the goose-stepping wooden soldiers. "There are 80 women who are Rockettes. So we have two separate

casts, each cast has 36 women on stage at a time," says Rockette Morgan Hartley. She's been with the iconic troupe for four years, but this is her first season performing in the Big Apple. "It is so magnificent and so grand and it is the most exciting thing ever to see that curtain go up and to be able to do what I love to do every single day in front of that many people." Hartley and fellow Rockette Audrey Thelemann shared a few behind-the-scenes secrets with FoxNews.com about what it takes to be a leg-kicking Rockette and how to put on a show-stopping routine.

The Rockettes do their own hair and make-up

As Hartley describes it, looking like a Rockette may not be so hard after all. "They just tell us to wear a red lip, fake lash and French twist. And however that's going to look on me is how I am going to look in the show."

Soldiers tall hats cause visual impairment

You'd think you want to see where you're dancing. The "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" has been in the show since 1933, but those tall black hats may need a makeover. "They all have to look the same so they all have to sit flat on our heads," says Hartley. "It's kind of like having a visor on, you can only really see about 4 to 5 feet in front of you."



Their rehearsal space is holy

Rehearsals start in September and are everyday Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 6 pm. But where they practice their routine isn't where you think it would be. "We rehearse at a church. Our rehearsal space looks exactly like our stage will look. So everything is exactly the same. So it's very specific even as much as a couple of inches can make a big difference when you are on stage at the same time."

Those rosy cheeks aren't natural

Okay, we kind of knew that. But what you may not know is that those red cheeks stay put thanks to the magic of double-sided tape. The Rockettes go through about 15,000 of them every season.

Rockettes can change faster than it takes a normal person to get out of bed

Each Rockette goes through eight costume changes a show. "Our quickest one is the soldier dance into the double decker bus – New York at Christmas and that change is 78 seconds," Hartley explains. "We change our shoes, we take off our pants, out on the red or green sequin dress, we put on gloves and earrings, we put on a hat, we put on a jacket. All of that happens on the stage in the wings."

Costumes can weigh as much as a small child

Their heaviest costume is the "Santa Suit", which weighs 40 pounds. The ladies light up when they talk about this number because they get to dance in flats. "We have about 50 people in this – we have the 36 Rockettes and the rest of our ensemble. This one is pretty quick because it is really just a big zipper and it has a belt and inside it has the fat suit. It's like a big jumpsuit," says Hartley.

The Rockettes are not the same height

"In order to be a Rockette you have to be between 5'6" and 5'10 ½"," says Hartley. "It's an optical illusion. They put the tallest girl in the center, going down the less tall girls at the end."

They wear microphones in their shoes

Microphones in their shoes magnify the taps during the "12 Days of Christmas" routine. Thelemann credits the crew with keeping those shoes in tip, tap shape. "We have a whole entire microphone crew, sound wise, they will fix up all of the shoes, tighten up the taps and screws in them. Make sure all of the battery packs are charged. "

The Rockettes don't hang on each other when they kick

The dancers never actually touch each other during their perfectly synched high kicks. "We rest our hands on the fabric," Thelemann demonstrates just before teaching me how to do that famous kick.