

Coordinates: 40.752908°N 73.994189°W﻿ / ﻿40.752908°N 73.994189°W﻿ / 40.752908; -73.994189

# Manhattan Center

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The **Manhattan Center** building, built in 1906 and located at 311 West 34th Street in Midtown Manhattan, houses **Manhattan Center Studios** (home to two recording studios), its Grand Ballroom, and the Hammerstein Ballroom, one of New York City's most renowned performance venues. In 1976, the building was purchased by its current owner, the Unification Church for \$3,000,000.<sup>[1]</sup>



Winter afternoon

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## History

The Manhattan Center was originally called the Manhattan Opera House and was built in 1906 by Oscar Hammerstein I. Hammerstein boldly sought to compete with the established Metropolitan Opera by offering grand opera to the New York public at lower ticket prices and with a superior orchestra and stage productions. Rapidly, it became a popular alternative to the Met and many great operas and celebrated singers debuted at the new theater.

In 1910, after the Metropolitan Opera felt it could no longer tolerate the competition, it offered Hammerstein \$1.2 million to cease producing opera for a period of 10 years. He accepted the offer and experimented with various other types of entertainment before ultimately selling the building. In March 1911, it was opened as a "combination" house by the Shubert brothers featuring vaudeville shows during the week and concerts on Sunday nights at affordable prices.

In 1922, the Manhattan Opera House was purchased by the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of Free Masonry, who built a new building façade and a new Grand Ballroom on the seventh floor. In 1926, Warner Bros rented the ballroom to set up a studio for the Vitaphone sound-on-disc system to record the New York Philharmonic orchestra for the film *Don Juan*. That film marked the release of the inaugural commercial film featuring a recorded musical soundtrack.

By 1939, the name of the building had been changed to the Manhattan Center, now a multi purpose venue featuring a variety of different types of events. In 1986, Manhattan Center Studios was formed to develop the center into a venue with the capability of holding multimedia festivities. MCS expanded the audio recording facilities when Studio 4 was opened in 1993. Studio 7 was rebuilt in 1996 to become a state-of-the-art control room capable of servicing all types of recordings and live events in the Ballrooms.

In March 1990, the company began investing in video equipment and studio facilities to expand into the video and television industry. The company's video post production facilities in Studio 9 were completed in 1993 and in the years that followed, two fully equipped television studios were built. Studio 1 was completed in 1994 and Studio 6 was completed in 1995. The connection of the studios to the Ballrooms makes them attractive venues for live broadcast events and webcasts. Studio 1 and Studio 6 were

temporarily closed throughout the Spring and Summer of 2003 to complete extensive upgrades as the company entered into a three-year contract with Atlantic Video, a Washington, D.C. based television services and production company.

Beginning in 1997, the Hammerstein Ballroom underwent a major renovation and reopened as a major concert hall for popular musical acts.

## Events

The Manhattan Center became a hot spot for "big band" dances as well as trade shows, union meetings and other social functions.

Among the diverse events held here throughout the decades that followed were radio broadcasts, recordings and performances by the likes of Alison Moyet, Bunny Berigan, Paul Robeson, Judy Garland, Harry Belafonte, Perry Como, Leonard Bernstein, David Bowie, Grateful Dead, Bob Marley and Evanescence, among others.

In the early 1990s, wrestling show *WWF Monday Night Raw* broadcast from the Grand Ballroom a record 28 times, including the first ever episode of *Monday Night Raw* on January 11, 1993 which was broadcast live on the USA Network. Its Hammerstein Ballroom has hosted Extreme Championship Wrestling events in the years before its closing and in its revivals in 2005 and 2006. Since 2006, the Manhattan Center has played host to yearly Ring of Honor events, both in the Grand Ballroom and the Hammerstein Ballroom. In 2014, Total Nonstop Action Wrestling taped multiple episodes of their *Impact Wrestling* TV program at the Grand Ballroom on June 25-27, and then again August 5-7.

Several seasons of NBC's *America's Got Talent* were taped there.

On January 31, 2014 the Hammerstein Ballroom hosted the Howard Stern Birthday Bash.

The Manhattan Center is currently home to Al Jazeera America's main studio and production facilities.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Manhattan Center is also the current home of Hillsong NYC, with weekly church gatherings happening every Sunday.

## References

- Biermans, J. 1986, *The Odyssey of New Religious Movements, Persecution, Struggle, Legitimation: A Case Study of the Unification Church* Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Melton Press ISBN 0-88946-710-2
- <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/manhattan-center-announces-al-jazeera-201500850.html>

## External links

- Manhattan Center Studios | AV Dept. | Home (<http://www.mcstudios.com/av>)
- Manhattan Center Studios | Audio Dept. | Recording Studios (<http://www.mcstudios.com/audio>)
- Manhattan Center Studios | History (<http://www.mcstudios.com/about/history.php>)
- Manhattan Center Studios | MCStudios (<http://www.mcstudios.com>)

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