

As Time Goes By – Entertainment at the Judges Dinner

Those who have had the opportunity to attend a number of Judges Dinners probably have their favorite, although it is likely that we found each to have been enjoyable. Entertainment, of one form or another, has invariably played a role in contributing to this enjoyment over the years.

Long before any of us can remember, Judges Dinners featured live entertainment for the audience gathered at the Waldorf. Back in the 1920s and 1930s, the entertainment of choice was a play having some connection to patents. The originator of several of these plays was a patent lawyer-turned-playwright named Lawrence Langner.

The first Langner play was entitled “Patent Applied For.” It was a comedy about a tall blonde Australian lady who was the inventor of a new corset. The corset was intended to adjust the contours of the female anatomy to comply with then-current fashion trends. The play was considered to be a great success, and this led to other Langner plays at later Judges Dinners.¹

Mr. Langner went on to achieve great success in the theater world at large. He was a co-founder of the Theater Guild along with his wife, Armina Marshall, a Theater Guild co-administrator, Mr. Langner participated in the Guild’s 1943 production of *Oklahoma*, which became perhaps the most celebrated of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. It is perchance somewhat ironic that Ms. Marshall, who was partly a Native American Indian, was born on the Cherokee Strip in what was then called the “Oklahoma Territory.”²

Of course, plays weren’t the only form of live entertainment at Judges Dinners in years past. Music was a mainstay. The Waldorf’s Basildon Room became the setting for musicians



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to provide sounds from the big band era for easy listening, and dancing to the foxtrot, cha-cha, waltz, rhumba, and jitterbug.

Spanning more than half a century, a saxophonist and band-leader named Ray “Dutch” Wolff performed at every Judges Dinner from 1960 through 2012. As you may recall, in 1960 Dwight D. Eisenhower was President of the United States, and top hats for men and fur shawls for women were still the order of the day. Back then, our Association’s Bulletin was only a dream in the mind of the newly-constituted “Bulletin Committee,” a dream that didn’t become a reality until the first issue of the Bulletin appeared in October 1961. It goes without saying that Dutch’s tenure of performing musical entertainment at the Judges Dinner is a record that is likely to stand the test of time.

The 2013 Judges Dinner ushers in a new band called the *Silver Streaks*, headed by Rudy Gisolfi. The new band promises to offer a wide range of musical renditions, ranging from rock to ballads to swing numbers. Who knows, maybe they’ll include one of those early pieces, such as *Birth of the Blues*, that harkens back to an earlier era of Judges Dinners.

Happily, we can look forward to a continuation of the Association’s long history of providing live entertainment at the Judges Dinner, mindful that it will help contribute to the evening’s enjoyment. See you at this year’s Judges Dinner!

With kind regards,

Dale Carlson

(Footnotes)

¹ Ladas & Parry, Firm History, available online at www.ladas.com/LADASINFO/history.html

² Armina Marshall’s Obituary (with Correction Appended), The New York Times, July 22, 1991, available online at www.nytimes.com.