

Streatham Hill Theatre - a Memory of Streatham.

In 1973 I became the general manager of Streatham Hill Theatre, managing the Mecca Social/Bingo club. It was the flagship club of the company and was every manager's dream to run it. Previous managers were Robin Pritchard, Harvey Pritchard and Pat Button but the most popular was Don Fox. He would always sing to the customers and they loved him!

The theatre had been thoroughly "Meccanised" for bingo but it could still be adapted back to a 2,000-seater for a theatre production if need be as all the backstage equipment was retained and in working order. I put that to use on many occasions when we staged mini-shows between sessions for the delight (I think) of our patrons. We would have special promotion days and themes and the staff would dress up and entertain everyone.

The most popular caller, without doubt, was Dallas Cavell, who also appeared in daytime soap operas on television. He had this wonderful deep baritone voice which was perfect for a bingo caller.

I still have photographs of some of the special occasions we held there. One shows the singer, Anne Shelton, with all the previous managers, including myself. She sang some of her most popular songs and wowed the crowd. I have photos of myself and Miss World 1973, Belinda Green, and Miss World 1978, Sylvana Suarez, when I took them on personal appearances around the clubs and also photos of some of the promotions we staged. I'm a photographic hoarder as you can guess! We held the finals of a Mecca Talent Contest there one November which was, I guess, the forerunner of The X-Factor! I also arranged a number of bingo bus trips to Brighton in the summer. Bingo on the bus, bingo at Brighton Mecca, fish 'n chips and cockles and winkles on the prom, dip your toe in the water, then bingo on the bus back. Talk about living the high life!

There was a special game played each year and the overall winners were awarded trips to Bermuda and New York including a cruise on the QE2. Other prizes were trips to Canada or Europe. I was fortunate to be invited along on such trips in 1972 and later in 1978. Great perks for a young manager!

My memory isn't so good when it comes to remembering all the names of the wonderful staff that worked for me but I do remember, with fondness, Doug Williams, who was one of my great assistant managers. In 1975 Doug and I did a Round-England motorcycle ride for charity and raised a sizeable sum of money but, boy, it was cold and wet and it was a hard ride. 2500 miles in 6 days in cold, snowy conditions but, overall, it was exciting and worthwhile. I also remember Sylvia Morris and Yvonne Williams who worked for me. They were close friends and loved being on stage. Their big act was as "Pinky & Perky" in one of our great stage performances! Where are they now? Then there was a wonderful assistant called Lorraine (?) who managed all the backstage bingo sessions along with a whole crew of people. Fond memories of all those people who made coming to work such a pleasure. The staff and the many great customers who came regularly to Streatham Hill Theatre are indelibly imprinted in my heart and I'm sorry I can't remember everyone's names. It's that age thing!

I hope you have all had as good a life as I have since those days. I now live in America where bingo is still played in church halls under strict regulations so there was no chance of me opening my own club and becoming the next Eric Morley (God rest his soul) so I settled for a life of customer service with a wonderful company and also playing lots of music as a hobby in one of the most beautiful states in the country. Maine, on the northeast coast, has the sub-title "The Way Life Should Be" and, believe me, it's been great.

If anyone remembers me and/or those days around 1973, you can contact me by e-mail at skiffleking@yahoo.com and share any other memories you have.

As Bob Hope (born in Eltham in 1903) would say, "Thanks For The Memories!"

A memory shared by Peter Gauci on May 9th, 2011.

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