

Dance Hall Life of City Is Revealed

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Girl Reporter Is Employed As Dancer

Pep Brings Cash

Loiterers and Riff Raff Fill Places Nightly

This is the first of a series of articles on the “free” dance halls of New Orleans by a girl reporter for The Item who worked in them.

In writing these stories, the reporter has given the uncolored facts and conditions as they exist.

The moaning of saxophones, the short staccato notes of banjos, the barbaric rhythm of the drums and above all the sentimentally slow notes of the piano, interspersed with whimsical and rather ridiculous runs and trills—these are the sounds you will hear every night from eight until twelve thirty, if you are lingering on the corner of Burgundy and Canal streets. On this corner are situated two of the three dance halls in the city where admission is free, and where once admitted, you are lured by the music and the smiles of girls, to pay the cashier the small sum of ten cents for a dance which lasts a little over a minute. Loiterers on street corners, sailors on leave, all the riff raff of the city streets, find these dance halls noisy and vivacious places to spend an evening, and every night hundreds climb the stairs and finding that they do not have to dance if they don't want to, hang over the railing which surrounds the dance floor, and watch the dancers.

The Arcadia, which began business a year ago, and was the first of the three to open, is situated on Burgundy street, just a few doors off Canal. Danceland, a rival place of business, is on Canal. Women are not allowed in these halls, because girls are supplied by the house. There are thirty girls at the Arcadia, who are paid five cents for every dance they make, and twenty-five at the Danceland, who receive four cents a dance. These places never advertise for girls, for those who dance there are steady workers, and when new girls are needed they bring their friends.

New Hall Opens

Recently a new hall was opened by the manager of the Arcadia, called Roseland, situated at 318 St. Charles St. There are ten girls working here, and because of the fact that the place is new and off the main street, business is not so good.

The writer visited these halls; and then worked in them. Seven-thirty one evening found us heavily made up with rouge and powder, climbing the steps of the Arcadia. The music had not begun, but nevertheless there was a crowd of young men hanging around the stairs, shouting familiarly to the girls as they came to work.

“Hey, Redhead, save a dance for me, will yuh kid?” “See the little fat one—she’s some stepper but you wouldn’t think it. I danced ten with her last night and everybody was watchin’ us.” “Aw, I like the goil with the King Tut hair. But she’s got a guy what’s jealous as h-ll.”

The girls shouted back as familiarly. Upstairs the hall was half lit and cold, not yet warmed by the crush of human bodies, for there is no other method of heating. A few musicians were taking their instruments from their cases, and tuning them, and a man behind the soft drink stand was swabbing off his counter with red, chapped hands. A good-looking policeman sauntered around chatting with the musicians and the girls. From the dressing room, where the girls were taking off their coats and hats and applying more layers of rouge and powder, came the sound of shrill giggling.

“How much did you make last night, kid? Cheesus and Murry, I only made sixty dances. If this keeps up I’ll have to go back to the beanery. Say, did you hear that Marie made a hundred and twenty. Gosh, if I danced the way that b— dances, I’d make it, too.”

Given Employment

Finally, after we had waited for half an hour, a tall gaunt man with eye glasses, the owner and piano player of the Arcadia came in, and fortified by the fact that we had as much paint and lip stick and powder on our faces as the other girls, we asked him for a job. “Need any more girls?” we said.

“How did you happen to hear I needed girls?” he asked, looking us over.

“Oh, I had a friend called Jackie who used to work up here and she said she made about three dollars a night. That’s better than working in the store.”

“Well, I don’t know—I do need some girls over at the Roseland—there’s only ten there, but of course if you want to take a chance here, you can. We’ve thirty already, but they all make pretty good money. You can stick around here for a couple of nights, and if you don’t make out, you can go over to the other place.”

Having taken us on, he became more genial and communicative. “There’s pretty good money in it for the girls that have lots of pep. Of course if you stand around talking to the fellows all evening you don’t get the dances. The only thing to do is to stick close to business. That skinny one there makes about three dollars a night and thinks she’s doing well. Whereas if she talked less and were a little more spry she’d make five and more.

“Do you see that little Wop with the frizzy hair. She danced for forty-eight hours in a marathon down in Texas and she makes six dollars a night most of the time. She’s got an eye for business.

“I’ll tell you what, though,” he added, “don’t wear your good shoes up here. The new ones always do, and they find out their mistake. The thing to do is to wear sneakers, or gym slippers and don’t give a damn how your feet look. Lots of them bring three or four pairs of

shoes up here with them and change during the evening to ease their feet. Every couple of weeks, I have to throw out a pile of old shoes that they've danced the soles off of. I oughtta start in the second hand shoe business."

Warned About Thefts

When the "lady manager" of the place arrived, we were introduced to her, and shown into the dressing room. "Don't leave your bags around here," she warned us, "because everybody swipes everything they can lay their hands on. Leave your bags outside where the men check their hats."

The girls treat the manager with an easy informality, but when Mrs. S., his associate, enters their dressing room, they quit their chatter and kill their surreptitious cigarets. During the course of the evening, some of them are running in and out of the dressing room, changing their shoes, eating sandwiches, drinking bottles of soft drinks from the fountain outside, and leaning out of the window, which looks down on Burgundy street, to take a few puffs of a cigaret. Down below, a gang of rowdy youths yell up at them, commenting on the details of their toilet.

Owing to the fact that it was the night after New Year's and business was expected to be dull, Mrs. S. after showing us around, told us we needn't start work until the next night, and adjured us to be there promptly at seven-thirty.
