

Magi Interview

Mike: When did the tour idea originally come to you?

Harry: In 1975 Jack asked me to take a group of Collegians out. He took one group, and I took the other. We called it The Living Christmas Tree. Basically they stood on risers and held a string of lights that one of the guys would plug in every once in a while. When I got back, Jack said, "What do you think?" I said, "Jack, it was terrible, honestly, it doesn't look like Word of Life...no class." That's when Jack said to me, "Why don't you do something about it?" I said, "I've never done anything like this."

Mike: That's when Let Freedom Ring was born, right?

Harry: Yes, I had the advantage in that 1976 was a big year and the story of Let Freedom Ring was a very patriotic story. Jack traveled with me and did a 10-minute gospel message at the end. We started out on spring break in 1976. The response was overwhelming. We had taken a giant step of faith. We were in every giant theater you could think of and filled them. We had over 90,000 people come to see it. That blew all of us out of the ballpark. There were hundreds of decisions. I decided while I was on that tour to write Ring the Bells.

Mike: How many nights in a row would you do these tours?

Harry: The full tour would be about 40 days.

Mike: When you were doing those tours, about how many nights were you and Millie on the road?

Harry: I think about 120 days a year.

Mike: Over the course of all your tours...I have heard you talk about the numbers...

Harry: Leander Chute was on the tour with me and would count the tickets every night. He was very precise so believe me when I tell you that he counted over two million tickets of those who attended all of our presentations.

Mike: What was the largest audience you ever had?

Harry: I think the largest audience we had was at Madison Square Gardens – not in the big Garden, but in the smaller 7500-seat place. We did three Christmas programs. We had about 21,000 people that day. We did it just like this: we opened the back door and let everybody out and then would bring them in by a different door.

Mike: Would you do again?

Harry: Definitely! But remember, I did not do it by myself the first time. I have a great team!