



by Freddie Sadler

Freddie Sadler has always, bar unavoidable interruptions, worked as a writer and entertainer. "I've been lucky enough, thank God, to earn a living doing what I want. I've been paid to work in places that I would have paid to see! Come to think, I've also been to a few places I'd have paid to avoid!"

He started in Music Hall as a Carroll Levis Discovery and survived in concerts, clubs, cabaret, summer show, tv, and latest development — after dinner (or lunch) speaking. The reason? "Include me on a bill and I make every other act look better — by comparison."

TRUE Music Hall breathed its last in the 1950's. I was in it before the death and worked with many veterans of variety — billtoppers and the "Wines & Spirits".*

Very much their junior, I listened and learned and loved every anecdotal minute.

A few great stars are known to successive generations of the public: Marie Lloyd; Sir Harry Lauder; Little Tich, a legend in his own laughtime. Born Harry Relph, he adopted his stage name from the currently notorious "Tichborne Claimant," and thus this smallest of comedians introduced a nickname to our language.

Lauder's first London booking was at Gatti's Theatre of Varieties, Westminster Bridge Road. This tiny theatre had but two dressing rooms and "limes hung from the walls". (An obscure contemporary description of the lighting.) But it launched the 30-year old Scot to stardom in 1900.

So much is known about the stars but I have found there is a rich vein to be worked among the lesser known acts. Particularly 60 or so years ago in the smaller No.2 & 3 halls.

Always hazards even for lighting. In September, 1918, the manager of the Bognor Kursaal was up before the magistrate at Chichester. He had fallen foul of a Lighting, Heating and Power Order by using six light bulbs at 11.15pm!

Neither gas nor electricity could be used in theatres between 10.30pm and 1.0pm. As scenery was being struck the case was dismissed on a technicality.

*So called in the profession because they came at the bottom of the bill — just as wines and spirits come at the end of a menu!

There were so many places to work — the Welsh valleys had over 40; Empires at Porth, Tonypany, Ebbw Vale; Workmen's Halls at Blaengarw, Ton Pentre; Palaces at Barry, Neath, Llanelly.

Communities with negligible populations could offer a week's work to the pro's. Some examples are Boosbeck Empire (Yorks); Bulwell Olympia (Notts); and Easton (Dorset) had a Palace on the Albany Ward circuit. West Calder (Midlothian) managed a Palace and Public Hall. They were sometimes maids of all work with concerts classical, political meetings.

"The Great Carlton & His Satellites" presented Spiritualism for the first three days and Hypnotism for the remainder of the week.

Music Hall contracts had several important clauses. The barring clause, hotly disputed initially, prohibited an artiste from working near the theatre for which he had accepted a booking. The ban operated before and after the fixed week — sometimes for months.

The performer must present his or her "Act as Known". It meant that trying new material was not acceptable unless it went well.

Another clause stipulated that music must be provided as the musi-

cians could not be expected to busk.

Robb Wilton, a great humorist off stage, told of the small act that was told he must provide 35 band parts.

At Monday rehearsal he asked the pianist when the other musicians would turn up. "There's only me," came the reply, "but I need the band books. It's a very low piano stool!"

Publicity material was also required — not least a description of the act for posters and programmes. This was known as 'Bill Matter' and as an art form ranged from the "Gorbimey to the Ridiculous". I hardly need remind you that "The Cheeky Chappie" brought Max Miller immediately to mind.

Fenner & Roberts, "Some are Somersaults Somernot"; Windsor Tate, "The Chalkative Talker"; Du Callon, "The Talkative Laddie on the Tottering Ladder", clearly indicated

the style of entertainment.

But what can you make of? ... Jasper & Vernon, "Putting the Wobble in the Blancmange". The man, blacked up, had a lived-in face after the lease had run out. He wore a battered topper and decrepit morning suit. The woman was an Indian squaw.

There was "Gee Gee Chaplin — The Laughing Horse". Ed. E. Ford resolutely stuck to: "The Australian Paradoxical Physiognomist". (I believe 'Fizzog' was a schoolboy term for 'Face'.) What possessed Foreman & Fannan to bill themselves as "The Smells of Mayfair", I don't know, but they were often in the Calls.

Ted Le Roy had "A Kiltie wi' a Gaglet or Twa". He changed his name to Scott Sanders and had a long career. I'll remember him for a superb stopper when he was getting the bird.

He hold the audience: "Many years

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