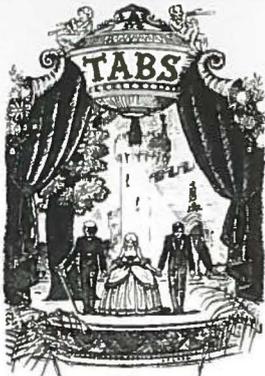


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COVER PICTURE

Limehouse Studio 2. Production: Harry's Christmas. Picture by courtesy of Professional Video. Photographer: David Darby.



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SEVENTY YEARS ON

1914. For every European the date can only have one immediate meaning. But in fact it was a fascinating year, quite apart from the trouble with the Kaiser.

Among the interesting events a few from the world of theatre are worth mentioning. April saw the first night of Shaw's 'Pygmalion' at His Majesty's, with Mrs Patrick Campbell as Eliza Doolittle and Herbert Tree as Professor Higgins. The rehearsals were especially difficult as the leading players were not on speaking terms.

Tree was so professional an actor – in the then West End sense – that he did not concern himself overmuch with details of the roles of the rest of the cast. Thus when Eliza threw the professor's slippers at him Tree assumed that this was part of their personal disagreement and promptly burst into tears. Only when he had the author's directions pointed out to him from the script could matters proceed. Shaw's cleverness in getting an actress to say 'bloody' on stage, in 1914, assured such publicity that the play would probably have succeeded even if it had not been a work of genius.

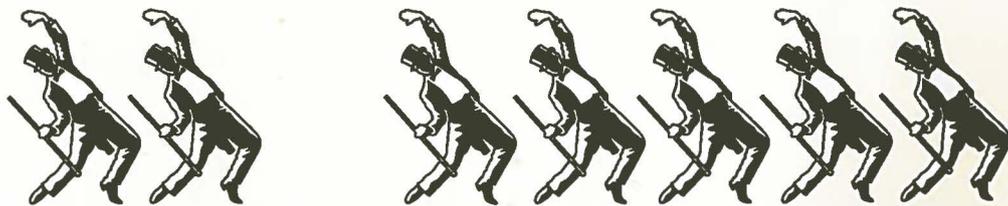
One point on the lighting. This

was really at the very end of the era in which the stars were followed spotted throughout the play, on the basis that they were the reason the public had come. Mrs Pat – although universally considered fascinating and attractive on stage – was no classic beauty, having an almost perfectly round face. G.B.S. persuaded her to forego her follow spot by telling her that it made her look "like a suet pudding in which two prunes had been embedded".

At the Palace Theatre the Russian Ballet, with Pavlova and Mordkin, had taken the town by storm. At the Hippodrome there was a sign of the shape of things to come. Ethyl Levy, the first American star to really score a big London success, was in 'Hello Ragtime'.

These few time markers will be enough to show that the London theatre of seventy years ago was innovative and flourishing.

No doubt this was also apparent to a Mr Phillip Sheridan and to a Mr Arthur Earnshaw, two clever stage electricians from the West End theatre, when they decided to set up a stage lighting company and took premises in Garrick Yard off St. Martin's Lane. The name they chose? Why, Strand, of course.



70 YEARS

AT THE TOP!