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An Intimate Understanding: the Rise of
British Musical Revue 1890-1920

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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The other firm basis for this thesis is the archive of play scripts held by the British Library, London. Those scripts involved in this thesis were accumulated by the Lord Chamberlain during his many decades of "censoring" British theatre. The staff of the Manuscripts section of the British Library have been most helpful, before and after their move from Bloomsbury to St. Pancras.

For years of helpful assistance and access to its collections--so underfunded that they are still not all catalogued--I also thank the staff of the Theatre Museum of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Covent Garden, London. Thanks for timely assistance from Samuel French, Inc., London. For long-standing friendship and support, thanks to Peter and Anneliese Kirianoff of La Habra, California and Pat and Sandy Arkin of Claremont, California.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Suzon Forscey-Moore, A to Z, who is most responsible, in good times and bad, for all my work on musical theatre.

DECLARATIONS

Although I have written about various aspects and personalities within musical theatre for reference works in the United States and Great Britain, and have learned enough about André Charlot to make one national radio programme about his life and times, none of these works are reproduced in this thesis; they are properly regarded as background to researching aspects of this thesis.

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

James Ross Moore, Cambridge, June 2000

ABSTRACT

An Intimate Understanding: The Rise of British Musical Revue 1890-1920

A close examination of more than 100 play scripts and the unpublished writings of Revue impresario André Charlot (1882-1956) provides the original bases for this thesis. Although it is usually assumed that British musical Revue's origins must be French, a close look at its genealogy shows that the elements of Revue existed in British musical theatre before 1890. These included Burlesque, Burletta, Musical Comedy, Variety, Concert Party and Ballet. The rise of the up-to-date thing called Revue was partly the product of general social change during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. Of particular importance to the development of Intimate Revue--the notably British contribution to the genre--was the physical development from 1890 of London's West End, particularly the building of many small and medium-sized theatres. A number of "proto-revues" and short "revues" included in Variety bills preceded the arrival of "real" Revue in 1912. In that year, Revue escaped Variety via the latest of many changes in jurisdiction which finally allowed its presentation in "theatres". Revue might not have developed beyond the Spectacular type except for the 1914-1918 war and its austerities. Charles B. Cochran's serendipitous *Odds and Ends* (1914-1915) is properly the first Intimate Revue, though the genre was subsequently given its definitive shape by Charlot. The development of its distinctive theatrical form is characterised in the development of Revue specialists, the most important of which are shown to be the literary-minded authors of mini-dramas: "sketches." All the elements of the developed form meet in the Charlot revue *Buzz Buzz* (1918-1920). It is argued that Intimate Revue, while gradually losing its "musical" aspect, held to this model for more than three decades; it is also argued that Intimate Revue's example altered the course of Revue in the United States.

An Intimate Understanding: the Rise of British Revue 1890-1920

Chapter One: The Genealogy of Revue

The study of British revue's years of development (1890-1920) properly begins with definition. But British revue itself did not spring from anyone's definition nor from any single influence or tradition.¹ Nor have British revue's infrequent commentators, scholarly or otherwise, particularly agreed regarding its origins. What agreement exists is mainly by default: of course it must in some way have arisen from France, the home of the word and the form.

The Lack of a Revue Tradition

This oversimplification is varied only slightly by the major commentators on British revue, Raymond Mander and Joseph Mitchenson. In *Revue: a Story in Pictures* Mander and Mitchenson² nominate James Robinson Planché (1796-1880) as a progenitor of British revue. Planché was a theatrical polymath who wrote burlesques, served as musical manager of Vauxhall Gardens between 1826 and 1827, managed the (London) Adelphi theatre, became an authority on heraldry (and in fact a herald himself) and in 1834 wrote a *History of British Costumes* which has remained a standard work in its field. In particular support of their theory, Mander and Mitchenson point to Planché's 1872 memoir, which insists that he had produced a "revue" in London as early as 1825.

For many reasons--most of them related to the unending struggle between governmental authority and "theatres" which will emerge at various times throughout this thesis--the terminology of theatrical genres has proved constantly shifting and unreliable. In 1825 Planché

¹ Throughout this thesis, I refer to "British" revue; although during these years it was primarily English, its exponents were found throughout the U.K.

² Raymond Mander and Joseph Mitchenson, *Revue: a Story in Pictures*, 1971, p.5

does not appear to have called his production a “revue”. It is true that whether at Vauxhall Gardens or especially at the (London) Olympic, Planché created special holiday entertainments at irregular intervals and used various terms to describe them. There was, for example, an 1847 “Easter piece” described (by Planché) as ‘an entirely New and Original Classical, Astronomical, Quizzical, Polytechnical, Experimental, Operational, Pantomimical EXTRAVAGANZA.’³ Dictionaries of all types struggle with “extravaganza.” *Webster’s New World Dictionary* notes its Italian origins and decides it is “a literary, musical or dramatic fantasy characterised by a loose structure and farce” and, slightly more narrowly, “a spectacular, elaborate theatrical production, as some musical shows.”⁴ As we shall see, by the turn of the 20th Century, the term “extravaganza” was much in use, covering pretty much whatever its user wanted it to cover. What is important is the gap between British musical revue 1890-1920 and this “astronomical, polytechnical” production; it’s immense.

This particular extravaganza of Planché’s was in fact called a “revue” in 1847, but not by Planché. Mander and Mitchenson note that the *Illustrated London News* of 3 April 1847 called it “one of those pieces known at the French theatres as a revue”⁵, perhaps because, like the French genre (see below) in imagination it more or less “toured” a number of metropolitan sites, in this case London sites. Using the word “revue” also seems an exercise in trendiness on the part of the reviewer, who thus conferred upon himself an enviable and up-to-date cosmopolitan expertise. Planché’s own summing-up at age 76 suggests much of the same willingness to confer historicity upon one’s own endeavours. As we shall see, Planché was not the last entrepreneur to decide *ex post facto* that his extravaganzas deserved the classier name revue.

In fact, Mander and Mitchenson are frequently contradicted in their assertion that Planché’s work is “revue”. Ernest Short and Arthur

³ *Ibid.* p. 7

⁴ *Webster’s New World Dictionary* (second College Edition, 1982) p. 497

⁵ Mander and Mitchenson, p. 8

Compton Rickett call his “Olympic revels” of major importance in the development, not of revue, but of English burlesque and pantomime”⁶ It is fair to generalise Mander and Mitchenson’s assessment of Planche as that of a colourful showman; they do not attempt to prove that he influenced another generation of “revues” or began any sort of tradition. Nor is there another candidate before the period of this study who can truly claim to be the father of British revue.

Some Goals of this Thesis

There is no study of British revue which addresses the social, legal and economic developments and pure happenstance which between 1890 and 1920 helped create a real revue tradition. That is one of the tasks of this thesis. So is the construction of a model of British revue, and I shall show how this model was assembled from pre-existing components. I will follow Mander and Mitchenson in one major respect: showing that the most suitably “British” form of revue was intimate revue. British intimate revue did develop, and, for various reasons; I find that a chronology is the best way to display that development. Thus my thesis is a kind of history as much as it is an argument. Having argued that by 1920 the form of British (intimate) revue was fully developed, my thesis then shows at least in outline how the form survived in subsequent decades. My thesis concentrates on London revue, though it will be made clear that especially during the 1914-1918 War a regular revue mania swept the nation.

It should be stressed that revue during this period was definitely musical; yet this thesis inevitably shows that intimate revue took its definitive shape because of the increased literary content of its “sketches.” Especially after the 1939-1945 War the importance of music lessened and, especially after the ravages of television, revue became largely indistinguishable from the “sketch show.”

These aspects of my thesis are largely original; another is in part

⁶ Ernest Short and Arthur Compton Rickett, *Ring Up the Curtain: being a Pageant of English Entertainment Covering Half a Century*, 1935, p. 21.

derivative. Among historians of (primarily American) musical theatre Gerald Bordman and Stanley Green have suggested--pretty much without documenting the notion--that American musical revue was transformed in the wake of the startling success of the visiting *Charlot's London Revue* (1924.) Chapter Seven examines their claims.

The Question of *Under the Clock*

Setting aside any thought of a revue tradition in Britain before the 1890s, it is necessary to examine another idea which has assumed the status of a convention. It has been stated by Mander and Mitchenson and reinforced by Richard Anthony Baker in his four-hour history of revue on BBC Radio Three (14 and 21 November 1993). According to this notion, the Sherlock Holmes spoof *Under the Clock* (The Court Theatre -- now the Royal Court -- 1893) should be called the "first British revue." It seems to me that this is pretty much like adopting Planche's assertions-after-the-fact, because it was that show's author, (Sir) Seymour Hicks, who, having called *Under the Clock* an "extravaganza" in 1893 decided in one of his autobiographical volumes⁷ that it was in fact a "revue".

Even if we call *Under the Clock* a revue, we are stuck with the fact (a pretty amazing one, considering the ingrown world of British theatre) that there were no immediate imitations, and in fact it was more than a decade before any British show called itself a revue (those at the London Empire by George Grossmith, Jr., see Chapter Two) and when they did, being closely related to French precedent, they bore little resemblance to *Under the Clock*. But the importance of *Under the Clock* in the development of British revue is real; the show itself is discussed at some length later in this chapter; it is referred to thereafter.

All thought of an orderly development of a tradition is made ludicrous by the amazing explosion of "revue" throughout the land between 1912

⁷ Seymour Hicks, *Me and My Missus*, 1939, cited by Mander and Mitchenson, *Op.Cit.*, p.15.

and 1915, when the word obviously meant whatever its impresario wanted it to mean. During the 1914-1918 War, which in general was a pounds-and-pence bonanza for theatre, it was revue that particularly prospered; this thesis demonstrates how by 1918 it had become Britain's most popular theatrical form. It was during the war years when, under the ferocious competition within the West End, revue was forced into a particular shape and style.

An Approach to a Study of Revue

Always remembering that "revue" as a word is an importation, and acknowledging in advance that British revue would be given its definitive form by an expatriate Parisian, I propose to begin this study and to reach a working definition of British revue by way of examining the varied forms of the London musical stage of the 1890s, leaving the economic, legal and social forces shaping this stage for later chapters. I hope to demonstrate that despite the foreign origins of the word and the form, no one had to import British "revue". I believe that virtually all the elements which subsequently characterised it were already on hand, scattered among the era's stages. In this I reject or at least sharply modify another nugget of received wisdom, which is that Revue actually evolved from the forms called music hall or variety in Britain and music-hall in France. (Here is another example of the difficulty of terminology!) Although variety's importance to revue is acknowledged, it was only one of the parents of British revue.

I also believe it highly unlikely that in any area of life during the years 1890-1920, Britain, so full of itself at this height of Empire, could have enthusiastically embraced a form it regarded as wholly "foreign." Britain embraced revue because Britain recognised revue as befitting British life.

The following sketch of pre-existing forms of musical theatre which I believe contributed heavily to the birth of British revue includes several which were displaced or even erased by the new form. Others remained

alive, though subsumed within revue; some -- such as variety in its multiple forms, continued to co-exist on their own terms. My sketch is executed in admittedly broad strokes, but my goal is to build a substructure from which we may approach a working definition of British revue. Although secondary sources have been consulted in compiling this sketch, it, like much else in this thesis, mainly relies upon the play scripts on file in the thorough and thoroughly indispensable collection of the Lord Chamberlain at the British Library.

The British Musical Stage in the 1890s: Elements of Revue

Burlesque: This venerable form, popular on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the 19th Century, was clearly on its last legs during the 1890s. This generalisation is in line with even the nostalgists among theatrical historians, such as Alan Hyman, who implies that the form might have endured longer, except that in 1892 the legendary impresario of the Gaiety Theatre and Daly's, George Edwardes⁸ in the process of somewhat successfully updating the form, was robbed of his regular stars, Nellie Farren and Fred Leslie, from chronic rheumatism and early death from typhoid fever, respectively,⁹ and responded by stitching together another type of entertainment: musical comedy.

Burlesque, once a broadly effective and flexible container for the barracking of anything pretentious, particularly suited to sending up contemporarily popular tales and plays, had in Britain largely degenerated into jokey adaptations of stories and legends generally well known--Christopher Columbus, Dick Turpin, Jolly Jack Shepherd, Joan of Arc. (That many of the same subjects served as fodder for the pantomimes which traditionally ended a theatrical year is probably instructive, as is the fact that the bawdier pantos have survived to this day. When burlesque ran out of fresh ideas and became

⁸ A great number of personalities weave in and out of this history of British Revue's early years. Edwardes is one; beginning as a box-office manager for Richard D'Oyly Carte at the Opera Comique in 1878, Edwardes moved up to acting manager at the Savoy, and in 1883 went into partnership with John Hollingshead at the Gaiety Theatre.. Known as "Guv" he gradually extended his sphere of influence throughout the West End..

⁹ Alan Hyman, *Sullivan and his Satellites: a Survey of English Operettas 1860-1914*, 1978, p. 105

indistinguishable from pantomime, the purer, more authentic form survived.)¹⁰

Yet even in these twilight years, what pertains to a study of revue is that burlesque, often at the length of a full evening in the theatre, opulently mounted and capable of runs stretching past a year, employed political and social topicality-- always, of course, within the "rules" currently administered by the Lord Chamberlain, whose regularly-changing role is discussed in several chapters. In Chapter Two I discuss one of the best of the later burlesques, *King Kodak* (1894, Terry's, and interestingly enough "sponsored" by Eastman Kodak -- the theatrical programme boasted a large advert).¹¹ *King Kodak* is interesting in itself--showing that its era was not unanimous in approving the economic imperialism of contemporary Cecil Rhodeses -- but for this study, which comes to emphasise literary qualities, its importance is surely that its topicality was displayed in a rather sharp piece of writing.

The social comment of this burlesque, like that of many revues studied herein, may be said to display a blend of deeply held prejudice and healthy populist skepticism, not terribly intellectual, not necessarily well-informed, but frequently said in an unforgettable manner. It will be shown that revue eventually developed a way of commenting upon the 1914-1918 War, but it is equally true that before and after the War, it tended to ignore the larger social and political issues confronting the U.K., preferring to limit itself to manners and mores. This is not a negative judgment; the social content of "legitimate" theatre during these years rarely rose above the level of the Aldwych farces.

One reason for the gradual decline of burlesque, topicality notwithstanding, is surely a failure of imagination, particularly observable in its increasing and finally wearily predictable reliance

¹⁰ The spirit of burlesque never quite vanished, as witness the various "Carry On" films of the 1960s and 1970s and subsequent imitations thereof.

¹¹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, British Library, LCP 107; 53547 (The numbering of items in the Lord Chamberlain's collection is somewhat inconsistent; the major disparity involves items before and after 1900) also Theatre programme, Terry's, 25 April 1894.

upon outrageous punning, which is observable to a high degree even in *King Kodak*. The veteran producer Robert Nesbitt has pointed out¹² that by the end of the nineteenth century, these burlesques had come to be regarded as something less than central to a theatrical year. To the profession of acting itself they were indeed like pantomimes, promising alternative, “one-off” roles for performers best-known in “legitimate” roles -- Shakespeareans and other tragedians at play, freed on their once-a-year days to become more or less modern examples of the Lord of Misrule. The audiences of burlesque, according to Nesbitt, had gradually come to expect nothing more of burlesque than such genial throwaway “turns.”

A reading of *Joan of Arc* (1891, the Opera Comique and subsequently the Gaiety)¹³ suggests a further reason for burlesque’s eventual demise. The heroine Joan is actually described in the playscript’s stage directions as “Loie Fuller”, the innovative American suddenly *au courant* in London for her flamboyant skirt-dancing and aesthetic theories.¹⁴ (Fuller never appeared in the show.) Audience recognition was nevertheless assured by (too) many puns on skirts and dancing, as well as dialogue emphasising this doughty “Joan”’s tendency to pretentiousness. With the advantage of a century’s hindsight, this *Joan of Arc* also can be seen to suggest the form’s -- and perhaps British theatregoing society’s -- smug, gossipy snobbishness, since Fuller soon moved on to Paris, where she was better appreciated and where, beginning in 1892, as *La Loie* she revolutionised modern dance and stage lighting.¹⁵

As for music: as a rule, burlesque songs simply grafted new words upon standard melodies, and the original songs of burlesque were usually forgettable; they rarely had anything to do with plots which were in

¹² Personal interview, London, 1993.

¹³ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 12; 53466

¹⁴ Fuller, known in the United States as a performer who never lost a friend or paid a debt, soon far surpassed “skirt dancing” by dancing amid huge swathes of material, which she flung into the air and illuminated, giving uncanny approximations of flames, flowers, and other natural phenomena.

¹⁵ Stage lighting “tricks” will be shown to have energised the early Intimate Revues, most particularly those staged by André Charlot.

any case contrived for easy and frequent abandonment; they employed standard patterns and in any event the music was clearly subordinated to physicality and word play. But it would be foolish to ignore the competitive theatrical context in which the composers and lyricists of these burlesques worked. After all, the last significant collaboration between W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan, *The Gondoliers*, opened in 1889. Burlesque composers and lyricists such as Lionel Monckton, Ivan Caryll and Adrian Ross proved more than ready when the newer, less formulaic forms, mainly musical comedy and revue, came along,

It should also be strongly underlined that even after full-length burlesques had lost their way, burlesques of the newer, shorter type such as (Sir) James Barrie's *Ibsen's Ghost, or Toole's Up to Date* (Toole's, 1891)¹⁶ created real interest. This witty satirical evisceration of the newly imported Ibsenism is also discussed at length in Chapter Two. A reading of these shorter burlesques reveals how they almost perfectly transmogrified into the "sketches" which came to characterise revue.

Musical Comedy This form, generally agreed to have been the result of Edwardes' needing something new to shore up his operations after the loss of Farren and Leslie, proved from the beginning so full of verve and inventiveness that it caught even the U.S. on the hop. Gerald Bordman devotes an entire chapter¹⁷ of his history of American musical comedy to its impact on Broadway. (Always capable of co-option, the American musical stage caught up, though it took a full decade). According to Hyman, Edwardes and his long-time associates created in musical comedy a new form "roughly a cross between the French operettas of Offenbach and Lecoq [part of the contemporary London theatrical diet-- interestingly, French farce was equally popular although French revue was much less known], Gilbert and Sullivan, and the Gaiety burlesques."¹⁸

Among the elements which differentiated the new musical comedy from

¹⁶ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 134; 53475

¹⁷ "Gaiety", Chapter Four, pp. 48-62 of *American Musical Comedy: from Adonis to Dreamgirls*, 1982

¹⁸ Hyman, *Loc. Cit.*

burlesque was something basic: for all its playful wish-fulfillment, musical comedy can be said to have relied upon “realistic” stories of “everyday” life. It is no coincidence that the earliest librettists of musical comedy, such as “Owen Hall” (James Davis) were gossiping journalists covering the chic London scene. A typical “realistic” plot, such as that of *The Shop Girl*¹⁹ (Gaiety, 1894) detailed the rise of a sales assistant from a department store (“Garrod’s”) to the aristocracy or at least the wealthy middle class. Such tales proved attractive to the pleasure-seeking, rather ingrown urban society of late Victorian/early Edwardian London. Since for several decades the real-life ladies of Hollingshead’s Gaiety Theatre chorus had indeed been marrying knights and Lords, it is reasonable to believe that 1890s audiences were as eager to see upwardly mobile people like themselves portrayed onstage as their newly prosperous 18th century ancestors had been to read about themselves in that era’s trendy middle class form--the novel. They must have readily accepted that musical comedy’s “truth” was an accurate mirror image of what regularly came their way through daily newspapers.

This apparent contemporaneity was enhanced by brisk staging and fashionable costuming, generally believed to have begun with *In Town* (1892, Prince of Wales)²⁰. Musical comedy language rapidly came to rely not upon punning but upon contemporary slang and catch-phrases. A trend-seeking audience could readily learn all the “in” things to wear and say.²¹

Students of the musical theatre are well aware that in every generation someone claims finally to have integrated music and plot, to attach songs firmly to character, etc. Such claims were indeed made for what came to be known as “Gaiety” musical comedy²². In truth, its plots were crafted with a “flexibility” which was quite calculated, though not

¹⁹ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 349; 53562

²⁰ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 273; 53509

²¹ The need to be “up to date” in such matters eventually provided many writers -- not only Revue writers -- with wonderfully funny material. See for example Ronald Jeans’s “The Old Lady Shows Her Muddles” in the Appendix.

²² Though, since Edwardes controlled as many as five theatres at a time, in fact a number of the shows originated elsewhere).

as chaotic as burlesque's. Since the most popular musical theatre of the moment remained variety in its many forms the new comedies were able to woo established stars of variety such as Arthur Roberts (who thus entered history as the first star of musical comedy--Captain Coddington in *In Town*) by making it possible for them to maintain their regular stage "characters" within this flexibility. These specialities, these familiar "routines" regularly "stopped the show".²³ Nevertheless, a closer approach to integration may underlie the surge in popularity of the songs written for musical comedy, and it is true that the youthful Jerome Kern²⁴ interpolating songs into British musical comedies as early as 1903, took "integration" farther and sooner than any of his composing contemporaries. The popularity of musical comedy song, soon rivalling the old music hall favourites, was also undoubtedly aided by the new availability of gramophones and recordings, such as the Leslie Stuart *Florodora* (Lyric, 1899). In this the British were also significantly ahead of their transatlantic rivals.

The link between musical comedy and revue certainly concerns trendiness and up-to-the-minuteness. Yet Hyman, in whose view Edwardes was at the heart of all turn of the century musical theatre, claims that "When...Edwardes's musical plays flopped, the new revues came into fashion."²⁵ If "flop" can be said to be the operative word, it can be argued that the flop was caused by revue's eventually being better at being trendy. In a relatively fast-moving era (see Chapter Two) musical comedy's greatest strength may have been its fast-moving evocation of what was current. Its plots matched contemporary enthusiasms and its manner was, by contrast to burlesque's, up to the minute and breezy. But the era passed very quickly indeed. It was not

²³ When British intimate musical revue made its legendary conquest of Broadway in 1924, audience and critics were amazed by an assured pace which completely eliminated such encores.

²⁴ Jerome Kern, whose claim as the first example of the Golden Age in American popular music is unassailable, was a true Transatlantic. Having been hired by the equally American producer Charles Frohman (see below), who operated theatres on both sides of the Atlantic, Kern was a precocious 18 in 1903; he proved able to write in a manner "English" enough so that his interpolations harmonised with London originals. *When London shows came to Broadway*, Kern was able to make them more palatable to American audiences by other interpolations. He went on to write more original scores for English musical plays than any other American composer.

²⁵ Alan Hyman, *The Gaiety Years*, 1975, p. 197

musical comedy's fault that wartime speeded up everyone's life to an unheard-of pace, and no one's more than the "on-leave" soldier. Wartime audiences came to demand more variety, briskness and frequency of change than musical comedy proved able to provide. For a number of reasons (which included deaths and defections to the U.S.) the plot invention of British musical comedy had stalled by 1920. By contrast to the many deft playlets--"sketches" -- which would characterise revue, musical comedy in Britain came to seem quite slow.

Burletta. This shorter form of musical farce presumably related to burlesque (derived from the Italian word *burla*, for mockery) and permanently defying most attempts at definition, was popular in late Victorian days. But it came to Britain much earlier. Watson Nicholson has suggested that "burlettas" came into popularity as tools in the non-Patent theatres' lengthy battle to produce plays. Nicholson notes the debut of "a musical novelty" called the *burletta* in the 1740s at the Marylebone Gardens. By the end of that century it was, according to Nicholson, generally understood to be "a drama in rhyme, which is entirely musical; a short comic piece, consisting of recitative and singing, wholly accompanied, more or less, by the orchestra."²⁶

Soon, burlettas were being played at Covent Garden and "all the minors" (the non-patent houses.) And the form of the burletta underwent constant change. Nicholson writes,

Among the various methods adopted by the minor theatres, to evade the limitations placed on their licenses, was to alter, by degrees, the burletta...until it approximated the legitimate drama in presentation, though still retaining its original title. So imperceptible were these changes that the monopoly had been almost surrounded and undermined before serious opposition was raised to the burletta; and by then, precedent had so thoroughly associated that particular sort of entertainment with the lesser establishments, distinguishing them from the guardians of the legitimate drama, that they could not be dispossessed of it after the thing itself had become confused with the regular drama. Furthermore...the patentees, in an evil moment, sanctioned the burletta after it had been metamorphosed into the drama, by bringing on a regular piece under the title of 'burletta.'By

²⁶ Watson Nicholson, *The Struggle For a Free Stage in London*, 1906, p. 281

stealthily advances the burletta so evolved that, by the time a dozen or so of the minors were well under way, it became a most desirable addition to the annual license; as by that time it had been made to cover every imaginable phase of the drama from the most trivial farce to *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*....By 1833 the mystery attaching to the burletta was dispelled, it had become indistinguishable from the drama. 'The question of what is or is not a burletta', writes the editor of the 'Morning Chronicle' (November, 28, 1833) 'has now in practice at least, been settled; it means a drama, with amusing plot, sprightly dialogue, and light sketchy characters, without any music.'...The burletta was the main loop-hole through which the minors sought escape, though not always successfully, when pursued by the majors.²⁷

Thus once more the problem of British theatrical terminology. At least in theory, the Theatres Act of 1843 (see subsequent chapters) in repealing the Patents and "freeing" the stage, should have cleared the confusion about burlettas, which should have been allowed to return to the category of "musical farce." And indeed "burletta" continued as a theatrical category through the end of the century, at least according to the compilations of J.F. Wearing in *The London Stage* [various years] a *Calendar of Plays and Players*.²⁸

If in fact a musical farce could be called a burletta, I think that a reading²⁹ of the play script of Hicks's *Under the Clock* (the title came from the *Telegraph* column listing entertainments; the column was headed by a woodcut of a clock) seems more burletta than the "first Revue." The original programme for the show followed Hicks's own nomenclature, calling it an "extravaganza" (so did *The London Stage*, which did not use the word "revue" at all until midway through its

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 282-287

²⁸ The various editions of this important reference work must be used with a degree of caution, though they are invaluable for their listing of personnel and journalistic sources. Variety houses were not classified as "theatres" for most of the years before 1920, and many early examples of Revue were born in such houses. Simply counting the number of productions -- for example, 240 in 1918, 408 in 1925, 555 in 1931 -- can be misleading. Nineteen-thirty-one was anything but a boom year in London theatre, and most runs were very short indeed. Further, a single performance of an opera or a play by Shakespeare was given as much space as a long-running play or musical.

²⁹ I find such "readings", made possible by the existence of play scripts in the Lord Chamberlain's collection at the British Library, essential to my thesis. If revue is to be discussed, it must be seen, and if that is not possible, it must be imagined from its words. A significant mass of this thesis is direct presentation from these scripts. They are given one footnote apiece, whether I am quoting from the script or the "review" made by the Lord Chamberlain's assessor.

1910-1919 listings. *The Stage Yearbook* refused to create a category for Revue until the later war years; it seems to me its authors really hoped the form would go away.)³⁰ As I have shown, it was when Hicks came to write one of his autobiographical memoirs that he decided that *Under the Clock* was after all a “revue”--and a rather “cruel” one at that. All this seems to me an example of *ex post facto* theatrical huckstering. Still, credit where credit is due: its jaunty irreverence may well qualify *Under the Clock* as an anticipator of revue. Perhaps this synopsis of this one-third of an evening’s entertainment will explain.

*Under the Clock*³¹ takes particular aim at an 1890s enthusiasm/fad: Sherlock Holmes³² In a succession of short scenes, “Sheer-Luck” (this was in fact the name of the story part of the evening’s entertainment)³³ sends Holmes (Charles Brookfield, Hicks’s collaborator), Watson (Hicks) and Hannah, Holmes’s “lady of all work” (Lottie Venn) through a survey of part of a London theatrical year progressively more anarchic. Holmes and Watson’s opening duet begins and ends thus:

SHERLOCK: I can unravel crime with the greatest of ease,

WATSON: Sherlock! You wonderful man!

SHERLOCK: I can make two and two total up as I please,

WATSON: Oh, he’s a wonderful man!

.....

SHERLOCK: But if there’s no evidence, what do you do?

WATSON: Not even a pip, or a thumb, or a shoe?

SHERLOCK: As easy as ABC: make my own clue,

WATSON: Well--THERE’s a wonderful man!

The plot is set in motion by the entrance of a stranger, introducing himself as M. Emile Zola -- so reads the script, though contemporary accounts of the performance³⁴ say onstage he was called “ M. Nana”, in

³⁰ The essays on theatrical forms found in various annual editions of this annual work are useful in tracking the rather intransigent views of a critical “establishment” on the changing tastes of the public.

³¹ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 279, 53537

³² By 1893, Holmes had appeared in the novella *A Study in Scarlet* and a series of stories in *The Strand* magazine, collected in 1892 into *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

³³ Theatre programme, Royal Court Theatre, 16 November 1893

³⁴ Cited in Mander and Mitchenson, *Op.Cit.*, p. 16

(probably mocking) honour of the idealistic Zola's naturalistic 1880 novel dealing with the life of a prostitute. Correctly perceiving that Doyle's detective was rather more intuitive than deductive, the burletta now shows Holmes apparently arbitrarily and incorrectly (but with contemporary relevance) deciding that "Zola" is an Irish terrorist; he sends Watson and Hannah to trail him. Hannah sings plaintively of "The Little Girl Detective" and from the evidence of noises and rhythms Holmes makes his first inspired (and indisputable) deduction--she was singing.

Under the Clock's other main locale is the (London) Mansion House, citadel of The City. Holmes and Watson appear there, using various disguises to sniff out "Zola." As King Richard I, Watson puns about contemporary British life: there is not only a Daily Telegraph but also a Daly Theatre³⁵ Accompanied by a small chorus, Watson regales "Zola" with a song asserting that this latest American invasion of London is for the sole purpose of learning an English accent³⁶

During banter between "Zola" and Hannah about the Lord Chamberlain's way of expurgating texts (ironically, Brookfield himself became the official Examiner of Plays in 1911!) the third Mrs. Tanqueray--said to have gone wrong at the Eleventh Hour--arrives, to be serenaded by Hannah : "I'm now the second Mrs. Boom Ta Ra Ra Tanqueray." (Here is raillery about *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, a contemporary play by Pinero as well as "Ta Ra Ra Boom-de-ay", the music-hall song which had made a star of Lotte Collins). All dance.

Dressed as the Devil, Holmes comments upon the "grizzling reeves" and "fat headed aldermen" of Mansion House, concluding,

Mansion House!

³⁵ In 1893 Daly's in Leicester Square was a brand-new theatre, the latest jewel in the crown of the American actor-entrepreneur Augustin Daly's relatively short-lived empire.)

³⁶ Hicks could in fact do a very good American accent. He had made his first acting appearance in the States in 1889 and with his wife, Ellaline Terriss, remained for many subsequent years in the forefront of the exchanges, collaborations and "borrowings" that characterised the transatlantic musical theatre. In an autobiographical memoir, Hicks noted that Charles Frohman once remarked, upon learning of his arrival, "Padlock your gags; Hicks is in town."

Mansion House! My station!
Dowdy, slammerkin, draggletailed, hogwashed,
Mucid, putrid, carious, smutty Mansion House!
I greet you!

Decorum and good sense gradually vanish. The Prince of Auvergne arrives, speaking “in the manner of Mr. [Henry] Irving”³⁷ A plaque of Goethe inserts his opinion. Alexander Pope, quintessential user of rhymed couplets, appears, in order to be questioned by the deductive Holmes:

Why do you speak in that peculiar way?
POPE: It’s the Impressionist method of the day.
The modern school who don’t know how to speak,
Resort to giving imitation weak.

As the chorus sings of “succulent turtle and barons of beef” (Mansion House menus are always the same”) Holmes becomes so engrossed in his own references to “semi-detached verse plays” and so confused by his own changes of dress that “Zola” escapes. there is nothing to do now except sing a closing chorus:

We can’t deny that if you pry into our little play
There’s very little story--and not very much display.
We’ve none of us shirked--
we’ve all of us worked with all our main and might.
We’ve boomed a lot of people’s plays--and wish you all good night.

If this is not farcical (and musical) it would be hard to imagine something that is. Still, however *Under the Clock* is classified, the play script proves that it was topical and varied, to a degree literate, certainly jaunty and irreverent. Mander and Mitchenson, whose discussion of revue concludes in disapproval of the “bitchy” intimate revue which they claim had evolved by the 1940s, find *Under the Clock’s* attacks upon performers such as Irving also bitchy.³⁸ But “bitchiness” would seem a fairly brittle thread upon which to hang a history. But as there was no follow-up to *Under the Clock*, its connection to the 1940s is properly seen as just as moot as its

³⁷ Irving’s long tenure at London’s Lyceum theatre, as well as his acknowledged place at the head of the profession, was coming to an end and all accounts show that he was no longer being treated with the deference he was accustomed to.

³⁸ Mander and Mitchenson, p. 17

classification. Hicks, who would shortly become a major operator and builder of theatres, had more immediately profitable musical comedies and operettas to attend to (one of these was *The Beauty of Bath* (Aldwych, 1906)³⁹ in which Kern's first collaboration with P. G. Wodehouse, "Oh, Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain!" was interpolated). Hicks played no further part in the development of revue. *Under the Clock* vanished amid the West End's fierce competition. Yet perhaps a whiff of its style remained in the air.

Variety. Music hall, the form of variety which in Britain had dominated working-class entertainment since at least its sanctioning by the Theatres Act of 1843, had gradually spawned grander, more "refined" venues. It is ironic that by the 1890s, now regarded by music-hall historians as its golden age in Britain, the top variety houses in London had divested themselves of most music hall trappings (and much of their working-class audience) and no longer called themselves music halls. These "Palaces of Variety", in and adjacent to Leicester Square, formed the "big time", luring away acts from smaller halls and related variety forms such as the blackface minstrel troupes.

Each of these major houses eventually developed a "personality". At the Hippodrome, (originally, in keeping with its name, the home of prodigious shows involving horses) one "act" might be a condensed version of *I Pagliacci* conducted by its composer, Leoncavallo. Yet regardless of the level of taste or audience, an evening of variety remained -- well -- varied, and therefore incomparably placed to go with the flow of current trends. Variety remained a collection of "turns" -- by the end of the century regularly including motion picture projection--given coherence only by the house's "personality". No one would have thought of forcing a theme upon these (highly egotistical) artistes. The variety programme was never static: bills were changed regularly and performers moved freely from one hall to another, sometimes performing in two on the same night.

³⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1906-9 (26-3-1906)

As shown above, the advent of musical comedy, with its flexible plotting, allowed some variety performers -- particularly those who could carry a tune -- to transfer virtually unchanged their painstakingly developed characters into the newer form. However, those "turns" which most closely approximated playlets, frequently written by the performers themselves (including Harry Tate and particularly Harry Grattan⁴⁰ who will be shown to be of central importance in the early days of revue) remained rooted to the variety stage.⁴¹ When revue came along (and when the appropriate legislations and compromises were effected: Chapter Three) other playlets required little revision to become the first generation of revue "sketches."⁴² Although when revue arose, many variety performers and entrepreneurs feared for their livelihood, the older form managed to exist with its new rival affably for several decades, and in fact the forms regularly bolstered each other. variety/music hall's supposed parentage of revue is discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Concert Party. The particular form of variety called (in Britain) concert party deserves particular attention. Before the 1890s it was largely an out-of-town pleasure. It had become known as the essential summertime seaside entertainment, holding forth in theatres at the end of the gorgeous piers built for their area's and era's civic self-promotion. The concert party differed from most other forms of variety -- excepting the minstrel troupes.

The minstrel show was responsible for many innovations in American theatre. Some scholars⁴³ believe that the musical playlets which formed

⁴⁰ Harry Grattan led a varied life in musical theatre. Having in earlier years established himself as a single comedy "act" important enough to be invited to the first Royal (Command) Variety Performance in 1912, he contributed heavily to revue (see in particular Chapters Three and Four), returned to variety and then vanished to South America, to be briefly reclaimed when Andre Charlot invented radio revue for the BBC in 1928.

⁴¹ (Grattan's "Buying a Gun", found in the Appendix, is typical, and should be contrasted with the "second generation" sketches of Ronald Jeans and Dion Titheradge, which are based upon truly dramatic situations.

⁴³ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 1993; Robert Toll, *Blacking Up* 1986

the last section of the minstrel show's typical three-part entertainment (following the competitively joke-telling cross-talk among the entire similarly-costumed troupe and a series of speciality "turns") were the actual forerunners of American musical comedy. Others note the subversive nature of its humour; perhaps the blacked-up clown could tell greater truths.⁴⁴

American blackface minstrels had been visiting Britain with great success since 1859. (When the massive J.H. Haverly troupe invaded in 1884, one member of its entourage was the paymaster, Charles Frohman)⁴⁵ It is my contention that whether British concert party can literally be equated with American minstrelsy, it served as a valuable counterpart. What is most importantly similar is that, like the Minstrels, these Pierrots were a stable company. Concert parties numbered fewer than 10. The concert party programmes might alter from week to week, but the company of pierrots did not.

Pierrots in their frilly neck-ruffs and sad-clown makeup (Pierrot: another term adopted almost willy-nilly from the French, who at the beginning of the twenty-first century continue to enjoy Pierrot troupes) had to perform singly, in duets and trios, in ensemble and chorus. They sang, recited, danced and performed playlets. These companies, regularly performing original material, proved adept at recognising and incorporating new musical or comic fads. Concert party created a link between variety and revue by way of the *bon vivant* Harry Pélissier.⁴⁶ Pélissier began his concert party--called *The Follies* (and the performers were the Follies) out of town in 1897. By 1900 his show was making occasional appearances in London. The opening of *The Follies* for a

⁴⁴ Gary Engle, *This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage* (1978)

⁴⁵ Frohman's powerful influence upon the British musical theatre began in 1897, when he took over the Duke of York's Theatre. He subsequently imported a number of American productions, principals and composers. The American "fight-back" to the invasion of Broadway by Gaiety musical comedy began with Frohman's importation of *The Belle of New York* (1899).

⁴⁶ The portly Harry Gabriel Pélissier, called by the *Dictionary of National Biography* a comedian who was also "an accomplished composer and producer" and by the *Times* critic James Agate a person whose spirit "was critical, judicious and faintly acid....if ridicule could kill, the lighter stage must long ago have bled to death," lived only 39 years.

full-scale run (Royalty, 1907)⁴⁷ came at a crucial point in the development of revue. A restlessly inventive man, Pélissier may well have known that he was readying a particularly important element of revue--a stable, versatile company.

Ballet. It is well known that Victorian “chorus girls”--ancestors of the next century’s showgirls--had long been a major attraction of British musical theatre. Despite sporadic campaigns against their “indecenty”, women-in-(rather slow) motion seemed to be there to stay. A particularly British form of ballet had for several decades been the staple of the large palaces of variety in Leicester Square, particularly the Empire (site of a famous anti-indecency campaign) and the Alhambra. In his interview, Nesbitt pointed out that especially the Alhambra’s ballets, often taking up half an evening’s entertainment, owed less to the Russian tradition of stylised dramatic dance than to the glorious pageant or even (royal) Progress which had been part of British celebrations for centuries. Not only that: the Alhambra’s ballet-pageants were often organised around a particular theme--nations of the world, flowers of the field--which the dance explored wordlessly and beautifully, if rather sedately.

So without directly borrowing one of the elements of the contemporary French revue (below, and subsequent chapters) the Alhambra ballets were preparing London for the kind of spectacular revue that America’s Florenz Ziegfeld⁴⁸ had adapted from Paris for New York in 1907, the kind of show Albert deCourville⁴⁹ brought back from Ziegfeld’s Broadway five years after that. As the century turned and the competition with musical comedy heated up, shorter, friskier ballets were incorporated into the bills at the Empire. Thus indirectly ballet, one of the elements which transformed variety bills, proved of genuine importance to the development of revue in the period of our consideration.

⁴⁷ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, unnumbered.

⁴⁸ Florenz Ziegfeld was an all-purpose showman who became famous for his series of opulently staged revues beginning in 1907. With the stated purpose of “Glorifying the American Girl” Ziegfeld’s lavish shows successfully mixed sex with high, low and medium comedy.

⁴⁹ DeCourville, like Charles B Cochran and Andre Charlot, is introduced at length in Chapter Three..

It seems to me that British musical theatre in general has until very recent years been rather uneasy about dance. Dance-in-revue tends to support this generalisation. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, the Ziegfeldesque use of huge and gorgeous choruses faded from prominence rather quickly. During the Interwar Years, only Charles B. Cochran (see Chapter Three) regularly insisted on making dance a major component of his revues. During these years, intimate revue in general gave its small-scale choruses a great deal more to do than merely dance. By the 1939-1945 War, intimate revue had pretty much dispensed with dancing.

French Revue.. In the middle of the century's first decade, contemporaneous with Pélissier's shows, George Grossmith, Jr.⁵⁰ incorporated something he called "revues" into the variety bills at the Empire (see Chapter Two); these "turns" eventually displaced ballet. Grossmith freely confessed that his "revues" owed much to French precedent. In so doing, Grossmith laid the groundwork for a larger Gallic infusion during the following decade.

It is not the purpose of this study to retell the history of revue in the presumed land of its birth. It is enough to say that in one form or another revue had been part of the French theatrical world since the late 18th century (Mander and Mitchenson more or less agree: on this point "...for the origins of revue one need look back no further than two hundred years"⁵¹ attaining major importance in the 1840s when theatres such as the Folies Trevises opened in Paris.

But something about the word folies: as Charles Castle has shown, the word is a variation of feuilles (leaves). Among its variations, feuilles had over time acquired the meaning of a "house" hidden beneath

⁵⁰ An exact contemporary of Pélissier, George Grossmith Jr. was the son of George Grossmith, the leading man of the D'Oyly Carte troupe who originated most of the starring roles in the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. Grossmith, Jr. proved himself from the beginning a highly versatile man of the theatre and is credited with having created the stock character of the "dude" circa 1901. Like Hicks, he gravitated to authorship and theatrical management on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁵¹ Mander and Mitchenson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1

leaves, a “field” where clandestine lovers spent romantic evenings.⁵² Folies soon branched further to mean the public places where the 18th century French danced, drank and watched small scale entertainments in the open air. Thus the first Folies housed a kind of variety, and Pelissier knew as much in naming his troupe *Follies*. The French Folies moved indoors to such interesting, informal (as contrasted to concert halls) locales as the large Folies Bergere, built in 1869 (its architecture along the lines of the Alhambra in Leicester Square) and devoted to all sorts of pleasure, including romantic assignations. Like English music-hall, which in general had evolved from pubs and dining-houses, French variety had emerged (along with cabaret) from the *cafés chantant*; little plays had gradually crept in amongst the quite varied “turns” and it was not until 1886 that the Folies Bergere staged its first “Revue.” It was even later before French revue could be said to have acquired a definite form (see below.)

However, by the first decade of the twentieth century the large Parisian revues had in general done away with a “literary” aspect; small playlets or “sketches” had gradually been shuffled to the beginning of the evening’s entertainment, and eventually they disappeared altogether. Revues had become vastly more spectacular (subsequent chapters) and considerably more structured, and at least for the nonce “respectable” enough so families could attend (it is often said that Fuller’s appearances at the Folies Bergere had particularly from 1897 onward accomplished this miracle, since mothers wanted to bring their children to see the marvellous spectacle of whirling colours.) It is this large and well-structured form of Parisian revue that is described by André Charlot in his essay “Producing Revue in England” written for the 1934 compendium *Theatre and Stage* and later included in Charlot’s

⁵² Charles Castle, *The Folies Bergere*, London, 1982, p.5

unpublished work, *People 'n Things*.⁵³

André Charlot's Definition of Revue

Charlot was a veteran of the Folies Bergere, Theatre du Chatelet and other Parisian venues, who, taking over at the Alhambra in 1912 (Charlot apparently had a well-developed sense of impending wars; he left Paris two years before the outbreak of World War I and abandoned London two years before the outbreak of World War II) made his first success by adapting the contemporary French style of revue to English tastes. It is one of the organising elements of this dissertation that from this fairly derivative beginning Charlot observed changing trends and during the next decade bequeathed to British revue its distinctive form and intimate style.

Although Charlot became thoroughly British (a naturalised subject, and in turn a naturalised American citizen) in "Producing Revue in England" he may have overstated the importance of contemporary French revue's influence upon the British version. As has already been shown, continental theatre was part of the London scene and actual French revue did visit London. By 1905, Oswald Stoll was regularly importing revues from the Folies Bergere and Theatre du Chatelet for his London Coliseum in St. Martin's Lane. The first one was in fact called *The Revue--*"invented and produced by Victor de Cottens." Stoll continued to import revues as part of the Coliseum bills until war broke out. It does not seem that these importations materially influenced the development of British revue, but it is equally true that these pre-war years were particularly creative for French revue, and that for British producers and performers, this creative centre was only a day away. Until the war, that is.

⁵³ *People 'n Things* consists of 25 separate "essays" ranging in length from 5 to 55 pages apiece. Most were apparently written in Hollywood during the several years immediately preceding his death in 1956. (He also wrote a number of "essays" which were not included in the main manuscript.) Despite this retrospective aspect, the essays seem very sharp and detailed, probably because Charlot had managed to transport across the Atlantic cases of scripts, musical scores, photographs, journals and other primary material. This material is now largely shared by his daughter, Mrs. Joan Midwinter of Pacific Palisades, California, and the Special Collections department of the Clark Library of the University of California, Los Angeles.

In his essay⁵⁴ Charlot ventured farther than anyone else in tracing the genealogy of revue. He claimed the classic theatre as partial parent of the contemporary French revue. He raised two of its characteristic elements, the compere and commere, to the status of a Greek chorus. He added that he had never seen a revue in France lacking these two devices.

By the turn of the twentieth century the French revues (somewhat like the fledgling British revues before 1910) were a particular variation the regular music-hall fare. The “revue” came at year’s end; in it the male compere served as guide for his female client, the commere. These two would “review” the year recently completed, travelling in imagination (with appropriate costuming and scenery) around Paris, peeking in upon its new enthusiasms, commenting upon the latest fashions, exposing societal and political foibles--to be sure, its follies. One of the features of this yearly review came to be a satirical commentary dealing with the world of the stage itself. The travels of compere, commere and by extension the “audience” provided a framework loose enough to give a sense of beginning, middle and end.

In his essay, Charlot calls Grossmith’s *The Linkman: or Gaiety Memories* (part of a double-bill including the burlesque *The Toreador* at the last offering of the old Gaiety Theatre, 1903)⁵⁵ the first “true” British revue (determining the nature of “real” revue became during the following decade a regular pastime among its practitioners) because in it he believed Grossmith had come nearest to the “spirit and quality” of French revue.⁵⁶ Charlot remains the only commentator so crediting *The Linkman*, though Grossmith’s undoubted importance to British revue is studied throughout this thesis.

In his essay, Charlot argues that the “linkman” (Grossmith) was also a

⁵⁴ This “essay” came third in the second half of *People ‘n Things*.

⁵⁵ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, unnumbered.

⁵⁶ Charlot’s connection with Grossmith should be taken into account. A few years earlier, Charlot, then a Parisian theatrical agent, had helped his client Grossmith learn the workings of French revue.

kind of compere, since he could stand aside from the action whilst providing continuity between the various components. However, as *The Linkman's* subtitle suggests and a reading of its play script proves, this “revue” more closely resembled a pageant with burlesque qualities, wherein characters and performers from previous Gaiety musical comedies, accompanied by thinly-veiled political figures of their era, spent a nostalgic hour strutting and fretting. It makes just as much sense to argue that the “linkman” could be called a music hall chairman.

However *The Linkman* is classified, Grossmith, clearly fascinated by revue, soon proceeded to write and produce (contemporary usage: in modern parlance he “directed”) a series of hour-long shows between 1906 and 1910 which were incorporated into the variety bills at the Empire and these shows correspond very closely to the model outlined by Charlot. When in 1912 Charlot left his job as the Alhambra's Parisian agent, taking over its London management, it was Grossmith who wrote its first production.

In Chapter Two the model Charlot outlines in this essay quite neatly and unsurprisingly is shown to fit that production, *Kill That Fly!* (14 October 1912.)⁵⁷ Charlot's model is in fact very like a summary of elements discussed in this chapter: “a medley of spectacle, topicalities, sketches, songs, etc. with a full cast, consistent in size with the theatre where it is being produced, and no attempt at a plot of any kind.”⁵⁸

In this first chapter I have identified a number of elements of British musical revue, while asserting that they existed well before any British production could have been called a revue. Even if my contention is accurate, someone had to assemble them into a revue; revue would also have had to be greater than the sum of these parts. I have suggested that Charlot's definition of revue gives a working model of that revue. Subsequent chapters will use this summary of elements as well as Charlot's model. During the first quarter-century of “real”

⁵⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1913-1 (10-1-1913)

⁵⁸ “Producing Revue in England”, p.1

British revue it will be shown that other revue producers, notably deCourville and Cochran had their own ideas (and their own claims as parent of the form). Any model, however, can be questioned, and no definition should become Procrustean. It should be recorded that what many call the longest-running “revue” of them all --*The Co-Optimists*⁵⁹ --was a Pierrot show in the most literal sense of the word.

A generally chronological approach seems the best way to deal with the phenomenon of how British revue came to be intimate revue. It did develop. But it also just happened. An understanding of the environment of that happenstance is vital. Chapter Two examines some of the era’s governing social, economic and legal attitudes and how they influenced and are apparent in several of what I shall call “proto-revues” (1890-1910). Chapter Two eventually arrives at the remarkable year of 1912. Among that year’s highlights were what I shall call the first “real” British revues--*Everybody’s Doing It*, *Hullo, Ragtime!* and *Kill That Fly!* But as I shall show, none of these were in any way “intimate”, and yet without them there would be no possibility of an intimate revue.

⁵⁹ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, 26 1923-26 (16-10-1923)

Chapter Two: 1891-1912, Aspects of Change

Although I have argued that virtually all of the elements which would combine to create British revue existed in the West End at the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century, their combination was not inevitable. But theatre exists in a wider world, and in certain eras that world is particularly amenable to change. Almost everything about the closing years of the Victorian era and the brief span of the Edwardian spoke of excitement and change. This chapter suggests some of the ways in which London theatre, particularly the musical theatre, experienced and manifested that change. Of particular importance are the changes in physical environment which inevitably produced change in other areas. Holding to a chronological organisation, Chapter Two also illustrates the changing nature of British musical theatre by examining representative play scripts between 1891 and 1912.

The Rise and Fall of Music Hall

First, the theatres themselves. The Theatres Act of 1843 had at least theoretically and finally freed theatres from the monopoly in presenting “spoken drama” held since Restoration times by the two “patent theatres”, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. It is not the intention of this thesis to track the intricacies of the Patents’ history, though Watson Nicholson’s discourse on the use and abuse of burlettas, cited in Chapter One, suggests that “monopoly” was always more a legal weapon than an established and regular fact, something for ingenious theatre-people to subvert and for harried authorities to avoid enforcing. Still, the Act of 1843, which attempted to properly locate the distinctions between dramatic and non-dramatic, musical and non-musical, entertainment does figure prominently in the subsequent development of the forms of musical theatre; and it is generally agreed that it facilitated the rise of music hall.

Music halls did not begin as “theatres,” and yet what happened to

these entertainment venues during the nineteenth century had real impact on the development of revue. Diana Howard says- “In 1850 the music halls were still in the embryo form of [very large] pleasure gardens and [quite small] tea gardens and music rooms....1860 was the peak when the freedom of the theatres, and the popularity of the new variety entertainment were both fully felt. The 1878 Act caused the rapid decline after 1880.”¹

The “1878 Act”, in its impact on theatres yet another attempt at regulating them, (often, closing them down) was the Metropolis Management and Building Acts Amendment Act. The result of a select committee study of the (London) Metropolitan Fire Brigade, it handed to the Metropolitan Board of Works (and later the London County Council) the job -- vested in a licensing authority -- of “safeguarding the public” in buildings such as theatres; the “rapid decline” documented in Howard’s book was mainly in the smaller “halls” which could not meet the more stringent -- and sometimes undoubtedly whimsical -- application of these regulations. Many of these halls were rooms above or behind public houses, and much subsequent nostalgia has related to the disappearance of these working-class establishments, pretty thoroughly scattered around greater London.

John Pick notes that many variety venues of the mid-nineteenth century packed in audiences of more than 5000, offering a hearty entertainment which appealed to broad swathes of the general public. The two patent houses seated 3000 apiece. Pick goes on to argue that beginning in the 1880s, London theatre management “mistakenly” opted for more exclusive pricing policies and more exclusive entertainment.² Whether or not these were mistakes, it was not long before the size of theatres changed radically, and this change was subsequently important to the development of intimate revue.

¹ Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950*, 1970, p. ix

² John Pick, *The West End: Mismanagement and Snobbery*, 1983. It is his general argument.

Improved Transportation

Too, the increasingly efficient and plentiful public transportation made having a good time in the West End much easier than before. Roy Porter shows that the formation of Piccadilly Circus and the cutting through of Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue in the 1880s produced “prodigious sites” for speculators³, who went on to create a dozen new theatres, while the opening of Kingsway and the Aldwych brought even more. In 1890 the first electric engines came to the Underground. In 1898 a new line linked Waterloo with the City, and the Central Railway linked Bank with Shepherd’s Bush. In 1901 the first electric tramway linked Shepherd’s Bush with Acton. The new--and very trendy--Aldwych complex was linked to the south bank of the Thames by the new Kingsway tunnel, which completed the new tramway system. By 1907 the Bakerloo, Piccadilly and Hampstead lines had been completed.⁴ Other West End facilities boomed; the years surrounding 1900 might well have been the first era in which large numbers of people from outlying areas were regularly able to “Go Down the Strand.” Porter estimates that this new entertainment centre could entertain 300,000 people at one time.⁵

A Boom in Theatre-Building

Not long after the enforcement of the 1878 Act an astonishing surge of theatre-building and rebuilding indeed took place in London. Although the opening of the Savoy in the Strand (1881) is often considered its beginning, the real take-off point came slightly later, in 1888, and by 1918, nearly the outside limit of this study, the West End as the nation’s entertainment centre was an accomplished fact (a time-traveller would not be entirely lost in today’s West End, so hardy have most of these theatres proved.)

³ Roy Porter, *London: a Social History*, 1994, p. 292

⁴ Although this thesis avoids unnecessary linkings between France and Britain, it is generally accepted that the first lines of the Metro in 1900 changed access to Parisian theatre, and therefore its audience.

⁵ Porter, *Loc. Cit.*

If we consider only the first half of this 30-year span, we can observe the outlines of the change. Among the older large London houses of musical entertainment which closed were the Grecian in Shoreditch (1882, capacity 1850); Foresters Hall in Finsbury (1886, 1600); the City of London (1887, 2500); the pleasure gardens of Albert Palace (1888, 3900); the historic Astley's (1893, 2407); East London Theatre (1897, 2150); the Islington Empire (1900, 3000); the Crystal Palace (1900, 1739) and two demolished during the slum clearance which resulted in the construction of the Aldwych: the Olympic (1904, 2150) and Opera Comique (1899, 862).⁶

(During the Interwar years, still more theatres and music halls, many of them seating more than 3000, closed in central London and others converted to cinemas; however, during the same period, large suburban variety theatres also arose, surviving and even thriving until the advent of television.)

When the Aldwych theatre and its nearby near-twin, the Strand, opened simultaneously in 1908, they had capacities of just over 1000 apiece, typical of the new trend toward smaller houses, and two-thirds of the Olympic-Opera Comique aggregate. It is not necessary to agree with Pick's populist condemnation of the era's theatrical entrepreneurs to understand how the trend would eventually favour theatrical forms tending toward intimacy. Likewise, with prices inevitably higher in smaller houses, a "smart" clientele and "smart" content would be drawn together.

In fact, the Aldwych and Strand were larger than most of the newly built or rebuilt theatres -- 27 of them between 1888 and 1918, almost one a year. The largest were generally those new palaces of variety in or near Leicester Square that gradually supplanted music hall -- the 1450-seat Palace (1891) and the 1340-seat Hippodrome (1900), which had sacrificed some seating possibilities in order to stage its near-circuses. There also came, not too far away, the 2358-seat Coliseum (1904), the conversion of the 2814-seat Lyceum to a "music hall" (1904) and finally

⁶ Howard, essentially the entire book.

the 2325-seat Palladium (1910). In Leicester Square itself remained the venerable Alhambra and Empire, each seating almost 3000.⁷

Virtually all the rest -- reflecting in their manner the new distinction between variety "palace" and "theatres" which employed music (see Chapter Three) -- were jewel boxes seating between 450 and 1000, and nearly all of them eventually housed revue. These included the Lyric (1888, 945 seats); the second version of the Vaudeville (1891, 740); The Duke of York's/The Trafalgar Square (1891, 700); the Lyric Hammersmith (1895, 755); Her/His Majesty's (1897, 1126); the Apollo (1901, 798); the third version of the Adelphi (1901, biggest at 1297); the Albery/New (1903, 877); the Globe/Hicks (1906, 907); the Queen's (1907, 989); the second version of the Playhouse (1907, 679); the Ambassadors (1913, 459); the St. Martin's (1916, 550); and the conversion of the London Pavilion from music hall to theatre (1916, 1080).⁸

Although the size of the new theatres undoubtedly made a difference to the development of revue, the influence of their ownership is more conjectural and the subject of a later chapter. It does seem that the gradual creation of theatrical "chains" during the years of our interest (the Strand, for instance, was quickly leased to the American Shubert Brothers) and their advance into the London market did not particularly affect the houses which came to be most identified with intimate revue -- the Ambassadors, St. Martin's, Comedy, Playhouse, Prince of Wales, Pavilion and Vaudeville.

The Nature of the Audience

So the explosion of theatre-building provided smaller houses more suited to intimate productions. What of the audience? Although it may not be helpful to equate the British 1890s with America's so-called "Gay Nineties" (gay for some, ruinous for others) it is true that for some -- particularly in London -- it was a glittering decade. The rise of musical comedy, already cited as a latter-day equivalent to the

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

eighteenth century novel in its ability to mirror a newly affluent middle class, further illustrated the Victorian era's expansion of leisure time and general popular education. The new audience proved itself at least moderately willing to attend new kinds of entertainment--provided by people with new ideas. The avenues and squares of the West End soon swarmed with a strolling horde of pleasure-seekers--eventually duly recorded in dazzling water coloured "cityscapes" such as the nighttime view of the Haymarket by the Edwardian artist George Hyde Pownall⁹ which in its shimmering haziness might be regarded as Britain's response to the French Impressionists' obsession with railways. Gavin Weightmann quotes the contemporary author Robert Machray:

A humming centre, truly enough, Piccadilly Circus is from eleven to one at night--it is the centre of the Night Side of London...A minute or two after eleven you will 'take your station'...at a point of vantage...For a few minutes the Circus is rather quiet. A bus now and again rumbles up, and interposes itself between you and the Fountain...A girl of the night, on her prowl for prey, casts a keen glance at you...And then a few more minutes pass, and the Circus suddenly buzzes with life; it hums like a giant hive. Here are movement, colour, and a babel of sounds! As the theatres and music-halls of London empty themselves into the streets, the Circus is full of the flashing and twinkling of the multitudinous lights of hurrying hansoms, of many carriages speeding homeward to supper, of streams of people, men and women, mostly in evening dress, walking along, smiling and gesting, and talking of what they have been to see....You catch charming glimpses in the softening electric light of sylph-like forms, pink-flushed happy faces, snowy shoulders half-hidden in lace or chiffon, or cloaks of silk and satin. Diamonds sparkle in My lady's hair...for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, it is as if all the world and his wife and his daughters, his sisters and his cousins and his aunts, drove past you. ¹⁰

It is also notable that what was going on in the West End, definitely including its theatres, soon became material for theatre in general -- and by the outbreak of the World War, particularly for revue.

The quarter-century beginning in 1890 also marked the zenith of British international power. London was now the largest city on earth, the

⁹ In Gavin Weightmann, *Bright Lights, Big City: London Entertained 1830-1950*, 1992, pp. 126-127

¹⁰ Weightmann, *Op.Cit.*, p. 126.

capital of earth's greatest empire. In 1898 a 99-year lease on Hong Kong's New Territories added the last major chunk to Empire. The turn of the century was marked by heroic (and shameful, though the general public knew little of that aspect at the time) events in the Boer War, not to mention imperialistic derring-do on the Dark Continent by various rogues of fortune, while the Northwest Frontier continued to be alternatively "safe" and threatening enough to be exciting. If the 60 years of Victoria's reign is now seen as the age of expansion and exploitation, the brief Edwardian era has generally been oversimplified as the time for enjoyment of the fruits of thrift and hard work. The fun-loving, theatre-going king himself, complete with Miss Lily Langtry and other theatrical mistresses, was an apt symbol. All of this, as well as a new straining for democracy within politics became, within the confines of what legislation and convention "permitted", further subject-matter for revue.

Licensing: Some Ins and Outs

Exactly what was permitted seemed permanently in flux. The impact of such legislation as the Theatres Act and the Act of 1878 has been suggested. In Chapter Three the impact of the ongoing struggle between entertainment venues over the right to stage playlets or "sketches" is discussed. As with much British legislation, application/enforcement of these statutes was often different from the legislation's apparent intent, which was usually also rather deliberately vague and endlessly interpretable. Exactly which governmental authority wielded authority changed with the passing years, and the rise and fall of theatrical forms is inevitably connected with changes caused by the political situation at any given time, not to mention the whims of the licensers/censors.

The public houses which had added concert rooms or music halls as a result of the Theatres Act of 1843 had usually been licensed by local justices (it is interesting that the Grecian, mentioned above, had to cope with justices led by General William Booth of the temperance-

advocating Salvation Army!)¹¹ After 1878 the London County Council came to power; over time, the licensing of houses like the Empire regularly rebounded among justices, the council and finally the Lord Chamberlain. The newly built theatres were responsible to that august office -- though as a casual reading of scripts will show, its "censorship" actually operated not so much to preserve public morals as to defend Government and the Crown.

Keeping the Theatres Clean

So the twists and turns of what was "permitted" in pre-revue years had a lot to do with the subsequent nature of revue itself. As many sources have shown, none more entertainingly than Weightmann, such capers as Mrs. Ormiston Chant's 1894 campaign to clean up the Empire, where two American visitors had been propositioned by prostitutes, caused Variety entrepreneurs concern--particularly in the clothing and general demeanour of the dancing girls.¹²

Even before 1890 "Gaiety Girls" had already married into the aristocracy so regularly that such subject matter found its way into burlesque and musical comedy¹³. The beautiful "girls" of Hollingshead's Gaiety Theatre, however, were a rather decorous and decorative lot, not given to high kicks or swirling movements, though the new "skirt dancers" (see below) were something else. But particularly at the Empire it was the movements of women in full body tights, pinkish

¹¹ Howard, *Op Cit.* ,p 101

¹² Jim Davis "Scandals to the Neighbourhood: Cleaning Up the East London Theatres" *New Theatre Quarterly* 23 (August 1990) pp. 235-238 notes that while the original premise behind licensing "minor" theatres and saloons in 1843 was "to increase the range of entertainment for the poorer classes of London" it had been extended to the conduct and construction of theatres. In practice, Davis shows that the Lord Chamberlain's licensing of these "minors" was heavily influenced by police reports, and that the police reports were particularly concerned with the conduct of children -- whether relieving themselves in and about the premises, offering themselves for prostitution, or even "behaving" themselves. The reports were heavily class-based.

¹³ During the Interwar years, the topic continued to fascinate authors of musical theatre, notably Noel Coward: *Operette* (1938)

ones at that, which caused some late Victorians moral worry.¹⁴ It was amidst the Empire bills after 1905 that the previously mentioned new George Grossmith “revues” (see below) dispensed with provocatively-clad chorines. Still, one of the regular joys provided by revue as it moved toward greater intimacy between audience and performers was the illusion of an even greater and thoroughly sexual intimacy. Smart, coy, largely verbal teasing (once more, note the emphasis upon writing)--indeed, a humour taking its rise from the French manner---became a stock in trade.

Proto-Revues: Up-to-Dateness

As Chapter One has suggested, the various theatrical genres which prefigured British revue were in place during the 1890s. The decade also saw interesting changes within these genres, and the development of what might retrospectively be called “proto-revues”. Although I have already called *Under the Clock* (1893) one of the last of the burlettas, it certainly contained several elements specified in Charlot’s definition. It clearly had its topicalities and songs; on the other hand it didn’t have sketches and its plot was incidental to its so-called “bitchy” critiques. Its “spectacle” was as limited as its cast. Yet I find it not only jaunty but blithe, and while Charlot failed to include blitheness in his definition, my reading of revue play scripts suggests that blitheness became a hallmark of Charlot’s own revues and finally of the genre itself. That is an arguable point, and perhaps it’s too early in this dissertation to suggest it. What is undeniable is that *Under the Clock* was quite up-to-date.

I suppose that seeming “up-to-date” has pretty much characterised most light theatrical efforts since Athenian times, and it is true that the lighter British theatre of the 1890s remained particularly in debt to W.S. Gilbert, whose genius -- aside from astonishing verbal pyrotechnics which would influence generations of American popular lyricists -- lay

¹⁴ During the same period a similar clamour for “clean” variety shows contributed to the rise of the gigantic Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit in the United States, and that the centralisation and sheer profitability involved in such conglomerates would inevitably unsettle the ownership of London theatres. (See Chapter Four.)

in crafting elaborately fantastic plots and situations often set in “unreal” worlds whose contemporary relevance was perfectly clear to its “up-to-date” audience. Martyn Green, one of the great Savoyard interpreters, has shown how subtle changes in wording and emphasis throughout the decades were able to keep G and S audiences apprised of the contemporariness of the joke.¹⁵ *Plus ça Change*. In London’s rapidly changing “smart” world, up-to-dateness must have been extremely important, and revue capitalised upon the trend.

During the 1890s a number of burlesques so emphasised “up to dateness” that the phrase frequently became part of the title, as in *Cinder Ellen Up to Date* (1891)¹⁶, one of Edwardes’ hopeful rejuvenations of the form. This was a full-length barracking of many things, including new ideas on free education and the particular contemporary fascination with tobacco:

The muses are men to invoke
To help us in praise of smoke
All care with tobacco with choke
And life without care is a joke
Tobacco bacca bacca bacca....
Poof poof poof poof...

Considered from almost any standpoint, the best of these “up to date” burlesques was one of the shortest, James Barrie’s sendup of Henrik Ibsen, *Ibsen’s Ghost--or Toole Up To Date* (1891)¹⁷ Toole’s, a 600-seat theatre in Charing Cross dating from 1869, had since 1879 been the home of John Lawrence Toole’s adventuresome troupe, which was nearly a repertory company. It regularly presented two short “burlesques” in an evening, and was open to new talent, such as Barrie. (It might have been a natural home to revue had it not been demolished in 1895 for an extension of the Charing Cross Hospital.)

Ibsen’s Ghost shows its author blithely unabashed by the quintessence of Ibsenism and, in the words of the *Illustrated London News*, highly

¹⁵ Martyn Green, editor, *Martyn Green’s Treasury of Gilbert and Sullivan*, 1961 p. 416

¹⁶ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 337; 53489

¹⁷ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 134; 53475

successful in “bringing out the funny side in the new philosophy.”¹⁸ Beginning with two characters left over from *Hedda Gabler*¹⁹ professor George Tesman (in the playscript described as “an Idiot”) and Thea Tesman (“his wife for the present”), Barrie gradually ridicules elements and motifs from everything of Ibsen’s which had been presented in London up to that time, in particular *A Doll’s House* (one woman is “Peter Terence’s Doll”) and *Ghosts*.

Amidst the growing carnage (eventually all the characters shoot themselves to death--“Let’s suicide together -- our life has been so pure!” -- only to rise and continue along a different plot line) Barrie jabs at theatrical faddism and intellectual tribalism (and the vagaries of literary translation) by having one character use the Gosses’ translation of Ibsen whilst others use the Archers’. (At one point, a character is implored to get on with the killing: “Do it quickly, or thickly in Archers’ version.”)

As Thea merrily burns George’s letters, George muses in perfect Ibsenese “Think of that.” When she gathers her things preparatory to leaving him, he adds, “My careful little wife.” Thea’s subsequent wildly bestowed kisses--a hereditary mania which is said to frighten secretaries--and her gleeful revelations (“Parson Grieg kissed me, and Henrik Barsaw, and Baron Kleig--I am mad! mad! mad!”) evoke a sudden aside -- by “Ibsen” himself (Toole) to the audience -- “Of Ibsen women, boys beware/They all have vine leaves in their hair.”

At the end of this short burlesque, all the characters dance and sing

Let’s go to Toole’s, his version says,
For it’s a rare, rare good place
Your taste his plays are sure to strike
And there you’ll fin the kind you like.

Then all the characters freeze into waxworks. Although *Ibsen’s Ghost* is clearly related to the era’s longer burlesques, it moves so rapidly, almost

¹⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 6 June 1891,

¹⁹ The play came to London that year, after its Norwegian debut a year earlier,

elliptically, refusing to pun whilst assuming a considerable level of knowledge in its audience, it can now be seen as a different sort of playlet--the precursor of the “smart” revue sketch. It also managed to be quite English in its essential anti-intellectualism.

Another short burlesque, *The Babble Shop, or Lord Wyndhamere's Fun* (1893)²⁰, a year after the debut of Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, while mainly aimed at Parliament, features other ‘up to date’ characters, including this skirt dancer:

I am the duchess who's up to date
Quite with the times in touch
I kick up to the ceiling, a lot of things revealing
And it don't seem a kick too much!

The up to dateness of *The Babble Shop* includes a passing allusion to the rise of workingmen's political parties in the character of the Opposition leader, an “’orny ‘anded son of toil” called by the PM “though sound in his heart...shaky in his H's.” A particularly surrealistic device sets *The Babble Shop* apart from most other burlesques and alongside the future revue sketch. As a roomful of toys come to life, one of them, “22222, Five Guineas in a Box Complete” turns out to be “Mr. Edison's phonograph”, complete with “two lovely black eyes” (alluding to a music hall song popularised by Charles Coborn); the PM falls in love with the phonograph; they sing and dance and he escorts “her” to a vegetarian restaurant. Topical and up to date indeed.

The full-length *Morocco Bound* (1893)²¹ might now be considered the first English musical comedy (it called itself “a musical farcical comedy”) except that theatrical historians have chosen to believe that in order to fit properly a definition derived many years after the fact, “musical comedy” at least in its formative years had to be “semi-realistic.” *Morocco Bound* stands somewhere between burlesque and -- perhaps -- revue. Written by Adrian Ross, the Gaiety era's most

²⁰ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 77; 53523

²¹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 273; 53537

accomplished lyricist-librettist²² and Arthur Branscombe, with music by F. Osmond Carr, it could be quite elegant:

England is diversified with eligible mansions
Suitable for families of commoner or peer,
Situated healthily in pleasure ground expansions,
Elegantly dotted with domesticated deer...

Morocco Bound is splendidly scattered with rouses and adventurers, stock Cockneys and Irishmen and matchmakers, ingenues and journalists, as well as young swains called Dolly who leap from punts, spying the loves of their lives. The young Grossmith was the love interest, and audiences were delighted by a great deal of contemporary racing slang: “pulling”, “squared”, “over the river”.

This show also couldn't resist remarking upon the fad of skirt dancing, as in “Dancing Girl”:

An ample skirt you must unfurl
To learn to be a dancing girl
So trip and skip and pirouette
With serpentine whirl
The social pet in every set
It is the dancing girl.

There's room for a little of everything in *Morocco Bound*: a Bey called Spoofah wants to establish a chain of music halls back home in Tangier, and that calls forth these lines eyeing the latest developments in Leicester Square:

A palace of varieties!
With kangaroos in boxing shoes
A palace of varieties!
If you go to a swell music hall

²² Adrian Ross, born Arthur Reed Ropes, was a brilliant historian, mathematician (wrangler) and fellow at King's College, Cambridge University) who preferred the West End; beginning with *Joan of Arc* (1891) he wrote libretti and lyrics for the most famous of the musical comedies and operettes staged by Edwardes at the Gaiety, Daly's and other venues. It was said of him that he never wrote a Gaiety song for Daly's, and vice-versa. Aside from these originals, Ross, whose last libretti were written in 1930, wrote some of the most often revived of British musical play, including the English versions of *The Merry Widow* (1907) and *Lilac Time*, the 1922 musicalisation of Franz Schubert's life.

Music 'all!
You must set yourself down in a stall
In a stall!
With a drink from the bar
And a shilling cigar
And a girl who might go too far...

Morocco Bound is by later standards quite racist -- as were other theatrical offerings -- making fun of African languages and custom by coinages in gibberish. A mixed but enjoyable bag, *Morocco Bound* seems to me to stand apart from what a later era would call "book musicals"; its spirit seems much more akin to later revue than most other burlesques and contemporary musical comedies.

Then we come to *King Kodak* (1894)²³, with another Branscome book and music by two of the era's pre-eminent light composers, Lionel Monckton²⁴ and Edward Solomon.²⁵ This massive burlesque reads--and, one hopes, played--as rapidly as revue and is as "up-to-date" as the advertisements in the programme of (Edward) Terry's Theatre -- for Kodak cameras and film ("used by the Princess of Wales, the German Emperor, the Duke of York and Admiral Peary") As flexible as contemporary musical comedy -- Fuller herself, this time in person, was interpolated into the plot during one week with new dances about pansies, orchids and "La Transparence" -- it must have been a riot.

In broadest terms, *King Kodak* lampoons British imperialism in Africa during Europe's greedy partitioning of that continent. In an illustration from the magazine *The Sketch* His Nibs the Kodak (of Kodakoria, a "buffer state" under the protection of Great Britain) is shown wearing a spiked pith helmet and Sherlock Holmesish clothing. The playscript, describing him as A British Opportunist, begins with his

²³ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 107; 53547

²⁴ Although Edwardes' operations at the Gaiety and Daly's sometimes assumed the character of a music and drama factory, with collaborations taking precedence over individual fame, it was usually Lionel Monckton's songs (usually with words by Ross) that proved the most popular of their era. Monckton also "discovered" and then married Gertie Millar, who became the prototype of the musical comedy heroine

²⁵ Solomon was one of the Transatlantics of his era. By the time of *King Kodak*, he had composed scores for musical plays in London and New York, as well as marrying women (one was the American star Lilian Russell) on both sides of the Atlantic without bothering with divorce. His tunes were also lively.

entrance along with his faithful retainer, Lord Deadbroke, “Sycophant of Kodak” The “native” chorus sings,

Hail to the Kodak, in triumph advancing,
Latest of ‘Lions’, by royal decree!
Wonderful stories, his virtues enhancing,
Herald his coming from over the sea....

He has -- by bribing the local monarch and gaining a freehold -- made “one of the largest fortunes of the present century all single handed, without the aid of any chartered company or the employment of any Maxim-guns.” *King Kodak’s* up-to-dateness often echoes Gilbert:

It’s the custom of the country now-a-days.
If you wish to make a fortune on the Annexation [Liberator] plan
Or a name quite histrionic a la Rhodes, the African
You must not wince at slander, nor heed the hue and cry
Of the journalistic skeptic, or the moralising fry
For tho the game you’re playing may be ‘spoof’ and ‘all my eye’
It’s the custom of the country now-a-days.

Much of the fun of *King Kodak* resides in its quite lightning-like allusions: to the latest London humbuggery of P.T. Barnum²⁶ to the notoriety of William Booth and Henry Irving. There is a fantastic finale wherein one character’s magic potion pill (shades of the favourite device of W.S. Gilbert!)²⁷ allows the others to transform themselves trendily into ballerinas, water nymphs, ice cream vendors, nurses, the hot cross bun brigade and finally the characters of “the palmy days of the Gaiety burlesque.”

Holding these “palmy days of the Gaiety burlesque” in mind, let us speed forward through a decade in which burlesques died out, Edward VII came to the throne, new theatres proliferated, and Gaiety musical comedy and operettas at Daly’s under Edwardes reached their artistic peak: we stop at the previously mentioned *The Linkman: or Gaiety Memories* (1903), which carried into being just such an evening as

²⁶ This is a puzzlement, since Barnum himself had died in 1891--but the great man’s influence apparently lingered on.

²⁷ Gilbert, incidentally, was still writing for the London stage; His version of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: an Original Tragedy in Three Acts* (but only 37 pages) played at the Vaudeville Theatre in 1891 without causing much fuss.

envisioned in *King Kodak* -- it was filled with characters, the heroes and heroines of the old Gaiety: Millar appeared as a skirt dancer, Grattan portrayed Roberts, musical comedy's first star, and Grossmith, the "linkman", also portrayed two female principals, Farren and Edna May, the American star of Frohman's *The Belle of New York*.

George Grossmith's Revues

If these productions qualify as "proto-revues" the contributions of Grossmith must be seen as even more important. Whatever the classification of *The Linkman*, he almost immediately began to call his creations "revue". Grossmith might be called a father of British revue; he was, however, not the kind of father who stays around. One of the most peripatetic of theatre people, Grossmith, like Hicks, was thoroughly involved in most aspects of transatlantic theatre, and when new horizons such as American cinema beckoned, he was off in that direction.²⁸ Still, between 1905 and 1912 his contributions were vital.

Beginning in 1905, Grossmith's "revues" at the Empire -- having made as a performer many French journeys he was familiar enough with the term -- were indeed one "turn" in a variety bill, and therefore had to avoid overlapping the other turns.²⁹ The first of these, *Rogues and Vagabonds*, was in fact subtitled "The REVUE, a 'musical melange.'" The particular kind of *melange* resulted from one aspect of the the era's maddening licensing laws; the inclusion of original music required one kind of license, but if currently popular tunes were used, authors had to apply elsewhere. Like many burlesques, *Rogues and Vagabonds* happily adapted other people's tunes. Seventh on the bill, following six unrelated turns--monkeys, dogs, tumblers, instrumentalists³⁰ it was succeeded by two more, as well as *Cinderella*, a "fairy ballet" in five scenes (the public expectation of such a large production suggests another reason why dancing wasn't really needed in these mini-revues) and the new motion picture machine (the Biograph) which in January

²⁸ In his autobiographical memoir *G.G.* (1933, two years before his death) he barely mentions these revues.

²⁹ Theatre programme, The Empire (Leicester Square) 15-1-1906.

³⁰ This very closely approximated contemporary French practice.

1906 was relaying election results.

Rogues and Vagabonds boasted a cast of 15 (considering the later development of intimate revue, this seems predictive) and some indication of the show's tenor and fanciful movement (in up-to-date fashion, this was around the new Aldwych development) can be guessed from their roles: the all-purpose leading man Arthur Playfair was referee, bus passenger and prime minister; Grattan was photographer, chorus girl, pensioner and president; others were "a madcap", "Harlequin", "a French swell and male student", etc.³¹ But *Rogues and Vagabonds* must have been well-enough received, since its successor, *Venus 1906*, switched places with the ballet and closed the bill.³²

Although *Venus 1906* employed a smaller cast (this time Grattan played five parts) it marked an important advance: an original score, not to mention two interpolations by the youthful Kern, currently making his early reputation under the aegis of Charles Frohman, now heartily engaged in exporting Britons to the States and Americans to the West End. (There were many subsequent Kern-Grossmith connections, mainly in musical comedy.) Grossmith's third Empire mini-revue, *Oh, Indeed!* (1908) was particularly "up to date" vis-a-vis contemporary drama, parodying not only the theatrical comedy based upon a *New York Herald-Tribune Paris Edition* cartoon strip heroine *Fluffy Ruffles* (in the actual production of which comedy Grossmith subsequently starred abroad), but also the sentimental *Diana of Dobson's* and the melodramatic offerings of a Sicilian troupe.³³ 1910 brought both *Hullo, London*³⁴ (featuring Davy Burnaby, one of many concert party graduates who would become important in revue)³⁵ and--partly in honour of

³¹ I am unable to discuss the plot, since, unlike most theatrical productions of its era, the script of *Rogues and Vagabonds* is not held in the Lord Chamberlain's collection since for the moment the Empire was "not a theatre." Such offerings were also rarely reviewed in the press.

³² Theatre programme, *The Empire*, 14-5-1906.

³³ Theatre programme, *The Empire*, 16-3-1908.

³⁴ Theatre programme, *The Empire*, 14-3-1910.

³⁵ The burly Burnaby, a product of the 1901 Cambridge Footlights, which itself became a major pipeline for revue writers and performers, went on to become the ostensible compere or chairman of *The Co-Optimists*, a Pierrot show which went through several editions in the 1920s.

Grossmith and, since Edward VII had died, partly in honour of the new King-- *By George! (a Coronation Revue)*.

One of the songs heard first in Britain in *By George!* was of greater significance than anyone could have predicted. This was "The Grizzly Bear". Nineteen-Ten was the year that "Ragtime" -- at least in its "white" manifestations -- arrived in London, during Irving Berlin's first visit there as a performer. "The Grizzly Bear", very much in the vein of Berlin's tunes, was very catchy indeed. And in 1912 ragtime helped promote large-scale British revue.

Grossmith's small "revues" certainly lacked more than one of the ingredients prescribed in Charlot's definition. More than anything else, they were generally pastiches of what else was going on in the West End; they fell short of the standard he set in 1912 after making another Parisian sojourn, appearing in a revue at the Folies Bergere (1910) and another at the Rejane (1911). But before discussing Grossmith's 1912 work -- *Everybody's Doing It, A Guide to Paris* and (with Charlot) *Kill That Fly!* -- I wish to consider the contributions of Harry G. Pélissier.

Harry Pélissier and the Follies

The first extant script of Pélissier's *The Follies* represents the edition which opened at the Royalty on 18 March 1907. It must be added that a script could not adequately represent any edition of *The Follies* since, as Compton MacKenzie says, Pélissier's particular genius was improvisation.³⁶ But he couldn't do everything and in 1907 the *Follies* listed two first-class lyricists, Walter Davidson and Arthur Wimperis³⁷.

The Follies had also in earlier versions occupied the status of a "turn" on various variety bills. They were indeed dressed as Pierrots and beginning in 1907 their shows occupied a full theatrical evening; in a manner not unlike Minstrel shows, they were comprised of least two

³⁶ Introduction to Fay Compton, *Rosemary*, 1926, p.23

³⁷ Originally a black-and-white artist, Wimperis began writing for the stage in 1904; for most of the time before 1913, he was a lyricist and librettist in musical comedy; during the 1914-1918 war, he was of great importance to the development of intimate revue.

parts: these included a collection of turns -- in 1907 "A Burlesque of a Music Hall" (a later version is discussed below) -- followed by a playlet. This first of Pelissier's "potted plays" featured "50 or 60 characters: but we shall perform them by our seven selves alone. This is very clever!"³⁸

Being up-to-date, the 1907 *Follies*, played at a time when the future entrepreneur Cochran was publishing a broadside ("Too Much Frohman") against the "Americanisation" [especially by Charles Frohman, who had in 1898 imported a lively comedy called *Too Much Johnson*] "of the British stage", and adapted George M. Cohan's "Give My Regards to Broadway" along these lines: "Give my love to Mother and my regards to Leicester Square/ Entreat the folk in Regent Street to spread the glad news there." Further references to Americanisation included the turns of "Col. Swanky D. Cotters" and "Miss A. Lotter Bulls, terror of the Redskins, Bete Noir of the Prairie Oyster."

The partly up-to-date playlet was *Baffles: a Peter Pantomime* (Barrie's *Peter Pan* was first performed in 1904 and was already part of the standard repertoire) which featured Baffles, an up-to-date Music Pirate ("A music pirate king am I; my risk is small, my profits tall/ I run alongside fav'rite songs/and cut their profits down"); Peter Tanned, the boy who couldn't sit down; Tinker Bell, a "prehistoric nymph"; Mrs. Darling, an "adventuress"; and various others, including "Barrie" himself. It is predicted that plays produced by "Mr. Charles Showman" will Peter out. Staged during the London runs of two actual plays about a serious new issue, women's suffrage -- *The Suffragette*³⁹ and *Votes for Women*⁴⁰ -- *Baffles* allows "Gwendy" to sing of the Lost Girls:

I'd mother 'em
I'd never forsake 'em to take 'em and shake 'em
The rest of my life I'd devote
Their votes and fights and women's rights
Would soon be gone for good
But if it didn't ensure a permanent cure
I'd smother 'em--I would!

³⁸ Lord Chamberlain's collection, unnumbered.

³⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1907-6

⁴⁰ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1907-6

The Follies -- which became a nearly annual event at the Apollo, punctuated by Pélissier's failed attempt at a longer Revue at the Alhambra (*All Change Here*, 1910) --⁴¹ seem, even in their dusty British Library corpses, mercurially blithe and smart. Over the lamentably short span of their existence (Pélissier's death in 1913 must be counted a major loss to revue) they also enjoyed cohesiveness and continuity in their personnel.⁴² And 1912 brought the beginning of "real" British revue.

The Changes of 1912-Part I

The year 1912 brought more change than theatrical change, more newness than revue. Change of one kind or another had been in the air since Edward VII's death. In 1911, festering dissatisfaction with the hereditary Lords had brought about a Parliamentary act removing their influence over finances. In 1912 general social unrest outside London boiled over in strikes among miners, dockers and transport workers. Abroad, it no longer seemed that the Balkan war could be ended "sensibly." Scott's expedition to the Antarctic was going wrong. In Russia, Lenin allied himself with Stalin and took over the editorship of *Pravda*. Perhaps the surprising eagerness with which audiences took to something new -- in this case, large-scale revues -- can be traced partly to sheer nervous energy.

"Real" Revues?

Grossmith's last authorial stand at the Empire began on 1 March 1912, with *Everybody's Doing It*, another mini-revue at first confined in the middle of a variety bill.⁴³ It is notable that the play script for this revue was passed by the Lord Chamberlain (the changes and compromises which made this possible are discussed in Chapter Three). *Everybody's*

⁴¹ McKenzie, *Op Cit.*, p 24.

⁴² To a lesser extent, so did Grossmith's troupe. The West End tradition of particular styles for particular producers and theatres -- obvious in the operettas of the Savoy and Daly's and the Gaiety musical comedies -- tended to continue when revue overran the West End.

⁴³ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1912-49 (5-2-1912)

Doing It featured a well-established star of West End musical theatre, Robert Hale⁴⁴ as well as the title song by Berlin, whose music was now all the rage, showing up all around town. (It is somehow typical of the sharp practices (music piracy!) of the period that Berlin is not credited in the programme⁴⁵; it is equally indicative of either an insufferable anti-Americanism or a lack of critical awareness of early revue that one reviewer didn't understand the title or the song, which in itself is a straight-out hymn to trendiness. Fortunately, Hale understood its essential humour, as his recording⁴⁶ proves.) The variety "turns" around *Everybody's Doing It* changed regularly, but what was really important was that the revue itself settled in at the Empire and began to dominate the bill. For the first time it seemed that a revue could have a long run.

On 24 May 1912 Grossmith's *A Guide to Paris* -- modestly described in promotional literature as an up-to-date version of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne* -- opened at the very large Alhambra⁴⁷ which for the last several years had been suffering an identity crisis and falling audiences (Pélissier's *All Change Here* had recently failed)⁴⁸ and was now trying out short revues as part of a nine-part variety bill.

A Guide to Paris serves as an apt prelude to *Kill That Fly!* and in it Charlot's model of revue is nearly realised. Indeed, the framework of the fifteen segments is a tour of Paris, beginning at the Western Railway Station, where two young English would-be men-about-town await the fiancée of one, meanwhile passing the time chatting and gossiping about mutual friends. The fiancée arrives with Joseph, a former valet of one of the Englishmen, and this pair decide to guide them around "all the architectural beauties" of the town -- thus the

⁴⁴ Robert Hale was a reigning star, pretty much straddling the pre- and post-revue West End stage. A fine mimic, he was also the father of two stars of the Interwar musical theatre, Sonny Hale and Binnie Hale.

⁴⁵ Theatre programme, *The Empire Theatre*, 1-3-1912

⁴⁶ *Revue 1912-1918*, Parlophone Records PMC 7145

⁴⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1912-25 (22-5-1912)

⁴⁸ In *Rosemary*, Compton Mackenzie says that Pélissier found himself "overwhelmed by the size of the Alhambra", as well as the struggle between variety and the Theatrical Managers' association [see Chapter Three] which insisted that there "was to be no spoken dialogue, so that every line...had to be written in verse and set to music." p. 23

compere/commere tradition comes to London. As the tour proceeds, characters and scenes come and go quickly and songs interrupt the flow of the action. Here are three extracts:

I want to go to see some show
Which is a little bit--you know.
The sort of play which--shall I say?
Mr. Brookfield [the very one from *Under the Clock*, now an austere
censor] finds a bit too gay.

I'm very British, far from skittish
as I go strolling down the street
why every girl I meet
looks oh so sweet
I'm looking for trouble--that's a fact!

I hear on good authorities
The tailors won't agree
To the minimum wage
And they've got in a rage--
So another big strike there's going to be.
It WILL be a catastrophe
George Alexander [a very stylish acting protege of Irving's and notable
theatrical producer, recently knighted] we shall see
appearing in trousers that bag at the knee
I've been told on the strict QT.

Despite those allusions to strike action, the commentary of *A Guide to Paris* is very frothy; there are allusions to the contemporary politicians Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, and the generally pointless tour just happens to end with a (presumably Folies Bergere-inspired) corps de ballet rushing onstage to perform the waltz from *La Belle Helene*.

Although the seams in *A Guide to Paris* clearly showed, its novelty was received well enough for the Alhambra to decide to take the big plunge: a new kind of Alhambra revue largely derived from a Parisian model. Briefly taking Grossmith as a partner, André Charlot immigrated from Paris to assume the theatre's artistic management. Montague Leveaux, fresh from Cambridge University, was Charlot's other original partner, hired to handle the business end.

Kill That Fly! an Anglo-French Revue

The result was *Kill That Fly!* (12 October)⁴⁹ Some of its principals had been regulars in Grossmith's Empire shows and because Alhambra audiences still expected a lot of dancing, Charlot employed a full-time choreographer (though the contemporary term was "dances and ensembles") Julian Alfred. The revue's creation has been credited entirely to Grossmith, but it is very likely that Grattan was an active collaborator, as he was in subsequent Alhambra shows. *Kill That Fly!* also boasted a full score of original music. This was the contribution of Melville Gideon, an expatriate American whose career illustrates the transatlanticism of the times.

Gideon was a 27-year-old pianist when he came to London in 1911, having played at Carnegie Hall; he had also composed ragtime variations upon Rubenstein's "Melody in F." Like many of the elements which eventually made up intimate revue, Gideon was in the right place at the right time. After one turn in an Alhambra bill, he took up piano-playing in a nearby restaurant for tips only -- and, according to one obituary in no time his income rose from £3 to £80 weekly. It will be shown that Gideon eventually contributed to many revues and other West End productions including a brief collaboration with the youthful Cole Porter on interpolations for Charlot's importation of *Very Good Eddie*, (1918) and, with Clifford Grey, the score for *A Night Out* (1920), the adaptation of the Georges Feydeau farce *Hotel Paradiso*. Gideon became a Charlot "irregular" (and in later years amused Charlot by offering to sell him tunes Charlot had already purchased earlier).⁵⁰ As well as Charlot's shows, discussed below, Gideon performed in others, including *The Bing Girls Are Here* (1917). Gideon was quite important in the early days of revue, but aside from a singing style which has earned him a place in the mythical race for the title of "the first

⁴⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1913-1 (10-1-1913) and Theatre programme, Alhambra Leicester Square, 14 October 1912

⁵⁰ André Charlot, "Journal", unpublished.

crooner”, Gideon’s reputation has rested largely upon the songs he wrote (and recorded) for the many versions of *The Co-Optimists* (1921-27, with two revivals during the Thirties). He died virtually penniless in 1933.

Kill That Fly! acquired its eccentric, topical title (its working title, “The New Alhambra Revue” can be seen on the side of a London bus in a contemporary painting, *Piccadilly Circus*, by Charles Ginner,⁵¹) late in development and precisely because Charlot had noticed something which the West End’s pleasure-seeking crowds had undoubtedly also noticed. The soggy summer had brought an infestation of flies to London. The slogan “Kill That Fly!” was seen on hoardings all over town. So the title was changed and a theme song was hurriedly written:

We’re not just afraid of the mud--
We’re out for somebody’s blood!
It isn’t the man who stole my wife,
It isn’t the Spaniard that blighted my life! [one more allusion to a contemporary music-hall song]
And it’s not Lloyd George!

In case of a terrible mess
We’ve thought it as well to dress.
We’ve taken a course of Antipon
And girded our armour on--

To kill that fly!
Kill that fly!

(To be sung to the tune of “Three Blind Mice”)

And whether it’s wet or whether it’s dry,
We don’t know why but that fly must die!
So good-bye summer, good-bye,
Good-bye! We’ll kill that fly!

⁵¹ The painting resides at the Tate Gallery, London, but in all serendipity, it also appears on the dust jacket of Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: a Social History of Britain 1870-1914*, 1993.

Even at two hours' length⁵², *Kill that Fly!* was still ostensibly part of a variety bill that began at 8 and didn't finish before 11:30. It was definitely a new kind of revue on a large scale, played against lavish scenery suggesting Park Lane, Montmartre, Honolulu and other exotic locales. It did indeed have "spectacle," though not quite of the same magnitude of the large-scale Parisian revue which had developed during the preceding decade. As Peter Leslie has noted

a typical Paris revue required the design and construction of fifteen sumptuous sets, many of them equipped with expensive stage machinery, and the manufacture of two thousand pairs of custom-made shoes or boots and four hundred costumes, some of which needed fifty pounds of ostrich feathers and sixty yards of costly material.⁵³

Kill That Fly! had by contrast only English-sized spectacle. But it also had punch.

Kill That Fly! employs both a compere (a journalist) and a commere, "Sally Samples". They provide the continuity in a series of 24 scenes including lively songs and dances, but particularly sketches glancing satirically at the fripperies of hat-making, the "science" of eugenics, the corruption and linguistic strangeness of New York policemen, and particularly the modus operandi of impresarios Charles Frohman and Edwardes. Social unrest is not mentioned. *Kill That Fly!* operated on a large canvas and must have been unlike anything the West End had previously seen.

In some of the show's most enjoyable moments, the over-busy "Edwardes" is portrayed as so hopelessly scatterbrained that by mistake he summons a barrister ("Rufus Isaacs") to write his show because he can't think of the right name: Paul Rubens, a leading Gaiety composer. Likewise the once-but-not future military hero Lord Kitchener, hired instead of "Robert Hitchens, sir." "Edwardes", quite distracted by his

⁵² See Chapter Three for a discussion of the problematic limits which in theory governed any "turn" -- including revue -- in a variety bill.

⁵³ Peter Leslie, *A Hard Act to Follow: a Music Hall Review* 1978, p.112.

own love of the race-course⁵⁴ promises anything to any performer, thus enraging his director and his German composers (within two years, German composers' works would be banned from performance in Great Britain for the duration of the war.) While distracted, "Edwardes" confesses that all his shows at Daly's and the Gaiety use the same plot. Sally Samples declares that she has brought him some samples of real English music written by a real English composer; Edwardes asks her to return in a year. Eventually Edwardes' motley crew of music-hall recruits run amok and all ends in chaos.

The ubiquitous Frohman is parodied in a playlet "The Pink Belle of the Cabbage Patch: or, If You Can't Get Wise, Get Rich." The locale is somewhere between "Dear old Tennessee" and "Pittsburg [sic] Pennsylvania". The hero, Nifty Nat of Nipple Creek, swears to win the love of the heroine by sheer niftiness. All ends in a melee of imitated American importations, including Edna May and the African-American singing comic, Bert Williams.

A second version of *Kill That Fly!* (16 January 1913) opened with compere and commere at the Reformed Race Course, where, supported by a dancing chorus of girl jockeys, alongside Mr. Ascot Heath-Robinson they survey the scene of upper-crust "racing heads"; Mr. Rothschild (of the Rothschilds) bets a million at 33 to 1; it is noted sniffily that theatre people are specifically barred from the Royal Enclosure, since they are deemed good only for fund-raising. The sequence was greatly successful largely due to the ingenious "starting machine" designed for Charlot by the master of eccentric machinery, Heath Robinson.

Charlot and Grossmith's revue proved itself perfectly flexible. On 23 January 1913 the American composer Louis Hirsch⁵⁵ -- by then famous

⁵⁴ Hyman, *The Gaiety Years*, notes that "the year 1911 turned out to be one of the most successful he ever had on the Turf; his horses won a total of £5,345 in races on the Flat, but this was a drop in the ocean to Edwardes, who was such a reckless punter that he could lose £5,000 in a week" p. 177.

⁵⁵ Hirsch was a true transatlantic, having during his days as a staff composer for the Shubert Brothers in New York written for the English star Jose Collins, as well as Al Jolson and other American headliners. Classically trained, he quickly understood the commercial appeal of Ragtime and proved himself a highly adaptable, often charming songwriter.

for some of the songs in *Hullo, Ragtime!* -- joined the company for a couple of weeks. *Kill That Fly!* gained excellent reviews, and one proved particularly prescient:

It is the best thing of the sort [revue] that we have seen yet in London and is just as sparkling in its way as the entertainment at the Gaiety Theatre...for we have Mr. George Grossmith here, if not in the flesh, in the spirit...Mr. George Grossmith is a little too intimate, perhaps, for anybody but the man about town. ⁵⁶

The very last *Follies*,⁵⁷ opening only 17 days after *Kill That Fly!* and one of the very best of the series, paid tribute to Grossmith and Charlot. After a series of turns featuring the usual Follies -- in particular Pelissier himself but including Pelissier's new wife, Fay Compton -- *Pelissier's Potted Plays No. 37* erupts: it turns out to be *D...That Flea*, "a burlesque of a revue." As part of the show, the audience is enjoined to sing:

To write a new Revue
Is quite the thing to do,
And though we've had a goodish few,
We'll stand some more;
When Mr. George Grow
Smith runs the show, you know,
It only needs a bit of go
To make it score.
Our music's rot,
It's got no plot,
But it pleases us somehow;
So don't be shy,
Come on and try
To kill that fly!
(I don't know why)
But everybody's doing it now
Everybody's doing it now!

The "revue" itself includes characters called Nobody, Everybody, etc. Neuter, Masculine, Feminine, Salt and Pepper, and Which, What, Yes and I Don't Know (proving that the lineage of classic sketches such as "Who's On First?" for the American comics Bud Abbott and Lou Costello is very long indeed.) An "amazing new instrument", the Follyphone, is played in a "symphonic tone poem" called "An International Peace

⁵⁶ *The Sketch*, 29-1-1913

⁵⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, (29-10-1912)

Conference.” (This is shown as the worst sort of folly.) There is time for a disquisition on musical terminology:

Andante: one in a bar

Allegretto con amore: two in a bar

Allegretto con fuses (as many as you can get in a bar)

Sforzando: closing time

Blithe indeed it was, not to mention scathing in parts, and in my opinion just as good as Charlot’s own revues would become.

Hullo, Ragtime!

The surge of revue continued on 23 December, when *Hullo, Ragtime!*⁵⁸ opened at the Hippodrome; soon it was London’s most popular show. Although its producer, Albert deCourville, called it a revue, it fitted neatly with the other Variety programmes characteristic of the Hippodrome. The Lord Chamberlain’s reader called it “utterly formless and incoherent” and in truth it could never be fitted within Charlot’s model--though that never would have concerned its producer, who thought of himself as London’s answer to Ziegfeld and in 1915 wrote extensively on “The English form of Revue” -- that is, his own. More of that in Chapter Three.

What made *Hullo, Ragtime!* popular was its sheer repletion, combined with deCourville’s keen sense of timing. He had not only fixed upon “revue”; he realised that this was the time for ragtime. Hirsch (already known on both sides of the Atlantic as the composer of “The Gaby Glide” for the infamous Gaby Deslys (see Chapter Four) contributed much of the Ragtime-oriented score, which was supplemented by a host of currently popular songs by other people, including “Row Row Row” and “Hitchy-Koo!”. The term “Hitchy-koo” quickly became a synonym for Ragtime itself and a “must” for “up-to-date allusionists. A flock of star transatlantic performers included the belting singer Ethel Levey (singing Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band”) the comic Dorothy Minto, the glamorous Shirley Kellogg (see Chapter Three) and the dialect

⁵⁸ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1912-54 (20-12-1912)

humourist Lew Hearn. A deCourville “company” gradually formed, and for the rest of the decade Levey and Kellogg were its core.

DeCourville liked big sets and--above all-- big choruses (They eventually grew into the hundreds, and when deCourville speaks for himself in Chapter Three, he makes it clear that his “revues” differed from variety mainly in their use of the large choruses immensely and intensely drilled--by the American dancing maestro Ned Wayburn⁵⁹) In one “scene” from *Hullo, Ragtime!* there were 16 valets and 16 chambermaids in the puzzlingly named “Military Mary Ann” set puzzlingly in the tea-room of the “Hotel deLuxe”, one of the many venues of a programme which might almost have been presented in any order at all and in other respects was closer to the regular Hippodrome variety programme than to revue.

But there were sketches of a sort, and the success of *Kill That Fly!* was acknowledged in a slapstick playlet involving cartoon impresarios -- “Mr. Coliseum”, “Mr. Empire” and “The Alhambra Brothers”, Charlot and Leveaux, two peripatetics jammed into the same overcoat, arms linked and legs tied together. They were dubbed “The two headed impresario, the greatest novelty in Leicester Square.” That was the general level of *Hullo, Ragtime!* (one wonders what had become of the literacy shown in the shorter burlesques; one grieves in advance for Pelissier) but never mind: deCourville’s spectacular shows remained highly popular for several years.

An “understanding” of the trends

The significance of these shows might not have been immediately apparent. But hindsight suggests that the artistic peak of British musical comedy had been reached before 1910, and that by 1912, when absolutely no musical comedies of note opened, the restless West End

⁵⁹ Ned Wayburn was the self-styled composer of the “first Ragtime theatre song”; he devised a by-the-numbers method of teaching theatrical dancing which dominated the American stage until jazzier choreographers came along in the late 1920s. For several years he was responsible for all the dancing in Ziegfeld’s shows, for which, incidentally, Hirsch wrote most of the music.

audience must have been looking for -- and receiving -- something definitely new. Exactly why musical comedy did not seize upon the promise of ragtime might make an interesting study. The vulnerability of trendy London to peppy American dancing had already been clearly shown in 1903 when the African-American musical *In Dahomey* took the town by storm.⁶⁰ And ragtime -- in itself a precursor of the "dancing craze" circa 1912 -- had already shown itself as a hot topic.

But musical comedy essentially ignored ragtime and revue snapped it up. Some of the opportunistic energy of revue is admired and admitted in the 1913 *Theatrical Yearbook*. There, E. M. Samson, who had previously eschewed anything approaching commentary on "revue", admitted in his essay "The Variety Year" that "Revue has jumped into popularity." Indeed, by the end of 1912 *Kill That Fly! Hullo, Ragtime! Everybody's Doing It* and, away from London, even something called *A Seaside Revue*⁶¹ were all doing very good business indeed.

⁶⁰ The show received much better notices in London than in its native New York; semi-learned discussions of the dangers of Cakewalking appeared in the press.

⁶¹ Lord Chamberlain's collection LCP 1912-49 (7-12-1912)

Chapter Three: 1912-14 Intimate Revue and Harry Grattan

Many of the elements necessary for the blossoming of British revue having been discussed in Chapters One and Two, this chapter begins with an examination of the legal situation facing those who wanted to produce revue. There follows an analysis of the major figures in the further development of revue during 1913 and 1914--Charlot, deCourville, Cochran and Grattan. The stage is thus set for an examination of how, at the beginning of the 1914-1918 war, intimate revue appeared, almost by accident, on the West End stage.

Music-Hall vs. Theatre

It is reasonable to begin by stating as simply as possible the legal situation vis-a-vis revue in late 1912. Revue was affected because of the lengthy battle between theatres and music-halls over short plays, and these short plays or “sketches” came to be the heart of intimate revue. It has been suggested in previous chapters that, in standard British fashion, the various rules established in earlier legislation were regularly ignored if no one (no one of substance, that is) complained very much. But by 1904 The Theatrical Managers’ Association had started to complain a great deal that through the increased inclusion of playlets, those houses classified as music halls (and these included the palaces of variety) were encroaching on their “monopoly” of drama.

A compromise reached in 1907 had allowed music halls to include sketches of up to a half-hour (This was the underpinning for Grossmith’s small revues at the Empire.) That even this compromise was quickly “stretched” can be seen in André Charlot’s brief description of the 1912 situation in “Music Hall Vs. Theatre”¹ an unpublished fragment probably written in the 1950s, when he was completing various versions of *People ‘n Things*. Noting that in 1912 the Alhambra,

¹ André Charlot, “Music-Hall vs. Theatre”, unpublished, p.1

like the other large variety houses, was classified as a music hall under the control of the London County Council, Charlot cites two important contemporary rules affecting a “music-hall”:

- a. no music-hall’s programme could consist of less than five acts or items, the overture and the ‘bioscope’ [yet another word for motion pictures] each being allowed to rank as a turn.
- b. no turn was allowed to exceed one hour (my underlining) in length.²

Charlot’s fragment credits the example, previously noted, of Grossmith’s *A Guide to Paris* with paving the way to a major change, adding that Grossmith became “one of the foremost leaders in a campaign to remove the stupid rules differentiating music-halls from theatres.” About the campaign, Charlot adds:

The Alhambra, the Empire, the Palace and the Hippodrome all joined forces but the fight was fierce, the London County Council, jealous of its established prerogative, hating the idea of surrendering the control of any of its houses to the Lord Chamberlain’s jurisdiction. A portion of the battle was won with the production of *Kill That Fly!* [from the opening of that show, control at the Alhambra was shared, with the Lord Chamberlain overseeing the sketch material.]

So despite its length, *Kill That Fly!* did not find its license rescinded by the London County Council (and indeed, the compromise meant that the “script” for *Kill That Fly!* gained status by being deposited with the Lord Chamberlain.) Nor was *Hullo, Ragtime!* confined to an hour’s length. Somehow the council had partly understood the appeal of and demand for a new form. Charlot concludes, “The public, fed up with stale vaudeville, was all for speedy shows with comics and girls, however corny they might be.”³

Cochran, DeCourville and Charlot

The development of this speedy new form between 1912 and 1920 is largely the story of three producers (today we would generally call them

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p.2

“directors”, though as their frequent bankruptcies will show, they were fully involved financially.) Neither the versatile Grossmith nor Hicks are included. Having helped to launch revue in general and Charlot’s revues in particular, Grossmith -- like Hicks -- resumed his career as a transatlantic performer and producer of musical comedy.

The three producers were Charlot, deCourville and Charles Blake Cochran, and before proceeding to discuss the changes they brought to revue between late 1912 and the end of 1914 it is useful to examine their pre-1912 careers -- careers exhibiting enough similarities to suggest that the coming of “revue” in Britain, related to, but different from, the French and American models, was, in an increasingly transatlantic era, simply a matter of time. What the British eventually did with it is another story.

Cochran’s Transatlanticism

In 1912 “C.B.” Cochran already had many years of London entrepreneurial experience. Cochran -- a “born showman”, according to James Harding⁴ not to mention Cochran himself (His first autobiographical work was *Secrets of a Showman*, 1925) -- had served a lengthy American apprenticeship. In one of these occasional memoirs (Cochran turned out a volume whenever he was temporarily bankrupt) Cochran claims to have made his first trip to the States in 1890, at the age of 18, in the express belief that he would “earn his living on the stage.” He began to do so by singing in a freak show.

As an itinerant performer, Cochran worked for Tony Pastor, the venerable showman who can properly be called the inventor of American vaudeville.⁵ Pastor kept a clear eye on British trends,

⁴ James Harding, *Cochran: a Biography*, 1988, p. xii.

⁵ Pastor was, even in his twilight years, a major player in the transatlantic musical theatre. His fascination with British performers dates from 1868, when he produced a burlesque of the current rage for Lydia Thompson and Her British Blondes. Thompson’s burlesque troupe represented the first post-American Civil War incursion of British popular theatre. It was a revelation to the more covered-up American stage (the novelist William Dean Howells was fascinated by the Blondes’ “horrible prettiness”, which subsequently revised its approach.

especially on the variety stage. His first British importation was Ella Wesner, a male impersonator (such grotesques were apparently particularly “horribly pretty”).⁶ Later he successfully burlesqued the 1880’s American mania for Gilbert and Sullivan, as well as introducing Britons Vesta Tilley and Bessie Bonehill to the States.

Pastor was only one of many American producers and agents who had regularly been prowling the West End from shortly after the Civil War. Second to none, of course, was Charles Frohman. When in 1888 Frohman decided to join his brother Daniel in a syndicate devoted to play production, his first agent was Elisabeth Marbury, a formidable scout of literary talent and a solid presence in New York, London and Paris who was eventually credited with inventing the theatrical royalty system. Marbury subsequently promoted the careers of Vernon and Irene Castle and eventually helped Kern, Wodehouse and Guy Bolton create the (New York) Princess Theatre musical comedies which provided the template for all the major productions of the century -- a template which during the Interwar Years became a curse to British musical comedy, so thwarting of innovation had it become. Lee Shubert, one of the brother-founders of the massive theatre and real estate organisation bearing their name, was also regularly in London, on the lookout for talent and a theatre to add to his collection. Such was some of the human furniture of the world of musical theatre when Cochran was learning his trade.

Cochran also claimed to have played seven parts in a New Jersey production of *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Cochran wrote that his first meeting with Ziegfeld in 1893 was a lucky byproduct of being stranded in St. Louis and arriving in Chicago late, just as Ziegfeld got there. At the time, Ziegfeld was promoting Eugene Sandow, his candidate for the title of strongest man on earth. The twists and turns of Ziegfeld’s career inspired a number of impresarios, and Cochran was one.

⁶ Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, 1991, pp 5-21.

Cochran's London Beginnings

Cochran's first American tour lasted seven years, but didn't amount to much until in New York he met the English-born actor-producer Richard Mansfield, who had become a matinee idol in the States. Cochran became Mansfield's secretary and protege. He returned to London in 1897 with high hopes, but in *Secrets of a Showman*, wrote, "I found it very difficult to get a footing in English theatrical circles. My American experience seemed to carry little weight...."⁷

It was during this period that Cochran took up journalistic writing (probably wisely, considering his need to reestablish his "Englishness") most notably the previously mentioned negative critique of Charles Frohman's influence upon the British stage. A bit later he showed off his fluency in "American" in the account of an interview with Edna May and her *Belle of New York* co-star, Dan Daly. In 1898 Cochran returned to New York, where he secured Mansfield's promise to finance him as a London theatrical manager. In London the following year, Cochran took up a Ziegfeldesque combination of management and agency, representing or producing the escapologist Harry Houdini as well as the semi-nude, artsy "Living Pictures" (these were representations of "classic" paintings) not to mention cowboys, midgets, hypnotists and roller skaters. Beginning in 1904 he frequently promoted boxing and wrestling matches⁸ In *Secrets of a Showman* Cochran cited his life's philosophy: "It is as great a service to amuse as to instruct."⁹

Cochran and Charlot

From the middle of the century's first decade Cochran worked what might be called the trans-Manche circuit, observing and signing French talent such as Maurice Chevalier and the woman who became the

⁷ Charles B. Cochran, *Secrets of a Showman*, 1925, p. 64

⁸ Such promotions were also frequently undertaken by the entrepreneurs of contemporary Parisian music hall.

⁹ Cochran, *Op., Cit.*, p.2

centrepiece of his own revues, Alice Delysia.¹⁰ It was in Paris that Cochran first encountered Charlot around 1908, when Charlot was working at the Folies Bergere, and Charlot's bilingualism very materially helped Cochran to secure some of his major French acquisitions.¹¹ The Charlot-Cochran connection eventually became complex indeed. According to Harding, although Grossmith had arranged the appointment of Charlot at the Alhambra in 1912, there was a proviso: Charlot had to procure an English partner. Apparently Cochran's name was prominently mentioned. Charlot is said to have decided against Cochran (and for Leveaux) because Cochran, with his Fleet Street connections, would certainly have the edge on Charlot if the partnership were to split. Nesbitt insists that at the time Cochran did not know of these machinations.

Instead, in 1912 Cochran was presenting his most grandiose project to date, a religious spectacle called *The Miracle*, at the vast Olympia, then as now basically an exhibition hall. As it turned out, *The Miracle* was no great success and in 1913 Cochran, saddled with a lease on the Olympia, had to look elsewhere in order to pay the bills. At the age of 40, he went to work as Charlot's publicity manager. It is best to take at face value his listing as such in the programmes for Alhambra productions. Harding claims that he partnered Charlot¹² while Sunday Wilshin, one of Charlot's performers from the 1920s and 1930s insisted in a radio documentary that Cochran handled Charlot's business affairs¹³. Given Cochran's once and future reputation for squandering money--about the same as Charlot's--this seems an unwise assumption on someone's part. So by 1913, for all his experience, Cochran had never staged a revue.

¹⁰ Delysia was the sometime wife of Harry Fragson, a singer of French extraction, born in England, who could sing in two languages. Delysia took up singing in small French music halls, where she was "discovered" by Cochran. Able to sing "with a tear in her voice", Delysia achieved enormous success in Cochran's revues beginning in 1914, but she was rebuffed when she starred in a Broadway revue a decade later.

¹¹ Personal interview, London, 1993.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹³ *Buzz-Buzz: The Lives of André Charlot*, 19 October 1993

DeCourville's spectacular revues

In 1912 Albert deCourville -- Londoner by birth if not descent -- could claim an apprenticeship similar to Cochran's, if shorter. DeCourville had travelled widely in the Western hemisphere, playing the role of adventurer-journalist (for the *Evening News*) and cultivating some famous friends, including the yachtsman/tea importer Sir Thomas Lipton and the prolific author of *Boys' Own* styled tales, Edgar Wallace. At the Holborn Empire deCourville had presented variety shows which included such turns as Sicilian diavolo players. Hired away by (Sir) Edward Moss, he persuaded the composers Leoncavallo and Mascagni to conduct versions of their short operas *I Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* at Moss's Hippodrome. At 25, deCourville had been around enough to have seen some Parisian revues and shortly after its 1907 opening taken in Ziegfeld's first *Follies*¹⁴ Some sources say that deCourville had been returned to New York by Moss in order to study such shows with an eye to bringing such spectacular shows to the Hippodrome. According to his 1928 autobiography (also written in the aftermath of a bankruptcy) it was deCourville who approached Moss, who was in need of "longer-running shows", with the idea of a "big, spectacular musical show" very much modelled on Ziegfeld's.¹⁵

In his memoir, deCourville recalls returning to New York and trying to interest the newly-famous Berlin and Kern, his contemporary, in writing songs for his spectacular. In the event, he engaged Hirsch. DeCourville also claims that he competed with Charlot, then also in New York in pursuit of native talent, successfully for the glamorous Kellogg, signing her for the show and marrying her.¹⁶

¹⁴ This was the first edition, crafted to suit Ziegfeld's French bride, Anna Held, whom Ziegfeld had first spotted "singing" at the (London) Palace in 1896. Held went on to star in a number of pre-*Follies* shows for Ziegfeld, and then apparently suggested that if Ziegfeld would only dress up "the most beautiful girls in the world [Americans] *chic*" he'd have a better show than the *Folies Bergere*. There isn't much reason to believe that Ziegfeld would otherwise have chosen to produce revue at all, let alone the kind of revue which came to bear his name. So goes history.

¹⁵ Albert DeCourville, *I Tell You*, 1928, p.95

¹⁶ In one of his journal entries, Charlot confirms the competition and suggests that the reason Kellogg never kept their appointment was that she had run off with deCourville.

DeCourville collaborated with Max Pemberton in composing *Hullo, Ragtime!* Among other American talent imported by deCourville were eight journeymen musicians whom he dubbed the American Ragtime Octette. Ever the showman, de Courville proceeded to convince thousands of theatregoers they were experiencing the real ragtime! From Paris variety came Levey, who had recently become the ex-wife of Cohan. To further distinguish his offering from standard variety practice, deCourville insisted that the show have no “curtain stops” -- therefore being more or less continuous.¹⁷ *Hullo, Ragtime!* has already been described as more variety than revue -- certainly more than Charlot’s revue -- and it regularly proved by sandwiching in such contemporary fascinations as the French pilot who had flown upside down over Paris. DeCourville’s “philosophy” of English revue, to be examined shortly, seems entirely the result of opportunism.

Charlot’s Apprenticeship

In 1912 André Charlot was 30, and his Parisian apprenticeship was not unlike Cochran and deCourville’s in London, with two exceptions which would prove highly advantageous in a London theatrical era about to swoop upon revue: he knew two languages (thanks to an English nanny and regular holidays in Jersey)¹⁸ and had been close to revue his entire adult life. In 1899, aged 17, Charlot was working for his father, for the moment a Parisian theatrical manager, reading plays and -- as an aspiring classical composer -- writing occasional music for the theatre. By 1901 he was on his own, writing occasional journalism and accumulating public relations and managerial credits at the Chatelet and Mme. Rejane’s theatre. In 1908 he left his post as business manager at the Folies Bergere to join the Sherek and Braff talent agency, working in London and New York before returning to Paris in 1910 to open his own agency. Charlot’s background in revue is apparent in “My Quarrel With Flers”, which details a contretemps during his 1911 managerial stint at two summertime (outdoor, temporary) Champs

¹⁷ Though it was not could be called a “non-stop” revue in the same sense as the degraded revues of the 1930s, when tacky, semi-nude shows ran from afternoon through late-night in order to compete with round-the-clock cinemas.

¹⁸ André Charlot, “Prelude to Life”, the opening essay in *People ‘n Things*, unpublished.

Elysees music halls:

In those days there were two outstanding Revue writers in Paris--Flers and Rip. They were equal in importance, but their style of work was as contrasted as day and night....Flers' Revues were of the spectacular sort--very much of the Ziegfeld Follies type. They had an appeal to the eye, but very little to the brain. They were always staged in the large music-halls of the day and Flers had more or less been the King of this type of Revue for years.

Rip [Georges Thenon, also a black-and-white caricaturist of great renown] was a few years younger than I; his reputation was well established, but quite recent, and he was one of my closest pals. His Revues were always staged in small theatres, where his caustic wit had made him the idol of the boulevards and the fear of those who had the slightest chance of being ridiculed.¹⁹

Writing with the benefit of a half-century's hindsight, Charlot was pretty clearly nudging his reader toward recognising Charlot himself as Rip's London inheritor. After noting that Rip had parodied Flers to the point of provoking Flers to challenge him to a duel (won, according to Charlot, in fact by Flers but in reputation by Rip) Charlot focuses on the reaction of Flers (who, at the Folies Bergere, had helped advance Charlot's career) to learning that Charlot had hired Rip to write one of his summertime revues. Another duel almost ensued after Flers turned his back upon Charlot in the street. (Charlot and Cochran eventually conducted London's most productive revue competition, but they never approached duelling.) Charlot writes, "I suppose this kind of thing would not be taken very seriously in America. In France it is considered a great insult."²⁰

So by 1912 Charlot had in France worked for Cochran and helped tutor Grossmith in revue, and was about to benefit from Grossmith's patronage. Charlot, as well as Cochran and to a lesser extent deCourville, was aware of such recent Parisian sensations as the arrival of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe in 1909 (the troupe had made a brief visit to London that year); with this fresh wind from the east had also arrived word of a remarkable Moscow troupe called the Bat Theatre (*Le Chauve*

¹⁹ Charlot, "My Quarrel With Flers", *People 'n Things*, unpublished.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Souris), which, using the same general sources as Diaghilev, made fascinating brief theatre pieces out of native legend, literature and music²¹, and after the 1914-1918 war, proceeded to charm audiences in London and New York. And like the others, Charlot had made several trips to America. His final preparation for taking over at the Alhambra came in 1911; he became the Alhambra's Parisian agent, securing for London the services of the era's ranking international *femme fatale* and "hot ticket", Gaby Deslys (see Chapter Four), who was in one way or another a constant feature of the London revue years preceding the outbreak of war.

The Changes of 1912: Part 2

Nineteen-twelve also marked what most music-hall commentators have called a (downward) turning point in the history of British variety. On 1st July the first Royal Variety Performance was given at (Sir) Alfred Butt's Palace theatre, though the campaign to bring it about -- and thereby confer "respectability" on variety houses -- was (Sir) Oswald Stoll's. As W. Macqueen-Pope has noted, it was also the only Royal Command Variety Performance and extremely controversial because the flavour of genuine music-hall was diluted:

Nothing vulgar, nothing suggestive, nothing likely to give offence must approach the sensitive ears and eyes of the Royal personages. [Yet] As Music Hall was primarily a vulgar entertainment, there was an almost overwhelming host of talent which clamoured for the honour of appearing....As the Press worked up the story, the public which never went to Music Halls became interested, too....And then the official announcement was made. It was a long and very well selected list, covering all branches of the business, from acrobats to comedians, from serio to singers and dancers. One great, very great name was not included. Marie Lloyd.²²

Like George Bernard Shaw's noble "natural philosopher" the dustman Alfred Dolittle (though two years before Shaw created him) music hall had been rendered "respectable" at high cost. Omitting Lloyd resulted in some concern among the other performers and in performances "far

²¹ Theatre programme, *The London Pavilion*, 2-9-1921

²² W. MacQueen-Pope, *Marie Lloyd: Queen of the Music Halls*, no date, p.145

below their best” before what Macqueen-Pope calls a “very stiff and stodgy audience”²³ meanwhile, Lloyd performed before a packed crowd that evening at the Pavilion.²⁴ The coming of the Royal Variety Performance was one more factor in music hall’s separation from its roots; although in its new palaces variety grew large, other forms of musical theatre inevitably benefited from the collapse of this native form, and none more than revue.

Other significant changes in the transatlantic entertainment world took place in 1912. Admission to American cinemas reached 5 million weekly--things to come in Britain. At the Cafe de Paris (in Paris!) a Canadian-American couple, Vernon and Irene Castle, created a sensation on the dance floor. The American novelist (and unacknowledged social historian) F. Scott Fitzgerald later wrote “We greybeards...remember the uproar when in 1912 grandmothers of forty tossed away their crutches and took lessons in the Tango and the Castle Walk.”²⁵ The Dancing Craze had begun.

Nineteen-twelve was also the year of Edwardes’s effective departure from the musical theatre. “Guv” suffered a stroke and never regained his strength fully, leaving the possibility of Gaiety musical comedy’s proving adaptable to such changes as ragtime and a world war as well as the rise of revue a moot point. Chapter Four discusses the dispersal of his theatrical empire after his death in 1915.

1913: a Transitional Year

Nineteen-thirteen can be seen as effectively beginning a major transition in the focus of London musical theatre. In a more or less traditional vein, there were a few operettas and two notable musical comedies, only one of which was English. These were *Oh! Oh!! Delphine!!!* (Shaftesbury, 10 February) and *The Girl From Utah* (Adelphi, 18 October,) *The Girl From Utah*, with music mostly by Rubens, was a throwback to the

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁴ Grattan was on this bill, from which was also absent (through illness) one of the greats of variety, the American blackface singer Eugene Stratton.

²⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Echoes of the Jazz Age”, 1931, *The Crack-Up*, 1945., p 18

earlier successful musical comedies along Gaiety lines; its stars were the expatriate American Joseph Coyne²⁶ and the visiting American Ina Claire. (*The Girl From Utah*, a late entry in the series of London Girls²⁷ has retained a place in the history of musical theatre largely because of a song interpolated into its subsequent New York production: Kern's long-melodic-lined "They Didn't Believe Me", widely acclaimed in retrospect as the first song of the Golden Age of American songwriting.) *Oh! Oh!! Delphine!!!* marked a brief triumphal return to the West End for composer Caryl, a long-time Gaiety favourite who had defected to America, where the show originated. It is also important as part of a rising movement on the British and American musical stage: adaptations from sources in French farce.

Cambridge contributions

Although the success of *Kill That Fly!* and *Hullo, Ragtime!* had produced some imitation (this ranks as elegant understatement: by the time it closed in 1913 400,000 people had seen *Hullo, Ragtime!* and it is estimated that 75 provincial companies were producing "revue") established critics still generally regarded revue from well above their noses. Setting aside Charlot and deCourville's productions for the moment, it is possible to note several important developments for the future of Revue. On 19 April 1913 *Come Over Here*²⁸ arrived at the Stoll in Kingsway. This was the newly renamed London Opera House.²⁹ On 12 June 1913 *Cheer-oh! Cambridge*³⁰ played a one-off charity matinee at the Queen's. The latter marked a transplantation of the Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club's recognition of the new form's possibilities. Robert Hewison has reported what the *Cambridge Review*

²⁶ Coyne was one of his era's stars, particularly memorable in *The Merry Widow* (1907) and *The Quaker Girl* (1910). He retained his popularity through *No, No, Nanette!* (1925).

²⁷ *A Gaiety Girl, The Shop Girl, The Girl on the Train, The Girl in the Film, The Quaker Girl, The Pearl Girl, The Girl Behind the Counter*, etc.

²⁸ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1913-12, (8-4-1913)

²⁹ The LOH had collapsed in 1912, the last great folly of that inveterate builder of opera houses, the first-generation American Oscar Hammerstein I, father and uncle of great figures in the musical theatre.

³⁰ A note for pedantry: although the show's title often appears as *Cheer-Oh, Cambridge!*, in one published collection of the lyrics, the exclamation point appears where it appears in this text. In yet another, there is no exclamation point at all.

said Footlights were up to:

something entirely new and original....At the present moment the universe seems to be giving itself entirely to 'revue' -- the University is the latest victim.³¹

The author and star of *Cheer-oh! Cambridge* was undergraduate Jack Hulbert, shortly to become a star of West End revue and subsequently a revue producer. "Extra lyrics" came from a variety of sources, including "G.P." Wodehouse. Hewison reports that Hulbert's script "evidently contained a thread of plot". But since the play script never made it into the Lord Chamberlain's collection and only the show's lyrics survive, we must look to them for confirmation that *Cheer-oh!* was really a revue. The following lyric was contributed by J.L. Crummelin-Brown:

We've poets here from Peterhouse and choristers from King's
Down along at our old shop;
And critics come from Corpus and connoisseurs from Caius
Who talk of the intensiveness of the soulful Japanese
And Rupert Brooke and Futurists and funny things like these,
Down at our old shop....³²

Maybe it was revue. Hewison also notes that the show's "females" -- this was when Cambridge was an all-male institution -- had been dressed "by a West End couturier." Of course there was already a strong Cambridge presence in London musical theatre, including revue, since Charlot's partner Leveaux had prepared for his brief career as co-impresario by taking a degree there. But now the connection between Footlights (joined eventually by its opposite number at Oxford) and London revue quickly strengthened, though it was 1924 before the annual May Week production was actually termed a "revue." By 1924 Charlot's organisation was regularly assisting Footlights shows, and Cambridge became a regular supplier of composers, librettists, lyricists and performers for London revue.³³

³¹ Robert Hewison, *Footlights! A Hundred Years of Cambridge Comedy*, 1983 p. 40

³² *Cheer-Oh! Cambridge* (a published version of its lyrics) 1913.

³³ By the later decades of the century it was the university revues which effectively kept the form, pretty well stripped of music, alive.

Passing revues

Come Over Here was rather typical of the era, calling itself a revue but being in fact an enhanced variety show. It certainly was a transatlantic curiosity, boasting British producers, American songs and a chiefly English cast. It sought to capitalise on the success of ragtime in general and Hirsch in particular; the score was nominally by Hirsch and -- for a change -- an authentic ragtimer, J. Rosamond Johnson,³⁴ though it included interpolations by unauthentic ragtimers such as Berlin, as well as the relatively young warhorse, "Waiting For the Robert E. Lee." Among the stars, all from the variety stage, was Clarice Mayne, whose accompanist/collaborator was her husband James Tate, well (but puzzlingly) known as "That." Some idea of the scattershot but trendy nature of *Come Over Here* can be had from its settings: Amiens, the road to Paris, Ciro's of Paris, Venice, a minstrel show, Alabama, and so forth. Having called itself a revue, *Come Over Here* had it both ways, printing a variety-type bill and also calling itself a music hall). The show accommodated the presence of Polaire, possessor of the "world's tiniest waist." (This measured 15 3/4 inches; Polaire, a great star of revue in Paris, was also noted for her favoured garb: chinchilla, even when ice-skating.³⁵ There must have been something untranslatable about her charm, for Polaire never topped a bill in the U.S. or Britain.)

On 4 August *The Passing Show* opened at the Pavilion, still nominally a music-hall. This was an English version of *The Passing Show of 1912*, which had been produced on Broadway by the Shubert brothers. The success of the Ziegfeld *Follies*, now an annual event, had spawned several imitating series such as *The Passing Show*, all of them revues--of the large and sprawling American type. Of the New York original, Bordman says "The comedy in *The Passing Show* time and time again came from burlesquing current shows. It was not the sustained spoof of a single Broadway hit...but shorter parodies, of a sort later revues

³⁴ Johnson (1871-1938), the brother of James Weldon Johnson, was educated at the New England Conservatory of Music; he was a noted singer of "coon" songs and collaborated with his brother on early ragtime compositions.

³⁵ Leslie, *Op.Cit.*, p. 143

employed until they faded from the theatre scene.”³⁶ Thus *The Passing Show* may have furthered the cause of revues based largely upon sketches, as well as seeming to have been quite like those Parisian revues Charlot credits to Rip, as well as to the shorter burlesques.

Another important aspect of the London *Passing Show* was its breezy book and lyrics, which came from Arthur Wimperis. Herman Finck, a Palace regular of Butt’s, was like Caryl a composer of light music who doubled as conductor of theatre orchestras. Finck’s lively score included “Gilbert the Filbert”, a song which created a stock character visible in several later revues.

Charlot and deCourville: 1913

The most successful revues of 1913 -- and by comparison with the foregoing shows much more like “real” revue of the spectacular sort -- were Charlot’s *Eight pence a Mile* (9 May) and *Keep Smiling* (5 October) at the Alhambra and deCourville’s *Hullo, Tango!* at Christmas time at the Hippodrome; the audiences for deCourville’s show were larger than those for Charlot’s pair, almost as large as those for *Hullo, Ragtime!*

*Eight pence a Mile*³⁷ clearly shows that in his Alhambra days, Charlot was sticking quite close to the Parisian model he was familiar with. The show bore one of the tricky titles which came to characterise early revue: this amount of money stood for the ordinary charge made by taxi-drivers for a tour of London, and indeed the format of this show, subtitled “The New Stop Press Revue”, was a fanciful tour of London. Written by Grossmith and Fred Thompson³⁸ it was set in “St. James, 1913”. Fourteen “scenes”, which suggest both the continuity of this “tour” as well as a willingness to give way to a set-piece or speciality which suggests its debt to variety, are listed in the original programme:

³⁶ Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: a Chronicle*, 1992, p. 288

³⁷ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1913-16 (2-5-1913)

³⁸ Fred Thompson, a highly adaptable librettist and lyricist, usually in musical comedy, played a major role in the Interwar transatlantic musical theatre; like Wodehouse, Bolton and Clifford Grey, he regularly collaborated with the era’s major composers, for instance George Gershwin: *Lady, Be Good!* (1924), *Tip-Toes* (1925) and *Funny Face* (1927)

1. A hundred years ago
2. Admiralty Arch as it is
3. Admiralty Arch as it might be
4. Black and White
5. The Auto Bath Club
6. Whiffles at the Alhambra
7. The Pastel Ballet

8. The New Boulter's Lock
9. The Musical Watsons
10. Omar Khayyam
11. The Orient
12. The Star Twin
13. The Law Courts
14. The Casino at Tooting-Plage, Normandy³⁹

The creeping Frenchification of the West End was enhanced by Charlot's importation of some of his Parisian co-workers. The show's exotic look was largely due to Paul Poiret's intensely trendy costumes, headdresses and jewellery. Poiret's revue career had begun in Paris in 1912, when he joined up with Erte to design decors and costumes.⁴⁰ As Leslie says, Poiret "was the right man at the right time...the world was ready for extravagance and exaggeration--and Poiret was more exaggerated than most."⁴¹ Poiret in fact believed himself to have been an Eastern prince in a previous incarnation. He once gave a costume ball in Paris "entitled *The Thousand-and-Second Night* at which three hundred guests in garments designed, made and paid for by their host stayed to watch the dawn gild the roofs above his Faubourg-St. Honore mansion."⁴² There were slaves, black and pale, male and female, costumes shimmering with thousands of pearls, Mme. Poiret in a golden cage, and then some.

Aside from this exoticism *Eight pence a Mile* probably did not startle the more analytical among its audiences overmuch. It retained the services of a compere, Lord Haymarket, supported by commeres galore named approximately for some of the reigning queens of the London

³⁹ Theatre programme, Alhambra Theatre, 9 May 1913

⁴⁰ They went on to design for the dancer Isadora Duncan, the failed spy Mata Hari and the soubrette Mistinguett.

⁴¹ Leslie, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

musical theatre and the theatres which usually housed them: Miss Gerty Gaiety, Miss Dorothy Dalys, Miss Laura Lyric, Miss Hetty Hippodrome and Miss Cissy Shaftesbury. Hindsight suggests the beginnings of a regular Alhambra revue troupe in the all-purpose veteran Hale and the willowy dancer Phyllis Monkman (subsequent chapters.) *Eight pence a Mile* also bore a Charlot trademark which would soon become standard for British intimate revue: imaginative lighting.

Part of Charlot's Parisian apprenticeship had included the remarkable use of theatrical lighting which illuminated artistically swirled fabrics by Fuller. Fuller's sensational debut at the Folies Bergere in 1892 was described by the symbolist poet Stephen Mallarme, "Her performance...an artistic intoxication and an industrial achievement...blends with the rapidly changing colours which vary their limelit phantasmagori of twilight and grotto...the dizziness of soul made visible by an artifice."⁴³ (In one of his later essays, Charlot confessed his admiration for Fuller and his disdain for her better-known contemporary, that "cow", Duncan.)⁴⁴ It should also be noted here that it was the 1920s before the house lights in London theatres were regularly dimmed for performance. So Charlot had plenty of room for experimentation and dazzlement. In "Black and White", only the dancers' (white) hats, gloves and boots were visible. Thanks to his innovative lighting, the Alhambra ballets were renovated.

"The Flowers of Allah", with Monkman as a shackled prisoner, gave full rein to Poiret's "Persianism." Satirical, anti-intellectual jibes were taken at futurist and cubist art as well as Arthur Conan Doyle's science-fiction. The hopelessly amorous American department store entrepreneur Gordon Selfridge (see Chapter Four) was mildly chaffed and fusty judges were shown cracking jokes which their court attendants had to laugh at. A pair of American ballroom dancers demonstrated the latest. There was even an impression of Tate.

⁴³ Margaret Haile Harris, catalogue for *Loie Fuller: Magician of Light* , Virginia Museum, Richmond, 1979.

⁴⁴ Andre Charlot, Journal, unpublished.

Everyone encountered during the tour wound up happily in Normandy.

Keep Smiling, a similar concoction, ran 2 1/2 hours after the obligatory five turns. Parisian set designers Ronsin, Marc Henri and Laverdet joined Poiret in the production, whose programme--similar in format to those used in French theatres--actually includes advertisements for French theatres: Capucine, Folies Bergere, Le Moulin d'Or, Olympia.⁴⁵ Hale and Monkman were joined in the evolving Alhambra company by the throaty American singer Lee White (see Chapter Four) who sang of old New Orleans, posed as an unlikely harem queen and fronted "Railway Porters on Parade." There were shipboard scenes, an Assyrian ballet to the music of Borodin, Glazunov and Ravel and a Turkish/Persian one in which the "Tango Tease" erupted. The finale, presenting "Troubadours and Follies", was staged on a massive staircase lauded by one reviewer: "for brilliance and kaleidoscopic effect...it has never been equalled."⁴⁶ *Keep Smiling* went through two editions, and during its run Leveaux bowed out, leaving Charlot in control, though both Grossmith and Cochran remained close at hand.

About *Hullo, Tango!* (which ran throughout the year, though once war broke out the audiences for a time diminished) there is less to say, since it unsurprisingly imitated *Hullo, Ragtime!* For splendour deCourville had engaged Leon Bakst, the designer of Russian ballet and opera who had been working in Paris for Diaghilev. Jack Norworth, the American song stylist, introduced "Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers", with lyrics by Wimperis.

DeCourville's "Philosophy"

This is as good a time as any to set forth deCourville's "philosophy" of revue, as contained in one of the gorgeous souvenir programmes which characterised the Hippodrome. Although the essay was contained in the programme for the 1915 revue *Push and Go*⁴⁷ (at a time of austerity,

⁴⁵ Theatre programme, the Alhambra Theatre, 24 June 1914.

⁴⁶ *The Sketch*, 1-11-1913

⁴⁷ Theatre programme "A Souvenir of *Push and Go*: the Story of Four Revues", The Hippodrome, 1-5-1915.

when spectacular revue was somewhat under fire) it attempted to define deCourville's entire approach to the form, at least as he wanted his public to understand it. It will go without saying that deCourville's notion of "English Revue" does not match this dissertation's, and that some of his generalisations don't make much sense.

...even as the art of painting consists of choosing the right colours and putting them in the right places, so does the art of revue making begin and end in the choice of satisfying elements and in the order of their appearance. The English revue, as we know it, is a thing apart from any other kind of representation, similarly described. The French revue aims at satirising local conditions. The producer seizes upon events which are for the moment occupying the attention of his public, and exaggerates or burlesques those happenings, or else he puts into the mouth of one of his characters some humorous comment upon the situation he desires to satirise. In France the latitude allowed to the author is considerably larger than that which is allowed on the English stage and also, it may be added, the French public is much better acquainted with the foibles and scandals of Parisian Society than is the British.

It is impossible in English revues to treat current topics with the breadth with which they are treated on the French stage, and every attempt to introduce revue in its Gallic form has been foredoomed to failure. The French depend also upon groupings of their supernumeraries rather than upon their activities, their skill, or their ability to hold an audience without principals. The English revue producer makes his chorus something more than a background. It is part of the number which is to be presented and though, of course, the principal is the centre of attention, giving as he or she does a clue to the scene, and supplying as it were an inspiration to and a *raison d'être* for the existence of the chorus, they are so welded as to be indistinguishable from the point of view of attraction.

I have spoken of the 'English Revue', and it is necessary to be a little more definite and endeavour to discover what an English revue is and how it came into being. An English revue is a Hippodrome revue.

This self-serving definition was not expanded but restated: deCourville's revues contained the "essential feature of success...the adequate employment of a well-trained chorus which did something more than group itself in picturesque attitudes or wave its arms gracefully and rhythmically." The essay notes that this chorus came to be called a

Ziegfeldesque “beauty chorus” and that the personnel of *Hullo, Ragtime!* mixed “Bernard Shaw plays, American Vaudeville, the Follies and the English music-hall stage.”

At the root of deCourville’s “philosophy”, if we are to take the essay seriously, is the avoidance of commentary, the presence of a Wayburn-drilled chorus and the expenditure of money. From £20,000 -- the purported cost of mounting *Hullo, Ragtime!* -- to the date of the programme, it was claimed that £200,000 “was spent in revue” at the Hippodrome: “Hippodrome revues cost enormous sums to stage.”⁴⁸ (In Chapter Four some idea of the contrasting sums expended upon intimate revues is given.)

Asserting that “the methods and the effects which were introduced into the Hippodrome shows were copied even in France” (an apparent reference to deCourville’s once taking a touring company to Paris) the essay claims “To create an entertainment to the taste of an English audience is a much more difficult proceeding than to import such an entertainment bodily from New York” (although of course the Hippodrome shows were nearer to the American model than to the French.) DeCourville’s “essay” -- coming as it did in 1915 and stressing vast expenditures of money -- clearly had something of the defensive about it, since in late 1914 war had broken out and intimate revue had quietly seized the London stage.

I wish to underline the aspect of deCourville’s “philosophy” which became so much at odds with these intimate revues--the focus upon a dancing chorus. I also wish to offer a tentative generalisation. If the Ziegfeld/American (and therefore the deCourville) revue emphasised chorus girls (how else are we to understand Ziegfeld’s persistent motto, “Glorifying the American Girl”?) and it is generally agreed that the French revue focussed upon stars; then what eventually defined the British revue was its reliance upon its writers.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Beatrice Lillie Arrives

Before intimate revue could perform the banditry which started spectacular British revue down the chute, however, there were further significant larger revues. On 4 May 1914 Charlot had produced his rangiest show to date, *Not Likely*, which in its second edition became *Everything New? Not Likely*.⁴⁹ It ran on into the new year. Grossmith returned as “advisor”, ostensibly co-authoring the show and retaining the compere-commere format. The French contingent was augmented by musical numbers by Gideon, the American Harry Tierney (later to pen the long-running *Irene*) and that permanent icon of Cafe Society, Elsa Maxwell. Grossmith joined a cast featuring Hale, White, Monkman and the sultry Teddie Gerard⁵⁰ In July the American singing comedian Eddie Cantor, at the beginning of a legendary career, visited the show for two weeks of “Eddie Cantor in Songs.”

The most important happening in *Not Likely* occurred in October. Beatrice Lillie, who became arguably the century’s greatest revue star on both sides of the Atlantic, made her first appearance in revue as “The Doll” in a scene called *From a Christmas Tree*. She was also one of Eight Marvellous Hoofers, which parodied (not so indirectly, as regards Cochran and deCourville) the sort of second-rate act often palmed off upon British audiences as “direct from their American triumphs. It is positively the greatest dancing act in the world, bar none. All the songs in this act are fully protected by copyright.”⁵¹ (At the echoing Alhambra, Charlot may still have been saddled with dancers, but they didn’t have to be taken so seriously.)

As part of a “music hall” entertainment, *Not Likely*, like *Hullo, Tango!* and *Come Over Here*, was also saddled with turns: comedy jugglers,

⁴⁹ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LC 2654 (23-4-1914)

⁵⁰ Teddie Gerard was an Argentinian-American who graced a number of pre-war London shows as a sort of “foreign” *femme fatale*. Imitation being the sincerest form of show business, it is hard to say whether Gerard was caused by Kellogg, Kellogg by Gerard, Delysia by both, or any other number of combinations. And there was always Gaby Deslys (see Chapter Four.)

⁵¹ Theatre programme, Alhambra Theatre, 4 May 1914.

comedy cyclists, even “America’s greatest bounding acrobats.” The *Stage Yearbook* for 1915 admitted that *Not Likely’s* two editions had made it a “staple item” but predicted that the “boom in revues is dying down.” Perhaps it was, the *Yearbook’s* general distaste for the form notwithstanding. Perhaps the novelty of these French adaptations and inflated variety shows might have proved itself just another fad. It is possible that revue might not have survived the coming of war had it not been for the arrival of intimate revue.

Count-Down to Intimate Revue

Before turning to Cochran’s “innovation” of intimate revue it is worth mentioning a few more developments before war broke out in August 1914. Among the dozens of “revues” duly catalogued in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection for 1914 can be found a number of *Hullos*, of titles such as *In And Out*, *Merry and Bright*, *Whimsies* and *Hurry Up*. Of provincial productions one might consider a couple in Birmingham: *Can You Beat This?*⁵², called by one of the Lord Chamberlain’s men “an idiotic affair about Mormons” and *Cut That Nerve*,⁵³ a “rollicking little burlesque of proceedings in a hospital ward, where comic patients are diagnosed and prescribed for by comic doctors, who include a celebrated mesmerist, “Dr. Walter Bogie.” The mesmerist’s magic phrase was “Galvano mento bendicular swanteroptiis Caramba! Hitchy-koo!” In such productions there is little sense of a particular form. At the Surrey Theatre there was *What Price London?* In Mossley there was *All Aboard*, in Salford *Well, I Never!* At the Hippodrome Poplar there was *It’s Doing Me Good: The Revue of Revues*, billed irresistibly as “an up to date Revue by J. Russell Bogue, author of *A Trip to Blackpool*, *A Night on the Big Wheel*, *A Fisherman’s Daughter*, etc.” None of these shows opened in London.

The popularity of ragtime and Hirsch was exploited in two brashly American-style shows directed by the peripatetic Wayburn which ran overlappingly in London, *The Honeymoon Express* (Oxford Music Hall,

⁵² Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1914-7 (23-2-1914)

⁵³ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1914-6 (17-2-1914)

14 April) and *Dora's Doze: a Musical Slumber in Seven Nightmares* (Palladium, 6 July.) The Lord Chamberlain's Ernest Bendall⁵⁴ wrote of the former (which had run successfully in discrete versions in New York and Paris, and was here Anglicised)

This is a rollicking burlesque of an elopement and a honeymoon journey, which eventually lands the lovers at a Carnival Ball. Such plot as the piece can boast depends upon the trick by which a rejected suitor is made to help his rival bear off his sweetheart....harmless fun...Rather vulgar foolish nonsense.⁵⁵

In this British version, the Honeymoon Villa turns out to be Golders Green, then a general symbol of bourgeois tackiness. All the girls have bought Vanity Bags at Selfridge's. There are massive stage effects involving the apparent locomotion of a train. A human gramophone emits Caruso, Melba and George Formby (Senior.) The snappy dialogue includes "I'm fond of toasting girls: the more you toast them the warmer they are."

Of *Dora's Doze* the Lord Chamberlain's G.S. Street wrote:

In the first scene we have the actual life of Dora, a drudge in a provincial boarding house. At the end of it she goes to sleep and the following scenes depict her dream of life in London with the various characters of the boarding house woven into it. Her lover, a local shopman, has become a sort of Selfridge, and marries her, and in the final scene (before she wakes up) the local music hall couple do an unsuccessful turn and she and her husband act a sketch written by the local poet. There is also a scene outside a nightclub in which suffragettes are ridiculed and a cinematograph affair is interpolated showing a farcical musical comedy experience. The fun chiefly consists of puns and there are some vapid songs.⁵⁶

The music hall couple's banter is highly American ("If I ever appeared in a revue I'd show them what I was made of." "You would if you wore some of the dresses I've seen." (There were never any pauses in a

⁵⁴ One of the pleasures of reading the play scripts in the Lord Chamberlain's collection is "watching" the reviewers sent out by the Lord Chamberlain gradually becoming "expert" at assessing the new form. Bendall in particular seems to have enjoyed his evenings at revue immensely.

⁵⁵ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-14 (14-4-1914)

⁵⁶ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-23 (2-7-1914)

Wayburn show) and topical: "Revue! Bah! Revues are killing the business!" Very much in the spirit of the times was the name of the nightclub -- the Colhipaladium -- and there was an obligatory reference to Gaby Deslys (see Chapter Four). At the "White City Open Aire Cafe" a "smart looking flapper enters" -- a decade before the nominal debut of that up-to-date type of female in the States.

Even before Cochran's innovation of intimate revue, smaller theatres--small at least by comparison with the Leicester Square giants -- were experimenting with smaller shows which they called revues. *Gee Whiz* (23 February 1914, Walthamstow Palace)⁵⁷ was an "Anglo American Revue" by the otherwise unknown Edward Harris which from its script seems quite appealing. Reminiscent of some of the burlesques discussed in Chapter Two, it involves a zany transatlantic flying race (one entry is powered by radium) complicated by the jealousy of Neptune, who blocks the creation of an Atlantic tunnel, not to mention a troupe of Fred Karno's clowns which is trying to get to America.⁵⁸ It is filled with puns: no suffragettes may compete, since this is a (*Daily*) *Mail* prize; an Irish political fixture explains that when he puts his arm around a mermaid that he is "only holding his Belle fast." Later he puts his "ulster" around her; discovering that she and her fellow mermaids are not married, he quips "Where singleness is bliss, 'tis folly to be wives." In a manner which was to become highly characteristic of revue, especially the type of revue soon written by Grattan -- stepping in and out of the story -- he finally says, discovering there will be no ballet in this show, that he is going over to the Alhambra. A further suggestion of the show's ancestry in burlesque was that most of its songs appear to have been parodies of contemporary popular ditties: "Put, put, put" for "Row, row, row" and the like, and perhaps, given the comparatively rich variety of fresh music in the "big" shows, that is where *Gee Whiz* finally fell short. Pity.

Be a Sport! (12 May at the Court, -- the earlier home of *Under the Clock*

⁵⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-7 (19-2-1914)

⁵⁸ Karno's touring troupe had recently lost both Charlie Chaplin and his understudy, Stan Laurel, who had chosen to remain in the States, while the future West End star Lupino Lane almost defected while the troupe was in Canada.

and a genuinely small theatre, seating just over 800), was equally spirited, causing Bendall, who was perceptive of this sort of “revue”’s genealogy, to write:

This is a lively revue of the usual burlesque pattern, with the scene laid at the Ideal Supper Club, run by an Honourable and his fiancée [the compere and commere], who are anxious to make money at it in order that they may get married. In spite of the fact that their clientele includes a Duchess and a cabinet minister as well as various variety artists, they seem likely to get into pecuniary and other trouble with the police [“We never should have barred Gaby Deslys!”]; when a rich uncle turns up to enjoy himself and to give them a fortune. Harmless, rollicking nonsense.⁵⁹

The title comes from an adaptation of “Girls” from *The Merry Widow*: “Go on, be a Sport! That’s the maxim [pun on Maxim’s, the show’s main locale, intended] of girls today.” The song adds “When you go to a Revue don’t the girls appeal to you? That’s why you like to go.” (thereby anticipating by 20 years these lyrics of the American Al Dubin’s from the Busby Berkeley film *Dames*: “What do you go for, go see a show for?...those beautiful dames.”) Another song, “I think you’re a wonder” is set to the tune of “Get Out and Get Under.” In the pits of ennui and the grip of the Dancing Craze, one character groans, “Won’t somebody invent a new dance?”

The Emergence of New Writers

Of real importance was the surfacing of future revue writers. Two full-length plays by Ronald Jeans appeared out of town. *Two and Two* at the Liverpool Repertory (See Chapter Six for its role in developing Jeans and therefore revue) was called by Bendall “a crude but rather clever little comedy of married life...the moral [to be happy, a woman should treat her husband as though she were his mistress] may be less sound than shrewd but it is enforced with no small superficial skill.”⁶⁰ *The Kiss Cure* in Manchester, called “a bread and butter little comedy of boys and girls who call each other ‘topping’ and talk a good deal about kissing” exhibited some blitheness:

⁵⁹ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1914-15 (1-8-1914)

⁶⁰ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, 2310 (16-1-1914)

None of the girls at Upper Bunkham are any good after they get married. Minnie Playfair's handicap went up ten after she'd married Archie Topham.

I kissed her because I felt I had to kiss something.

(In a tone of command) Take off those gloves...and your hat...and your coat. Now, kiss me.⁶¹

Eric Blore, whose lasting fame as cinema's perfect but often apoplectic gentlemen's gentleman lay two decades ahead of him, wrote a couple of sketches incorporated into the variety programmes at the London Coliseum. Of *My Friend Woodbine Street* wrote

A young man studying for the Bar who is 'broke' wants to get money to put on a horse called Woodbine, running that day at 1:00. It is nearly the hour and he is desperate; his rich aunt arrives and with the assistance of a sporting maid servant he persuades her to give money to pay the passage to Australia of his friend Woodbine. He is just in time and the horse wins. The fun consists of verbal confusions. It is all absurd and harmless.⁶²

*A Burlington Arcadian*⁶³ shows Blore's indebtedness to his mentor, the Variety comic G.P. Huntley, an indebtedness in verbal catch phrases and mistaken identities which would carry over in Blore's own theatrical persona. Set in the fashionable Burlington Arcade, it involves an irascible City gentleman attempting to purchase a shirt from an amiable, but featherheaded youth who engages in such asides as "I always imagined burglars in grey woollen sweaters." It takes some time for him to realise the gent's wants ("Oh, I see! You want to buy something!" -- and doesn't this sound like Blore's own acting voice?) and he eventually thoroughly enrages the would-be buyer, parrying his search for a single shirt stud with "Oh, but I can hardly separate them; they've been together from the very beginning." The denouement is that the youth has wandered into the wrong shop, whose real keeper

⁶¹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-26 (6-8-1914)

⁶² Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1922-12 (2-5-1922). But it appeared in variety in 1914.

⁶³ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-25 (16-7-1914)

has been out for a shave.⁶⁴

Hulbert, now graduated from Cais College, Cambridge, contributed a one-act comedy-with-music called *The Cambridge Gazette*, which made its debut at the Theatre Royal in Chatham and apparently never got further. Bendall called it

a wild little sketch of riotous flirtations in the rooms of a Cambridge undergraduate during May Week. One of the lively quartet turns out to be the editor of the Cambridge Gazette. The action is that of a 'rag' and although as harmless as the chaffing dialogue, would hardly meet the views of any college authority.⁶⁵

And there were the adaptations from the European. Wimperis was the co-adapter of *Mam'selle Tralala* (Lyric, 16 April) from the German original. Bendall wrote of this frothy drama of fashion and chocolate, "The game of hunt-the-ticket is kept up with spirited ingenuity and both dialogue and lyrics are well above the average in literary humour."⁶⁶ The one-act *L'Impresario* (Palace, 16 February) was partly in French. The Lord Chamberlain's man called it

a bright little sketch of the strange experience of a popular actress, who receives a call from an escaped lunatic posing as an American manager from whom she is expecting the offer of an engagement. In spite of the man's odd behaviour in professing acquaintance with the actress' companion and the villa in which she lives, she gives him a new sentimental song over which he weeps, and a new comic one [ending with 'hitchy-koo!'] over which he screams with laughter till he locks the door and begins threatening to avenge some farcical wrong. He compels the scared actress to attempt a frenzied dance, and then the doctor providentially makes his appearance and takes the crazy enthusiast back to his asylum.⁶⁷

It could have been a silent film, couldn't it?

⁶⁴ Blore's facility with lyrics and sketches received its first real acclaim with Charlot during the early development of intimate revue, with which he became identified until his virtual decampment to Broadway in the middle Twenties.

⁶⁵ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-6 (20-2-1914)

⁶⁶ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-14 (14-4-1914)

⁶⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, 16-2-1914

Revue in "Theatres"

Among these importations and adaptations, of considerable importance is *Plantons Les Capucines*, a revue entirely in French, comprising 'four tableaux', which opened at the Ambassadors' 11 May 1914.⁶⁸ A small show praised for its "intelligence, not suggestiveness", it seems to have given Cochran something to think about. The Ambassadors, one of the new theatres mentioned in Chapter Two, had opened in June 1913 under the management of John Herbert Jay; its capacity was 490. In theory it would be possible to produce shows on its 24 1/2 foot wide stage at extremely low cost. Perhaps best of all for the would-be revue producer in 1914, it was a theatre, therefore free of the London County Council's requirements.

In *Secrets of a Showman* Cochran claims that despite having never produced a revue, "I had long visualised for London a revue on the lines of those at the Capucines and other small theatres in Paris."⁶⁹ In Mander and Mitchenson's *Revue*, Cochran is quoted as remarking that after having seen *Delysia*, he determined to star her in a London show.⁷⁰ In these reminiscences Cochran may well be telling the truth; but a number of things had to happen correctly before this "long" visualisation could become reality. Cochran wrote that the size and shape of the Ambassadors seemed exactly right to him; he took a lease on the theatre 1 August 1914, but war broke out three days later. It was not immediately clear that the theatres would be allowed to stay open (in the earliest days of wartime, banks were even closed and in fact some of London's major attractions, including the British Museum, were eventually closed for the duration). It was also unclear how wartime would change revue. In retrospect it can be seen that wartime was the making of the form.

⁶⁸ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-15 (5-5-1914)

⁶⁹ Cochran, *Op. Cit.*, p. 196

⁷⁰ Mander and Mitchenson, *Op. Cit.*, p.28.

Odds and Ends: Intimate Revue

By October the initial panic over the war had subsided on the “home front” and Cochran wrote that he was ready “to make a start”, to create a revue “applicable to the times and with a cosmopolitan cast, which I felt would appeal to the many strangers [i.e. refugees -- but English public opinion was strongly with the French] within our midst.”⁷¹ His revue would form part of a bill which included two one-act plays, one in English and one in French.

The cast of Cochran’s revue, which came to be called *Odds and Ends*, included a contingent of performers recruited from the contemporary French music-hall revue in all the starring roles: Delysia, Leon Morton (“the attenuated droll”), Max Dearly and Jeanne St. Bonnet. History in the form of a wartime incident intervened, making Cochran an extremely lucky man. As he wrote:

I particularly wanted eight English dancing girls, the Grecian Maids, who, under the direction of J.W. Jackson, had been a feature of [Max] Reinhardt’s Munich production of *La Belle Helene*; but they were in Germany at the outbreak of the war and it was some time before they reached England. The difficulties they experienced in getting home supplied the basic idea of my revue. Leaving Berlin, they travelled for a day or so, when suddenly they were put out of the train and kept at a station --the name of which they did not know--for a day or so more. They were put on another train, and the same thing happened. How many frontiers they crossed they could never tell. ‘When we reached England,’ one of them told me, ‘I had no idea that I was in England until I heard the English-speaking porters.’⁷²

Cochran hired Grattan to write a “book” based on the Maids’ plight. The show opened on 16 October and Cochran later wrote:

The opening scene showed the Ambassadors stage quite bare [in the early intimate revues there never was any ‘scenery’ in the normal sense of the word, only a drapery of black curtains, for which ‘economy’ Cochran claimed a first] save for a table, at which sat Mr. J.M. Campbell in the role of the stage doorkeeper of a deserted theatre at a seaport town. The revue began by his reading of a letter from the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

proprietor of the theatre, who was at the front. For ten minutes at least Campbell kept the audience in roars at the humorous topical sallies written by Mr. Grattan. Then one saw, through the actual stage door of the Ambassadors' Theatre, porters bringing in baskets, boxes, and the other paraphernalia of a travelling troupe. The porters were followed by the troupe itself, headed by Max Dearly. All rushed up to the stage doorkeeper, clamouring to him in every language but English. The stage doorkeeper, nonplused, blurted out in the vernacular of the stage-hand a very obvious English phrase. There was a chorus of 'Where are we?' The follow-on was obvious. "Here's a theatre--we are players--let's give a show. What can we do?" And it was Max Dearly ['a well known Max him'] who got a laugh by saying, 'Why, we have some English dancers, so why not give a French revue?'⁷³

Bendall summarised the action:

Partly English, partly French and wholly topical--an impromptu performance given by a refugee troupe at a provincial theatre where it takes shelter on its flight from the Continent...harmless chaff...a bedroom scene involving a lady, her lover, and a burglar [Dearly, whose character chatted with the audience from time to time] commented 'Well, you must have one bedroom scene nowadays, so it's all right so far...everything in it is translated'....discussions of championship boxing, popular players....an illustration of the friendliness between English and French soldiers....a burlesque of 'Delysian undress.'⁷⁴

Of major importance in the development of revue, *Odds and Ends* can be said to have introduced the Grattanesque period, which lasted at least until 1916, when newer writers such as Jeans began to write a more "up-to-date" kind of sketch.

The King of Revue: Harry Grattan

Like all performers in variety, Grattan was well-versed in directly addressing his audience, drawing them into his stage persona. He proved remarkably able to adapt that ability to the newer genre's possibilities; these early years of intimate revue are clearly The Age of Grattan. One of Grattan's most characteristic devices animates the entire evening of *Odds and Ends* -- the pretence that the audience is simply overhearing, accidentally present at an event in the lives of the

⁷³ *Ibid.* p 29

⁷⁴ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1914-33 (16-10-1914) Or could it have been "Deslysian undress"(Chapter Four.)

cast. Thus the audience becomes part of the show itself. An “intimate understanding” is achieved as much by this device as by the sheer proximity of audience and “play”, and of course by the relative lack of staging.

As with almost anything one can say about British theatrical genres, this device was not original. At least as far back as the short burlesque *A Pantomime Rehearsal* (Rosina and Cecil Clay, 15 April 1891)⁷⁵ the audience was allowed to believe it had just happened in upon an event--we discover Sir Charles Grandison on a stepladder, painting the scenic backdrop for a forthcoming panto, whilst the soulful and put-upon director, Jack Deeds, noodles on piano, waiting for the arrival of other “amateurs” for which he has written a panto of “Babes in the Woods” filled with “poetic lines.” Deeds turns to the audience and asks “Do you suppose they ever say a word of them?” With the arrival of the amateurs -- the bluff Captain Tom Robinson, the fusty Lord Arthur Somersault and others, all of whom know each other but not the director -- it becomes clear that they haven’t, don’t and won’t; they certainly don’t approve of the “fairy scene”, can’t wait to get at the food and drink, want to tailor everything to their own personalities; the “rehearsal” eventually breaks down in a farrago of individual prejudice (“I’m directing this, not you!”) and misunderstandings. (“It is MY conception”) Dedicated to “Messrs Brandon Thomas and Weedon Grossmith⁷⁶ with all good wishes” it must have been a good deal of fun.

Regardless of originality, the devices of *Odds and Ends* became identified with Grattan. They seemed fresh and different, and that remains their major significance -- especially since while Grattan continued to use them, the restless Cochran soon enough abandoned this format. The show introduced Rubens’ (and *The Daily Mail*’s) musical recruitment plea, “We Don’t Want to Lose You (But we think you ought to go)”--and then insouciantly had it both ways, closing with

⁷⁵ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, 53476

⁷⁶ The dedication is quite fascinating, since the first production of Thomas’s *Charley’s Aunt*, one of the most durable of English farces, was a year in the future, as was the publication of *The Diary of a Nobody*, the novel by Grossmith and his brother George (senior) that introduced the quintessential suburbanite. Presumably the burlesque’s authors believed that Thomas and Grossmith would recognise the situation perfectly.

a song which mentioned not only “Cheery On: Boys of Britain in your Khaki kit.” but promised “No more patriotic ballads...with a breezy cheery oh’ .

Mander and Mitchenson state a standard view, that this “new form from Paris (my underlining) introduced into London by C.B. Cochran...was aimed at a sophisticated theatre-going public, as opposed to the popular variety-music hall audience now successfully catered for by the spectacular revue...it is on the intimate style that the main interest of the next forty years centres.”⁷⁷

Yes and no. It would take a great deal of analysis to determine whether Grattan’s libretto particularly resembled the small Parisian revues. Whether they knew what they were in for or not, this “sophisticated” audience of first-night critics and playgoers are recorded as not having been at all amused, more likely just puzzled. However, the show’s low overhead kept it going through nights when only £25 came through the till. And eventually it caught on. *Odds and Ends* ran for nearly 500 performances and Cochran claims to have cleared £500 weekly. Whatever was intended by Cochran, *Odds and Ends* did start something. It was making money and eventually there would be imitators.

Even though there was no immediate rush to the “new” kind of revue, Cochran had surely stolen a march on Charlot, creating a show that was more “French” in a way immediately understandable to audiences than anything at the Alhambra so far. And at the huge Alhambra (3500 seats) with the huge production costs of large scale revue, Charlot had a huge “nut” to crack with every performance. Charlot never threw money around in the deCourville sense, but he surely must have understood the profit/outlay equation that was represented by *Odds and Ends*. For the moment his only response was to add Rubens’ song, sung by White (“all receipts and royalties to Queen Mary’s Work for Women Fund”) to close the first half of *Not Likely*.

⁷⁷ Mander and Mitchenson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 27

Only one more major revue opened during 1914, deCourville's somewhat nervously named *Business as Usual* (15 November, Hippodrome), in the by now well-established spectacular manner. The outbreak of war posed real questions for which there were no ready answers--even if in 1914 it was fashionable to believe that the war could not last long. How much would it affect theatregoing and theatregoers' preferences and demands? And if the war were to be prolonged, the bustling transatlantic -- not to mention cross-Channel -- flow of ideas and influences as well as performers, would surely diminish. English theatre in general would have to become more "English". Chapter Four, devoted to 1915, details an amazing explosion of revue offerings, among them the true beginning of the Charlot-Cochran rivalry which would define British intimate revue.

Chapter Four: Charlot's Conversion 1915-1916

An Overview

The war years 1915-1916 proved crucial to the development of intimate revue. Cochran's scaled-down and moneymaking example -- *Odds and Ends*, together with its lineal descendant *More (Odds and Ends)* running from 1914 to the middle of 1916 -- was influential in causing a general movement toward smaller shows, though as early as 1916 Cochran himself was already getting ready for bigger ventures. Of greater significance was Charlot's conversion to the intimate form. Charlot's conversion was part of a general movement away from the spectacular revue, though deCourville, continuing to assert that his was the authentic formula, made them as big as the era allowed.

By early 1915, revue in general, despite its proven ability to recognise material that was commercially trendy, had still not won over the "establishment" of musical comedy and variety. (In the long run this apparent deprivation of what was "established" was good for revue, which proceeded to develop its own stars--and most importantly, its own authors.) There were some attempts at blending musical comedy and revue. Theatre in general also had to cope with immense changes in theatre ownership and indeed revue found itself cut off from its putative Parisian parent. Even if we limit ourselves to the topic of theatre ownership, the year 1915 might prove as worthy of discussion as 1912. But there was more: it was on May 7, 1915 that the liner *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine. One of the dead was Charles Frohman; after sixteen years the Duke of York's returned to British hands, where the crusty Violet Melnotte took charge. In October 1915 Edwardes died. He was once more at home in England after an internment (bad timing: he was in a German health spa when the war broke out) which might in other circumstances have produced the plot for a musical comedy. Although Edwardes' control of his empire had been shaky for several years, his death brought about its final dispersal.

An austerity dictated by real shortages of material (it was during 1916 that the first “voluntary” food rationing began) was not the only influence World War I exerted upon revue. Writing in 1926, the *Times* theatre critic James Agate recalled a wartime evening when he overheard a group of “lively young men” trying to decide what to do after dinner. Offering himself as a reliable guide, Agate asked whether they would like to “see a play of spiritual purpose and noble intent” and was immediately rebuffed: “Good God, no! We don’t wish to see anything of the sort. *We’re on leave!*” In one of his gloomier moods, Agate went on to assert that the English theatre-going public always considered itself on leave.¹ But by any standard of measurement it is clear that during increasingly grim times, the entertainment genres ideal for various kinds of “leave-taking” were variety and revue.

Many memoirs of World War I, including a personal interview in 1996 with the Peterborough industrialist Norman Collins, who was 99 at the time² have mentioned the general craziness evoked in suffering soldiers by a horrifying war, waged at a snail’s pace, which was taking place less than a day’s journey from the West End. In the field of revue it was Charlot who first realised that wartime audiences, thus laden with “leave-takers”, vastly preferred lighthearted playfulness to a flag-waving which sat ill alongside their real experience. He decided to banish the war from his boards. (He was not alone; *The First Hundred Thousand*, a light novel by Ian Hay, imagined war to be like a public boarding school.)³ As we shall see, however, revue soon worked out a more sophisticated approach to the war, more attuned to the ironic humour which servicemen themselves used in trying to cope. But revue concurred with wartime in another respect: an audience could arrive late, leave early and still get a great deal of enjoyment in between. Sounds ideal for one’s potential last leave, when theatre was competing with other urges.

¹ James Agate, “The Co-Optimists” (review) 5-12-1926, *Immortal Joys* 1945, p. 143

² Personal interview, Kings Cliffe, 1997.

³ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, p. 52

Yet emphasising such an aspect which makes revue sound disposable would be selling the form quite short, since it emphasised revue's roots in variety at the expense of those practitioners like Grattan, who found a way of running a thread of continuity and even meaning, however slender, through what eventually became as many as 25 separate "numbers." It further slights the versatility of the small casts that performed sketches and routines, sang songs and learned the latest dances.

There is little doubt that historically Charlot's conversion proved the most important event in the progress of revue. After two more "extravaganzas" at the Alhambra in early 1915, Charlot created an intimate revue in a smaller theatre. This was also a major step forward in Charlot's career. While he stayed at the Alhambra, he was a manager; but once he went small, his productions became known as Charlot revues. Like many other revues in that year, Charlot's first intimate revue copied Cochran's manner of naming: it was *Samples* (and its sequel would be *Some (more Samples of Odds and Ends)*). Charlot also temporarily reacquired Grattan. Competition for artisans such as Grattan who knew their way around the genre was clearly intense, and it was to the eventual credit of both Charlot and Cochran that, although regularly raiding each other (and therefore inevitably increasing their otherwise skinflint payrolls) they came to command a general allegiance from their creative personnel, developing distinctive "companies" and styles that derived partly from such coherence.

Charlot's Last Spectaculars

On 19 March 1915 Charlot produced at the Alhambra *5064 Gerrard* (the title, superseding *The 1915 Alhambra Revue*, emerged from a newspaper competition which -- we should never discount Charlot's history as a press agent -- allegedly attracted 8000 entries; it was the telephone number of the Alhambra's backstage area.)⁴ Bendall called *5064 Gerrard*, a production in 12 "scenes", "a new revue of the old

⁴ *The Times* 10 March 1915; "Miss Rose of Streatham Hill" won the prize of 5 Guineas.

chaotic order, very American in the hum of its slangy dialogue.”⁵ The operative word here is “chaotic.” One reviewer remarked that the best way to enjoy it would be onstage in a merrygoround. The 1916 *Stage Yearbook* -- for the first time devoting a chapter to revue -- called it one of the year’s best,⁶ although Arthur Coles Armstrong, a devotee of deCourville’s who somehow also was able to claim that only French revue was authentic, rather surprisingly failed to notice the French ancestry of the Charlot-Grossmith shows.

In retrospect, *5064 Gerrard* assumes more importance than Charlot’s other Alhambra shows largely because in he can be seen starting to reform his “company” into something ideally suited to intimacy. This was not immediately apparent, since this great, sprawling show was on the surface very much a vehicle exploiting, in the French manner, “big names”. Its libretto was nominally by two journeymen, but they were very much in collaboration with Hale (In 1915, it was thoroughly expected that performers would “write” a good deal of their own material.) Hale’s co-star, vastly more important from the angle of box office exploitation, was the notorious Gaby Deslys.

Deslys, for whom more than one trendy dance had already been written, was the toast of several continents, a genuine celebrity of the moment (thus as perfect a drawing-card for variety in its day as it is for television in ours) willing to be shown off, if not actually exploited in shadowy scenes involving the illusion of nudity. (One notation in the programme for *5064 Gerrard* speaks of “some new dresses for Miss Gaby Deslys; everyone is tired of seeing her in cast off clothing.”)⁷ Deslys was the former amour of Portugal’s king and the current favourite of department-store magnate Gordon Selfridge⁸. She was not part of the original *5064 Gerrard*; at that time she was starring at the Duke of York’s in a competing revue, *Rosy Rapture*. But despite her allure, a

⁵ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, 3264 (10-3-1915)

⁶ *Stage Yearbook*, 1916.

⁷ Theatre programme, Alhambra Theatre, 10-4-1915

⁸ Selfridge had opened his immense “American-style” department store in Oxford Street in 1909. A few years after his time with Deslys, Selfridge, who clearly had a weakness for international *femmes fatales*, took up with both Rosie and Jenny Dolly (see Chapter Seven)

libretto written by James Barrie (another who had fallen under her spell) and some songs by Kern, *Rosy Rapture* closed quickly and Charlot snapped her up. Hale's impersonation of "Miss Rosy Rapture" (accompanied by a pint-sized version of Sir James) regularly stopped the show and, according to Gardiner frequently convulsed the lady herself.⁹

5064 Gerrard was otherwise a transitional Charlot show. Compere and commere were still on hand, departing from London's Revueston Station for a look around town. Before they leave the station, White sings about her love for London. Among the curious crowd milling around her is Lillie. Later in the show, Lillie made her solo debut out front of the curtain, dressed as a farm boy, singing Berlin's "I Want to Go Back to Michigan." Lillie, who as a child had learned to sing "character songs" with the Lillie Trio (mother and sister Muriel) sang it, as was her wont, with all apparent seriousness and the audience was convulsed, though even Lillie later speculated that the humour came from the idea that anyone would want to go to a place called Michigan.¹⁰ Lillie's career was now pointed toward becoming "the funniest woman in the world" and another piece of Charlot's repertory company, one particularly suited to intimacy, was in place.

This particular tour of London has compere and commere lurching around town, being searched for wartime contraband, being fleeced by a sham antique dealer; they witness an exotic Vestal Virgin ballet featuring Monkman and visit Murray's Club (very much the night club of the moment) where a "beauty chorus" featuring (in Cochran mode) "a young American actress who recently won a beauty competition in New York in which 700 faced the judge"¹¹ exhibits all the latest dances.¹² The notably unbeautiful but magnetic Lillie portrayed "Miss Foxtrot." There was a striking ensemble number called "The Pearl Necklace" in which a chorus all in white except for a couple strategically placed, all

⁹ James Gardiner, *Gaby Deslys: a Fatal Attraction*, 1986, p. 116

¹⁰ Beatrice Lillie, *Every Other Inch a Lady*, 1973, p. 69

¹¹ *The Telegraph*, 10-3-1915

¹² With notable exceptions, Charlot was usually a relatively restrained publicist, but he was also, as here, influenced by his competition.

in black, were looped about the stage to create a stunning necklace effect. *5064 Gerrard* also included a bevy of militarily clad girls (“The Alhambra Scouts”) and a finale (demonstrating revue’s partial debt to other forms of musical theatre) which eventually filled the stage with blonde-bewigged Pierrots (one onlooker said there were a hundred!) but began as

Robinson Crusoe, a gorgeous and spectacular pantomime in six spasms and occasional interludes...plot hatched at Hatchetts [a trendy night club], music stolen by Gelville Mideon...tights by Tautz...island especially discovered for this production by T. Roosevelt...Friday’s fire supplied by the Savoy Grill [then as in later years Charlot’s favourite retreat, refuge and general hangout]...savages lent by the Savage Club [an actors’ club] Animals kindly lent by Charles B. Cochran from the Wonder-Zoo.”¹³ [ever the showman, Cochran had followed *The Miracle* at Olympia with what later generations would recognise as an indoor wild-animal park. A few years later he again took up the promotion of championship boxing.]

Advertising for *5064 Gerrard* made a significant boast: it contained NO PATRIOTIC SCENES!¹⁴ Differentiating itself from deCourville and Cochran’s shows, it positioned itself as ideal “on leave” entertainment. Here in so many words was Charlot’s considered method of dealing with wartime. The record will show that by comparison to revue, musical comedy took more than another year to understand the importance of this new kind of escapism to wartime business.

5064 Gerrard was not Charlot’s last revue at the Alhambra. Its lineal descendant, *Now’s The Time*, also featuring White and Lillie (who, in a Chaplinesque era proved an appealing pseudo-tramp and still looked good in men’s evening clothes as the nominal--and comically combined-- compere/commere, Lord Lionel Lyonesse) opened there on 15 October 1915, a month before Charlot’s first intimate show, *Samples*, took up residence at the Playhouse. The revue survived an opening night simultaneous with the first German Zeppelin attacks upon London, after which the song “Where Did That One Go?” acquired a special meaning. Despite being roundly entertaining and quite

¹³ Theatre programme, The Alhambra Theatre, 12-3-1915

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

beautiful, *Now's the Time* cannot from the standpoint of developing the form be seen as breaking new ground. (Charlot also confessed a debt to Rip and Bosquet for the dressmaker sequence in which Lillie sang the show's title song.)¹⁵ But *Now's The Time* did enlist a stage-struck Egyptologist, Arthur Weigall, whose designs were a reasonable substitute for Poiret's: Weigall was responsible for the golden-haired Monkman's Cleopatra ballet, complete with sphinx. Weigall proceeded to marry Lillie's sister Muriel, and the newlyweds were soon writing songs for Lillie.

Wartime changes in theatre ownership

By the time of *Now's The Time*, the Alhambra had become part of the Stoll group, one of the early components of what eventually became London's largest theatrical chain, Stoll Moss. (during the writing of this thesis, Stoll Moss -- The Apollo, Cambridge, Duchess, Garrick, Gielgud, Her Majesty's, the London Palladium, the Lyric, the Queen's and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane -- has been acquired by the Really Useful Group, which already included the Palace, the Adelphi and the New London,)¹⁶ During the war, however, many changes in ownership characterised the West End, with real impact upon its offerings, and this is as good a time as any to discuss the part they played in the development of musical theatre.

As Norman Marshall later wrote¹⁷ wartime brought still another wave of speculation in the profitable enterprise which theatre seemed to be, and this latter begat the decline of "actor-managers" and the advance of such large operators as Stoll, who were, according to Marshall, primarily businessmen rather than "theatre people." Marshall's statement is interesting in light of a facsimile edition of *The Observer* for 7 January 1900 published in honour of the "millennium" beginning 1 January 2000. Virtually every theatre advertised therein lists the manager or lessee above the title. These included Arthur Collins (Theatre Royal,

¹⁵ Theatre programme, The Alhambra Theatre, 13-10-1915

¹⁶ The Alhambra eventually reverted to variety before being demolished to make way for a cinema.

¹⁷ Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, 1947, p.15

Drury Lane), A. and S. Gatti (Adelphi), Charles Wyndham (Criterion and Wyndham's), Arthur Chudleigh (Court), Edwardes (Daly's), Frohman (Duke of York's), H.T. Brickwell (Garrick), John Hare (Globe), William Greet (Lyric), H.A. Freeman (Grand, Islington), Mr. [Beerbohm] Tree (Her Majesty's), Frederick Harrison (Haymarket), J.H. Leigh (Prince of Wales), Robert Arthur (Princess's), and Edward Terry (Terry's) In fact, almost the only houses which did not give "top billing" to the impresario were the variety palaces.¹⁸

We do not have to argue that all these impresarios were "actor"-managers in order to sense their personal engagement. Marshall's sadness at the 1930s decline of those he defined as the "independent entrepreneur -- Cochran, Grossmith, and to a lesser extent Charlot -- can be juxtaposed with Huntly Carter's conclusions.¹⁹ Carter believed that by 1925 such independent entrepreneurs (and these three were not among them!) had already disappeared, citing a "theatrical trust" -- American in influence and stemming from such mergers as the Keith-Albee ascendancy -- which essentially used wartime's fluidity to take over the West End.²⁰

This "trust"'s influence, according to Carter, created a creeping standardisation of theatrical product, largely because of the opportunism of financial backers (financiers, capitalists, speculators) and the trustees (financial middlemen who employed managers such as Moss and Butt) who had been pushing the genuine actor-managers (in addition to the above, Carter specified Sir Johnston Forbes-Robinson and Oscar Asche) aside.²¹ It is easy enough to understand Carter's concern -- indeed, to find it understated -- if we listen to J.B. Booth.

¹⁸ "Millennium Souvenir Replica Edition-*The Observer* 1900 January 7, 1900, p. vi

¹⁹ Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the European Theatre 1914-1924: a Comparative Study of the Changes Effected by the War and Revolution*, 1925, p. 25ff

²⁰ Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward F. Albee had gradually "organised" American vaudeville into a big business during the closing years of the Nineteenth century. In 1906 they established the United Booking Office of America, "regulating performers' access to theatres and theatres' access to performers". They established a monopolistic company union and in 1907 overwhelmed a competing "syndicate" headed by Mark Klaw, Abraham Erlanger, Frohman and the Shubert brothers, which agreed to stay out of vaudeville for the next 10 years.

²¹ A trawl through Wearing's chronicles tends to support Carter's conclusions, if we limit ourselves to "serious" (or even memorable) drama, which was notably absent.

Looking backward from 1943, Booth recalls one of these capitalist-speculators, William Clifford Gaunt,

the Bradford mill-hand who, in the hectic war aftermath, controlled the Apollo, Gaiety, Winter Garden and Shaftesbury Theatres, as well as His Majesty's, that theatre of Tree's domain. He was credited -- or should one say debited? -- with losing a million in the West End theatre, and he and his like certainly did an incalculable amount of harm to dramatic art and the dramatic profession."²²

Booth goes on to recount a meeting with Gaunt at His Majesty's, a place now suffused with "an air of neglect...lost, barren, deserted." Booth concludes that this "big bluff man, red-faced, with a bowler hat clamped down over his face" deserved what he got: "It was perhaps good for art and manners that Gaunt lost his millions, and went back to the little house in sight of the dirt and smoke of Bradford."²³ Booth's commentary is of course undercut by his overwhelming snobbishness. He is only slightly less snobbish and outrageously racist about the accession of Butt from the (plebeian) Palace to the (aristocratic) Theatre Royal, Drury Lane:

It was an epoch of wild speculation in theatre properties. The fortunes to be made during the war by any kind of entertainment had attracted hordes of speculators into the theatre business...and the West End amusement world had undergone a tremendous change....One by one, the old establishments fell into the hands of the speculators, and the City and Jewry were ever ready to find money for theatrical speculation and to dabble in theatrical shares. There was hardly a theatre in London...which was not in the market, at a price, and Alfred Butt and his company made a sensational bid for the whole of the shares in the Drury Lane Company...and the old rule was at an end....So passed a great regime, and not so many years later, Butt was to pass from both Drury Lane and the House of Commons--not perhaps with the same quiet dignity which surrounded the passing of Arthur Collins.²⁴

Then there was the mercurial Jimmy White. In 1922 White gained control of Edwardes' beloved Daly's. D. Forbes-Winslow, the biographer of Daly's²⁵ saw White as a generous "meteor", who had delighted in such

²² J.B. Booth, *The Days We Knew*, 1943, p. 12

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125

²⁵ D. Forbes-Winslow, *Daly's; the Biography of a Theatre*, 1944, pp 173-175.

earlier coups as a £3 million takeover of the Duke of Bedford's Covent Garden estate and the purchase of the General Post Office site. Forbes-Winslow has written that White raised £200,000 and moved Edwardes' daughter and Robert Evett aside. Although White made and spent millions over the next five years (he claimed to have made as much as £750,000 in one day and boasted that he had sometimes won £100,000 on a single racetrack bet) under his management Daly's came to rely more and more upon importations from the Continent and had few successes.

Booth, however, who saw characters such as White as part of the ruination of the West End, had little use for him as a manager. Likening him to the "mill-hand" ("with all Gaunt's polish and culture") Booth bemoaned White's accession to Daly's: ("His favourite word seemed to be 'brass' and in the end, he too lost his 'brass' and took a short way out"²⁶ [White committed suicide in 1927 before bankruptcy could overtake him but not before writing his own farewell, "My Last Look at Life"]....I met them both at the height of their affluence, and have never disliked two men more on the slightest of acquaintance."

Amid all this tumult and all this allegedly deplorable changing of the guard, revue appears to have prospered. None of these "parvenus" seem to have harmed it. Perhaps revue impresarios were a tougher breed. At least White's frustrating experience with Charlot (see below) would suggest so. However we discount Carter and Booth for the way they cling to such a view of "the [aristocracy via establishment] old days", they warn of a particular sort of theatrical standardisation, a natural consequence of the American "industrialisation" of theatre and a step toward what might be called the "fast food" approach to merchandising. It can be argued that reliability at a low denominator had become preferable to irregularity.

"The straight theatre had become a revue theatre"

²⁶ Booth, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12

“The straight theatre had become a revue theatre”

It is somewhat aside from this dissertation’s main thrust to dwell upon Carter’s (and to a lesser extent Booth’s) overall concept, since particularly Carter was interested mainly in “drama.” On the other hand, the undoubted beneficiary of what Carter believed was a dereliction of governmental duty was the musical theatre. Carter believed that Government should somehow have done something -- if necessary, nationalise theatre -- in order to curb this “standardisation”, in order to satisfy the public’s yearning for meaningful theatre: “During the war [the public] longed for insight into the meaning of its moods. It turned to theatre, but were given ‘meaning’ which sold the best seats....they asked for bread, but the Trust gave them poison.” He added that by the end of the war, “the straight theatre had become a revue theatre.”²⁷ (my emphasis.)

Carter said that by the end of the war a “big six” that he did not consider “independent entrepreneurs” at all controlled London theatre: Carter’s big six were Cochran, Butt, deCourville, Grossmith, Laurillard (these latter two particularly profiting from the disappearances of Charles Frohman and Edwardes) and Charlot. Carter had his reasons for fearing American invasions. The transatlantic machinations of Grossmith, Hicks and Frohman had certainly facilitated American footholds. Carter prophesied that the Shuberts and their allies -- somewhat thwarted, as we have seen, by the manoeuvring of Keith and Albee in the States -- would recoup by buying up all the London theatres. He was wrong, although the ownership of London theatres did become increasingly concentrated. By the end of 1999 only 10 of the 41 major West End theatres were not owned by one chain or another. One wonders, however, what Carter might have said about Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, the head of Really Useful, who is quoted as having defended his takeover by asserting that business people should not be in charge of theatre.

However flawed Carter’s prophecy might now seem, there is no doubt

²⁷ Carter, *Op.Cit.*, p. 81.

However flawed Carter's prophecy might now seem, there is no doubt that not long after the war, and certainly during the Twenties, when the British economy never recovered from its wartime pounding, the "reliability" of a "pre-sold" attraction as a prerequisite of theatre-going was of great importance. One wonders whether the birth of intimate revue could have taken place in such an environment. It should be noted that when in January 1916 the Government announced the closing of Britain's museums and libraries, no such order was made about theatres, music-halls and cinemas. Which was more important to the "war effort"? The window of opportunity for intimate revue was truly narrow. Perhaps only during World War I could it have "simply happened"²⁸

More Cochran

To resume the chronology of 1915-1916 revue: although almost all of Charlot's revues subsequent to *Now's The Time* were housed in small theatres, he did not completely abandon the Alhambra, and one of wartime's most loved productions, *The Bing Boys Are Here* began its long run there in April 1916. Although it had begun as Grossmith's show, Charlot took over the run when Grossmith entered the military. (See below.)

As Charlot wound down his Alhambra operation, the more restless Cochran was playing with his Wonder-Zoo and producing his small revues -- almost always starring Delysia and Morton -- at the Ambassadors and other small houses. At this point in his career Cochran, who was also aware of the need to keep one's self in the newspapers and in any case was more the restless entrepreneur than the devotee of any theatrical form, from time to time denied that he was even producing revues -- rather, he implied, these shows represented some altogether new form. *More*²⁹ was succeeded by *Pell-Mell* (1916)³⁰. Even though its small, shallow stage was still mainly

²⁸ Nesbitt, personal interview, 1994.

²⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, 3534 (14-6-1915)

³⁰ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1916-13 (30-5-1916)

dressed with a painted back cloth of dark green, *More* suggested Cochran's future, larger ambitions. One of its dazzlements was a chorus of Victorian dandies in silvered top hats and striped bow ties. According to Harding, the legendary chanteuse Mistinguett, charmed by this number, shortly copied it in Paris.³¹ *Pell-Mell* began with the Grattan-like assertion that, since its plot had finished at 8:25 (curtain time was 8:30) it could be played backwards as effectively as forwards. (This idea eventually was borrowed by Charlot's writers for one of their best sketches.)

Between Cochran's two smaller revues came a big one in 1915 -- the imported *Watch Your Step*³² at Stoll's Empire. *Watch Your Step* could have easily been called musical comedy, except for one thing: just before its opening, Cochran decided it didn't make sense as it was, and so he had the second act played first. *Watch Your Step* in the original had been quite a hit in New York a year earlier with its songs by Berlin (his first full-length theatrical score) and dances by the Castles. Cochran's version, adapted into "English" by Grattan, could not boast the Castles, but starred Coyne and Levey, temporarily poached from deCourville. There was strong support from the youthful Lupino Lane³³ And there was Billie Carleton,³⁴ in her West End debut.

Cochran's instinct of reversing the show's two acts was apparently correct; he made enough money from the success of the long-running *Watch Your Step* to help him sell his lease on the Ambassadors and acquire one on the next-door St. Martin's, which with nearly 600 seats had a 25 percent higher seating capacity. The enlargement allowed Cochran to follow his instincts into slightly larger shows -- and to pay the larger salaries which his troupe had come to expect after a string of

³¹ Harding, *Op.Cit.*, p. 58.

³² Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1915-11 (29-4-1915)

³³ A member of the Lupino clan, which included the actor-librettist-lyricist Stanley Lupino, his actress wife Connie Emerald and their Hollywood-bound daughter Ida Lupino. Lupino Lane had a highly successful Hollywood film career during the 1920s and starred as Bill Snibson, the quintessential Cockney, in the long-running *Me and My Girl*, beginning in 1937.

³⁴ Carleton was a mercurial all-singing, all-dancing, (and unfortunately) all drug-taking comedienne who figured in the West End's first major drug scandal (Chapter Six).

successes. On 1 May 1916 Cochran staged *Half Past Eight*³⁵ at the Comedy Theatre, a house which shortly became one of intimate revue's most important venues. This "revue" was according to Street "composed almost entirely of entirely disconnected one-act plays"--a fair description of the revue sketch as it eventually developed and an indication of the increasing importance of the written word to British revue. The score and its book was largely written -- in a rare excursion outside Gaiety comedy -- by Rubens, who died a year later at the age of 42. With a decorative chorus of 16 it managed some topical jibes at Greece for not having joined the war and urged a "racing" government to hire "Wilson Woodrow" as their new jockey. *Half Past Eight* can be classified with the era's experimentations, as can Cochran's followup. This, his first St. Martin's production, continued to blur the lines between genres. *Houp-La!*, written by Thompson and Wright with music mainly by the suddenly in-demand Nat Ayer, caused Street to comment:

I suppose it would be called a musical comedy. A rich American falls in love with Tilly, the niece of a circus proprietor. His friend, wishing him not to marry her, tells Bunn, the publicity manager and chief comedian, that he will give him £500 if he marries Tilly. This offer is subsequently enlarged to cover anybody employed at the circus. The scene is transferred to Italy, and in the upshot, the young American, told by Tilly he must do some work, becomes a groom in the circus and weds her. This simple plot is complicated by the fortunes of Bunn, who thinks he has won a large bet, borrows on the strength of it, comes to grief and son on, and by the affairs of minor members of the circus troupe.³⁶

So much for the musical comedy aspect of it: when the action moves to a hotel in Italy, where, amidst chat about the crowd at Ciro's (one of the night spots of the era, soon a mecca for dance band enthusiasts) allusions to revue entrepreneurs, etc. the audience is treated to 'The Passing Pageant of 1917 (Revue is always a year ahead)' in which "Mlle. Paris" describes fashions and sings in French about love. Bunn wanders into the revue, a "syren" (Tilly in disguise) arrives and amidst much punning, performs a song and dance to a new hit song from America,

³⁵ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1916-9 (19-4-1916)

³⁶ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1916-28 (14-11-1916)

“Pretty Baby.” So revue, once part of variety, had now become -- at least from time to time -- part of a musical comedy.

Further Experiments in musical comedy/revue

One of the stars of *Houp-La!* was Millar. Her appearance can be interpreted as a measure of the new acceptability of revue -- or at least of revue which did not differ too much from musical comedy. Millar came to *Houp-La!* after a successful run in *Bric a Brac* (Palace, 18 September 1915)³⁷ That show's title clearly evoked the jaunty new genre. But its creative personnel were almost completely of the old establishment. The songs were by Finck and Monckton, while most of the sketches were written by Wimperis. Millar's leading man was another musical comedy regular, Arthur Playfair, while the main support came from variety headliners: Gerard (billed as “Naughty-naughty One Gerard”) and knockabout comic Nelson (Bunch) Keys, about whom much more later.

But the Lord Chamberlain's man was willing to call *Bric a Brac* a revue, and a “bright” one, “more remarkable for the impudent wit of its dialogue than a consistent plot.” There was in fact a nominal thread -- the peregrinations through London (not very original, this) of the Frenchman Anatole, an artist with a Kodak (“an artist in design, and no modiste could have a soul...more wonderful than mine~!) -- and allusions to some of the new roles enacted by women during wartime (“As butcher girls blue or as green grocerettes, to mention but two of your trades unionettes.”) *Bric a Brac* produced one song, “Chalk Farm to Camberwell Green”, which became a standard in the era's music halls. It included a number of successful “turns”, including cross-talk between two sentries outside St. James Palace, The Optimist and The Pessimist, mimicking the Chaplin walk and discussing the news of the day.

I sees the world in a pleasant light.

That ain't my point of view.

When I am sent out on sentry go it's proper to say All's Well.

³⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1915-25,(25-9-1915)

I s'pose you'd keep saying so if you sent-in-'ell!

Bric a Brac also briefly approached social commentary in a sketch on Anglo-Russian relations. *Bric a Brac*, more lavish than most revues as austerity increased, was frequently visually exciting: the artist Anatole creates an onstage design, through which real girls step, bringing it to life: Ziegfeld stuff. In one of the several French episodes, the company, clad a la Louis XV, dance through a rose garden. This Frenchness was generally the province of Gerard, who helped define a Parisienne:

The eyes of a flirt...
the love of an hour...
the swish of a skirt...
the scent of a flower...
a daughter of Eve...
an idol of men...
that's what we mean by
Parisienne!

Another saucy sequence includes this formula: "Sunday: pass her by/
Monday: catch her eye/ Tuesday: have a talk/ Wednesday: take a walk/
Thursday: lunch for two/ Friday: Waterloo/ back again on Monday by
the early train."

A Brighton sketch encapsulates the performance of a concert party called the Gay Incognitoes, a fairly obvious (and therefore, per the Lord Chamberlain's practice, permissible) caricature of the wartime leaders David Lloyd George, Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Kitchener and (one could always hope) President Wilson. Considering the way the war was going -- the run encompassed disasters such as the Somme and Gallipoli -- one wonders how this sketch played, or even if it was replaced after the Lord Chamberlain's man read it. *Bric a Brac* ran into 1917.

Perhaps the most successful of these melanges which might be called "comedy-variety revues" was *The Bing Boys Are Here*, which followed *Now's The Time* into the Alhambra in April 1916. Concocted from a German original, boasting particularly attractive songs composed by Ayer with lyrics by Grey, it rested on a nominal "plot" about two rustic

brothers who migrate to London from the “slow town” where there was nothing to do but “watch the turnips grow.” Once in London (the site of all the rest of the show’s seven “panels”) the boys endured temptations and were treated to yet another tour of the town, including Hyde Park, the (new) zoo, many pubs, Bond Street, and so forth. this tour was regularly interrupted by “turns” -- sometimes these were dances by Monkman with various partners, and sometimes they were satirical or spoofing songs such as the “Kipling Walk”. Most of the “turns” went to the brothers, who were played by two reigning variety stars, the lugubrious monologist Alfred Lester and the “prime minister of mirth” and master of comic timing, George Robey.³⁸

The Bing Boys Are Here marked the effective debut of lyricist Grey, who throughout an amazing career (he was credited with more than 3000 songs) demonstrated an ability to fit words to a performer’s personality. In one of Robey’s most famous numbers, the meandering/voyeuristic “I Stopped, and I Looked, and I Listened” it is possible to believe that Robey wrote the whole thing. Considering the era’s laissez-faire attitude toward a song’s “ownership” it is also possible that he did. Though Robey’s comic skill was the show’s nominal engine, it was such detachable songs as “If You Were The Only Girl in the World” sung perfectly straight by Robey and Violet Loraine, and “Another Little Drink Wouldn’t Do Us Any Harm” that imprinted the show in memory and history.

Audiences returned to hear these songs again and again. In his personal interview, Collins recalled “If You Were the Only Girl in the World” as the song of World War I. Collins was in the majority. The gently fantastic lyrics (“A garden of Eden, just made for two, with nothing to bar our joy”) became the war’s most cherished song, somehow the exact anthem for pining lovers separated by shellfire. And since the “plot” did not produce definitive changes in the Bing Boys themselves, they were free to make other journeys, which they did

³⁸ Though Robey spent more of his time in Variety than in other venues of musical theatre, he was such a drawing-card that all the major revue impresarios -- even Charlot -- contended for his services, which frequently came at a significant human “star quality” cost.

in 1917 (*The Bing Girls Are There*) and 1918, when it was de rigeur to Americanise one's shows (*The Bing Boys on Broadway*).

Revue Adrift

Generally speaking, however, aside from Grattan's work for Cochran and the gradual development of a "company" under Charlot, the 1915 revue scene does not seem particularly exciting. Among other 1915-1916 revues was another *Passing Show*³⁹, this one called a "reviewing revue" adapted by Wimperis which was set at the "Revuesical Theatre" and based on an American model. This was a generally nonsensical show which pretty well trivialised the war. In a Constantinople market place, an escapee from America rescues an English girl but falls into the hands of Turks, finally to be rescued by the Allied Armies. Somehow a couple of American hit songs--"Ballin' the Jack" and Caryl's "Good-bye Girls, I'm Through" were interpolated to applause.

In September 1915 (the year of Christabel Pankhurst's 30,000-strong march down Whitehall chanting "We demand the right to serve!") an *All Women Revue*⁴⁰ came to the Hippodrome. Written not at all by women, with a host of forgettable songs ("Here's a Daisy", "Gee, We're Busy", "It's a Scream", "Step Forward") by various composers and lyricists, it told, foretold and trivialised the role of women in wartime (nearly 200,000 entered government departments, half a million took over clerical work in private offices, 800,000 went to work in engineering shops, 250,000 worked on the land, and the household servant "industry" was changed forever⁴¹ --- in five scenes:

1. Will She Do It? set at a girls' school
2. What Can She Do? set at the HQ of the Women's War Work Committee
3. Doing Her Bit (as a Land Army girl) in a country mansion
4. What Has She Done? in a munition factory
5. She's Done It! (which abandoned the concept in favour of a series of variety turns.)

³⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1915-26 (2-10-1915)

⁴⁰ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1915-25 (25-9-1915)

⁴¹ Taylor, *Op.Cit.*, p. 38

In July 1916 there came *We're All In It*, a large Empire revue built around the "blue" comedian George Graves. Graves was an old squire dreaming of how best to invest his money: eventually Mephistopheles(!) persuades him to invest in a revue produced by a greengrocer. Graves's bed flies to Paris, Egypt and Leicester Square, where a chorus of policemen investigate the morals of the revue--etc etc. There was one at the Pavilion called *Pick-a-Dilly*, which featured "Miss Phyllis Junkman, Mr. George Gags" and others. Bendall, who was becoming a connoisseur of the form, dismissed it as "one of the typical and dramatic melanges defined nowadays as revue."⁴²

At this point in theatrical history, the ubiquitous thing called revue might as well have been called a "dramatic melange", a generally formless form which didn't know what to do with some important contemporary topics--most obviously the war itself. The proliferation of "revue" in the provinces certainly exhibited incoherence. In 1915 these included *I'm Sorry* (Mansfield); *The Radium Girl* (!) (Blackpool: "nonsensical", said the Lord Chamberlain's man)⁴³; *Oh that Girl* (Margate: "stupid and pointless"); and *Heave Ho, Blighty* (King's Lynn.) There were also revues in Cheshire, Durham, Northampton and Tottenham, Manchester and Bath. Who knows how many revues might have come and gone so quickly they never were collected in the Lord Chamberlain's files? Everyone was certainly doing something called revue. (Decades later, Nesbitt, the lighting genius of spectacular revue in the Forties and Fifties, recalled such days, coming home on school holiday and finding revues everywhere)⁴⁴ When Charlot's *Samples* opened at Frank Curzon's bandbox Playhouse at the end of November, it was only one of six West End revues opening during the closing two months of the year.

Charlot's First Intimate Revue

Over the following twenty years, Charlot would present better and more

⁴² Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1916-15 (5-7-1916)

⁴³ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1915-26 (2-10-1915)

⁴⁴ Personal interview, London, 1994

popular revues than *Samples*, and in some ways *Samples* quite closely resembled the larger, “chaotic” revues at the Alhambra. But *Samples* deserves lengthy treatment because the subsequent history of British musical theatre shows that from it Charlot developed his (and the culture’s) definitive brand of intimate revue.

For *Samples*⁴⁵ Charlot hired Grattan (now regularly styled “the king of revue”, very much an above-the-title presence with a significant financial claim on the profits) and brought back Gideon, carrying a caseful of his own compositions.⁴⁶ At almost the moment of *Samples*’ opening, the comedy *No Reflection on the Wife* was taking the boards at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre.⁴⁷ Its author was Jeans, to be shown in Chapter Five as the inheritor of Grattan’s crown and for many years the linchpin of intimate revue. With the exception of the singing and dancing comic Bert Coote, the cast of 16 (including chorus) was ordinary by the era’s standards.

In *Samples* Charlot and Grattan took a leaf from Cochran’s book, making a virtue out of a shortage. This time it was the war-caused lack of youthful “chorus boys”, male dancers. Add a small stage and voila! *Samples* boasted the first of Charlot’s scaled-down choruses featuring girls who could sing, dance and take minor roles in sketches. Charlot later wrote that he generally chose his seven chorines from about 700 hopefuls.⁴⁸ *Samples* was an undeniable hit, and shortly transferred to the Vaudeville, a slightly larger house run by the theatre-owning restaurateur-businessmen, brothers John Maria Gatti and Rocco Gatti, under whose auspices Charlot would eventually create his most successful revues.

These Gattis continued a line which had begun in 1847 with Carlo Gatti, the Italian-Swiss entrepreneur of coffee, ice cream and music-

⁴⁵ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1915-31 (23-11-1915)

⁴⁶ André Charlot, Journal, unpublished.

⁴⁷ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1915-26 (2-10-1915)

⁴⁸ Ever the paternalistic or avuncular impresario -- as well as one who appreciated female charms -- he went on to create a club and a dancing school for his “girls.” according to his daughter, Joan Midwinter, who was allowed to join the club.

halls.⁴⁹ In between Carlo and the brothers John and Rocco came Agostino and Stefano Gatti, who among other enterprises had acquired an electricity company to properly serve their Adelphi Theatre (and the rest of their adjoining empire, including the Royal Adelaide Gallery, the most elegant restaurant of its day). John and Rocco Gatti can be counted among the most important influences upon the development of intimate revue. The Gattis also withstood the trend toward chain ownership of West End theatres; Gattis continued to hold the Vaudeville past mid-century and even today the Vaudeville stands very much on its own.

Even in such small theatres as the Playhouse and Vaudeville, relics of the days when revue was confined to part of a variety bill remained in *Samples*. The show proper began after three short curtain-raising (and audience-settling) “turns” including a Chaplin imitation. The “plot” of *Samples* almost immediately confronted the problem of how to deal with wartime. Revue had to confront it because other entertainment media were confronting it. These included some highly propagandistic short films, but even more to the point a series of gramophone records, many of them utilising the stars of the West End. Issued on some highly opportunistic labels (The Winner) as well as the more standard ones such as Zonophone, Regal and Edison Bell, these included “An Air Raid (Somewhere on the Coast)”, “Dugout Days”, “The Wreck of a Troopship” “Arrival of the British Troops in France”, “The German Submarine”, etc.⁵⁰ While these were essentially serious, sentimental and overacted, some of them conveyed the humour of the trenches. Beginning with *Samples*, wartime may have been better dealt with by intimate revue than other forms of theatre. But of course it was covered in a particularly insouciant way.

Bendall wrote that Grattan’s “plot” focussed upon “the effort of its blase wealthy hero [Eustace Slackitt] to find something even in the way of work to give an interest to his vapid night club life.” (In 1915 the issue

⁴⁹ Peter Barber and Peter Jacomelli, *Continental Taste: Ticinese emigrants and their Cafe-Restaurants in Britain 1847-1987*, 1997

⁵⁰ Personal collection, Christopher South, Little Chesterford.

of “slackers” who avoided enlistment, often by working in an “essential” industry, was a live one, even though historians have pointed out that the armed forces already had more personnel than equipment to train or arm them with.)⁵¹ “Slackitt” was “aided by a burlesque Mephistophlean Devil”. The Devil feels generally put-upon (“I’ve had a rotten time in my place lately -- you see, the papers aren’t censored there [The British press was in fact better at letting the public know what was going on during the early war years than the Government was] and in consequence I look like getting deposed”). The Devil keeps Slackitt under his power by granting his every wish. Slackitt thus metamorphoses from curate to loafer, to customer in a shop kept by the Devil as an American ragtime impresario (“Here the folks all say ‘Fetch the pepper, fetch the pepper’ all the livelong day”) thence to friendship with the arbitrarily-introduced Wendy and Peter Pan (who grows up and enlists) and finally to “the patient of a professor of elocution who is mistaken for a dentist.” One can see here that Grattan did possess a blithe and jaunty perspective and a keen sense of the absurd.

Throughout these convolutions, the ever-faithful “Myrtil” keeps up her hopes, finally triumphing at the end when Slackitt proposes to her: the one thing the Devil couldn’t do to keep his hold was grant a marriage. Bendall concluded, as did most over the next two decades who tried to explain the “atmosphere” of a Charlot show, that “the fun may come out more humorously in action than it does on paper.” (Translation: “you had to be there” or: “Charlot understood theatrical magic.”) In *Samples* Grattan further modified the conventions of revue by dispensing with a compere. Instead, he managed a sort of continuity via the persona of “Gidd”. This version of Melville Gideon is a general figure of gaiety, a jaunty womaniser (certainly true of the offstage Gideon) who is always ready with a wisecrack (“Oh yes! I’ll believe anything. I’m an American”). The first Sample (labelled “The Plot Disappears”) finds Gideon at the piano, performing the hit song “When I Leave the World Behind.”

⁵¹ Taylor, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

One of the influences bequeathed by Charlot to subsequent revue practitioners -- Noel Coward wrote eloquently of it in his introduction to Mander and Mitchenson's *Revue* -- dealt with the importance of "running order." To my knowledge Charlot never likened putting on a revue to creating a memorable dinner, but there are many similarities, in particular the need for aesthetic balance and variety, a building of excitement and momentum, tempered by such practical and temperamental requirements as occasional sequences before the curtain so the (minimal) scenery behind could be changed, and one show-stopping number should not follow another (which is another way of saying that one must keep one's stars assured of their ascendancy.)

In *Samples* the girls are quickly brought on in "Visions of Beauty", but the vast beauty pageants of the larger revues are quickly punctured in a fashion which was particularly Grattan's, enlisting the audience in a manner rather like a Variety performer's: "How dare you come in here and try to spoof me in a fourth rate revue chorus?" The curate's sequence is peppered with jokes about a curate's egg. A song and dance naturally arises from a trip to the seaside (at last: not a tour of London).⁵² During the Ragtime sequence, Gidd and the Devil engage in a singing contest. Into their repartee are woven puns on other producers' revues ("Send him the music of *More* and you might send some of the slackers 'I hear you calling me'") as well as suggested satirical match ups of current songs with political figures: "Some things are better left unspoken" for Churchill (whose campaign at Gallipoli had gone badly wrong) and "Waiting" for Admiral Jellicoe (at Scapa Flow, his moment of fame at Jutland not yet arrived). In the same bit, Gidd finds himself plugging his own songs to a French "sowbrette" more than passingly reminiscent of Deslys.

Samples also profited from several songs by Ayer. One was a typical boy-girl front-cloth song "Providing" (Several choruses of changes upon 'I'll go with you providing you do this but not that!') Highly topical, aimed directly at the servicemen who might be attending with their (temporary) girlfriends was Grattan and Herman Darewski's "Will You

⁵² Theatre programme, The Playhouse 30-11-1915.

Be My Sweetheart for Tonight?"⁵³

Once I knew a nice young man who lived up to the moral--Life is very short and sweet. And there's no time to quarrel. So if his best girl gave him 'beans' he would not take it badly. But just look--oh! so contrite. And then would murmur sadly 'You're right in what you say. But don't let's part this way.

Chorus: Will you be my sweetheart for tonight? Just for tonight--a short respite--I want you for my very own tonight, to hold you tight, with all my might. don't think of tomorrow. Lots of joy and sorrow must come with the dawning morning light--Let's gaze in the firelight's ember and forget we should remember--Only be my sweetheart for tonight.

Should there be a nice young man, I don't care fair or dark, he'll quickly learn from me the plan. But my choice is with khaki. Still, as soldiers are so shy--at least so girls have told me--we COULD reverse the order, and I would let him scold me. Just so that I could say, until he'd learned the way

After a repeat chorus, the song ends:

Let's forget that your sojourn'll soon be over, curse the Col'nel, only be my sweetheart for tonight.

It is interesting that such songs, which though sentimental spoke directly to the urgent attraction between men and women during wartime, never approached the popularity of the sweetly cloying "If You Were the Only Girl in the World."⁵⁴ Although revue never claimed to be a realistic form, and songs like "Will You Be My Sweetheart for Tonight?" never achieved great popularity, they can be seen as an important element in the "understanding" intimate revue achieved with its wartime audiences.

The first half of *Samples* wound down with the Terry Sisters' boxing act, three (very short) "ballets" from the mini-chorus and a sequence in Maori Land. A song about "That Old Maori Doctor" ornaments a scene

⁵³ Sheet music on file in University Library, Cambridge.

⁵⁴ "If You Were The Only Girl in the World" was just as popular in the U.S., where the "on-leave" connection could not have been made in 1915-1916. The song had originally been written otherwise, with more than a touch of humour: "If you were the only maid in the world and I were the only valet." Listeners obviously heard what they wanted to hear.

in Honolulu (no one ever claimed that revue geography was very accurate) in which the devil becomes a devil-doctor (“Well...he looked like developing into a plot [indeed, the subtitle is “The Plot Almost Gets Back”] so as he said I could have anything I wished, I wished him in H...”

According to Charlot’s theory of running order, if the first half had properly built to its climactic finale, the second bit after the interval would be just as important since it would restore the momentum and promise more of the same (and make those lingering in the bar hurry back). For *Samples* this was a rather dazzling display of one of Grattan’s great strengths, a feature largely derived from burlesque -- and perhaps American burlesque at that. This was the sometimes-meaningful, sometimes-crazed malapropism, embedded in a cross-talk about current wartime gossip:

Every little ‘elps our boys in the stenches, and as Gen’ral Jossier [this was the French commander Joffre] says to our own Lord Kitchen [we know who that was] untidy we stand, decided we fall.

I don’t think much of this Coalusion Gov’ment, do you? [Prime Minister Asquith had announced a Coalition government in May, probably to keep the political situation from changing very much]

No, but the Liberators never did get on with the Conservatorys.

We live in times of turned oil and stripe.

Suppose one of them Zdelplins [although Zeppelins had appeared at the Coast as early as December 1914, as we have seen, it was 1915 when they commenced attacks upon London, which, though soon repulsed, caused considerable panic] do come how can our emptyair cracked guns see to ‘it ‘em?

By consecrated movement on Blocks, or as the French general Issy Moses [generalissimos] thinks, by this ‘ere ‘ebblin which is called the process of Nutrition [attrition, of which by the end of the war there had been entirely too much.]⁵⁵

Samples cruises toward conclusion with the Peter Pan sketch, in which

⁵⁵ Compare this with “The Old Lady Shows Her Muddles” by Ronald Jeans in the Appendix. Grattan’s malapropisms exist on their own; Jeans’s are embedded in a dramatic context.

Wendy and Peter are joined by Lord and Lady Whittington, Mr. and Mrs. Sinbad, Miss Alice Carroll, Master and Miss Wood, and various other refugees from children's books and pantomimes. A dance sequence entitled English China involves a Wedgwood Claire de Lune, Rockingham dance and an Old Chelsea arabesque. All the principals and the chorus ^{plus} as much of the audience as possible ^{in dark} in an orgy of paper-tearing (Paper-tearing itself was a comic allusion to a speciality long since worn out on both sides of the Atlantic.) No more faux Orientalism here.

Wartime humour

Samples does seem as chaotic as *5064 Gerrard*. But it was jauntier, lighter on its feet -- and much, much cheaper. Further, it is possible to see it as both ideal on-leave entertainment, ostensibly devoid of "serious purpose", and in its humorous references to the war (which especially in the Grattan malapropologues above resemble the "court jester" aspect of American minstrel shows) something that may have served as a tonic and release for those actually on-leave.

Paul Fussell⁵⁶ makes the point that for the active participant, World War I must have seemed intensely theatrical -- the participant himself was playing a role he had never intended in a situation he could never have imagined. Fussell also notes the humour shown in the *Wipers (Ypres) Times*, a front-line publication which ran alongside its wryly observed "news" such punning and double-meaning "adverts" as OVER THE TOP, A SCREAMING FARCE; A STIRRING DRAMA, ENTITLED 'MINED', A MOST UPLIFTING PERFORMANCE; MISS MINNIE WERFER [alluding to the German words for various sizes of shells], ALWAYS MEETS WITH A THUNDEROUS RECEPTION; THE ATKINS [This was of course Kipling's typical soldier Tommy Atkins] FAMILY, CELEBRATED 'A' FRAME EQUILIBRISTS AND DUCKBOARD DODGERS. These "appeared" at the Cloth Hall, Ypres, "Best Ventilated Hall in the Town." How much do these differ from Grattan's approach?

⁵⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 1975, pp. 194-195.

It is also interesting that in his assessment of the decline of British theatre even the gloomy Huntly Carter found *Samples* quite appealing:

[the revue manages] to provide an intimate entertainment consisting of sound, movement, colour and variety woven into topical skits. *Samples* wanders from paradise to paradise...in a decorative frame, with painted cloths and ingenious lighting....Cool figures in white and neutral colours sing and dance in rhythm against warm colours....The effect is dazzling.⁵⁷

He added,

Charlot is the aesthetic type...does not plunge his revues into extravagance and vulgarity....Cochran is the showman type, one part English, two parts French and one or more American.⁵⁸

The sequel to *Samples*, also by Grattan, was *Some (more Samples of Odds and Ends)*. The show has remained historically alive for various reasons. Writing 76 years later, Marek Kohn said

In the summer of 1916 the revue *Some* afforded West End audiences the lightest relief from the Great War. It was in the 'intimate' style pioneered by its producer, André Charlot, and relied on charm and wit instead of spectacle. The sets were cheap, the humour self-deprecating, the cast overworked.⁵⁹

Opening at the end of June 1916 at the Vaudeville, *Some* was probably better than *Samples* in one respect, since the developing Charlot "company", no longer busy at the Alhambra, was wholly available. This meant White and Lillie, the American dancer Clay Smith, the versatile Gene Gerrard, the almost-promising Carleton ("If only her singing and speaking voice were a little stronger I could see a very brilliant future for Miss Carleton in musical comedy....She has cleverness, temperament and charm"--so said *The Tatler*, according to Kohn-⁶⁰) and a juggler called Rebla. (Somehow working a juggler into the continuity of a revue--he even played a speaking part-- is helpful in understanding Charlot's "method". Almost two decades later, critics were still remarking on how a Charlot show resembled a party attended

⁵⁷ Carter, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Marek Kohn "Opium and the Showgirl" *The Observer Magazine* May 1992, p. 12

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

by old friends who knew each other well and understood that their host would give them genuine, unstressful pleasure.)⁶¹ Among the surprises were a 10-year-old (“who can act in three languages”) and a new and already unpredictable member of the chorus, Gertrude Lawrence.

Some also survived its own backstage (or pre-backstage) drama. In his unpublished autobiography Charlot gives an unusually clear picture of the fabled Jimmy White as well as the business side of producing revue. I quote at length:⁶²

When I transferred “Samples” from the Playhouse to the Vaudeville, I began an association with the Gatti Brothers, who owned the theatre, which lasted eight and a half years. I mention the fact now because I am coming to a story which might have had a vastly different ending but for the fact that I enjoyed their practical friendship just when I most needed it in the preparation of my next show, “Some.”...I was backing the show myself, but I was shy of about £1,000--and a friend introduced me to Jimmy White.

Jimmy was a fabulous character. He had started life as a mason in his native Lancashire; his brogue was of the broadest! It was said that he had actually walked his way from Manchester to London. By what miracle he had managed to worm his way to the top of the financial ladder, I could not tell, but when I met him, he was living like a millionaire, and owned a racing stable. I was told that the next step in his mind was to be known as a backer of shows, so it looked as he could be ‘my man’, and he agreed to put up the £1,000 I was looking for.

Starting with as little as I did, one cannot pick and choose one’s backers, otherwise--I say it quite frankly--I should not have chosen Jimmy White. From our first meeting, I failed to hit it off with him. He was living at the Grand Hotel, and had his office there, too. He had that mania that I have never understood, nor could appreciate, for cracking a bottle of champagne for any or no excuse, and it did not matter what time of the day it was....

Jimmy White had another habit which got on my nerves terribly. He called it a game. I called it an inanity. It consisted of throwing stamps at the ceiling. He would moisten the stamp, place it face downwards on a penny, and then toss the coin up. If the stamp happened to hit

⁶¹ Charlot, incidentally, lauded Rebla, who had been nearly frozen in fear at the thought of saying lines, for his performance.

⁶² Andre Charlot, “I Fired a Backer”, *People ‘n Ideas*, unpublished.

with the gummed side uppermost it was, of course, transferred to the ceiling. And he thought this such fun that he would interrupt a serious business conversation to get on with it. I think I have as good a sense of humour as the next man, but asinine conduct should be confined to asinine occasions, even among humorists. I suffered an agony of helpless aggravation....

Jimmy had the exasperating habit of using our rehearsals to entertain... particular friends of his [boxers, trainers.] I have a horror of strangers at rehearsals. A backer, of course, is a partner, and his interest in the progress of the play is legitimate, but I allow nobody else inside the theatre during rehearsals unless they have business there. It paralyses some artistes; it is unfair to everybody, and interferes with the work of rehearsing....

This one time I was sitting in the stalls near the stage, when White and his uninvited guests landed some way behind me. The strangers had not heard a song which had interested White at a previous rehearsal. We had finished that song half an hour earlier, and decided not to go through it again.

White wanted his friends to hear it, and sent his secretary to tell me to stop the rehearsal where it was and go through that song. This was more than I could swallow...even from a backer. I was working to schedule, too. so I sent the secretary back with the message that I was sorry but I could not put on the number. Back came the secretary, trembling after having had to take a refusal to his master....Mr. White, he reported, had said that I had jolly well got to put it on. And I sent the secretary back a second time with the reply that I jolly well wouldn't. White left in a fury.

The incident somehow reached the ears of the Gatti brothers. They sent their manager to me with the message that if I found Mr. White too trying, and wanted any money to pay him off, they would advance the necessary sum. They thought I could work better with a free mind. This wonderful piece of news was brought to me in the evening, and the following morning Jimmy White came again to the rehearsal.

I knew what he came for, but he did not know what I had up my sleeve....He started again with his dictatorial interference, and informed me that if he wanted me to rehearse anything, I should have to rehearse it, or ----. He shrugged his shoulders. I knew, of course, what that meant, but I said: "Or what?"

"Or you can pay me out", he snapped back

I said, "Do you mean that?"

"If you are not going to do what I tell you," he answered, "you can

repay me my £1,000.”

“All right, I will repay you your £1,000.”

He was certainly taken aback by my prompt acceptance of the alternative. He had thought I was helpless.

“I am giving you till tomorrow morning, 12 noon, to pay me off,” he shot back, and left the theatre.

By 12 noon the following morning I had sent Jimmy White my check for £1,000--and I should add that he was far too good a sportsman to go back on his word. He accepted the check and dropped out of the show.

I repaid the Gatti brothers at the rate of £200 a week, and they generously declined to accept any interest on their loan. I repaid the whole of the £1,000 out of the profits, and as it turned out Jimmy White had done me a wonderfully good turn in forcing the disagreement which resulted in my paying him off. Instead of having to share profits with him, I was able to keep the lot. It was a one-man show and brought me a very substantial profit.

Charlot concluded that even though he had “fired” White for his boorishness, he was able to maintain relatively cordial relations with him, and in all understatement added that White even “went on to manage his own theatres.” This excerpt, which also suggests Charlot’s imperious character and working methods, certainly shows John and Rocco Gatti for what they were -- benefactors of theatre who carried on an honourable family tradition.

Of major importance is the introduction via *Some* of the Vaudeville and the Gattis into the mainstream of revue. Until he was (temporarily) flush enough in the early Twenties to take a long-term lease on the Prince of Wales Theatre (this proved a long-term mistake) Andre Charlot staged almost all his best work at the Vaudeville. And after his bankruptcy in the early 1930s, it was the Gattis who helped Charlot on the comeback trail. (When he left the U.K. for good in 1937, Charlot also left behind the interior walls of the Vaudeville covered with caricature-murals by Tom Titt. They may still be there, under wallpapers layered on during the theatre’s frequent renovations.)

Financing Revue

Further, and briefly, to the “art” of financing revue. It is possible to suggest that producers never truly mastered it (or perhaps any form of theatre!) especially considering Cochran’s repeated bankruptcies and Charlot’s final precipitous fall from grace. There is no particular reason to believe that Charlot was remarkable in his scrabbling about for backers. But some of Charlot’s business records are available, while in general the records of theatrical producers seem about as closely guarded as military secrets.

The records now on deposit in the Charlot section of Special Collections at the University of California, Los Angeles, show an endless series of manoeuvres, from which I have selected a few examples: on 12 April 1917 Charlot is employed as the manager of the “A.C.H. Syndicate Ltd”. His salary is to be “a sum equivalent to three per cent on the amount of the gross receipts of the Syndicate from any and every source whatsoever before any deduction is made therefrom (except so far as receipts from the sale of seats are considered a deduction for commissions payable to libraries.)”⁶³ On the next day, Charlot, as Vendor, Charlot Ltd (“the Company”) and Atherton Powys, “the Trustee”, undertook to issue £20,000 worth of bonds, whose purpose was to pay off Charlot’s offices at 6 and 7 Arundel Street, just below the Aldwych. Charlot was awarded 98 of the company’s 100 shares and had control of selling the bonds.⁶⁴ There was also an “arrangement with Messrs J.N. and R. Gatti in regard to the production of the [next] revue entitled ‘Cheep’”⁶⁵ [Charlot had already agreed to divide the profits of that show as follows: 30 shares to himself, 60 to Grattan, 95 to White and 25 to Smith] as well as contracts with Monkman, White, Lillie and John Humphries for “services” in that revue.⁶⁶

But this is not all. There is also an agreement of 12 April with Kresten

⁶³ André Charlot papers, University of California, Los Angeles

⁶⁴ Charlot papers

⁶⁵ Charlot papers

⁶⁶ Charlot papers

Heistein of 14 Lancaster Gate “regarding a loan of £4000”. This was to be an interest-free loan, to the Company and not to Charlot personally, and in return Heistein was to acquire a one-third interest in the company’s capitalisation. Heistein was to be repaid from the receipts for *Bubbly*.⁶⁷ Such contractual arrangements seem to have been the rule rather than the exception, and they appear to have kept Charlot and his high-flying lifestyle afloat until the slide of the later Nineteen-Twenties. There is also an agreement for 30 April 1918 between Charlot’s company and B.J. Redman, whereby Redman (“or one of his companies”) would underwrite the production of *Tabs* for £3000. One of the interesting but apparently normal stipulations of this contract is as follows:

It is understood that the Vaudeville theatre is let to André Charlot upon sharing arrangements with Messrs. Gatti and the receipts referred to are derivable by André Charlot upon such arrangement--which is 62 1/2% (sixty-two and a half per cent) to André Charlot and 37 1/2% (thirty-seven and a half per cent) to the Theatre of the gross receipts less discount to the Libraries. ⁶⁸

A month after *Tabs* opened in May 1918, Redman agreed to a larger slice of the profits in return for increasing his contribution to £4000, while Charlot agreed to reduce his salary to £30 weekly. Such was the life of an impresario. No wonder there was fear of Americans with deep pockets taking over the West End during wartime. And yet and yet: revue impresarios found the money and the form prospered.

Revue au Grattan/Charlot

Although the opening of the actual revue *Some* was not really original, it extended Grattan’s method of involving the audience. Thus Gerrard’s opening monologue, which can be read as a testament of at least Grattan/Charlot’s contemporary understanding of revue, and in all its drollness still a better description than any that preceded it:

⁶⁷ Charlot papers

⁶⁸ Charlot papers

Well, revue commences, but has no beginning. It finishes, but has no end. It has bits in the middle which can be part of the whole or not--just as they like. In fact, it's like a worm; cut him in two and you have two worms, not two halves of a worm. But two worms cut in several parts, you have several worms, not several parts of a worm. Join them together--you have a worm. there is a certain crude skill necessary in joining a worm after cutting it in several pieces...very few of you ever come to see the beginning, still fewer see the end. I don't know which to congratulate most. But with a laudable wish to please all parts, we will play the finale first and then do as we please and hope to please as we do....⁶⁹

Some was very much like its predecessor, but Bendall's summary is particularly detailed and helpful in suggesting the "let's put on a show" thread and the several departures from it:

a 'revue' which, as its title suggests, is of a more scrappy order than usual. It begins with some managerial and other chaff [The opening chorus, sequentially introducing the principals, was 'We're all Crazy'] of the methods of revue production, followed by the grumbling of artistes over their roles, the condolences of their friends over a first night failure, the inevitable 'imitations', and the noisy chatter in the dark while taxis are being called after the performance. There are further included a mild satire upon the bringing up of the modern child, a ghost scene in a nursery, a skit upon a visit to the Royal Academy and another upon the troubles of telephone users. There are plantation ditties in a cotton field⁷⁰ followed by some farcical business in the office of a resolute money-lender. The whole winds up with a lunch at a bankrupt river hotel, where the high spirited guests carry out schemes for scaring the poor landlady's harsh landlord.

The successful platform of *Samples* and *Some* (as well as the savings from abandoning the Alhambra and certainly some income from *The Bing Boys Are Here*) must have helped Charlot to "expand his business"--a phrase which runs through his journals. In this he was not terribly different from Cochran, though unlike "C.B." he never developed a taste for wrestling or boxing (excepting in a comic photograph of Charlot and Maurice Chevalier in pugilistic pose taken one summer in Bognor Regis.)⁷¹

⁶⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, 122 1916-33

⁷⁰ By Will Marion Cook; several years later Charlot presented Cook's Afro-American orchestra in concert and he may have been setting up a negotiating base by including the songs here.

⁷¹ Charlot family archives, courtesy Joan Midwinter.

Charlot's Developing Company

It must be admitted that Charlot didn't develop the intimate form in anything like a straight line and, since he was an entrepreneur, he didn't stick to revue. A most unCharlotesque show (in fact an uneasy collaboration with another impresario which Charlot later insisted he agreed to only to "build up my business") *Three Cheers!*⁷² opened 22 December 1916 at the large Shaftesbury Theatre. This was from the beginning a star vehicle for the penurious Scottish variety kingpin Harry Lauder -- definitely not a favourite acquaintance of Charlot's -- and, staged by Austen Hurgon instead of Charlot himself, actually resembled a deCourville show. Grattan's book (about fortune-hunting as far afield as south Persia) and Darewski's music were joined to lyrics by Ross. Levey apparently held her own with Lauder, who played a caricature of his regular persona. It was not a peak in either's career.

*This and That*⁷³ which opened 15 September 1916 at the Comedy, was even less successful, recording only 48 performances. Written by Grattan and starring (as the title might suggest) Mayne and Tate (who also wrote the music), it otherwise suffered from a second-string cast. It is tempting to suggest that Charlot's shows succeeded when he created his own company and failed when they were saddled with "big name stars." Neither *Three Cheers!* nor *This And That* contributed to the form, and by the end of 1916 most playgoers and few critics would not have recognised Andre Charlot as the future of revue, nor certainly its definer.

But still the demands of wartime audiences needed to be met. Soon, in fact, despite the occasional failure, Charlot had three shows on the boards simultaneously. Continuous creativity was in demand. Charlot's method of supplying the demand was to evolve, gradually but basically from the ground up, what amounted to a real two-company system. Chapter Five shows that these were companies of revue specialists. This

⁷² Theatre programme, Shaftesbury Theatre, 22-12-1916

⁷³ Theatre programme, Comedy Theatre, 15-9-1916

inexorable trend can be observed in the show which succeeded the ill-fated *This and That* at the Comedy on 14 December.

See Saw in one way returned to the formula of *Samples* -- although it was not written by Grattan and relied upon the contributions of several librettists, including Weigall and Blore. Its central concept was certainly unoriginal -- yet another tour of London, beginning at the Grand Union Railroad Exchange Station and touching the river, the Embankment, a Picture Palace, etc. What was important about *See Saw*⁷⁴ was its onstage freshness, and the freshness came from what historians came to recognise as Charlot's greatness: the ability to spot fresh (and therefore inexpensive) talent, and to continue the development of a "company." These abilities of Charlot's can be seen to greater or lesser degrees in all the developers of the intimate revue form in subsequent years, particularly Herbert Farjeon and Norman Marshall himself in the later Thirties. The discoveries of *See Saw* were largely musical -- Philip (Pa) Braham (who had formed a songwriting partnership with Blore) and Ivor Novello wrote their first revue songs. And in the lanky Hulbert, Charlot also unearthed at a propitious moment -- social dancing was catching on--an ideal dancing partner for Monkman, an open-faced someone who could more than hold his own as a comedian and mimic -- in short, an ideal member of a revue company.

⁷⁴ Theatre programme, Comedy Theatre, 14-12-1916

Chapter Five: New Voices 1917-1918

The grim years 1917-1918 saw the sorting-out of the boom in revue. These years continued to benefit intimate revue to the disadvantage of the more spectacular variety. The war ground on and an Entertainment Tax, introduced in late 1916, showed no sign of going away. Though speculation continued and many made money, there were fewer productions of all kind (According to Wearing's figures, the numbers did not return to pre-war figures until 1920)¹. There were still plenty of revues in the provinces (though this thesis will not usually comment upon them further) but in London, much more attuned to contemporary reality (the bombs were falling), the total declined.

After a (relatively more expensive than its title suggested, and relatively unsuccessful) *£150 Revue* in 1917 Cochran read the runes, concluded that revue was in decline, and turned to other ventures. By now he was managing three theatres and at one, a wartime comedy that became an historical landmark, *A Better 'Ole*, was settling in for a lengthy run² Although Cochran turned out (not for the first or last time) to be wrong about a theatrical trend, and when he realised his mistake he reversed his field, his was not an unreasonable attitude, since there were other escapist diversions for a gradually shrinking clientele. The money spinning *Bing Boys* trilogy continued to unfold with *The Bing Girls Are There* (early in 1917 an ersatz *Bing Boys* show with a Jewish angle, *The Other Bing Boys*, attempted to cash in and references to the Bings popped up in all the revues.) The immense popularity of Asche's *Chu Chin Chow*, an escapist fantasy based on *Ali Baba And the Forty Thieves* which had opened in 1916, was becoming obvious. It went on to achieve a run of 2238 performances, a record which endured for four decades. During 1917 an escapist musical comedy, *The Maid of the Mountains*, opened at Daly's, then still under the supervision of

¹ Wearing's figures show that in 1918 there were 240 stage productions; in 1919 there were 253. In 1920 the number leaped to 414 and usually remained above 400 until the beginning of the 1939-1945 war.

² A wartime comedy-drama with added songs -- "if you know of a better 'ole [trench, shellhole] go to it" -- it was about the only legitimate play of wartime to threaten the domination of variety and revue.

Edwardes' daughter, settling in for a four-year run.

A closer look at 1917, however, suggests the real durability of revue. It was only those revues which either -- against all the realities of austerity -- tried to be big or those who settled for an amiable incoherence that failed. While this restless London public (and especially the urgent, last-chance audiences of wartime) may have hidden out at times, while at others it certainly seems to have wanted escapist diversion, the proportion of musical theatre hits was heavily in favour of intimate revue. Perhaps intimate revue was gradually educating its audience. The form itself underwent further refining and defining, but of greatest importance was the development of revue specialists.

With Cochran temporarily out of the way and deCourville's natural instincts for going over-the-top on hold for the Duration, there was no doubt who was the revue specialist among producers. Throughout his career, Charlot never quite gave up his occasional (and only occasionally successful) forays into straight drama and musical comedy, but by 1917 his revues were ascendant. He was gradually leaving behind much of the personnel he had inherited from music hall and musical comedy; he was continuing to expand his two-stranded "repertory company" and his reputation for spotting and developing new talent was growing.

Sketch writers: Ronald Jeans

Although the greatest public acclaim eventually attached to Charlot's new performers, It seems to me that the triumph of intimate revue as a form owed most to its new authors. While perhaps no wartime revue could truly be said to have a coherent "book" in a comic-dramatic sense, it was revue sketches-- ever shorter, more expertly crafted, and increasingly in tune with a quickly changing public mood -- which freshened revue and made it the interwar British musical theatre's most important form. Further, these sketches originated largely from people more interested in contemporary developments in the legitimate

theatre than in adapting music hall. Of these none was more important than Ronald Jeans. Although Jeans's main West End career did not begin until 1918, a few paragraphs at this point might illustrate what was new about the new authors.

Born in 1887, the son of the managing director of the *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, Jeans jettisoned his career as a stockbroker, turning to theatrical criticism for his father's paper. In 1911 Jeans was one of the enthusiasts who created the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, which was only the third of its type in the UK and destined to be one of the longest-lived. The LRT was truly an enthusiasts' theatre, since it was owned by its shareholders, who came to number 1500. In later years Jeans claimed to have been "largely responsible" for its birth -- probably through influencing his father's newspaper coverage -- though Basil Dean was the LRT's first producer and, by the outbreak of war, its twin guiding lights, equally onstage and off, seem to have been Estelle Winwood and Madge McIntosh. It was also true that the LRT, presenting short runs of mainly modern and classic dramas instead of saleable West End hits, never found a way to make money until the early 1920s, by which time Jeans was well established in London. Whatever: in the era of our interest, Jeans quickly emerged as the Rep's resident original dramatist.

By 1915 Jeans had already contributed three comedies to the LRT, including those previously discussed. The company's offering for the spring holidays was another *Hullo-- Hullo, Repertory!* Written by Jeans and called "a burlesque of a music hall revue"³, it starred the flighty Winwood as "Miss Westwood Windmill, the elusive heroine" (who at one point became -- inevitably? -- Gaby Deslys. see Chapter Four!) The show, quickly lauded in the local press as "a real revue at last"⁴, made many jokes at the expense of the LRT ("The Repertory Commonwealth") itself, beginning with a shambolic directors' meeting and eventually

⁴ Unless otherwise noted herein, the press reactions to Jeans's work cited in this chapter come from the extensive Jeans archives of the Theatre Museum of the Victoria and Albert Museum, currently housed at Blythe House, near Olympia, London. In the early years, these are generally from newspapers in and around Liverpool.

spoofing three recent LRT productions. Jeans was lauded for his “insight, humour and pointed criticism of life” -- all done with “ease and skill”⁵

Hullo, Repertory! lived on after its Liverpool engagement, touching down in Birmingham and Manchester (where its broadly knowing sendups of serious drama -- i.e. *Legs and the Woman for Arms and the Man* -- seem to have been more appreciated than its burlesques of revue) before opening in late June as part of the two-a-day London Coliseum bill. (Jeans also contributed an adaptation of Marivaux to the bill.) *Hullo, Repertory!* did not last long in London, where it generally was thought too provincial. However, the critic for the *Daily Telegraph* noted that it was “brightly and wittily written.”

Alas for the scribe from the London *Morning Post*, whose assessment suggests having been wholly taken in by deCourville’s propaganda: “In England revue means nothing more than a profusion of pretty girls in becoming or startling dresses, scenic display, much singing and dancing, seasoned with such comicalities as commend themselves to the particular comedians implicated. Really it is no form; at any rate it has none.”⁶

At home in Liverpool once more, Jeans and the LRT soon returned to revue. *Higgledy-Piggledy: a Burlesque Revue* opened there on 27 December. The *Post*, in retrospect a good deal more perceptive than most of the London papers, suggested that “humorous, genial satire is the salient of real revue” (my emphasis) while the *Echo*⁷ lauded Jeans for “potting” so many targets. The *Courier* said it was “careful to eschew anything in the way of serious purpose”, while laughing at “self-conscious art, at mere artifice.” *Higgledy-Piggledy*’s “fresh air has swept through the dusty corridors of mind.” These indirect and possibly unwitting comparisons to the best, pretence-puncturing London intimate revue, and particularly Charlot’s, are striking.

⁵ As above.

⁶ One wonders how the ascendancy of intimate revue in the 1920s and the increasing intellectuality of the form in the 1930s affected such a blinkered mind.

⁷ As above, the Jeans archive.

Defining intimate revue

The revue ran on past its scheduled closing date. In a typical burst of congratulation and self-aggrandisement, Cochran, whose *More* was by then touring in Birmingham, wrote “This is the first real revue I have seen outside the Ambassadors Theatre.” Adding to his earlier definition (it seems that by now everyone thought he/she knew what “real” revue was) Cochran said that [real] “Revue should give the atmosphere of an impromptu entertainment, just as a cartoon of a great black and white artist appears to have been dashed off in a few moments.” (Emphasis mine).⁸ He continued: why are revue authors not more in demand? Consider, he suggested, the great Grattan himself. Jeans, he concluded, like Grattan, showed the real revue spirit. Cochran subsequently signed Winwood to a long-term contract (and not long thereafter she moved to Broadway) and the LRT thus lost its most charismatic performer, and before long Jeans was contributing to London revues. By early 1918, Jeans was collaborating with Grattan, and by the end of the year he had replaced him⁹

DeCourville fades

Back to 1917: after the second edition of *Box O’Tricks*, which deCourville had likened to “a mosaic with every part fitting, as carefully cast as opera”¹⁰ and bragged unfortunately of a quickly-forgotten composing discovery (“Now America comes to us for music”), he did manage one more relatively sumptuous show, *Zig Zag*¹¹, with another score and cast largely recruited from the U.S. It included a comic song rather nervously called “Beware of Chu Chin Chow”. But among the revues which exerted little claim upon audience or posterity were four others which in one way or another derived from deCourville, including one (*Smile*) so shrunken it could fit into the Garrick for a

⁸ As above, the Jeans archive.

⁹ By the mid-20s, Jeans was writing Cochran’s revues.

¹⁰ Theatre programme, Hippodrome, 3-12-1916

¹¹ Theatre programme, Hippodrome, 31-1-1917

including one (*Smile*) so shrunken it could fit into the Garrick for a short run -- and an ambling pair built around Hale. One of these, *Hanky Panky*, caused Street to write, "This is an average London revue, with a certain amount of briskness and very little wit or fun."¹² It is interesting that the Lord Chamberlain's men were beginning to expect wit from revue.

There was a "certain amount" of humour at the expense of "incompetent ladies going onto the land" (wasn't this already a passe topic?) as well as the incompetent drilling of incompetent recruits. The increasing desire for American performers -- as the war deepened, now in shorter supply -- was lampooned in the response of a character to the leading lady: "Tell me, Miss Keane, when you are OFF the stage are you really an American?" The other Hale revue, *Topsy Turvy*, which followed *Hanky Panky* into the Empire a mere five months later, was notable mainly for introducing a new producer, Laurie Wylie, who after the war took deCourville's place at the Hippodrome and for a time revived spectacular revue. *Topsy Turvy* came off after three months, to be replaced by *Here And There*, starring Levey. That show lasted even less than three months. (After the war, deCourville was able to recapture some of his earlier glory and almost inadvertently changed the course of British musical history by importing -- for the 1919 revue *Joy Bells*- albeit for only one performance, due to the jealousy of Robey - - the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.)¹³

Charlot's Ascendancy

These and other revues came and went quickly, but Charlot's two for 1917 stamped him as the form's reigning genius -- or at least as one who was able to strike the correct balance between audience expectations and practical realities. Only one of Charlot's earlier shows had given as many as 300 performances (*Not Likely*, 305). *Cheep!*, which opened 26 April at the Vaudeville, made 483. *Bubbly*, which opened 5 May at the Comedy, achieved 429. With such successes and a

¹² Lord Chamberlain's collection, (14-3-1917)

¹³ James Harding, *George Robey and the Music-Hall*, 1990, p. 100

payroll as yet not swollen by the salaries of established stars, Charlot probably did not much mind the bombs which fell on his St John's Wood house, forcing his family to commute for the duration of war from Bognor Regis, the home of Mrs. Charlot's family.

Though both revues exhibited their producer's sense of blitheness, they actually differed significantly, and one was pointed more accurately toward the future. However, that one was not *Cheep!*. It was pointed firmly at the present (on February 3 the Ministry of Food had announced a "voluntary food rationing" system. The Food Controller asked each person to limit himself weekly to four pounds of bread, two and a half pounds of meat and three-quarters of a pound of sugar. Austerity was the order of the day.)¹⁴

*Cheep!*¹⁵ was another Grattan speciality ("The show staged by the author; we could not afford a real producer"). It was quite a lot of fun, playing as it did with austerity and in its punning title making light-hearted fun of the *£150 Revue*. The Grattan touch is obvious from the very beginning: since not enough money existed for a whole new show to have been written, the finale from *Some* -- "It's a Wonderful Night", with Lawrence as a Fairy Queen -- would suffice. But of course one thing after another is added, willy-nilly, because, as "Mr. Tryer", the put-upon director, tells the audience, "All our present authors are played out...they find the difficulty of getting to America very cramping." and from then on, the audience is asked to accept the notion that they are watching the performers working out a revue.

In a relatively ingenious manner of introducing a cast, each player in turn pops in late (Lillie) or on time, well-rehearsed or all-at-sea. When they have finally assembled, Mr. Tryer speaks again, playing the patriotic card quite deftly, playing it amidst puns and absurdity: "Let's try and act up to the need of the moment -- fun without finery...we will rely more on what is heard and done than what is scene....Spectacular revue must wait/ till Germany's rubbed off the

¹⁴ *The Observer Souvenir Replica Edition, Op.Cit., p. 1*

¹⁵ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1917-8 (17-4-1917)

slate.” He goes on to suggest a scene which “opens in utter blackness and remains so throughout...it will be played by deaf mutes.” Costumes must be cut down (“The censor can’t have it both ways”) White appears dressed in newspapers because she has spent all her (15-shilling) clothing allowance on a headdress. Shortly thereafter arrives yet another spoof of the women’s land army “We’re all allotments now....drastic diggers by day and naughty nymphs by night”. Etcetera. And there were plenty of songs and dances for White and Smith.

Despite such fun (surely Grattan must be given much credit for the feeling) of greater importance to the future of revue was the capabilities of the cast of increasingly confident specialists. By its second edition, Lawrence was beginning to suggest future stardom. She had a scene with Lillie as well as her first solo song. It was in *Cheep!* that the aspiring actor Noel Coward first caught sight of Lillie, later writing

Miss Lillie, with her highpiled auburn hair and a green satin evening gown from the bosom of which protruded a longstemmed chrysanthemum, will stay in my memory forever. She sang, in a piercing soprano, a popular ballad called ‘Bird of Love Divine’, she sang this with apparently the utmost sincerity, but it did just occur to her during the second verse to prop her music up against the chrysanthemum. I believe I was still laughing hours later.¹⁶

Coward’s description surely captures the spirit of Lillie -- this song was part of the repertoire of the pretentious and truly awful “Dedleighdul Quartette”¹⁷ -- as well as suggesting the evolving nature of Intimate Revue a la Charlot--understated and quite sophisticated, though not terribly intellectual. It may be instructive that between the two versions of the show, White and Smith -- now husband and wife -- left Charlot’s company.

White, a native of Missouri with fairly broad theatrical credentials in the States, had been a regular in musical London since her first appearance as part of a singing duo at the Palladium at the age of 28 in 1913. She had been part of Charlot’s troupe almost from the first, since

¹⁶ In Stanley Green, *The Great Clowns of Broadway*, 1984, p. 131

¹⁷ Theatre programme, Vaudeville Theatre, 26-4-1917

Keep Smiling. She had often been the nominal female star; *Not Likely* (she was one of the performers called “the most American sort of Americans”) had been delayed two days because of her illness. In *Now’s The Time* she had added stiltwalking to her usual down-to-earth singing and, according to one reviewer, “just rag-timed into the affection of our theatregoers.”¹⁸ Smith, born in Arkansas a year before White, had spent much of his childhood in Britain, and by 1913 was singing and dancing in various shows, including some of deCourville’s. They first teamed for Charlot in *Some* and gained historical significance as the people who spotted Lawrence in a touring show one evening in Swindon and telegraphed Charlot to give her a chance. White was in fact top-billed in *Cheep!* (Her “broad sense of humour and frank sentimentality”¹⁹ were much lauded) and Smith’s name followed close behind.

But there were problems. As we have seen, the pair together shared in the show’s profits to nearly the same degree as Grattan and Charlot. When Smith and White departed, their absence was put down to a previously agreed contractual term (I have not found the contract) and it was not long before these newlyweds began their own revue company. In 1918 White was listed as the manager of *U.S.*, a highly American intimate revue at the Ambassadors starring the pair. As *United States* it ran into 1919, when it was replaced by *Back Again*, an obvious sequel which did less well. White actually performed once more for Charlot, but by 1920 the pair were touring overseas and never regained their London prominence. White died in 1927 and years later Lawrence, by then a reigning Broadway star, found Smith wasting away in a Midwestern U.S. nursing home.)²⁰

From another standpoint, however, it was not only financial differences that parted Charlot from White and Smith; “broad, frank” performance was increasingly less suited to Charlot’s newer revues. After White left, Lillie picked up many of her songs, giving them -- through her own rare

¹⁸ *The Sketch*, 14-10-1915

¹⁹ *The Tatler*, December 1917

²⁰ From Gertrude Lawrence, *A Star Danced*, 1945, in Morley, *A Bright Particular Star*, 1986, p. 140.

sense of detachment -- it must be said in all understatement, a whole new meaning.

Cheep! was also notable because its popularity was enhanced by "original cast" recordings. Although British recording practices of the era far outstripped their American counterparts -- at least in the freedom to draw upon theatrical material (many American composers -- even Kern -- believed that recordings would destroy the sale of sheet music) -- it was the success of recordings of songs from *The Bing Boys Are Here*, especially "If You Were The Only Girl in the World", which revealed or created the market for music from revues and semi-revues. Though only White could have been called a genuine singer, Lillie's comic caricature of "Julia" and a spoof of the dancing craze called "Shoot the Rabbit!" remain accessible ; furthermore, the songs from *Cheep!* recorded on Columbia²¹ set a precedent for later Charlot shows, and must in one way or another have contributed significantly to the reputation and visibility of r evue. It was finally possible to believe that the best new music in the West End was being heard on the revue stage.

There were more wartime references in *Cheep!* than in previous Charlot shows, and *Cheep!* boasted a musical score mostly by R.P. Weston and Bert Lee, newcomers spotted by Charlot, who, particularly in musical comedy, became a prolific team in the interwar theatre. Among all this newness and the increasing pace of wartime life, it is possible that Grattan's in-joking antics might have begun to seem old-hat. And Charlot, buoyed by an increasing sense of the rightness of his revue vision, must have been looking for ways of changing the balance of power -- and of finance -- that still insisted that Grattan's name appear above the title and share in the profits.

*Bubbly*²² was by contrast to *Cheep!* almost lavish, with scenery by Marc Henri and Laverdet as well as Weigall, who by 1917 was urging

²¹ "Julia" and "Shoot the Rabbit" are on Columbia L1194; an orchestral medley is on Columbia 675; "At the Calico Ball" by White is on PMC 7145.

²² Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1917-9 (27-4-1917)

manuscripts upon Charlot in hopes of writing his own revue; he was also interested in working with Charlot on screenplays for André Charlot Film Productions²³ (Charlot's fascination --in retrospect, fatal? -- with cinema had already begun to take hold.) Featuring Hulbert and Monkman, now called "the flaxen queen of dance," disguising the sultry Gerard in several male roles and calling its various segments "bubbles", it was in all ways lighter on its feet than *Cheep!* The score was mainly from Braham, and several lyrics came from Blore, now in military service but still very much a contributor to the West End. Perhaps its most important introduction was a Charlot discovery, the author John Hastings Turner. Turner remained an important revue writer for many years²⁴.

More Literate/Literary Sketches

That Turner was of the future tribe of Jeans and Dion Titheradge -- and therefore at the heart of the intimate revue of the Twenties -- is suggested by one of *Bubbly's* sketches. This was an interesting combination of the broad and the demanding, in one sketch ("We have to do what the Government sends us -- it's an old plot") playing and replaying the same dream in four different styles, including a problem play ("Muck") a twist-ending by O. Henry and an elegant Oscar Wildeish set-to ("A Woman of Some Importance.") Turner could turn out good epigrams: "Some women go through life looking on a stocking as if it was a safety curtain. Rightly used, of course, it is a fire alarm." "What is amusing at 20 is disgusting at 50. But I am 49." In one of the show's most popular sequences, Turner parodied Grand Guignol, complete with (trendy) opium dens. Good original music had infiltrated the form; now literature was making its stealthy entrance into revue.

When Hulbert finally left the show for military service -- an astute use of 48-hour passes and London billeting had preserved his piece for some

²³ André Charlot papers, UCLA

²⁴ Turner's was the "book" which underpinned *Wake Up and Dream*, the highly successful 1929 Cochran revue with original music by Cole Porter.

time²⁵ -- a young Scot called Jack Buchanan took his place, playing that sketch and in general bringing a new dimension to the show's dancing. Later, the outstandingly "camp" revue performer Douglas Byng wrote of the Buchanan-Monkman team

They both looked as though they had been out all night and they probably had. But in any case it was a lazy sort of tap dance they did together which was very nostalgic. It wasn't the usual 'full of zip and pep' type of dancing. It was almost languid and it was very attractive. In its way it was quite sensational because they even had a finale which wasn't a finale. It was a sort of 'the party's over now' number. That was most unusual then because I don't think anybody else had ever tried this before.²⁶

Charlot "discoveries" both of them, Buchanan and Hulbert went on to become the interwar British musical stage's leading dancing actors -- and producers, too -- but in 1917 Charlot could hardly have envisioned them as competitors who might threaten his ascendance. (In fact the revues Hulbert later produced, usually co-starring with his wife Cicely Courtneidge, were so much in the Charlot manner -- he even used Charlot's writers -- that the fact was noted by reviewers. So with *Cheep!* the performing foundation for the 1924 New York show that was surely the greatest of British intimate revues -- Lillie, Lawrence and Buchanan -- was complete. This achievement went unnoticed by Arthur C. Armstrong in the 1918 edition of the *Theatrical yearbook*, which as usual ignored Charlot completely, preferring deCourville's *Hotch-Potch* and *Happy-Go-Lucky*.

Charlot laid plans to extend his empire by taking a 14-year lease on the Prince of Wales Theatre, where he eventually moved his family into an upstairs flat, and in May 1918 he presented Butt's production of an American comedy. This was *Fair and Warmer*. This play by Avery Hopwood, called a hybrid of French and American farce, had achieved a year's run on Broadway and lengthy runs with many American touring

²⁵ Jack Hulbert, *The Little Woman's Always Right*, 1975, pp. 74-76

²⁶ In Michael Marshall, *Top Hat and Tails: the Story of Jack Buchanan*, 1978, pp. 22-23

companies. At the Prince of Wales *Fair and Warmer*²⁷ achieved 497 performances and helped make a star of Hale's daughter Binnie. Despite such an illustrious beginning as *Fair and Warmer*, the record shows that in general it was only with his own revues that Charlot succeeded at the Prince of Wales. Still, in late 1917 he had shows running in four theatres simultaneously. It was unnecessary to replace *Cheep!* and *Bubbly* until mid-1918, but the replacements were important to the development of revue. On 15 May 1918 *Tabs* came to the Vaudeville and on 1 June *Tails Up* entered the Comedy.

The fall of Grattan, the rise of Jeans

*Tabs*²⁸ (the title referring to "tableau curtains of theatre or music-hall") was historically significant. As previously indicated, it marked the ascendance of Jeans as a writer of revue. It was also the show during which Lillie for a time left the cast after a horseback-riding incident, thus allowing Lawrence (at the time seven months pregnant) enough time in which to establish herself as a genuine star of revue. *Tabs* also marked more good songs by Novello. The main importance of *Tails Up*, aside from the continuing Monkman-Buchanan combination and the further contributions of Turner, was that it marked the demotion and shortly the departure (as one writer called it, "the fall") of Grattan, who was listed as its nominal "producer"²⁹ With Grattan essentially gone (he returned to variety and continued for a time to contribute to others' London shows before making what Charlot later described as his puzzling exodus to South America)³⁰ and with the exception of his usual backers and the owners of the Vaudeville and Comedy, Charlot was now relieved of the inbuilt burden of sharing the profits. The Charlot ledgers show that he acquired access to bigger backers.

Over the length of its run, *Tabs* was virtually two distinct shows. The

²⁷ With America's entry into the war, American plays were proving quite popular, regardless of whether Americans were playing in them or whether Americans were buying up theatres. The avalanche of American musical comedies by Kern, Gershwin, Youmans, Rodgers and others would follow as soon as the war ended.

²⁸ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1918-8 (7-5-1918)

²⁹ Theatre programme, Vaudeville Theatre, 15-5-1918

³⁰ André Charlot, "Introduction" to *Charlot's Hour Limericks*, BBC, 1928.

first edition was Grattan's with a good deal of assistance from Jeans (if song lyrics are included, he was credited with eight numbers to Grattan's five.) The second was credited entirely to Jeans, though Grattan's best number was retained. The reviewer for the *London Morning Post* (could it have been the same one?) calling the show "a revue au Grattan" found that Jeans's large contribution "has not affected the tradition -- bright, cheery family sort of entertainment."³¹ Referring to the typical Grattan manner, another writer found "the incessant familiarity of the players a little wearisome at times."³² A typical Grattan invention early in the show involved the more or less physically violent conclusion of each "turn" when the next one barged onstage.

By contrast, one of Jeans's sketches, "The Bystander", well illustrates a manner and attitude sharply different and apparently considerably more in line with the more world-weary and cynical attitude of an audience nearly worn out by a war which seemed unlikely ever to end. This "sophisticated" piece was a progression of quick one-on-one conversations centred upon a rose -- a gift which passes between wife and husband, to a typist, to her admirer, and back to the wife, in whose hands it is recognised by the husband. Clearly Jeans knew his Arthur Schnitzler, and even if the revue-going public did not, it could respect and understand the sardonic truth. The *Times* review lauded Jeans's "remarkable economy of words." The sketch reappeared in later Charlot shows. (It should also be noted that by this time, the actor Titheradge was beginning to shift his focus to producing and writing for the theatre, though his sketches did not begin to appear until after the end of the War. Eventually many of the sketches of Jeans, Titheradge and Turner appeared in French's acting editions, as did another prime author of the era's Revue, Harold Simpson, and even some of Coward's. Revue indeed became the rage.

Although Jeans was sometimes criticised for his "highbrow leanings" when the second version of *Tabs* appeared, the *Weekly Dispatch* mused

³¹ Jeans archive

³² Jeans archive

that it had rarely seen “so improved a revue.” The *London Opinion*, calling it an “excellent example of the Intimate Revue”, added to the evolving definition of the British form: “the chief aim of revue should be satirical, and Ronald Jeans’s ‘dramas in a nutshell’ are brilliantly written and concentrated satires on everyday life.”³³ (my emphasis)

Though historically *Tails Up* (the title suggests an alternative to Thumbs Up, a deliberate morale-boosting thought) may have been notable for Coward’s first contribution to revue -- the song “Peter Pan” -- it mainly shows how quickly the other half of Charlot’s rep company had found its stride.³⁴ (It can also be seen as a gentle, smooth precursor of the many “dancing musicals” -- all formulaic musical comedies -- which characterised the London musical stage in the Twenties.) The show ran on happily after the end of the War, accumulating 467 performances. Supported by a genial (and well-recorded) score nominally by ex-Concert Party cohorts Braham and Burnaby, Buchanan and Monkman dominated the show, (one of their most effortlessly charming numbers, “Any Little Thing”, came from Jeans and Novello) and before the end of the run had developed an acrobatic dance, “Have You Forgotten”, in which in all comical seriousness, Buchanan tossed Monkman all around the stage. In *The Sketch* Monkman used her ascendant authority to urge people who wanted to learn to dance not to take a lesson: “Take a line of your own”, she advised. She was not too kind to jazz bands, which were characterised by “yelling, rolling and banging.”³⁵

Buchanan was the nominal star of most of Turner’s sketches. In one, he was required to transform from a 1918 night club to an 1815 version of Vauxhall Gardens. Overall he created such caricatures as a “low-down fellow”, a policeman, James Trump, Private Tarbuck, Lady Macduff and Lord Ronald Sandrock. There was also “The Curious Case of the Intellectual Sergeant-Major” and “The Strange Tale of the Historical Lecture”. Gerard danced an Apache Rag.³⁶ In truth, *Tails Up* did not

³³ Jeans archive.

³⁴ Lord Chamberlain’s collection, LCP 1918-10 (30-3-1918)

³⁵ Interview with Phyllis Monkman, *The Sketch*, 19-3-1919

³⁶ Theatre programme, Comedy Theatre, 1-6-1918

much resemble revues au Grattan. But one reviewer noted a particular strength of Charlot's -- he knew how to "weed out."

Wartime Concert Party

To return to Burnaby: this burly veteran of musical comedy was by now dabbling in revue with Charlot, and preparing himself for his greatest fame in musical theatre. Burnaby's destiny was also in part being prepared across the English Channel. There, quite close to the front lines (the tone of the *Wipers Times* "adverts" was easily borrowed) a number of British concert parties -- the natural habitat of entertainers in military service -- were engaged in entertaining the troops. Lieutenant Eric Blore was in charge of one of them, the "Welsh Wails." Another, *The Artists' Rifles*, was headed by Leslie Henson.³⁷

In 1918 the Artists' Rifles were performing in Lille, France. In their show, (Henson called it a revue) *The Gaieties*, all the Pierrots sat around in full costume on the stage at the beginning of the performance. Henson thought this was a good idea. After the war, he claimed that Pelissier's widow had approached him with the idea of a new version of the *Follies*. Henson said he had his own idea, a company of Pierrots including such as Lillie, Monkman, Buchanan, Stanley Holloway, Gideon and others, particularly his old friend Burnaby. Theatrical legend has it that the actual genesis of *The Co-Optimists* (1921 and for many years thereafter; see Chapter Seven) was in the dressing room of *A Night Out* (1920), an English version of a French farce imported by Cochran, adapted by Grossmith, Grey and others, and starring Henson, Burnaby and several others who became part of the Co-Optimists.

As You Were

But *The Co-Optimists* were still in the future. Charlot's 1917-1918 successes were obvious enough at the time but Cochran's biographers

³⁷ In one of his autobiographical works, Henson later claimed that revue had really come to London when a concert party in which he was a member -- the Scamps -- merged with the Tatlers a troupe which included Burnaby, to present early in 1912 a show called *Nicely, Thanks*. No trace of the show seems to have survived.

generally ignore them in discussing *As You Were*, the show which opened Cochran's latest acquisition, the London Pavilion, on 30 July 1918.³⁸ If we concentrate solely on Cochran, the acquisition of the Pavilion is of course of great importance. The former music hall was his flagship for years, where during the Twenties and Thirties he staged his best revues -- almost all of them created by or starring people he had lured from Charlot³⁹. Cochran strung electric lights on the Piccadilly Circus facade of the Pavilion, spelling "London Pavilion -- the Centre of the World", and it is certainly true that some of the most evocative photographs of the Circus during the Twenties and Thirties show the Pavilion at -- as it were -- centre stage.

But what kind of revue was *As You Were*? First, it was mainly written by Wimperis. Since 1904 he had written lyrics and co-written the books of Gaiety musical comedies, contributed sketches to several editions of the *Follies*, written or co-written *Bric a Brac* and two editions of *The Passing Show*. He eventually wrote several important screenplays for Alexander Korda. Wimperis was an author with credentials. At a time when adaptations from the (Allied) French were very much "in", Wimperis worked from *Plus Ça Change*, a sardonic work by Rip. The overall "plot", worked out in six "scenes", involved a cuckolded husband time-travelling -- eventually all the way back to a primeval forest -- in search of a faithful woman (and a peaceful world). Though the first component of his search was familiar enough -- Charlot would be playing variations on it 17 years later in *Shall We Reverse?* -- the second was very much a "hot" item in later wartime.⁴⁰

In fact *As You Were* with a cast of 20 on a stage "not much larger than a fair sized dining table", according to Harding⁴¹, reuniting much of Cochran's repertory company, led by Delysia (who sang "Live for all

³⁸ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1918-13 (24-7-1918)

³⁹ Almost all sources repeat variations of the same epigram, possibly coined by Douglas Byng: Charlot created the stars and Cochran turned them into constellations.

⁴⁰ The transatlantic journalist-playwright John Balderston was particularly fond of this concept, whose psychological appeal during wartime is obvious. Balderston's plays, beginning with *The Genius of the Marne* (1919), in which Napoleon returns to advise General Joffre on the best way to defend Paris, culminated with the poignant love-across-the-centuries *Berkeley Square* (1926).

⁴¹ Harding, *Cochran.*, p. 69

you're worth/while you are on this earth....never make a grouse of it/when it ought to be a lark") and Morton (with costumes by Poiret) was as much a musical play as revue. Street noted a "fair amount of cleverness and sprightliness....a coherent story. " Wimperis toned down the sardonic and emphasised the playful. When the story reached recent times, there was a good deal of punning on the dreaded Hun enemy: "hunwashed, hunpopular, hunsporting, hunderhanded....[in fact the references were] "hunending" and the German crown prince is "Hunpleazant." In its later stages, *As You Were* became increasingly warlike ("We'll teach you Huns the Aeroplane walk! The Americans will!") and in the concert finale England and France band together: "They will never pass!"

Whatever else can be said of it, *As You Were* clearly marked a return to Cochran's notion of revue and clearly responded--and successfully, too, scoring its own 400-plus performances--to Charlot's challenge. In its "borrowings" *As You Were* clearly signalled a renewal and intensification of the struggle for Revue ascendancy. What was Charlot's response? *Buzz Buzz*, which opened shortly after the signing of the Armistice, was written by Jeans and Wimperis. It is the main subject of Chapter Six; in *Buzz Buzz* all the elements of this study come together to create the model intimate revue.

Chapter Six 1919: Buzz Buzz, A Model Revue

Although many mentions of British revue focus, reasonably enough, upon such dazzling examples as Charlot's [London] Revue, the compilation of items from Charlot revues which stormed New York in January 1924, (see Chapter Seven) that show owed everything to the template for intimate revue which had been completed before 1920.

In *The Other Theatre*, Marshall assessed the contemporary (1947) musical stage partly by comparing it to conditions at the end of World War I:

Musical shows to-day occupy exactly the same number of theatres as in 1919, but there is nothing among the fifteen musicals in the present list to compare with *The Maid of the Mountains*, *Chu Chin Chow* and *The Lilac Domino* [interestingly, all these were the kind of thoroughly escapist musical comedies which had evolved in reaction to the escapist sort of revue]¹ though *Sweetest and Lowest* [the last of three similarly-named intimate revues begun during World War II and starring Hermione Gingold -- such shows were among the indirect inheritors of Charlot] can stand comparison with *Bran Pie* and *Buzz Buzz*, the intimate revues of 1919.²

Marshall was writing from his own conviction and involvement, having been involved with Gingold's career since the heydeys of the Festival Theatre in Cambridge during the late 20s and was himself, alongside Farjeon, most responsible for the regeneration of intimate revue in the later 30s. Still, he correctly selects two Charlot shows to illustrate the vitality of revue at the end of the War, and this chapter concentrates upon the example of *Buzz Buzz*, seeing in it the completed model of British intimate revue, the fusing of the elements set forth in Chapter One, the end product of the developments of 1912-1918.

Other 1918 Revues

But first, a few words about other revues in 1919. Of Cochran revues there were none at all, none till late in 1920. That peripatetic

¹ N. Marshall, *Op.Cit.* p 224

² *Ibid.*

showman was again busy elsewhere, including a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and in 1920 several weeks of the French singer-composer Sacha Guitry. That it was Cochran who presented (and would continue to present) Guitry is another tale in itself, since back in the Parisian days, it was Guitry and Charlot who were friends, if rather edgy ones. (This can be seen as further evidence that the Charlot-Cochran rivalry was quite real.) Cochran kept his own Delysia-centered “repertory company” occupied with *Afgar*, an operetta penned by a contemporary Frenchman. Cochran regularly showed himself at the forefront of the surge in adapting French farce to the musical stage.³ Cochran had also again taken up his enthusiasm with prize-fighting, whose popularity had increased during wartime. In late 1919 he staged a world heavyweight championship fight at the Holborn arena and subsequently began planning bigger and better fights.

Aside from deCourville’s postwar comeback there were no London revues outside Charlot’s. But deCourville’s was big indeed. Introducing to London a “joy plank” (a raised runway for dozens of chorus girls to prance upon, over the heads of the audience) *Joy Bells* (Hippodrome, 25 March 1919) ran for nearly two years. It was a glorified variety show, full of optimism in the face of continued austerity. Nesbitt recalled the immense opening number detailed the overthrow of “Mr. Gloom”, another of the cartoon creations of the *Daily Mail*, and the re-lighting-up of London⁴ and completely focussed upon Robey, then at the height of his considerable popularity. Once the ODJB had been dismissed, there was no reason to pay attention to the music of *Joy Bells*, which altogether did nothing for the form (though it presumably was of temporary help to deCourville’s bank balance.)

The run-up to *Buzz Buzz*

Regardless of this apparently thin competition (the overall competition was not really all that thin, since full-scale variety continued all over

³ One such, late in 1920, was *The Eclipse*, for whose music Gideon and Darewski were supplemented by a couple of songs from the fledgling Porter.

⁴ Nesbitt, personal interview, London, 1994

London) it is amazing that *Buzz Buzz* (20 December 1918, Vaudeville)⁵ itself ran for 612 performances, the longest run of any show Charlot ever staged and the longest run for any revue up to that time. (It must have been an exhausting 612, considering that the era's standards required three matinees per week, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.) And *Buzz Buzz* did not even enjoy the services of Lillie, who was making her debut in musical comedy in the London production of Kern, Wodehouse and Bolton's *Oh, Joy!* (its American title was *Oh, Boy!*)

It is tempting to conclude that the commercial success of *Buzz Buzz* must in some way have stemmed from Charlot's increasing confidence in his endeavours. But though a "magisterial" presence (Nesbitt's words) Charlot was also a man riddled with self-doubt who could take to his bed for days at a time when confronted with setbacks or even dilemmas.⁶ *Buzz Buzz* was not a sure thing, and surely Charlot knew it. But using hindsight, from the standpoint of this thesis it can be generalised that *Buzz Buzz* was conceived and executed with the expertise of revue specialists. Its authors knew their way around the form; its composer and the company in general understood Charlot's concepts. It can be argued that it was clearly time for an important intimate revue.

As we shall see, *Buzz Buzz*, while clearly of the same ancestry as the Charlot revues which immediately preceded it, was different in a significant respect. Once more the luck of wartime favoured revue, and this time the dice fell Charlot's way. Opening less than six weeks after the end of the war, his was the first post-war revue -- and even that quickly, the public mood had shifted. On 27 November, Carleton, then starring in a comedy at the Haymarket, had died after a Victory Ball of what the inquest called cocaine poisoning. The social context and public attitudes seemed to alter overnight. As Kohn has written⁷

The West End was a zone in which normal class barriers were blurred;

⁵ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1918-22 (16-12-1918)

⁶ Nesbitt, personal interview, 1993.

⁷ Kohn, *Loc. Cit.*

The West End was a zone in which normal class barriers were blurred; there was a disturbing absence of clear lines between women of the night and nightclub women...[who] represented the growing uncontainability of women as a whole during the war: working, making good money, driving ambulances, smoking in public, filling streets that had formerly been full of men. [Her] sudden death...precipitated Britain's first major drug scandal. Instead of comedy, she signified tragedy; instead of promenades, parasols and duets, the British public heard about opium 'orgies' in Mayfair, chiffon night dresses and Chinese drug dealers in Limehouse....

Buzz Buzz did not truly exploit this atmosphere -- it would not have appealed to him as suitable to a "party of good friends" -- but the sketch-writers hired by Charlot -- Jeans and Wimperis -- saw to it that there was plenty of bite. Aside from having the luck to arrive amid this atmosphere, *Buzz Buzz* seems to have had all the luck regarding its name.

"-----"

According to another of Charlot's unpublished fragments⁸ the revue's original title was *Coupons*, a concept topical enough, considering the nationwide rationing of various commodities which had come to pass in the war's last year. (In the spring of 1918 the truly unthinkable -- rationing bread! -- was in full readiness, but it was never put into practice.)⁹ That the war had ended made the title and concept only somewhat less timely, since (as also proved true of World War II) austerity of one kind or another would last for many more years. But in the meantime, as Charlot wrote, a "provincial manager" had "stolen" the title away. Charlot ostentatiously avoids mentioning what he told the manager when the manager offered to sell him the title.

Charlot has not revealed how the new title was chosen, or by whom, but he clearly saw the publicity value in keeping it secret. As the opening date drew nearer, he had the posters outside the Vaudeville painted to call the show "----". According to Charlot's fragment, conjecture

⁸ André Charlot, "Buzz Buzz", unpublished.

⁹ Taylor, *Op.Cit.*, p. 77

occurred on the pavements and in the press. Charlot did not tell his company the new title, though as the running order took shape, it became clear that the number which would close the first half might well contain the title. Charlot states that cast and general public alike eventually came to believe, if for no other reason than the rhythms of that song, that *Jazz Jazz* might be the title.

An hour before the show was to open, the new number was handed to the cast, and once the show was well underway, Charlot sent the painters out front to change the posters to *Buzz Buzz*. That number and the further implications of the new title are discussed below. Clearly part of the first nighters' enjoyment was looking forward to knowing the name of what they were watching. All this can now be seen as part of the kind of game intimate revue is able to play with its audiences, part of an "intimate understanding."

The Personnel of Buzz Buzz

For some time during its lengthy run *Buzz Buzz* benefited from the unlikely presence of a "star", Nelson (Bunch) Keys, whose variety credentials were impressive. Keys had played the lead role in *Very Good Eddie*, the Kern-Bolton-Philip Bartholomae musical comedy which Charlot, still seeking to "increase his business", had produced in May at the Palace. Later called one of the shows that changed the course of the American musical, *Eddie* had not succeeded in London and Keys was more or less available. Charlot later wrote that he had never liked Keys, who apparently had the habit of keeping all the costumes he wore during any show; Charlot was a man who liked to spend his money on his own gracious living rather than subsidising the comfort of his employees. (Charlot had written on a production still of Keys in top hat and tails, "Nelson Keys in *Buzz-Buzz*. This is how I like to remember the little bastard. Piss on his ashes.")¹⁰ But Keys was a quick study who could play many characters and it is to Charlot's credit that he recognised a natural-born revue performer.

¹⁰ Charlot family collection, courtesy Joan Midwinter.

Buzz Buzz further advanced the career of Jeans. But in his typical fashion Charlot did not entrust the show solely to one talented youth. Charlot liked to bring along his discoveries slowly and keep them in no doubt as to who was in charge; a few years later, having flunked Coward in an audition and subsequently buying the song "Peter Pan" for *Tails Up*, he would assign the seasoned Jeans as a "safe pair of hands" to partner Coward in the creation of *London Calling*, (1923) perhaps the single best revue of its era.¹¹ Rather than collaborating, Jeans and Wimperis wrote their own sketches and their own lyrics. Instead of Novello (now involved in motion pictures as well as musical comedy) or Braham, Charlot assigned composition to Darewski, one of a breed peculiar to the prewar London musical theatre, the musical director-composer. Darewski was a serviceable if uninspired composer and a successful publisher of music, particularly his own.

Still and all, on the face of it *Buzz Buzz* did not exhibit the makings of a memorable revue. No Lillie, no Monkman, no White -- in short, no co-star of Keys's stature, and by then even Keys had performed in few revues. But *Buzz Buzz* certainly did prove that Charlot's "repertory company" was coming of age. Lawrence (in the sheet music, published by Darewski, she is "Gertie" Lawrence)¹² played a major support, soloing (and making her first recordings)¹³ and partnering Walter Williams, by now himself a regular supporting player in the Charlot company. The glamorous Canadian actress Margaret Bannerman was the Phyllis Monkman of this show¹⁴, while another major support was the versatile Vera Lennox. What *Buzz Buzz* had was style, production personnel (Weigall was again in charge of costumes and scenery, largely by Marc Henri and Laverdet; he made small capital look big) and a form that had reached its maturity. Here follows a fairly closely observed

¹¹ In another well-documented manifestation of this "magisterial" persona, in 1925 Charlot peremptorily demoted the budding star Jessie Matthews back to the chorus mainly because she was acting like a star too soon.

¹² All the quotations from lyrics are found in the show's sheet music by Herman Darewski, Arthur Wimperis and Ronald Jeans, 1919, published by Darewski's company.

¹³ "I've Been Waiting for Someone Like You" and "Winnie the Window Cleaner", Columbia L1296.

¹⁴ She was eventually replaced by Heather Thatcher, who after the close of *Buzz Buzz* was snatched away by Grossmith for a series of American musicals at the Winter Garden Theatre.

examination of the form of *Buzz Buzz*.

The Future of Opening Numbers

Audiences used to the Grattan approach probably felt themselves momentarily reassured when, before a curtain painted to resemble the “St. Victorialoo” railway station, twelve of the cast, including a lot of porters, gradually assembled, singing Jeans’s lyrics, “Here we are, waiting for the star....up and down, try to drown Herman Darewski’s tune”

Actually, the opening of *Buzz Buzz* is a clear departure from the past and moves toward a template for future revues.¹⁵ Once the “waiting for the star” was over and Keys had indeed appeared (as Sir Thayer Aubakkagen, the noted explorer) the conceit of letting an audience eavesdrop was abandoned. It is almost as though a motion-picture camera was liberated, giving alternate panorama and close-up instead of always looking over the actors’ shoulders. The action swirled and Keys engaged in saucy banter with others at the station, including Bannerman as the station-mistress and Lawrence, here garbed as a chauffeuse. The Lord Chamberlain’s man blue-pencilled this exchange:

An explorer is a man who is ever seeking to rend the veil and penetrate to the unknown.

Yes, I’ve known some like that! He’s not coming--in MY cab.

That this slightly “blue” line was expunged mattered little, for the sketch moved on to Jeans’s lyrics for “Who Killed Missis Grundy?”, gently suggesting that wartime had (surprise, surprise) undermined conventional morality. These lyrics included

I, said the WAAC, I led the attack/When I drive an officer out in his car/I’m only a private, as most of us are/So I can’t protest if he’s going too far/I’ve done my bit!

¹⁵ By the time of *Charlot’s London Revue* most revues opened with the cast in general, directly introducing itself to the audience. In all the permutations of *Charlot’s Revue* this meant a Blore-Jeans-Braham song, “How D’You Do?”

I, said the lift girl, I'm rather a swift girl/ I'm known to my friends as the Little Lift Belle, and once with a man, all alone, so they tell/ I hung for an hour between Heaven and -- well, I've done my bit!

There were four more verses along these lines, and a chorus: "All the birds ev'ry where, Danced from Saturday till Monday, When they heard of the death of Missis Grundy."

Amongst all this hubbub, Keys managed to transform himself into Ha Hi Lo Da, a preposterously broad caricature of the Chinese, and to sing a song in pretty bad pidgin English. The number that closed this St. Victorialoo Station sequence was Jeans's "There Are So Many Girls Around Me", (which troubled the Lord Chamberlain's man a bit: "It wants careful production") a song-of-a-type which was rather a hangover from Gaiety musical comedy, the babbling of a rather promiscuous, preening and rather sillyass male-about-town:

There are so many girls that I'm in love with
There are so many girls in love with me,
The winky sort, the shrinky sort, the dinky white and pinky sort,
From twelve to forty-three....

The Merchant of Venison

That was the end of the brisk and acceptably naughty beginning of *Buzz Buzz*. Its authors may not have done so deliberately, but it is possible to think of this sequence as a recapitulation (and finishing-off?) of many contemporary conventions of revue -- audience eavesdropping, pro-forma suggestiveness, leading-man braggadocio, etc. This moderately familiar opening was followed by something very new: Jeans's sketch "The Merchant of Venison", with Keys as "Braylock" and Bannerman as the "Fair Apportioner". A foreword in Shakespearean style is accomplished by a herald and a chorus before the curtain:

Herald: I can say to many a star
I have made you what you are
I engaged you as you were
I'm Charles B Cochran's courier!

Chorus: Welcome, Sir! But it seems queer
That you should be appearing here.

Herald: That role I play once weekly only
On other nights when feeling lonely
I try to do the best I can
As André Charlot's Charlatan.

Chorus: All hail to Charlot's Charlatan!

The Herald, briefly assuming the role of compere (for the first and last time in the revue), speaks:

Responding to the very widespread criticism
That wartime shows seem to devote
Themselves to naught but song and witticism,
We thought we ought to strike a deeper note.
And to this end, we're going to introduce to you
A scene, by William Shakespeare, no less.
(We feel we need make no excuse to you
For dressing it in what's called 'modern dress'.)
The subject is immortal as the fashioning
More apt to-day than ever 'twas before,
So now 'A drama of Meat Rationing--
'The Merchant of Venison--Act 4.

The first-night audience of *Buzz Buzz* could not have suspected that they were being prepared subtly for the revelation of the show's title, which was marginally Shakespearean. Here is the appropriate sequence from *Hamlet*, act 2 scene 2. Following an exchange of witty, scathing remarks with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Polonius enters:

Hamlet: Hark you Guildenstern, and you too--at each ear a hearer.
That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling
clouts.

Rosencrantz: Happily he's the second time come to them, for they
say an old man is twice a child.

Hamlet: I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players, mark
it. You may say right, sir. O' Monday morning, 'twas so indeed.

Polonius: My lord, I have news to tell you.

Hamlet: My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an
actor in Rome--

Polonius: The actors are come hither, my lord.

Hamlet: Buzz, buzz!)

G.B. Harrison has noted “Buzz, buzz!” as contemporary Elizabethan slang for “old news.”¹⁶ (See below how the first act’s closing musical number “Buzz, Buzz” made rather more of the phrase.) In ordinary circumstances Jeans, who wrote that song’s lyrics, probably would not have expected his audience to recognise the allusion. Though Shakespeare was the national playwright, there was as yet no national Shakespearean theatre and at least as far as London was concerned, revivals of *The Bard* came and went at highly irregular intervals. But there indeed had been a recent Shakespearean season¹⁷ and perhaps Jeans and Charlot saw their opportunity. So “*The Merchant of Venison*” enjoyed a double contemporary relevance, one for the up-to-date theatregoer and one for the literarily inclined -- and that was aside from the topical subject matter of meat rationing.

The curtains for “*The Merchant of Venison*” opened on a butcher-shop. Hambonio, the butcher, sighs to a hopeful customer, Bass-on-Draftio, “My shop, e’en as the time, is out of joint” (the bequest of burlesque, the pun, was still a powerful weapon, when used sparingly). Bass-on-Draftio remarks, “The which does but increase my gratitude That thou didst send me round my Sunday beef Last Saturday -- despite the fact that I was couponless” (note the erstwhile revue title). And Hambonio returns, “I did it to oblige As thou gavest me my whisky after hours.” This would surely have amused any audience, whose members might have been doing the same sorts of things to “get by” during the war’s austerity.

But this lack of coupons threatens to bring down the wrath of Braylock, due at any moment to demand his pound of flesh, and Hambonio calls the boss -- the Duke of Venison -- to deal with the crisis. Braylock (“an overdressed Jew”) arrives with knife and scales.

¹⁶ G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare’s Major Plays and the Sonnets*, 1948, p. 622

¹⁷ All in all, Wearing lists 27 separate productions of “classic” plays -- the category into which Shakespeare fitted -- during 1918.

Braylock: Braylock is my name. I come to claim the pound of flesh that I did order yesterday by telephone.

Venison: Hast thou thy coupons.

Braylock: Aye. Three weeks ago I did deliver them, and in return I have received no flesh--not even offal!

Venison: A knotty point that will demand the strict Attention of the Ministry of Food, the Female representative of which--She whom we call the Fair Apportioner--Doth stand within. Let her be brought in.

After the sound of trumpets, she enters and they begin to argue. Braylock has the coupons, but the butcher hasn't any meat. The apportioner appeals to Braylock's sense of duty as a patriot to go without.

Braylock: So speaks officialdom! 'Twas ever thus,
The shortage of supplies! The old excuse
For its own follies. Would that I could plead
The lack of wherewithal to tax collectors!
There be gas rates and water rates...

Fair Apportioner: Hold! Hold!
What's sold cannot be unsold, and likewise
What's short cannot be bought. That is the law!

Braylock: Open that meat safe--if it empty be
I'll be content with kippers for my tea.

After more trumpets, the safe opens, a "gory piece of meat" is found and the Apportioner puts it on the counter, whereupon Venison seizes it. The Apportioner directs him to allow Braylock his due portion from it. But when Braylock advances with the knife, she speaks:

Nay, nay, 'tis not for such as you to butt in
Give me the knife and let me do the cuttin'. (She cuts.)
There is your pound of flesh.

Braylock: Dost give me naught of paper nor of string?

Hambonio: These things the customer himself must bring.

Braylock: Thus wouldst thou send me rudely through the street
Bearing a bloody naked piece of meat?

Ere ever I shall feel it neath my belt
This none too solid flesh is sure to melt!

Apportioner: Your bond and coupons give you nought but meat,
Of paper there is mentioned not one sheet!
“Tis up to you now to make up your mind
To take it naked -- or leave it behind.

Braylock: I pray you give me leave to go from hence
To buy a Times; ‘twill cost two pence
But it is worth it.

Venison: Stay! ‘Tis only fair
To warn you first that long ere you return
We shall be closed--’tis early closing day.

Braylock: A minute only!

Venison: Nay--not half of one! (the clock strikes)
We cannot serve you now -- it is the law.

Braylock: Of all the scurvy tricks I ever saw
Yet, I’ve one consolation; though I have been had,
I’ve held it long enough to know (smelling it) that meat is bad.
(He throws it in Venison’s face)

Black Out.

“The Merchant of Venison” was nobody’s literary masterpiece, but it was surely topical and (especially considering Keys’s extremely broad performing style) an appealing blend of low and moderately high comedy, clearly in the line of descent from such short burlesques as Barrie’s “Ibsen’s Ghost.” (“The Merchant of Venison” had a long life in a French’s acting edition¹⁸ and in 1940, during another war, was scheduled into another revue.)¹⁹ Clearly looking backward at the war, it presented the motif of coupons, it was tight and fast-moving (I have presented virtually all the dialogue), and it sneaked Shakespeare into the entertainment.

Keeping Pace

¹⁸ Ronald Jeans, *Charlot Revue Sketches*, 1925.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

If pace were not to slacken (and it is evident from a copy of the revue's programme annotated by Charlot that it should not -- the Victorialoo sequence lasted from 7:50 to 8:18 and "Venison" to 8:28)²⁰ -- even so minimally staged a sketch as "The Merchant of Venison" had to be followed by something in front of the curtain. "I've Been Waiting for Someone Like You", with lyrics by Jeans, brought Lawrence and Williams together. It had nothing to do with coupons and was also very much of a type particularly popular during this era -- the flirtatious boy-girl duet. But just as the more contemporary revue sketches favoured by Jeans needed a "punch" at the blackout, the best of revue songs produced a "twist." "I've Been Waiting" is formulaic for ever so long:

He: There was something in your eyes the day we met.

She: (spoken) Was there?

He: There was something in your look I can't forget.

She: (spoken) Try to describe it.

He: A reciprocal glint Sort of gave me a hint that you'd a heart to let.

She: (spoken) I must have been a forward minx....

And the chorus:

He: I've been waiting for someone like you!

She: I've been waiting for somebody too--

Often I've dreamed But it always seemed My dream would never come true. ...

But then after further byplay comes the denouement:

He: Answer me true, dear, Are you waiting too?

She: Yes, for somebody richer than you.

As theatrical history has recorded, Lawrence was never a tuneful singer, and perhaps the "spoken" parts of this song were crafted with her limitations in mind. But such casual (and easily made ironic) "dialogue" was one of her great strengths, and "I've Been Waiting For Someone Like You" can be heard as a prophecy of future greatness -- heard, that is, on the recordings which quickly followed, certifying the success of *Buzz Buzz*.

²⁰ Annotated theatre programme , Vaudeville Theatre, 20-12-1918, Family collection.

It was now 8:33 and time for Jeans's sketch, "Christmas 1918", in which Williams and Bannerman play two children awaiting Father Christmas. Alas, it has been a hard war, full of deprivation, and Uncle Jack, Aunt Betty, Grandfather and Grandmother are on hand. They are so enthusiastic about the celebrations that they take over the toys and the kids are left to complain about the manners of the older generation. The whole thing took two minutes.

A Wimperis lyric "Nosey Parker" was the platform for a slightly spooky dance number for a trouser-clad Vera Lennox²¹ and the chorus ("There's a bogey, who Must be known to you, Mister Nosey Parker is his name/ When you lie asleep, He will crawly creep Underneath the window frame!").

A Wimperis sketch-and-lyric, "Coupons for Kisses", returns us to the presumed unifying thread.

You have to have a coupon For ev'rything to-day
Or else they'd come and swoop on you
For butler and bacon. Unless I'm much mistaken
You have to have a coupon, too.
You have to have a coupon to go to see a play
Yes, given at the Vaudeville
But when they go and ration the lover's tender passion
It's rather rough on Jack and Jill.

It's a very appealing sketch, built around the idea of a kissing booth (like nearly all the scenery, this was basically the outline of a house with an opening standing for a window, through which one character leaned) which dispenses, according to the number of coupons proffered, kisses of Grades 1, 2 and 3 -- one being the most passionate kind. The sketch is crammed with puns such as "Couponi soit qui mal y pense" and reaches its own saucy blackout when Bannerman, the proprietress, is handed by Keys a huge batch of pink and blue coupons, which are tossed high in the air as the kiss is collected.

²¹ The visual aspects of this discussion of *Buzz Buzz* are based upon photographs from *The Play Pictorial*, January 1919.

Everything is Buzz Buzz now

The closing number of Act 1, called in the programme “What’s in a Name?” and therein subtitled, to keep the suspense high, “Everything is ---- ---- Now”, zestfully performed by Williams and the chorus, resourcefully ignores the Shakespearean connection in favour of up-to-dateness:

You’ve heard the latest phrase, It’s going to be the craze
It’s buzz buzz buzz buzz buzz
You buzz off to the city, You buzz off from your food,
You buzz into your office, Say ‘Buzz off!’ if you’re rude,
You buzz off out to dinner And on a buzz, buzz home.....
Now then, if you please, imitate the bees;
Ev’rything is Buzz Buzz now.

After the Interval

It was now 8:58. Only eight minutes more than an hour had passed. And there was only a 10-minute break ahead. Still, Charlot’s psychology of not letting any of his new “stars” think they were too important can be seen in his choice of the opening number of Act 2, which might well be missed in part by those lingering at all in the Vaudeville Theatre’s cosy bar. This was Lawrence in what proved to be her most popular number, Jeans’s “Winnie the Window Cleaner”²² One would hardly guess from the lyrics that this was a fully-staged number, complete with chorus, and that “Winnie” was improbably garbed in a huge cloche hat and a (stylishly wrap-around?) pinwheel-of-a-dress.²³

Here is one of its segments:

Since Winnie went window-cleaning, She’s found lots to do
Winsome little Winnie Laid aside her pinnie
For an overall of blue.
And Winnie just kept on cleaning
Till she got pulled through
By a young lieutenant who had noticed Winnie’s charms.
Winnie heard that soldiers all know how to use their arms--
Since Winnie went through the window,
Winnie knows it’s true.

²² Predating the gormless banjo-playing George Formby Jr.’s suggestive “When I’m Cleaning Windows” by two decades.

²³ *The Play Pictorial*, *Loc. Cit.*

If this was a method of “reaching” Lawrence, it clearly did not work, because on 8 November 1919 Charlot fired her (“Not for the first time....”²⁴ “She would ‘gag’ her lines, make faces at other members of the cast on the stage, and generally misbehave....There was no malice in her; she was simply a crazy kid.”)

According to Charlot’s theory of running order, the second selection after the Interval had to be of the highest calibre--this was Jeans’s sketch “Home At Last”, which over 11 minutes showed Bannerman and Keys as newlyweds back from their honeymoon, trying to settle into their flat but struggling with the offputting problems inherent in a lack of servants (the category of worker which declined most notably during wartime,) shortages of coal, gas and other presumed necessities. However, keeping warm, it was strongly hinted, would not really be a problem for them. Or would it?

Williams returned to sing the comic “Live and Let Live.” This was an interesting argument by Jeans, rather subtle for revue, suggesting that parading a generosity of spirit, a “tolerance” of others, is frequently a cover for one’s own selfishness. But, it concludes, since life is as it is, being selfish at the right time might, strangely and unintentionally enough, actually benefit a lot of other people. Lawrence’s “I Left My Heart in Maori-land” was a spoof, set against a stylised primitive backdrop and with a tropically garbed chorus, of a certain kind of “exotic” song popular in the time²⁵ Jeans’s “If I Went into Parliament” allowed Keys, called “the eloquent one” to regale his cabbie (note the reversal of stereotype) with a series of highly populist platform planks -- tearing down pubs and rebuilding them twice the size, seeing to it that the right people got married, even making sure that everyone got all the clothing they needed -- excepting, of course, “the girls in revue -- oh, no! I wouldn’t touch those!”

Wimperis’s sketch and lyric, “Miss Sunshine and Mister Rain”, was a

²⁴ And not for the last, either, he wrote in his annotations to *Buzz Buzz*.

²⁵ e.g., “Under the Bamboo Tree.”, a cakewalk by Bob Cole and J. Rosamond Johnson.

quaint-and-cute pastel piece in which, respectively (and, in a “house” suspiciously like the booth of “Coupons for Kisses”) Bannerman and Lawrence portrayed the figures on a barometer: (“He stayed at home, when the bright sun shone, She disappeared when rain came on....Fine or wet, they never, never, never met.”) The interpolated American nonsense tune “K-k-k-katy” allowed a speciality to Williams and Dan O’Neill--as well as, with the aid of a very large sandwich-board full of the tricky lyrics, teaching the audience the number.

The closing sketch

The relatively long (29 minutes) closing sketch “How It Is Done”, by Wimperis including three of his lyrics, showed, in two sections -- How It Is Done and The ‘Finished’ Article -- producers Sir Prying Choyce and Boanerges G. Whizz (Keys, an American characterised by the size of his cigars, as well as his snappy galluses) acquiring a patriotic spy melodrama and converting it into a revue. Somehow a parody of Mrs. Patrick Campbell is incorporated (another set piece for Keys). An alien (a German!) is concealed in a cupboard, but there is also suspicion that the cupboard has actually been used to hoard scarce wartime items, and of course the alien is suspected of being the hoarder. (“Well, then it’s the very place for sealed hoarders.”) The sketch and revue’s last song, “The Corpse-Reviver Rag”, performed in order to resuscitate the three corpses which were created during the mayhem, managed to kid theatrical convention, Ragtime and the new craze for American cocktails all at once. It was 10:25 and *Buzz Buzz* was over.

Buzz Buzz ‘s lengthy run allowed for a number of revisions. There came to be “Percy Plantagenet Ponsonby Pitt...was perfectly priceless”, a semi-variety turn satirising the silly young blades, and “The Maid of the Mountebanks”, an outstanding new closing number (a collaboration between Jeans and Wimperis) and parody of *The Maid of the Mountains*, the Jose Collins hit show at Daly’s. In the parody, Jose is unable to accept a new engagement because she’s held prisoner at the Palace (yes, an allusion to Butt’s variety venue). We have already been

told that “One Daly’s play, we’re glad to say/is very like the last/ with robber-chief and waltz-motif/and Jose in the cast.” The spoof also burlesques the mannerisms of the original, including the emphatic repetitions of whatever the fierce kidnapping robbers say (“I think it’s going to be a fine day today. (Fiercely whipping out knives, etc.) TODAY!”

Other interpolations included a sketch on *The Village Grossmith*, in which Keys appeared as Kellogg:

They’ll do it at the Hippodrome
In quite a different way.
Well, RATHER, I should say!
They’ll treat it good and gay!
I guess they’ll introduce ‘effects’
That fairly swamp the play,
DeCourville stuff,
All blare and bluff,
Hip-Hippodrome-Hooray!

and a new Act One finale (since there was no useful surprise to the term “Buzz Buzz” any more) in which Keys changed identity frequently, singing about the method of song-”plugging” typical of American shows as well as deCourville”s:

Sing me a song with a wonderful tune
Sweet as the roses that blossom in June
A song that everyone will buy,
A song that does not go too high,
Sing me a song with a catchy refrain,
One they will encore again and again,
You can fake every note
With a sob in the throat:
That’s the sort of song to sing!

During the run of *Buzz Buzz*, another future star of revue and musical comedy joined Charlot’s chorus. This was June (originally June Tripp). When Charlot wrote about it later, he also revealed one of the ways in which revues developed:

June is a splendid example of unrelenting devotion to her art. One day

during the run of *Buzz-Buzz...* Junie came to me and said 'I have worked out a little ballet, would you like to see it?' And there and then she showed me, with a few steps and descriptions, the outline of a perfect little gem of choreography that she had devised. I was delighted to put it into the show, and June danced it to the end of the run of 15 months.²⁶

Before turning to *Bran Pie* it might be useful to assess the significance of *Buzz Buzz* somewhat differently. This revue was the longest-running show of any kind to open in London during 1918, and for that matter it was not until mid-1920 when any newly-opened show set out upon a run which surpassed its total of 612 (Wearing makes it 613.) And one more thing: if between 1915 and 1918 intimate revue had found a way of treating war, *Buzz Buzz* was notable for something which must have been immediately noticeable to audience and competitor alike: it stated firmly, if indirectly, that wartime was over.

The Rivals of Buzz Buzz

What kind of theatre did *Buzz Buzz* surpass? For one thing, opera: there were 70 performances in London alone during 1918. Those who long had feared American domination of the West End were probably happy in their anguish during 1918. Among original productions of any kind, next to *Buzz Buzz* came *The Naughty Wife* (600), an English version of a highly unsuccessful New York farce (in the middle of its Broadway run it had changed its title from *Losing Eloise*). The long-running (and at least dramatically respectable) American comedy by James Montgomery, *Nothing But the Truth*, had in its English version 577, while the American musical comedy about flying, *Going Up* (book by Montgomery, music by Hirsch, starring Coyne and essentially introducing one of the greats of 20th century British musical theatre, Evelyn Laye) achieved 573. The only other show to achieve more than 500 was Charlot's own *Tails Up*, though as we have seen, his American importation *Fair and Warmer* came close. It does not take much reflection to conclude that in these days the only British theatrical form able to cope with even mediocre American material was intimate

²⁶ Andre Charlot, addendum to *Buzz Buzz*, unpublished.

revue and that indeed, Carter's declaration that the stage had become a "revue stage" was founded on fact.

Bran Pie

*Bran Pie*²⁷ (each sequence in this show was called a "dip") was the first of Charlot's revues to be staged at the (newly redecorated) Prince of Wales. It opened 28 August 1919, went through four versions and ran for 414 performances. If there were such things in Charlot shows as star vehicles, this might be called one, since despite the presence of Phylliss Titmuss -- another substitute Monkman -- and the soubrette Odette Myrtil (the opening night programme noted, "Mr Charlot thinks that in fairness to Miss Myrtil he should inform the public that she is suffering from relaxed throat and appearing against medical advice")²⁸ Lillie and Hulbert dominated all the versions. *Bran Pie* was also somewhat unusual in having no single librettist or sketch writer. Poiret, who having designed the dresses for one of Cochran's adaptations of French farce, was now part of the tug-of-war Cochran-Charlot rivalry, was once more on hand. The Prince of Wales allowing for somewhat more lavish staging, the sequence "A Perfume Dip" -- in fact a clear sendup of the Ziegfeld-deCourville pageantry -- was advertised as "Inspired by the famous Perfumes of Rosine of Paul Poiret, who has designed and executed the costumes.") *Bran Pie* did not represent an advance in revue form, but it did showcase revue specialists at their truly confident and highly entertaining best.

Cochran and deCourville again

Cochran made his return to revue in September of 1920 with *London, Paris and New York*²⁹ (the "third Pavilion production"). Nelson Keys having completed his run in *Buzz Buzz*, the "little bastard" now threw in with Cochran, as did Darewski and Wimperis. Harding comments that Keys could not shine without good material, but fortunately

²⁷ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1920-4 (27-5-1920)

²⁸ Theatre programme, Prince of Wales Theatre 28-8-1919

²⁹ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 31-12-1920

Wimperis provided a good deal, so Keys was able to impersonate “a fat German bandsman, a romantic matinee idol, a passionate Frenchman, a Spanish brigand, a street singer, a Regency beau, a Cockney tipster, a drunken Admiral, a man-about-town, and a Japanese juggler.” In characteristic fashion offstage as well, he charged to Cochran a bill for dentistry, which he claimed was necessary because he had had two side teeth extracted so he could look more Japanese.³⁰

London, Paris and New York was a reasonably successful show, clocking 366 performances -- not quite as many as the new deCourville or Charlot shows. It was, however, considerably more “lavish” than Charlot’s or certainly his own earlier revues, and in its dance-orientation a further hint of Cochran’s future direction³¹ The array of dancers in *LP&NY* was changed frequently; finally in early 1921 came an American importation carrying historic significance. The dancing team of Dorothy Dickson and Carl Hyson -- a rather Midwestern version of the Castles -- made their London debut in this show. Later in 1921 Dickson created the eponymous heroine of the London version of Kern’s *Sally* and was on her way to becoming the West End’s major interwar star of (usually American) Musical Comedy.³² The Pavilion programme for *London, Paris and New York* included one of its regular features: a “Who’s Who Behind the Footlights”. The subject was Andre Charlot.

The major Hippodrome revue for 1920 was *Jig Saw*.³³ This 10th deCourville extravaganza³⁴ was called “[hitting] the mood of the moment...mad and glad...reckless and irresponsible...deliriously expensive.”³⁵ *Jig Saw* scored a booking coup by wresting from the States

³⁰ Harding, *Cochran*, p. 88.

³¹ The advent under Lillian Baylis and Ninette deValois of a truly English ballet in the early 1930s brought “serious” dance into the revues of even Charlot, for whom (Sir) Frederick Ashton and Anton Dolin choreographed several numbers. It can be argued successfully that revue nurtured English ballet.

³² Hyson eventually became a mainstay of the earliest cabaret shows (Charlot’s) in London (Chapter Seven)

³³ Theatre programme, Hippodrome, 6-8-1920.

³⁴ Little of its own music was memorable, but it did introduce “Swanee” -- uncredited to George Gershwin -- to London. DeCourville eventually made that up to Gershwin, hiring him to write the entire score for the 1923 revue *The Rainbow*. It was Gershwin’s first full-length theatrical score and deCourville’s farewell to revue.

³⁵ *Opinion* 26-6-1920

Jenny and Rosie Dolly, who singly and in tandem were well on their way to wresting the *femme fatale* title from Ms Deslys (see Chapter Four.) The Dollys more or less inevitably took up residence in London, not to mention with Mr. Selfridge. For *Jig Saw* they performed a pony dance and were Chinese for "Limehouse Nights." But they were shortly captured by Cochran and by 1922 deCourville had begun his retreat from spectacular revue and, understanding the demand for "jazz" dancing largely created by the advent of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, was running his own night club.

It is not to suggest that by the beginning of the Twenties Charlot had the London revue scene to himself. He didn't, but Cochran had abandoned his earlier claim to the "intimate" variety and deCourville's version of spectacular revue was essentially dead, though not quite buried. Chapter Seven shows how the kind of revue Charlot "perfected" in *Buzz Buzz* became the British model for future decades and exerted its influence abroad.

In Summary: The Fusion of Elements into Revue, Buzz Buzz as Model Revue

It has been shown that during the years 1890-1920 British revue had acquired a great deal from the pre-existing forms, phases and elements of musical theatre. From burlesque came a certain irreverent topicality, and from burletta a lighter and perhaps freer version of the same; from musical comedy of the Gaiety variety came briskness and up-to-dateness; from variety came -- well -- variety, but from the specific form of variety called concert party came the idea of a small, highly versatile and mainly stable company. From ballet -- itself in these days a component of variety -- came, pretty obviously, the element of dance, but for most revues it was a greatly scaled-down dance, and the chorus of intimate revue came to be chosen from dancers who could sing and act. From the speculative theatre-building mania of the 1880s and 1890s came smaller theatres, and from the legitimate stage, as best exemplified by the experimental repertory companies, came a

generation of authors oriented toward drama instead of musical shows.

The Typical Intimate Revue

Let us stipulate that these were the elements received from other genre. What was the model for British revue, observable in *Buzz Buzz*, which animated the form thereafter? The most obvious element should be considered first. Intimate revue was developed and belonged in small theatres seating between 450 and 1000. Otherwise there would have been little chance for the “party of friends” atmosphere so frequently cited as one of intimate revue’s chief joys. Chapter Two has detailed one of several serendipitous events which promoted intimate revue, a theatre-building boom beginning in 1885, which produced many theatres of just that size. The Vaudeville, home to *Buzz Buzz* and many more intimate revues, was reconstructed downward from 1000 to 740 seats in 1891. As this thesis is written, the Vaudeville’s management continues to stage contemporary attempts at revue.

During these developmental years of intimate revue, the size of the performing company varied within fairly strict limitations. It has been shown that Charlot in particular developed a kind of repertory company. Although many of its key players were not involved in *Buzz Buzz*; that company possessed its own particular coherence. Fourteen names, headed by Keys and Bannerman, are shown in the published score for *Buzz Buzz*. Charlot’s choruses rarely numbered more than eight. Since Charlot’s idea of a chorus demanded the ability to help out in sketches as well as singing and dancing, some of these named “principals” were also surely part of the chorus and the entire performing company was rarely more than 18. Charlot’s orchestras usually numbered no more than 10³⁶ but they were full enough, judging from the “original cast” recordings of *Buzz Buzz* on Columbia records (1919.) This model would in fact remain relatively constant for revue throughout the Twenties; it was rather late in the Thirties when choruses vanished altogether and the orchestra became two pianos.

³⁶ Charlot papers, UCLA

Buzz Buzz, with its frequent references to wartime rationing, was what might now be called a “concept” production, its elements loosely held together by some motif or subject. The brief history of these years as retold herein suggests that such an organising factor is crucial evidence that revue had departed from whatever variety roots it may have had. *Buzz Buzz* also shows that the “concept” was not invariably crucial to the evening’s contents. The songs and sketches dealing with rationing alternated with other numbers unrelated to that topic. Numbers -- most especially the opening sequence, which served to introduce the entire cast -- utilising most of the company were interspersed with “specialities” featuring individual members of the company who had gradually become familiar to the audience. I tend to agree with those interviewed for the 1993 BBC radio production “*Buzz Buzz: The Lives of André Charlot*”³⁷ that what really made a Charlot revue coherent was Charlot’s personal taste and style: an examination of others’ intimate revues should show a similar quality.

Intimate revue is also characterised by a brisk pace; Charlot’s well-monitored timing of *Buzz Buzz*, mentioned above, shows that the audience’s attention was manipulated in part by “running order”, but also partly by an adroit mixture of numbers of varied lengths -- from a two-minute sketch to a 25-minute mini-musical comedy. It became a “given” of intimate revue that no performer would be allowed to “stop the show.” (In a coda to his discussion “Music-hall vs. Theatre”, Charlot muses that revue in his London days was a slower-moving thing. So the pace kept accelerating.)³⁸

It has been repeatedly stressed that intimate revue achieved its form and expressed its nature largely by developing its own specialists. Revue speciality in performance meant an ability to play many “characters” or possibly more precisely “types” in an evening. I think that the earlier discussion of *Buzz Buzz* has emphasised Nelson Keys’s strength in this area, but nearly all the cast was required to change

³⁷ Radio Two, 9 p.m. 19 October 1993.

³⁸ “Music-hall vs. Theatre”, unpublished.

personae as often as it changed costuming. Further, revue performance meant being able to create a character in one or two sentences or gestures. By 1920, revue specialists had to sing and dance acceptably in the contemporary modes. By 1920 specialisation in revue performance also implied approaching material from a lightly comic, ironic perspective. Charlot may have been the luckiest of impresarios to have discovered and nurtured people who were surpassingly good in all these ways -- more than anyone else, this meant Lillie, Lawrence and Buchanan. Perhaps it was also luck that Coward's earliest successes on the musical stage came in Charlot's revues. I think it is also clear that Lillie, Lawrence, Buchanan and Coward were a kind of culmination; they created an image of revue performance that others copied for the succeeding decades.

I believe I have shown that revue speciality in writing and content was evolutionary, and that what changed during the years 1890-1920 was the orientation of the writing specialists. Grattan, whose status as creator of the first intimate revues cannot be questioned, had been a variety performer of sufficient stature to be part of the first Royal Command Variety Performance in 1912. The kind of revue created by Grattan clearly shows this hinterland in its direct approach to the audience, taking it into confidence, revealing theatrical "secrets" and all that. Grattan had a highly trained "ear" and could create "characters" through their speech, characters that really didn't need a situational background in order to appeal to the audience, characters who were really variety monologists in thin disguise. This was true to a lesser extent in the stylish, language-based work of Arthur Wimperis, which was on view in *Buzz Buzz*.

When revue became the province of authors like Turner, Jeans, Titheradge and Coward, the hinterland was not variety but theatrical and often highly literary drama. Revue sketches were thus written by

people who also wrote full-length plays.³² Tightly-written, embodying views of human nature that were frequently sardonic, these sketches brought a centre to revue which was lacking in the shaggier, all-for-fun approach of the tribe of Grattan. *Buzz Buzz* was an excellent showcase for Jeans, although there is less of the sardonic in his work for this show than in some later revues for Charlot and Cochran. It may lie outside the scope of this dissertation to prove a point which I believe to be self-evident: as intimate revue matured in subsequent decades, the sketch became its dominant component, until finally revues became synonymous with “sketch shows.” I also take the eventual eclipse of revue in the 1960s by such television “sketch shows” as “That Was The Week That Was” as a confirmation of my view that the most important “Revue specialists” were, after all, the authors.

I have also suggested that over the years, revue music had moved from importations and settings of old tunes to new words to fresh, original music by a generation of composers and lyricists attuned to this form. Darewski’s tunes for *Buzz Buzz* are not particularly outstanding, but they are good vehicles for the lyrics by Jeans and Wimperis, which are actually saucier than their sketches. Darewski does not rank among the top composers of revue songs, but those recordings did sell moderately well and they still make tolerable listening.

Revue music came to be as specialised as revue sketches. Revue songs tended to become little dramas within themselves, and just as the sketches were characterised by building to a climax which was a reversal or witty commentary, so too did many of the best revue songs. In *Buzz Buzz* it has been shown how the predictable lovey-doveyness of “I’ve Been Waiting For Someone Like You” is undercut by the girl (Gertrude Lawrence)’s “Yes, for somebody richer than you.”

³⁹ Much later, Jeans wrote that “revue sketches, however apparently spontaneous and lighthearted, had to have a beginning, a middle and an end, conforming to the unalterable laws of the drama, but by their very concentration demanding a high degree of technical skill.” (This is quoted in pre-written (1959) obituary of Jeans (who died in 1973) by H.R.Shaw, held in the library of the *Liverpool Daily Post and Echo*.)

Revue Music

It has been stated that the evolution of intimate revue eventually subordinated music and dance to sketch. But the process took some time, and it can readily be shown that during the Interwar Years (and in fact a few years on either side of wartime) the most significant composers -- Novello, Coward, Vivian Ellis,⁴⁰ Noel Gay⁴¹ -- emerging within British musical theatre were “discovered” in revue (usually by Charlot.)

A large proportion of the popular songs of the Interwar Years were in fact composed for revue. To name a few -- Braham and Douglas Furber’s “Limehouse Blues” and Novello and Titheradge’s “And Her Mother Came Too”(both from *A To Z*, 1921), Coward’s “Parisian Pierrot” (*London Calling*, 1923), “Poor Little Rich Girl” (*On With the Dance*, 1925), “A Room With a View”(*This Year of Grace*, 1928). and “The Party’s Over Now” and “Mad Dogs and Englishmen” (*Words and Music*, 1932), Porter’s “Let’s Do It” (*Wake Up and Dream*, 1929), Ellis’s “Other People’s Babies” (*Streamline*, 1934), Eric Maschwitz and George Posford’s “These Foolish Things” (*Spread it Abroad*, 1936) Herbert’s “A Nice Cup of Tea”(*Home and Beauty*, 1937), Geoffrey Wright’s “Transatlantic Lullaby” (*The Gate Revue*, 1939) and Maschwitz and Manning Sherwin’s “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” (*New Faces*, 1940).

Some of these -- “And Her Mother Came, Too” in particular -- were the “typical” revue song as discussed earlier, while others -- “These Foolish Things” and “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” in particular -- were simply beautiful songs whose natural habitat was the revue stage, the dance floors of the best hotels or the late-night BBC outside broadcasts. Writing in 1953, Cecil Madden noted, “True revue is a polite anthology of the arts in which beauty and wonder have equal

⁴⁰ Ellis, who gained his greatest fame for the 1930 musical comedy *Mr. Cinders* and his collaborations with Herbert, most notably *Bless the Bride* (1946), indeed learned his trade in revue, working for both Cochran and Charlot.

⁴¹ Gay, whose greatest fame came with the Cockney musical comedy *Me and My Girl* (1937), took his name from the stars of Charlot’s *London Calling* (1923): Noel Coward and Maisie Gay.

place with sentiment and humour.”⁴²

Considering these truths, it is not too much to claim that during the Interwar years, especially considering the increasing popularity of American imports, it was revue which kept British musical theatre viable. Whether this is (as I believe it to be) a truth or merely an assertion, it is now necessary to examine other claims made by this thesis: that the form (“perfected” in *Buzz Buzz*) did in fact continue as the basis for British revue after 1920, and that British revue did change the nature of American revue.

⁴² Cecil Madden, *The Daily Telegraph* 14-1-1953.

Chapter Seven Coda: Revue At Home Abroad

“Proving” that Charlot’s version of intimate revue, completed by *Buzz Buzz*, in fact proved the model for all subsequent British intimate revue would take another six chapters, as would “proving” the subsequent impact of British revue upon the American variety. But if these are taken as assertions, it is possible, by building upon the comments of other historians of musical revue and looking closely at selected revues, to make them more than assertions.

After a brief renaissance in the immediate aftermath of World War I, spectacular British revue simply disappeared.¹ DeCourville was out of revue and into night clubs by 1923.² DeCourville’s defection to that world of late-night entertainment was also partly the product of another defining moment for British revue. This was the advent of cabaret in Britain.

Come to the Cabaret

Lisa Appignanesi has dated the birth of cabaret at 1881; she suggests that the delay in coming to Britain, as well as the fact that British cabaret was never so bitinglly satirical (with the almost-exception of Herbert “Fargeon”’s shows) and downright political as the Continental cabaret, in particular the German.³ She suggests a reason: British newspapers give a good deal of information. In Germany, she says, “Kabarett is a surrogate for journalism.” Whether this is true, it is absolutely true that the development (and curtailment) of cabaret in Britain was determined by yet another jurisdictional struggle.

It is generally agreed that the first “authorised” British cabaret show

¹ A somewhat scaled-down version of spectacular revue revived during the 1939-1945 war, especially at venues such as the London Palladium and especially under the direction of Nesbitt, who subsequently took over the Hippodrome, turning it into a theatre-restaurant called The Talk of the Town, eventually the home of what became known as “Las Vegas-style” shows. Nesbitt regularly referred to his revues as “large-scale Charlot revues.”

² Though he did follow up Charlot’s “invention” of radio revue (1928) with his own series on the BBC and had some later success producing on Broadway.

³ Lisa Appignanesi, *The Cabaret*, 1975, pp. 164ff.

was The Midnight Follies, which opened on 4 December 1922 at the Metropole, Whitehall Rooms, London SW1. The programme, whose illustrations included photographs of Lennox, Marjorie Spiers and Lawrence, noted that Dancing took place at 9:30 p.m., followed or accompanied by Supper, and Cabaret, with "Follies" at 11:30 p.m. There was original music. The producers of the Midnight Follies were Grossmith, J.A.E. Malone, Paul Murray and Charlot, and costumes and stage decorations by Poiret, Marc Henri and Laverdet.⁴

The twelve-member cast included Hyson, also listed as producer. The programme makes clear that this first cabaret was very much a shortened revue with less emphasis upon writing. An opening number presents portrayals of, among other muses, The Cocktail, The Goddess of Wine, the Spirit of Melody, My Lady Nicotina, the Party Spirit (Lawrence). This is followed by Lawrence's spoof solo "Pom-Pom Tilloah-ay", a jealous threesome sketch ("I Saw Monty First"), a paired dance "Duke Street", (both of these showcasing Hyson) a number called "Gipsy Night in June", focussed upon Lawrence, a joke-telling lariat-spinner (these were the Broadway days of Will Rogers) called Tex McLeod, and a finale "A Tale of Many Colours", inevitably starring (as the colour Gold) Lawrence.

The Midnight Follies were quickly imitated and quickly resisted by those who were not involved in its production. In the aftermath of the opium death of Carleton there remained a fear of what might be going on in the late-night haunts. Whether this was the hidden agenda, it is true that the issue of "sketches" arose once more. Charlot has written of the arguments regarding jurisdiction which immediately followed⁵. When the smoke cleared, it had been determined that Cabaret could not present sketches. And Charlot withdrew from the production of cabaret. With Hyson in charge, the Midnight Follies continued throughout the decade. In fact this decision can be seen to have strengthened revue's significance. It was now the unquestioned home of topical (if small) dramas.

⁴ Cabaret programme, "The Midnight Follies", The Metropole, 4-12-1922

⁵ Taped interview, Joan Midwinter, 1993.

Cochran, the Dance and some failures

After *London, Paris and New York*, Cochran continued his experiments with dance-led revue without much luck, or for a time much health. *The League of Notions* (1921) featured the Dollys in an “inconsequential process of music, dance and dramatic interlude”⁶ which included a dog act, “The Dollies And Their Collies”. In the same year, the Dollys, even while performing at deCourville’s night club, helped rescue *The Fun of the Fayre*. Recovered, Cochran produced *Mayfair and Montmartre* (1923). It was unsuccessful, despite some larky songs by Porter.⁷ Cochran next tried an import on a very large scale indeed. This was Berlin’s *Music Box Revue* (1923). By the standards of contemporary American revue, this show, created by the expatriate English director Hassard Short for Berlin’s recently opened New York theatre (the Music Box), was quite modest. (At the Music Box “small-scale” included the creation of a travelling stage platform and a backstage elevator which hoisted sixteen chorus girls into their positions on a giant black iridescent fan)⁸ Cochran’s imported version of the *Music Box Revue*, while filling the stage of the Palace theatre, did not long fill its seats.

The failure of this revue seems quite instructive. From 1920 to the early 1930s, American musical comedies, imported as well as written specifically for London, ruled the book-musical boards. Yet the *Music Box Revue* failed, and in fact the only American revues which held West End attention were the African-American series pivoting upon *Black Birds* (1926), also imported by Cochran. It was also in 1923 that Gershwin’s score for *The Rainbow* did not guarantee a long run or any but lukewarm reviews. But the particularly British kind of revue certainly did prosper. Starting in 1925, with *On With the Dance* and its sequel *Still Dancing*, Cochran rediscovered the right formula, which was perhaps simpler than he had figured. While following his own inclination in “poaching” Leonid Massine (who brought two ballerinas with him) from Diaghilev’s company, he hired Ronald Jeans and Noel

⁶ *The Play Pictorial*, Vol. 38, No. 230

⁷ A laconic gem was “The Blue Boy Blues”, in which Gainsborough’s portrait moans about its recent removal to the Wild West -- i.e., the Huntington Gallery in California.

⁸ Lawrence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer: The Life of Irving Berlin*, 1990, p. 181.

Coward to write the kind of revue they had written for Charlot.

Charlot Conquers Broadway

By 1925 Jeans and Coward were available because Charlot was on the verge of becoming a victim of his own success. His revues ran on and on. *A to Z* (1921) and *London Calling* (1923), both following the precedent and design of *Buzz Buzz* but increasingly economical and literary, remain among the most coherent and inventive shows of revue. Increasingly ironic in tone, they benefited from (in *A to Z*) the sketch writing of Titheradge and (in *London Calling*) the all-round attributes of Coward. Novello's best revue score graced *A to Z*. Hulbert had "graduated" into his own Charlot-like series of revues; Lawrence, though still (when not fired) a Charlot "property", had become a major star; Buchanan was a star as well as part-producer of a string of musical comedies and Lillie, after her marriage to a baronet, was now Lady Robert Peel, wooed by impresarios on both sides of the Atlantic who were willing to pay her more.⁹

Particularly after the success of *Buzz Buzz*, Charlot focussed his attention on a larger goal, signing long-term contracts with key performers such as Monkman and Buchanan and negotiating with American producers for an invasion of Broadway itself.¹⁰ During 1923 Charlot's discussions with the American producers Edgar and Archie Selwyn bore fruit and a Charlot revue was finally projected for New York. (Many commentators have noted how useful such a project also could be in keeping especially Lillie in the Charlot camp). Charlot created a show from several of his most recent revues, particularly *A to Z* and *London Calling*. Trying out a condensed version in mid-Atlantic aboard the *Aquitania*, he took it to New York as *Charlot's London Revue*.

It has often been generalised that Charlot's troupe took New York by

⁹ The relationship between Charlot and Lillie was strong; despite offers of more money, she never worked for another British revue producer until Charlot had departed Britain for good in 1937 and she helped him financially during the years of his subsequent downward spiral.

¹⁰ André Charlot, *Journal*, unpublished. and Charlot papers, UCLA.

storm, but the magnitude of the storming is rarely mentioned. Neither is the surprisingly hostile reception which awaited it. This was partly Charlot's own fault. After closing the deal with the Selwyns in the spring of 1923 he had told a press conference

When the American theatre-going public is given a chance to see my London Revue, they will understand the difference between this type of show and revue in America, which in some ways, is too subtle to put into words. Over the years, we have developed an intimate understanding between players and the audience, such as you do not know in this country. The mixture is hard to define since it depends not only on a company in which everyone--and not just the principals--can sing, dance and act, but also on lighting and scenic effects which are simple but artistic. I intend to offer outstanding melody, humour, good taste and distinctive charm.¹¹ (my emphasis)

As usual, Charlot had defined intimate revue better than anyone else before or since. The thrown gauntlet, however, brought about an almost instant riposte, once the troupe had disembarked.

Charlot's archives detail the humiliation dumped upon the cast at a dinner thrown by one of the show's American backers. During the meal the backer had given his 10 year old son \$5, enough, he said, to purchase his choice of leading lady. The Americans' after-dinner speeches were uniformly hostile : Charlot wrote that they made it obvious that " Broadway didn't need people like us. Most of our ladies were close to tears."¹² After Buchanan's remarks, which noted that he had not invited himself to God's country, the evening was saved when it was Lillie's turn. Charlot wrote:

She rose, holding her glass of champagne, and uttered a single syllable: 'Oh.' That single syllable was uttered so effectively that it seemed to bring our host and his friends suddenly to their senses. Not only was the exclamation effective, but she accompanied it with a swift upward movement of her glass which flung the champagne well over her shoulder. perhaps it was this as much as the speech which made all the difference.¹³

¹¹ In M. Marshall, *Op.Cit.*, p. 32.

¹² André Charlot, *Journal*, unpublished.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Once the hostility of backers had been surmounted, as well as some “dirty tricks” which Charlot believed were engineered by Ziegfeld himself,¹⁴ Charlot’s troupe had to face actual theatrical competition. In the pomp of an unprecedented boom of theatre-building and easy money -- the exact opposite of postwar conditions in London -- smusical Broadway had rarely mounted such an impressive set of attractions.

Musical Broadway: 1923/24

Currently on offer were two musical comedies featuring the music of the most popular American composer of the early 1920s, Vincent Youmans. One was the sweetly old-fashioned *Wildflower*, starring Edith Day.¹⁵ It had been running for a year at the cavernous Casino Theatre. Just opened was the premiere offering at the attractive new Imperial, Youmans’s snappy *Mary Jane McKane*. At the nearly-new Apollo, the fame of W.C. Fields, recently freed from Ziegfeld’s *Follies*, was ascendant in *Poppy*, in which he created, as the bibulous Professor Eustace McGargle, the first of a series of dangerously eccentric rogues forever thereafter associated with his name. The star of an earlier era, Fred Stone, was headlining another of his stereotypical triumphs, *Stepping Stones*, now well into its second year. Over at the year-old Earl Carroll Theatre, Ziegfeld’s topical comedy about the Florida land boom, *Kid Boots*, was embarking on a long run and its star, Eddie Cantor, was cementing his banjo-eyed grasp on fame and fortune. Uptown, *Runnin’ Wild*, the lineal descendant of the epochal African-American musical *Shuffle Along*, introduced “The Charleston.” Of lesser note, yet still potentially lethal competition, was *Sally, Irene and Mary*, one of the last of the contemporary Cinderella tales to sweep Broadway.

These were only the “book” shows. Ziegfeld’s latest *Follies*, lacking Fields and Cantor, was possibly inferior to the 1922 version, which had run for 67 weeks and created a nation-wide craze for comics Ed Gallagher and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Day would shortly become London’s “Queen of Drury Lane”, starring during the 1920s in the American operettas *Rose Marie*, *The Desert Song* and *Show Boat*.

Al Shean. But the “funny girl” Fanny Brice was still a Ziegfeld star and the out-of-town visitors surely would know they’d get their money’s worth of gorgeous girls and the real tinsel at Ziegfeld’s New Amsterdam, the pride of Forty-Second Street. As well, there were contemporary editions of the large-scale George White’s *Scandals*, which had developed a reputation for presenting the music of good new composers, and the stylish *Greenwich Village Follies*. Much rawer, but still potent at the box-office, were the vast *Earl Carroll’s Vanities* (fur coats were good at disguising nudity) and the Shuberts’ *Artists and Models* (one number displayed a line of well-greased chorus girls apparently roasting on a spit) Most worrisome of all, however, would have had to be the latest edition of Berlin’s *Music Box Revue*. Charlot’s troupe had checked out some of the competition. At the Music Box, they found a \$50,000 gold mesh curtain and a number called “An Orange Grove in California”, during which the principals sang in a shimmer of orange while valves under the audience’s chairs released the scent of orange blossoms.

After a difficult break-in week in Atlantic City, during which Charlot, offended by Archie Selwyn’s intrusions during rehearsal, threatened to take the entire troupe back to London¹⁶ the show opened at the new Times Square Theatre -- an almost perfect copy of the Music Box -- on 4 January 1924. During the tryouts, Charlot had made significant changes, dropping numbers, adding others and reshuffling the all-important running order.¹⁷ It is not necessary to detail here the entire revue, except to note that its shape barely differed from that of *Buzz Buzz*, except that greater prominence was afforded to Lawrence, Lillie and Buchanan. This distinction was unimportant to the first-night critics. Perhaps the notice from the *New York Evening Telegram* can stand for the generality:

When André Charlot’s Company stepped out on the stage last night with their opening ‘How Do You Do?’ number there was an immediate response between actors and audience. That cordial relationship

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Theatre programmes for the revue as staged on the *Aquitania*, in Atlantic City, and at the Times Square Theatre, from the Charlot family collection.

continued throughout the evening and when the curtain fell, the fact was established that in Charlot's Revue, Broadway has something new in the way of musical comedy [sic]¹⁸

However unprepared Charlot's audience might have been, or how hostile Charlot's competitors, the New York critical elite were thoroughly prepared to be enthusiastic. The theatre reviewers at major newspapers were either members of the "Algonquin Wits"¹⁹ or possibly envious of them and willing to outdo their enthusiasms, and the Algonquin circle, all of them stage-struck, were well disposed toward the innovative, the insouciant, whatever thumbed its nose at the "established"; its "members" including the self-proclaimed arbiter of style Alexander Woollcott, the mordant wit Dorothy Parker and the expansive Marc Connelly, had already performed in a show (30-4-1922) called *No, Sirree!* which certainly resembled a revue²⁰ as well as *The 49ers* (6-11-1922) all too recently closed at the same theatre on 49th Street. Robert Benchley was regularly reciting his "Treasurer's Report" in Berlin's revue, which also boasted a sketch by George S. Kaufman ("If Men Played Cards as Women Do").²¹

Morley has pointed out that critics and non-critics among the Algonquin set had also already shown a certain snobbish Anglophilism²² lauding the understated polish of works by established British playwrights including Somerset Maugham and Frederick Lonsdale (as they shortly would laud Coward's). Despite this critical goodwill, considering the competition arrayed against Charlot's Revue around Times Square, it seems unlikely that the show could have survived on critics' puffs alone.

¹⁸ In Morley, p. 49.

¹⁹ Otherwise known as the Thanatopsis Literary and Inside Straight Club, these journalists, playwrights, performers and general anecdotists met irregularly at the Algonquin Hotel on West 44th Street (the heart of the Theatre District) to gossip, promote and attack each other. They were among the most brilliant of the Twenties renaissance in American writing and they believed very strongly in their own tastes and prejudices.

²⁰ James R. Gaines, *Wit's End: Days and Nights of the Algonquin Round Table*, 1977, p. 63

²¹ Benchley made the character of the eccentric, harmless bumbler all his own; Kaufman was one of the era's major talents as playwright and play-doctor.

²² Morley, *Loc. Cit.*

In fact, the critics' main worry seems to have been the show's literacy and wit -- was it too much for an American audience? Critics aside, at the closing curtain, it was Berlin himself who is said to have turned to his stage-box companions and complained that the whole show had probably cost Charlot less than the finale of his latest show.²³ (The most expensive number had been Coward's "Parisian Pierrot", in which the satin-clad Pierrot (Lawrence) finished by being buried in a flurry of floppy Pierrot dolls).

The show ran on, to packed houses at the Times Square and the Selwyn, where it transferred during the summer, until September, when it embarked upon a successful tour before returning to London. *Charlot's London Revue* was to stylish New Yorkers, in an era which adored *chic*, the essence of *chic*, the talk of the town. Within weeks of the opening, Franklin Simon and Company, Fifth Avenue, was advertising "The Charlot Suit. Today's Fashion News. The suit that confers youth because it IS youth."²⁴ Michael Marshall writes that youthful fashion plates, impressed by the leading man's cool style, were soon greeting each other "Say, you look real Buchanan today"²⁵ After Buchanan returned to London to star in his own musical comedy, the critical praise rolled on in a saying often attributed to Woolcott: "Lillie and Lawrence, Lawrence and Lillie/ If you haven't seen them, you're perfectly silly." In his notebooks, the stage-struck F Scott Fitzgerald (his own absurdist comedy, *The Vegetable: or, From President to Postman*, had recently found few audiences) wrote "Beatrice Lillie broke up the British Empire with 'March to the Roll of the Drums'"²⁶ (Fitzgerald, never accurate with titles or spelling, was referring to "March With Me", in which Lillie, as Britannia, was regularly run off the stage by her well-armoured minions.)

On May 21, 1924 the first clear American "imitation" of Charlot opened in the small playhouse atop the Century Theatre. This "intimate revue inspired by Mr. Charlot's entertainment" was called *Around the Town*

²³ M. Marshall, *Op.Cit.*, p. 37

²⁴ Charlot family collection,

²⁵ M. Marshall, *Op.Cit.*, p. 44.

²⁶ Fitzgerald, Notebook, *The Crack Up*, p. 124.

and was largely another showcase for the Algonquin circle (Lawrence and Lillie were already honorary “members” of its Round Table) boasting contributions by Connolly, Parker, Heywood Brown, Kaufman and Herman Manckiewicz.²⁷

Bordman writes that it took a few years for the “lessons” of *Charlot’s London Revue* to work through the American system²⁸. He doesn’t explain this assertion, and in fact one can argue that the first Rodgers and Hart *Garrick Gaieties* (1925) spoofing the productions of its sponsor, the Theater Guild, resembled the Charlot model much more than any previous American show. And a night club revue by Rodgers and Hart in 1926 included the song “Lillie, Lawrence and Jack.”²⁹

In 1929 the first *Little Show*, largely written by Howard Dietz, with music by Arthur Schwartz, also boasting sketches by Kaufman and others, began its 321 performance run at the Music Box. Stanley Green calls it, “In its smartness, style and intimacy...something of an American counterpart to the British *Charlot Revues* and *This Year of Grace*”³⁰ Since Dietz, an advertising man who became not only a librettist-lyricist but also a film producer, was also a member of the Algonquin inner circle, the influence was probably real enough. Regardless of which came first, soon enough Lillie, Dietz and Schwartz were embarked upon a series of literate revues. Though none were as small as *Charlot’s London Revue*, they differed vastly in tempo and intellect from the Ziegfeldesque spectacular revue, which shortly was almost as dead as the deCourville revue

Broadway conquers Charlot

Whether in 1924 Charlot could have imagined this sort of influence upon American revue, he was powerfully influenced by his American

²⁷ Advertisement, *New York Times*, 20-5-1924. Manckiewicz was the future writer of the screenplay for “Citizen Kane.”

²⁸ Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: a Chronicle*, 2nd Edition, 1992, p. 384.

²⁹ Dorothy Hart, *Thou Swell, Thou Witty: The Life and Lyrics of Lorenz Hart*, 1976, p. 186.

³⁰ Stanley Green, *Broadway Musicals Show by Show*, 1985, p. 67.

experience. Even though *Charlot's Revue (as played in America)* became the hottest ticket in London in 1925 (the celebrated opening "Midnight Matinee" of 30 March 1925 was called by one critic the most important event in the history of English revue and the show was the first British revue to carry its producer's name) Charlot chose to press his luck in the States and reassembled his three stars for a reprise of *Charlot's London Revue* early in 1926. The show was warmly received in New York, as was a late-night cabaret with Lillie, Lawrence and Buchanan, but foundered on the road and was abandoned in California.

Without any of these three (all captured by America in one way or another) *The Charlot Show of 1926*, opening in the fall and led by Matthews, written by Jeans with fresh music by the youthful and subsequently successful Richard Addinsell³¹ and Gay, seemed destined for further success. But during the busy panto season, no London theatre, not even the Prince of Wales, was available, and Charlot made a disastrous miscalculation, agreeing to take his troupe to New York, where they shared a run with the latest Earl Carroll nudie extravaganza.³² The debacle, which continued on a brief road tour, was so thorough that after dispatching his players home, Charlot himself was stranded in the States until Lawrence, Lillie and Buchanan sent him the fare. Charlot never really recovered from this setback and never got over his fascination with America. He may never have understood that in any line of business in that country, the innovative will be imitated, will be co-opted, and will probably be shunted aside.

Intimate Revue from 1925

As has been suggested above, Cochran solved his problems with intimate revue by hiring Jeans and Coward. For *On With the Dance*, Coward adroitly wrote the sketches to lead into his own songs (one was

³¹ Addinsell gained momentary renown for his "semi-classical" composition for a wartime film, "The Warsaw Concerto".

³² This was the 1927 Earl Carroll *Vanities: International Edition*, a stop-gap for Carroll (he was in prison because a showgirl had taken a champagne bath onstage at a party in his theatre) but an unqualified disaster for Charlot.

an early hit, “Poor Little Rich Girl” for Delysia) so there were few opportunities for the other composer, Braham).³³ Coward’s revue style had been clearly set forth in *London Calling*,³⁴

Coward’s style in revue sketches can be suggested by the opening sketch of *London Calling*, “Early Mourning”, which was also the first sketch he wrote for Lawrence. (“Early Mourning”, when published, became “Sorry You’ve Been Troubled.”)³⁵ The main performers are Poppy (Lawrence) and her telephone, the situation is that Poppy has just heard of her husband of three months’ apparent suicide, and the action is that after receiving the news she blithely phones her friends, finally setting up a luncheon date at Ciro’s. The denouement comes when Poppy’s maid arrives with the highly unwelcome information that it was not Poppy’s husband but rather that of the woman upstairs who had killed himself. The sketch’s published title is Poppy’s bitter closing “consolation” of the newly bereaved.

One Dam Thing After Another

*One Dam Thing After Another*³⁶ serves as an illustration of how the example of *Buzz Buzz* (and the presence of Jeans) had become the central tradition of revue. It begins with a chorus of six “sandwich girls” -- these, of course, were Mr. Cochran’s Young Ladies.³⁷ The sandwich girls urged the audience to vote for one or another of the electioneering characters -- who arrive, one by one. The first of these, to appropriate music (Cochran had temporarily acquired the services of Rodgers and Hart), was “Mr. Melo Drama”. He and a “clerk” (something of a wise-cracking compere) chat. They agree that there are too many choices in the theatre these days; Mr Melo Drama recalls the great days when there was *body* in an evening’s entertainment. It is the clerk’s

³³ Harding, *Op.Cit.*, p.111.

³⁴ The trendy title referred to the call-words of the British Broadcasting Company, which began its operations in 1922..

³⁵ In Frank Muir and Simon Brett, *The Book of Comedy Sketches*, 1982, pp. 62-64.

³⁶ Lord Chamberlain’s collection , unnumbered.

³⁷ The entrepreneur had come to see the advantage of having a small Charlot-like chorus which could do a great deal more than dance, and from this point on, future stars of British revue such as the impressionist par excellence Florence Desmond and the future queen of historical drama Anna Neagle regularly emerged from the Young Ladies.

when there was body in an evening's entertainment. It is the clerk's opinion that Miss Musical Comedy will win the forthcoming election: she has dignity. He proceeds to introduce and comment upon the others: Miss Ballet ("Your mother married a Russian, and you're the result"); Miss Shakespeare, or Portia ("So shines a good girl in a naughty dance"); Moss and Stoll, who sing themselves on in a slapstick parody of Gallagher and Shean); and Miss Musical Comedy (who cannot refrain from revealing that "Prince Monserrat of Neurasthenia will quickly repent of his cruel conduct"). An ingenious opening sequence: puns and theatrical allusion; theatrical parody and epigramming; a veritable history of the form.

The parade is momentarily interrupted with the announcement that "7000 schoolgirls from Streatham have voted for Miss Musical Comedy." It resumes with Mr. Broadway Play, brandishing a revolver ("Put 'em up...They gotta have sex and saxophone. I'm the only guy who can deliver the hot stuff.") Miss Modern Comedy chats endlessly on the telephone (!) revealing everything. Signor Opera ("Bonzo Locano, Mussolini Piano, Luigi Romano, Piccolo, Cabaret--Thou art more honoured in the Beecham [Thomas, later Sir Thomas, a famous and choleric conductor] than in the observance")

It seems that the parade has finished, and in response to a query about Revue, the clerk says "Revue is dead." But Revue arrives, literally dancing circles around the other candidates ("And so I mix my bag of tricks, with a little of you, and you, and you....and finally for fun I add the Sine Qua Non") And what follows for the rest of the evening IS revue--just One Dam Thing After Another. Jeans, like the other masters of the form, was expert at pouring old wine into new bottles (or new wine into old bottles.)

The rest of *One Dam Thing After Another* is indeed a mixed bag of tricks. A ventriloquist act is followed by a satirical song "Paris is Really Divine" in which "Notre Dame" is rhymed with "Not a dam" and the following lyrics weave in and out:

When it's June in South Dakota
Mrs Jones is on a boat a
Float on the waves of the sea....

French revues that we adore so
Glorify the Paris torso....

We leave for home without our pants
It costs a lot to Vive La France!

A song about a gigolo is followed by "The Lady of the Lake", in which the many exciting events of a romantic tale must be described to the audience because the curtain is stuck. ("After all, people are used to this sort of thing on radio.") A lengthy sequence, "Progress", runs time backwards through eight dancingscenes populated by 15 performers. The present is evoked with some Cowardesque dialogue ("Let's be engaged a bit, shall we?") and both the Charleston and the Black Bottom. Along the way the Assembly Rooms at Bath are visited, where Charles and Lady Betty invent the Minuet. When the mediaeval period is reached, a jester sings "We're between the devil and the BBC." The ironic climax is reached with a dance of savages which looks quite like the Charleston and Black Bottom.

Elsewhere in *One Dam Thing After Another* is found a sketch in which a flapper and her friend give differing interpretations of a cubist picture. The artist, overhearing, reveals that he hasn't the faintest idea what it means. There's a boy-girl song ("My Lucky Star") and the title song, which is sung by a baby ³⁸ :

One dam thing after another/First it's brother/Then it's pa
Everyone's crazy to pet me If they'd let me I'd tell Pa
Uncle John makes much/ Piggy back and such
Then he starts to slap/ What a decent chap, /Wouldn't even touch.
Ma will kiss my shoe/ Aunty does it too
Then they pinch my toes/And they tweak my nose/Till it's black and
blue

³⁸ Like almost everything else in the show, this was partly an in-joke, since one of the funniest moments in the 1925 London *Charlot's Revue* was a sketch called "Fallen Babies", in which the crib-bound Lillie and Lawrence showed what the amoral Twenties and plays like Coward's *Fallen Angels* had done to the youngest generation.

God bless them

Grand papa tickles my tummy/Then my thumb he bites with glee
And all the great big older folks/Seem dam childish--to me.

One Dam Thing After Another, whose reputation was enhanced by the inclusion of the earliest great Rodgers and Hart song "My Heart Stood Still",³⁹ also featured a sketch exploiting what might be called the Rashomon-factor called "As Others See Us" and a good-natured "Community Singing in the Home". With Miss Revue having clearly made her point, it was left to Miss Shakespeare to end the evening with an eloquent shrug.

Other Charlotesque Revues

Other revues of the Twenties which continued the tradition of *Buzz Buzz* included those of another former journalist, Archie deBear. DeBear's entrepreneurial career began with *The Punch Bowl*⁴⁰ (21 May 1924), a show which actually opened under Charlot's banner at the Duke of York's (Charlot was in New York but was still obligated under the terms of his sub-lease from Melnotte to fill that house). One of the features of this show was "Six Characters in Search of Shakespeare." Another, later in its considerable run, was "Yes, Yes, Flannelette"⁴¹ DeBear's performers came from the enlarging pool of revue specialists and included many of Charlot and Cochran's regulars. DeBear's variations upon the Charlot model were largely confined to the music, a potpourri of work by various contemporary composers. (Gershwin, Berlin, Gideon, B.G. deSylva, Irving Caesar, Joseph Meyer, *et al.*)

While Charlot was in New York, Titheradge wrote his first full revue (also under Charlot's banner and for the same reasons for the Gattis at the Vaudeville). This was *Puppets*.⁴² For the balance of the decade Coward, Jeans and Titheradge, Turner and Harold Simpson continued in the same vein. Revues staged by Jack Hulbert, starring Hulbert and

³⁹ Sung by Matthews in a shimmering white dress while Edythe Baker played piano,

⁴⁰ Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1924-18 (16-5-1924)

⁴¹ Youmans' *No, No, Nanette* opened in London in May 1925 and became the decade's longest running musical comedy.

⁴² Lord Chamberlain's collection, LCP 1923-35 (31-12-1923)

Courtneidge, were usually written by Jeans or Titheradge. Titheradge wrote "The Great White Sale" for Courtneidge in *Clowns in Clover* (1927.) It is a dizzying tour de force of malapropisms on Courtneidge's attempts to order "two dozen double damask dinner napkins" and was a hit on radio and gramophone record⁴³. The 510 performances of *Clowns in Clover* were the high-water mark for revue in the Twenties -- unless one adds together the five editions of the revival of concert party called *The Co-Optimists*⁴⁴, from 1921 through 1927.⁴⁵ (There were two less successful revivals in 1930 and 1935.) *The Co-Optimists*, which in its play scripts in the Lord Chamberlain's collection startlingly resembles Pélissier's *Follies*, was well received at relatively small houses such as the Prince of Wales, larger ones such as His Majesty's and even the very large Hippodrome itself.

Riverside Nights

Whether *Riverside Nights* (1926, Lyric Hammersmith)⁴⁶ can accurately be described as Charlottesque is less important than the clear fact that it was highly literate. Staged by Nigel Playfair, the Lyric's manager between 1920 and 1935⁴⁷ it was essentially the creation of (Sir) A.P. Herbert⁴⁸. *Riverside Nights* is also properly seen as the beneficiary of several years of *Le Chauve Souris*. From the example of its proprietor-creator, Nikita Balieff, Herbert took the notion that a nation's general culture provided all the material necessary for fresh creativity, and his sketches are filled with literary allusion. It is also worth noting that the programme of the *Chauve Souris* says that it has "established a subtle, exquisite sympathy between the stage and the stalls; between the entertainers and the entertained:"⁴⁹ an intimate understanding.

⁴³ *Revue 1919-1929* Parlophone PMC 7150

⁴⁴ Theatre programme, Royalty Theatre, 29-6-1921

⁴⁵ It cannot pass unnoticed that *Clowns in Clover*, though thoroughly Charlottesque in its general contents, also managed to evoke the Co-Optimists. After all, its central motif was a group of Clowns in full costume. The sincerest form....

⁴⁶ Lord Chamberlain's collection, unnumbered.

⁴⁷ Playfair is sometimes called a literary dilettante, largely because his long-running version (adaptation by Frederick Austin) of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1920-1923) struck many as reducing a gem of satire to a jolly, posing romp.

⁴⁸ A literary polymath, a major librettist of musical comedy and the last Member of Parliament for Oxford University

⁴⁹ Theatre programme, The London Pavilion, 2-9-1921

The ostensible venue for *Riverside Nights* is “a private theatre in the garden of Mr. Smith’s house, Hammersmith, London, 1810-1816,” Watched over by a bust of Dr. Johnson, Mr. Smith’s seven daughters give a performance compered by Mr. Smith which explores many aspects of the attractions between male and female. Mr. Smith promises “The first English variety entertainment ever presented in England -- no Italian juggler, no French comedia, no Russian dancer, no Parisian joke.”

First comes “The First Valse”, an “unrecorded episode from *Vanity Fair*”, in which Becky Sharp, “in outdoor clothes, radiant and excited”, bursts into Miss Pinkerton’s Academy for Young Ladies and proceeds to show the ladies, engaged in learning the Minuet, the latest thing: a man dancing with his arm around the lady! Becky’s moral is “Life is a dark affair/Man crops up everywhere/Love’s not quite nice.”

In “The Old Flame”, Mr. Moon and Miss Fair, who are parting because he is marrying someone else, are caught in a lift, while Mr. Fair and Mrs. Fair await below. Mr. Moon gladly shifts his weight toward Miss Fair (“There is nothing like a common danger for drawing two people together.”) While the parents call up from below, Moon and Fair find themselves discussing kissing (“The most beautiful and romantic fashion of greeting known to mankind, showing courtesy. It is a spiritual bond, like a handshake.”) Things do progress from there, and it is finally revealed that Mr Fair has stalled the lift purposely (“I thought you knew best, Mr. Moon.” “Quite right, Mr. Fair.”)

A “three-act fantasy” called *Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck in the Reign of Henry VII* dramatises (in six pages of text and hardly any performers) a rebellion on a vast scale. Act 1 is quickly dealt with (“We must raise another in his stead -- but who?” “I will pretend to be the Duke. You pretend to be one of the Princes....Hurry up with your rebellion, Lambert, as I am getting mine ready in case yours doesn’t come off.” Act 2, set in Yorkshire, shows the recruitment of 30,000

volunteers. But there is a problem: "What are you doing in Yorkshire?" "I want to tell you something. Lambert Simnel [a rival rebel] is marching with 40,000 men which he has collected." In Act 3, their plot found out, Simnel beards the leader in the King's kitchen, while the thousands outside are in tumult: "Perkin Warbeck, I have caught you! You will be tried and executed!" (Herbert was clearly an antecedent of Desmond Olivier Dingle, creator of The National Theatre of Brent.)

There are songs (Wordsworth set to music, genre pieces such as "Please sell no more drink to my father" and "I'll Strike You With a Feather"). In "Will Bagnall's Ballet" the "craze for dancing" is traced to the days of Charles II complete with exhortations:

Let every poet a Ballet make with speed/
O women, monstrous women,
what do you mean to do? You are all for pride and shew?/
Where is the decency...in gowne of cloth and caps of thrum they went full meanly
clad./...O Women If you mend not your wayes/
the devill will fetch you all one of these days

There is "An Imaginary Conversation" between "Bossuet" and the "Duchess de Fontanges" attributed to Walter Savage Landor:

Do you hate sin? Very much....I have left it off entirely since the King began to love me....as for (hating the) flesh, I never could bear a fat man....To love god we must hate ourselves....To love is easier....it is (my) spirit, my wit, etc. that pleases him....I would aspire to the glory of converting you....You may do anything with me but convert me.

"The Policeman's Serenade" is a 'grand little opera', in which a milkman's aria ("Milk-o! Milk-o!") brings forth "Susan" from her home for a pint and a kiss, much to the dismay of the policeman, who has chastely courted her. After the policeman arrests the milkman as a burglar and takes him away, a real burglar appears. After Susan sees his face beneath the mask, she asks him to marry her and they run off with the bag of swag, just before the policeman returns to guard the house.

"Love Lies Bleeding" is "a Russian play inspired by residence in

Hammersmith.” It presents a Chekhovian family called the Jollys -- Stephen old and untidy, Love, young and sulky, Henrietta extremely old. Among the family’s maunderings about their decayed past and gloomy present are found such lines as “There is something peculiar about this house. The pork sandwiches have gone bad....I admire pork. Yesterday I was misinformed by a gipsy at Sandown⁵⁰, today my daughter is being married to a steeplechaser.” Agate, who generally despised anything remotely serious in musical theatre, said “This is parody of the very highest order, and entitles Mr. Herbert to sit down even in the presence of Mr. Max Beerbohm.”⁵¹

Riverside Nights, for all its particular literacy and undoubted deepening of the form, remained firmly onside in another respect. Opening on 11th April and running into early 1927, it managed entirely to avoid the climate leading to the General Strike of early May 1926. That kind of satirical revue lay another decade in the future.

Musical Films: Bad News

Riverside Nights is also of considerable significance because its approach, which actually makes considerable intellectual demands upon its audience, began something that paralleled that of the small revues which were soon staged by Norman Marshall at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge and by the mid-Thirties were involved in making Charlot’s model even more intimate. Marshall said as much:

It was a time [1934] when intimate revue was ‘presumed dead’. The long line of brilliantly successful revues produced by Charlot and Archie deBear had come to an end....To re-create the type of show put on by these masters of revue was obviously impossible at the Gate....What we could do--or at least try to do--was to be topical, witty and satirical. Revue writers at that time were humorists rather than wits, and the Lord Chamberlain had successfully cured them of any ambitions they might ever have had of being satirists. The one exception was Herbert Farjeon....⁵²

⁵⁰ Then as now a significant stopping-place on the racing calendar, flat and jump alike.

⁵¹ Agate, “*Riverside Nights*”, *Op.Cit.*, 11-4-1926

⁵² N. Marshall, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

Marshall and Farjeon's version of revue is dealt with below. In his commentary, however, Marshall was inaccurate in one respect; Charlot had mounted his final comeback in 1933 with *How D'You Do?* and from then until his dismal departure after several "non-stop" revues in 1937, he served up the mixture as before in the same houses as before. But Marshall was wholly accurate overall. And it was not only revue which was in decline. Musical theatre in general had been badly harmed by the double-whammy of an economic situation which only worsened and the advent of musical motion pictures. Hulbert and Courtneidge were among the many who defected at least temporarily to film. In an effort to combat the apparent munificence of film Cochran went larger than ever before, taking on the Adelphi Theatre, reconstructing its proscenium to a width of 36 feet and adding revolving stages.⁵³ Cochran's revues also grew larger, notably the highly skilled *Streamline* (1934), a collaboration among Herbert, Ellis and Jeans. Despite excellent material and the best performers the period could buy, by 1937 Cochran had been forced into a two-a-day policy in order to combat the continuous showings at cinemas. Cochran's fortunes did not revive until the middle of the 1939-1945 war, when Beatrice Lillie made her patriotic return. Together with the upsurge in intimate revue at the Gate and Little theatres, Lillie's reappearance was as influential in West End revue as it had been on Broadway.

American Revue: the Lillie years

Although Charlot's physical presence was unnecessary to the remodelling of American revue, it is hard to imagine the process without Lillie and, on a more occasional basis, Coward. After 1925 generally based in the U.S. ("The jam was spread thicker in America", she later wrote)⁵⁴ Lillie followed her film debut with two Broadway musical comedies. She was already the critics' darling before co-starring

⁵³ Cochran's opening production at the Adelphi in 1930 was the musical comedy *Evergreen*; his duel with Charlot reached a peak when he changed its opening date so to beat Charlot's *Wonder Bar* onto the boards. *Wonder Bar*, with the Savoy Theatre essentially transformed into Sam Wonder's Bar, the cabaret venue of the play, was Charlot's expensive response to the depredations of the cinema. Well-reviewed, it lost money and led directly to Charlot's bankruptcy.

⁵⁴ Beatrice Lillie, *Every Other Inch a Lady*, p. 200.

with Coward in the New York production of Coward's *This Year of Grace* (1928). In retrospect it seems clear that American authors now contended to provide her with the highly literate kind of material she so ably handled in the intimate British revues. Consider this listing:

The Third Little Show (1931, sketches by Coward, S.J. Perelman⁵⁵ and Connolly)

Walk a Little Faster (1932, sketches by Perelman, lyrics by the political and economic radical E. Y. Harburg)

At Home Abroad (1935, sketches by Dietz and Connolly, Titheradge ("The Great White Sale", now Lillie's property, had become "A Dozen Double Damask Dinner Napkins") and Reginald Gardiner, whose numbers as well as his person had been recruited by Lillie herself from the 1932 London revue *Over the Page*.)

The Show Is On (1936, sketches largely by Moss Hart)⁵⁶

Happy Returns (1938, Hart)

Set To Music (Coward, the revision of his *Words and Music* 1939)

Seven Lively Arts (1944, Hart and Ben Hecht⁵⁷)

Inside USA (1948, largely Hart).

Only the best for Lillie, and Lillie was the best for American revue. *At Home Abroad*⁵⁸ can illustrate what had happened to American revue in the years following Charlot's invasion. A summary of its contents reveals that it was clearly a star vehicle for Lillie. But not one of the old style. The concept is a world cruise taken by Otis and Henrietta Hatrick. After an establishing opening, we are in a London department

⁵⁵ Perelman was a particularly brilliant satirist known mainly for his "essays" in *The New Yorker*, which was the natural habitat of many of the Algonquin circle. He had already collaborated on one Marx Brothers musical and went on to contribute to several of their films.

⁵⁶ Hart was from the Thirties to the early Sixties a most remarkable combination of author (his favoured theatrical collaborator was Kaufman) and producer. His theatrical autobiography, *Act One*, is often called the best of its genre.

⁵⁷ Hecht was a major novelist and playwright; his best-known works were his collaborations with Charles MacArthur, in particular *The Front Page* (1928 and many, many revivals.)

⁵⁸ Theatre programme and photographs, The Winter Garden, 19-9-1935 and gramophone record, Smithsonian Institution, R014.

store where Lillie and Gardiner perform “Two dozen double damask dinner napkins.” After a big “hottentot” song-and-dance starring the dynamic African-American Ethel Waters as the Empress Jones⁵⁹ who has brought all necessary civilisation (Chanel perfumes, Cartier rings, etc) to the jungle and a pretty Parisian dance, Lillie returns as a Moulin Rouge poster come to life. In his liner notes to a Smithsonian Institution reconstruction of *At Home Abroad*, Green says “In this ardent anthem to the glories of the city, the lyric so perfectly fits the Lillie style of coquettish mockery that the song (“Paree”) became her personal property, and no one else has ever dared to sing it in public.”⁶⁰

After an “emotional ballad of leave-taking” it is again Lillie’s turn. In “The Audience Waits”, we are in the dressing room of Sonia Polonariskaya, a premiere ballerina (a refugee from Russia who has come from Moscow to Omsk, from Omsk to Pinsk, but is now through fleeing (“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”) and will not dance until her lover arrives (“I could not face the mujik”). Finally she decides she can’t dance at all; her lover arrives and happily dances with her understudy. This is followed by Gardiner’s monologue “Trains”, showcasing its author’s ability to verbally anthropomorphise the trains of many nationalities. Another torch song for Waters is followed by the first act finale, in which Lillie and Herb Williams, roped together, hopefully climb the Matterhorn singing “O Leo!”

After a big Viennese production number on “Love is a Dancing Thing”⁶¹ Madcap Mitzi (Lillie) descends the spiral staircase of the Viennese set and boasts that she’s “the toast of Vienna, and most of Vienna can

⁵⁹ *The Emperor Jones* (1920) was among the earliest of Eugene O’Neill’s dramas which transformed the reputation of the American stage. In an expressionist manner, it showed the gradual psychological regression to a savage state of Brutus (“The Emperor”) Jones, an African-American who had gained control of a West Indian island.

⁶⁰ The number illustrates one of the differences which had been made in American revue. A lavish stage (and, of course, more famously a cinema) director such as *At Home Abroad*’s Vincente Minnelli could load up the previous Paris-set number, and Lillie could appear in the same set and with an apparently straight face demolish all pretentiousness. *At Home Abroad* was not a “small” revue; but its spirit, thanks to the legacy of intimate revue, was incisive.

⁶¹ Which shortly reappeared in *Follow the Sun*, a British revue by Dietz and Schwartz using much the same central concept.

boast they've been host of the toast of Vienna." A sketch about a rest home in Brussels where homesick New Yorkers are catered to is followed by Lillie and Gardiner's "You May Be Far Away From Me", where in a train station the romantic couple bid each other fond farewells, only to have the mood ruined by Gardiner's missing his train, whereupon the couple bicker energetically. Another rouser (set in Jamaica) for Ethel Waters precedes Gardiner, alone onstage, miming to all the Rhythm Boys⁶² singing "Mississippi Mud." Once more to Lillie, this time quite Japanned (and at first unrecognisable, wherein the humour of incongruity) in "Get Yourself a Geisha". A bullfighting ballet precedes Lillie's return in "Two in a Bar"; in this Americanisation of Titheradge's "Tea Shop Tattle", a cockney barmaid cooks her chances of being discovered for opera by verbally mistreating the man she thinks is a bum; he is actually a talent scout. "Got a Bran' New Suit"⁶³ featured Waters as maid and Eleanor Powell as her mistress in a toe-tapping paen to just going out for a good time. In the finale "Pomp and Peculiar Circumstance" there are gorgeous costumes and fanfares by buglers. In the depths of Slump and Depression, this fantastic tour of lands which were in fact undergoing all sorts of crises, was in one way an anachronism -- but a brilliant anachronism, thanks to the particular double-view bequeathed by its star and its writers.

American Revue: the decline of the huge

There is another way of measuring the alterations in American revue -- revue without Lillie. There follows an almost complete listing of Broadway revue during the 1930s:

The "big" (old-fashioned) ones:

Ziegfeld *Follies* -- only one, in 1931, though Ziegfeld's widow lent her name to several pastiches thereafter (Lillie was involved in one of those.)

Earl Carroll *Vanities* -- four, before Carroll left in 1938 for a new theatre-restaurant bearing his name in Hollywood.

⁶² A recently "hot" vocal trio composed of Harry Barris, Al Rinker and Bing Crosby.

⁶³ also destined for *Follow the Sun*.

George White's *Scandals* -- four, before essentially being made redundant by film musicals

In addition, there were four Lew Leslie revues -- three unremarkable editions of *Black Birds* and *The* (money-losing) *International Revue* (1930).

And the following "smaller" (and certainly more literate) revues:

1930-- *Nine Fifteen Revue* (sketches Ring Lardner, Anita Loos, etc.)⁶⁴
The Garrick Gaieties (Sterling Holloway, Carroll Carroll)
Hot Rhythm (an African-American revue)
The Second Little Show (Connolly and others)
Three's a Crowd (Dietz, Groucho Marx, Fred Allen, Corey Ford)⁶⁵

1931 *The Band Wagon* (Kaufman, Dietz)
Shoot the Works! (Broun, Parker, E.B.White, Peter Arno)⁶⁶
The Laugh Parade (Ed Wynn, the anarchic *Perfect Fool*)

1932-- *Ballyhoo of 1932* (lyrics by Harburg)
Flying Colors (Dietz, Kaufman, Ford)
New Americana (lyrics Harburg, Johnny Mercer)⁶⁷

1933-- *Strike Me Pink* (Lew Brown, Ray Henderson, Mack Gordon, Jack McGowan)⁶⁸
As Thousands Cheer (Hart)

1934-- *New Faces* (an expansion by Leonard Sillman of *Low And Behold*, a revue which had begun at the very small Pasadena (California) Playhouse in 1933)

Life Begins at 8:40 (Ira Gershwin, Harburg)
Thumbs Up! (included a sketch by Jeans)

1936-- *New Faces of 1936* (especially Nancy Hamilton)⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Lardner was a humourist, writer of mordant short stories and ex-sportswriter who gained additional fame as a dadaist playwright ("The curtain falls for seven days to indicate the passing of a week.) and Loos, among the earliest of important screen writers, was the expert on "gold diggers", the author of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

⁶⁵ Allen was one of the leading radio comics of his era; his approach was dry and satirical. Ford was a somewhat surreal, somewhat dead-pan humourist.

⁶⁶ This was virtually a *New Yorker* production. White was the magazine's stylist, a wry commentator on metropolitan values; Arno was its leading cartoonist.

⁶⁷ Mercer, one of the great lyricists of the century, sometimes had a wicked way with satire.

⁶⁸ They were among the leading song-writing teams of their era.

⁶⁹ Hamilton was involved in all the early *New Faces* shows; she was a gentle satirist who went on to become a successful theatrical producer.

1937-- Pins and Needles (Harold Rome, Marc Blitzstein, members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union) at the Labor Stage (formerly the Princess Theatre) 1108 performances, at the time a musical long-run record.

1938-- Sing Out the News (Kaufman and Hart)

1939--One for the Money (Nancy Hamilton)

Sing for Your Supper (Jack Murray, Rome)

The Straw Hat Revue (Max Liebman, Sylvia Fine)⁷⁰

So the longest-running American musical production of the 1930s, *Pins and Needles*, was an innovative, almost “amateurish” small revue.⁷¹

This “golden age” of American musical revue resumed following World War II, only to decline thereafter (most notably after Lillie’s valedictory *An Evening With Beatrice Lillie* (1953).

New Faces of 1952, the hopeful renewal of his series by Sillman, seems now a (perhaps unintentional) love letter to the kind of revue pioneered in Britain and given a “made in America” sheen. It serves as a useful conclusion to the American part of this thesis. Written by a number of authors otherwise engaged in creating a golden age of television comedy which would put paid to American revue -- Mel Brooks, Ronald Graham, Paul Lynde, June Carroll -- it was highly literate. (Perhaps best was a brilliant sending-up by Brooks of the current Arthur Miller classic, *Death of a Salesman* and bits of its dialogue which came to be cliches --“Well-liked” and “Attention must finally be paid.”) The opening of *New Faces* could have come straight from Charlot’s book. The cast assembled onstage and sang directly to the audience “You’ve never seen us before/We’ve never seen you before/What a pleasant place to finally meet/So much pleasanter than a busy street. We vocally take your hand and vocally shake your

⁷⁰ Liebman’s greatest fame came in the early 1950s, as producer of the most literate variety show in American television history, *Your Show of Shows*, which starred Coca and comic Sid Caesar. Fine was the wife of one of this revue’s stars, Danny Kaye; almost all the routines which subsequently made Kaye famous were written by Fine.

⁷¹ This during a decade boasting the most accomplished and enduring musical comedies of Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart and the most famed director of Broadway, George Abbott, as well as the Gershwins’ historic and prize-winning invasion of the fields of political satire and opera.

hand/ and ask you to regard this hullabaloo/ As our equivalent to how do you do/ How'd you do, Mr Balcony, How'd you do, Mrs Mezzanine, How'd you do, Lord and Lady Orchestra, you're the welcomest sight we've ever seen....."⁷²

The New Intimate British Revues

British intimate revue survived and renewed itself during the 1930s. Titheradge died in 1936. Although Jeans remained active in London theatre through the 1950s, his later works were mainly full-length comedies. Jeans's background in the Liverpool Repertory Theatre re-emerged in 1938 when, as part of the movement Marshall called the "other theatre", he took over, in partnership with J. B. Priestley, The London Mask Theatre, a small Westminster house, and helped guide it through two seasons of classics and new drama.

However, the kind of intimate revue eventually practised at the Gate and the Little did not depend upon "elder" practitioners and in fact drew heavily on a new generation of revue performers which had begun to assemble in *Ballyhoo* (1932)⁷³, a small show at the Comedy Theatre written by Charlot's protege Nesbitt and his collaborator William Walker with music by Braham. Aside from capturing -- according to *The Observer*, in a very smart way, the "lackadaisical gloom which is the dominant quality of British youth today" -- *Ballyhoo* had introduced the expatriate American dancer Walter Crisham, who proved for the next two decades to be as adaptable as a revue comic as he was flexible in motion. At the heart of *Ballyhoo* alongside the durable French comedian Leon Morton (a fitting tieback to the very first intimate revue) was Hermione Baddeley, a revue veteran since 1926, but here allowed freer rein; she was likened, in her ability to parody herself, to Courtneidge herself. *Ballyhoo* proved itself a transition to the new intimate revue.

Farjeon, a drama critic, had been producing "little" revues here and

⁷² Gramophone record, RCA Victor LOC 1008

⁷³ Theatre programme, Comedy Theatre, 22-12-1932

there around London and writing sketches and songs for others for some time⁷⁴ before he began producing at the 309-seat Little Theatre in the Adelphi. Marshall's Cambridge experience led him (and a number of his Festival Theatre staff) in 1934 to the similarly-sized Gate, virtually around the corner in Villiers Street. Despite the real luxury at the Gate of a "private" venue which did not need the Lord Chamberlain's approval and the apparent luxury of pleasing only the "members" who had subscribed to the season, Marshall records that only a rousing financial success at the close of the first Gate season would ensure its survival. He chose to do revue. Marshall wrote with a certain amount of pomposity in its programme,

The Gate, with its intimate atmosphere and sophisticated audience, is the ideal theatre for a satiric revue of the kind which originated abroad in theatres no larger than the Gate, such as the famous Theatre de Dix Heures in Paris, and the Gondole and Kolibiri in Berlin. The lack of opportunity for spectacle in a small theatre is perhaps no bad thing in these days when a revue often tends to become a series of variety turns, rather than a commentary on the events of the day by a small and versatile company....We think you will find *This Year, Next Year* gay, amusing, witty and impudent with some catchy music, attractive settings and clever dancing.⁷⁵

This Year, Next Year became the first annual Gate revue. Farjeon contributed several numbers to supplement those by recent Cambridge University graduates Diana Morgan and Robert MacDermot⁷⁶; the songs came from two products of Cambridge Footlights, Ronald Hill and Walter Leigh, the ballet music from another, Geoffrey Wright, while the small ballets (the most exotic being "The White Negro") were invented and danced by Hedley Briggs.

There were ten performers, headed by Gingold, Max Kirby and Charlotte Leigh, and two pianists involved in the 23-part programme. The admirably vague Gingold assumed various guises, including Paulette,

⁷⁴ Notably *Spread It Abroad* (1936), with music and lyrics by Walker, starring Crisham, Dickson, Gingold, Keys and others. It also introduced the Eric Maschwitz song "These Foolish Things", which became a Transatlantic favourite.

⁷⁵ Theatre programme, The Gate, 21-12-1934

⁷⁶ MacDermot and Morgan, a husband-and-wife team, were for the next 15 years the leading sketch writers of intimate revue.

the *Pride of the Plage*, and *The Carnival Queen of Golders Green*. There was a literary gardener, a literary racketeer, and a double-talking plea for Free Trade. The *Observer* critic Ivor Brown, noting several double entendres, seemed glad to say that the revue “fortunately mixes its blue paint with brains.” He went on to announce a principle which he apparently felt to be on the wane: “The theatre ought to be a vehicle of sharp social criticism.” (my emphasis) He marvelled that the cast seemed “to change their makeup and attire every five minutes.” He commended “the many and brilliant raids upon the ridiculous.”⁷⁷ After such reviews, *This Year, Next Year* played its eight-week holiday run to standing room audiences.

In following years, Marshall’s troupe created equally well-received Holiday revues. *This World Of Ours* (1935) won from Agate “swift and ingenious...[other theatres] should learn from the Gate Theatre how to be less elephantine...[it shows] words and wit and ideas.”⁷⁸ *Your Number’s Up* (1936) was more of a musical play about school life by Morgan and MacDermot which Agate found “in comparison with other plays on the same subject...of a devastating realism;”⁷⁹ *Members Only* (1937) added the flamboyant dancer-choreographer William Chappell to the company, as well as Richard Haydn, as ‘Mr. Edwin Carp, the one and only fish-imitator’. Evoking Charlot, one reviewer called it “a kind of family party”. The show that opened at the Gate on 20 December 1938 was simply called *The Gate Revue*, and it was under that title that it transferred to the Ambassadors in March 1939. In this show, written by Morgan and MacDermot, Gingold (“grey detachment out of which application appears”) Wright and other Gate veterans were joined by Crisham (a novel reader craving a happy ending, a petulant bubble dancer -- he was described as “an exquisite dancer who should dance more even if it means acting less....His demoniac eyebrows as the Lord Chamberlain in the opening, making sure the show will have nothing of Hitler, Stalin, sex or sin, beds, babies, nudies, panties, scanties or

⁷⁷ Ivor Brown, *The Observer*, 22-12-1934.

⁷⁸ Agate, *Op.Cit.* 1-3-1937 P 119

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

vesties”)⁸⁰ the future film star Michael Wilding and Carol Lynne⁸¹ There were The Stage Family Robinson (in five minutes showing how to act badly), Kensington Gore girls who “sally forth in simple black dresses...with silver fox and pearls to marry suitably and help their country”⁸² and an “Epilogue in Vienna”, a mad dance of death by the supple Crisham in the face of *Anschluss*. Intimate intimate revue engaged.

Over at the Little Theatre, the same sort of thing was going on, starting with *Nine Sharp* (1938) and some of the players were the same -- in particular Wright, Leigh and of course Farjeon. An equally brilliant series evolved, starring the other Hermione (Baddeley) and Cyril Ritchard. When the bombs wiped out both the Gate and the Little on 16 April 1941, their creators and performers continued, carrying intimate revue safely through the war and its aftermath. Although the larger West End venues of that era were once more swamped by American musicals, beginning with *Oklahoma!!* (1946) the theatregoer looking for something smart and sharply-edged continued to turn to intimate revue, right on through the 1950s.

But it should not be necessary to track performers such as Crisham, the two Hermiones and Ritchard, writer-performers like Michael Flanders and Donald Swann, producers like Laurier Lister and writers such as Alan Melville and Sandy Wilson⁸³ through those years of ever-more intimate revue in order to sense the line of descent from *Odds and Ends*, *Samples* and especially *Buzz Buzz*.

And then came television and in 1961 *Beyond the Fringe*, in 1962 *That Was the Week That Was*, and in 1963 *Cambridge Circus*. And that was virtually all there was, for British musical revue.

⁸⁰ *The Tatler*, 26-4-1939

⁸¹ Lynne’s *Washing Up to 199*”, managing to be both poignant and satirical about the new BBC move to popularise the classics that turned out to be Radio Three.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Wilson, the author of the long-running love-letter to 1920s American musical comedies *The Boy Friend* (1953), can be called the last writer of intimate musical revue.

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¹ I have listed the play scripts which undergird this thesis in chronological order. The Index numbers show variable coherence, owing to the overlapping systems used by the British Library. For one thing, the system of numbering these scripts -- which include the comments made by the "reader" in the Lord Chamberlain's office -- was changed after 1900. The dates accompanying the LCP numbers do not always correspond to a show's West End opening, since the Lord Chamberlain's man could have based his decision on an out-of-town performance. Since an author's name appears on only some of the scripts, I have chosen to omit all names.

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Little Jack Sheppard 53349
A Trip to Chinatown unnumbered
- 1899-- *Florodora* LCP 153; 53695
- 1903-- *The Linkman* unnumbered
- 1906-- *The Beauty of Bath* LCP 1906-9 (26-3-1906)
- 1907-- *The Follies* unnumbered
The Suffragette LCP 1907-6
Votes for Women LCP 1907-6
- 1912-- *Everybody's Doing It* LCP 1912-49 (5-2-1912)
A Guide to Paris LCP 1912-25 (22-5-1912)
Kill That Fly! LCP 1913-1 (10-1-1913)
The Follies (29-10-1912)
Hullo, Ragtime! LCP 1912-54 (20-12-1912)
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Come Over Here LCP 1913-12 (8-4-1913)
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The Kiss Cure LCP 1914-26 (6-8-1914)
My Friend Woodbine LCP 1922-12 (2-5-1922)

A Burlington Arcadian LCP 1914-25 (16-7-1914)
The Cambridge Gazette LCP 1914-6 (20-2-1914)
L'Impresario (16-2-1914)
Mam'selle Tralala LCP 1914-14 (14-4-1914)
Plantons Les Capucines LCP 1914-15 (5-5-1914)
Well I Never (20-7-1914)
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Bric a Brac LCP 1915-25 (13-9-1915)
The Passing Show LCP 1915-26 (2-10-1915)
Peaches 23-3677 (26-8-1915)
More 3534 (14-6-1915)
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5064 Gerrard 3264 10-3-1915)
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Push and Go 3372 (1-5-1915)
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Hullo, Repertory! 3488 (11-6-1915)
No Reflection on the Wife LCP 1915-26 (2-10-1915)

1916-- *Some* LCP 1916-33
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Cheer-Oh! Cambridge (the lyrics of the show) Private collection of Harry C. Porter, archivist of Footlights, Cambridge. Cambridge, 1913.

Theatre Programmes

"A to Z", Prince of Wales' Theatre, 11 October 1921

"Ballyhoo", Comedy Theatre, 22 December 1932

"Box O'Tricks", London Hippodrome, 3 December 1917

"Bran Pie", Prince of Wales Theatre, 28 August 1919

"Bubbly", Comedy Theatre, 5 May 1917

"Buzz Buzz", Vaudeville Theatre, 20 December 1918

"By George!: Coronation Revue", Empire, Leicester Square, September 1910

"Charlot's Revue", Prince of Wales', 23 September 1924

"Charlot's Revue, as Played in America", Prince of Wales', 30 March 1925

"Cheep!" Vaudeville Theatre, 26 April 1917

"Cochran's 1931 Revue", London Pavilion 19 March 1931

"The Co-Optimists", Royalty Theatre, 29 June 1921

"Eightpence a Mile: the New Stop Press Revue", Alhambra, Leicester Square, 9 May 1913

"Everybody's Doing It", Empire, Leicester Square, 1 March 1912

"Flying Colours", London Hippodrome, 16 September 1916

"Follow the Crowd", Empire, Leicester Square, 19 February 1916

“Folly To Be Wise”, Piccadilly Theatre, 8 January 1931
“5064 Gerrard”, Alhambra, Leicester Square, 19 March 1915

“The Gate Revue”, Gate Theatre 19 December 1938, Ambassadors Theatre 9 March 1939

“Hi Diddle Diddle”, Comedy Theatre, 30 October 1934

”Home and Beauty: the Coronation Revue”, Adelphi Theatre, 2 February 1937

“How D’You Do?”, Comedy Theatre, 25 April 1933

“Hullo, London!”, Empire, Leicester Square, 14 March 1910

“Jig Saw”, London Hippodrome, 6 August 1920

“Jumble Sale”, Vaudeville Theatre, 16 December 1920

“Just Fancy”, Vaudeville Theatre, 26 March 1920

“Keep Smiling”, Alhambra, Leicester Square, 24 June 1914

“Kill That Fly!”, Alhambra, Leicester Square, 14 October 1912

“League of Notions”, New Oxford Theatre, 17 January 1921

“London Calling”, Duke of York’s Theatre, 4 September 1923

“London, Paris and New York”, London Pavilion, 4 September 1920

“The Midnight Follies” at the Metropole, Whitehall Rooms, London SW1
4 December 1922

“Not Likely”, Alhambra, Leicester Square, 4 May 1914

“Now’s The Time”, Alhambra, Leicester Square, 13 October 1915

“Oh, Indeed!” Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, 16 March 1908

“Pierrot’s Christmas” and “Poached Eggs and Pearls”, Apollo Theatre, 21 November 1916

“Push and Go”, London Hippodrome, May 1915

“Puss, Puss!” Vaudeville Theatre, 14 May 1921

“Ring Up”, Royalty Theatre, 22 October 1921

“Rise Above It”, Queens Theatre, 8 January 1941

“Rogues and Vagabonds”, Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, 15 January 1906

“Samples”, The Playhouse, 30 November 1915

“See Saw”, Comedy Theatre, 14 December 1916

“Some (More Samples)”, Vaudeville Theatre, 29 June 1916

“Spread It Abroad”, Saville Theatre, 1 April 1936

“Streamline”, Palace Theatre, 28 September 1934

“Sweet and Low”, Ambassadors Theatre, 9 May 1943

“Tabs”, Vaudeville Theatre, 15 May 1918

“Tails Up”, Comedy Theatre, 1 June 1918

“Theatre de la Chauve-Souris: The Bat Theatre Moscow”, London Pavilion, 2 September 1921

“This and That”, Comedy Theatre, 15 September 1916

“Three Cheers”, Shaftesbury Theatre, 22 December 1916

“Under The Clock”, The Court Theatre, 16 November 1893

“U.S.”, Ambassadors Theatre, 28 November 1918

“Venus 1906”, Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, 14 May 1906

“Watch Your Step”, Empire, Leicester Square, 4 May 1916

“Zig Zag”, London Hippodrome, 31 January 1917

Gramophone Records

78 speed recordings (courtesy of Christopher South, Little Chesterford)

An Air Raid (Somewhere on the Coast) The Winner 3190

Army Reminiscences: Route March, Parts 1 and 1 The Roosters, with
Military Band Regal G9200

Arrival of the British Troops in France, Parts 1 and 2, (A. H. Brooks and H G Bideau) Regal G8814

The Birkenhead Spirit (An Incident at Sea) The Winner 3190

The Capture of the Emden Scala Military Band Scala 670A

A Cavalry Charge The Winner 2690

Christmas With Jack Parts 1 and 2 Male Chorus and Effects, Palace Military Band, Conductor Paul Broadhurst Eclipse SC62

Days of the Dugouts Parts 1 and 2 Bobbie Comber as Nobby Broadcast 544AB

Departure of a Troopship London Regimental Band Zonophone Serial 564

The German Submarine, Whitlock and Penrose The Winner 2791

Hiring a Taxi D'Albert and Whitlock The Winner 3356

A Motor Trip With Our Wounded Tommies Arthur Lord Regal G7266

A Sailor's Life The Winner 2690

The Soldier Son (Missing) Bluff, Whitlock and Co. The Winner 3070

The Soldier Son (Returned) Bluff, Whitlock and Co. The Winner 3070

Spies of the Kaiser Whitlock and Penrose the Winner 2791

Tommy and Jack Demobbed D'Albert and Whitlock The Winner 3356

A Voyage on a Troopship Scala Military Band Scala 670B

The Wreck of a Troopship London Regimental Band Zonophone Serial 564

A Zeppelin Raid "Somewhere in England" Arthur Lord Regal G7266

Long Playing Records:

At Home Abroad Smithsonian R014
London Revue Highlights Crescendo RSCT 112521
New Faces of 1952 RCA Victor LOC 1008
Revue 1912-1918 Parlophone (EMI) PMC 7145
Revue 1919-1929 Parlophone (EMI) PMC 7150
Revue 1830-1940 Parlophone (EMI) PMC 7154

Compact Discs:

Cabaret's Golden Age Vols. 1 and 2, Past (Flapper) CD 9727-28
The Glory of the Music Hall, Vols. 1, 2, 3 GEMM CD 9475-77.
Laughter on the Home Front, Past (Flapper) CD 7047
Treading the Boards Conifer CD 154

Radio Broadcasts

(These from National Sound Archive--their identifying number)

The Impresarios: Andre Charlot T2053R (1975 or 1979)
The Impresarios: Cockie! Charles Cochran T917W, T919W (1975)
Close Up: Beatrice Lillie P257R (23 5 1955)
The Time of My Life: Jessie Matthews P319R

(These not from NSA, but on file in BBC Radio Archives)

Buzz Buzz: The Lives of Andre Charlot : James Ross Moore BBC Radio
Two, 19 October 1993

Revue: Richard Anthony Baker BBC Radio Three, 21 November and 28
November 1993

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