1962

A History of Professional Theater in Dallas, Texas, 1920-1930.

Jackson Davis
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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Speech–Theater

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A HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL THEATER

IN DALLAS, TEXAS 1920-1930

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Speech

by

Jackson Davis
B.A., Central College, 1940
M.F.A., Yale University, 1947
August, 1962
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to present in detail a picture of professional theater activity in Dallas from January, 1920, through the end of the 1929-1930 season. Because it was the intention of the investigation to be as complete as possible, the study covers legitimate touring and musical roadshows, dramatic stock, vaudeville, tabloid shows, tent shows, minstrel shows, musical stock, the State Fair Musicals and concerts and recitals of a quasi-theatrical nature. Each is treated separately in five-year segments but common influences and trends are discussed. Contemporary Dallas newspapers, interviews and theater collections were the chief sources of information.

The dominant trend in the city during the decade was the gradual supplanting of live entertainment by the motion pictures. The Majestic Theatre, owned by Karl Hoblitzelle's affluent Interstate Company, was the only Dallas theater that had continuous vaudeville throughout the period. The Majestic, in 1923, added motion pictures and the other vaudeville houses switched early to the less expensive musical stock and tabloid shows and then to a straight picture policy.

When vaudeville started a period of renewed popularity in 1925, two large motion picture theaters, the Melba and the Palace, added stage shows but by 1930 the Melba had gone back to straight pictures and the Palace was experiencing difficulties.

The smaller theaters were unable to meet the rising costs of vaudeville and could not supply the name stars and quality productions.
which were demanded more and more by Dallas audiences as the decade proceeded. These theaters alternated between the less expensive tabloid and musical stock shows and by 1930 had all adopted straight movie policies.

The insistence on quality also affected dramatic stock. Popular in the city early in the decade and aided in 1923 by the construction of the Circle Theater specifically to house them, the dramatic stock companies, nevertheless, except for the summer stock Cycle Park troupe, were never able to complete a full season and after 1927 were seen in the city only intermittently. Their decline was accelerated by the more objective dramatic criticism that came about after John Rosenfield became the critic for the Dallas Morning News in 1925.

The decline of the road, coupled with Dallas' remote geographical location and the absence of suitable theaters in Dallas and the rest of Texas, combined to reduce progressively the number of touring legitimate and musical shows that came to the city. However, as the number declined, the quality both of the shows and of the actors definitely improved.

The construction of the 5,000-seat Fair Park Auditorium in 1925 brought better musical shows but by 1930 audiences were dropping off and the critics were complaining about its size and poor acoustics. However, the Auditorium proved a definite asset for the State Fair Shows. Operettas were successfully presented there during the Fair season from 1925 through 1929 and in 1930 the policy of bringing outstanding Broadway musicals was adopted.
The decline of stock, vaudeville, the minstrel shows and other live entertainment in Dallas during the decade paralleled nationwide developments. The city had less live entertainment in 1930 than in 1920 but its theater fare began to reflect the cultural revolution on Broadway. Dallas audiences became more sophisticated and increasingly resented the city's enforced provincial status. Vaudeville continued as long as it did at the Majestic because Karl Hoblitzelle had the resources to satisfy the growing cosmopolitan taste.
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The 1920-1930 decade is now far enough in the past to warrant its study by theater historians. The decade was one of critical importance in American entertainment. It was a time when the road all but disappeared and when dramatic stock virtually vanished from the American scene. During the latter years of the decade the sound motion pictures began their tremendous impact on legitimate entertainment but live entertainment in the motion picture houses, virtually non-existent today, flourished across the nation. There were many kinds of live entertainment in the 1920-1930 decade, some of which like the tabloid shows and musical stock have ceased to exist. In an attempt to describe the professional stage entertainment of the period, the writer has selected Dallas, Texas, both because theater activity during the decade in that city has not previously been subjected to scholarly scrutiny, and also because the various types of shows presented in Dallas may be said to have been typical of those seen in other cities in most sections of the nation.

The purpose of this study is to draw in detail as complete a picture as possible of all the professional entertainment in Dallas during the ten-year period. The writer has been constantly aware of the larger societal and artistic implications of such things as attendance totals, trends in entertainment, theater construction, censorship problems, and even of the space allotted in the newspaper
columns to particular shows. He has made some attempt to indicate, where possible, the role these played in the Dallas theatrical scene, but primarily he has been concerned with the shows themselves—with the names of shows and the performers and with the critical reactions. The writer hopes that his study may spur other researchers to investigate the complex cultural and societal factors that must be taken into consideration if a study in depth of entertainment during the decade is to be made.

In this study a departure is made from the approach that has been used in similar studies of professional theater activities in other American cities. The procedure in other studies has been to treat in detail those presentations that have been traditionally considered to be professional in nature, i.e. legitimate road shows and resident stock companies. Those two types of presentation are treated in detail in this study also but this writer has also discussed other forms of stage entertainment such as vaudeville, tabloid shows, musical stock, and the mixed forms of live entertainment shown in motion picture houses during the 1920's. The writer has also treated tent shows, minstrel performances, and those concerts and personal appearances by such well-known entertainers as Al Jolson and Will Rogers where the entertainment was more akin to vaudeville or drama than to the musical field. It is the belief of this writer that a complete picture of Dallas professional entertainment cannot be gained unless these forms of entertainment, usually disregarded in studies of the professional theater, are also included. To this end also, he has treated in detail the State Fair Shows which were such an important facet of Dallas' theatrical life during the decade.
Although the major emphasis in this study is on the presentations themselves, the writer, in an attempt to show trends and to relate the period to what came before and what followed, has devoted some space to related factors such as the theater buildings, the changing policies of the theater managers, theater prices, theatrical mergers, the impact of the motion pictures and radio, shifts in public taste, censorship and other background information.

Limitations of Study

Because the study is limited to professional theater, the writer has not felt it necessary to discuss musical concerts, recitals and operas, although he is aware that Dallas was the scene of extensive musical activity during the decade under consideration. For the same reason, amateur theater has also been omitted even though the writer recognizes fully the importance of the Dallas Little Theater both in helping build an audience for the better touring shows and in determining the choice of plays by the resident stock companies.\(^1\)

Choice of Period

As has already been indicated, the 1920-1930 decade in Dallas, as elsewhere in the nation, marked a significant turning point in

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American theater development. Bounded by two great social upheavals—World War I and the depression—the ten-year period was one of sharply eddying public tastes and of great change in the entertainment field.

If the experience in Dallas was typical of that in other American cities, then the overriding trend in the country was one away from live theater and toward the motion pictures. It was during this decade in Dallas that the number of touring shows coming to the city declined drastically in number but improved greatly in quality. The construction of the big downtown motion picture houses came in the early years of the ten-year period and the State Fair Auditorium was built in 1925. The 1920's started with vaudeville, the tabloid shows and musical stock firmly entrenched and ended with these forms of entertainment virtually gone from the city. Dramatic stock flourished in the early years of the decade in Dallas, but by 1930 it, too, had practically disappeared. The minstrel shows, too, flickered out before the period had ended.

All of this was highlighted against the growth of Dallas to metropolitan status and the demands of the dwindling, but more highly sophisticated playgoing audiences, for theater fare of a more finished and artistically satisfying kind. The writer is of the opinion that subsequent studies will show that entertainment developments in Dallas during the decade paralleled those elsewhere in the nation. He has been guided also in

his selection of Dallas as a subject of study by the fact that professional theater in the city prior to the 1920-1930 period has already been the subject of research.  

**Sources**

The principal source for the information used in this study has been Dallas newspapers of the period. This information was supplemented and clarified through personal interviews with Dallas newspaper critics and theater people and by reference to general works on the period and to the few magazine articles that deal specifically with Dallas entertainment in the 1920's.

Newspapers consulted were the Dallas Morning News, the Dallas Daily Times Herald, and the Dallas Journal. It should be mentioned at this point that it was the original intention of the writer to extend his study through the 1930 period, and although space limitations precluded this effort, the writer did consult the Dallas Morning News not only for the entire 1920 decade but also through the following ten-year period making it possible for him to view the period selected with

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3 The Dallas Opera House was the center of professional theater activity in Dallas prior to 1920 and has been studied by Henry Barton, "A History of the Dallas Opera House, with a Day Book for Seasons, 1901-1902 to 1910-1911, unpublished M.A. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1935; and by Mrs. Lucile Blondelle (Brown) Kennedy, "A History of the Dallas Opera House," unpublished M.A. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1940.

4 The Journal was under the same ownership as the Dallas Morning News and served as the afternoon edition of that newspaper. The name of the Dallas Daily Times Herald has since been changed to Dallas Times Herald. There was one other newspaper in the city during the 1920's, the Dallas Dispatch. It went out of existence in the early 1930's, and its back files were destroyed. Neither the Dallas Public Library nor the Southern Methodist University Library had back copies in their files.
more perspective and to make reference to theater developments started in the 1920's which reached culmination after the decade had ended.

The Dallas Morning News proved by far the most useful of the papers consulted because of its more extensive coverage of theater events. Perhaps the principal reason for this greater coverage was the bigger circulation enjoyed by the News. In 1921, for example, the News had a daily circulation of 61,057 and a Sunday circulation of 97,096. Its nearest rival, the Times Herald, had a daily circulation of 50,614 and Sunday circulation of 50,938. The Journal's circulation for the same year was 11,182, and for the Dispatch, 27,103. Neither of these papers had Sunday editions. By 1930, the News circulation had gone up to 89,055 daily, and 102,305 for Sunday. The daily circulation of the Times Herald stood at 63,432, and 61,016 on Sunday; the Dispatch at 36,308; and the Journal at 44,117.

The News led in other respects:

The South and West, with more slowly developing industrial economies, small populations, and fewer major cities did not match the East and Middle West in producing newspapers which could win the highest possible ranks in the estimate of the craft, but they did produce several dailies which stood well up in the profession. . . . In the Southwest, the Dallas Morning News, which Ted Dealey inherited in 1916 from his father George, maintained leadership on the basis of its extensive news coverage and civic mindedness.

Another writer observed that "George Dealey . . . in his seventy-two years of association with the News at Galveston and Dallas was

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destined to carry on and broaden its traditions to make it one of the great newspapers of America."  

The interviews, as stated, served more to give the writer a point of view toward his material and an overall perspective of Dallas theater as it has evolved since the 1920's than specific factual data. The most fruitful of the interviews were with John Rosenfield, Amusements Editor of the Dallas Morning News, and with Virgil Miers, Amusements Editor of the Dallas Times Herald. Frank Starz, veteran showman associated with Interstate Theatres, provided much interesting data concerning the policies of Interstate during the 1920's and David Russell, Professor of Speech at Southern Methodist University, gave useful background information on the Dallas Little Theatre. Data about the State Fair Auditorium and the new Municipal Auditorium was obtained from Thad Ricks, the head of public relations for the State Fair Music Hall, and from Ray Belden, a city employee in charge of operations for the new Municipal Auditorium. The writer also interviewed Lawrence Kelly, general manager of the Dallas Opera Association, and Mrs. Zelma Naylor, box office manager for Theatre '59, formerly the Margo Jones Theatre. In addition, the writer also talked by telephone with a number of Dallas theatergoers who had seen shows presented during the 1920's. The writer also went through the theater collections at the Dallas Public Library and at Southern Methodist University and re-recorded a tape made of a meeting of the Dallas Philological Society in June, 1958, in which several persons prominent in Dallas entertainment spoke on "The Growth of the Theater in Dallas."

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None of the general works on theater in America during the 1920's contained specific reference to Dallas and were therefore most useful in giving the writer a broad perspective against which to view the entertainment developments in the city. The most useful, with regard to the playwrights of the period, were Gagey's Revolution in American Drama; Duffus' The American Renaissance; Bentley's The Dramatic Event, an American Chronicle; Flexner's American Playwrights 1918-1938; and Elmer Rice's The Living Theatre. Material about vaudeville and vaudevillians was available in Douglas' American Vaudeville, Its Life and Times; Green and Laurie's Show Biz, from Vaude to Video; and Laurie's Vaudeville; from the Honky Tonks to the Palace. Background information concerning the musical comedies was found in Marks' They All Sang, from Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallee; Ewen's Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre; and Isaacs' The Negro in the American Theatre. General information about other types of professional entertainment was available in Revett's A Minstrel Town; Seldes' The 7 Lively Arts; Taylor, Peterson, and Hale's A Pictorial History of the Movies; and Sobel's A Pictorial History of Burlesque. More specific information dealing with Dallas was obtainable from Margo Jones' Theatre-in-the-round; Rogers' The Lusty Texans of Dallas; Howard's Big D is for Dallas; Santerre's Dallas' First Hundred Years 1856-1956; Sharpe's C. B. Dealey of the Dallas News; and Henshaw and Dale's Economic Survey of Dallas County, Texas. In addition, a number of more general works on the theater were consulted.

The Organizational Plan of the Study

This dissertation is divided into two major sections, one dealing with Dallas professional theater from January, 1920, to the
start of the 1925-1926 season, and the other treating the next five seasons. Although such a division is largely arbitrary, it is somewhat justified by the fact that the year 1925 marked the peak of post-war prosperity. Another justification for the division is that John Rosenfield became Amusements Editor for the Dallas Morning News during the summer of 1925, and almost immediately upon his taking over the post, the extent of theatrical coverage in the News, and the quality of criticism not only in the News but also in the city's other newspapers, sharply improved.

The order of chapters in each section is essentially the same. Each section begins with a discussion of some of the economic, social and cultural factors that played a role in the course of professional theater in the city during the half-decade under consideration. Because it was during the early years of the decade that the city's big theaters were built, this aspect of theater economics is stressed at the start of the first section and is followed by the agitation by Dallas citizens that led to the construction of the State Fair Auditorium. The introductory chapter of the second section is concerned with the onset of the depression, the giant mergers, the problem of censorship, the influence of the sound motion pictures, and the part played by the State Fair Auditorium and McFarlin Auditorium in the city's professional theater from 1925 to 1930.

After these introductory chapters, both sections proceed in somewhat parallel manner from a consideration of dramatic stock companies to the legitimate and musical roadshows. Then follows the discussions of stage entertainment in the motion picture houses, proceeding from theaters with traditional vaudeville to those with stage
entertainment of the musical stock and tabloid variety. Chapters on the Texas State Fair Shows and on such lesser forms of entertainment as the minstrel shows and tent shows end each section.

The writer has chosen to follow through each type of entertainment, i.e. legitimate road shows, touring musicals, vaudeville, for a five-year period, rather than proceed on a year-by-year basis for all the activities. He has done this partly for convenience and partly because he feels that in this manner the separate trends in each entertainment form can best be observed.

The Setting for the Study

Dallas was first settled in 1841, and by 1870, was already beginning to prosper. But it was not until the first railroad came to the city in 1872 that the city's real growth began. Both Dallas and Fort Worth became transportation centers for the North Texas agricultural area, and industrial growth followed. By 1890, Dallas had become the biggest inland cotton market in the world, and by 1930, was second in the state in industrial output. Since 1905, the city has held a position of leadership in wholesale trade and banking, and even in those early years showed tendencies of being more of a commercial than an industrial center.

Already in the 1920's, Dallas was noted as a cotton market, as a publishing and bookselling center, a center of telephone and telegraph activity, and as a city where the principal skyscrapers were banks. Dallas, during the decade, was a Baptist stronghold, a fashion center, the headquarters for the regional offices of many national businesses and government agencies, and was widely known as a "money" town. It had
more women than men and a largely native-born population. The city’s population increased from 158,976 in 1920 to 261,010 in 1930.

During the 1920-1930 period, the First National Bank was built (1920); the city’s first radio station, WRR, was opened (1921); and the Baker Hotel, described as "the finest hotel in the state," began operations (1926). By 1926, the city’s corporate area included more than forty-two square miles. Dallas got its first NBC broadcast in 1927 and the new Federal Building and the Dallas Fair Park football stadium, seating 45,000 were completed in 1929. By the end of 1930, the city was experiencing the worst depression in its history.

As for the major entertainment developments in the city prior to 1920, the city's first theater, Field's Opera House, was built in 1873 and attracted a number of traveling stock companies and major performers. The Cycle Park Casino was the scene of resident stock activity as early as 1899 and in 1916 Gene Lewis and Olga Worth began their seasons of summer stock in the theater. Field's Opera House burned down in 1901 and was rebuilt a year later. By 1916, it was taken over by Karl Hoblitzelle and became the first Majestic Theater.

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11 See George H. Santerre, Dallas' First Hundred Years 1856-1956 (Dallas: Book Craft, 1956), Unnumbered pages.

12 Ibid.

13 See Chapter I for more complete discussion.
The first Dallas State Fair was held in 1886 and its annual show became an important part of the Dallas theatrical season. Attendance at the State Fair climbed to 75,000 by 1905, and by 1918, State Fair Park included one hundred and forty-five acres.\textsuperscript{14}

The 1920's provided the dynamics that were to erupt in Dallas into such significant theatrical projects as the Margo Jones Theater and the Dallas Theater Center. The writer hopes that this study of theater in Dallas during the 1920's will shed light on the trends that led to such developments, and that though the study is concentrated on Dallas, it may add its small contribution to the understanding of American theater as a whole.

\textsuperscript{14} Santerre, op. cit., Unnumbered pages.
SECTION I

THE GOLDEN YEARS OF VAUDEVILLE 1920-1925
CHAPTER I

THE PHYSICAL THEATER TAKES FORM

The 1920-1923 period was one of physical growth for Dallas theater. It was during these years that the present big downtown theaters, the Majestic at 1925 Elm Street, the Melba at 1913 Elm Street, and the Palace at 1625 Elm Street, were constructed. They were all built during a flurry of activity that lasted until the end of 1923. In these same three years, three other smaller theaters were built either in or near the downtown section—the Capitol, a movie house; the Happyland, a "tab" playhouse; and the Circle Theater, built for legitimate productions. Except for the conversion of the 1

1 Called the Hope Theater when first constructed. The name was subsequently changed to the Melba, and in the late 1950's to the Capri.

2 Torn down in 1959. This Capitol Theater is not to be confused with the Capitol Theater which was the new name given the old Majestic Theater at Main and St. Paul Streets when the new Majestic was opened, and which was damaged by fire on December 27, 1921 and never reopened.

3 The "tab" show was the theatrical vernacular for the tabloid show, an inferior type of variety program that used an abbreviated and distorted musical comedy plot. The tabloid shows were usually done in theaters that charged 10¢, 20¢, and 30¢ for admission. These "ten-twenty-thirt" houses, as they were called, were popular after World War I, but gradually disappeared in the late 1920's.

4 Located at 318 North St. Paul Street, this theater became the Joy, a movie house, after World War II.
Old Mill into the Rialto Theater in 1935\(^5\) and the construction of the Tower Theater by Interstate,\(^6\) this was the last major building program of downtown theaters down to the present day.\(^7\)

**The Majestic**

Construction work on the new Majestic Theater began in February, 1920. The theater is located eighty-five feet west of Harwood Street on Elm Street and was constructed on what was then a vacant lot between the Rodgers-Myers and the Hart Furniture Stores. The theater has a frontage of one-hundred and ten feet and a two-hundred foot depth running through to Pacific Avenue.\(^8\) The original estimate of the construction cost was $800,000. An announcement in the *News* on February 15, 1920, said about the proposed theater:

> The structure will be four stories high, fireproof, and will seat more than 3,000 persons. Except for three stores which will occupy the space on the lower floor, the building will be devoted exclusively to purposes of the theater.

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\(^5\) The Old Mill Theater was located at 1525 Elm Street.

\(^6\) The 1,500-seat Tower Theater, opened by Interstate on Friday, February 19, 1937, is still in operation. The Interstate Amusements Company, of which Karl Hoblitzelle was president, was the owner of the Majestic Theaters in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth, and was the most powerful theatrical group in Dallas throughout the decade under discussion. Interstate also leased theaters in a number of other Southern and Southwestern cities and owned theaters in Wichita, Kansas, and in Chicago. The company also booked vaudeville acts for a number of theaters in the South. Under Hoblitzelle's direction, Interstate introduced vaudeville to Texas and other Southern cities and introduced the popular-priced, two-a-day shows. Hoblitzelle was also the first theater owner in the country to put air conditioning into his theaters, enabling his Majestic theaters to operate throughout the year.

\(^7\) Spring, 1961. The construction of the Dallas Civic Auditorium in 1959 cannot be considered a theater project.

\(^8\) The first Majestic Theater, located at St. Paul and Commerce Streets, was destroyed by fire in 1916. The Majestic then occupied the Old Opera House at Main and St. Paul Streets.
A special mezzanine balcony will be constructed which will contain boxes with comfortable seats, where smoking will be permitted. This balcony will be ventilated so that smoke will not affect any other part of the house.

The stage will be large enough to accommodate any type of show, including grand opera, and will have the advantage of the most complete equipment that modern ingenuity in stage building has devised.²⁹

The cornerstone to the new theater was laid on March 26, 1921. The Times Herald¹⁰ carried the following description of the occasion:

While one hundred or more prominent Dallas men and women looked on, pretty Mrs. Karl Hoblitzelle, wife of the Interstate Amusement company's president, laid and sealed the cornerstone of the new Majestic theater Saturday noon. Mrs. Hoblitzelle wielded the trowel in place of Mary Garden, Chicago Grand Opera star who was called suddenly to Houston.

An impressive ceremony marked the cornerstone laying. Pronouncing the invocation, Rabbi Lefkowitz paid a high tribute to the theater's builder, and declared good theaters essential to every big city.

"Stores do not make a city," he said. "Man needs churches for worship. He needs art galleries for beauty. He needs theaters for joy and laughter and recreation. What would a great city be without its theaters?"

Mayor Wozencraft pointed out the value of a greater theater to its community, declaring every city is known by the amusements it offers.¹¹

On the cornerstone of the building was inscribed the words:

"Dedicated to art, music and wholesome entertainment in grateful recognition of the support always given me by the People of Dallas." Below this appeared the name of Karl Hoblitzelle.¹²

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¹⁰In 1921, this newspaper was known as the Daily Times Herald. It is now called the Dallas Times Herald.

¹¹Times Herald, Sat., Mar. 26, 1921, I, 1

¹²News, Sat., Mar. 26, 1921, 4. Karl Hoblitzelle was the founder of the Interstate Amusement Company in 1905—a corporation which became a potent influence in Dallas theatrical life.
The original estimate of $800,000 proved far too conservative. Before it was completed, the theater cost approximately $2,000,000.

Prior to the official opening of the theater on April 11, 1921, the famous singer and opera manager, Mary Garden, came to Dallas and was taken on a tour of the theater. She was ecstatic in her praise of the interior, but criticized the boxes on grounds that they detracted from the performance. "People should come to the theater to see," she commented, "and not to be seen."\(^{13}\)

Advertisements in the newspapers hailed the opening as comparable to that of the Coliseum at Rome. The opening was described in the advertisements as "the culmination of a dream—that gives Dallas the finest Vaudeville Show west of New York City."\(^{14}\)

The opening of the theater was heralded by special sections in both the *News* and the *Times Herald*. The *News* account of the opening was as lavish as the theater it described:

> With its richly ornate lobby—its brilliant foyer and its magnificent auditorium blazing the scintillating rays of more than a thousand electrics, the great bay of the orchestra banked with countless baskets of flowers whose fragrance and elegance vied with the marble and gold of the wall motif, and a gathering of the society of the Southwest in one of the most brilliant social events in the history of Dallas, the new $2,000,000 Majestic Theater threw its doors open to the public for its premiere at 8:15 last night.

> From the hours of 7 o'clock when the mirrored doors of the auditorium were thrown open for the public's inspection many thousands of people who had been unable to get tickets for the opening night filed through the wonderful new show place in an endless stream, simply to view the interior of the theater built by Dallas interests and called by Mary Garden and Olga Petrova the finest house outside of New York City.

\(^{13}\)[*News*, Sat., Mar. 26, 1921, 4.]

\(^{14}\)[*News*, Sun., Mar. 7, 1921, II, 5.]
The new Majestic . . . represents the consummation of two dreams—one the sixteen year's dream of Karl Hoblitzelle to give Dallas the finest theater money could build to house the Interstate circuit—the other the life-long dream of Otto Mitchell, Chicago decorator, to one day incorporate in some house somewhere the salient features of all the greatest theaters the world has ever seen.

The great electric sign, reputed the largest in the South, blazed the headliners of the opening $12,500 bill from a height that could be seen for the entire length of Elm street. The big animated flash sign was proudly topped by the famous Majestic bird that suavely maintained his precarious poise upon a whirling ball that flashed all the colors of the rainbow in its revolutions.

Through the mirrored doors that lead to the foyer could be seen the waters of the Vatican fountain playing softly over the dolphins and cupids that are prominent in the decorative scheme. Ferns and cut flowers had been banked so thickly about these figures that they were all but obscured. Flowers were also everywhere in evidence along the walls and stairways—great baskets of roses and lilies and carnations that flashed their brilliance in colorful contrast to the ivory and gold of the walls and ceilings. Most of these baskets were congratulatory messages from the various business houses of the city or the personal friends of the Majestic officials. . . .

One of the most beautiful things about the foyer is the wonderful lighting effects. Chandeliers of the Louis XIV pattern depend [sic] from the ceiling, their cut-glass pendants reflecting the glory of the high-powered lamps that are concealed above. The entrancing effects of these lights, the solid white of the walls, the sheen of the gilded ornaments reflected in the depths of the massive wall-length mirrors is an unforgettable one.

The auditorium of the new house offers several distinctive features. The pitch of the floor is such that every seat in the long sweep of rows gives an excellent view of the stage and of every foot of the stage. There are no posts, there are none anywhere in the house, which is a feature seldom found in a very large auditorium. The seats are comfortable, roomy and spaced with enough room between the rows that passing is easy and the occupant is afforded the maximum of comfort.

The boxes . . . were copied from the Italian and they present long conservative streams of white with massive Corinthian columns crowned with gold. Their guards were marble balustrades done in plainest white but ornamental and impressive in the extreme.

The perimeter of the ceiling is marked by artistic lattice work draped and intertwined with colored vines and flowers to give the effect of a garden wall, which it does wonderfully. . . . A lighting system is so arranged that effects of the afternoon or the deepest night can be most realistically portrayed by merely playing the light switches. . . .
The balcony of the new theater is really a loge floor. It isn't of unusual depth, the ceiling seems unusually low, but it gives a comprehensive view of every foot of the stage from any seat in it, and the art of the architect is most strikingly given in the manner that the seats to either side of the motion picture operators' booth so neatly clear the corners of the booth in their perspective.

The gallery, which is in reality the balcony, is one of the wonders of the new house. Its long sweep of seats is striking. It seats more people than the main auditorium, and the topmost seat has a range of vision as long as the depth of the block from Elm to Pacific, yet the view from the top row is perfect and the acoustics of the house are so perfected that even a whisper on the stage is audible. The decorative scheme is faithfully carried out, even to the farthest stretches of the gallery, the landscape effect being shaded into the . . . walls and completely harmonized with the general decorative scheme of the auditorium.15

The heating and air cooling systems used in theaters early in the 1920's were described in the Times Herald:

When $300,000 is spent on heating and ventilating machines for a Texas audience, and $100,000 alone on the new Majestic in Dallas, it goes without saying that the heating and ventilating plant must be of some magnitude. That is decidedly the case with the Interstate Amusement Co. . . . The new Majestic is the last word in modern heating and ventilation construction. Practically and theoretically, there are two plants— one on the roof of the New Majestic . . . pumps the pure air into the theater— one in the basement . . . takes the impure air out of the theater. . . . No one would know they were there for in the building of the theater false walls have been erected at the back of the basement auditorium that allows the air to steal through unawares. It may be hot air or it may be cool— but whichever it is it makes eternal springtime in the new Majestic.16

The Majestic supplement in the Times Herald carried other details about the rococo decorative scheme of the theater:

The vast auditorium that seats 3,000 people is an exact reproduction of "The Roman Forum."

Overhead a million twinkling stars tell you that velvety night has come— that in front of you— on a stage unobstructed

15 News, Tues., Apr. 12, 1921, 12.
16 Times Herald, Sat., Apr. 2, 1921, 6.
by a single post, the highest grade vaudeville performers have been summoned to entertain you.

All about you are flowers, fragrant with the first kiss of spring. In the background—in dim relief are forests—a vision of Mount Vesuvius—a hint of singing birds. 17

There was an unusual feature in the new theater—a playroom for children. The Majestic was the first theater in the nation to have such an innovation. 18 The Times Herald described the playroom as follows:

Did you ever hear of a theater in the entire country that gave 60 feet by 48 feet over to a playground for the kiddies? . . .

Inside there will be a merry-go-round with the horse all ready to leap forward at the starter's signal. There will be a real Cinderella's coach, all red and gold, with four cream white ponies, champing at their bits. Two liveried footmen hold the restraining reins in their hands and drive proudly through the streets with Cinderella dressed in silver cloth. . . .

In another part of the playground there is a miniature Robert Louis Stephenson's [sic] Treasure Island. . . .

There will be an aviary, alive with singing birds, starting with the golden throated canary to the shrill cockatoo of South American origin. There will be animal cages with the most attractive of animals that children love, Bre'er Rabbit the Cotton Tail, the squirrels and a dozen others.

Then down the street, directly in the center of the theater, will be old fashioned lamps, the kind one saw in the early days of England when the curfew law was still in use. These lamps, faintly illumined, lead the way to the dolls' house, a veritable little palace, with telephones, bath tubs and every modern furnishing one would find in a grown-up home.

There are many toys, walking dolls, dancing dolls, squeaking animals and bears and toads and spiders stuffed so that nobody can get hurt. . . .

And then down off in a quiet nook is the nursery for the little ones. A little house sheltered and dim with soft lights so the little ones may sleep soundly and well. Little beds with snow-white linens, trained nurses in charge. That is the feature of the nursery. A place where every mother can leave

17 Times Herald, Tues., Apr. 12, 1921, Majestic Supplement.

her babies during the show with an easy conscience. No charge is made for this service as no charge is made for any service.\textsuperscript{19}

All seats in the new theater were reserved.\textsuperscript{20} With the construction of the new Majestic, the general offices of Interstate Amusements were moved from Chicago to Dallas to the new structure.\textsuperscript{21}

The new Majestic Theater was to prove the most significant theater in Dallas during the next forty years. It was there that vaudeville was to have its longest stay in the city, and it was also the Majestic which was to house many of the legitimate productions during the 1930's. The theater marked the start of genuine big-time activities for Karl HoblitzeUe and his Interstate company. HoblitzeUe was to remain the most important person in theater in Dallas for the next three decades.\textsuperscript{22}

The Palace Theater

In the Spring of 1920, construction also began on the Palace Theater, originally due to be called the National. Built for the Hulsey interests, controllers of Southern Enterprises, the new theater was originally supposed to cost between $600,000 and $800,000,\textsuperscript{23} but the

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Times Herald}, Sun., Apr. 3, 1921, III, 6.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{News}, Tues., Apr. 26, 1921, 4.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{News}, Sun., Apr. 17, 1921, III, 9.
\textsuperscript{22} HoblitzeUe introduced vaudeville to Texas and other Southern states. He introduced to the Southwest the popular-priced, two-a-day shows and was the first theater owner to introduce air conditioning, making it possible for theaters to operate the year around. He was the first theater operator in the Southwest to install sound equipment in his theaters. \textit{News}, Fri., Aug. 1, 1941, 15.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{News}, Sun., Feb. 15, 1920, 1, 15.
cost eventually reached $1,000,000.²² Located on Elm Street, west of Ervay, the theater had a seating capacity of 2,800, larger than the combined capacities of the Queen, Hippodrome and Old Mill Theaters, making it the largest motion picture theater in Dallas and one of the biggest in the South.

The interior is arranged with a parquet of unusual width, with a tier of gradually rising boxes circling both sides of the lower seating space. The first floor and the boxes seat 2,000. The balcony provides 800 more. On both sides of the screen are small stages, shut off from the parquet. The miniature stages will be devoted to the use of singers and instrumentalists which will interlard the picture program at the theater from time to time.

Present plans provide for an orchestra of forty pieces. The pit or rostrum lies directly in front of the screen, slightly lower than the stage of the parquet floor. In addition to the unusually large orchestral music provision, the theater will be equipped with a large echo organ, containing three echo organs and two main chambers.²⁵

The new theater had entrances both on Elm Street and Pacific Avenue and was intended for the showing of Paramount pictures and comedies only. Vari-colored lights distributed on the main floor and balcony were operated with the pictures. Storm scenes, for instance, could be accompanied by appropriate lighting effects. The stage was a duplicate of the Rivoli Theater in New York. Over the entire stage there was a curtain which fell behind the organ and the orchestra pit. In front of the pit there was a third curtain which, when down, cut off the stage from the spectators. The purpose of this arrangement was to provide for a gradual showing, first of the orchestra, then of the organ, and finally of the stage. The orchestra pit was inclined so that

²² Times Herald, Sun., June 12, 1921, I, 1.
the leader could look forward and upward to the players instead of to the right and left, as would be necessary if they were on the same level. The theater had four assistant managers, each assigned to various parts of the building, and all parts of the theater were connected by an intercom system. The theater also had a registering machine which made it possible for the person in the box office and elsewhere in the building to know what part of the picture was being shown and how much of it remained. This made it possible not only to give accurate information at the box office but also to have more accuracy in the music cues.26

The predominating architectural scheme of the Palace was in the Georgian style and the color motif was that known in designing circles as "Cafe au lait."27 Laurence (Buddy) Stuart was selected as the first managing director of the Palace. He had on his staff a chief usher, thirty-two ushers and pages, doormen, captains and attendants, all adding up to a total personnel of sixty-six employees. The theater was much like the Capitol Theater of New York in its design.28 One of the predominating features was the use of various types of marble. In the vestibule Tennessee gray was used for the floor and part of the walls. The lobby had MacMillan gray in the walls and floor and both MacMillan and white marble were used on the floor in terrazzo panels. Scagliola marble was employed in the auditorium in the Roman balustrade around

27Times Herald, Fri., June 3, 1921, I, 8.
and behind the loges and was also employed on the walkway beneath the colonnade at either side of the house.\textsuperscript{29}

The theater also had a private projection room for the use of the manager and the musical conductor where they could prepare musical accompaniments, scores, programs, prologues, and could time the pictures and synchronize the music.\textsuperscript{30} The cornerstone of the Palace was laid on March 1, 1921, in a ceremony which had Bebe Daniels, a native of Dallas who had become a famous movie actress, release the stone from Hollywood through a telegraph connection.\textsuperscript{31} There were two programs on opening day, one at 7 p.m., and the other at 9:15 p.m. The motion picture for opening week was \textit{Sentimental Tommy}, with Gareth Hughes, Mabel Taliaferro, and May McAvoy. Other features on the program were an organ solo; the Palace Selected News—"Topics of the Day;" an overture, "Evolution of Dixie" played by the Palace Symphony Orchestra with Don Albert conducting; "Palace Tours," a prelude; \textit{The Guide}, a comedy with Clyde Cook; and the "Exit March," played by the symphony orchestra. There were no reserved seats and no "free list." Seating was on a "first come, first served basis."\textsuperscript{32} A report on the opening in the \textit{Times Herald} stated that the "lighting effects proved so perfect the audience broke into cheers as the brightness faded almost imperceptibly into purple twilight, dark enough to bring out the picture on the screen." The report noted that

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Times Herald}, Thurs., June 9, 1921, I, 8.
\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Times Herald}, Fri., June 10, 1921, I, 8.
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{News}, Tues., Mar. 1, 1921, 8.
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Times Herald}, Fri., June 10, 1921, I, 8, advertisement.
Miss Peggy Gates, soprano, and Mrs. Leighton Edelon Cook, soprano, sang "Hiawatha's Melody of Love" as a prelude to the feature picture "in a setting of mountain scenery."^33

As will be seen later in this study, the Palace Theater clung to the entertainment policy of mixing classical selections with motion pictures and the use of local talent until 1925. The Palace differed from the Majestic in that whereas the Majestic, even when it began showing movies in 1920 placed the major emphasis upon its stage entertainment, the Palace built its program around its feature motion pictures. The Majestic was primarily a vaudeville house, the Palace a "deluxe photoplay theater."

The Melba

The third of the big downtown theaters in Dallas built between 1920 and 1925 was the Melba. Late in 1920, J. T. Jones and his well-known financier brother, Jesse Jones of Houston, purchased a 70x200 foot site on the north side of Elm Street between St. Paul and Harwood Streets, and announced their intentions of building a theater of steel and terra cotta with a seating capacity of 2,500.^34

Construction of the new theater began on May 20, 1921. Built at an approximate cost of $1,000,000, it was housed in a six-story structure and the upper stories were used for offices. The plans for the seating capacity were revised in May, 1921 to provide for housing an audience of 3,000, making it approximately the same size as the

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^33 *Times Herald*, Sun., June 12, 1921, I, 1.

Palace and the Majestic. John T. and Jesse H. Jones announced their plans of making it the finest theater in the South. A $50,000 pipe organ was installed and the theater was so designed that it could be converted into a legitimate theater, although motion pictures were shown at first. Even before it was completed, the building was leased to the First National Exhibitors, one of Hollywood's "big three."\(^{35}\)

Construction was not completed until the spring of 1922. The original plans called for the theater to open about February 15, and the newspapers carried publicity to the effect that Norma Talmadge, Charlie Chaplin, Constance Talmadge and other screen stars would be present for the ceremonies.\(^{36}\) However, the actual opening was delayed until April 26. On hand for the opening were Hope Hampton, screen star in whose honor the theater was named the Hope when it was originally opened; J. D. Williams, president of the Associated First National Film Corporation; Jules Brucatour, producer of the Hope Hampton pictures; Charles Christy, producer of the Christy Comedies; and S. I. (Roxy) Rothafel, manager of New York's Capitol Theater.\(^{37}\) Earlier in the week, the Trinity River in Dallas had overflowed its banks and the arrival of Hope Hampton from New Orleans was delayed by several hours. The Hope Theater sign had letters that were six feet in depth, "twice as long as those in any other theater sign in Dallas," according to advance publicity,\(^{38}\) but because of the flood the Dallas Power and Light Company

\(^{35}\)\textit{News}, Sat., May 21, 1921, 4.


banned the use of electric signs in order to conserve power during the flood, so they were not in use on opening night.\footnote{Times Herald, Apr. 26, 1922, I, 1.}

The bill for the opening day program got under way with an overture by the Hope Theater orchestra with Graham Harris as the conductor. Following this came a performance by the Capitol Mixed Quartette, then a special Dallas film provided by the Chamber of Commerce. The feature film, Stardust, starring Hope Hampton, came next, and this was followed by The Cops, a Buster Keaton comedy. The program was concluded with an organ solo.\footnote{Times Herald, Sun., Apr. 23, 1922, III, 4.}

As for the theater itself, it was described in a newspaper account as follows:

Mr. A. Vollmer of Vollmer, Gergrehn and Company . . . with the cooperation of Finn and Dunne, architects, have given Dallas the only playhouse in this country designed in the Spanish Renaissance period—a type peculiarly adapted to Texas' sunny climate and in keeping with its traditions.

The interior of the New Hope theater is in the colours predominant in Spanish Renaissance—known technically as polychrome . . . . The decorator of the Hope, Mr. A. A. Vollmer, has employed these colors in their mellowed values—adapting the Spanish yellows, orange, green, ivory and gold, to modern conditions—producing a delightfully harmonious color scheme out of a semi-tropical color gamut. The use and arrangement of these colors were greatly influenced by the native fauna and the dresses worn by the fair signors [sic] of the early Spanish period . . . .

The breadth and simplicity of Spanish structure makes possible the harlequinad sic of detail, without its giving offense. The detail is a jewel set in a sheet of color. In the Hope there are plain expanses of wall almost devoid of detail, soft in coloring, without the sense of monotone. It is in such points of vantage as the proscenium arch, dome, and along the upper walls near the graceful ceiling, that the rich fantastic ornaments, elaborate panels and decorative schemes are found. In these the Moorish influence is apparent in the many pointed battle shields.
No nation has developed the grills to such exquisite proportions as the Spanish. Splendid examples of these are found in the Hope, finding a happy location somewhere in the scheme of this theatrical gem.

The Elm street front of the Hope with its broad expanse of windows and well-balanced iron balconies forms a picture that no other theater in America can boast. Upon entering the playhouse one is confronted with the dignified mezzanine balcony with a staircase on either side. Two richly ornamented frames of the Spanish period encase figure murals painted by the famous artist, A. Lincoln Cooper.

The balcony itself is furnished in tastefully selected furniture of overstuffed tapestry and Spanish leather.

Once inside the auditorium proper the visitor is thrown under the warm glowing spell of its forms and colors. There is something "chummy" about it, without falling to the mediocre; luxury without "ginger-breadedness"; beauty but not of the dazzling type, rather does it feel permanent; a beauty that will not wane and tarnish with time.

The large panels on the side walls contain the Moorish shield motif while the lower half is balanced with delicate bronze brackets, each supporting five electric candles. The eye runs to the grouping of design, near the proscenium arch. Here several small panels, reveling in color and detail, and the magnificent grille work hiding the organ chambers, excite the imagination.

The visitor will probably notice the gorgeous dome topping the auditorium before anything else. Here is a work of beauty that will truly be "a joy forever." The dome is thirty-five feet in diameter and is illuminated by three sets of lights, 380 each, amber, red and blue.

With excellent foresight the management allowed the artist to supervise the setting of the stage, a thing that is woefully neglected in many an otherwise perfect playhouse.

Nothing is more typically Spanish than the bolero trimmings dangling from the draperies that hang from the proscenium arch. Moorish spiral columns of the type used in the famous Alhambra, play an important part in the stage atmosphere.

By October, the name Hope Theater was dropped and the theater was given the name Melba, originally planned for it.

\[^{1}^{1}\text{ Times Herald, Sun., Apr. 23, 1922, III, 4.}\]

\[^{2}^{2}\text{ News, Sat., Oct. 7, 1922, 4, advertisement.}\]
The Capitol Theater

There were other theaters built between 1920 and 1925 in the downtown section, none as imposing as the Majestic, the Palace and the Melba, but all pointing to the growing popularity of the motion pictures and to the growth of the city.

In June, 1922, the Popular Amusement Company, organized by I. Rude, L. A. Goodwin and L. Gohlman, owners of property at 1519-21 Elm Street, between the Jefferson and Old Mill Theaters, applied for a permit to build a theater on that site. It was to be a $50,000 structure with a seating capacity of 1,050. At the time the permit was applied for, the name had not yet been decided upon. The theater, called the Capitol, had air cushion seats, all on one floor, and the plant included a Barton organ. The Capitol opened on December 16 with a popular price schedule that ranged from 15¢ for adults and 5¢ for children on weekday matinees to 25¢ for adults and 10¢ for children at night and at Sunday and holiday performances. The theater was advertised as "the most gorgeously decorated exterior in the South with fireproof construction throughout." An account of the opening in the News stated that "few theaters in the Southwest have as unique and attractive a front as the Capitol . . . beaming white, with only the blue lights to shade the effects . . . intricate art, combined with the multitude of paneled windows." The theater had a policy of first run

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\[\text{News, Fri., June 23, 1922, 4.}\]

\[\text{Not to be confused with the Capitol Theater which was the name given the second Majestic Theater after the new Majestic was built. It had formerly been the Old Dallas Opera House.}\]

\[\text{News, Mon., Oct. 2, 1922, 10.}\]
pictures "when those of high quality are available, otherwise the best of second run pictures." The first feature shown at the new theater was _Slim Shoulders_, with Irene Castle. The Capitol was the first "quality" downtown theater devoted principally to second run films.\(^{16}\)

**The Happyland and Circle Theaters**

While much of the emphasis during the period was on building theaters that were to have motion pictures as their principal form of entertainment, at least three, the Majestic, the Happyland and the Circle were designed mainly for live entertainment.\(^{17}\)

The Happyland, a theater that was to house tabloid musical shows (popularly known as "tab" shows) successfully for several years, was opened at Elm and Akard Streets by Harry Simon, a veteran Dallas showman, on March 22, 1922. One novel feature of the new theater was that it had no balcony. Instead, there was a very small smoking loge by the side of the projection booth. The stage, especially built for tabloid presentations to specifications drawn up by Simon, was big enough to house an even larger company than the sixteen persons in the company with which the theater opened. The dressing rooms were on the second floor and there was running water in each room. Also on the second floor were the general offices and the stockroom. There was a piano in the stock room so that rehearsals could be held inside the building while movies were being shown downstairs.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) _News_, Sat., Dec. 16, 1922, 4.

\(^{17}\) Only the construction details of these theaters are discussed in this chapter. The entertainment programs are taken up in later sections of this study.

The Circle Theater, located on St. Paul Street opposite the Medical Arts Building, was the first playhouse built in Dallas specifically for legitimate productions since the Old Dallas Opera House had been built. Financed by the Hulsey interests, the Circle had a seating capacity for eleven hundred persons. It opened on Tuesday, December 25, 1923, with a stock company production of *Why Men Leave Home*, a three-act play by Avery Hopwood. The reviewer for the *News* said about the theater one day prior to the opening:

"Patrons of the new Circle Theater, which opens Christmas Day with a dramatic stock company, have a pleasant surprise in store for them... From the outside it hardly seems possible that the four walls could contain such a beautiful and comfortable home of the drama. The "circle" idea is tastefully carried out in the mural decorations. The boxes are attractive looking and all on each side are connected.

One feature which immediately appeals to the patron is that the seats are easy and that the stage can be seen clearly from each. This is as much true upstairs as down.

Since no moving pictures are to be shown, it was not necessary to build any projection booth. This enabled the architects to work out exceedingly graceful lines without any unseemly breaks."

As will be seen in the discussion of stock companies later in this study, the Circle Theater was to play an important role in Dallas entertainment in the decade of the 1920's.

**Suburban Theaters**

Although the intensive period of theater construction in the outlying areas of Dallas did not come before 1925, the 1920-1925 period did see some of this building activity. Both because of limitations, and also because this study is concerned with motion picture theaters

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*News, Mon., Dec. 24, 1923, 4.*
only insofar as they affected live entertainment, only brief mention will be made of the suburban theaters.

Ed Foy was the principal entrepreneur in the city for neighborhood houses. One of those he built was the Oak Lawn at 2916 Oak Lawn Avenue. A description of its opening on August 7, 1923, provides a picture of the interest in the city which accompanied such events during the 1920's:

An enthusiastic audience which taxed the seating capacity to the limit, greeted the premiere performance . . . at the Oak Lawn Theater. . . . Manager Jack Joyce greeted his guests at the door. In front the Elks band played and a music program was given inside by the A. Harris Jazz orchestra and the Elks male quartet. . . . Cigars were given to the men, flowers to the women, and toy balloons to the children.

The theater is a handsome structure, comfortable and homelike inside and is really cool. The stage arrangement is of general beauty and will compare favorably with that of some of Dallas' larger houses. For its opening feature, the Oak Lawn presented "The Flirt."50

Other theaters owned by Foy included the Colonial at Forest and Colonial Streets; the Columbia at Columbia and Collett Streets; and the Haskell, between Elm and Main Streets on Haskell. By January, 1923, Foy had eight theaters. His problem of booking feature films was simplified for he was able to show a new film in each theater every day, carrying the films from one theater to another.51

Existing Theaters

There were already a number of theaters in Dallas at the start of the 1920 decade. Probably the best known and the largest of those devoted primarily to motion pictures was the Old Mill at 1525-27 Elm Street. It had opened on June 29, 1913, under the owner-managership of Frank and Roy Dalton, two brothers who owned a chain of theaters in the city. At first, it was given over to tabloid shows and among the early stars were the Martin Sisters, and Jessie Reid, who was later to become a celebrated Ziegfeld beauty. The "tab" show policy was soon replaced by straight vaudeville and one of the most popular performers was Harry Jolson, brother of Al Jolson. One of the standing jokes on Elm Street was that the stage of the Old Mill, built for tabloid shows, "was big enough to house Ben Hur." Another early stage performer in the theater was Lasses White, a favorite of the minstrel shows, who had often been seen with another minstrel favorite, Bert Swor, at the Happy Hour Theater in the city.

In June, 1914, the theater adopted a picture policy and became the first Elm Street house to go exclusively to films. The prices for admission were 5¢ and 10¢, and the first pictures were two-reel subjects. In December, 1914, the theater was acquired by E. H. Hulsey, and after a brief shutdown for remodeling, reopened with Tillie's Punctured Romance. By September 1, 1919, the theater became part of Southern Enterprises operated out of Atlanta, Georgia, by S. A. Lynch. Hulsey became general manager of the Lynch interests in Texas. A favorite anecdote on Elm Street had it that Will Rogers appeared for a week on the Old Mill stage. He got no salary, but instead collected
small change in a dishpan for one of his pet charities while he spun his rope and did his well-known route.\textsuperscript{52}

Even older than the Old Mill was the Queen Theater, constructed in 1912 as "the finest photoplay house in the Southwest." At the time it was completed, the Queen, located at Elm and Akard Streets, the Washington, 1615 Elm Street, and the Crystal, were considered the popular motion picture houses in the city. Mention has already been made of the fact that E. H. Hulsey got control of the Old Mill Theater in 1914. In the same move, he also took over ownership of the Queen and the Hippodrome Theaters. When Southern Enterprises took over the Hulsey interests in 1919, that firm acquired possession of the three theaters, and Hulsey, as has already been noted, was named general manager for the Lynch interests in Texas. When the Palace Theater was built in 1921, the three theaters, together with the Crystal, came under control of the Paramount-Players Lasky Corporation with Southern Enterprises continuing to hold the leases. In 1922, the Queen was acquired for $270,000 by Joseph C. Singer, and the new owner announced his intentions of changing the name of the theater and of making extensive improvements.\textsuperscript{53}

One theater about which much more will be said in the discussion of stock companies is the Hippodrome, located in the 1000 block on Elm

\textsuperscript{52}News, Sat., May 4, 1935, 10. This article by Fay Lemmon was written when the Old Mill was shut down for extensive repairs. It was later reopened as the Rialto Theater.

\textsuperscript{53}News, Wed., Dec. 20, 1922, 4. Because the Queen continued as a straight motion picture house and had no live entertainment, its subsequent history does not concern us further in this study.
Street, between Griffin and Field Streets. The Hippodrome was opened in 1913 by the Lynch interests. Prior to 1920, a policy of vaudeville acts and a feature picture was adopted for the theater. It became a stock company house in the fall of 1922 when it was leased by Robert J. Littlefield Jr., owner and director of the Rex and Happyland Theaters. After the failure of the Hippodrome Players, the Standard Amusement Company took over the theater and announced its reopening on April 29, 1923, as a musical comedy playhouse. The entertainment policy included motion pictures, vaudeville acts, and a musical comedy company.

The Jefferson Theater, located at 1517 Elm Street, has already been cited as one of the three theaters in the city with a policy of vaudeville presentations at the beginning of the decade. At one time known as the Garden Theater, the Jefferson had been acquired in 1915 by the Jefferson Theater Company, headed by W. E. Weatherford of the Hughes-O'Rourke Construction Company. For a time, the Interstate "small time circuit" of vaudeville was tried at the theater, but this did not succeed. When Weatherford became president of the Southern Managers' Vaudeville Association, he instituted a policy of musical comedy at the theater, but this also failed after a few months. In 1918, the Southern

54 See Chapter III of this study for discussion of the 1922-1923 season when the Hippodrome was used as a stock house, and Chapter IX for consideration of the 1920-1921 and 1921-1922 seasons of vaudeville and tabloid shows at the theater.

55 At the start of 1920, the Majestic, Jefferson and Hippodrome were the three theaters in the city with vaudeville.

56 1510 Elm Street.

57 News, Sun., Aug. 13, 1922, II, 11. The Hippodrome Players was the name of the stock company that occupied the theater.


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Managers' Vaudeville Association became affiliated with the Pantages Circuit. Weatherford commented in July, 1920, that "the Jefferson has made money ever since." At the start of 1920, the Jefferson had a straight vaudeville policy.

The Gaiety Theater, the last of the "old-time Variety Houses," was one of the numerous variety and tabloid theaters in the downtown area prior to and during World War I, which were, according to an account in the News, "the delight of thousands of Dallas residents and visitors from over Texas." Some of the best known of these other theaters were the Happy Hour, the Orpheum and the Feature. The Gaiety, located near the corner of Elm and Akard Streets, and the Princess Theater were razed in December, 1921, and replaced by a clothing store and a small picture house, the Fox Theater. The Fox opened on Saturday, February 25, 1922, with a policy of second run pictures.

One famous landmark in the city was torn down during the 1920-1925 period. As was already noted in connection with the discussion of the New Majestic Theater, the Dallas Opera House at Main, St. Paul and Elm Streets, which housed the second Majestic Theater, became the Capitol Theater, and for part of the 1921-1922 season housed the Capitol Players, a stock company. Then, in December, 1921, it was badly damaged by fire. Decision as to what to do with the structure was

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60 The entertainment of the Jefferson between 1920 and 1925 is taken up in detail in Chapter VII of this study.
pending until January of 1923. In that month, it was torn down and a two-story brick building was erected on the site. The new structure housed a number of stores.63 A kind of obituary over the Opera House appeared in the News:

After twenty-three years of service, during which time famous tragedians, well-known comic opera stars and renowned prima donnas of days gone by have entertained Dallas theatergoers at the Dallas Opera House . . . the building is passing out of existence . . .

The building, although it was erected as late as 1900, is regarded to a certain extent as a landmark and as its walls go down, the appearance of such stars as Joseph Jefferson, Richard Mansfield, E. H. Sothern, Julia Marlowe, Sarah Bernhardt, De Wolfe Hopper, Fred Warde, Frank Daniels, Francis Wilson and Thomas Keene are recalled to the minds of many Dallas citizens.

The stage where twenty years ago E. H. Sothern, Thomas Keene and Fred Warde played the roles of "Hamlet," "Macbeth" and many other famous Shakespearean characters and where Joseph Jefferson in tattered clothing and long beard reproduced Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," is now a mass of wreckage. The orchestra circle, the balcony and the "roost" where people in all walks of life enjoyed the productions of yesteryear also present a dismantled appearance . . .

The building was erected by Sonnefield, Emmins & McCord, Dallas contractors, at a cost of $50,000.64

Something should be said also about the Cycle Park Casino, located originally in Gaston Park opposite the Main Street entrance, the home of summer stock in Dallas from 1899 through 1925. Cycle Park was first opened on Monday, May 15, 1899, with the production of The Tale of Enchantment or The Black Crook, described in the advertisements as "A strictly moral and refined entertainment, catering to ladies and children," with admission prices of 50¢, 35¢ and 25¢.65 The second Cycle Park Theater was built at the corner of Second and Gunter Avenues,

63News, Tues., Nov. 21, 1922, 4.
65Times Herald, Sun., May 14, 1899, 1.
about a block from the old location which had been taken over by the city as part of its park system. The theater opened on Sunday, May 2, 1915, with the newspaper statement that "there is not a bad seat in the house and Manager Brown defies anyone to find a step in the theater proper. The stage is unusually large for theaters of this kind and much money has been spent on stage settings." The company which opened the theater were the Renfrow Pathfinders. It was in this theater that Gene Lewis and Olga Worth were to begin their summer stock seasons a year later. They were to return each summer for the next eight seasons.

The pattern of theater construction, renovation and demolition in Dallas during the 1920-1925 period appears to have been created in response to two dynamic trends—the need for increased seating capacity as a result of population growth, and the changing tastes in entertainment. During the early 1920's, there were two predominant factors in the world of entertainment, the growing importance of the movies, and the competition between the motion picture palaces and the vaudeville houses for the customers' patronage. The Majestic Theater was built as a large vaudeville house because this form of entertainment was at the peak of its popularity during the 1920-1921 season. At the start of the 1920 season, the downtown area was served by three different vaudeville circuits, and two of the theaters were devoted exclusively to stage entertainment. When vaudeville began to drop off in popularity,

66 Times Herald, Sun., May 2, 1915, 12.
67 The summer seasons at Cycle Park for the 1920-1925 period are discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this study.
the Majestic combined its stage presentations with movies, and the
Jefferson moved to musical stock and tabloid shows, the Hippodrome to
dramatic stock. The giant movie house chains which were tied in with
the motion picture companies were being organized in the early 1920's.
Southern Enterprises in Dallas allowed control of the Palace, the Queen,
the Hippodrome and the Old Mill theaters to pass into the hands of the
Paramount-Players Lasky Corporation. On the other hand, Karl
Hoblitzelle, as head of Interstate, believed firmly in the future of
vaudeville. The competition in Dallas for the downtown patronage in
the early part of the 1920's was primarily between Interstate and
Southern Enterprises.

The Majestic was built as a straight vaudeville house, and even
when it combined motion pictures with the stage presentations, the major
emphasis was still on vaudeville. The Majestic stage was constructed
with live entertainment in mind and there was more than adequate
dressing room space.

The comfort of the actors and the actresses who will play
at the new Majestic has been well provided for in an elaborate
back-stage scheme of improvements unequalled outside of New
York and Chicago. . . .

For the actresses and actors, the most complete dressing
rooms have been arranged. Many separate rooms [have been
provided]. These rooms are finished in tile and marble, with
complete separate baths; a full-length mirror forms the back
of the door in addition to the many mirrors situated on the
dressing table.

A green room—a room of relaxation—filled with easy chairs
and bright colored chintzes, spells comfort and pleasure for the
actors and actresses. Until one compares these wonderful
dressing rooms with the awful makeshifts of the average play-
house one cannot understand just what they mean for the actors.

Besides the ladies and men's beautiful and comfortable
retiring rooms, there are lavatories for both sexes located on
every floor of this vast theater. There is a tea room too
where they may dine or have a delightful luncheon while they
wait for the opening of the show.

When the theater was completed, Hoblitzelle moved the Interstate headquarters there from Chicago and soon afterwards launched a program of building other Majestic theaters of similar design in Fort Worth, San Antonio, Austin and Houston. In the late 1920's and the 1930's, Hoblitzelle was repeatedly to expound the philosophy that his Majestic theaters were not to be devoted solely to motion pictures, to vaudeville, to legitimate productions, or to musical shows, but rather were to be places of entertainment suitable for any type of show.

The Palace Theater, on the other hand, was built as a deluxe motion picture "palace" designed to capture the increasing number of persons who wanted to see their movies presented in surroundings of the luxurious and the "classical." The interludes, the prologues, the organ recitals, and the popularized symphonic concerts presented by symphony orchestras cut down to theater size were intended to frame and to enhance the feature film. When the Palace Theater management during the 1925-1926 season began to place more emphasis on live entertainment of a popular nature, the stage had to be renovated and the dressing room space enlarged.

The Melba represented a compromise between the positions taken by the builders of the Majestic and the Palace. It was a motion picture house that could also be used for vaudeville, legitimate productions and musical comedies. The Melba continued primarily as a motion picture house until 1925 when the great wave of popularity for vaudeville presentations swept the nation. Only a small number of road shows came to Dallas and most of these went to the State Fair Coliseum after 1925, mitigating against use of the Melba for road shows. When Karl Hoblitzelle acquired control of the theater in the early 1930's and made a determined bid for the road shows to be given in the Interstate houses,
the Melba and the Majestic were used for these presentations. However, even though the Palace, too, came under Interstate ownership in the 1930s, it was very rarely used for touring shows. One reason for this may have been that once the large downtown theaters were built, they tended to be identified in the public mind with certain kinds of entertainment. The Majestic, for example, was the theater for vaudeville; the Palace for the quasi-classical type of program. So strongly was this entrenched in public thinking that downtown theaters other than the Majestic which tried the kind of vaudeville popular at that theater had a hard time of it.

The growing popularity of the motion pictures and their increased ability to stand on their own as a form of entertainment is reflected in the construction of the Capitol as a second-run motion picture house. Other second-run film theaters were built. And the rapid construction of suburban movie houses during the period was evidence that Dallas was burgeoning into a metropolis and of the growing hold the movies were gaining on the Dallas public.

The appeal that live entertainment still made to audiences in the early 1920s, however, was demonstrated by the construction of such theaters as the Happyland where a debased kind of vaudeville that geared both the entertainment and the prices to less esthetic sensibilities and a low-income group was presented. Theaters like the Happyland, the

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69. When the Palace did adopt a live-entertainment policy in 1925, it was of large-scale spectacular nature, quite different from the kind of vaudeville seen at the Majestic.

70. The Melba, the Pantages (formerly the Jefferson), and the Circle all had short-lived and unsuccessful periods of vaudeville.
Gaiety, the Hippodrome and the Jefferson did not have the financial backing of the larger theaters and were, as a result, more immediately susceptible to short-range shifts in public taste. These theaters switched from vaudeville to tabloid shows, from musical stock to the motion pictures, depending on the theories of their individual managers as to what would best suit the changing public taste, or what would be most in keeping with the complex economics of the situation.

The Happyland survived for several years with a policy of tabloid presentations, but then went to an all-movie policy. The Jefferson continued after 1920 for a brief time with vaudeville but early in the 1920's changed to musical stock.

But there was another strand of popular taste— for dramatic stock—which was strengthened during the 1920-1925 period and that was not due to subside until the next half-decade. In response to this demand the Circle Theater was constructed. The Circle had first been planned as a downtown legitimate playhouse for touring plays, but, by the time it was completed, dramatic stock was playing such an active role in the city that the Circle managers thought best to use it for that purpose instead.

The growth in popularity of dramatic stock had been evidenced during the 1921-1922 and the 1922-1923 seasons when both the Dallas Opera House (earlier the Majestic and renamed the Capitol) and the Hippodrome successfully housed stock companies.

As for the touring legitimate and musical comedies, the plan to build the State Fair Auditorium, formulated early in the 1920's, undoubtedly prevented construction of a theater in the city specifically for their use.
The 1920-1925 period was one of great flux in Dallas theater. It was a period of construction and of adaptation. It was a time when trends that were to determine the entertainment future of the city for the next three decades were being developed but were not yet firmly established.
CHAPTER II

THE CAMPAIGN FOR AN AUDITORIUM

The tradition of the Dallas Opera House, which had served the needs of legitimate theater in the city from 1873 until 1916, when it became the Majestic Theater given over to vaudeville, persisted strongly in the city. It was this tradition, plus the awareness in the city at the start of 1920 that there was no suitable theater for dramatic road shows, for musicals other than the "super-extravaganzas," and for musical events which could not draw the large crowds necessary to fill the State Fair Coliseum, which was responsible for the agitation for a downtown playhouse. With the decline of the road and the corresponding growth in importance of the stock companies, this early agitation centered around plans for a theater that would not only house a resident company and touring shows, but also for one that would provide a home for the arts in general, complete with studios and recital rooms. This early movement petered out, but Dallas was to get its legitimate playhouse in the Circle Theater, built as a private venture. However, the Circle was to prove inadequate for most road shows and quickly fell into virtual disuse after the disappearance of stock.

The dynamic behind the movement for a downtown legitimate playhouse was absorbed in the movement for an auditorium. The downtown merchants, in particular, wanted a structure that would serve the needs of legitimate drama and that at the same time be adequate for large conventions. There was a struggle, lasting for several years, between

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those who wanted the auditorium in Gaston Park, where the State Fair buildings were located, and those who wanted an auditorium in the downtown area. Eventually, the State Fair adherents won out and construction of the 5,000-seat auditorium got under way in 1923.

There had been numerous complaints about the Coliseum, converted in 1925 into an agricultural exhibit hall for the Fair, and some of these same complaints were to be leveled against Fair Park Auditorium. The Coliseum was described as too big for most plays and concerts, very inadequate acoustically, and as really not big enough for the bigger conventions. The need for an auditorium that would meet the dual need of a smaller theater for road shows and a large convention hall was not met until the construction in the 1950's of the Memorial Auditorium.

Movement for a Downtown Auditorium

Although it was not until the mid-1950's that Dallas was to get a downtown auditorium, as far back as 1920, businessmen of the city were clamoring for such a structure. The Dallas Rotarians on February 26, 1920, announced their intentions, as one of their activities for the year, to "sponsor a movement in this city to build a downtown auditorium," and proposed a bond issue vote on the subject for the following April.\(^1\) The same movement was under way in nearby Fort Worth where the Park Board received word from an American Legion official of

\[\ldots\text{a tentative proposal for the erection of a memorial building} \ldots\text{a splendid opportunity for the ultimate acquirement of a municipal auditorium and a public center on the property now occupied by the park and some of the adjacent property.}\]\(^2\)

Alex Sanger, president of Sanger Bros., one of the city's


leading department stores, said in response to a query as to what might be a suitable memorial for the soldiers and sailors of Dallas:

The development of Dallas into a metropolitan city and civic center has been rapid, and this development has reached the point where a large auditorium is imperative. . . . With ample facilities, assemblies of national character could be attracted and this made the convention city of the Southwest.

As a music center Dallas needs such an auditorium, and a Metropolitan opera season is not an impossibility. 3

The appeal for a downtown auditorium to serve not only the purposes of entertainment but also to draw convention business to the city was to be made again and again in the next thirty-odd years.

At a meeting of the Presidents Club in the city in 1922, the auditorium question was again revived by W. A. Watkins who said that "the need for a large and centrally located auditorium has been recognized in Dallas for the last forty years, but apparently the securing of the auditorium is no nearer at present than it was forty years ago." He also called attention to the fact that the existing State Fair Coliseum, largest assembly hall in North Texas, "only has a seating capacity of 3,840." 4

An editorial in the Dallas Morning News pointed out the loss the city had suffered during the previous ten years . . . by the lack of an auditorium downtown suitable for large assemblages. But there can be no doubt it is a large sum. . . . It has been a loss of money and the greater loss of the opportunity to spread the fame of the city's attractions over the country. And it has suffered another loss, the loss of the diversions and entertainments that it could have enjoyed if a suitable place for giving them had been provided . . . It must be regarded as an investment, and in the most realistic sense of the word. . . .

The City Planning Commission has urged the Mayor to take up the project. . . . He has responded by promising to create a


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committee of citizens at an early day to consider it. . . . Some of the needs of Dallas may be more important. . . . None is more urgent than the need of a modern and conveniently located auditorium capable of seating large crowds. . . . The problem of financing such a project is . . . difficult. . . . But . . . it will be solved if those who attempt it go about their task with an appreciative sense of the city's need.5

In the "Letters from Readers" column in the News on Friday, February 10, 1922, the plea was made that

... In building an auditorium Dallas should not be satisfied with a big barn or warehouse with nothing to recommend it but its size. We should build an auditorium of brick and stone and marble and steel, architecturally stately, harmonious and beautiful. It should have the largest and best pipe organ in the State and should be altogether a thing of beauty and the pride of every citizen.6

The emphasis was on size and beauty in another News editorial that appeared the same week which pointed out the time and money which would be needed for the kind of building envisaged in the "Letters from Readers" proposal:

... There may be a danger . . . that we shall be betrayed by the financial difficulties and the urgency of the need into contenting ourselves with something less. It will take time and a large amount of money to build such an auditorium—and we are short on both. . . . These facts present a temptation to skimp the job in the interest of both money and time. . . . We should go about this task with determination to build an auditorium which will abundantly satisfy the needs of a city of four or five-hundred thousand people and of the cultural capacity of twice that number of people . . . It will be worth the cost in time and money.7

A year later a group of Dallas businessmen revealed they had been working on auditorium plans for a number of months, and through their spokesman, Frank Wozencraft, began plans for financing a $750,000
building "with accommodations for conventions, the drama and grand opera, through provisions of seating facilities for more than 3,000 persons, with studios for the fine arts, a little theater and banquet hall in a six-story building." The detailed plan called for

... an auditorium taking up the central part of five of its six floors, with 32,000 square feet of space ... The main auditorium will seat 3,300 divided as follows, main floor, 1,500, first balcony, 1,000, second balcony, 800. ...

Basement, small auditorium to seat approximately 500.
Banquet hall to seat 400 ... dressing rooms for characters and chorus, storage rooms to carry stocks for shops on the ground floor.

Ground floor - main auditorium, stage 40 x 70 with fifty-six foot opening. ...

Harry Beatty, stage manager for the Chicago Grand Opera Company will be "loaned" to Dallas to plan and equip the stage. He is familiar with all the stage arrangements in the larger American and European cities and has promised Dallas something superior to anything the Chicago Grand Opera Company is using in Chicago or elsewhere.

Every room in the building will be sound proof. Noise will be reduced by cork-on-concrete floors. All seats pneumatic leather cushions.

The auditorium will have a hot air heating device ... a cold-air cooling device for the summer.

The design calls for an exterior of pearl grey brick. The architect estimates that the building can be completed within six months ... having it ready for the grand opera season next February.

It is the intention of the promoters of the enterprise to build a playhouse that will put Dallas in the foremost rank. ... Many features will be borrowed from the old world. The decorations will be suggestive of continental theaters. The financing scheme calls for $350,000 in stock and $400,000 in bonds. The bonds bear ... seven per cent ... expected dividends on the stock at same figure. Gross revenues ... $135,000 a year ... pay interest and dividends and retire bonds at end of ten years.

Again the Dallas Morning News on Sunday, July 1, 1923, editorialized:

... The erection of a fine arts building where grand opera and the drama may be comfortably and suitably housed is bound to come sooner or later. The reputation that Dallas has already earned in connection with presentations of this kind almost

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presupposes a place where they may be staged. And yet it will take the building now proposed to justify that supposition.

The building which is planned is one which will contribute to the pride of every citizen who is sensible of culture and progress . . . will set up a center for art lovers and art a visible and impressive nucleus about which to grow . . . . The presence of a downtown auditorium which will be comfortable both in hot weather and cold contributes even more to the community's consciousness and to its profitable access to the less gross concerns of life . . . .

On October 13, 1923, the committee announced that it was ready to begin construction at Commerce and Paydoras streets, if the city would exempt the Fine Arts Museum, as it was to be called, from taxation for ten years. It was announced that "more than half of the amount necessary for completing and equipping the building has been subscribed." City Attorney James J. Collins five days later ruled that the committee's suggestion that the city expedite construction of the building by agreeing either to forego taxes for ten years or to pay the rental on the building equal to what the city's taxes would be would not be valid "until it is constructed or until definite assurance that it will be constructed has been received."  

Agitation for a State Fair Auditorium

Meanwhile counter pressures were building up to locate the auditorium in the State Fair grounds. Residents of South and East Dallas wanted the building situated at State Fair Park so they might share in economic benefits such a building would bring, and they met to draft plans for what eventually was to be a successful drive. In November, 1923, representatives of the South and East Dallas Improvement

Leagues passed a resolution that the voting public be asked to decide between a $500,000 bond issue for an auditorium at Gaston Park, site of the State Fair, or $1,000,000 for an auditorium in the business district. At the meeting, Judge Felix D. Robertson called attention to possible "auto parking jams for miles in either direction if the auditorium were located downtown," and commented:

We can get the ground for the auditorium for nothing in Gaston Park, and will have to pay as much as the building will cost to secure ground for it downtown. A downtown auditorium to seat 12,000 or 15,000 people simply cannot be built. We need a seating space of that magnitude to care for the national Democratic convention and other gatherings that will be brought to Dallas when the building is completed.11

There was an interesting aside made at the same meeting on Dallas cultural life when H. L. Goerner, superintendent of the county school system, commenting on the small number of people at the meeting, observed that "Dallas is one of the recognized Christian cities of America. It is easily understandable that every one is at prayer meeting instead of at the Coliseum meeting."

Added backing was given the campaign to have the auditorium in Gaston Park when the State Fair stockholders12 endorsed the project. Judge William H. Atwell, who was elected chairman of the stockholders' meeting, said that the Coliseum was to be turned into an agricultural exhibit building. He noted that the fair grounds were no longer on the outskirts of the city, and that an auditorium there to take the place of the Coliseum would have the advantages of size, adequate street car service, and parking space for automobiles.

For a time it was touch and go as to whether the auditorium would be built at Gaston Park or in a downtown location. Those backing a Fine Arts project downtown announced plans for a building on a site bounded by Ervay, Federal, Patterson, and Bullington streets with a seating capacity of 5,000. It was to cost approximately $750,000, and in addition to the auditorium proper, was to have one hundred and thirty individual studios for "persons in the artistic profession." The permanent seating capacity of the auditorium was to be 4,000, with provisions for 1,000 emergency seats "in addition to the standing room at the rear and around the sides." As for the stage, it was to have a proscenium width of fifty-six feet and a depth of forty-two feet "with adequate and conveniently arranged dressing rooms to make it adaptable for theatrical and operatic uses." Again the Dallas Morning News took an editorial position backing the project:

As things stand, there is an excellent prospect that private enterprise and public spirit may go hand in hand for the accomplishment of what the artistic and esthetic elements of the citizenship require. It is a thing to rejoice in. It is stimulating to live in a city where a known necessity brings to the front unsuspected resources in meeting it. Beyond what we think or are able even to dream, Dallas must grow . . . But the circumstance that growth in hospitality for the finer things of taste and creative art is evidenced in Dallas is a matter for congratulation indeed . . . The City of Dallas stands out as an appreciative city in a State not yet widely known for that attitude toward the work of artists. The undertaking which offers a picture gallery and a cluster of studios and offices for kindred use is at once a recognition and an example of how Dallas feels in regard to such things.\(^\text{14}\)

Those proposing the State Fair structure in Gaston Park projected a plan for building it at a cost of $750,000. Originally, they planned to have

\(^\text{13}\)News, Sat., Dec. 22, 1923, 8.

\(^\text{14}\)News, Mon., Dec. 24, 1923, 8.
it completed in time for the 1924 Fair. The State Fair project had won the approval of the mayor because it was less costly than a downtown building and parking space was more easily available. The initial planning also called for sectioning off part of the auditorium, making it possible to adjust the size of the seating area to the nature of the attraction. This sectioning would involve use of a steel or wooden curtain that could reduce the seating capacity to 1,500 or 2,000 persons and make possible the booking of musical and dramatic shows that could not fill the entire hall.\footnote{News, Thurs., Feb. 21, 1924, 12.}

In order to assure that the building would have no defects, a consulting acoustic architect would be engaged, the auditorium backers promised.\footnote{News, Fri., Feb. 22, 1924, 4.} An editorial in the \textit{Dallas Morning News} on the same day stated that although Dallas would be served best by a downtown auditorium, the difficulties were "formidable," and a structure downtown "is a thing of the distant future."

Calling for the building to be located at Gaston Park, the editorial continued:

It is to be hoped that no false sense of economy will be allowed to keep us from making the projected auditorium all that it ought to be. In the matter of size, the most important of all, we are safeguarded against the danger of blundering by the decision to give it a seating capacity of at least 6,000. We shall not often have need of a larger assembling space. It remains to make sure that the building shall be in all respects modern, offering all the advantages which the best architectural science has devised in lighting, heating, ventilation and acoustics.

On March 8, the plans of the Dallas Property Owners Association to build a downtown auditorium were "suspended," because of the
agreement between the city and the State Fair Association to erect a building at Gaston Park.\textsuperscript{17} By July 14, it had been decided to make the cost of the auditorium $500,000 and not to attempt to complete it for the 1924 State Fair season.\textsuperscript{18} Then, on July 27, after architectural competitions, the plans submitted by Lang and Mitchell of Dallas were selected.\textsuperscript{19}

Spanish in motif, the new auditorium will be built of concrete, steel and pressed face brick trimmed with artificial stone with . . . gray tile, semi-fireproof and will cost $425,000. It will seat more than 5,000 persons occupying a ground area of 35,000 square feet. . . . The auditorium proper will be shaped like a megaphone, enlarging from the stage toward the main entrance at an angle of 60 degrees, and thus eliminating the objectionable seats to be found in most auditoriums of either an oblong or 90 degree shape.

The acoustic properties of the auditorium would be guaranteed to be perfect, due to the use of the 60-degree angle in its construction. The expansion of sound waves adapts itself naturally to this shape, Otto Lang of the firm said, "preventing any focusing or reverberating conforming to the natural shape of the megaphone."

A spacious foyer and a loggia give access from the main entrance of the building to a promenade that runs in a semicircle around the rear of the tiers of seats occupying 12,000 square feet of space. The balcony seats occupy 18,000 square feet with the boxes 1,200 square feet. The architect says that the stairways, promenades, foyers, etc., will hold the entire seating capacity of the house in motion without crowding and that the building can be completely emptied in five minutes. Exits are provided on all sides. . . . The distance of the last seats from the stage will be one-hundred feet to the side walls.

The balcony will be seventy-five feet from the stage and the distance of its last seats 150 feet along the side walls, with a slightly greater distance in each instance in the center rows. The proscenium arch will be thirty-six feet high and sixty feet wide. The average height of the ceiling of the main auditorium will be forty-five feet, with twelve and a half feet under the balcony.

Checkrooms, ticket booths, committee rooms and restrooms will be grouped about the auditorium with property rooms and

\textsuperscript{17}News, Sat., Mar. 8, 1924, 13.
\textsuperscript{18}News, Mon., July 4, 1924, 9, 4.
\textsuperscript{19}News, Sun., July 27, 1924, II, 1.
other special features embodied in the rear of the building, alongside the stage. . . .

The method of selecting the architect by an open competition was said to be unusual and to set a precedent in the Southwest. There was agitation, eventually successful, by the Technical Club of Dallas, to make the auditorium of full-fireproof construction. As for the plan to have a sectional type auditorium, this was never put into operation, and the unwieldy size of the State Fair auditorium was to prove, and is still a definite handicap in booking most types of legitimate productions.

The contract award and the start of construction on the new city auditorium, destined to be known as Fair Park Auditorium, came during the 1924-25 season, within the five-year period under study, although the building was not ready for use until the 1925-26 season. The $315,155 contract award made on December 24, 1924, was described as "a figure considerably below the amount anticipated by the building committee." Actual construction began on December 29. The city engineers had laid out the structure's two-hundred foot front to head almost due northwest with its west side paralleling the Parry Avenue fence that enclosed Gaston Park. The auditorium was to be made completely fireproof. This decision followed some agitation that resulted when it was learned that the original plans did not call for fireproof balconies.

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20 It turned out that the architects were over-optimistic. One of the chief criticisms of the auditorium after it was completed was to be the inadequacy of its acoustics.


The decision to build the auditorium at Fair Park not only put a stop for ten years to agitation for a downtown auditorium, but also quieted demands of those who insisted that a 5,000-seat theater would be too big for legitimate drama. This was to prove prophetic for by the mid-1930's, the Fair Park Auditorium was felt to be too large for the usual touring show and the function of housing the productions was taken over by the downtown movie houses.

**Plans for a Legitimate Theater**

Agitation for a legitimate theater in Dallas was launched as early as January, 1919, as is evidenced by the fact that the Dallas Elks' Lodge negotiated with a Klaw & Erlanger representative about the possibility of putting such a theater in a new Elks' building. A year later, a group of citizens in the city attempted to gain support for a "$500,000 modern playhouse of the highest type for the production of legitimate offerings." The move was spearheaded by the Dallas Wholesale Merchants Association who subscribed $100,000 for the project. The plan called for a theater "capable of seating 1,500 and modern in every respect." George D. Watters, who had come to Dallas from Des Moines, Iowa, where he had operated such a theater for ten years, was named general manager of the company. Watters picked a site at Commerce and Poydras Streets and envisaged the structure in this manner:

In addition to a large auditorium providing ample seating space for 1,500 persons with an unusually large space between the rows and roomy aisles, the new playhouse . . . will have a stage big enough to accommodate any style of legitimate production. A modern ammonia ventilating plant will be installed, insuring a cool, even temperature throughout the house at all

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times. A modern electrical system and a large pipe organ will be other features. The second and third floors of the new building... will be devoted to club quarters for the Wholesale Merchants Association.

Watters said that he planned to secure "the highest type of dramatic talent from the Eastern centers," presenting a different production each week, "provided that longer runs are not considered advisable." He had a resident stock company in mind, for he also spoke of using guest stars. He wanted the price of admission set at $1.25, and he explained this would be possible because "the enormous expense of transporting scenery and a cast of characters for each performance will be eliminated." ²⁵

Watters explained that this "resident company plan of operation also eliminates the frequent disappointment experienced by theater patrons who pay high prices to see "well known plays with inferior casts, shabby scenery and soiled costumes." Watters' plan also called for "the choicest of road companies." He said each play presented was to be "the work of a well-known author and one that previously has met with more than unusual success in New York and other metropolitan cities." Watters described his proposed new legitimate theater as "the only one of its kind in the state."

A group of businessmen who met with the director of the Dallas Wholesale Merchants Association the following day called the theater

²⁵Watters' plan for a legitimate theater highlights the two directions that the agitation for such a structure took in Dallas in the early 1920's. One was for a smaller theater that could be used for traveling shows and for a resident company, a plan envisaged by Watters. The other was for a much larger building which could be used not only for traveling plays but also for conventions. With this in mind, Watters' programming scheme is given in some detail.
plan "the most important step taken in the city in some time" and W. I. Bogardus, one of the businessmen, said at the meeting:

We need attractions for visitors who come to Dallas and this is the great opportunity to provide the proper kind of attraction. The wholesale men need a place to meet the buyers who come here, and the two floors above the theater would be used as club and entertainment rooms for visitors. Dallas now has an annual wholesale trade of about $600,000,000 and to keep pace with this market, we should have such a building as headquarters.

Watters, amplifying on his plan, outlined a scheme of presentation that was to be echoed, in theory, by a number of stock company producers who subsequently came to Dallas.

I have learned that it isn't any particular type, but usually the variety and manner in which the plays are introduced that appeals. . . .

It would hardly do to present "Up in Mabel's Room" this week and follow it with "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath" next week. They are both farces of a similar type and one would detract from the other, but if "Up in Mabel's Room" were followed by, say "A Prince There Was" which, in turn, would be followed by "Turn to the Right," and then "Parlor, Bedroom and Bath," both farces would be thoroughly enjoyable, as the two other plays intervening are entirely different brands of entertainment.

The public demands variety. They enjoy a good farce, a clean comedy drama, a clever crook play, a wholesome rural play, even a well-knit tragedy, but they want their theatrical diet varied, and if you gorge them with an overdose of tragedy the result is that they might suffer what might be termed theatrical indigestion and the theater suffers with a drop in business.

A play that proves very popular Christmas week may be a failure if presented Easter week, and so on, and it is a fact that in hot weather, plays of a humorous vein are the business-getters. When the public is sweltering in the heat, they are not in the mood to suffer through the untangling of a tragedy, for the average theater-goer goes through all the emotions that an actor reflects from the stage; he is carried away by the theme of the play and the success of any play depends on the ability of the playwright and the actors to carry the audience along with the plot of the play—to make them forget they are plain Johnnie Jones or Minnie Smith. If they succeed in doing this the play is a success, but if they lose the interest of the

audience for even a minute, the play is usually relegated to the storehouse—a failure.  

There was great public excitement about the proposed new theater and a number of prominent civic leaders gave statements of support. City Commissioner L. L. Henderson called the theater project "one of the most outstanding needs of today." A. Green Jr. commented that it "is another step forward in bringing to Dallas one more thing that heretofore we have had to go elsewhere to get." He suggested that such a structure could also be used for grand opera and concerts and said the theater "would fill a gap that we have all noticed for years." Robert E. Eagon stated that the city "has a clientele whose desire for legitimate offerings has been amply attested by the unflagging support it has given all worthy productions." Dallas people, he said, would pay the price "for anything of value and merit."  

The comments of Judge E. B. Perkins and Dr. J. J. Terrill are particularly interesting because they indicate attitudes held at the time about the moral and therapeutic values of legitimate drama.  

Judge Perkins said:

Nothing in my opinion can have a more powerful influence for good in a community than a good theater run on wholesome, educational lines. It can certainly not be denied that good plays presented on the stage have a great influence in shaping the views of the people and raising them to a higher social plane.  

Dr. Terrell, president of the Dallas County Medical Association, also stressed the moral value of drama. And he added:

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27News, Fri., Feb. 4, 1921, p. 5.
29News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, 1, 12.
Recreation is a recognized need for a normal and well-balanced life, and the theater would be a vehicle for furnishing this very type of recreation and amusement which Dallas has so long needed. ... the mind can be starved in the same way that bodies can be starved by denying ... the proper diet. ... Our population and that of the surrounding country is of such a variety that varied types of entertainment are needed to meet the different needs. 30

Karl Hoblitzelle, who as president of the Interstate Amusement Company was to play such an important role in Dallas theatrical life during the next forty years, was also strongly for the playhouse, even though his primary interest at the time was in motion pictures.

I believe it would be a real community force for the good from every viewpoint. It would also give a normal outlet for any theatrical or dramatic talent that people of Texas may possess. It will be remembered that Mrs. Fisk began her career in a little theater in San Antonio, and that other great stage celebrities and dramatists have had such origins. The possibilities in this direction appeal to me as being one of the most favorable aspects of the project for a theater in our city. 31

It is difficult to understand why the project never reached fulfillment, if, as was claimed "... the movement ... is receiving the support of persons of small and large means alike." 32 Watters, manager for the proposed theater, expanded once again on his plans:

In addition to bringing American and European masterpieces to Dallas it is expected that a certain number of new plays will be given their premier production here. Oliver Morosco, for example, does this from his playhouse in Louisiana and in this way several successful plays have been put on the stage by him, the play moving from the West to the East instead of the reverse. ... The types of plays to be presented will be selected for their wholesomeness and cleanliness. In Des Moines, ministers' nights were held, when the ministers were invited to attend. The purpose of the theater will be to present plays that are of real value and which avoid all vulgarity and lowness.

30 News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, I, 12.
31 News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, I, 12.
One especially attractive phase of the theater would be that it would provide also a place where lectures and other attractions could be held when the stage is not occupied. The theater would also be suitable for the production of grand opera and also orchestra concerts, but the policy as it stands at present, is particularly for the presentation of legitimate plays.

It was announced that half of the funds for the playhouse had been raised. Mrs. C. P. Adams, prominent society matron, told reporters:

I have just returned from New York City and while there I learned that thirty shows are waiting to go on the road and are being prevented from doing so because of the dearth of theaters for that purpose. . . . The people of Dallas are tired of only one type of entertainment. . . .

Of course Mrs. Adams did not explain what value a legitimate playhouse would be to Dallas insofar as touring shows were concerned if stops intermediate between Dallas and Broadway did not also build such suitable theaters.

The Dallas Chamber of Commerce gave its endorsement to the project, and Charles L. Sanger, member of the Sanger Bros. department store family, who was chairman of the Chamber committee, said that only $200,000 remained to be raised. Watters called attention to the fact that "there are seventy-five theaters of the same character in smaller cities . . . which are paying big profits on large investments."

As has been pointed out earlier, the drive for a downtown legitimate theater failed at this time. The Circle Theater, built in

33News, Sun., Feb. 27, 1921, II, 10.
34News, Fri., Feb. 18, 1921, 7.
35Her statement reflects a widespread attitude held in the early 1920's, and still prevalent in certain circles today, that the legitimate drama is the "true" form of entertainment and that the movies are a passing phase of entertainment.
36News, Sat., Mar. 5, 1921, 6. But he failed to name the cities where the 75 theaters were operating.
1923, was to satisfy the need partially, but its inadequacies for touring legitimate plays soon became evident. The energy and funds that might have financed a satisfactory legitimate playhouse in the city were instead expended on the 5,000-seat Fair Park Auditorium.

It was also during this five-year period that Southern Methodist University announced receipt of a $350,000 gift from Mr. and Mrs. R. M. McFarlin of San Antonio and Tulsa, Oklahoma, to build an auditorium on the campus "surpassing anything of its kind in the country." Plans called for the main entrance to be through a large memorial hall and for a seating capacity of 3,500. The stage was to be large enough to take care of all university activities and concerts.37

The dynamics behind the movements for a downtown auditorium and for a legitimate playhouse in Dallas grew in part out of the changing situation of the road and legitimate drama in general, and out of the needs of a growing city. The legitimate theater became supplanted by the movies as a form of mass entertainment. No longer did plays attract the large crowds which had attended them prior to World War I, and the very scarcity of dramatic productions which set in with the decline of the road got people out of the habit of finding their entertainment in legitimate houses. There appears to have been between 1920 and 1925 a confusion in the minds of those responsible for entertainment as to whether the movies would supplant the stage, supplement it, or eventually decline, restoring the stage to its former eminence. This confusion manifested itself in the demand for an auditorium that would

house several thousand persons. It was evident in the unwillingness of the State Fair Association to allow for some kind of partition scheme in the auditorium that would have made it possible to create a smaller theater inside the larger structure.
CHAPTER III

WINTER STOCK PROVES POPULAR

Like many other American cities, Dallas had a long tradition of dramatic stock. As early as 1888, the Baldwin-Melville Company had been formed at the Dallas Opera House. Later, Charles Mangold had sponsored stock at the Lake Cliff Casino, and some of the well-known actors who had gotten their start there included Blanche Yurka, Boyd Nolan, Clara Nelson Hall and Mamie Cahill.¹ In 1915, Gene Lewis and his wife Olga Worth began their summer stock seasons at Cycle Park² and continued in the same location to 1924. During the 1920-1925 period, there were three attempts in Dallas to establish winter stock companies in the city, one in the Capitol Theater,³ one at the Hippodrome Theater,⁴ and another at the Circle Theater.⁵

The Broadway Players 1921-1922

The first winter stock company to begin activities in Dallas after 1920 was the Broadway Players. On Friday, August 26, 1921, Allen

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²Cycle Park Casino was built in 1899 in Gaston Park. In 1915, it was rebuilt at the corner of Second and Gunter Avenues, a block from the old location.

³The old Majestic Theater at 1925 Elm Street.

⁴Located in the 1000 block on Elm Street.

⁵A St. Paul Street theater built specifically for legitimate productions and opened on Christmas Day, 1923.

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T. Morrison, assistant general manager of Southern Enterprises, announced that the name of the old Majestic Theater, once the Old Dallas Opera House, would be changed to the Capitol, and that the theater would house a stock company, with Thomas A. Magrane of New York as director, and Enid Mae Jackson and Albert McGovern as featured players. Fred Wear, who had been with the Cycle Park summer stock company for several seasons, was to be a member of the new stock group which was to be made up of fifteen persons. Plans called for changing the bill each Monday night, with matinees every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Morrison also announced that a number of "strong plays" had been obtained for the coming season, and that Frank Powell would be the "scenic artist."6

The opening date for the new stock company was set for September 19, and the event was hailed publicly as a reversion of the Dallas Opera House "to its first love—the legitimate drama." As became the rule for all subsequent Dallas stock companies, the Broadway Players balked at being called "stock." The News amusement writer wrote:

When the Capitol opens its door for its initial presentation, Dallas will be the home of one of the finest legitimate play producing organizations in America. For the Broadway players can never be called a stock company. They are more than that. Permanent players banded together under one head they are, but their ideas and policy will not be that of an ordinary stock company, but rather an organization adhering to the highest ideals of the American theater— the ideals of Daly and Wallack—and of the present day—Morosco and Stuart Walker.

Thomas A. Magrane who has been entrusted with the production and staging of the Capitol offerings is a man whose reputation as a director is unimpeachable. . . . With his own company, Magrane played through Utah and Idaho when no other traveling theatrical organization had preceded him. Magrane went east later and hit Broadway as the original Nick the Bartender in Belasco's great success "The Girl of the

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Golden West." Then came the crowded years filled with engagements--now as an actor--now as a stage director. Wilton Lackaye's pieces, "The Inner Man," "Hit the Trail," "Holiday," "The Man Who Came Back," were some of the high spots during this period. He was stage director for Cohan and Harris, Comstock and Gest and David Belasco . . . and was scheduled for a Broadway position when he was prevailed upon to come to Dallas.7

Advertisements for opening night billed the Broadway Players as "soon to be America's best stock company," and the play for the occasion was Adam and Eva by Guy Bolton and George Middleton. The night prices ranged from a top of $1.10 to 25¢.8

But the company did not open as scheduled. As was so often to be offered as a reason during these years when a production was delayed, the director stated that "Eastern theatrical houses and opera chair manufacturers had failed to deliver promptly." Magrane demonstrated his showmanship with the statement which accompanied his announcement that the opening had been postponed until Monday, September 26:

> It is within our power to open next Monday, but I do not desire to open that way . . . I am different from most stock directors. I am not content to fake things . . . The stage settings of that theater are going to be perfectly in accordance with the script before I will permit a performance.9

When Albert McGovern came to the city to join the company, the event was hailed in the Dallas press as a major event in civic life:10

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7News, Sun., Sept. 4, 1921, 7.
10In the early 1920's, the stock companies got extensive newspaper coverage. Stock actors were publicized in much the same manner that motion picture and television stars are treated in today's press. Even their hobbies and their philosophy came in for considerable attention. As Dallas grew in size, and as one stock company succeeded another, stock got less and less attention in the press.
Albert McGovern, leading many of the Broadway Players... is a very athletic looking man whose appearance is that of a well-groomed business or professional man.

"I train for my stage work different than most actors," McGovern said yesterday. "The matter of learning my lines is secondary to me. It is the polishing off process that comes after weeks of training. I go about it like an athlete. I have found that once one is in A-1 physical condition the things he wishes to do come easily. So at least three mornings a week during an entire season I play hand ball, box a few rounds and take a plunge."

McGovern's career has included engagements on three continents... Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania and South Africa. ...

He appeared in "The Third Degree" and "The Traveling Salesman." Robert Edison found him most able support in "The Noble Spaniard" and "The Call of the North." He was a member of the Belasco all-star cast in the revival of "The Heart of Maryland." Other Broadway engagements were in "The Hawk" with William Faversham and with John Drew in "His House in Order."

In the stock field McGovern is one of the best known of leading men. He was featured for ten weeks last year with Maude Fulton. ... His other stock appearances include seasons in Spokane, Wash., Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Duluth. He was for two seasons featured with the Baker Stock Company in Portland, Ore. 11

When Fred Wear and Lillian Beneke, both favorites at Cycle Park, joined the company, a civic reception was given for them. Wear, who was to play an important role in Dallas stock company activities, had a background that included roles with Elsie Ferguson in Such a Little Queen and with Wilton Lackaye in The Bondsman. He also had acted with William Farnum in The Littlest Rebel, and had stock experience that included five seasons with the Lewis-Worth company at Cycle Park and one season in San Antonio with Emma Bunting. 12

Other leading members of the company were Mildred Foster, ingenue; William J. Brady, a character man; Edward Ewald, juvenile;

12 News, Sat., Sept. 24, 1921, L.
Florence Burroughs; Jack Robertson; and Edwin Brandon, stage manager.13

The review of *Adam and Eva*, the production with which the Broadway Players opened their season on September 26, is indicative of the enthusiastic and undiscriminating attitude that the city's dramatic critics took toward the stock companies:

Really, Thomas Magrane's Broadway Players are more than first-nighters were hoping for. They seem to be the genuine article. Dallas hasn't seen anything like them since Hector was a very young pup and occasional road shows were straying west of the Mississippi. They made good on the jump and they deserve the hearty support of all good city folks. The initial performance of "Adam and Eva" was what you might call a howling success. The audience did most of the howling and the company achieved the success.14

The second play given by the Broadway Players was *Wedding Bells*, by Salisbury Fields, and the criticism praised the "sparkling comic lines" as doing "laugh-making service."

The Broadway Players, who under Thomas A. Magrane's direction won their way into the heart of good houses night after night last week in "Adam and Eva" brought into their second week's offering refreshing vigor of action. . . . A little bit of a pup is brought into the play to take the place that had been set aside for a canine being at least two years old, and Lillian Beneke, as the about to be married daughter of Florence Hunter said something she really didn't mean to say in the interpretation of a line in the second act, but it was the first night and the confusion of lines is not likely to happen again.15

Pointing out that the comedy had been seen as a motion picture a short time earlier, the reviewer stated that "pictured subtitles are poor substitutes for shafts of humor and philosophy as spoken by

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McGovern, Miss Jackson, Edward Ewald and others." He called the play "a pleasing comedy full of farcical situations," and praised William J. Brady as Jackson, the English Butler, and Jack Robertson as the "honest and Christianized Japanese." The reviewer commented also that "there was the hint of powerful dramatic possibilities in the laugh-making mannerisms and voice of McGovern." Particularly interesting in these reviews were the comments made on the clothing worn by the cast. In this instance, the reviewer noted that "all of the players fit into the clothes they wear."16

The advertisement for The Eternal Magdalene, the third production of the season, carried a tag line which was to be repeated again and again with stage productions in the early 1920's—"Not a Motion Picture." And the advertisement also gave facts about the original production, in this instance noting that the play had been "performed originally in New York by Julia Arthur and Emmett Corrigan."17 The Dallas stock performance got an extravagant review in which it was praised as "gripping in its intensity, startling in the vivid handling of an ordinarily forbidden subject. . . ." The reviewer called it "a play abounding in keen humor even as it does in sensational drama."

Thomas A. Magrane, the director, who took the leading role of Elijah Bradshaw, performed his part, according to the review, in a manner "well-nigh faultless," and Enid Mae Jackson as "the Woman" was said to be "a veritable dream creation." The reviewer also praised Frances Pitt

as Bradshaw's daughter and Sumner Gard for his humorous portrayal of
Judge Bascombe. ¹⁸

Insight into another device used in stock company advertising
was provided when Cappy Ricks, the presentation for the week of
October 16, was advertised as "direct from one year at the Morosco
Theater in New York City, one year at the Cort Theater, Chicago." Any
details which could make the audiences believe they were witnessing pro­
ductions by top rank companies were utilized by the stock companies.
This applied to all aspects of the production. For example, the same
advertisement stated that "Cappy Ricks' required some innovations in
scenic effects and the Capitol management has had a corps of scenic
artists and carpenters building sets for several days." ¹⁹

This play also received an enthusiastic review and was said by
the reviewer to have gotten "the greatest reception from the first
nighters of any play to date." The emphasis on scenery was underscored
by the reviewer with the comment that "the second act offers opportunity
for some beautiful stage settings," and he noted that, as was customary
with shorter plays, there was entre'act entertainment, observing that
Earle D. Behrends "drew a good bit of applause with a popular song and
the Capitol Orchestra played some amusing numbers." He called Sumner
Gard "well nigh perfect" as Cappy Ricks and also praised Fred Wear who
acted the part of John Skinner. ²⁰

¹⁸News, Tues., Oct. 11, 1921, 4.
²⁰News, Tues., Oct. 18, 1921, 4.
The stock companies in Dallas often made the claim that the play they were going to give was "being presented for the first time by a stock company." The advertisement for The Hottentot, the play done by the Broadway Players for the week of October 23, is typical:

The Broadway Players have obtained "The Hottentot" . . . one of the greatest comedies in years, as a successor to the barrage of laughs handed out in the passing week's offering. . . . The list of plays available were carefully scanned. They were not satisfied. A list of the plays now running or recently closed were studied. The two year run of "The Hottentot" in New York, coupled with the name of Willie Collier held their eye.

After numerous "wires" Manager Nash Weil of the Capitol drew from the New York play brokers the right to be the first stock company in the world to produce "The Hottentot."21

In the review of The Hottentot, the play was called "the season's biggest laugh producer to date." The review pointed up an aspect of stock that not only attracted contemporary audiences to stock company performances, but that also can be said to have been one of the factors responsible for the eventual disappearance of stock. The actors in the cast were expected to furnish their own wardrobes, and the women particularly vied with one another in the richness, if not the dramatic appropriateness of their gowns. The Dallas News critics, and they can be assumed to have been typical of those elsewhere in the country, often made reference to this theatrical practice. Included in the review of The Hottentot was this comment:

Cast in the role of Peggy Fairfax, the heroine, Miss Enid May Jackson does some fine work and wears the most beautiful lot of gowns she has displayed since the Capitol opened. Other feminine members of the company also wear gorgeous raiment.22

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The reputations of famous actors who had made roles notable in a play's Broadway performances were often cited in advertisements by the Dallas stock companies. The Broadway Players, for example, called attention to the fact that *Blind Youth*, written by Lou Tellegen and Willard Mack and presented by the Dallas company as the production for the week of October 30, had Tellegen in the leading role "for one solid year," and that Tellegen was "Sarah Bernhardt's leading man, then a film star, a stage star, and finally the husband of Geraldine Farrar."23

The opening night performance of the play in Dallas ran up against an unusual handicap, according to the review.

With the constant din of the Halloween crowds surging through the streets, the Broadway Players had a hard time last night in their initial presentation of "Blind Youth." Not only did the turmoil from the outside visibly make some of the actors nervous, but it diverted the attention of many in the audience so that the house was the coldest since the theater opened. "Blind Youth" is a strong play and the Capitol stock company did nobly well with it under the circumstances. But it is a play which calls for concentration of thought—for tense silence on the part of the audience that the lines and acting may be appreciated. It would be hard to imagine a tense silence with bedlam broken loose just outside the theater, as was the case of Halloween.

The reviewer called Albert McGovern "forceful and convincing as Maurice, the Franco-American artist who escaped the toils of Parisian vampire," and indulged in what was to be a frequently-repeated reviewer's cliche when he commented, "Frances Pitt only has a small part and Capitol habitues are looking forward eagerly to the time when she will have a chance to do some real acting."24


24 *News*, Tues., Nov. 1, 1921, 4.
The reviewer got the opportunity to see Frances Pitt in a dramatic role in the next production, Sign on the Door, a production which he called "the best thing the company has done to date." He described Miss Pitt as not only "artistic," but also as "a dream of loveliness," and pointed out that this would be her last week with the company "as she leaves Monday for an engagement in one of the larger Eastern cities." The review also stated that "first nighters were much pleased with the new curtain which is a considerable improvement over the old one," and praised a new publication of the Broadway Players, The Capitol Bulletin, which, according to the reviewer, "carried the programs of the play and other features . . . and elicited much favorable comment."25

The announcement that The Naughty Wife would be the production for the following week came simultaneously with the disclosure that the date of openings would be changed from Monday to Sunday and that there would be no matinees on Sundays.26

The play, in the opinion of the reviewer, verged "perilously close to the risque at times, but always stayed just within the bound of propriety." The reviewer described the lines as "delicious," the acting as "clever," and the stage settings as "so attractive that this work of the stage carpenters was applauded before an actor appeared on the stage." He praised Enid May Jackson for her work in the female lead.

25 News, Tues., Nov. 8, 1921, 4.
and stated that Edward Ewald "registered utter disgust in a way that set
the audience howling with laughter."²⁷

The stock companies operated on the premise that not only new
plays but also new faces had to be shown to the public and it was common
practice to make changes in the casts. The first mass change in the
Broadway Players took place during the week of November 15 while The
Dummy was in rehearsal. J. Arthur Young, Leona Powers, leading lady,
Tamson Manker, Lisle Leigh, character woman, and Philip Sheffield, light
comedian, came into the company. Enid May Jackson, Edwin Brandon and
Brandon's wife, Florence Burroughs, left the company. Brandon was
replaced as director by Jack Robertson.²⁸

Every stock season at the time included at least one "crook"
play, a genre which today would be described as a "detective" drama.
These were very popular, particularly if they included as did The Dummy,
the presentation for the week of November 20, such an unusual character
as a deaf mute, or such a sympathy-getter as a little girl.

The reviewer made a comment about the opening night performance
which tells much about the style of acting in stock. He stated that
"Miss Lisle Leigh, the new character woman . . . had only three days to
work up the part, yet she was one of the hits of the performance." And
he highlighted one of the criticisms that were frequently made of stock
productions when he observed that "despite the fact that there are four

²⁷ News, Tues., Nov. 15, 1921, 4.
²⁸ News, Fri., Nov. 18, 1921, 4. Brandon, who had been with the
company when it was organized as stage manager, replaced Thomas Magrane
as director with the production of The Hottentot during the week of
October 25. Robertson had also been with the company since it started.
acts with a shifting of scenery between each, there are no long waits.\textsuperscript{29}

The announcement of the Dallas debut of Leona Powers in \textit{Smiling Through} on November 27 with the Broadway Players was hailed in an advertisement as "the most important announcement since distinguished dramatic stars played in Dallas." Miss Powers was called "one of the greatest personalities on the stage." The advertisement reflected the attitude of the public toward stock companies in its statement: "We have erased the word 'stock company' and inserted the word 'productions' presenting some of the most distinguished actors in America."\textsuperscript{30}

After the opening performance of the play, a group of theatergoers went backstage for a party, and the newspaper account illustrates not only the lengths to which stock companies of the day went in scenery but also the idolatrous attitudes of the playgoing public:

As the guests filed back on the stage the same dim light as had shown during the play disclosed to them the beauty of the scenic settings. They realized what an arduous task Jack Robertson, stage director, and his assistants had in placing all those vines and roses over the walls and trees. From the quaint gabled house which is an integral part of the setting issued soft music. . . . Many of those present remarked that . . . now they were meeting some of the best of the present generation of Thespians. . . . Some of them were emphatic in declaring that the drama of today, as presented at the Capitol, pleased them as much as on those never-to-be-forgotten evenings when actors of wide fame trud the boards of the same theater, then the Dallas Opera House.\textsuperscript{31}

An appeal made not only by stock companies but also by touring shows and all other types of entertainment in Dallas during this period

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{News}, Mon., Nov. 21, 1921, 4.

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 27, 1921, II, 8.

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{News}, Wed., Nov. 30, 1921, 4.
was exemplified in the advertisement for *Happiness*, the next presentation of the Broadway Players. The advertisement stated: "The same play and the same high standard of acting in the exact production as seen in New York at prices several times higher." The play, according to the advertisement, had originally starred Laurette Taylor for a year on Broadway. The review of its opening Dallas performance on December 4 described the play as "a sparkling comedy with considerable pathos thrown in." Fred Wear as "the dapper admirer of Miss Leigh," and Philip Sheffield, "the rugged Irish beau of Miss Powers," were singled out as having done "a wonderful piece of work." The reference to costumes was again made by the reviewer:

> Miss Lisle Leigh is the rich woman and Miss Powers an errand girl. ... Miss Leigh wears beautiful clothes beautifully. She gives a most polished performance, looks the part and comes very near dividing first honors with Miss Powers. But the Capitol's new leading lady makes her character absolutely natural, is shabby clear through to the epilogue, and then proves that she can wear classy frocks.  

*Our Wives* was frankly billed as "a fashion revue in three joyous acts," and this time the appeal made in the advertisement was in part based on the fact that a portion of the proceeds were to go for a charitable purpose. The scenic effects, according to the review, were "elaborate and wonderfully effective." In the lobby, the reviewer stated, was a dais "with oriental rugs valued at several thousand dollars and colored lights and a small fountain in honor of Shriner's week." The play was said by the reviewer to be "for laughing

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33 *News*, Mon., Dec. 5, 1921, 4.
purposes only," and the women "had opportunity to wear pretty dresses
... the men carry the story." But the reviewer insisted that it was
"the sterling performance" of McGovern and the "fascinating work" of
Miss Powers that made the production interesting to the audience.35

A late Broadway show, The Girl in the Limousine, was advertised
as "a laugh blow out" and as the work of Wilson Collison and Avery
Hopwood.36 The reviewer called it "a regular, new-fashioned bedroom
farce" and stated that "never since the Capitol opened has a first night
audience laughed so uproariously." He was careful to point out that
"there is nothing in the play to which the most fastidious could take
offense," and called attention to the "scenic settings . . . with . . .
the lightning flashing through the windows . . . and the rain . . .
pouring down."37

Daddies, described by the reviewer as "David Belasco's recent
success," was destined to be the last production of the Broadway
Players. The review stated that the play had "such undeniable freshness
and charm as to captivate even the most blase and sophisticated," and
that, concerning as it did "one of the most deeply rooted human emotions,
the love of children," it took on "bigger proportions" than its designa-
tion as a comedy would indicate. The reviewer praised the entire cast
and had particularly kind words for Earl Lee, the "dramatic director,"
who, the review stated, "scored another success in the stage settings."38

35News, Mon., Dec. 12, 1921, 1.
On Tuesday night, the second night of the run of Daddies, the Capitol Theater was gutted by fire. Southern Enterprises, lessees of the Capitol Theater, at first planned to take the entire company to Atlanta after a fruitless survey had been made of Dallas theaters and auditoriums for a place where the season could be continued.

It was estimated by the Southern officials that the damaged theater would take five or six months to repair and that the theater could not be ready until the following season. The cost of repairs was felt to be prohibitive. E. H. Hulsey, president of Southern Enterprises, holders of a ten-year lease on the theater, stated that the rebuilding plans depended on what the Dallas Opera House Association decided.

Most of the Opera House Association stock was held by the J. B. Wilson Estate, and in January, 1922, Fred Schoelkopf, administrator for the estate, announced that because the lease was too valuable to be allowed to lapse, the structure would be rebuilt and that it would once again be leased by Southern Enterprises and be used for dramatic stock. However, a year later the decision was made to tear down the theater and replace it with stores. This marked the end of the Old Opera House which had long been a Dallas landmark.


40Southern officials commented that "Some houses haven't enough seating capacity. Some houses with adequate seating capacity haven't enough stage space." News, Thurs., Dec. 29, 1921, l.

41News, Thurs., Dec. 29, 1921, l.

42News, Sat., Jan. 21, 1922, l.

The Broadway Players was the first winter stock company in Dallas in a number of years. Backed by Southern Enterprises, the same theatrical corporation which built the Palace and the Melba theaters, the company was evidently not plagued by the same financial troubles which hampered subsequent stock companies in the city. The company opened on September 26, 1921, and continued until the theater was damaged by fire on December 27, a total of seventy-two days. In all, the company presented twelve plays for seven evening and three matinee performances each, and a thirteenth play, Daddies, had to close after its second evening performance because of the fire. Members of the company included Thomas A. Magrane, the first director; Enid Mae Jackson and Albert McGovern, the leading players with the troupe when it first started; Fred Wear, veteran member of the Cycle Park summer stock company; Lillian Beneke, also a Cycle Park favorite; Mildred Foster; William J. Brady; Edward Ewald; Florence Burroughs; Jack Robertson; and Edwin Brandon, stage manager. There appears to have been some change in personnel and these did not always get newspaper publicity. However, from the reviews we learn that Sumner Gard and Earle D. Behrends were also members of the original troupe. The manager of the Capitol during its short-lived stock season was Nash Weil upon whom fell the responsibility of obtaining the plays. J. Arthur Young, Leona Powers, Tamzon Manker, Lisle Leigh and Philip Sheffield subsequently joined the company and Enid May Jackson, Edwin Brandon and Florence Burroughs left. Brandon had replaced Magrane as director on October 25 and was replaced two weeks later by Jack Robertson. However, before the Broadway Players had completed their stay in Dallas, still another director, Earl Lee, was overseeing the productions.
This constant shifting of personnel was a characteristic of the stock companies and served to prevent their obtaining repertory status. As will be seen later in this chapter, one poor week in attendance was sufficient to cause the company to fail and the managers were constantly on the lookout for new talent. Too, a stock actor in Dallas who was not satisfactory to the director or not satisfied with the company could count on employment with one of the other stock groups that were so numerous in the country at that time. There was another factor. Stock actors were definitely typed as to whether they played comedy, character, or romantic roles and it was relatively an easy matter, for example, for the stock manager to secure another "heavy," a juvenile or ingenue, or a "character man." Prior to the movies, when audiences were so dependent upon stage drama for their entertainment, it was not so important that the acting be of satisfactory caliber, particularly in the provinces. But by 1921 the movies and vaudeville were providing stock with keen competition. The public taste was shifting and the stock managers seemed to have attributed to an actor's lack of ability what might better have been placed at the door either of outdated plays or of a change in audience taste.

The popularity of stock in 1921 is attested to by the great public receptions given stars that joined the company. However, it is difficult to evaluate whether stock consistently drew large audiences. Occasionally, the reviews called attention to the size of the house, but it must be remembered that these were opening night performances. Too, stock managers, like other theatrical impresarios of the time, were extremely reluctant to disclose attendance figures publicly.
As for a critical evaluation of the ten-week season of the Broadway Players, that is even more difficult. The newspaper reviews were so over-enthusiastic and so lacking in objectivity that any attempt to assay the artistic merit of the productions using them as a guide would be futile. The plays presented by the Broadway Players were standard stock fare, and of the thirteen productions only Smiling Through is familiar at all today. The Broadway Players were more unabashedly a stock company than any of the winter stock companies that subsequently came to Dallas. The Players made no attempt to change the rigid caste system among actors that prevailed in stock and did plays considered more within the stock domain than did the following troupes. There were no pretenses to being a "resident" company and no claims that the actors were cast in all types of roles.

The Hippodrome Players 1922-1923

After the disbanding of the Broadway Players because of the Capitol Theater fire in December, 1921, the city was without winter stock until the beginning of the 1922-1923 season. Robert J. Littlefield Jr., owner and director of the Rex and Happyland Theaters, took a lease on the Hippodrome Theater where vaudeville, movies, and musical comedies had been presented during the past few years, and, with the comment that "many believe a revival of the drama is at hand," announced the formation of the Hippodrome Players. He named as manager Carl C. Peters who had been active in Dallas theater activities for a number of years. Peters described the proposed company in a manner that was to become familiar to Dallas theatergoers:

The company . . . will consist of specialists in histrionic attainments, each and every one having been connected with some of the biggest dramatic stock organizations in the country.
The plays we propose to present... will be the last word in dramatic stock presentation... the whole company has been selected with great care. ... Dallas will be given the best that New York has to offer. ... The Hippodrome will be the only amusement house in Dallas which will not make feature pictures a part of the program. New furnishings, stage settings, lighting effects, and everything necessary to present a show in a first class manner will be offered.44

Listed in the company were Leslie Adams, leading man; Hazel Miller, leading woman; Henry Gervey, juvenile; Helen Lewis, ingenue; Fred Wear; Edith Ketcham; Fred Hervey, character man; Emily Lascelles, character woman; Charles Lammers; Charles Danforth, character man; and Aubrey Noyes, "director general." Lammers, like Fred Wear, had been associated with Cycle Park. The company had an orchestra with five musicians and began its season on Labor Day, September 4, with Cheating Cheaters by Max Marcini.

The reviewer described Cheating Cheaters as "a crook play in which two bands of high class crooks plot to rob each other." An interesting insight into one of the physical characteristics generally associated with leading ladies was provided by the reviewer's comment on Hazel Miller: "She isn't one of the towering heroines; on the contrary she is diminutive. Her stage presence is free from force and her reading good." The manner of the leading man, Leslie Adams, was described by the reviewer as "easy-going and... impressive." And Fred Wear was said in the review to have been handicapped by a minor role but was nevertheless "the favorite... and given the most applause." The reviewer called the play "high class" and observed that

Miss Miller received many flowers.]

The second production of the Hippodrome Players was Mountain Man and a description of the plot illustrates the type of melodrama that was popular in stock at the time:

Leslie Adams plays the title role of Aaron Winterfield, a mountain man whose innermost feelings are those of a gentlemanly refined kind, in spite of the fact that his appearance and little mannerisms are those of the uncouth, rugged mountaineer. By a trick of fate he inherits vast wealth and power and wins for a wife a young and not too deserving worthy relative.

Her way of living is not his and she carries him out of his mountain home to a modern city and attempts to make out of him one of the . . . idlers. He chafes . . . a disagreement arises which causes a separation.

During this time the mountain man apparently becomes a man of the world, but he has not forgotten his old cabin. . . . He goes to France during the late war . . . and sacrifices he makes there only accentuate his dislike for the petty conventions. . . . During his absence his wife realizes the worth of the man she had thought loutish and upon his return a reconciliation is effected and they return to the mountain home.

It was the leading man, Leslie Adams, who, according to the reviewer, stole most of the honors at the performance. The criticism abounded in hyperbole:

Leslie Adams may remain in Dallas for years, but it will be months, at least, before those who see him this week, will cease comparing what he does other weeks with his interpretation of the mountaineer. . . .

Seldom has a Dallas audience witnessed such a transformation as Adams gives of Aaron Winterfield changed from the awkward and taciturn mountaineer, garbed in ill-fitting clothes, to the graceful and cultivated captain of the AEF, wearing his uniform like a West Pointer. Yet so forcefully does he portray his character that the audience realizes it is the same grim Aaron Winterfield. . . . Leslie Adams is almost the whole show.

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^7 News, Mon., Sept. 11, 1922, 4. During the first two or three years of winter stock in Dallas it was the practice to write a synopsis of the plot in the News on the Sunday preceding the production. This practice was discontinued, however, as stock got less attention in the press.

^8 News, Mon., Sept. 11, 1922, 4.

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The third play presented by the Hippodrome Players, *A Stitch in Time*, was described in the advance notices as "a charming and romantic comedy drama fashioned somewhat after 'Peg O' My Heart,'" and as "one of the most dependable of stock plays." Hazel Miller, according to the reviewer, "scored a true hit" in the production which told "a fascinating love story with the little daughter of a scrub woman who made a man out of the hero and then got him for herself—as the heroine." The reviewer commented that the audience "liked the show so well that it applauded even after the final curtain, something very unusual for a dramatic performance here." He praised Hazel Lewis in what he called a "catty" role, commented that she "wore her gorgeous costumes marvelously," and observed that Fred Wear, in the part of the butler, "does one of his wonderful character roles which have endeared him to Dallas audiences." The reviewer called the play the best "from a dramatic standpoint," that had been presented by the Hippodrome Players.

*Mile a Minute*, Kendall, by Owen Davis, was the offering for the following week and the reviewer described it as "one of those entertaining rural comedy dramas with a young city man as the hero." He observed that it had such types as "a penurious and cranky small town hotel keeper and a sour and suspicious albeit witty old maid who is chief cook and dishwasher," a part played by Emily Lascelles and made by her, according to the reviewer, into "one of the big things of the play." He commented that the play was "genuinely funny," and that the lines were "scintillant." [sic] The reviewer observed about Fred Wear

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that "the most serious thing he has to do . . . is to furnish amusement largely through his grasping disposition."51

Insight into stock procedure was furnished by an account in the News that told about the different roles which Charles Danforth, "general business" man in the acting company, had to be prepared to assume:

Just how many sorts of roles he has played, Mr. Danforth admits he can not remember, but says there are few kinds of characters he hasn't tried. Since the Hippodrome opened to dramatic stock, four plays have been put on. Mr. Danforth has appeared as a typical Bowery tough, an old and feeble Southern negro servant, a gay and debonair young society man, and this week . . . he is cast as a rube Justice of the Peace who makes his living fining motorists who violate the speed law.52

Rachel Crothers was the author of the fifth play of the season, 39 East. The advertisement called attention to popular priced matinees at 25¢ and 50¢.53 As might have been anticipated, the reviewer praised the play, calling it "well-written," declared it "well-acted," and stated that it was "well-received by the first-nighters."54

Corra Beach, an actress who, according to the advance notices, had been a motion picture star for a number of years and a "popular stage favorite," joined the company early in October. She made her first appearance with the Hippodrome Players in Peggy Behave. The review of the play, which opened on Sunday, October 8, revealed an unusual attitude on the part of the critic toward acting. He wrote:

Much keen enjoyment was vouchsafed to the Sunday night audience at the Hippodrome when The Players gave their initial presentation of "Peggy Behave." Part of this pleasure came from the play itself and the rest from the knowledge that many of those in the cast were just about learning their lines as they were saying them. And yet the play pleased.\(^5\)

The reviewer explained that the difficulty with lines was due to a siege of dengue fever that had struck the cast, one that led to an interesting manifestation of audience taste:

Miss Emily Lascelles is very ill. Fred Wear is just back with the company after a hard attack, and as he did not have much time to learn what would have been his part, several shifts in the cast were necessary. Frank Harvey is appearing as Wallis Stanton, father of Peggy, instead of Fred Wear, as announced in the printed program.

Mr. Wear is appearing as Chief of Police in place of Walter Shumway. Henry Gurvey is cast as the clergyman instead of Mr. Harvey, and Charles Lammers is taking Miss Lascelles place as Mrs. Jordan Judd, deaf but determined. . . . Mr. Lammers proved himself a worthy female impersonator and snared many laughs. . . . "Peggy Behave" is far from being the best play Owen Davis ever wrote, but the interpretation given it at the Hippodrome is one which pleased the Sunday night audience immensely.\(^6\)

An opportunity to show off their wardrobes always thrilled the female members of the cast, and occasionally they got the opportunity to display gowns that might have been out of their financial reach. The advertisement for Lombardi, Ltd. which dealt with "a famous designer of exclusive gowns who came near ruining his business and his life through an insane infatuation for an adventurous actress" stated that "through the courtesy of A. Harris and Co.\(^7\) a display of the latest modes in women's wear and of the latest designs in dress materials will be shown

\(^6\)News, Mon., Oct. 9, 1922, 4.
\(^7\)A Dallas department store.
at each performance." And the play, in the eyes of the reviewer, was
"by far the cleverest and the dressiest play since the Hippodrome
reopened as a dramatic stockhouse." Helen Lewis as Daisy, "a green but
romantic mannequin" won praise from the reviewer, but Leslie Adams as
Lombardi, according to the review, acted in a manner described as
"sterling . . . if a little too repressed." As might have been
expected, the costumes were said by the reviewer to have been "wonder­
fully displayed," and the settings were described as "extravagant and
wonderfully in keeping with the spirit of the play."

Mildred Southwick, daughter of Harry L. Southwick, dean of the
Emerson College of Oratory in Boston, who joined the company in mid-
October, was described in the advance publicity as "of the slender,
graceful type and ardently fond of tennis and swimming." She made her
Dallas debut in Overnight, described in the advertisements as a three
act farce comedy "of two honeymoons that were nearly ruined by an inno­
cent act that looked compromising." The review of the opening night
performance on October 22 reported that the audience "howled with
glee . . . ." The reviewer commented that the roles had been shifted
because of illness in the cast and that "Henry Gurvey as Percy Darling,

59 It would be interesting to know if the reviewer was denouncing
understatement or merely making a comment on inadequate assimilation of
the role.
one of the honeymooners, is good . . . except for a bad habit of talking too much to his audience instead of the person addressed."63

Fred Wear became the new production director late in October and the first play given under his direction was The Ghost Between.64 This play, too, like almost every other production given by the stock company, was described in the review as making "the greatest hit with a Sunday night audience of any since the house opened with dramatic stock." The reviewer attributed this to the fact that it was a better play than usual and that Fred Wear was "directing it in his virile manner." He called Wear "made-to-order" for his acting part and stated that Miss Southwick was "wonderful as the widow [and] she wears fine clothes with distinction," and that Leslie Adams was "superb."65

To honor Fred Wear for his direction of the play, the management designated Thursday of the week's run as "Fred Wear Day" and gave the first five hundred women who attended the matinee "a personally autographed photo of Mr. Wear."66

Langdon McCormick's The Storm, given during the week of November 6, was marked by spectacular effects:

The curtain rises on a cabin set in the Canadian forest. A blue river is seen winding its way to the distance and dead leaves come fluttering down from the overhanging trees. Two friends, a woodsman and a city man have decided to spend the winter here, but fate sends the French-Canadian girl as the third member of the firm.

Darkness descends and the moon sends its sparkling rays across the river. Winter sets in and the snow is seen pelting

down and turning the entire landscape into a sea of white. These effects drew applause from the audience. Inside the little cabin, the world old drama is worked out. Friends become enemies, for both want the girl.

The woodsman is stronger physically than his city antagonist, but no match in the battle of wits. There is a good bit of honest humor in the cabin scenes, but all of it builds toward the clash certain to come. Vainly the girl tries to keep the men friends. With spring comes the forest fire, which is vividly represented by unique stage effects, and the spectacular element reaches its climax when a big tree crashes down on the cabin. The author very kindly gave the story a happy ending.67

In *Daddy Long Legs*, the production during the week of November 13, a new leading lady for the company made her debut. Claribel Fontaine, who replaced Hazel Miller who had gone home because of an attack of dengue fever, won ecstatic praise from the critic. The reviewer gushed:

Overshadowing all the others is Miss Claribel Fontaine, new leading lady, who so completely won the hearts of the Sunday night audience that little else besides compliments on her work could be heard as the crowd filed out through the rain to street cars and automobiles.

Everything necessary to make a dramatic heroine is possessed by Miss Fontaine. That she is pretty is perhaps the best of these, but she is a delicious bit of feminity, wears clothes in the manner born, and she has some of the most bewitching mannerisms imaginable. Miss Fontaine threw herself into the role of Judy Abbott as if she was in reality the girl from the drab orphan asylum. She gave a superb piece of acting. More than that, her every word could be heard distinctly in the farthest reaches of the theater, and her voice is cool and lulling in its rather lilting flow.

She also demonstrated that she is both a singer and a pianist of more than passing ability. "Daddy Long Legs" is a real play. Leslie Adams as the hero has one of his best parts and plays up to Miss Fontaine as if it was a real pleasure. Miss Mildred Southwick as the girl responsible for the onus of the story has a rather sober, although impressive part and scored heavily in the role. She wore a charming green gown in the second act which was the outspoken envy of many women in the audience.68

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67 *News*, Mon., Nov. 6, 1922, 4.

New to the cast for this play, in addition to Miss Fontaine, were Lou Streeter, a Cycle Park veteran, and Ella Etheridge.69

On the Firing Line, giving during the week of November 20, drew the largest opening night audience since the Hippodrome had opened with stock,70 and Nice People, presented during the following week, was said by the reviewer to be "a forceful and colorful interpretation." The review called attention also to "the exquisite costuming of the four feminine members of the cast," and praised Claribel Fontaine as "the embodiment of the age of jazz, yet real woman underneath it all." He also lauded Ella Etheridge as providing a fine performance as Teddy's Aunt; stated that Mildred Southwick made "an adroit and thorough female villain"; and commented that Charles Lammers "carried much of the comedy for the play and did it in his irresistible manner."71

Enter Madame, seen the following week, was said in the review to be "undoubtedly one of the most interesting plays yet given at the Hippodrome . . . the most artistically presented since 'The Ghost Between.'" The reviewer especially praised the scenic effects and again lauded the acting of Claribel Fontaine, who, he stated, "surprised even her most loyal admirers by the wonderful way in which she played Madame Lisa De la Robbia . . . Madame displays a fit of temper in the first act which is delicious in its intensity." He commented about Mildred Southwick that her work was "so delightful . . . the Sunday night audience gave her a big hand in her strongest lines, something unusual."72

69 News, Sun., Nov. 12, 1922, II, 11.
70 News, Mon., Nov. 20, 1922, 4.
71 News, Mon., Nov. 27, 1922, 4.
The production for the following week, *De Luxe Annie*, a play about "society crooks," was described by the reviewer as dealing with "amnesia ... and the badger game," and as "not utterly beyond the bounds of possibility." The reviewer praised Claribel Fontaine in the role of a nearly white octoroon stating that her "aping of darky eccentricities is not only amusing but fascinating." The play in performance, according to the reviewer was "unmistakeably liked" by the audience.

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The *Cinderella Man* was performed during the week of December 25 and the announcement was made that a new juvenile, Geoffrey B. Bering, had joined the company. He was described as "only 22 ... and a finished actor." The play itself, in advance notices, was said to be "bubbling over with the true Christmas spirit." It was in the publicity for this production that the company was referred to as "The Players," instead of "The Hippodrome Players." Although the new company name was to be used for the rest of the season, the reason for the change was not made public.


Welcome Stranger, by Aaron Hoffman, was the production for the first week of the new year, and a familiar "gimmick" was employed when the advertisement stated that the play commanded "the highest royalty ever paid for production rights."78

The week of January 7 saw the presentation of Main Street, the dramatization of the Sinclair Lewis novel made by Harvey O'Higgins and Harriet Ford. The review stated that the play effectively summoned up memories for those in the audience who had lived in small towns. The reviewer described Claribel Fontaine as "very emotional as the social uplift. . . . It is a part which calls for overplaying." And he commented that Mildred Southwick as the druggist's wife "does some exceedingly strong work." Leslie Adams, according to the reviewer, "exalts the country practitioner to the heights he really deserves," and Earl Jamison as the young Swede was called "exceptionally fine."79

Shavings, the presentation for the week of January 16, was described in the advertisements as "'The Old Homestead' and 'Way Down East' brought up to date."80 The reviewer praised Leslie Adams, who played the lead role of the "kindly old character who spends most of his time with the toys he whittled out," as doing "one of his best parts since joining the company."81

The announcement was made during the run of Shavings that Leslie Adams was leaving for New York City after the conclusion of the

The following Sunday it was disclosed that Albert McGovern, who had been leading man for the Capitol Players in Dallas during the previous season, was to replace Leslie Adams.

*East is West,* played during the week of January 22, was said by the reviewer to have charmed the audience. He commented that "at the hands of Miss Claribel Fontaine and other members of the company it was given an interpretation which will make it remembered as one of the very best things done by the organization yet." Leslie Adams, making his farewell performance in the role of Charles Yong, was said by the reviewer to do "this role wonderfully." Others who drew the reviewer's praise were Fred Wear "whose best friends almost forgot who he was"; Ella Etheridge who "acted the mother role as if the whole thing was real"; and Earl Jamison, the juvenile. The stage settings were described by the reviewer as being "probably the best yet at the Hippodrome," and he praised the love boat scene as "extremely beautiful" the Chinese home as "exquisite in its appointments;" and the Benson home set as having "really impressed as being the residence of real people."  

*The Ruined Lady,* given during the week of February 1, had a fifty-minute second act which, according to the review, was "virtually put over by the wit and verve of a three-character conversation," and the reviewer described the play as "a thorough antidote for the drop in temperature outside." He praised Sam Flint for contributing "his

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usual studied performance of the part." A famous old melodrama, The Great Divide, was presented the following week and won the praise of the critic as "one of those tense, gripping dramas which never lets down from start to finish. As given Sunday, it was a genuine histrionic treat." The review described the lighting effects as "the most exquisite yet given by this company."86

Another well known play, Within the Law, one of the original "crook" dramas, by Bayard Vellier, drew a description of the acting of Claribel Fontaine from the reviewer as a "remarkable portrayal . . . [she] dominates the action" in her role of Mary Turner. The reviewer commented that "the Hippodrome Players make it a living, breathing 'mellerdrammer' of the old days—a story that keeps the audience at top interest throughout." He said about Helen Lewis that she was "the laugh producer," and observed that "it is hard to imagine how anyone else could have taken her part with the same success for she does it as if she had been practicing it for years." And the reviewer explained that "it was due to insistent demand that Manager Nash Weil . . . decided to present a few of these favorites to see if the desire to see them was widespread enough to use others."87

Several Dallas school children, including two whom the News referred to as "little darkies," were utilized for Penrod, given the week of February 25, and the reviewer described the children as holding "the center of attention." He stated that Ray Simmons, "a fine

juvenile, is the real star as Penrod," and commended Albert McGovern in
the role of the father; Ella Etheridge as a servant; and Lou Streeter.

Buddies, the first musical comedy presented by the Hippodrome
Players, was given during the week of March 4 and was advertised as "not
a war story . . . or 2nd lieu in it," indicating that the public was
sated with sentimental dramas about the late war. The critic praised
the play:

By far the largest and most enthusiastic Sunday night crowd
of the season witnessed the opening performance of "Buddies" at
the Hippodrome. The great George V. Hobart play was excellently
presented and the performance charmed by its novelty as well as
its merit. It will easily rank as the outstanding hit of the
Hippodrome season to date.

The reviewer went on to describe the singing and the chorus as
"above average" and gave particular credit to the singing of Claribel
Fontaine and to the performances of Mildred Southwick and Earl Jamison
as "an exceedingly pleasing American girl," and as "a bashful lover."
It was noted that "practically every seat was taken."

But in spite of the enthusiastic reviews and the accounts of
capacity audiences, the Hippodrome Players must have run into financial
problems, for on the second night of the run of Buddies, R. J.
Littlefield, producer for the Hippodrome Players, announced that prices
for admission would be reduced, with the new scale ranging from 25¢ to
75¢. As was customary both in the movie houses and with the stock com­
panies, this reduction was explained away with a rather pat reason:

The present high standard of plays will be continued. It was decided to put the new schedule of prices into effect so that lovers of the drama who may have felt they could not afford to attend the Hippodrome might have an opportunity to do so.

The play for the week of March 11 was to be *Rolling Stones*, but *Buddies* proved so popular that it was held over for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of the following week, making it the first of the company's plays to win such distinction. There was a large audience on Sunday night and this was attributed in part to "the fact that the new scale of lower admissions went into effect Sunday." 52

*Rolling Stones* by Edgar Selwyn, was called "bright and snappy" by the reviewer and was said to be marked by "excellent acting." Credit was given by the reviewer to the stage crew for the settings, "especially for the bridge scene, with the street car gliding along in the distance, and that where the safe was blown." The reviewer disclosed that two of the most popular members of the company, Albert McGovern and Mildred Southwick, were leaving after the week's run.93

*Step Lively, Hazel*, presented for the week of March 19, proved to be a farce on the subject of prohibition, according to the reviewer, that could not possibly change "anyone's opinion on the subject and without possible offense to even Mr. Volstead." The reviewer stated that it "pleased and amused a good cold weather audience." In the review, a curious fact can be noted. Because the leading man and the prima donna in stock were committed to take the romantic leads, they often got parts which were relatively minor in importance. The critic

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commented: "Action is fast and plentiful, though with not so much opportunity for the principals of the cast as would have been expected." Then, for some reason not made public, the Players announced that Step Lively, Hazel would be their "farewell week." There was no mention in the newspaper account as to why they were closing or where they planned to go.

The actors decided to continue the season on their own, a step that was to be taken several times in the next few years when producers announced the closing of a company. Under the leadership of Fred Wear, they reopened at the Hippodrome on April 1 with The Barrier, utilizing Marion Grant who had replaced Claribel Fontaine as leading lady. Helen Lewis had also left the cast to join the Gene Lewis-Olga Worth Company at Houston and Albert McGovern and Mildred Southwick had gone on March 19. Those who remained to carry on the season included Fred Wear, Ella Ethridge, Helen Hampton, Hal Worth, Earl Jamison, Lou Streeter, Sam Flint and Jack Richardson.

The Barrier, a Rex Beach melodrama, was announced as the start of a seven-week season. The reviewer of the play commented about Marion Grant's acting that she "easily dominates the interest of the audience... won a warm place in the hearts of her audience...[is] charming in the character, natural in voice and manner, and does excellent work in portraying the varying moods of a girl beginning to achieve the problems of womanhood and the real troubles of life." Sam Flint and

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Hal C. Worth were described as the "outstanding male figures" in the play by the reviewer, and he stated that "'The Barrier' is a good show, well staged and well acted. It affords two and a half hours of real entertainment."97

For the next play, The Rose of Killarney, Rosemary Hilton, described in the advance notices as "late of the Castle Square Stock Company in Boston," joined the cast to take the title role.98 The play was called in the review, "the best done by the Players in their recent offerings." The critic stated that the plot was not "too much," but commented that "the humor is almost continuous" and he gave principal credit for the comedy to Fred Wear and Ella Ethridge, commenting that "Wear does some excellent character work." Rosemary Hilton was said in the review to have "proved herself thoroughly qualified. She has the vivacious youthfulness necessary to the role, with a quite apparent ease of proportion." The reviewer also praised Earl Jamison and Marion Grant.99

The Shepherd of the Hills, given during the week of April 15, was to be the final production of the Hippodrome Players. The reviewer called the play "good old fashioned rural drama, relieved with humor and homely philosophy," and he observed that "outstanding characterizations" were turned in by Sam Flint as Grant Matthews the Elder; Fred Wear as Daniel Howitt, the father; Lou Streeter as Preaching Bill; and Marion Grant as Pete. The reviewer qualified his comments by stating that

99 News, Mon., Apr. 9, 1923, 4.
"none will be disappointed who like a Harold Bell Wright story." The Hippodrome Players disbanded on Saturday, April 6, 1923, after the run of *Shepherd of the Hills* had ended.

In all, the Hippodrome Players' season had run for thirty-three weeks. A total of thirty-two plays had been presented and there had been one week, March 25 through March 31, 1923, when no play was given. This was the week that followed the closing of the company by Robert J. Littlefield and its reopening under the leadership of Fred Wear. Twenty-nine of the plays were given while the company was still in the hands of Littlefield and three were presented with Fred Wear in control.

The original company which opened at the Hippodrome on September 1, 1922, included Leslie Adams as leading man, Hazel Miller as leading woman, Henry Gurvey, Helen Lewis, Fred Wear, Edith Ketchum, Fred Hervey, Emily Lascelles, Charles Lammers, Charles Danforth and Walter Shumway. The manager was Carl C. Peters and the director Aubrey Noyes. Fred Wear became director after several weeks and Hal Worth, Jack Richardson, Corra Beach, Mildred Southwick, Claribel Fontaine, Lou Streeter, Ella Etheridge, Geoffrey B. Bering, Sam Flint and Albert McGovern joined the company as replacements before the season ended.

The Hippodrome Players were to be the only stock company that stayed in Dallas for an entire winter season of all those that came to the city between 1920 and 1930. Although the newspapers carried little about the internal workings of the company, there is reason to believe that there was internal dissension. Also, the evidence of the price reduction indicates that attendance was not always up to expectation.

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100 *News*, Mon., Apr. 16, 1923, 4.
When Littlefield withdrew his financial support, Fred Wear projected a seven-weeks season for the actors group who attempted to carry through the rest of the season on their own but abandoned the venture after three productions.

As stock seasons went, the Hippodrome Players can be said to have been successful, but there were indications that the public was beginning to get jaded with this type of entertainment. The over-enthusiastic nature of the reviews and the lack of published information about attendance hinders an objective evaluation of the true success of the company. But the Hippodrome Players' long run is perhaps the best gauge that this was the most successful of all Dallas stock groups.

Like the Broadway Players of the season before, the Hippodrome Players made little pretense to being other than an orthodox stock company. The rigid system of casting was still maintained and there was little talk about repertory status. Too, the plays of the Hippodrome Players appear to have been geared more for popular taste than had been those of the Broadway Players. There was more use of such stock standbys of earlier years as The Great Divide, Penrod, Within the Law, The Cinderella Man and Daddy Long Legs. Also, there was more emphasis on spectacular scenic effects.

The Circle Players 1923-1924

The Circle Theater was the first built in Dallas since the construction of the Old Opera House in 1899 that was intended to be utilized solely for legitimate productions. Built by the Hulsey interests, it was located on St. Paul Street off Pacific Avenue opposite the Medical Arts Building and had a seating capacity of approximately 1,200 persons.
The Halsey interests entrusted the direction of the stock company, which opened the new playhouse on Christmas Day, 1923, to Walter B. Gilbert who had begun his career in 1895 at the Arch Street Theater in Philadelphia. He had been associated with some nationally known dramatic companies and had also achieved recognition as an actor.101

The opening production of the company, known as the Circle Players, was Why Men Leave Home by Avery Hopwood, and the featured players were Leona Powers who had been with the Broadway Players, and John Glynn McCarlane, said in advance notices to have been "the original star of the New York cast" of the play. The announcement was made that season's reservations were being taken.102

Others in the Circle Players troupe were Kathryn Givney, Billie Long, John G. Fee, William Abram, Frances Loughton, Russell Fillmore, Lora Rogers and Irving Kennedy.103

The second production of the stock group was The Goldfish, called in the advertisements "Marjorie Rambeau's latest success."104 Then came The Breaking Point by Mary Roberts Rinehart, which opened on January 6, 1924, and continued through the following week.105

Bluebird's Eighth Wife, a French comedy, was given during the week beginning January 13, and was described by the reviewer as "delicious in its philosophy and daring in the way it runs along so as to

just barely stay censor-proof." He called it "a typical French concoction, bedroom scene and everything" and stated that J. Glynn McFarlane and Leona Powers "handle the love affair with distinction."

But the reviewer gave principal honors to Russell Fillmore, who, as the "youthful admirer," gave a "splendid portrayal of a juvenile role" except for one scene where he is plied with liquor until he is maudlin." John G. Fee received praise for his role as the "impoverished father."

The reviewer also commended Frances Loughton in the role of the married sister and William Lee in a minor role as the secretary. 106

In its advertising the Circle Players emphasized much more the circumstances and cast of the original productions than did other Dallas stock groups. When Rose Briar was given during the week of January 20 the advance notice called attention to the fact that the play was owned by Ziegfeld.

It was produced in New York City last fall under his personal direction at the Empire Theatre. Miss Billie Burke, wife of Mr. Ziegfeld created the original role of Rose Briar and in it scored one of her most notable successes. 107

Kempy was the presentation for the week of January 27 and the advance account stated:

J. C. Nugent's "Kempy," the comedy drama that ran for more than a year at the Belmont Theater on Broadway, will be the offering at the Circle theater all this week.

When Kempy was first produced in New York, Grant Mitchell was the featured player, and other leading roles were taken by the author and members of his family. J. C. Nugent himself created the character of Dad Bence, his wife that of Ma, his son Elliott played Kemp and Ruth Nugent played Ruth Bence. 108

The following weeks saw the presentation of *Mad Honeymoon* and the advance notice gives an indication of the types of characters usually found in the "crook" dramas of the time:

Mrs. Leona Powers, leading, takes the part of Peggy Colgate, and Russell Fillmore that of Wally Spencer, her lover. J. Glynn McFarlane, leading man, is cast as Duke Wilson, the reformed ex-convict, a part that gives him exceptional opportunity for clever work; John F. Gee and William Lee play the parts of Crandall and Cripes the two crooks; Miss Lora Rogers portrays Mrs. Shannon, the Colgate housekeeper, and William Abram that of Rufus Colgate himself. Miss Kathryn Givney plays the country boarding housekeeper and Irving Kennedy has the chance to do some clever comedy as her husband, the amateur detective.

*The Badman* by Porter Emerson Browne, advertised as "a thrilling melodrama of the Mexican border," was given during the week of February 10 with J. Glynn McFarlane in the part of Pancho Lopez, "a romantic bandit." That *Girl Patsy* was the production for the week of February 17, and on February 24, *It is the Law* was announced as the play for the week with the cliched advertisement that "only a few weeks ago, 'It is the Law' closed after a run of a solid season at the Ritz and Bayes Theatres on Broadway," and that this was the first time the production had been released for stock.

When *Smilin' Through*, one of the most popular plays in stock and the vehicle in which Leona Powers had been introduced to the Dallas public two years earlier when she was the leading lady for the Broadway

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110 *News, Sun., Feb. 10, 1921, IV, 4.*
111 *News, Mon., Feb. 18, 1921, 4.*
112 *News, Sun., Feb. 24, 1921, IV, 4.*
113 This play was also referred to as *Smiling Through.*
Players, was given at the Circle during the week of March 2, George W. Caldwell, director of the Circle Theater orchestra, presented a special musical program that included Joe Holick and Harry Hassell in a saxophone duet, "My Wild Irish Rose."  

After the presentation of Barnum Was Right during the week of March 9, The Circle Players gave Lawful Larceny, picturesquely described in the Sunday advance notice as "a drama of an unscrupulous adventuress, a man's infidelity, a wife's unselfish forgiveness—of a love that conquers all things."  

Chauncey Brown, reviewer for the News, said about the production: "From the prologue, in which the husband confesses his sin to the wife, through three acts to the curtain, the action is both vivid and sustained."  

The High Cost of Loving was presented during the week of March 23, and when Gypsy Jim was giving the following week, a new leading man, Minor Watson, made his Dallas debut. The announcement stated that the play had come to the city "straight from Broadway, having closed less than two weeks ago at the Forty Ninth Street Theater."  

Chauncey Brown called Gypsy Jim "delightful entertainment," and stated that "either the genuine dramatic quality of the play,  

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the personality of Minor Watson, or both, served to put new life into
the company. 120

The Bat, the well-known mystery melodrama, was the production
for the week of April 6. 121 Cave Girl, by George Middleton and Guy
Bolton, was the presentation for the week of April 13. 122 Then came
Polly Preferred, by Guy Bolton, described in the advance notices as "a
New York success, having played the Little Theater for two seasons." 123

The play Her Temporary Husband by Edward Paulton was presented
during the week of April 27 and was the final production of the season.

If any one attribute marked the Circle Theater during the first
season of its operation, it was that of stability. Of all the stock
companies that played in Dallas during the 1920-1925 period, this was
the only one that opened and closed as scheduled. The director,
Walter B. Gilbert, who was hired at the beginning of the season,
remained through to the end, and the only cast replacement came when
J. Glynn McFarlane was replaced as leading man by Minor Watson. Part of
the stability of the company during this season may have been due to the
astuteness of the manager, Nash Weil, who had also been the manager of
the Broadway Players. The advertising policy, stressing as it did that
the plays presented by the Circle Players were of recent Broadway

120 News, Mon., Mar. 31, 1921, 4. The comment of Brown carries
the implication that the company had come in for adverse criticism
because of the quality of its productions. Also, the fact that
McFarlane left the company without publicized notice suggests that it
was he who was the principal target for the attack.

121 News, Sun., Apr. 6, 1921, III, 7.


vintage and citing the success of the original productions and the stars who had appeared in them, appears to have been a factor in drawing Dallas audiences.

But probably the biggest factor in the company's stability during the season was the fact that the plays were given in a theater especially designed for legitimate productions. The Circle Theater was smaller than either the Capitol or the Hippodrome and had better acoustics and sight lines for stage productions. Too, the glamorous aura attached to a new theater doubtless helped sustain patronage. The best proof of the season's success was the fact that the owners were willing to risk another stock season in the fall.

In all, the Circle Players gave eighteen productions, opening on December 25, 1923 and closing on May 3, for a total of one-hundred and seventy-seven matinee and evening performances. In addition to Gilbert and McFarlane, the company also included Leona Powers, Kathryn Givney, Billie Long, John G. Fee, William Abram, Frances Loughton, Russell Fillmore, Lora Rogers, Sam Flint and Irving Kennedy.

As for the quality of the productions, the critics made reference to the high standards set by Walter Gilbert, the director, and the plays included more recent Broadway successes than did the repertoires of the Broadway and the Hippodrome Players. This was a company with its own theater and it had the solid financial backing of the Hulsey interests behind it. It did not depend so much on stock standbys but instead made use of Broadway shows that had recently closed.

The Circle Players 1924-1925

On August 31, 1924, the announcement was made that the Circle Theater would reopen again in early October with dramatic stock. The
company, the announcement stated, had been reorganized and the new manager, Sam Flint, had gone to New York to get actors for the new season. The new company, it was announced, "will consist largely of actors and actresses who have never appeared in Dallas before." By September 11, the complement of the new company was known and the opening date for the season was set for October 5. The leading man was Victor Browne who, according to the advance publicity, had "played leads last with a stock company in Washington, D.C., two seasons as leading man in Cleveland and one in Union Hill, New Jersey." Dorothy Beardsley was the leading lady. She had, according to the notices, "just closed a seventy-six week engagement in Utica, New York." Sam Flint, the manager, commented that he had "interviewed more than 50 candidates" for the position. The company comedian was Harry Hugenot, described as "now playing on Broadway in 'The Wonderful Visit' ... for seven straight months."

Others in the company were Frances Hall, ingenue; Arthur Kohl, juvenile; Robert W. Smiley, "character actor"; and Bertha Creighton, "character woman." The director was Harry Manners who had formerly been with the Morosco stock company in Los Angeles and the Fifty-sixth Street Theater in Washington, D.C. Two persons already familiar to Dallas theatergoers were also included. They were Fred Wear as "second business man" who had been associated with every stock company in the city, and Ella Etheridge, an actress with the Hippodrome Players and at Cycle Park. The company selected as its slogan,

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125 Flint had been an actor with the Hippodrome Players and with the Circle Players.


"If you can't go to Broadway, we'll bring Broadway to you," and the play that was to open the season was first announced as Honors are Even,

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but was subsequently changed to New Toys.

The reviewer described New Toys as "teeming with laughs and abounding in good situations," and commented that "the cast looks much stronger than have been seen here in dramatic stock and, more than that, is well balanced." He praised Dorothy Beardsley and Victor Browne but observed that the real star of the show was Arthur Kohl the juvenile, who played a role "to whom the author has intrusted [sic] most of the laughs." He predicted that Kohl would become a Dallas favorite. The reviewer also stated that Bertha Creighton, in the role of the bride's mother, "scored an instant hit with the audience," and that the same was true of Frances Hall, the "pretty ingenue." The director, Harry Manners, had, according to the review, "given evidence of being a real director."

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Philip Barry's You and I was the production for the week of October 12, and the reviewer called it "one of the soundest plays dramatically and finest from an entertainment standpoint to be released for stock companies in a number of years." He stated that it got a "sterling presentation Sunday night at the Circle theater," and gave principal credit to Frances Hall, Dorothy Beardsley and Victor Browne. He commented about Frances Hall, who played the part of Etta, that she was "as pert and slangy a piece of pulchritude as could be deserved," and that she showed herself "a past mistress at facial expression and


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got a big hand . . ." The reviewer stated that Dorothy Beardsley did "superlative work as the fiancee who decides not to come between her lover and his work," and that she turned "a bit of moralizing in the second act which might have been boresome" into one of the high spots of the action." As for Victor Browne, the reviewer stated that the leading man "was feeling every word, every motion of his part, such a conscientious and convincing portrayal did he give."130

The advance announcement of The Alarm Clock, by Avery Hopwood, for the week of October 19 showed that the Circle Players were continuing the same line of advertising they had carried on during the previous season. The play was said to have been "first produced in New York City by Charles Frohman, Inc. just before the Xmas holidays," and the leading roles in the New York production were stated to have been taken by Blanche Ring, Bruce McRea, Vincent Serrano and other well known favorites. The Amusements editor of the News paid tribute to the company with this comment:

The record of the first two weeks of the Circle's 1924-25 season has given a healthy indication of the manner in which the theategoers of Dallas have received the offerings of this stock house.

Several special attractions have been booked for the coming week. On Tuesday more than one-hundred and fifty members of the Dallas County Gasoline Dealers Association will attend the show in a body. There were a number of special parties last week. . . .

Last Sunday night a number of editors from all parts of the State formed a party and on the following night between fifty and one-hundred Harvard ex-students paid homage to Philip Barry. William Pickering, campaign manager for the University Club of Dallas, wrote Manager Flint . . . "a splendid performance. . . . Personally I can say that I never saw a more artistic performance given by a stock company, for, indeed, it compared favorably with anything I have seen on Broadway."131

Dear Me, presented during the week of October 26, was said by the reviewer to be "as sweet a comedy drama as a local stock company ever presented in Dallas." He stated that it was "enthusiastically received," and commented that Dorothy Beardsley as the heroine "scored both as an actress and as a vocalist, the audience forcing her to repeat her song three times." He called her "a great actress," and stated that she "wears some exquisite gowns." The reviewer praised Victor Browne for acting "in a subdued manner which permits Miss Beardsley to make a personal triumph . . . and yet in a way which makes his character thoroughly natural," and called the play "the finest offering . . . to date."\[132\]

On Tuesday of the week's run it was announced that Kay Hammond would replace Dorothy Beardsley at the end of the week as leading lady. The new leading lady, according to the announcement, had held the same position with Harry Manners when he was director at the President Theater at Washington, and was "said to be one of the best groomed women in dramatic stock today." Miss Beardsley was returning to Utica, New York, to fill a winter's engagement at the same theater where she had been the previous season.\[133\]

Kay Hammond made her Dallas debut in the vehicle, In Love with Love, which played during the week of November 2. For the production of the following week, Just Married was presented and the advance notices called it "a highly entertaining and riotous farce comedy by two of America's greatest play writers, Adelaide Mathews and Ann Nichols."\[134\]

\[134\] News, Sun., Nov. 9, 1924, III, 9.
The performance of this now-forgotten piece of trivia was elaborately praised by the Dallas reviewer:

Fast and furious merriment is evoked by "Just Married" . . . and almost every member of the Circle cast shared in honors.

The lion's share goes to Victor Browne who gave a droll rendition of the inebriated young aristocrat turned sober when accused of being married to two women . . . perhaps his most likeable characterization.

Miss Kay Hammond is delightful as an innocent party to an awful scandal . . . and looked most lovable in each of her many costumes, which ranged from lingerie to street attire. . . .

Arthur Kohl and Miss Frances Hall were great as the newly married couple.

As the elderly couple, Robert Smiley and Miss Bertha Creighton . . . were most convincing.

Edward Butler as the male vampire and Miss Ella Ethridge as French sweetheart were both fine.

All scenes set on board a ship bound for America or the wharf at Bordeaux. Vincent de Vici, scenic artist, has turned out some noteworthy settings for the action.

While George Caldwell and his orchestra scored with their instrumental selections, it was the song "Boy of Mine" by Master Fred Hester which went over so big that he was forced to come back and give two encores.135

The Last Warning, by Wadsworth Camp, was presented for the week beginning November 16 and a new "second woman" joined the company in this production. Alice Mason, according to the publicity, possessed the four attributes for a stock actress. She was "young, pretty, possesses a stunning wardrobe and is reputed to be a very accomplished actress."136

Dulcy, by George Kaufman and Marc Connelly, given the week of November 23, was publicized as "the most delightful comedy yet offered by the Circle Theater."137 When Lilac Time, publicized as "Jane Cowl's great starring vehicle," and as "The Sweetest Romance of the World War," was announced as the production for the week of November 30, it was also

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136News, Sun., Nov. 16, 1924, III, 10.
disclosed that Kay Hammond, leading lady of the company, would "circle over Dallas Sunday afternoon dropping free tickets to this play."\textsuperscript{138}

\textit{Turn to the Right}, publicized as "The greatest American comedy the stage has ever seen . . . taking rank with 'Lightning' . . . written by the same author," was the offering for the week of December 7.\textsuperscript{139}

For the week of December 14, the presentation was \textit{Good Gracious, Annabelle}, described in the advance notices as "now being presented as a musical comedy at Times Square Theatre, New York City, with Billie Burke as Annie Dear,"\textsuperscript{140} and the following week there was another play written by Guy Bolton, \textit{Chicken Feed}. Bolton's plays were extremely popular with the stock companies.\textsuperscript{141}

The Circle Players turned to an old stock favorite for their next presentation when they gave \textit{The Old Soak}.\textsuperscript{142} The first presentation of the new year was \textit{Connie Goes Home} given during the week of January 4.\textsuperscript{143} Another all-time favorite, \textit{The Fool}, was presented for the week of January 11 and the reviewer called attention to the "unusually large audience," which, he stated, "was enthusiastic from start to finish." He called Victor Brown\textsuperscript{144} "nothing short of

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\textsuperscript{138}\textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 30, 1924, III, 9.
\textsuperscript{139}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 7, 1924, III, 6.
\textsuperscript{141}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 21, 1924, III, 6.
\textsuperscript{142}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 28, 1924, III, 7.
\textsuperscript{143}\textit{News}, Mon., Jan. 5, 1925, 4.
\textsuperscript{144}It is difficult from newspaper accounts to know the correct spelling of this name as it appeared in print sometimes with the final "e" and sometimes without.
\end{flushleft}
marvelous in his portrayal of the strong character of Daniel Gilchrist. His performance was one of the high marks in the Dallas history of dramatic stock, so forceful was his acting." It was disclosed in the review that Margaret Wilson of the Dallas Little Theater had replaced Kay Hammond as leading lady with the company. The reviewer stated that Miss Wilson "gave a rather repressed performance. . . . The part is more or less on that order and her interpretation is pleasing." Frances Hall, who acted the role of Mary Margaret, the crippled girl, was said by the reviewer to have "delighted the audience most of any of the feminine characters." Edward Butler, according to the review, acted a "suave heavy . . . with his customary convincingness," and Harry B. Kenneth, as Umanski, a "rough miner," made, according to the reviewer, "one of the hits of the play . . . in a virile performance that drew a big hand on his stirring lines." The reviewer described the scenic effects as "exquisite . . . particularly the interior of St. Matthews Cathedral," and he commended Vincent de Vita, the scenic artist,\(^{116}\) Harry Manners, the director, and Gustav Bowhan, the stage manager.\(^{116}\) The Fool proved so popular that it was kept over for a second week. During the second week of the run, Helen Stewart, a new leading lady, took the part that had been played by Margaret Wilson, who apparently had been on loan from the Little Theater. Miss Stewart was described by the reviewer as "spirited and charming" in her interpretation of the role.\(^{117}\)

\(^{115}\) Another instance of newspaper carelessness. In the review of Just Married the scenic designer had been referred to as Vincent de Vici.

\(^{116}\) News, Mon., Jan. 12, 1925, 4.

In spite of the success achieved by The Fool, the Circle Theater management apparently felt that stock alone was not providing enough income for the theater. Arrangements were made with touring companies to use the theater for one-night stands. Stock performances were suspended during the one-night run. After the week's performance of The Whole Town's Talking which the Circle Players opened on Sunday, January 25, 1925, the farce, Nervous Wreck, by Owen Davis was given, but there was no performance on Monday, February 2, to allow for the road show presentation of Lasses White Minstrels at the theater. On that evening the Circle Players presented The Whole Town's Talking at the Forest High School auditorium for the benefit of the For-Hi Athletic Association.

For the week of February 8, the production was The Desert Flower by Don Mullally, and then, without public warning, Strange Bedfellows, by Barry Conners, was announced as the Circle Players' "farewell week" production. Most of the cast left the city after the week's run had ended. Harry Manners, the director, and Victor Browne went to California. Helen Stewart went to Atlanta, Georgia, Alice Mason to New Orleans, and Edward Butler and Robert W. Smiley to New York. However some of the cast organized a smaller company in order to present a "problem play," The Unwanted Child. The play was given at the Circle

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during the week of March 1, with special matinee performances every afternoon, and Miss Bertha Creighton, one of the cast members, gave a talk "along the line of the play." The cast, which included in addition to Bertha Creighton, Frances Hall, Winfred Axtell, Arthur Kohl, Gus Bowhan and Harry B. Kenneth, planned to take the production on a tour of various Southwestern cities.

The amusements writer for the News commented about the disbanding of the company in an apologetic manner which suggested the reason why the company had not done as well as might have been expected: "A number of famous plays have been offered this season and others, which, while not so well known, were selected because the management thought the Dallas public would like them." 153

Just prior to the opening of The Unwanted Child, it was disclosed that Frances Hall had been featured in the play in many Eastern cities in the East and had "won unstinted praise from press and public." 154 It would be interesting to know whether it was Miss Hall's experience with the role that persuaded the actors in the play to make the venture with her. In any event, the play won critical praise in Dallas. The reviewer wrote:

Florence Edna May's "The Unwanted Child" is a play which the audience can enjoy without fear of plot complications or the interest being fagged out . . . There were numerous places . . . where the hearty applause of the audience followed some clever quip of the juvenile or the spirited retort of the bluff old farmer. . . .

Miss Frances Hall gave an excellent presentation of a role well suited to her personality. Gus Bowhan . . . gave a creditable performance of the artist who takes to the city a country lass of whom he afterwards becomes ashamed. . . .

It was the juvenile role taken by Arthur Kohl which brightened the play most. . . .

Of the women in the cast Josephine Duval is a charming flapper, while Bertha Creighton is herself as the rich and indignant mother who softens after the climax. . . . Winfred Axtell gave a vivid presentation as the scheming woman.\[155\]

On May 17, 1925, word came that the Circle Players under the direction of Gustav Bowhan were due to open in Waco the following night with Willard Mack's, The Fight as their initial production. The announcement stated that the Players planned to change their bills twice a week and that many of those who had been in the Dallas productions were in Waco.\[156\]

The second season of the Circle Players, although it included two more productions than had been presented during the 1923-1924 season, seems to have been less successful than the first. It opened on October 5, 1924, and closed on February 22, 1925. A total of nineteen plays were given by the regular company for two-hundred matinee and evening performances.\[157\]

From guarded comments in the criticisms it can be gathered that there was some criticism leveled against the choice of plays. During the season, the company resorted to the use of some perennial stock favorites such as The Old Soak and The Fool, indicating that Dallas audiences were dissatisfied with some of the plays that had recently been seen on Broadway. There was reference at the start of the season to the high quality of the productions and the balanced acting, but


\[157\] The Fool was held over for an added week. On Monday, February 2, The Whole Town's Talking was presented at the Forest High School auditorium while Lasses Minstrels played the Circle Theater.
inasmuch as the reviews for the rest of the season remained undiscriminately enthusiastic, it is difficult to reach an objective evaluation of the exact merit of the company.

One sound indication that the management believed the acting may have been in part responsible for the dwindling audiences is that there was much shifting of personnel. Members of the original company who opened on October 5 included Sam Flint, manager, Victor Browne, Dorothy Beardsley, Henry Hugenot, Frances Hall, Arthur Kohl, Robert Smiley, Bertha Creighton, Fred Wear, Ella Etheridge, and Henry Manners, director. The lack of later reference to Fred Wear and Ella Etheridge indicates that they left the troupe soon afterwards. Other actors who came in as replacements included Gustav Bowhan, Kay Hammond, Edward Butler, Alice Mason, Margaret Wilson, Helen Stewart, Winfred Axtell, Harry B. Kenneth and Josephine Duval.

Unlike the 1923-1924 season which opened and closed as scheduled, the Players in their next season closed quite unexpectedly. The decision of some of the actors to present The Unwanted Child on their own does not appear to have been motivated by a desire to carry on the season. The attention, instead, was focused on the production of this one play. It dealt with a daring subject and its appeal appears to have rested more on the nature of its theme than on its dramatic appeal.

Winter stock became established in Dallas on September 26, 1921, with the presentation of Adam and Eva at the Capitol Theater after it had been missing from the city for a number of years. The Broadway Players, backed by Southern Enterprises, continued their run at the
Capitol for seventy-two days, presenting twelve plays. The theater was badly damaged by fire on December 27 and was never reopened.

The Broadway Players appeared to be enjoying a highly successful season until the disaster put an end to the season. There was great public interest in the stock company stars and the reviews of the plays were highly favorable.

During the 1922-1923 season the Hippodrome Players held sway at the Hippodrome Theater for thirty-three weeks, opening on Labor Day, September 4, and officially closing on March 25, 1923. However, a group of the actors, under the leadership of Fred Wear, attempted to keep the season going for seven more weeks, but were able to present only three plays before they were compelled to disband.

The third company to open with stock during the 1920-1925 period was the Circle Players who opened at the newly-constructed Circle Theater on Christmas Day, 1923, and closed as scheduled on May 3, 1924. This first season of the Circle Players was marked by great stability with few changes in personnel and apparent high audience interest. Most of the plays presented were recent Broadway successes. The first season of the Circle Players ran for nineteen weeks and eighteen plays were presented.

The Circle Players reopened at the Circle Theater on October 5, 1924, with a company made up largely of actors and actresses new to Dallas. The season ended abruptly on February 22, 1925, without any public reason being given for the shutdown, but it appears that the public was not reacting favorably to the choice of plays, in spite of the high quality of the productions. The season had lasted twenty weeks and nineteen plays had been done. A week after the season was
officially called to a halt, a group of the actors presented a problem
drama, aimed largely at female patronage, for seven matinee and evening
performances. This company two months later was reported to be in Waco
attempting to establish stock there.

An objective evaluation of the success of stock during the five
year period is extremely difficult, both because attendance figures were
kept a closely guarded secret, and also because the reviews were
uniformly enthusiastic. However, only the Circle Players during their
first season were able to open and close as scheduled. The same company
in its second season had to close down early. So, too, did the
Hippodrome Players during the 1922-1923 season. The Broadway Players
may have been able to make it for an entire season if the Capitol
Theater had not been damaged by fire.

All three of the stock companies clung closely to the
traditional stock system of casting. There were the difficulties
attendant upon short rehearsal periods and the dependence upon outworn
scenic methods. Also the quality of plays selected for production was
somewhat of a problem. During the five year period, the Dallas Little
Theater became firmly established and introduced audiences in the city
to some of the better dramas then being written. Stock managers
depended either upon old standbys of an earlier day or on current
Broadway fare of a more popular nature. Another problem of the stock
companies was the mounting expense of production. John Rosenfield, who
became the Dallas Morning News critic in the summer of 1925, took a look
backward in 1931 and said about the 1924-1925 season of the Circle
Players: "The 1924-25 season, we have learned, was well patronized but
the expenses ... exceeded the intake. ... Mr. Hulsey's company seemed to be enjoying prosperity but his books told a different story.\textsuperscript{158}

On the whole, winter stock may be said to have enjoyed relative popularity in the city between 1920 and 1925. When one company failed, there was another ready to take its place. However, the growing sophistication of the audiences, made inevitable by the contacts with little theater productions and with the better scenic techniques of the movies, was already apparent at the end of the period. Dramatic stock in Dallas, as elsewhere in the nation, was becoming isolated from the main stream of American drama.

\textsuperscript{158}News, Sun., Jan. 18, 1931, III, 6.
The Cycle Park summer stock company was perhaps the most successful of all the city's stock ventures. Started in 1915 by Gene Lewis and his wife Olga Worth, the Cycle Park company not only owned its own theater but was able, prior to the summer of 1921, to renovate completely the open-air structure at a cost of $15,000. When the theater was partially destroyed by fire in 1922, Lewis and his wife were able to rebuild it completely. Again, in the summer of 1923, a bridge mishap at the entrance to the theater injured several persons, and the Lewis-Worth company was able to continue through to the end of the season. For the 1924 and 1925 seasons the couple stayed in Memphis and gave the Dallas management over to Sam Bullman. He was able to keep the company going for one summer, but during the 1925 season, had to disband before the season had gotten well under way. The end of summer stock at Cycle Park also meant the end of this type of summer entertainment in Dallas, aside from the tent shows, until the Texas Centennial of 1936 when the Globe Players were to give a Shakespearian repertoire, and the English Village Company was to present *The Drunkard* during the summer and fall.

Two observations may be made about the summer stock company before beginning the discussion of the seasons and the plays. First, it will be observed that the types of plays selected ran heavily to
farces and melodramas, in line with the popular theory that the public
demands light entertainment during the summer months. The other is
that the open air Cycle Park theater was subject to cancellation of
performances during rainy weather. There were not enough rainy
evenings in Dallas to make this a serious problem, and the fact that
presentations were cut in the open solved the heat problem. It is
rather ironical that when Gene Lewis and Olga Worth tried winter
stock during the 1927 season at the Circle Theater, which was not air
cooled for summer performances, a long hot spell during the fall
season led to the company's failure.

Like most stock companies of the period, the organization of
Cycle Park revolved around the producer. The company had the custom­
ary hierarchy of roles—leading man, leading lady, character actors,
etc. Although changes were made from season to season in the comple­
ment of the company, the Cycle Park group was unusual in that a small
corps of the same actors returned season after season. Among these,
in addition to Gene Lewis and Olga Worth, were included Fred Wear,
Charles Lammers and Klock Ryder.

The 1920 Season

The summer of 1920 found the company opening with Peg O' My
Heart. Describing itself as "America's finest stock company," the
Lewis-Worth Stock Company, as it was called, presented The Misleading
Lady during the week of June 6 with this intriguing advertisement:

Can a woman flirt with a man, display her ankles,
bare her neck, make a sex appeal by means of a diaphanous

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gown, extract a proposal of marriage from him, and be allowed to get away with it. You'll find the answer in this play.²

Gene Lewis and Olga Worth acted as leading man and lady of their own company and were usually featured in the billing. In the advance notice of Jerry, "the play that made Billie Burke a star" the theater management described the play as "the delightful comedy that was produced at the Astor Theater by Charles Frohman with Billie Burke as the star. . . . Miss Olga Worth will be seen in the role of Jerry and the entire company will be seen to advantage."³

There was the usual publicity statement when the company advertised A Voice in the Dark as "offered for the first time by any stock company," and with the announcement that nobody would be seated during the prologue.⁴ The summer stock company also employed another perenially favorite attention-getter with its "Merchants Nights" when prizes were given away.⁵ An interesting commentary on the evaluation of public taste by Gene Lewis and Olga Worth came when Pollyanna was ready to open:

The most unprecedented advance sale of "Pollyanna" is very significant. It shows that the public is keenly alive to what is new and vital to the theater and is eager for plays that convey the sweet and beautiful influence that has made "Pollyanna" fiction . . . ⁶

There was another claim made for the play:

If Olga Worth in "Pollyanna" is seen by every household in this city there is no question of a doubt but that our social community will be cured of a thousand ills by which it is afflicted and that, where the treatment she suggests is consistently kept up, it will come nearer than any other agency has thus far succeeded in making our earth a paradise. Pollyanna will bring joy and new hopes to millions. As you watch her the "glad" feeling creeps through your veins and into your heart and lo! you find yourself loving even your enemies and trying to do good by them.7

Praised in the review for their performances in the play were Olga Worth, Grace Young and Klock Ryder for the "ease and certainty with which they handled their roles."8

The first melodrama of the summer season was The Woman in Room 13, which according to the advance notices had thrilled Broadway for more than eight months and was the greatest sensational play ever written."9

The critic did some tightrope walking when he observed regarding Parlor, Bedroom and Bath, the presentation for the following week, that "There are many risque situations but the comedy of it all carries them off without any touch of vulgarity." The show was said to be "in excellent style," and as giving "Mr. Lewis and Olga Worth . . . roles very different from what they have been seen in here."10

At 9:15, by William Brady, the company's next production awakened memories in the reviewer of the older melodramas. As usual,

Gene Lewis and Olga Worth were said by the reviewer to "shine in the leading roles," and particular mention was made of Philip Hoegle's "true to life" impersonation of a detective captain and his "masterly handling of a difficult role" setting him apart as "one of the best 'heavies' ever seen on a Dallas stage."

Lewis and his wife essayed a different kind of play when they presented The Silent Witness in which he played a middle-aged man and she a misunderstood middle-aged sweetheart. The performance, according to the reviewer, saw "Lewis and Miss Worth . . . almost dethroned by the versatility and cleverness of Hal Worth and Ewing Cherry." Described in advance as "the most popular play ever written," Way Down East was revived at Cycle Park during the week of August 15. It was advertised as having been seen by more than twenty million people and as "twenty years old and more popular today than many of the late Broadway successes." The advertisement promised also the quartette that traditionally sang at performances of this play. It also assured Dallasites that "the farm yard scene will contain horses, cows, calves, sheep and chickens while the snowstorm scene of the third act is acknowledged the acme of stage realism and appears so natural as to make one shiver in his seat."

Rainy weather led to several cancellations of performances of Sinners during the week of August 22, and the play was extended

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through the following Monday night. The final play of the season was George M. Cohan's *A Prince There Was*, described by the reviewer as "more delightful than any of the season's productions." The reviewer added there was "good clean humor all the way," and using one of the most common critical cliches of the day, noted that "there is not a dull spot."^15

Undoubtedly the 1920 season of the Cycle Park stock company was a financial success. There is strong likelihood that the quality of performances was not up to those of winter stock, although it is difficult to ascertain this from the criticisms. The plays selected were older in vintage and selected more for their "pure entertainment" value. Gene Lewis and Olga Worth owned Cycle Park and did not have the overhead problem that the winter stock companies had.

The 1921 Season

There was an illuminating description given of the Cycle Park open air theater just prior to the opening of the 1921 summer season:

No longer does the solitary stone stage stand ready to welcome visitors to Cycle Park. No longer does the old frame dwelling clutter up one side of the inclosure. It will be a new Cycle Park that will greet patrons of Dallas' only open-air summer theater the night of May 15, for many great changes have taken place there in the last few months.

Real Texas style has been followed in the architecture. The ticket office, now with three ticket windows, is of stucco and looks remarkably like a vest pocket edition of the far-famed Alamo. The outer walls also are of stucco and there are three big circular flower beds along with big rocky borders.

Along the top of the outer fences and along the fence

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running from the stage to the theater entrance are a series of flower beds.

New and comfortable seats have been received. Some of the seats grew rather hard in times past.

Along each side, from the stage to the entrance, is now a series of boxes, nine to the side. This is a distinct innovation for Cycle Park. There are also twelve boxes along what might be termed the mezzanine floor. In the big inclosure which leads to the theater proper are four high posts which will be adorned with powerful wiring. Underground wiring has been used entirely in the theater. The appearance of the inclosure is now a delight to the eye, instead of being cluttered up by a bunch of unrelated buildings and objects as in the past.

Those in charge estimate it will cost in the neighborhood of $15,000. But Gene Lewis was determined to make Cycle Park the most attractive open-air theater in the entire Southwest.

In addition to Gene Lewis and Olga Worth, members of the company for the sixth season at Cycle Park included Idabelle Arnold, Pauline LeRoy, Lillian Benecki, Fred Wear, Edward Beach, Larry Sullivan, Klock Ryder, Frank Powell, Dave Heilman, Joseph Remington, Charles Lamers and Guy Douglass. The company had just come from a twenty-week engagement in Miami, Florida, where, according to the publicity, they had been "playing to capacity houses."

The company was held in high regard, as can be seen from the following comment that appeared in the News:

The opening of the new Cycle Park Theater marks the culmination of an ideal that had its birth in the hearts and minds of these two young people, who have endeared themselves to all Dallas as no members of the theatrical profession have ever achieved on their first visit here six years ago. They had only one principle and that was to elevate the dramatic stage to a higher level than it ever enjoyed before, and with this end in view, set about giving intelligent performances of the new plays.

17 News, Sun., May 1, 1921, II, 5.
These ambitions were highly appreciated, but the going was rough for the first year and the financial deficit was big, but the next year found them back again aiming higher than ever before and with an even more expensive company, and soon after this Dallas began to realize that there was a factor in the amusement world that was not to be passed by, and then things started to pick up and Mr. Lewis began to realize that the company was outgrowing their surroundings and that Dallas too, deserved a better summer theater.

The financial men of the city became interested and offered material assistance to the young man who walked in where angels feared to tread, but he declined on the ground that he would allow no one to assume any risks but himself. 18

This "puff" appeared as a regular news article, but it would be interesting to know how much the editorial policy of the amusement section of the Dallas Morning News was influenced by the advertising. Cycle Park was always a heavy advertiser in the amusement section.

In the review of Civilian Clothes, the opening production, the reception of the play was described as "enthusiastic . . . by the capacity audience . . . waves of applause and laughter . . . swept over the house time after time." 19 A new member of the company, Guy Douglass, was "an instant favorite," according to the reviewer. There was an unusual "gimmick" attached to the second production, Sick Abed, with the advertisement that "every invalid in Dallas will be admitted free this week." The play, the review said, was "really funny" and the Cycle Park rendition was "well worthy of the laughs it received." Gene Lewis played the patient and Olga Worth the nurse in the Klaw and Erlanger comedy. 20

Friendly Enemies by Samuel Shipman and Aaron Hoffman,

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19 News, Mon., May 16, 1921, 2.
20 News, Mon., May 23, 1921, 4.
performed the following week, was advertised as "the first production of the world's greatest comedy drama," but whether this was the first production in stock, or actually a world premiere was not made clear. It was said to have "the fun of 'Potash and Perlmutter' and the pathos of 'The Music Master,'" and the reviewer described the audience reaction as showing "that lessons and times of the war recently ended have not been forgotten was evident by the tears and applause . . ." Klock Ryder was said to "look and act the peace-loving stubborn old German to perfection," whereas Henry Block, played by Joseph Remington, was "intensely American all the time." The comedy was "furnished by the quarrels between these two." Pauline LeRoy had a "heart-broken mother scene which is most effectively done." The play, according to the newspaper account, drew crowds of "Dallas' intelligent and discriminating theatergoers watching America's finest stock company appearing in Broadway successes staged and acted in true metropolitan manner."

Up in Mabel's Room, said to be a favorite with the company and one at which they have "been having great fun at the rehearsal all last week," featured Idabelle Arnold. "One laugh followed another all during the presentation of the three act farce," the reviewer said. And Idabelle Arnold "took hold of her part . . . as Geraldine Gerry's wife [and] was loudly applauded when she first stepped on the stage."

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The part of Mabel, the "foxy widow," was taken by Lillian Beneke. And the reviewer added the comment:

    Since the whole act is set at night the play affords ample opportunity for a gorgeous display of lingerie and the feminine portion of the audience exclaimed with delight while the men simply gasped at some of the visions. But everybody laughed, it's that kind of a play.25

Advertisements for The Acquittal, called "George M. Cohan's Greatest Dramatic Success," listed the theater prices as 75¢ for the lower floor and $1 for box seats, so apparently that was the prevailing scale at Cycle Park. The play was termed in the review a "tense drama . . . their first essentially dramatic production of the season . . . by far the best thing they have done yet." Fred Wear took "the difficult part of the man acquitted . . . and he makes the most of it." Olga Worth, as his wife, was called "superb, [and] in the second act, where she informs him that she knows him as he really is . . . rises to great dramatic heights."26 Apparently the Sunday night performance had been "rained out."

Here Comes the Bride, was described in the review as "a big success which abounds in enough farcical situations to make two or three of the average comedies presented by stock companies." Donald Scanlon, new juvenile, was said to "show off to unusually good advantage" as James Carlton, but "the only fault in his work was a slight overdose of overwork."27

War plays were still plentiful, and still another was

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25 News, Mon., June 6, 1921, 4.
26 News, Tues., June 14, 1921, 4.
27 News, Mon., June 20, 1921, 4.
presented with *Forever After*, in which an American soldier, wounded on a French battlefield "in his delirium lives through vivid scenes of his past life." The scenes were said in advance publicity to be marked by "fast changes," and the critic commented that "it took considerable nerve for Gene Lewis to attempt to produce it in the open air." Every set, it was pointed out, "has been especially constructed for the presentation . . . the artists were busy many days painting the scenery."^28

The reviewer called the play "unquestionably the strongest . . . ever presented . . . for a packed house last night." He added that it "unfolded in three acts of eight scenes, each of which has a particular appeal. . . . Scenic shifts really play almost as important a part as the story itself." And the lighting effects were said by the reviewer to have been "handled cleverly, especially in the trench and moonlight scenes." The reviewer wrote that "mixed with the heart and sympathetic appeal is a clever vein of comedy which prevents the plot from causing too many tears."^29

*Johnny Get Your Gun*, by Edmund Lawrence Burke, the presentation for the week of July 3, was said by the reviewer to give the audience a glimpse of a movie studio in action. The play, he noted, was an old-fashioned melodrama, with the usual stock characters—the duke who wants to marry an American heiress and the "dashing cowboy who foiled him." A burlesque of the oldtime thriller, it began, noted the reviewer, with a prologue that showed a "moving picture factory." He

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^29*News, Mon.*, June 27, 1921, 5.
praised Idabelle Arnold as "cute as ever her admirers could wish . . . and wears a charming riding costume," and the reviewer observed that the prologue "was one of the funniest things ever put on at Cycle Park."\(^{30}\)

Polly with a Past, presented for the following week, was said in the advance notices to have been made famous by David Belasco. The notices stated that the part of Polly gave Olga Worth one of the strongest roles in her career, and added that the play had been "one of the really big hits on Broadway for more than a year . . . just released to stock companies." The notices had that well-worn statement that the royalty was "one of the largest ever known in the history of stock companies . . . this presentation by special arrangement with David Belasco."\(^{31}\) The review called the performance "an altogether delightful evening of comedy . . . presented to a packed house." Rain had postponed the opening.\(^{32}\) There was a newspaper comment the next day to the effect that "Olga Worth is as clever as Ina Claire who played the part on Broadway for nearly two years."\(^{33}\)

Gene Lewis chose next Turn to the Right, a play in which he had acted on Broadway for one season, and which he said he was presenting by "special arrangements with the Century Play Company of New York as the first stock production in the United States of America's greatest comedy." He called it "without a doubt the greatest play

\(^{30}\)News, Mon., July 4, 1921, 4.


\(^{32}\)News, Tues., July 12, 1921, 4.

since 'The Old Homestead' and 'The Music Master,' and pointed out that "all scenery has been painted and designed from photographs of the original New York showing." Cycle Park fans, the reviewer said, "will never have the chance to see a better play." He said it was "jammed with an assortment of humor and pathos that completely captivated one of the most enthusiastic audiences which ever filled the open air theater to the balcony top," and gave great plaudits to Fred Wear who "makes his performance stand out as one of the best which has appeared in Dallas," to Idabelle Arnold whose "winsome attractiveness lends an undeniable appeal," and to Larry Sullivan who was "unusually adapted to the role" of the village roustabout. The scenic effects were said to be "exceptional, especially the peach orchard where apparently the actual fruit is seen on the tree."

As for The High Cost of Loving, given next, the review applauded the farce as "being of the kind that takes care of itself." Idabelle Arnold was said to have "surveyed her audience and the young man whom she finally captured with the same easy nonchalance." And Klock Ryder "in spite of being in view of the audience for practically the entire performance . . . presented his character with admirable variety."

"One of those well-known bedroom scenes . . . plenty of compromising situations and a rather risque atmosphere" induced the reviewer to decide that Scandal was "one of the most exciting plays

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34 News, Sun., July 17, 1921, II, 6.
35 News, Mon., July 18, 1921, 4.
36 News, Mon., July 25, 1921, 4.
presented this season." New people in the cast included Ted Brackett, Marie Fuller, Irene Daniel, and Lena Budd Powers, director of the Dallas Little Theater, who "gave a very realistic interpretation to the part." Gene Lewis was said by the reviewer to "stand out as the dominant feature of an otherwise ordinarily clever play."\(^{37}\)

As a "come-on" for the performance of Kindling, the play's advertisements featured a paragraph-long speech from Act II which deals with "a woman's shame" and which, it was said caused New York to "gasp when these lines were spoken by Margaret Ollington at Daly's Theater for over six months."\(^{38}\) "Every now and then," wrote the reviewer, "an actress in stock plays a part which is talked about for months afterward. Visitors to Cycle Park this week will find such an instance." He eulogized further, that Olga Worth's Maggie would "live in the minds of her audience long after most of her other parts are forgotten." He also praised the work of Gene Lewis, and of Pauline LeRoy and Ted Brackett.\(^{39}\)

_Innocent_, a starring vehicle for Pauline Frederick, was "staged in an exquisite manner and interpreted remarkably well" by the Cycle Park group, in the words of the review. Olga Worth took the lead "and acts the part as if she were really living it," and, as was inevitably mentioned, "her costumes are gorgeous from the Chinese garb in the first act to the shimmering creation of the modern modiste's art in the last." Lewis made "a wonderfully convincing Bela," and

\(^{37}\)_News_, Mon., Aug. 1, 1921, 4.


\(^{39}\)_News_, Mon., Aug. 8, 1921, 4.
Joseph Remington "does a remarkable bit of character acting," the reviewer commented. The hotel corridor scene was said to be "one of the most impressive views seen at Cycle Park this season."40

It is interesting at this point to note the order in which the plays were presented. Serious drama was balanced with comedy, and melodramas and farces were scattered so that no two succeeding plays were of the same type. After Innocent came a comedy, Fair and Warmer, called in the review "one of the most entertaining bits of comedy seen . . . this season." The play, stated the reviewer, "one of the favorites on Broadway in the days when the compromising situations and the society cocktail were the vogue, has lost none of its appeal with the interference of Mr. Volstead and the transplanting of the situations to Dallas." Gene Lewis, as Billy Bartlett "the pinkly proper husband of Laura, a woman who longs for connubial turbulence" was responsible for most of the laughs. The highlight of the play, according to the review, was apparently the "polite drinking scene . . . often . . . overdone in stock performances."41

Gene Lewis and Olga Worth in a public statement thanked the Dallas public "for helping to make Cycle Park the most successful summer theater in the entire country," and presented as their next to last production Good Gracious, Annabelle. They announced as their final play of the season, On Trial, different from the usual production in the use of a revolving stage, making it the most expensive production

40News, Mon., Aug. 15, 1921, 4.
ever attempted in stock, according to the advertisements. The reviewer proclaimed that "spectators in the Cycle Park theater last night must well have thought themselves in a real courtroom." The play "kept the audience keyed to a high pitch in anticipation of the climax ..." The reviewer added that guest child actress, Margaret Warner, who had thirty pages of lines, "easily reached the heart of her audience. Never a slip, without the slightest hesitation, she carried on her part in a finished manner." After Labor Day, the Lewis-Worth Players went to Beaumont for a few weeks and from there to Wichita Falls. Then they made their winter headquarters in Miami, Florida. They had just completed a highly successful season, probably the peak of all the seasons they had spent in Dallas. Gene Lewis had just spent $30,000 in improvements at the park and planned to spend another $15,000. This indicates the financial solvency of the group. They were not again, after 1921, to enjoy the high degree of popularity they knew during that season.

The 1922 Season

Just before the grand opening of the company in the summer of 1922 with the play Twin Beds, an advertisement carried the price of season tickets:

Special! Save $4.00. Buy a season ticket. We will sell a number of season tickets good for two admissions once each week during the entire season for $20.00.

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43 News, Mon., Aug. 29, 1921, 4.
Members of the company for the season included Pauline LeRoy, Fred Wear, Edward Beach, Charles Lammers, all returning actors, and newcomers Marie Mitchell, ingenue, Billy Long, second woman, Mortimer Weldon, Charles Nicholson, and Lou Streeter. Lewis let it be known "that he considered this the best company he has ever had gathered together," and that "a new floor has been laid in the auditorium, everything brightened up." The opening performance was made more interesting by the weather:

Despite the rain, which fell intermittently, Gene Lewis, Miss Olga Worth and their company staged the opening performance of their seventh season at Cycle Park Sunday night. At 8 o'clock Mr. Lewis practically decided to call the show off, he stepped to the door of the office, saw that the park was full of people and made up his mind it would be unfair to disappoint such a loyal crowd.

When the opening curtain went up practically every seat in the auditorium proper was taken. The appearance of Gene Lewis on the stage was the signal for an ovation and the same was true for Miss Worth. The play "Twin Beds" a bedroom farce brought many laughs from the audience. But long before the final curtain those sitting in the uncovered auditorium had either gone back to the gallery which has a roof, or had raised umbrellas, and the sight was one unique in the theatrical annals of Dallas.

It was hard work for the actors. The bulk of the audience was clear on the back of the house. It was like talking into a cavern and those on the stage could not tell whether the clever lines of the whimsical plot were "going over" or not. Practically everybody stuck the play out and it was not until after the play was over that the rain began descending in torrents.

The day after the opening, the theater was partially burned down when it was struck by lightning. Lewis Heilman, business manager of the company, announced that Cycle Park would be rebuilt. In the meantime, performances were to be given at the Majestic Theater.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{145}}\text{\textsuperscript{News}, Sun., May 21, 1922, II, 10.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{146}}\text{\textsuperscript{News}, Mon., May 22, 1922, 5.}\]
Feature pictures were to continue at the Majestic but their showing was to be correlated with the plays. As was customary at Cycle Park, Monday night was to continue to be free to women, "country store" was to be held every Friday night, and the same prices were to prevail at the Majestic as at Cycle Park. The wardrobes of most of the actors were destroyed but Dallas merchants offered to equip the actors with clothing. Heilman also said that the "remains of the old structure will be torn down and a much more modern edifice erected."

One comment should be made here. This was a blow that would have wrecked most stock companies, but the Lewis-Worth company was apparently so financially solvent that it weathered the shock. Another factor in the ability of this company to survive was the high regard which Dallasites had for it. In "a love letter from Gene Lewis and Olga Worth," inserted as a large advertisement the day after the fire, the co-producers expressed their gratitude

... to the Adolphus Hotel, the Republic National Bank, the Coca Cola Bottling Works, Judge W. L. Crawford, A. Harris & Co., Central State Bank, Annabelle Clopton, Benson Semans Clothing Co. and Lang Floral Co. ... and to the many who have filled our rooms at the Adolphus with flowers.

Their prices for performances at the Majestic, detailed in the same advertisement, ranged from a $1 top to 25¢, the prices charged at Cycle Park. Performances of the plays at the Majestic followed the picture at 2:30 and 8:30 p.m. The run of Twin Beds was continued for the remainder of the company's first week in their new headquarters.

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While the company was at the Majestic, the advertisements for plays were included with those for the movies, and it was possible to see both the play and the movie with payment of a single admission. Three Live Ghosts, the second Majestic production for the Cycle Park group, was called in the review "a screamingly funny comedy" and "one of the original sort of plays which only come about once in a decade." Pauline LeRoy, character woman, was hailed by the reviewer for the part of Mrs. Gubbins which "led all the way," and which "stood out . . . prominently and . . . altogether pleased the audience." The Broken Wing, advertised as a "sensational success from the 48th Street Theater, New York City," followed next, and again the critic commented that "Only a few times in the last six seasons have Gene Lewis, Olga Worth and their players staged a more thoroughly enjoyable play." The production was said to "start out exciting and grow more tense as it went along," and Olga Worth and Fred Wear got particular praise. A new ingenue, Mary Fox, "made a very favorable impression in the role of Cecilia," the reviewer observed.

For the presentation of The Champion, Ewing Cherry returned to the company, and Harry Cheshire, formerly with the Hippodrome Players, was added.

By June 15, the Cycle Park Theater was ready for reopening with the play, 3 Wise Fools, by Austin Strong. It was described in the

advertisements as being "without a doubt the biggest play ever released for stock," and the new fireproof theater was said to be "now complete, at a cost of thirty thousand dollars, and . . . the finest summer theater in America." In the notice of the opening, there was an appeal to the Dallasites' fond belief that they were seeing Broadway shows for less money with the announcement that the play could be seen for "the first time under two dollars a seat." Prices in the theater were set at 75¢ for the lower floor; $1 for boxes; 50¢ for the grand stand.

The review took notice of the large audience at the reopening, and the reviewer commented about Olga Worth that "the gown and the evening wrap she wore in the second and third acts were so beautiful that they extracted murmurs of admiration from the audience, especially the feminine portion." As for the play, the reviewer commented that it had "humor a plenty," "a sweet love affair and pathos in abundance," and that it "kept the audience in suspense."

Smooth as Silk, presented during the week of June 25, was declared in its review to be "excellent in its entertainment values," and one of the cleverest of Willard Mack's "crook" plays. The "lines and situations" were described by the reviewer as "well handled by the Lew-Worth Players," as the company was now called. Another Willard Mack play, Tiger Rose, was offered the following week. Mack had

appeared on the Majestic stage during the spring in a farce playlet.\textsuperscript{57} It could not be presented for its Sunday opening date because of rain, and the week's run began instead on Monday.\textsuperscript{58} "A tense and colorful melodrama" was the evaluation the reviewer put upon it, and he paid tribute to the "exquisite interpretation by Miss Olga Worth and the display of primal emotions by the daughter of the forest . . one of Miss Worth's best pieces of work in . . seven years."

In the second act comes a storm scene. Officers of the Royal Mounted are searching for Rose's sweetheart, whom she has secreted in her guardian's home. The flashing of lightning, the rolling of thunder and the pouring down of the rain were so realistic that the audience burst out into applause.

Ed Beach was called "great in the role of McCoUins;" and Mortimer Weldon "fine as Dan Cusick, a doctor with a past."\textsuperscript{59} After the presentation of Nightcap, another "crook" play which was fulsomely praised,\textsuperscript{60} came Experience, one of those modern morality plays so popular earlier in the century. The production, according to advance notices, called for ten complete sets and "narrates the experience of 'youth' who goes to the city and falls into devious paths until he finally finds his way back home.\textsuperscript{61} In the performance which, according to the review, surprised even his most loyal admirers by its magnificence Gene Lewis as "Youth," met a great many vices and virtues before

\textsuperscript{57}News, Thurs., June 29, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{58}News, Mon., July 3, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{59}News, Tues., July 4, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{60}News, Mon., July 10, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{61}News, Fri., July 14, 1922, 4.
he reached home, traveling through "Land where Dreams Begin," "The Street of Vacillation," "The Room of Pleasure in the Primrose Path," and "The House of Last Resort." The reviewer felt that "the most gorgeous scene is that in the room of Pleasure. Miss Billy Long wears a dazzling cloth of gold robe." As for Olga Worth, the reviewer commented, she "not only appears as Love in the first and last scenes ... but as Passion and Frailty. Her work as Frailty was one of the high marks of the play." There was praise in the review, too, for the jazz playing of George Caldwell in "The House of Last Resort." Apparently the play made a tremendous hit for "several hundred persons were turned away ... Monday night," and there were indications that the attendance records for the seven years the theater had been in existence would be broken.

Boomerang marked the 700th performance of Gene Lewis and Olga Worth at Cycle Park, and to celebrate the occasion a souvenir photo of Lewis was presented to every member of the audience. It "entirely captivated the big Sunday audience," according to the review, even though the story was "practically nothing" and the play was merely a "succession of interesting incidents, ... a stream of witty dialogue." Fred Wear was praised in the review both for his "superb" portrayal of the young doctor and for his casting, "for he is the producer this week," and "Miss Worth was such a vision of loveliness

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in her party gown . . . that it drew an involuntary burst of applause."65

Pierre of the Plains, the Edgar Selwyn drama, found "Gene Lewis rise to new heights," the reviewer commented. He rhapsodized that the play was "a great, big wholesome out-of-doors offering, with a few pulls at the heart strings and a few tears and thrills blended together." Lewis, the review continued, "romps gaily through his lines with ease," and Pauline LeRoy, as the mother "shares the honors . . . although her acting is more of the home-like. Her emotional interpretations are excellent, and she really loved her part." The reviewer added that as Jap Durkin the villain, Walter Shumway "renders a difficult role in a very hateful manner." He wrote that "The play is different . . . Pierre . . . does not win the girl."66

Broadway and Buttermilk, by Willard Mack, given during the week of August 6, was acted, the review commented, by Olga Worth in a manner that "not for one half of a fleeting minute does she allow anyone else to star." He noted that "she doesn't relinquish the spot to anyone . . . she's the play. Without her, the play would be as flat as Pegleg Connolly's bankroll." The reviewer observed that Gene Lewis "was so content to let the leading lady uphold the reputation of his company . . . he wears the same suit and smokes the same cigarettes through the last acts." And he stated that "Fred Wear raced through his lines just as if he had been playing the part for years."67

The next play, **The Six Fifty**, was reviewed as "a most unusual play in both plot and execution . . . starring Olga Worth and giving prominent roles to Fred Wear and Mortimer Weldon, both of whom were practically perfect in the divergent roles." As for the "heaviness" of some of the scenes, these were "largely counteracted by the sarcastic side-splitting remarks of the millionaire, played by Lou Streeter."\(^6\) A week later **The Girl of the Golden West**, David Belasco's famous melodrama, was advertised as "the first time ever given by a stock company." And Olga Worth's performance was called "her most dramatic hit of the season . . . in spite of the terrific heat which was apparent on the stage." Fred Wear played the villain, and the reviewer commented that "Dallas audiences have indicated that they like this Wear chap and his heavy roles." It was, however, the performance of Harry Hoxworth as Sonora Slim that won principal acclaim from the critic who commented that "His character was refreshing because it was different."\(^6\)\(^9\) The seventh season at Cycle Park ended with **Stop Thief**, originally presented by Cohan & Harris at the Gaiety Theater.\(^7\)

With stock companies, the opening and closing performances were very important, and in this final production there was to be a prologue in which each member of the company said "good-bye" in character. The Lew-Worth Players were to open a Houston engagement on Labor Day, so the established custom of closing the summer season

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\(^6\)News, Mon., Aug. 21, 1922, 4.

\(^7\)News, Sun., Aug. 27, 1922, II, 9.
on Labor Day was foregone and instead the season was ending Saturday night. As an innovation, the stage was set in front of the audience "so that the laboring gang behind the lights were shown in full view." Two veterans of the International Association of Theater and Stage Employees, Sam and Lew Bullman, were among those working on the stage. Sam Bullman, in charge of the stagehands at Cycle Park, was destined later to take over the management of the summer stock company.

The final week of the season promised to break attendance records for the company. A spokesman noted that the company "has already played to more than 100,000 paid admissions this season." This attendance, of course, had been considerably boosted by the four weeks the company had been at the 3,000-seat Majestic Theater.

The 1922 summer season appears to have been successful from an attendance standpoint. But perhaps John Rosenfield's comment about the stock companies that "they never changed" most aptly sums up a retrospective evaluation of Cycle Park activity at this time. The plays tended to be on the same level and there was the same caste system in the assignment of roles as marked the winter stock companies.

The 1923 Season

Gene Lewis let it be known in January of 1923 that he intended

73. Taped interview with John Rosenfield (May 27, 1960) referred to hereinafter as Rosenfield Interview.
to return to Dallas the following summer for his eighth season. George M. Cohan's The Meanest Man in the World was selected as the play for the start of the season on May 21. Listed as those returning to Cycle Park from previous seasons were, Pauline LeRoy, Fred Wear, Edward Beach, Helen Lewis, Klock Ryder, Charles Lammers, Ewing Cherry, Hal Worth and Mortimer Weldon. The only new members of the group were Helen Ambrose and Dick Elliott. There can be no doubt that the fact that the same core of actors returned summer after summer to Cycle Park did much to contribute to its success. This philosophy was, incidentally, quite at variance with the practice of the winter stock companies who operated on the assumption that the public wanted new faces each season, and sometimes several times a season.

Ceremonies at the opening performance were as elaborate as they had been at the closing production of the previous season. As described by the reviewer:

The old motto of the theater "The Play's the Thing" counted for nought Sunday night. Most of those present seemed more in a welcoming frame of mind than anything else. The show was stopped by prolonged applause at the initial appearance of all the favorites and the curtain talks by Mr. Lewis and Miss Worth outshone the play, although the company gave an excellent presentation.

The Meanest Man in the World was called "a philosophical sort of a comedy," by the reviewer and was said to have "some scenes as funny as ever a George M. Cohan play offered for the delectation of an American public."
Two weeks later came The Man Who Came Back, by William A. Brady. Another favorite appeal in stock company advertising was made when it was stated in the advance publicity that "the play requires four complete sets of scenery, which has been built from photographs of the original New York showing." The opening performance was described in the review as "finely staged, wonderfully acted drama." And the reviewer, in characteristic manner, observed that, "with tense situations predominating, yet there is so much clever and wholesome comedy that never does the action become heavy and oppressive." There were, the critic stated, "fine chances for great emotional work" in the Chinese "opium joint" episode. Miss Worth's acting was called "uncanny" and Gene Lewis was said to "give a sterling performance throughout." The famous "crook" play, Bulldog Drummond elicited this comment from the reviewer:

In the olden days of the opera house, the gallery gods would have gone wild over Bulldog Drummond ... Yet the laughing spots come with amazing frequency, one of the biggest being right at the close of the play.

Another name might be tacked onto the play, "The Battle of Blondes," for Olga Worth with a blonde wig, leads the forces of right against the forces of evil, headed by Helene Ambrose, a striking blonde in her own right.

Gene Lewis has an old time gallery hero part as Capt. Drummond, Fred Wear and Klock Ryder make as arrant a pair of knaves as Cycle Park has ever enjoyed, Mr. Ryder's make-up being particularly creepy, while Mr. Wear's character is that of a more skillful crook.

As the victim of the crooks, Mortimer Weldon has one chance and scores with a fine piece of dramatic work. Ewing Cherry as Drummond's chum is a happy-go-lucky young Englishman. Edward Beach makes a convincing detective.

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Especial credit must go to Fred Wear for staging the production and to Charles Lammers, stage manager, and the scenic crew, for there are five changes of scenery, all of them are unusually attractive, and but little time is lost between acts.79

The Royal Hawaiian Serenaders were specially engaged to provide entertainment in connection with The Bird of Paradise, and, according to the review, the performance, done with "realistic Hawaiian scenery, native Hawaiian musicians and hula dancers and costuming and customs of the paradise of the Pacific," made the production, "offered in an open air theater for the first time, one of the most entrancing productions in the long history of that theater." Olga Worth's work as Princess Luana was termed "sensational," and Gene Lewis was said in the review to provide "marvelous support."

There was one interesting production note:

Some of the audience became restless and a little excited just before the final scene, when a cloud of smoke came rolling from the stage. As the curtain rose, however, it was seen that it came simply from the spectacular volcano effect.81

Then, during the second day of the run, an incident occurred at the theater which marked a turning point in the careers of Gene Lewis and Olga Worth.

Freighted with the weight of about 250 men, women and children who were seeking to crowd their way through the gate to attend a performance of "The Bird of Paradise" . . . a wooden platform bridging a small creek and serving as a gateway to the open air playhouse collapsed shortly after 7 o'clock Monday night. Probably 150 went down in the wreckage, many of whom fell into the shallow

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79_News, Mon., June 18, 1923, 4.
80_News, Sun., June 24, 1923, IV, 7.
waters of a branch beneath the structure. Forty or fifty were injured, but so far as known, none fatally.

The crash came without the slightest warning according to eye witnesses. The crowd was pressing slowly up to the single ticket gate. . . .

Anticipating a large crowd, the theater management had taken the precaution of chaining off the board walk to the entrance, but the crowd, in its eagerness to reach the airdrome proper, disregarded this barrier and was precipitated into the creek when the platform, about fifteen feet wide, gave way for about twenty-five feet of its length. . . .

At 6 o'clock in the evening there were about 400 people waiting to get in the theater . . . .

Immediately following the crash of the timbers, Mr. Lewis and Miss Olga Worth and other members of the cast began aiding in rescuing people . . . .

'Hundreds of people asked us to go on and give a show after the accident,' said Mr. Lewis, 'but we were too deeply grieved and some members of the cast were in too highly a nervous condition to be able to do good work on the stage.' 82

By the following day it was reported that all those injured were recovering. The bridge was rebuilt and the performances resumed. And the district attorney said he was not contemplating any investigation because "there is no criminal action that can follow the accident." He pointed, however, to the possibility of civil suits. 83

Apparently the mishap did not discourage those who wanted to see The Bird of Paradise for people were turned away, and it was described as "the greatest stampede for seats ever known in the history of Dallas theatricals." 84

It was announced that the play would be repeated for a second week, starting the following Monday. 85

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This was the heyday of the Potash and Perlmutter comedies, and Cycle Park got on the bandwagon when it announced a production of Potash and Perlmutter early in July. At the same time, Frances Valley joined the company as the new second woman. She made her first appearance at Cycle Park in The Bad Man, described in advance notices as "the nationally famous Porter Emerson Browne comedy."

Another popular success, Captain Applejack, was the next production at Cycle Park. The Brat, a play in which Olga Worth had "scored one of her greatest Cycle Park successes," was next scheduled for repeat performance "because of many requests." Again, according to the reviewer, "Miss Worth made her greatest hit of the present season." He said that "she threw herself into the character with utter abandon . . . literally stopped the show with her dance in the third act. There was considerable disappointment because she did not respond with an encore." Dick Elliott, as Tirson the butler, was said in the review to have "gained the most favor with the crowd," next to Olga Worth. "His drunk scene in the first act was a gem," the reviewer commented.

The Cohan and Harris production, The House of Glass, was the final play of the 1923 summer season. The season had customarily ended early in September and this was ending it earlier than usual, but the company was moving on to Memphis to open the winter season on

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Labor Day. The play was described in the advance notice as "one of the most absorbing crook plays ever written." The final performance was on August 18.

The 1923 season had virtually the same performers as Lewis had used in his previous seasons, a fact which spoke well for the stability of the company and contributed to its success. But the 1923 season was to be the last in which Gene Lewis and Olga Worth came to Dallas for summer stock, although their company continued in the city for two more summer seasons. It was during the 1923 season that the Lewis-Worth company suffered its second major setback. The first had come the previous season with the theater fire. The new mishap involved the collapse of a footbridge leading to the theater. Nobody was injured and the event does now seem to have discouraged audiences, for they flocked to see the current play, The Bird of Paradise, in such large numbers that the production was extended for a second week. In all, it was a successful season but the repertoire of plays again ran heavily to light comedies and melodramas.

The 1924 Season

Gene Lewis and Olga Worth had taken their company to Memphis after the close of the 1923 summer season. They found they were quite successful in Memphis and decided to stay there through the summer of 1924. The season at Cycle Park was to be under the management of Sam Bullman.

Bullman gave assurance two months prior to the season that

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"the company would be one of the strongest ever brought here." He said that he had been with "Gene and Olga" in Memphis all winter and that a corps of men had been employed to put solid concrete and structural iron framework under the bridge and park approaches at Cycle Park. He disclosed that Fred Wear would be the director of the company and that it would include Sam Flint and Ella Ethridge, both of whom had been with the Hippodrome Players, Dick Elliott, Ewing Cherry, Joseph Remington and, as stage manager, Charles Lammers, all of whom had been at Cycle Park during previous seasons. The leading man, Jack Lorenz, and the leading woman, Mildred Florence, both came from the well-known Union Hill Stock Company in New York. Also new to the cast were Mildred Hastings, character woman, Herbert DeGuerre, character man, and Anna Mae Neilson, ingenue. The scenic director was to be Jack Platzer. Mondays would continue to be "ladies free night" and Fridays "merchants night." There was to be no change in prices and ushers were to be garbed in Japanese costumes.91

Now known as the Cycle Park Players, the company was to open on Sunday, May 18, with The First Year, Frank Cravens comedy. It was billed as the "first stock production in the United States and the first time in any theater under $2.50 a seat."92 A news item during the week's run stated that the play "has been a big success and playing to large audiences."93 That "super-mystery thriller" The Cat and the Canary, described as "perhaps the outstanding popular favorite of all

plays produced in the last twenty years," was scheduled for Cycle Park presentation on May 25.94

Another Potash and Perlmutter play, Partners Again, was given the following week,95 and two weeks later the stock group had a hit with It Pays to Advertise,

Apparently Sam Bullman and Fred Wear have found just what the Dallas theater public wants in "It Pays to Advertise" ... for it is drawing the largest crowds of the season.96

Madame Sherry, a musical comedy described in advance notices as "a great favorite a few years ago," was presented during the week of June 22 with Florence Chapman, advertised as the "leading lady who toured with 'Madame Sherry' for two seasons," taking the lead at Cycle Park and helping with the directing.97 Still another Potash and Perlmutter production, this time, His Honor Abe Potash, billed as "exactly as produced by Al H. Wood in New York City for more than one year," came the week of July 6.98 The next production, So This is London, was called "another hit" by the reviewer. He said it was "costumed and staged adequately by the Cycle Park Players, retaining and getting over every bit of the subtle wit provided by the author," and he praised Dick Elliott, cast as Hiram Draper, for doing "some of the best work of his Dallas career;" Fred Wear for a "fine interpretation

95 News, Sun., June 1, 1924, III, 6.
of Sir Percy Beauchamp;" Jack Lorenz as "very good;" Ann Nielson as "clever and convincing;" Florence Chapman as deserving praise "for a most natural rendition of a role that might easily be overdone;" and the "flawless characterizations of Ella Ethridge and Mildred Hastings." He concluded with "it is a good show, with an abundance of clean humor."99

It is interesting to note that in these early reviews there was no such thing as a poor, or even a fair production, and that all the actors performed well.

A play billed as "a story of ghosts and haunted houses" was presented the week of July 28; Spooks was said in the review to have "all the thrills and scares of haunted houses in the ghost stories of childhood days . . . the melodrama of all mystery plays . . . but it abounds in touches of humor." Mentioned in the review was the Cycle Park orchestra, "observing 'All Request week' with a program of classical and popular numbers between acts which add much to the pleasure of the entertainment."100 Present at the production of the play was Robert Sherman of Kansas City, the author of Spooks, who announced his intention of helping with the direction of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in August at Cycle Park.101

Francis Sayles, active for several years with leading stock companies in New York City, joined the Cycle Park players for the production of The House Next Door by J. Hartley Manners. Sayles had

100News, Mon., July 28, 1924, 4.
played the role of Sir John Cotswold in the play many times and was especially engaged for this and for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was to follow. Another newcomer to the company was Klock Ryder who had been with the Circle Players for two seasons and at Cycle Park earlier. It was he who was to take the role in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* that had been made famous by Richard Mansfield. Ryder had been on the road with the play for a season and at one time had been associated with the late Richard Mansfield in the production. Perhaps as reward for his assistance with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Sherman saw another of his plays, "H," acted at Cycle Park during the week of August 17. The farewell offering for the season was *The Crimson Nemesis*, presented during the week of August 21, and the company then opened in Fort Worth with *Adam and Eva* at the new Ritz Theater for a season of winter stock.

It is difficult to determine whether the absence of Gene Lewis and Olga Worth had any effect on attendance during the 1924 summer season. The reviews of the time uniformly praised all of the plays and seldom mentioned when there was a small audience. One indication that the season was fairly successful was the return of the Cycle Park Players the following summer with Sam Bullman as manager. The plays presented during the 1924 season catered even more to popular taste than they had in previous seasons.

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The 1925 Season

In the middle of May, 1925, Sam Bullman, the manager, announced that the new season would begin on May 31. He was returning to Dallas with the same company that had just played thirty-eight consecutive weeks at the Ritz Theater in Fort Worth, a record for stock in that city. Heading the summer cast were James Billings as leading man and Irene Summerly, who had been a great favorite in Fort Worth. Jane Marbury, said in the newspaper accounts to have been "recommended as a great character woman" was added to the cast. Those already known in Dallas who were returning included Joe Remington, Ewing Cherry, Mortimer Weldon, Helen Lewis, Jack Robertson, Harry Hoxworth and Grace Young.105 The first play was Haunted House, billed as "a newly-wed comedy with the scene of the play in a house supposed to be infested with spooks," written by Owen Davis. His At 9:45 had already been seen in the city.106 Haunted House proved in performance to be, according to the review, a "satire on the mystery play, a roaring burlesque with touches of old time 'meller' wrapped in risibles." Jimmie Billings was said in the review to have "made a pleasing impression as the male half of a pair of newly-weds" and Irene Summers, leading lady, "was fine as the bride." Joe Remington as the novelist was said by the reviewer to be primarily responsible for "developing the drama," and Harry Hoxworth "was the greatest delight of the audience as the Constable who fainted at the mention of blood." Apparently Cycle Park was a pleasant place, for the reviewer

noted that "flowers are blooming all over the park, the lawn is in good condition, and the swing chairs proved as popular as ever before the show and during the intermission."\[107\]

The next production was Meet the Wife, said in the advance notices to have been "lauded by New York critics as one of the greatest of all American successes." The playwright, Lynn Starling, was described as "one of the leaders of American playwrights."\[108\] The play was, according to the review, "a merry farce . . . and enthusiastically received." Irene Summerly, leading lady, became ill just before the opening performance, and her part had to be taken by Grace Young who was compelled to read many of the lines on opening night. Elwyn Harvey was subsequently called in by Bullman to take the place in the company of Miss Summerly, who had been stricken with appendicitis and operated on, but whose condition was critical.\[109\] Miss Harvey opened on June 14 at Cycle Park in The Silent Witness. Others who joined the company with this production were Dorrit Kelton, character woman, and John Cowell, second man.\[110\] This play, the reviewer said, was "an absorbing and entertaining murder trial play," with Harry Hoxworth, in the role of an "ancient gardener on a college campus," drawing applause for his "homely quips . . . The crowd watched for him to appear even though he was a minor character." All the cast, as might have been expected,

\[107\]News, Mon., June 1, 1925, 4.


received high praise. A touch of the exotic was provided with

The Love of Su Shong, but this drama by Dewitt Newing did not receive
the unqualified praise from the reviewer that was customary.

There are many persons to whom the love pangs of the
Oriental girl, joss houses and incense, coolies and queues furnish the acme of theater enjoyment. They will find a
tasty fare at the Cycle Park this week in "The Love of Su
Shong," a new "East is West."

There are others to whom the mating of a Chinese maid
and an American he-man is an exceedingly trite story, to
whom the stuff formality and interminable circumlocution of
pidgeon English is distinctly tiresome. These folks also
will not be disappointed . . . .

"The Love of Su Shong" is a heavy-handed version of
the above mentioned "East is West." The play's chief handicap
is the unvarying formality of the lines. Involved phrases,
metaphor upon metaphor, vainly aspiring to the Shakespearian,
comes from the mouths of the actors in the tempo of a funeral
march. One longs for one chinaman to break loose and exclaim
"Gee Whizz! What a hot night!"

The Cycle Park players form one of the best stock
companies Dallas has ever seen. They pump hard on the text
of this opus, and that they fail in so far as a part of the
audience is concerned is no fault of theirs. . . .

There is strong reason to believe that this refreshingly
different unsigned criticism was written by John Rosenfield, Jr.
And whether the criticism supplied the coup de grace to a company
that was already failing, or whether there were other reasons for
the sudden demise of the Cycle Park players, is largely conjectural.
After announcing Wedding Bells, by Salisbury Fields, for the week of
July 5, and publicizing that "there will be two real weddings on the
stage during the week, one Tuesday night and the other Thursday," the Cycle Park Players suddenly disbanded without ever giving this

111 News, Mon., June 15, 1925, l.
112 News, Mon., June 29, 1925, l.
113 News, Sun., July 5, 1925, III, l.
play. Cycle Park was never again to figure in the Dallas theatrical picture.

The 1925 season marked the end of summer stock in the city. Sam Bullman, the manager, brought in more new people and the company sustained a blow when its leading lady was stricken with appendicitis and had to leave the cast. As was the case with winter stock, one bad week was enough to put the end to a season and this happened when, after giving three plays, the fourth, The Love of Su Shong, got a bad criticism, a rare event in those days for Dallas stock performances. Apparently written by John Rosenfield, the criticism undoubtedly helped put an end to the season for no other play was presented.

There were to be other stock companies in the city during the next five year period, some of them of distinctly higher caliber, but the golden days of stock in Dallas had ended. And summer stock passed from the city's theatrical scene. Gene Lewis and Olga Worth were later to try winter stock unsuccessfully at the Circle Theater, but the influence of this couple, so potent for eight years, had apparently dwindled with the changing tastes and growing size of the metropolis.

The passing of summer stock at Cycle Park may be said to have been a turning point for all dramatic stock in Dallas. Never again after that was dramatic stock to be quite so popular, the performers quite so idolized in the city, and the merchants and the public quite so willing to consider such ventures "civic" in nature.
At the start of the 1920 season, the Cycle Park troupe ranked high in popularity in Dallas. The turning point in the fortunes of the company may be said to have come when the theater burned down at the start of the 1922 season. Although the company found a temporary home at the Majestic theater, the incident undoubtedly was a severe financial setback. Gene Lewis and Olga Worth suffered another reversal with the bridge accident during the 1923 season. This was their last season in summer stock in Dallas. Under Sam Bullman, the company made a brave effort to continue and did succeed in getting through the summer of 1924, but later, in June, 1925, abandoned the attempt.

But not all the blame for the failure of the company can be attributed to the fire and the accident. The Cycle Park company continued to present light farces and melodramas at a time when theater in the country was undergoing a revolution. The demand of audiences was for heavier fare and for better plays and Cycle Park did not change with the times. Also, as other stock companies were to learn, the Cycle Park group continued with its fixed casting system, often resulting in miscasting, when the little theaters of the nation were demonstrating that this system was outmoded.

Cycle Park may be said to have gained its principal popularity at a time when the public was becoming jaded with motion pictures. When the film industry began presenting better productions, it was inevitable that stock of this caliber would suffer severely.
CHAPTER V

TOURING SHOWS - LEGITIMATE PRODUCTIONS 1920-1925

The almost complete breakdown of the road is demonstrated by the scarcity of legitimate road shows during the 1920-1925 period. The five years began auspiciously enough with four productions in January of 1920. But then for two years the only traveling play seen in the city was a Hebrew performance done by a Yiddish company. During the next season only two productions were seen and there was a slight pickup in the 1923-1924 season with seven touring plays, all but one of which were done at the Majestic Theater. The 1924-1925 season marked a letdown with four presentations, all given at the Circle Theater.

One fact which becomes evident from a survey of the period is that after January, 1920, only the most established stars, or plays which had achieved an unusually outstanding record on Broadway, risked the economic exigencies of traveling on a circuit which would bring them as far Southwest as Dallas. Stage veterans with established reputations like Guy Bates Post, Norman Hackett, Amelia Bingham, Wilton Lackaye, Charlotte Walker, Margaret Anglin, Thomas Jefferson, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coburn and Fritz Leiber, or outstandingly successful plays like The First Year, The Bat, The Cat and the Canary, White Cargo, and The Monster, or a play with exceptionally low production costs like Stuart Walker's Book of Job were seen in the city. The Circle may be said to be the only play done by a touring company in the city in the five year
period that can be called representative of the new drama that was revolutionizing the American theater, and it was an English piece more in the tradition of The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and Lady Windermere's Fan than of the post-war trend. Most of the others were melodramas like The Bat, and The Cat and the Canary, that marked a transition between the older type melodramas and the newer psychological dramas.

The absence of plays in the newer mode from the road show repertoire is revealed in vivid fashion if one looks at the plays done by the Dallas Little Theater in the same five-year period, productions which included Beyond the Horizon, Why Marry?, Emperor Jones, Jane Clegg, Pygmalion, Mr. Pim Passes By, Outward Bound and Nan.

It may also be observed that the number of plays which came to the city tended to become more numerous as suitable theaters became available. At the start of 1920, the touring shows were done in the Fair Park Coliseum, a barn-like structure which seated as many as 3,800 persons and about which there were many complaints regarding its adequacy for the spoken drama. The Coliseum was only a stop-gap house for plays, put into such use when the old Dallas Opera House became the Majestic, and it was apparent in January, 1920, that there were very few touring plays which found its stage facilities adequate or which could fill its vast seating capacity. The two touring presentations seen in the next two seasons were played at the antiquated, small City Hall Auditorium located in the Dallas Municipal Building. This auditorium was sometimes called the Municipal Auditorium. When the Jefferson Theater began housing touring productions during the 1922-1923 season, two plays were given there. But the Jefferson found this activity unprofitable, and it was not until the Majestic Theater became available
for road show productions in the 1923-1924 season that the number of shows markedly increased. In the spring of 1925, when a stock company had withdrawn early, the Circle Theater became the site for road shows and there were three presentations in that house.

An article which appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* in 1921 commented on the decline of the road:

Randolph Daniels, assistant general passenger agent of the Katy Railroad in Dallas, has received a letter from a friend in New York relative to a conversation he recently took part in at the Waldorf on the subject "Where is Texas?" The conversation was between a group of men, several of whom spoke in loud praise of Texas as a winter resort.

One of them, however, interrupted to ask, "Where is Texas?" His friends seem puzzled by the question and asked him what he meant by it.

"'I mean,' was the answer, "that I haven't heard of the State in my profession for nearly five years. I am a theatrical manager and I and my associates route over fifty percent of the companies which travel over the country. In these five years I have not seen the abbreviation 'Tex' on a contract.

All of you may think Texas a big bustling progressive State, but will be surprised that in this department of high mental recreation, the immense community is nil. Motion pictures, vaudeville, in fact all the by-products of the legitimate theater are blossoming profusely in Texas, but the high-class theater, the intellectual stage, is entirely barred out.

The condition is simple of understanding. To go into the vast territory of the State a theatrical property owner must have before him the possibility of at least breaking even on his expenses. To do this, he has to figure long railroad movements at enormous expense. There is not a city in Texas . . . which may be utilized as a week stand. Time was when the most important companies we sent out could lay out a week of one-night stands in Texas at enough prospective profit to justify gambling with the heavy expenses of playing in the more minor cities. This week was invariably composed of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio have been off the theatrical maps, and one cannot afford to go into the state with its immense railroad isolation depending only on Galveston, Waco and Austin. The jump from one to the other of these two cities would increase the week's expense to a prohibitive figure.

The communities of Texas have been fully forewarned of this condition, and have paid no attention to it. Even when it was possible to play the six cities named, their theaters were not up to the requirements for the better productions. The historic example of this was when the managers of Sarah Bernhardt proclaimed she would play under a circus tent. And they meant it,
too, because they knew the conditions were such in the cities
named that they could by no means earn the necessary immense
income. Of course their plan was defeated by the wind blowing
down the tent in Dallas. But I happened to be present when in a
temporary auditorium, nor the regular theater, in, I think it
was Houston, and as penetrating as the Great Bernhardt's voice
was, it couldn't be heard for the creaking of the boards.

No, we of the theater do not know where Texas is now, and
you'll have to forgive me if I insist that a community which
neglects providing theaters for the better classes of companies
is lacking in enterprise. . . .

Out of the facts pertaining to my own activities I am forced
to convict this great community of lack of progress."1

January-June-1920

The first touring legitimate production seen in Dallas in 1920
was Experience, presented by F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest at the Fair
Park Coliseum. The advertisements called it "the most wonderful play
in America," and described it as "now in its sixth year of continued and
marvelous success."2 The play was reviewed as dealing with "the stern
realities of life . . . with humor, force and truth straining at the
wordy leash of its diction." At the Coliseum on January 15, 16, for a
two-night stand, Experience, which was to be presented later in Dallas
at Cycle Park, was said by the reviewer to have an "able cast," and
particular praise was given Patricia Carr "who plays Excitement, Tempta-
tion and Frailty with remarkable attention to detail," and to Paul Bell
"who interprets the nonchalant Chance, the hard-boiled Makeshift, a
restaurant proprietor, and the coke-sniffing Crime with equal facility."
The reviewer summed up with "one is well inclined to think Comstock and

Gest go too far in calling it 'the most wonderful play in America,' but it deserves at least a high place in recent dramatic effort."³

*Up in Mabel's Room* was presented by Al H. Wood at the Coliseum the following Saturday,⁴ and it was Wood who presented another farce, *Parlor, Bedroom and Bath*, also at the Coliseum on January 29, 1920. The reviewer for the *Times Herald* observed that "the flippant farce ... delighted the audience." He wrote that "Harlan Briggs as Reginald Irving ... brought forth peals of laughter from his audience as he endeavored to carry out his role of vamp to please his wife." The reviewer had words of praise for Mary Kilcoyne as Polly Hathaway, for Foster Williams as Geoffrey Hatwood, and for Fred Van Etten as the bell boy. He observed that "the play sparkled with bright comedy and ludicrous situations and each character was well interpreted." Others in the cast were Elsie Southern, Mary Diehl, Gene Cleveland, Jerry Savage, Nathalie Duggan, George Duthie, Frank Stratton and Jack Tucker.⁵

When the veteran actor, Guy Bates Post, brought his much-heralded drama, *The Masquerader*, to the Coliseum on February 2 for four nights, the advertisement stated that it came with

... the same excellent company--the one that has supported Mr. Post ... since it began--the same wonderful scenic equipment--with its massive, double revolving stages--its three mechanical crews--its triple electrical equipment--inimitable resources that require three mammoth cars to transport. ...⁶

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⁵*The Daily Times Herald*, Fri., Jan. 30, 1920, p. 8. References to this newspaper will hereafter be made in the footnotes as *Times Herald*.
Demonstrating how fearful Dallas audiences were at the time of second-rate touring companies, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, which sponsored Post's appearances in the city, stated through their president, T. E. Jackson:

When the possibility of bringing Guy Bates Post to Dallas presented itself, the Chamber of Commerce said it would gladly become interested, provided the same cast and production would be shown here that was then showing in San Francisco.7

After the opening performance, the reviewer for the Dallas Journal commented:

The art of Guy Bates Post, a difficult double role in The Masquerader, won enthusiastic approbation from an audience which filled the Coliseum. . . . There is no stronger contrast in the Jekyll and Hyde of Mr. Mansfield than in the two characters whom Mr. Post portrays—the forceful writer and the wreck of a man who is Chilcote.

Alice John plays well in the role of Eve Chilcote. The entire company is well chosen. Gerry Cornell's interpretation of Brock, the veteran servant, also won emphatic approval, as did Aubrey Anderson as Lillian Astrupp, the vampire of the play.8

The Times Herald critic called the play "tremendously successful," and stated that "the great American actor has attracted a capacity audience at every performance throughout his tour,"9 and the following comment was made in the News:

Playing to undiminished enthusiasm on the part of the local theater-goers, Guy Bates Post and the Richard Walton Tully Company . . . last night renewed the success that attended the Monday and Tuesday night performances. Another large audience attended the third rendition here. Mr. Post was given five encores at the close of the second act.10

7_The Dallas Journal_, Tues., Feb. 3, 1920, p. 4. Referred to hereafter in the footnotes as _Journal_.


9_The Dallas Journal_, Tues., Feb. 3, 1920, p. 4. Referred to hereafter in the footnotes as _Journal_.

10_The Dallas Journal_, Tues., Feb. 3, 1920, p. 4. Referred to hereafter in the footnotes as _Journal_.

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Scandal, billed as "the most daring and brilliant comedy ever attempted on the American stage," came to the Coliseum on February 7 with Emma Bunting, and the Times Herald reviewer stated that "the delightful and popular Emma Bunting pleased the local theatergoers ... when she enacted Walter Hunt's production of Cosmo Hamilton's 'Scandal!' He added that the play "afforded Dallas one of the most enjoyable evenings of entertainment that it has relished for a long time," and commented that "Miss Bunting, in the role of the society girl in quest of adventure and romance ... was convincing and charming. ... Miss Bunting is the type of girl that holds unusual interest every moment that she is on stage." The reviewer stated about the rest of the cast that they provided "excellent support for the tiny star."

The well-known theater classic, The Better Ole, was presented on April 16, 17 at the Coliseum, and the News reviewer described it as "realistic pictures of the war mixed with the convincing amount of song and dance." He noted that DeWolf Hopper, the star of the play, made a curtain speech at the end of the first act in which he

... bewailed the fact that the cartoonist, Bruce Bairnsfather, in first designing the character, had wished the enormous nose on his chief actor, along with a mustache that insisted upon losing several of its hairs into his mouth at every performance."

The reviewer observed that there were approximately 2,000 persons present for the opening performance and commented that "there were times when the audience was near to tears, and times when they laughed with Ole Bill, but at all times it was enjoyable." The Times Herald

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reviewer called the appearance of DeWolf Hopper in the role of "Old Bill" the "real big event of our theatrical season when speaking of the legitimate stage." He continued:

Hopper had little or no trouble in keeping the large gathering inside the Coliseum walls last night in a good nature. His curtain speech was received with open arms. The character that he portrays in the Bairsafeather cartoon comedy is unlike anything that Mr. Hopper has heretofore attempted. . . Then there are other people in the cast that deserve mention. Harry McNaughton as "Alf" and Victor Dyer as "Bert" were very good. Marcia Abbe, a pretty little girl portraying the role of Victoire, was pleasing. The company in general was good and offered the famous comedian able support.

The musical score which consisted of a dozen numbers was pretty and novel. . . There is a bevy of pretty girls that sing and dance in a most pleasing manner. It is a different sort of a play with music.

The review listed as members of the cast Carl Rosa, Doris Sherman, Harry McNaughton, Victor Dyer, DeWolf Hopper, Maxine Henry, Leonard Hooker, H. P. Woodley, Helen Leonard, John Douglas, Marcia Abbe, Gertrude Carey, Anne Belmar, Chriss Laverne, Irene Newton, Etta Annie Corinne, Ethel Willis, Marguerite de St. Clair, Tom Ellis, Jack C. Douglas, Agnes Patterson, H. P. Woodley, Jack Parry, Ollie Cameron, Edith Williams and Joseph Wilson.\textsuperscript{14}

The Dallas Journal review called the production "extremely entertaining," and described it as "a realistic presentation and a mixture of musical comedy, drama and real humor." The review noted that the chorus "wear fetching uniforms with Sam Browne belts, wrapped puttees and all," and stated that "an excursion into No Man's Land by Ole Bill . . . is vividly depicted, even to the whistle and burst of the shells."\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14}Times Herald, Sat., Apr. 17, 1920, 5.
\textsuperscript{15}Journal, Sat., Apr. 17, 1920, I, 4.
The road had not yet gone into the sharp decline in the spring of 1920 that it was to feel in the next three seasons, and from January through June a total of six legitimate roadshows were seen in Dallas. Of the six, however, one was an outdated morality show, two were frothy farces, and three, The Masquerader, Scandal, and The Better Ole brought outstanding stage stars to the city and received enthusiastic critical acclaim. As the decade proceeded, farces like Up in Mabel's Room and Perlor, Bedroom and Bath were seen only rarely in such provincial cities like Dallas whereas the dramas featuring known stars tended to form the staple of legitimate roadshow activity. In 1920, actors of the stature of Guy Bates Post and DeWold Hopper could still draw capacity audiences in Dallas, regardless of the dramatic worth of their production.

1920-1921-1922-1923 Seasons

The Better Ole was to be the last legitimate touring show save one done at the Coliseum, and that exception was a production identified in the News only as a "Hebrew play" performed by David Myerowitz & Company on March 19, 1921. After this production, the Coliseum was host to touring musicals, but all subsequent legitimate shows were given at the Circle, the Majestic, the Jefferson and the Old Mill until the new auditorium at Fair Park became available following the 1925 State Fair season. Whether it was the unavailability of a suitable playhouse, or whether the road had sharply contracted is difficult to determine, but the fact remains that the Myerowitz play was the only touring show seen in Dallas during the 1920-1921 season, and that there were none in the 1921-1922 season and only three during the following season. It was not until the Interstate Circuit became available for touring plays at the
start of the 1923-1924 season that the number of legitimate shows in the city began to show anything like their earlier frequency.

The City Hall auditorium, sometimes referred to as the Municipal auditorium and often criticized by the press as inadequate for legitimate drama, was the scene of matinee and evening presentations on January 1, 1923 of The Circle, by W. Somerset Maugham. In the cast were a quintet of famous performers—Wilton Lackaye, Henry E. Dixey, Amelia Bingham, Norman Hackett and Charlotte Walker. An advertisement stated that "for the first time in the history of Dallas have we had the opportunity of offering five of the most brilliant stars in America in a play conceded by critics to be the smartest that has been produced in years."16

The opening performance got "rave" reviews from all three newspapers. The News described it as "bold in its treatment of a great social problem, almost unbelievably clever in lines and situations, forceful in the two morals it presents at the same time ... a genuine dramatic treat."

The reviewer continued:

Seldom even in the old days when road shows were a regular thing, have Dallas audiences had the privilege of seeing such a captivating play presented by such a group of stars. Norman Hackett, Charlotte Walker, Wilton Lackaye, Amelia Bingham, Henry E. Dixey and Gordon Ash all have parts for which their unexcelled talents are peculiarly fitted. Even the minor roles are unusually well taken.

What if the cramped stage interferes with the work of the actors? Here is the drama in sumptuous style served by a coterie of world famous performers. What if doors did not swing orderly, and what if the reflection of graceful gestures were visible in the too-close sky? Despite the handicaps, "The Circle" was so entrancingly presented that it made those present sigh for the good old days before the opera house with its comedies and tragedies had been crowded into the background by its more modern brother, the theater with movies and vaudeville.

In the hands of the all-star cast, "The Circle" hardly seems a play at all. It is hard to realize that the actors are just acting.

Charlotte Walker as Elizabeth the wife, originally from Galveston, is more beautiful than in the days when she first won stage renown. . . . In the third act she wore a gorgeous blue creation which was the envy of every woman in the audience. . . . Her acting . . . is of high quality.

As the mother who ran away, Amelia Bingham is marvelous.

. . .

Wilton Lackaye as Lord Porteous . . . does perhaps the best work of anybody in the all star cast. His peevishness seems so natural, his rudeness so whole-souled that it is hard to believe he doesn't mean it. Yet he can be tender, at times.

A large share of the comedy is furnished by Henry Z. Dixey as Clive Champion-Cheney.

The husband of Elizabeth . . . is well portrayed by Norman Hackett who makes the most of the rather dull and prosy character.

Teddy Luton . . . is given a worthy characterization by Gordon Ash, distinguished recruit from the English stage.17

The reviewer for the *Times Herald* praised the play but damned the theater. He commented that "modern English drawing room comedy won its spurs in Texas New Year's Day with two flawless performances. . . ." and observed that "for season after season of late the legitimate stage in Dallas has been dark, while famous players who toured here of yore had almost become a memory." He commented that "it was pathetic as well as exhilarating to sense the joy of countless Dallas folk Monday at the return of professional drama," and stated that "it was an even greater pleasure to greet on the lightened stage such suave, beautiful and popular comprehending people as Miss Walker, Miss Bingham and their associates." He praised Amelia Bingham as giving "the outstanding performance of the evening," and commented that "Miss Walker has been admirably chosen for the part of the beautiful young woman who defies the warning of her mother in law," and that Wilton Lackaye "brings roars

from the audience." The reviewer, who signed the criticism as "S.A.,"
called attention to the need in Dallas for "a legitimate theater where
such intelligent productions may be adequately housed," and stated that
"the absence of such a playhouse is enough to draw our most vehement
indignation."\textsuperscript{18}

The \textit{Dallas Journal} referred to the play as "one of the best
constructed and most enjoyable . . . of recent seasons." This reviewer
singled out for particular praise Charlotte Walker, who, he said, was
"still beautiful as in the days when she was the toast of Galveston,
and Norman Hackett, whom he described as having "the best speaking voice
of anybody in the cast," and whose "change in facial expression, when he
discovers that the woman he has married is planning to leave his luxu-
rious home for a life of poverty is still uncanny in its convincingness."
But he cited Wilton Lackaye, Amelia Bingham and Henry E. Dixey as
carrying off "the laurels." About Lackaye, he commented, "Utterably
rude, altogether selfish, the character has many redeeming qualities and
Lackaye rings all the changes in adroit manner."\textsuperscript{19}

For the 1922-1923 season the Jefferson Theater was available for
touring shows, and the first seen there was a religious drama, \textit{The Book
of Job}, presented by Stuart Walker. Brought to Dallas by church organi-
izations, the production played for two performances on February 26.\textsuperscript{20}
The \textit{News} reviewer called it "just sheer drama, minus any love theme
except that of a suffering human being for the Creator," and stated that

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Times Herald}, Tues., Jan. 2, 1923, I, 8.
the setting was simple and the effects were gained largely through lighting.²¹

Margaret Anglin appeared at the same theater for four performances in *The Woman of Bronze*, opening April 12. The well-known actress had personally supervised and took the lead in the play which included in its cast Harry Minturn, Vera Berliner, Virginia Howell, Henry Mowbray, William Street, Arthur Fisher, Max Montesole, Harry Barfoot, C. Hannam Clark, Janet Cameron, Dorothy Johnson, Sally Williams and Helen Flinger.²² The review in the *News* described the play as "real drama, pure and undefiled and strong . . . as tense a story of domestic life as Dallas has ever seen," and, pointing out that Margaret Anglin had been playing the role for four years, stated about her acting that "she fairly lives the tragic role of a wife who loved her husband so much that she let him step out of her life when she thought it meant his happiness." Her acting was said to be "superb," and the supporting cast was termed "of unusual excellence."²³

The actress also drew praise from the *Journal* reviewer who stated that she "thrilled the big audience," and commented that "more than anything else, Miss Anglin is called on to depict sorrow and she does it in a manner which arouses and holds the attention of the entire audience." He paid tribute to Max Montesole for his handling of the role of Griggs, saying that it was done "with consummate skill," and to Harry Minturn for a "virile and impressive" portrayal of the husband and

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Janet Cameron as "very pretty and the sort of a girl to set men's brains in a whirl." This reviewer stated that the sets were "excellent and the lighting effects fine," and commented on the many curtain calls Margaret Anglin took both "after the second act and at the end of the play."24

The Times Herald review was not quite so enthusiastic. Sam Acheson, the reviewer, conceded that Margaret Anglin had made a personal triumph, but called this "all the more remarkable in view of the undistinguished and tawdry dramatic piece with which she has chosen to drape her Junoesque figure on the American stage today." He noted that her strength in the play "derives from the portrayal of the woman's magnificent suffering," and stated that she depicted this "with all the economy of line and stress that could be demanded for verity and for understanding." But Acheson contended that "the limitations of the play itself are inexorable." He praised Max Montesole, Janet Cameron and Harry Minturn, but criticized what he called "the casual manner of speaking of many in the company" as bordering at times "on the indistinct," and hit out particularly at a long "aside" in the second act which, he said, "strains at one's credulity and can be excused only on the grounds of an obsolete stage convention."25

Margaret Anglin commented on the night of the performance that the reason touring companies so seldom came to Dallas was that "it has been a long time up to this season that it was possible to find enough theaters open to legitimate drama to permit of a tour through Texas."26

Legitimate roadshows all but disappeared from the Dallas scene during the 1920-1921, 1921-1922, and 1922-1923 seasons. The only show presented in the 1920-1921 season was a Hebrew play, so insignificant that the newspapers did not even give its name. There were no touring dramas seen the rest of that season or throughout the 1921-1922 season. The road revived slightly in the city the following season with presentation of The Circle, starring a number of well-known stars, The Book of Job, a low-cost production brought to the city by church organizations, and The Woman of Bronze, starring Margaret Anglin. Again it can be noted that only actors who could bank on their reputations attracting audiences dared go to Dallas on their road trips. Both The Circle and The Woman of Bronze got enthusiastic reviews. Margaret Anglin suggested one reason why road companies did not go to the city when she stated that there were not enough adequate theaters in Texas to justify such a trip.

1923-1924 Season

The turning point as far as touring legitimate shows in Dallas were concerned was reached when the Majestic Theater became available for such presentations at the start of the 1923-1924 season. Interstate, operators of the Majestic, could offer such shows the opportunity to play in modern theaters not only in Dallas but also in San Antonio, Austin, Houston and Fort Worth.

The first production seen at the Majestic was Lightnin', with a cast that included Thomas Jefferson, Bessie Bacon, Charles Evans, Robert Keith, Margaret Mosier, Walter Dickinson, Frank Thornton, Felix Haney
and Grace Chappelle, and it was given during the week beginning August 19. Thomas Jefferson was said in advance notices about the play "to link the finest traditions of the American stage with a brilliant portrayal of a role that can be compared only with 'Rip Van Winkle' immortalized by his father." The notices also pointed out that Bessie Bacon was the daughter of the late Frank Bacon who had first created the title role in the play, and that Charles E. Evans was known both for his long tenure in A Parlor Game and as the Reno Judge in Lightnin', a role in which he had "won the applause of millions with his partner, the late Bill (Ole Hoss Hoey) Evans."

The play was enthusiastically received at its opening performance, according to the News reviewer, who described Bill Jones, the role taken by Tom Jefferson, as "one of the greatest characters in the history of the drama." The reviewer continued:

Jefferson's portrayal commands and holds the sympathy of the audience from start to finish. Romance and pathos find their place in the drama, but always so sugar coated with homely humor, that there is joy without sadness. . . . "Lightnin" is in a class by itself as far as the modern drama is concerned. . . . It was truly an appreciative Sunday night audience. Tom Jefferson was forced to make a curtain talk after many calls and told of what a pleasure it was to act a play so enthusiastically received. He expressed the hope that he might play Bill Jones for several generations of theater-goers, even as his father had Rip Van Winkle.

The Journal reviewer commented that the opening performance was highly successful before "a typical Dallas audience . . . one that overlooked nothing in its expression of approval." He noted that "Thomas Jefferson takes the part . . . with such understanding that he almost merges into

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the character," and he praised also Robert Keith, playing the part of John Marvin as

... a juvenile lead whose superior has not been seen in Dallas. ... He is good-looking enough to turn the heads of some of the feminine members of the audience and goes about his part with all the seriousness of a veteran. The total absence of staginess makes him doubly attractive.

The reviewer also described Bessie Bacon, in the role of Margaret Davis, as "exceedingly pleasant;" and also lauded Charles E. Evans as Judge Townsend, and Helena Phillips as Mrs. Jones.30

Frank Craven's The First Year was seen at the Majestic for three nights beginning September 1 and had a cast that included John W. Ransome, Ray L. Royce, Joseph Garry, Elizabeth Dunne, Pauline Moxon, Scott Walsh, and Patricia O'Hearn, advertised as "artists of high repute."31

Advance notices for The Bat, which came for a week's run at the City Hall Auditorium on October 29, called it "the world's greatest mystery play." The play had a record of nine hundred and eighty-two performances in New York and five hundred and fifty-three in Chicago, according to the publicity, and it was estimated that more than six million persons had seen the play and that "it had returned more than $9,000,000 to its owners." The notices stated that Dallas had been waiting three years to see the production.32 The play returned to the same theater for a return engagement on January 1, 2, 1924, and the News critic praised it as furnishing "no end of thrills ... every person

who saw the great play Tuesday, found that he had grown a new crop of
goose flesh." The reviewer commented that the entire cast was "good"
and he particularly praised Mabel Wright who acted the role of
Miss Cornelia Van Gorder as "excellent . . . and charmingly feminine."
George O. Wilson, enacting the part of Anderson, was said by the
reviewer to have presented "a convincing character." As for Carrie
Weller, who played Lizzie, the maid, the critic commented:

... she is a "scream" and indulges in numerous such outbursts,
much to the delight of her somewhat tense audience. Her comedy
is of a natural sort, and her terror at the strange happenings
throughout the play furnish the necessary relief of laughter to
the audience.

Others mentioned by the reviewer as being in the cast included Ernest
Howard, Ellen Crowe, Gordon Eldrid, Charles Merriwell, John S. Clubley,
Orrin Shear and Roy Dunbar.33

The Monster came to the Majestic for a matinee and night
performance on January 7, and the News reviewer gave it an approving
review:

Creepy sensations come over the spectator, to be relieved by
hearty laughter. . . . There are only six persons in the cast,
but backed by weird and thrilling mechanical effects they put on
three acts of as tense drama as Dallas has ever seen.
Into a mysterious house two men and a woman find their way.
Here they meet Dr. Ziska, played by Crane Wilbur, a crazed
scientist, who hungers for human bodies on which to experiment.
After doors have mysteriously opened and shut, faces have
appeared on the wall, gusts of wind blown out the candle and
awesome shadows gone chasing along near the ceiling, Dr. Ziska
appears preceded by wisps of curling smoke.
Outside a storm rages. The three wayfarers fear to leave
the room, spooky as they have found it. An intrepid young
newspaper reporter, who has volunteered to stand watch,
discovers that both of his companions have disappeared. Just
then a fearful form creeps up behind him with a bludgeon raised
to strike as the lights go out and the curtain falls.

Two acts take place in the haunted room. The final act finds the participants . . . in an underground chamber. An electric chair and an operating table are the principal pieces of furniture. Dr. Ziska announces that the girl is the daughter of the man who ruined him. As he prepares to perpetrate his fiendish aim of vivisecting a live human being, things begin to happen. The audience sighs with relief at the climactic ending.

Mechanically and dramatically, "The Monster" is a masterpiece. Crane Wilbur as Ziska, Frederick Bruce as the reporter, Frank Darien as the starter of most of the laughs and who turns out an entirely unexpected sort of a person, and Walter James as the doctor's dumb servant are all excellent.

Miss Suzanne Caubet, the only girl in the cast, is not only a clever little actress, but is considerable of a beauty. And due credit must be given to the mechanical staff, which pulled the many mysterious stunts without a hitch.34

The reviewer for the Journal stated that "Edgar Allen Poe in his wildest flights of fancy never conceived a more weird and mysterious situation than that of 'The Monster,'" and added that "the superior acting of the entire cast and a setting in perfect accord with the story combined to send shivers up and down the spine of the most sophisticated spectator." He commended Suzanne Caubet, who, he said, "studied for several years under Sarah Bernhardt and gives great promise for the future," and commented that the audience called it "the best mystery show ever brought to Dallas."35

The Bat was seen for the third time at the Majestic on January 27,36 and on February 4 and 5, The Fool, by Channing Pollock, who also directed the play, and which was advertised as "praised from the pulpit in every city . . . recommended by the governors of ten different states . . . the greatest dramatic play in the history of the world," was at the same theater. In the company were Leo Kennedy,

Helen St. Leger, Elizabeth Shirley, Beth Tenney, May McCabe, Beth Ward, John Kline, Albert Andruss, Jerome Sheldon, Alf Helton, Robert Brodeur, George Tobias, Guy Seabrook, Wanda Lawrence, Stanley Rignold, Harry English, Walter Powers, Nelly Neil and others. The play was described by the Times Herald reviewer as preaching "a powerful sermon," but he asserted that "perhaps its idealism seems a little far-fetched to ultra-practical businessmen submerged in struggles for riches and success." The reviewer stated that "Leo Kennedy portrays with power and feeling the exacting role of 'The Fool,'" and he also observed that "Mr. Pollock has seen to it that all his cast understand what they are about in the work of presenting his highly successful play. The reviewer for the Journal took issue with the claim that the play was "the greatest ever written," contending that this assertion was based more "upon the wholesome lesson it seeks to teach rather than upon its theatrical qualities, although it is vibrant with tense drama." He stated that the cast was "eloquent in talent" and called the production "one of the best sermons that has been preached in Dallas in many years."

The presentation of The Climax, which marked the return of Guy Bates Post to the stage, was heralded for its appearance on February 11, 12, at the Majestic with a quarter-page advertisement in which Karl Hoblitzelle, Interstate president, stated that "Guy Bates Post . . . carries more honors, more weight, more followers than any other man in his profession. All America honors his achievements."

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37 News, Mon., Feb. 4, 1921, 4.
38 Times Herald, Tues., Feb. 5, 1921, 8.
John W. Rogers, Jr. wrote about the play in the *Times Herald* that "Guy Bates Post captivated Dallas audiences." Pointing out that it was "an ideal play for touring, having only four characters and one setting," Rogers commented that Post had "surrounded himself with actors who are quite as well suited to their parts as the star himself," and he called the production a "finished and beautiful interpretation." The critic noted that there had been "few successes in America that have lasted as long," and he cited evidence of the "fashions of other years," pointing out that the heroine was "living with two bohemian musicians," but made "such a fuss over an occasional 'damn' thrown in to punctuate an intimate conversation." Rogers described Post as "very polished, and reads his lines with an air that marks him unmistakably as the star"; Parks Jones as "excellent"; Gerald Pring as having a "beautiful quality to his speaking voice"; and Lucia Lee as "charmingly appealing in a simple unsophisticated fashion." The *Journal* reviewer stated that "Guy Bates and his company . . . were given an ovation at the matinee performance." He noted that "at the close of the second act, the applause was so insistent that Mr. Post finally consented to give a curtain talk," and that the performance was "intensely dramatic." The reviewer called the four performers "master delineators of the parts in which they are cast," stating:

Guy Bates Post lived up to every expectation. . . . Miss Lee . . . has an excellent voice and handles the job of 'mothering' her teacher and his son with realism. Parks Jones . . . is as temperamental as one would wish, and Gerald Pring . . . is acceptable.

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*Times Herald*, Tues., Feb. 12, 1921, 8.

*Journal*, Tues., Feb. 12, 1921, 4.
As for the review in the News, it called the play "drama, pure and unadulterated . . . a real slice out of artistic life with nothing to either bolster or relieve it." The reviewer commented that "so strong is the play, so vivid the character portrayals, that the audience is held spellbound." He stated about the performance of Guy Bates Post:

Most of those in each of the audiences Monday went to see Guy Bates Post. They demonstrated that by the enthusiastic reception which greeted his first appearance on the stage and the eager manner with which they hung on to his wonderful impersonation of the rapidly aging singing teacher.

Mr. Post handles this big role with intuitive feeling. It is as if he is, for the purposes of the play, really an old Italian musician. Decidedly fatalistic, Luigi is altogether an adorable character and one which will live long with some of Mr. Post's most famous impersonations.

To make the character even more impressive, Mr. Post gives his curtain talk in the Italian dialect of the play.1

On March 3, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coburn, with a cast that also included Lumsden Hare, gave two performances of So This is London at the Majestic. The reviewer for the Journal commented that "arguments for a better understanding between the United States and England" were "cleverly concealed" in the play. He stated that "the George M. Cohan laugh success . . . pleased two audiences at the Majestic," and described the company as "especially strong." He observed that "there isn't so much to 'So This is London' except that it is packed with laughs and philosophy, most of which turns out wrong," and added that "this is unusual—each of the women in the company is pretty."2

The Cat and the Canary, the next legitimate touring show of the season, was offered at the Majestic on March 10 with a cast that included Elsie Hitz, Robert Toms, Alma Krueger, William Bonelli,

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Antoinette Rochte, Harry Oldridge, Bertha Lowe, M. J. Briggs, Roy LaRue, Robert A. Bennett and others. The long time Dallas had waited to see the play was pointed out by the Journal reviewer who commented that the audiences at the Majestic "pronounced it good." He noted that Robert Toms was in the role which had established the reputation of Henry Hull, and proclaimed Tom's work as "of stellar order." He described Elsie H Hitz in the role of Annabelle West, as "a very lovable heroine." The reviewer observed that "much of the action is in semi-darkness and that makes the play all the more absorbing," and stated that "each of the roles is well taken and the climax is as startling as it is unexpected." The reviewer for the Times Herald called the production "a thriller of a strange house at midnight," and stated that "the audience forgot to wonder . . . whether 'The Cat and the Canary' is really the most exciting play ever written," a claim made by the producers, because "they were too busy calming their goose flesh before the next attack." According to the News review, "the two big Dallas audiences . . . were practically unanimous in voting it one of the best." The reviewer called Robert Toms "a lovable although unusual hero," and commented that "whether or not feminine members of the cast are pretty will remain an unsolved question to the audience—they couldn't see well enough to tell." And he pointed out that the play "doesn't depend much on the quality of the acting."
The effects of supplying roadshow companies with sufficient theaters in the state to make the trip to the Southwest worthwhile were dramatically highlighted during the 1923-1924 season. Karl Hoblitzelle not only made the 3,000 seat Majestic Theater in Dallas available for touring companies, but also assured the companies performances in the other Interstate theaters in the state. The result was that the season, from the point of view of touring plays presented, proved to be the most successful of the entire ten-year period. The trend established earlier in the decade of well-known stars bringing vehicles associated with their names continued. Thomas Jefferson in Lightnin', Leo Kennedy in The Fool, Guy Bates Post in The Climax, and Charles Coburn and his wife in So This is London were all seen at the Majestic during the season. Significantly, only Lightnin' had a week-long run at the theater. The Bat, also given for a week at the much smaller Municipal Auditorium, was probably the most popular of the presentations. It returned twice more during the season. But the greatest popular ovation went to Guy Bates Post for his performance in The Climax. A definite fondness of contemporary audiences for "spooky" melodramas was apparent, for during the season, in addition to The Bat, The Monster and The Cat and the Canary also drew large audiences in the city.

The 1924-1925 Season

The Circle Theater became available for touring shows with the failure of a stock company that left the theater vacant. White Cargo was the first touring play shown there and was advertised as having "an original Broadway cast and production direct from a record run in the larger cities of the country." Presently for four days beginning on

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February 25, the play drew a mixed review from John W. Rogers, Jr. in the Times Herald. White Cargo was to run into censorship trouble when it was presented by Gene Lewis in winter stock during the 1926-1927 season, and statements by Rogers in his review indicate that the Dallas censors were suspicious about the drama at this first Dallas showing. Rogers wrote:

After two years in New York, a year in London, a year in Chicago and successful tours of half a dozen road companies, the most extraordinary thing about the opening performance of "White Cargo" . . . was the presence of the local board of censorship and the board of appeals sitting with eyes and ears agog to judge whether it was proper for a Dallas audience to be allowed to see it.

Whatever may have been the private opinion of the censors, the large audience of respectable citizens which filled the Circle seemed to enjoy the piece without being visibly shocked at the occasional "cuss word," or even the seduction scene in which a mulatto vampire turned her wiles upon a pathetically lonely, homesick young Englishman.

Rogers commented that three minor parts created by Marshall Vincent, Cornelius Roddy and Bert C. Wood were "excellently acted . . . all more interesting and more living creations than the two principals." He paid particular tribute to Roddy, who, he said, "largely was responsible for the sustained tension of the play," and stated that the whole company was "a good one and the production is up to metropolitan standards." Others in the cast cited by Rogers included Bernard Thornton who portrayed Langford, and Helen Stransky as Tondelayo.

The critic closed the review on this note:

"White Cargo" stripped of its sensationalism is nothing more than a melodrama with an exotic setting and touches here and there that rise above melodrama. It would have hardly deserved to have been taken seriously by a board of censors who have allowed the opera "Thais" to be sung here in the past and are going to let the Chicago Opera Company sing "Thannhauser" [sic] here next week.50

On March 9, Fritz Leiber, a young Shakespearian actor who was to bring his troupe to Dallas several times during the next decade, and who was eventually to appear successfully in Chicago and New York, opened a week’s engagement at the Circle Theater. Directed by George Ford, the company also included John Burke, John Alexander, Robert Strauss, Phillip D. Quin, Joseph Singer, Richard Allen, Harry Winston, Elsworth Jones, Anderson Lawer, Virginia Bronson, Gertrude Linnell, Pauline Crell, Olga Lee, Margaret Pixley, Isabell Stuart and twenty others. Plays shown during the week were Hamlet, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew, Julius Caesar and The Three Musketeers. Prices for the performances ranged from a $2.75 top to 83¢, for night performances, and $1.65 top to 50¢ for matinees. The company was advertised as the "Greatest Shakespearian organization on tour." Hamlet, according to J. W. Rogers, Jr., writing in the Times Herald, was given in such a manner as to give promise that the week’s engagement would "stand out in the theatrical history as a memorable and unsurpassed Shakespearean festival." He described the performance as displaying "precision and sensitive intelligence . . . remarkable even for a company that has only two or three Shakespearean plays in its repertoire." The critic called the production "excellent," but added that it was "uneven . . . Mr. Leiber himself struck heights which, at times, he did not sustain." Rogers praised the "clearness of diction" with which the company spoke, and commented about Leiber that he "is a

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vigorous young man and one endowed with a very definite sense of humor for all his melancholy and tragic vacillation."

Never did an actor make it more convincing that Hamlet's madness was only feigned. . . . He read the hackneyed quotations with such naturalness that they were out and past before the audience quite realized how well it knew them.

Philip Quin made Polonius a humorous figure and made him so effective that one wonders why the old man hasn't been played more often that way.

As Ophelia, Miss Bronson was most unfortunately cast. She succeeded in making Hamlet's love a convincing figure neither in looks nor in speech. Frank Peters spoke the ghost with a very beautifully impressive voice, but he looks almost absurdly fleshly, especially in his appearance in the queen's closet. Robert Strauss' comedy as the grave digger was shrewdly given and the whole supporting company was better than one usually finds.53

Rogers called Macbeth, the offering for March 10, "a worthy successor to . . . 'Hamlet'" and praised particularly the climax scene in Macbeth's castle and the banquet scene "where Leiber used only a green light cast upon his own face." Rogers felt both about Macbeth and Hamlet that "a judicious cutting of scenes would have made the productions actually vastly more enjoyable at the moment and in retrospect," but he maintained that Leiber's Macbeth "was perfectly clean cut . . . a more sustained interpretation than his 'Hamlet.'" He stated that Virginia Bronson as Lady Macbeth was occasionally "interesting," but observed that "her voice and manner were flambuoyantly melodramatic."

Rogers praised Philip Quin as King Duncan, Harold Winston as Malcolm, John Burke as Banquo and John Alexander as MacDuff, but commented that the three witches "sounded very much like three young ladies who had studied elocution."54

The same critic stated that the company succeeded "in catching and maintaining the true spirit" of *The Merchant of Venice*, the March 11 presentation. He praised the entire company as "imbued with a love for Shakespeare," and observed that he had not heard "a single line falteringly delivered or noted but one wrong answer to a cue." He described Leiber's Shylock as "a robust and picturesque figure of Hebraic orthodoxy which the world has come to associate with such a man," and called the portrayal "soundly conceived ... shrewdly built into the comedy as a whole." He commended John Burke as "a handsome and competent Antonio," and commented that "Harold Winston has shown himself one of the most intelligent, sensitive members of the company in the reading of his lines. . . . His Lorenzo was excellent." Gertrude Linnell, stated Rogers, made "a girlish and delightful Jessica," and the critic particularly enjoyed Robert Strauss as Launcelot Gobbo.55

Rogers did not remain so enthusiastic about Leiber's company. He stated about *Romeo and Juliet*, which had Virginia Bronson as Juliet and Leiber as Romeo, that it was "so absurdly miscast that it is quite useless to attempt a criticism, except to say that the production should be deleted from their repertoire."

It is something of an imposition on a public who knows that Juliet was fourteen or thereabouts, and Romeo but little older, to ask it to spend its time and money upon this production. Miss Bronson looked at least ten years older than the girl playing Juliet's mother and Mr. Leiber's Romeo looked very little like Romeo and very much like Savanarola. It is most unfortunate the earnest efforts which he has shown in the former plays should be marred by this travesty on one of Shakespeare's loveliest plays.56


Julius Caesar, the March 13 production, also met with a mixed review in the Times Herald. Rogers praised the scenes of Mark Antony's speech, of Brutus in his tent, and the one on the plains toward Phillipi, but called the one of Caesar's death in the Senate "poorly worked out." He observed that "The final impression of Mr. Leiber's repertoire is that he has included more Shakespeare than his company is able to do well.

It is true that his company knew their lines and spoke them remarkably glibly, but many of the scenes in the plays were simply gotten over. They give every evidence of a slurring and unimaginative direction and a woeful lack of a single competent intelligence which worked out the whole production as a unit. Had Mr. Leiber's ambition spread itself over less ground, had he seen to it that the plays he did give more evenly held to the best he has offered in his work here, he would be leaving Dallas with a higher reputation as a Shakespearean actor than his appearance here has actually won for him. Nothing is more depressing to an audience than Shakespeare badly done. The very goal which Mr. Leiber has set for himself demands more discriminating than his performances have evidenced when considered all together.

The critic commented that Leiber's interpretation of Brutus "ranks with the other characters he has done this week with the exception of Romeo," but maintained that John Burke's Cassius was "inclined toward the bombastic," and that John Alexander as Mark Antony "proved a better orator ... than an actor."57

Leiber's Hamlet had proved so popular that the play was given a return performance on Monday, March 23. The reviewer in the Dallas Journal stated that the production was "greeted by a responsive, capacity house." He commented on a controversy that had been stirred up by the Leiber company's Hamlet:

The Dallas cleavage, roughly speaking, is in this: Should the play be given as a sort of ceremonial and the Dane be enacted as if he were the high priest of mysticism? Or, should the play be treated as the pure melodrama it is and Hamlet be portrayed as a normal young man, plausibly upset by his father's death and his mother's precipitous marriage? Mr. Leiber . . . treats the author with respect but not reverence. To Mr. Leiber, Shakespeare is a playwright before a great poet. The actor's Hamlet is one of the best of its kind that can be seen today. He is red-blooded, lively, unsophisticated, eager to do something, doubtful of what to do, overpowered by the forces of life which he has not the hardihood effectually to combat. . . . The settings, said to be of Mr. Leiber’s own design, employed modern methods of suggestiveness with an effective use of a gauze drop to create an illusion of "the curtain of night."50

About the week of Shakespearian plays, Chauncey Brown of the News had this to say:

Notwithstanding the fact that the week was ordinarily a bad one for theaters—the last week for income tax—the engagement was a financial success. And it was the Shakespearian plays that drew the largest audiences, there being more vacant seats for "The Three Musketeers," matinee and night than any of the other offerings.

The real test of a performance is the way the audience receives it. . . . By this test, Fritz Leiber and his company were good in everything they undertook for every play pleased. Audiences were almost equally divided between the older people, most of whom had seen some of the famous Shakespearian stars of the past, and the younger generation who knew their Shakespeare only as they had studied it in school. Fritz Leiber was a delight to both classes.

Brown quoted Leiber as commenting:

It has been very gratifying the way our efforts have been received in Dallas, as well as other places. I believe we are succeeding in pleasing our audiences. At least, we are earnestly trying to give them versions of the greatest dramatist's masterpieces which are logical and convincing and in which the characters are represented as real men and women.59

The next production seen at the Circle was Hurricane, given the night of March 30 by Olga Petrova, the actress who had been featured on


the opening bill when the new Majestic Theater was opened in the city. The audience for the play, which had been written by Miss Petrova and in which she took the leading role, was, according to the reviewer for the *Journal*, the largest in the history of the Circle. He noted that the play dealt "with bold situations in which frankness was the keynote" but was "moral in the extreme," and that "Petrova scaled all the emotions known to the stage." The reviewer observed that she "deliberately violated the usual laws of the theater" by not providing a happy ending, but that this made the play more effective. He praised George Pelzer in the role of the father, Lewis Willoughby as the lover, and Percy Carr as the doctor, but commented that "Petrova dominates the play."\(^60\)

The reviewer for the *Times Herald*, who signed himself "FH," observed that "Olga Petrova swept the Monday night audience ... into alternate tears and laughter through four acts of a gripping drama of life." In addition to high praise for Petrova, he also lauded Joseph Grenby in the part of Joe Jennings, and Ludmilla Toretzka as Martha, and stated that "every member of the company is remarkably suited to his or her part." He stated that "the huge audience, overflowing into the orchestra pit, paid glowing tribute to the artist's popularity in Dallas."\(^61\)

The effects of the withdrawal of Interstate from the presentation of touring legitimate shows were sharply felt in the 1924-1925 season. Only three companies came to the city as compared with eight during the previous season. Actually, however, more plays were

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\(^60\) *Journal*, Tues., Mar. 25, 1925, 4.

\(^61\) *Times Herald*, Tues., Mar. 31, 1925, 8.

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presented in the latter period for Fritz Leiber and his Shakespearian troupe were seen in seven separate productions. The other two roadshows were White Cargo and Hurricane. The Circle Theater, available after the failure of a stock company, housed all the roadshows during the season. White Cargo was a stock standby and Hurricane drew crowds because of its star, Olga Petrova. As for the Leiber repertoire, the presentation of Hamlet was so successful that it played for an extra performance. Leiber and his company definitely added artistic prestige to the season.

John W. Rogers, Jr., a Dallas playwright who was reviewing for the Times Herald, showed sharp acumen and displayed some of the critical judgment later to become so evident in the reviews of John Rosenfield.

The 1920-1925 road season in Dallas was more akin with the tradition of the past than the theater of the day. While theater in America was being revolutionized by the words of O'Neill and the other playwrights who were experimenting with new types of drama and productions that were being exemplified in Dallas in the works of the Dallas Little Theater, the touring performances seen in Dallas featured illustrious stars of a bygone age and plays like The Bat and The Cat and the Canary; morality plays like Experience or farces like up in Mabel's Room; star vehicles like Woman of Bronze, or Lightnin', The Climax and The Masquerader; closer in spirit to pre-war theater than to the post-war decade. It was only the established stars or the successfully-proven plays that dared to take to the road. Dallas and the rest of the

inland cities had been surfeited with second-rate touring productions, and Dallas businessmen were convinced that touring shows would again be welcomed by the city's theatergoers if well-known actors or well-known plays could be brought to the city, just as they were also convinced that the plays were not coming to Dallas because there was not an adequate theater in the city to house them.

Contemporary comment indicates that it seemed incredible to those who wanted to see the road return in its former greatness to Dallas and similar cities that the touring productions should have dropped off so in number. Especially in Dallas was this true, for Dallas appeared to them to be an ideal location for touring plays. They had before them the example of the sensational success of the Dallas Little Theater. They believed that Dallas was more sophisticated in its theater tastes than other inland cities. They were aware that Dallas residents went to New York and Chicago to see plays. There was frequent comment in the newspapers about this fact. In 1920, a correspondent who called herself "Nancy B," wrote from New York City: "At the theaters, one either encounters Texans or hears conversations in which one's best friends are discussed. There are Texans not only in the audiences at the theaters, but on the stage as well."63

The city was in the most favored position of any in the Southwest when it came to the ability of people in the surrounding area to get to its theaters easily and economically. A vast system of interurban lines connected Dallas with nearby cities. The prosperity that prevailed in North Texas made 1920 a record year on the four interurban

lines that radiated out of the city. The biggest traffic increase during the year was between Dallas and such cities as Sherman, Denison, Corsicana, Waco and Fort Worth. Two more interurbans were scheduled to be built in 1921.  

In 1922, the Texas Electrical Railways brought 629,850 passengers into Dallas from Denison, Waco and Corsicana. These who believed that the road could again be restored to Dallas frequently cited reports that the city attracted bigger audiences to its theatrical and musical events than any other community in the state. In 1924, for example, Herbert Marcus, chairman of the grand opera executive committee of the Chamber of Commerce revealed that the Chicago Grand Opera Company in that year had total audiences in the city of 10,018 persons at three performances and grossed receipts of $38,903, or well over the $37,500 guaranty. Marcus stated that Dallas "came nearer to paying out on grand opera this year than many of the larger cities," and he called attention to the fact that the opera season "attracted more out-of-town people to Dallas than have been here since the State Fair."  

But in spite of these favorable factors, the audiences for the touring legitimate productions in Dallas continued to dwindle, as evidenced by the fact that the Coliseum with its enormous seating capacity was not used again for touring plays after January, 1920. To say that the audiences were getting smaller does not mean that there was not an

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audience for well-known plays and performers. *Lightnin'* and *The Bat*, for example, were so well received during their first runs in the city that they came back for repeat performances. As will be more evident from the discussion of the next five-year period, only the best known stars and productions could count on profitable runs in the city. The usual touring show either just broke even or ended its Dallas run in the red.

The factors responsible for this decline have already been mentioned—increased production costs, the competition of the movies, the fact that the scarcity of legitimate plays got entertainment seekers out of the habit of going to live theater, and also the fact that the very risks of the road kept plays from touring which might better have satisfied contemporary tastes. It is quite probable also that the low standards of stock productions "soured" many would-be playgoers on legitimate drama. After all, they could see it done so much better in the movies.

Acting as counter-influences were the high quality of productions set by the Little Theater and the increasing tendency for touring plays to include first-rate casts. These factors created a milieu for legitimate drama in Dallas which was eventually to lead to the Margo Jones theater and the Dallas Theater Center.
CHAPTER VI

TOURING SHOWS - MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS

The decline of the road affected musical shows and legitimate plays alike and the number of musicals that came to Dallas in the 1920-1925 period rose and dropped off in number during the same seasons as did the legitimate productions. There was the same pattern also with regard to the theaters that housed the musical shows, except that the Coliseum, which was no longer used for plays after January of 1920, was to house occasional musicals during the five years that followed. Four major types of musical shows were seen in the city during the five year period. These were the extravaganzas such as Chu Chin Chow and Hitchy Koo; the Negro musicals like Broadway Rastis of 1920, Bamboula, and Shuffle Along; the Shubert operettas, represented by Blossom Time; and the more orthodox musical comedies like Gingham Girl, Irene, and Oh, Lady, Lady. In addition there were miscellaneous types like Glorianna, The Passing Show, Greenwich Village Follies and Take It From Me. It was also during this five year period that the musicals featuring Broadway stars, due to be such an important part of the city's theatrical fare in the late 1920's and the 1930's, began to appear in the city. Outstanding performers who came to Dallas in the 1920-1925 period included Raymond Hitchcock, Willie and Eugene Howard, Ferne Rogers, Fritz Scheff and Irene Castle.
Oh, Lady, Lady, written by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, with book by Jerome Kern, was the first touring musical seen in Dallas in 1920. Given on January 3, 1920 for one night at the Coliseum, the Comstock & Elliott production had a cast that included Pauline Barri, Florice Auburn, Joseph McCallion, Billy Gaston, Madeline Grey, Walter Grey, Thomas G. Leary and Marie Haun. The Times Herald reviewer called attention to the fact that there was a good audience, in spite of the cold weather and that the "charming play was presented in an amiable fashion." He paid particular tribute to Pauline Barri "on account of her unassuming attitude and pleasing manners," but stated that "Billy Gaston . . . overdid his work. He was very funny at times, but it appeared as if he were merely trying to be funny in several instances." The reviewer called Florice Auburn "excellent," and added that "She is good to look at and is as vivacious as one could possibly be." The review stated that Betty Blue as "Fainting Fanny" was worthy of mention "for her excellent portrayal of that character," and commented that the musical was "a real Comstock, Elliott & Gest production with that touch of individual class injected to the very last." The Journal reviewer also called attention to the weather stating that "with such weather as Dallas experienced last night a musical comedy presentation is near impossible in the Coliseum." He added:

Not only is it hard on the actresses, who must appear in light

clothing, but the audience last night shivered along with the shimme dances and orchestra. With a well-heated theater in which to show "Oh, Lady, Lady" would be worth while. It is a tuneful, peppy melange of songs and comedy that must have been highly entertaining when the costumes were new and the weather not so cold. Pauline Barri, former vaudeville star, puts over some catchy songs in an excellent manner.  

Fritzi Scheff, noted musical comedy star, was the featured performer in Glorianna, with music by Rudolf Friml and performed at the Coliseum on January 31, 1920. The cast also included A. H. Wilson, George Everett, Ursula Ellsworth, Virginia Burt, Jane King, Curtis Karpe, Melville Anderson, James J. Dunn, Marie King, Ed Wakefield, James Gormley, Margery Lane, Harriet Press and Vera Dunn. Advance billing described it as "a metropolitan cast of unusual excellence." The Times Herald reviewer commented that "the Coliseum assumed the air of modern California last night when Fritzi Scheff walked upon the stage," and called the production "real entertainment all the way through." He stated that Fritzi Scheff "looked younger than ever and... is just as vivacious as she was in the days of the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company," and added that she "made a wonderful foreground for the lilting music." He described the scenery as "typical Ziegfeld standard," because it was done by Joseph Urban. It was Al Wilson, the dialect artist, who "provided most of the laughs in his role of Alexander Calloway," according to the review. As for James Dunn, later to become famous as a movie actor, the critic called him "a shining member of the cast," who "sang and danced with

3[Journal, Fri., Jan. 9, 1920, l.]
plenty of vim and vigor." The reviewer also commented that Dunn's baby daughter, Vera Dunn, "shared some of the honors," and observed that Gormley and Wakefield "were well received in their Porter's dance." He called Glorianna "the best musical comedy that has played in Dallas in years . . . one company that came almost intact from Broadway and Chicago."

Negro musical comedies appeared in the city from time to time during the 1920's. A company calling itself "The Smarter Set" drew approximately 2,000 Negroes and several hundred white persons, seated in separate sections, to the Coliseum on February 26 for a musical show that was in part a pageant-like portrayal of the history of the Negro race. The reviewer for the News called the crowd "one of the largest that has been in the Coliseum this season," and described the music as "splendidly adapted," the singing as "good," and commented about the acting, "the characters literally did their part." The racial element was "dragged in" as it were, through the presentation of "the shimmy in many lands." The reviewer praised Homer Tutt and Salem Tutt Whitney as having "supported their reputations as negro musical comedy leaders throughout the wholesome, clean entertainment."

On December 11, 1920, a hybrid musical featuring "Professor Theodore the great Hindu Hypnotist known in the Orient as the Wonder Man," with oriental dancers, classical singers and comedians and an orchestra, gave a one-day performance at the Coliseum in August, 1920.

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5 [Times Herald, Sun., Feb. 1, 1920, III, 1.]
6 [News, Fri., Feb. 27, 1920, 6.]
7 [News, Thurs., Aug. 19, 1920, 6.]
Bringing Up Father at the Seashore was also at the Coliseum for a one-day stand, on December 9, 1920, with prices that ranged from a $1.50 top to 75¢, and the News reviewer panned the production. Because this is one of the few really adverse criticisms written during the five-year period in any Dallas newspaper, it is quoted in full:

Some earnest members of the theatrical trade worked hard at the Park Coliseum Tuesday night to entertain the crowd, sparse as the hair on Jiggs' head, which had gathered to see "Bringing Up Father at the Seashore."

Every now and then they succeeded, but only in spots. Danny Simmons made a convincing Jiggs and J. Lee Allen was not far behind him as Dinty Moore. Josephine Sebel was entirely too good looking for her part of Maggie, in spite of her make-up, but she worked hard.

Most of the comedy which got to the crowd was furnished by Jiggs, Dinty and Maggie. There was a supposed pawnbroker whose idea of being funny was to jabber so that nobody could understand him. Most of the laughs he got must have been through sympathy.

On the whole, the music was tuneful and all ten members of the chorus smiled and pranced and shouted their very best. They earned their money. Jiggs was always in trouble at the seashore as well as at home. But if the "life saver" really carried what he seemed to, many a man in the audience would willingly have changed places with the comedian.

Quite a different kind of Negro musical was presented at the Coliseum for two nights in late December of 1920. Broadway Rastis of 1920, billed as "the greatest colored show on earth," was headlined by Irvin C. Miller and Emmett Anthony and was described in the publicity as "a gorgeous new spectacular with a cast of thirty-five people." On February 6, 1921, another Negro musical, Bamboula, was presented by Salem Tutt Whitney and J. Homer Tutt at the Coliseum with

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admission prices ranging from 50¢ to $1.50, and the News critic commented:

It is funny . . . in a fashion that is associated with "Darky" humor, and original, while at times very clever, and all the way through clean and without coarseness. The singers are natural. It is not an art that they have to learn, but a thing that is born in them.\(^{10}\)

The same conditions that held for legitimate dramatic roadshows also held for touring musicals. However, the musicals were most costly to tour and even fewer of them came to the city during the spring of 1920 than did legitimate shows. The only two musicals of any merit seen in the city during the half-year period were Oh, Lady, Lady, and Glorianna. The others were Negro musicals, save for a presentation of Bringing Up Father at the Seashore, which got very mixed reviews. The inadequacy of the Coliseum for housing shows during the winter was noted in the reviews. Also evident was the emphasis in the advance billing for the shows on the presence in the musicals of the "metropolitan cast,"--a statement which was highly doubtful. Apparently musical shows were not expected to draw big audiences for all of the presentations from January through June of 1920 ran for only one night.

The 1921-1922 Season

A heavily publicized production, Chu Chin Chow, moved into the Coliseum for a week's run starting January 30, 1922. Called in the advance publicity "the first musical show in more than two years," and "the genuine 100 per cent big city show," the musical, which had a top price of $2.50, was advertised as having fourteen "massive

\(^{10}\) News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, II, 4.
scenes, 864 dazzling costumes, chorus and ballet of more than 60 beautiful girls, camels, yaks, donkeys and other animals of the fabled Orient. The advertisements, making the point that two other "huge spectacles," Mecca and Aphrodite would come to the city if Chu Chin Chow were well received, asked the question, "Is Dallas ready for 'big time' status in the amusement world?" The cast of Chu Chin Chow included Henry Latimer as Chu; Virginia Howell as Zahrat, the desert woman; Eugene Cowles as Abdullah, the steward; Don W. Ferrandou as the Merry Ali Baba; Blakely Thomason as Nur-Al-Huda, the cobbler; Louis le Vie as Kasim Baba, the miser; Maude Files as Mabulah; Adelaide Mesmer as Alcolom, the wife of Kasim Baba; Carmontell as the slave buyer; Lorraine Weimer as the fortune teller.

The producer of Chu Chin Chow was Morris Gest, who was to have interesting associations with Dallas in the years that followed. Booked for eight performances, Chu Chin Chow was the most important musical seen in the city for a number of years.

The musical drew an enthusiastic review in the Journal, which declared, "Myriads of pretty girls, many of them scantily clothed, weird strains of Oriental music by soft voices and an excellent orchestra, gorgeous costumes and magnificent scenery which almost defies description—all have their place in 'Chu Chin Chow' . . . It is thrilling drama." And the reviewer maintained that "nothing anywhere near as gorgeous has been seen on a Dallas stage for years, if

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The review continued:

Three characters stand out in the play. Virginia Howell as Zahrat, the desert woman, does some emotional acting of the highest quality. Such a role is unique in a musical play, for it is full of tragedy clear to the climax, where she kills Abu Hassan, the robber chief, and goes away exultingly to free her desert lover. Miss Howell is superb in the part. Don W. Ferrandou as Ali Baba, the jovial drundard, and Henry Latimer as Abu Hassan divide the lead with Miss Howell, both proving themselves to be wonderful actors.

Eugene Cowles as Abdullah the steward, charms the audience with his bass solos, for he is one of the best bassos heard in Dallas for many seasons. Adelaide Mesmer as Alcolom has a sweet soprano voice, and her love affair with Ali Baba furnishes some of the best comedy of the play.

... it is the wealth of Oriental magnificence which sets "Chu Chin Chow" above other productions which have been here. There are fourteen scenes, each of which is a genuine work of art. . . .

Feminine beauty is not overlooked. The scene in the slave market where a score of Oriental maidens display their charms to the prospective buyer is exotic in the extreme. This, however, almost fades into insignificance by the side of the bazaar scene where forty beautiful mannequins appear clad in the most bizarre and extravagant costumes the entire Orient affords.

... there are so many things of interest crowded into the fourteen scenes that it would be next to impossible to mention them all. . . . Yet with all the many changes in scenery, the action does not dray. Due to the fact that three stages are used, only a few seconds are needed to switch from one scene to another.13

The News critic called the production "a marvelous performance from out in front,"14 but although Arthur B. Miller, manager of the company, reported on the last day of the run that "attendance has been increasing steadily and indications were yesterday that Saturday would see the banner crowds for the week,"15 the musical apparently

did not draw the anticipated crowds, for Gest did not bring *Mecca* and *Aphrodite* to the city.

One of the problems associated with bringing a musical to Dallas and other southern cities was pointed up by the fact that the Negroes in the cast of *Chu Chin Chow* were let go for the Southern tour and their parts handled by white persons because the manager of the show "did not believe in doing anything which might create any disturbance."\(^{16}\)

During the lean 1921-1922 season only one touring musical, *Chu Chin Chow*, came to Dallas. The musical, with its spectacle and Oriental atmosphere was a throwback to an earlier era. Its producer, Morris Gest, showed an amazing willingness to take gambles. He was to demonstrate this later when he brought such shows as *Chauve-Souris* and *The Miracle* to the city. The gamble came not only in bringing the spectacle during a depression year when other shows were not taking to the road but also in presenting it for eight days at the 2,000-seat Coliseum. And although *Chu Chin Chow* had enthusiastic reviews, it failed to draw the anticipated attendance.

**1922-1923 Season**

The arrival of *Up in the Clouds*, another musical extravaganza, was preceded by a postal card campaign carried on by Mrs. Harriet Bacon MacDonald, Dallas booking agent, in which she asked potential patrons whether they were "in favor of Dallas being included in the routes of first-class road attractions and how many main floor seats

\(^{16}\) *News, Sat., Feb. 4, 1922, 4.*
he will purchase. When the announcement was made a few days later that arrangements had been completed to present the show at the Jefferson Theater, Joseph M. Gaites, its producer, commented:

In establishing a rule that I would never offer to the public, whether in the largest cities of the country, or the few one, two and three-day stands we play, other than the Number One, the original and only organization, I acted from selfish motives only . . . permitting the only company to cover the country obviates the cost of a second production . . . such a show as "Up in the Clouds" involves an expenditure of over $150,000.18

Presented for four nights and a matinee starting February 1, the cast included Charles Meakins, Gertrude O'Connor, D'Andrea and Walters, Justine Gray, Jack Sheehan, William N. Bailey, Thomas A. Magrane, Arnold Gluck, Page Spencer, Inez Foster, Jane Victory, Dorothy Curtis, Beulah Baker, Ledru Stiffler, Van J. Melino, and Listelle and Ellis.19

"Dallas theater goers packed the Jefferson Theater," according to the News reviewer. He stated that the show was "more than up to expectations," and described the show as treating of "a girl from Missouri who was trying to get into the movies, of a fake director, and of her successful efforts to disclose his duplicity." The reviewer called the chorus "one of the daintiest, classiest aggregations of chic and saucy damsels seen on a Dallas stage at one time in years . . . pretty, bizarre and beautiful costumes . . . can sing and can dance," and particularly praised a number called "Betsy Ross" in which Dorothy Curtis and seven other girls "in Colonial costumes

sat around, apparently singing, and the chorus displayed an American flag with thirteen stars." Dorothy Curtis, the leading lady, was called "vivacious, pleasant, and with a good voice," and Arnold Gluck was said to be a "handsome young leading man, the cynosure of feminine eyes." One member of the cast, Thomas Magrane, who had formerly been director of the Capitol Theater stock company in Dallas, was singled out by the reviewer for special mention. The reviewer called the entire show "absolutely clean, spectacular and decidedly worth while."20

The Journal reviewer also labelled Up in the Clouds "a thoroughly enjoyable musical show" and commented that it was "greeted by an enthusiastic capacity house." He particularly commended the dancing which he said was "some of the most graceful . . . that has come to Dallas in a number of seasons," and called Cecilie D'Andrea and Harry Walters, the principal dancers, "genuine artists . . . their appearance on the stage . . . was always the signal for an ovation." He also lauded the work of Gertrude O'Connor "the elongated comedienne," and Jack Sheehan, "the leading comedian." This reviewer called the absence of waiting periods "one of the most pleasing features," and noted that "this is accomplished by the use of a big drop about half way back on the stage. While the action is taking place in front, the performers are assembling back of this curtain for what is to come next, and as the result it is hard to realize that the show takes up the time it does." The reviewer commented about the show that "there is much sparkling comedy . . . most

of the jokes are new. Some of the songs made distinct hits . . . .

Costuming was exquisite and the girls wore what little there was
to the items in their wardrobe in a very fascinating manner." He
too had words of praise for Arnold Gluck and Dorothy Curtis, the
leading man and woman, and stated that Tom Magrane, cast as the hero's
father, "carries the part off in great style."  

Take it from Me, another Joseph M. Gaites production, played
at the Jefferson Theater for three days starting March 4 and drew even
greater praise than had Up in the Clouds. The cast, according to
advance publicity, was the same "that created such a furor of appro­
bation at the Forty-Fourth Street Theater in New York and the
Studebaker Theater in Chicago," and the book and lyrics had been
written by Will B. Johnstone, "famous cartoonist of the New York
World."  

The reviewer for the Journal described the production as
"a pleasant display of color, songs and legs," and stated that "the
rhythm of Marjorie Fielding's dancing was excellent and the staging,
although not elaborate, was in good taste." He commented that the
show had "more laughs to the square inch than any other that has
visited Dallas this year, not excepting 'Up in the Clouds,'" and
praised Alice Hill and Joseph Wilton as "a good-looking couple of
comedians that manage to get laughs without too much roughness."
He singled out Marjorie Sweet, as Queenie LaBelle, commenting that she
"gave an interesting interpretation of Kipling's 'The Vampire,'
assisted by Robert Capron," and observed that "Her whole voluminous

\[ \text{Journal, Fri., Feb. 2, 1923, 4.} \]
\[ \text{News, Sun., Feb. 11, 1923, II, 13.} \]
figure is venomous in its beauty. She is not of the cold Southern
type of beauty, but more of the passionate flower of some warmer climate,
where the moon glimmers on a silken sea scented with lemon blossoms."
As for Edgar Gardiner and Arline Gardiner, who played the leading roles,
the reviewer commented on their frankness and sincerity, and stated
that they sometimes struck a "real dramatic effect."23

The Times Herald reviewer called Take it from Me "a pleasant
surprise to first audiences," and stated that it had "bright music,
a clever plot and an abundance of beautiful chorus ladies who are
vastly superior to the usual traveling variety." He predicted that
capacity audiences would attend the final two nights of performances
and called the comedy by Alice Hill, Charles Homer and others in the
cast "fast and full of pep." Stars of the performance, according to
this reviewer, were Arline Gardiner, Grace Gordon, and Marjorie Sweet,
although he noted that Alice Hill "does some of the more finished
work of the evening." One number praised by the reviewer was "I'd
like to Linger in the Lingerie," and he cast doubt on the worth of Up
in the Clouds when he observed that Take it from Me "more than makes
up for Mr. Gaites' former production here."24

A new caliber of musical comedies came to the city when the
Majestic Theater became available for touring shows. The announcement
that Hitchy Koo, featuring Raymond Hitchcock, "America's inimitable
comedian," would be at the Majestic for a one-day stand on March 28,
bringed the statement from the Interstate Amusement Company, that

24 Times Herald, Mon., Mar. 5, 1923, 8.
"these big productions . . . will include some of the best performances with strong casts. . . . The excellent lighting facilities and the spacious stage of the Majestic will furnish adequate setting for these." The show, according to the announcement, would play a matinee and a night performance in the Majestic theaters of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth, and while the road show was playing, vaudeville for the day would be suspended. In addition to Hitchcock, the cast also included the Hickey Brothers, the Twelve London Tivoli Girls, Ruth Urban, Irene Delroy, the Three Wainwright Sisters, Lee Morse, Edythe Raynore and Maurice Black. The top price for the matinee was $2 and the top night price $3. Karl Hoblitzelle, president of Interstate, had made a special trip to New York to "conclude arrangements for this and the other road show," and Hitchy Koo was due to go to Chicago as soon as it had played the two weeks on the Majestic circuit. The costumes for Hitchy Koo 1923 had been designed by John Wenger, and the music was composed by Louis Gensler, William Donaldson, and Cole Porter. The reviewer of the News stated this about the show:

Playing to a large matinee audience and a capacity house at night, Raymond Hitchcock's "Hitchy Koo 1923" brought to the Majestic theater . . . the most sparkling and entertaining musical revue that could reasonably be desired. It is a combination of rich humor, dancing and singing of high order, and stage and costuming effects which well eclipse anything ever seen in Dallas.

Raymond Hitchcock, veteran of many seasons, is the life of the show. The audience likes him, but he has as much fun as the audience. While the crowd is coming in he stands down by the orchestra and carries on a running fire of nonsense and

personal patter all his own.

... Mr. Hitchcock's oration on "Prohibition" brought down the house.27

The production, according to the Times Herald review, proved "a light and frothy entertainment," and he observed that "a large and well cast chorus matches the excellence of the principals." He called Hitchcock "as funny as ever," and noted that he "wears his inevitable costume of gray derby, stick, white vest, and other paraphernalia, but more than all he retains the whimsical line of talk that has brought him a world reputation." He described the production as "untouched here in many seasons... in the matter of big scenes, decoratively perfect, in stunning sets artfully lighted," and gave Irene Delroy "first rank among the female leads, being a charmingly graceful dancer as well as a clever comedienne." The review also named Lee Morse, "a singer of southern melodies and 'blues!'," as one of the leading performers. A significant trend in musical comedies was noted by the reviewer when he called attention to the emphasis on "the burlesque and farcical" in the performance. The reviewer commented that the decision of the Majestic "in bringing from time to time the best shows touring America" was amply vindicated by the large audiences.28

The reviewer for the Journal described the show as "pretty girls, adorned with all the colors of the rainbow, rapidly changing scenic and electrical effects of unusual beauty, pungent wit and homely humor in word and pantomime..." The reviewer added that the show was "kaleidoscopic in its nature," and gave first rank in

"sheer artistry" to the "Tivoli chorus of eleven graceful girls from London." He stated that "seldom has a Dallas audience enthused over a chorus, but the Tivoli maidens drew genuine applause right in the middle of their numbers." He called Hitchcock "as funny as ever--or more so," acclaimed Lee Morse, "a Fort Worth girl," as "by far the best singer in the organization and one of the best actresses," and praised Irene Delroy, the Hickey Brothers, and the Wainwright Sisters.29

Shuffle Along, another Negro musical comedy, was at the Coliseum for three days in March, 1923. The Negro section of the audience was seated in the balcony for this show which, according to the review in the News, was one in which "harmony and comedy continuously bid for the lead recognition in the rapid succession of scenes and events." The principals, Theodore McDonald and Blanche Thompson, were praised by the reviewer for their "melodious voices," and the entire cast was said to have "displayed talent and art only long practice can produce."30

Irene, described in the advertisements as "a smart musical comedy," came to the Majestic for four nights starting August 26, of the same year and commanded a night top price of $3.30 and a matinee top price of $2.75. The cast included three well-known musical comedy stars of the period, Dale Winter, Flo Irwin, and Jere Delaney, and also numbered Mary O'Moore, Gladys Nagle, Dorothy Lamar, Dorothy Kane, Henrietta Housen, Howard Freeman, Henry Coote, George Collins, Edward Marr and George Mantell.31

The reviewer for the Times Herald called Irene the "third great contribution made to the cause of public confidence in road show attractions in the past six months in Dallas." He noted that the audiences at the Majestic "laughed and cheered with unbridled enthusiasm at the musical comedy . . . . enjoying the performance as fully as they did 'Lightnin'' last week and 'Hitchy Koo' last spring." Irene, he commented, was "brimming full of rich comedy, tuneful light opera airs and excellent dance numbers," and he stated that Dale Winters "could carry the show by herself, if necessary, so easy and finished is she in the major role . . . . She has that inimitable style in mimicry that a playgoer will walk a mile for." He praised Flo Irwin and Jere Delaney for their comedy and observed that "Mary O'Moore and Gladys Nagle are dancers of the most pleasing appearance and performance." And he called the chorus "superior to the average run of road shows," noting that in the program they were referred to as "ladies and gentlemen of the ensemble." The reviewer for the News stated that "Dale Winter fits into the title role as if it had been created for her . . . . She is just about as attractive a maiden as has trod the boards of the new Majestic since it opened." He called Jere Delaney, the male lead, "a scream," and praised such song hits as "Alice Blue Gown," and "The Talk of the Town." The performance, however, brought a critical comment that was to be made often, not only with regard to presentations at the Majestic, but also at the Fair Park Auditorium after it was completed in 1925:

It was unfortunate Sunday night that several principals

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either did not speak or sing loud enough to be heard back of the first few rows or spoke lines with faces turned away from the audience, thus making it impossible to understand them.⁢³³

The difficulty was corrected on the following day, according to the News:

Members of the "Trend" company . . . pitched their speaking voices slightly higher Monday night with the result that they were much more easily heard. The trouble seems to be the size of the theater was not gauged correctly Sunday night by some of the performers. Strange as it may seem, few members of the "Irene" company are used to singing or speaking in a theater as large as the Majestic. They had attuned their voices to the smaller houses played in the East, and many of them had to adopt a higher pitch.⁢³⁴

Improving economic conditions, an upturn in the road, and the availability of the Jefferson and the Majestic theaters all combined during the 1922-1923 season to make it a moderately successful season. Joseph M. Gaites, a producer who used somewhat the same promotion devices as Morris Gest including that of holding a club over the city's head by promising other productions if the current one were successful, brought Take It From Me and Up in the Clouds to the Jefferson Theater to good critical notices and big opening night audiences, although there was indication that Take It From Me was not of as high quality as its advance advertisements indicated. It was during this season that Karl Hoblitzelle announced the Interstate policy of booking touring shows and of routing them over the Interstate circuit in the state. Two musicals of superior caliber were presented at the Majestic for two performances each at high top admission prices.

Both Hitchy Koo, starring Raymond Hitchcock, and Irene, with Dale Winter, Flo Irwin, and Jere Delaney, marked definite improvement over other musicals seen in the city since 1920. The only other touring musical presented during the season was Shuffle Along, a Negro production, and drew good reviews.

The 1923-1924 Season

Irene Castle, "the best dressed woman in the world," presented "a glittering revue of dance, music and fashions" at the Majestic on Sunday, October 28. Three weeks later, on Saturday, November 10, The Clinging Vine, described in the advertisements as the "season's best musical comedy," and called "Henry W. Savage's latest musical success," with Ferne Rogers as the featured star, was given at the Majestic. The News reviewer said that honors for the show were divided between Cora Williams and Ferne Rogers. He stated that Ferne Rogers was "good looking and an excellent actress. Her voice is not very strong but she put her musical numbers over in fine style." The reviewer described the plot as "clever," the lines as "sparkling and amusing," and the production as "elegantly staged," but observed that "the music does not measure up to the rest of the play." He observed further that "almost without exception, the women are pretty." A week later at the Majestic, Sir Harry Lauder, famous comedy singer, appeared in a repertoire of "new and old songs," and tickets

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for the one-day stand ranged from $3.30 to $1.10 at the night performance, and $2.20 to 85¢ for the matinee.\textsuperscript{38}

The first presentation in the city of \textit{Blossom Time} was at the Majestic on Sunday, December 2, with a cast headed by Greek Evans, baritone, who was said in the advance publicity to be "well known throughout the South as having been the baritone with the Scotti and Creatore Grand Opera Companies." Others in the cast included Margaret Merle, Robert Lee Allen, Fenita de Soria, Alma Keller, Bee Brady, Isabel Vernon, Verna Schaff, Cliff Whitcomb, Edward Orchard, Gregory Ratoff, (later to become well known in the movies) Jack Hamilton and Oliver T. McCormick.\textsuperscript{39}

Julian Eltinge, the well-known female impersonator, and Tom Brown were featured in the \textit{Black and White Revue of 1924} which was at the Majestic on December 10. The advance billing for the show stated that it had "the largest saxophone band in the world," and seventy entertainers, "some of them the most important names in the American theatrical world." The cast also included Theresa Valerio, Zella Walton, Pauline Lorraine and Babette Fuller.\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{The Gingham Girl}, described in the advance publicity as the production "which is credited with having put the new Earl Carroll theater on the theatrical map of Broadway," and which was claimed in the publicity to be so successful "that two additional companies are now presenting the piece" came to the Majestic on January 14, featuring

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 18, 1923 IV, 7.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{News}, Fri., Nov. 30, 1923, 4.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{News}, Thurs., Dec. 6, 1923, 4.
Julia Kelety, who had been the star of *The Merry Widow*, and numbering also in its cast Irma Marwick, Peggy Pates, Lillian Young, Natalie Sawyer, Vera Thomas, Edna Dare, Vira Rial, Fay White, Bobby Jarvis, T. J. Keogh, Loring Smith, Frank Shumer, Henry White, Howard Mills, Randall O'Neill and Jack Raymond. The *Times Herald* reviewer commented that "the whole show jogs along in the usual revue fashion and can stop at any time to let the audience laugh at scenes whose only connection with the play is their humor." But he added that there were a number of funny lines and "a number of pretty songs, already familiar to the audience."

Called in the advertisements "the biggest revue that ever struck Dallas," *The Passing Show*, presented at the Majestic on February 18, 1924, and featuring Willie and Eugene Howard, was highly praised by the reviewer for the *News*:

Few road productions of recent years have been so uniformly satisfying as "The Passing Show" which was enjoyed afternoon and night Monday at the Majestic by large audiences. It is one offering which even surpassed the advance claims, which seemed extravagant.

Dominating the glittering bouquet of entertainment were Willie and Eugene Howard. Willard does the comedy, Eugene furnishes the straight lead, and these two clever fellows uncorked more merriment than a dozen average shows can boast. One gorgeous spectacle follows another in rapid succession. Lighting effects are used to fine advantage on as fine a group of stage settings as the season has seen.

A takeoff on such mystery plays as "The Bat," "Bull Dog Drummond," "The Monster," and "The Cat and the Canary" and others made a great hit. So did the Howard version of the courtroom scene from "Lightnin." But the biggest bunches of laughs came from the 'Old Joke Attic,' a curtain on which a number of wise cracks were painted.

Emily Miles scored in a tense dramatic sketch "Pen-Al-Marre," a locomotive coming onto the stage at the gripping

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2 Times Herald, Tues., Jan. 15, 1924, 8.
Heading the dancers were Nara and Zita Lockford who did some of the best dancing of the year. Some of the scenes that stand out are "A Study in Black and White," the bizarre opening number; "Camp's Daily Dozen," in which the chorus goes through its exercises clad in bathing suits; "A Ballet of Siam" and Peggy Brown and a group of beauties in "Eleanor."

As the final musical road show of the season, Blossom Time came back to the Majestic for a return engagement on February 25. This was also to be the last touring musical comedy seen at the Majestic until after 1930.

The same improvement noted in Chapter V in the touring legitimate shows when the Majestic Theater was available for their presentation during the 1923-1924 season was evident for the musical roadshows also. Perhaps the outstanding musical of the season seen in the city during the season was The Passing Show, with Willie and Eugene Howard. But such outstanding musicals as The Clinging Vine, Blossom Time, and The Gingham Girl were also presented, all to excellent reviews. In addition, Irene Castle and Julian Eltinge, both internationally-known entertainers, brought revues to the theater, and Sir Harry Lauder was heard in a concert. It was a highly successful season that added emphasis to the point that the availability of a suitable theater was a highly important conditioning factor for roadshow presentations.

The 1924-1925 Season

For the 1924-1925 season it was the Circle Theater which was

to house the musical road shows in the city. The theater became available when the Circle Players stock company disbanded in February, 1925. The only touring musical seen in the city during the season was *Flashes of the Great White Way* which was coming to Dallas before opening in New York. It was described in advertisements as "of the school of revue made famous by the Parisian 'Folies Bergere,' 'Ziegfeld's Follies,' 'Vanities,' 'Scandals,' and 'Artists and Models,'" and was to be given for a two-day run on February 22 and 23. The cost of admission ranged from $1 to $2.50. In the cast, according to the advertisements, were "at least a dozen who have won fame in some of the greatest successes in recent years." These included Carl D. Francis, Mildred King, Kathryn McConnell, Edith Masling and Ed West, and one of the big hits of the show was said to be the Saxi Holtsworth's jazz band. The appearance of the show at the Circle was preceded by large advertisements carrying full criticisms that had appeared in the *New Orleans States* and the *Times Picayune*. The reviewer for the *News* stated that the "two packed houses . . . had not seen anywhere near as dazzling a revue in several seasons." The reviewer commented that "most of the comedy is either started, abetted or ended by Carl D. Francis, the elongated individual who was such a sensation here last season in 'The Clinging Vine.'" Saxi Holtsworth and his jazz saxophones, according to the reviewer, "won many encores." He noted that Holtsworth "directs in

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\[^{45}\text{News, Tues, Feb. 3, 1925, 4.}^\]

\[^{46}\text{News, Thurs., Feb. 19, 1925, 4.}^\]

\[^{47}\text{News, Sat., Feb. 21, 1925, 4.}^\]
a manner all his own, dancing, singing, playing." Vera Burt, the re-
viewer stated, was the best female member of the cast. He called her
"extremely comely, full of fun and graceful... her voice is sweet
and powerful." He praised, among the dancers, George Hurd, "a fast
stepper," Mona Mura, Mildred King and Edith Maslin, and commented that
Willa Renard "contributes some very good singing and Ed West acts as
a fine foil for the leading comedian." The plot, observed the reviewer,
was totally lacking, but the show was given cohesiveness by Francis
and his comedy. He pointed out that there were no waits between the
twenty-eight scenes, that most of the costumes "are meager in material
but long in look," and that the settings were "gorgeous," the music
"bright and snappy."\footnote{\textit{News}, Mon., Feb. 23, 1925, 4.}

The withdrawal of the Interstate Circuit from the presentation
of touring shows was sharply felt during the 1924-1925 season. Only
one musical, \textit{Flashes of the Great White Way}, was seen in Dallas during
the season. The show, presented at the Circle Theater for a two-day
run, received enthusiastic notices and attracted capacity houses.

The entire picture of musical road shows in Dallas is com-
plicated by the fact that downtown movie houses were presenting live
entertainment very similar in style and content to the traveling pro-
ductions. The musical revues which occasionally played the Majestic
for a week, the seasons at the Jefferson and Majestic theaters devoted
to musical stock, the "tab" shows at the Majestic, Hippodrome and
Happyland theaters, were different only in scale from the larger
presentations which came into the Coliseum, and later on a road show basis into the Majestic, the Jefferson and the Circle theaters. There was further complication in the fact that musical road shows which came to the Majestic in Dallas played the Interstate circuit throughout the state, just as did the vaudeville productions.

Even the more lavish nature of the musical road shows ceased, after 1925, to serve to distinguish them from the movie house presentations, for the Palace Theater between 1925 and 1930 played the Publix unit productions which were as elaborate and spectacular as any of the touring revues.

The observation has been made earlier that only well-established stars and plays took to the road in the 1920-1925 period. The same may be said of the musicals, with one difference however—that on the touring musical show circuit were also the so-called "turkey" shows, productions put together at low cost with second-rate companies. These shows had been successful at on time on Broadway and were later reassembled at Chicago, Cincinnati or other inland cities, reduced as to plot and caliber of cast, and sent on tour on a low-budget basis. Dallas theater-goers were often "stung" by such presentations and were wary of all musicals for that reason unless they boasted "name" performers. The advertisement of The Passing Show with Willie and Eugene Howard, for example, stated:

Dallas is a poor show town
If this stupendous attraction doesn't make an everlasting hit as one show in a thousand
It is by all odds the biggest revue that ever struck Dallas.
Intact from the New York Winter Garden.49

In this advertisement we see the emphasis on the bigness of the show, and on the quality of the performers, although the ad skillfully avoids saying anything about the original New York cast. The feeling of the producers who brought their musicals in Dallas and similar cities seemed to be that the provincial public wanted shows that were big, flashy and expensive. The Chu Chin Chow advertisement called attention to the "massive scenes, dazzling costumes, chorus and ballet of more than 60 beautiful girls, its camels, yaks, donkeys and other animals of the fabled Orient," and asked if Dallas were ready to "prove herself more than a mere 'one-night' stand."

Another appeal made by the touring musicals was the "low price" charged in Dallas. The Chu Chin Chow advertisement emphasized that "the top price will not be $5 or $4 or even $3 which other cities and smaller theaters have paid." The prices of $2.50 for the first sixteen rows in the orchestra, of $2 for the first ten rows in the parquet and $1.50 for the rear section, were described as "special for Dallas." Advance stories on Up in the Clouds noted that the show "involved an expenditure of over $150,000." Take it from Me was said in advance stories to be played by "the same company which gave the piece in Chicago."

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\[\text{News, Sun., Jan. 22, 1922, II, 6.}\]
\[\text{News, Sun., Jan. 22, 1922, II, 6.}\]
\[\text{News, Sun., Jan. 7, 1923, II, 10.}\]
\[\text{News, Sun., Mar. 4, 1923, II, 11.}\]
It would appear that the most successful efforts to bring high quality musicals with good casts to Dallas was made by Karl Hoblitzelle of Interstate. In March of 1923 he announced that the Majestic theaters in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth would form a circuit for one night stands of "big road shows." Not only did this guarantee the road show company at least four performances in Texas backed by all the publicity resources of the state's largest theater chain, but it also provided theaters with excellent stages and good lighting facilities. *Hitchy-Koo*, as has been seen, had a cast that included Raymond Hitchcock, Ruth Urban, Al Sexton and the Hickey Brothers. *Irene* featured Dale Winter, Flo Irwin and Jere Delaney; *The Passing Show* had Willie and Eugene Howard, Emily Miles, and Nara and Zita Lockford.

In 1924-1925, when the Majestic no longer was booking musicals and they were going into the Circle Theater, the shows partook more of the nature of revues than of musical comedies. The difference between the revue and the musical comedy was one of plot content. The revue was a series of acts strung together with very little plot whereas the musical comedy had a well-defined plot. It has been in this last direction that musicals have tended to go in the past twenty years.

The 1920-1925 seasons in Dallas may be said to have been as linked with the past, and yet as portentous of the future insofar as the touring musicals were concerned, as they had been for legitimate drama. The extravaganzas linked these seasons with a bygone day, yet also tied them to the future seasons that were to bring the efforts of George White, Flo Ziegfeld and Earl Carroll to the city. The musical comedies tied them in with a musical comedy tradition that
was to increase in strength in subsequent seasons. Due to disappear, however, were the Negro revues and such plotless pieces as Flashes of the Great White Way. The trend in musicals toward social satire was not to be felt in Dallas until after 1930. Also not yet seen in Dallas, but scheduled to form a major part of the touring musical picture in the city between 1925 and 1930, was the trend toward nudity and vulgarity.
CHAPTER VII

VAUDEVILLE IN ITS TRADITIONAL FORM - THE MAJESTIC

Vaudeville in the Downtown Theaters

Under the general category of vaudeville, a number of different types of entertainment must be considered. Although in the popular mind, vaudeville included all kinds of flesh and blood entertainment, in a stricter sense, vaudeville is only one genre of many forms. The live entertainment varied from the more or less orthodox variety acts, unconnected by any unified idea or format, found in its more sumptuous styles in the larger presentation houses and in its less luxurious settings in the "ten-twenty-thirt" theaters, to the unit shows, revolving around a central theme which were assembled by well-known producers in New York or Chicago. Sometimes these unit shows traveled with their own master of ceremonies; at other times, the master of ceremonies was more or less permanently attached to a theatre.

As for the types of theaters found in Dallas, there were the straight vaudeville houses which presented nothing but live entertainment; the theaters which combined movies with vaudeville; and the motion picture houses that had only occasional live entertainment. Some of the smaller theaters were devoted to tabloid shows, a type of entertainment made up of an abridged version of a play, with vaudeville acts and vocal numbers interspersed between the acts and before and after the play. Other theaters had musical stock companies, much
like the dramatic stock companies, and presented abbreviated versions of musical revues and musical comedies. In such deluxe theaters as the Palace, the programs tended to have a strong classical tinge with the entertainment borrowing heavily from the concert and operatic fields.

It will be seen from the foregoing discussion that even in the traditional variety format there were no strict bounds as to the types of acts. They ranged all the way from the presentation of well-known stage and screen stars in dramatic playlets to dog acts and aerialists. There were the comedians who specialized in the more zany types of entertainment. They were known as the nut comedians. There were the quick-change or protean artists whose specialty lay in lightning-like changes of costumes; the eccentric dancers; the comedians who specialized in rural comedy, known as the rube comedians; those who did skits, sketches and blackouts; the athletes; the patter comedians who performed in song-and-dance acts; the blackface comedians; the ballet dancers and the female impersonators. This list is only barely suggestive of the great variety of performers who appeared in Dallas theaters.

An indication of the popularity of the downtown theaters in 1920 can be seen from the report in the News that on Sunday, October 24, approximately 40,000 persons attended performances in downtown Dallas. It was estimated that the theatergoers that day spent between $7,000 and $10,000 for their entertainment. And business was expected to get even better during the winter months. The News article continued:

With the coming of fall weather the theaters have better houses, according to past records. Managers explain this by the fact that the people can no longer spend their Sundays
in the parks or by riding in automobiles in the country. Several local theater managers said that attendance in winter increases almost twenty-five per cent above that of summer.

Discussing the difference between attendance on Sundays and week days, the writer commented:

Most managers declared that there were better crowds on Sundays in spite of the fact that the doors are open four hours less than on week days. The larger attendance is attributed to the fact that many of the theaters change their programs on Sunday. A few managers said that week day attendance at their theaters was on the whole larger than the Sunday records, but only a few such assertions were made.¹

The Majestic Theater was the stronghold of vaudeville in Dallas and was the most orthodox in its approach to the form. Long after other downtown theaters in the city had abandoned vaudeville or were presenting it in diluted form, the Majestic continued its variety policy. Karl Hoblitzelle, president of Interstate, the owners of the Majestic, remained a strong adherent of live entertainment throughout the 1920's, and it was not until 1933 that the Majestic finally gave up its "flesh and blood" policy.

January-June 1920

At the start of 1920, the Majestic Theater was occupying the structure that formerly had been the Dallas Opera House and was devoted exclusively to vaudeville. The theater was on the Interstate-Orpheum-Keith Circuit and program changes were made on Sunday. Its advertisements carried the tag line "The only theater playing big time vaudeville," and the price range is indicated by the announcement that as of February, 1920, there would be a new policy of "bargain

matinees" with a top admission price of 25¢.2

The first 1920 program, which began its week on January 4, was headlined by Sybil Vane, "the Galli-Curci of vaudeville." On the same variety program were La Bernicia, "America's foremost prima ballerina;" Yvonne Verlaine and Company, "Classic Dancers;" the customary playlet, And Son, "a comedy in one act by Edwin Burke with Howard Smith & Co.;" Pianoville, with George Reed "and the Girls;" Frank Wilson, "The Cycling Genius;" Bobby Murphy and Elmore White in "a peppy arrangement of Tunes and Laughs;" and Kate Elinore and Sam Williams in A Reel of Real Fun, written by James Madison.4

The reviewer5 commented about the show that the Majestic had "departed from its record of good bills . . . slipped back to the old order of things and presents one that is far below the standard set since the house opened for the season. He observed that "of course La Bernicia dances, if you want to call it that," and commented about the playlet that it was "the one bright spot of the evening. It is well acted and has the punch to keep the audience interested right up to the final line." The reviewer wrote about Kate Elinore and Sam

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3Announcements of the entertainers in the advertisements or in news columns were usually accompanied by a "tag" line about the entertainer's speciality or by a brief description of his past achievements. These will be indicated in this study of quotation marks and are not to be confused with reviews or criticisms of the actual performance. The reviews and criticisms will be so identified.


5All criticisms and reviews on the vaudeville shows are from the Dallas Morning News, unless otherwise indicated.
Williams that they "offer a line of chatter that is good in spots," and added that "the female half of the act evoked several good laughs and when she caught some one really laughing she shot an air gun at them." The bill, according to the reviewer, was "harmed by smutty songs which it seemed was carried by every act that had a song in it."6

The playlet was the headline act on the bill for the following week because it starred Sarah Padden, known as "the Bernhardt of Vaudeville." On the bill also were examples of the types of acts that were to reappear in Dallas theaters again and again. One was Fink's Mules, "Vaudeville's equine joy fest," and Oscar Loraine, "the violin Nuttist."7 Also on the bill was a mind-reading act, "A Modern Svengali, assisted by his Trilby," who went into the audience where "songs, new and old . . . may be whispered to him. Without a word, he will transmit the command to his Trilby, who will play and sing the selection called for." The Sarah Padden playlet, Betty Behave, concerned "a theory held by an exuberant, mischievous, ingenious-minded young girl, that the way to reconcile quarrelsome married folks is to make them desperately unhappy with jealousy."8 Yaqui Indian entertainers, aerialists, a spinning act, a dancing duo, a comedy trio who sang, and blackface comedians were included in the bill for January 18.9 The bill was de-

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7 The term "nuttist" derives from "nut comedian" which meant what would otherwise be called a "low comedian."
scribed as "good" by the critic, except that he found fault with the "license" of one act called *Boys Will Be Girls*, commenting that it would "go as good if they did not revel in license just because they are boys. It leaves a bad taste in the mouth." But he stated that the audience seemed to enjoy both the masquerading in feminine attire and the "altogether risque song by William Dunham and Grace O'Malley." He praised the dog in one act as "a truly good actor," and his master as "a finished acrobat." And he noted that "Miss Robbie Gordon has a good figure." 10

As for the Will M. Cressy and Blanche Dayne appearance in Cressy's play, *The Man Who Butted In*, which was the headline attraction on the January 25 program, the critic commented:

One would never know that the war was over by visiting the Majestic Theater this week. The work of the actors and actresses overseas is told, explained and shown in more than one way and no one loses the chance to acquaint the audience that they were across. It is beginning to become tiresome and takes up much time that should be given over to entertainment. No real entertainer is going to depend upon his war record to put him across.

The best act on the bill this week is a comedy playlet by Will M. Cressy, Blanche Dayne and Miss Marion Hodges.

Cressy also gave a monologue, and the Vivians had a shooting act about which the critic observed that it was "no different from others seen here this season, except that a lot of time is taken up with mediocre comedy." 11

Julia Nash and C. H. O'Donnell gave a playlet, *Three G.M.*, during the week of February 2 that was, according to the critic, "another well-worked drunk husband and waiting wife episode with a

heavy ending." The athletes and trapeze artists, so common in vaudeville, were represented in this program also by Beth Beri and her partners, Lhose and Sterling, said by the critic to perform "a good line of tricks on the trapeze and rings." The critic regretted that "varied lights put 'Color Gems' to a disadvantage and a number of splendid female forms in the original are lost in the dark." 

Billy Abbott, Leona and Len D. Hollister in their skit Out in California, and Joe Towle were four well-known vaudevillians who appeared during the week of February 8. The February 15 bill was headlined by Julius Tannen, called by the reviewer "as good as ever and this is one way of saying he is as good as the best," and by Arthur Stone and Marian Hayes in Green Goods, "a carnival episode." Stone was said in the review to be "a big surprise. . . . The comedian sent out a barrage of comedy that was unique and which brought as many laughs as any act has so far this season." The comedian's "brand-new way of putting tickles in your throat" was described as "taking off a 'rube' at a side show." Almost every vaudeville show had its animal act. In the February 22 bill it was Carl Emmy and his Pets, "prettiest act in vaudeville." Harriet Rempel in a "playlet of romance" called Tarrytown on the following week's program was said by the reviewer to "put over the idea well" in the dual role of the

girl and her mother. Old Cronies, with Lydell and Macy, on the same bill, was called by the critic "a continuous laugh over the rival claims of the Civil War vets, one a sailor and the other a doughboy, as to 'who won the war.' Madame Ellis was the mind reader on the bill.16

The U.S. Jazz Band, "twenty-five formerly enlisted bluejackets returned from overseas . . . largest jazz band in the world. Played for President Wilson in France," was the headliner on the March 7 program.17 The following week, Gertrude Hoffman, "Star of 'Scheherezade' and 'Sumrum,'" presented a series of dances and impersonations. She gave impressions of Ann Pennington, Eddie Foy, Olga Petrova, Fannie Brice and Bessie McCoy. Another character vaudeville act on the program was that of Chris Richards as an "eccentric English comedian."18

A new schedule of prices went into effect at the theater on March 21, ranging from $1.50 for boxes and loges to $1.10 for orchestra seats. In the balcony, prices ranged from 55¢ in the first six rows to 25¢ in the gallery.19

Harry Green, the well-known comedian, headlined the bill for March 21 in George Washington Cohen, a satirical comedy playlet. The reviewer called Green's "a peculiar brand of comedy" which, he stated,

was somewhat "heavy." Ralph Kittner and Jim Reany, veteran vaudevillians, had their entertainment described as "somewhat old."\(^{20}\)

El Brendel, later to achieve movie fame, was the last of the "turns\(^{21}\) on the vaudeville bill for the week of March 28. He was seen with a performer called Burt in an act, Waiting for Her. The headliner on the bill was Vernon Stiles, described in the advance notices as "formerly of the Metropolitan and Chicago Grand Opera," and Isolde Illian was seen in The Man Hunt, "A somnambulistic comedy."\(^{22}\)

The Honey Boys, favorite vaudeville entertainers, came to the Majestic for the week of April 4 in Honey Boys at Home. The same bill had a comedy, Indoor Sports, called in the advertisements "the prize winning laughmaker," and Listen, Mickey, with George Lane and Tom Moran.\(^{23}\) The reviewer described Roy Hall, the headliner for the following week, as "riding on a single wheel . . . doing every dance one does on feet . . . and . . . one that can't be done with the feet," and called it "one of the cleverest of its kind seen in Dallas in several seasons." He stated that the audience "was quick to respond." The animal act consisted of Bartholdi's Birds, and Allman and Nally did a song-and-dance skit that, according to the review, "contained clever and entertaining lines."\(^{24}\)


\(^{21}\)Single vaudeville acts were called "turns" in the profession and this expression was often used in the newspapers of the day.


\(^{24}\)News, Mon., Apr. 12, 1920, 5.
Bartholdi's Birds, "papageys, cockatoos and parrots," were back again the following week. Also back were Jack Allman and Margaret Nalley who called their new song-and-dance act *Vice Versa*. On the same program, James H. Cullen was featured in a playlet, *Man from the West*. Nat Mazzaro Jr., a popular performer, was in the April 18 show, assisted by the Atlantic Fleet Jazz Band, and on this occasion the animal act consisted of "canines, cats, pigeons and roosters." Jessie Brown and Effie Weston, in what was described as "a terpsichorean cocktail with a kick," headlined the following week's show, while Al and Fannie Stedman, during the week of May 2, "captivated the Sunday night audiences with their versatility displayed in melody, dance and wholesome humor," according to the reviewer. He stated about the program that "whatever may be one's preference in the vaudeville line, that taste may be satisfied at the Majestic Theater this week." The reviewer praised Jack Princeton and Leon Leonard in *Once Upon a Time*, "a musical comedy sketch," and described Bob Hall, who called himself the "extemporaneous Chap," as taking his "themes and melodies from the audience and composed as he sang." According to the reviewer, Hall sang about "Hoe Bailey, President Wilson, a woman suffragette, and prohibition" to the tune of "Smiles."
All kinds of entertainment were grist for the vaudeville mill. Harry Watson Jr. did skits as "The Young Kid Battling Dugan," a portrayal described by the reviewer as "not familiar enough to the Dallas audiences to be really appreciated," and an In the Telephone scene about which the reviewer commented that it "offers a burlesque on telephone services that comes dangerously near reality." On the same bill, Harry Hayden and his troupe presented a playlet, The Love Game, called by the reviewer "a comedy sketch along different lines," and Japanese equilibrists displayed their ability to walk on their hands. The same program had a cellist, a pair of gymnasts, and comedian Jack Osterman, who, the reviewer stated, "didn't go as well as he evidently has been accustomed."29

Howard Mack and Henrietta Lane were in the playlet, What's it all About, seen the week of May 16,30 while Bert Swor, called "the Blackface King of Laughs," was featured on the May 23 program which also had Dan Bruce and Margot Duffet giving a "surprise comedy" called Thru the Keyhole. Swor, the reviewer reported, was welcomed back to the city "with prolonged applause . . . in spite of the hot weather." The blackface comedian explained, according to the reviewer, "the irrefutable ratiocination why the human anatomy should have been differently designed." The comedians, Kennedy and Rooney, the reviewer stated, "proved themselves to be regular vaudeville villains, especially Clayton Kennedy, who asked central to give him 'Canadian Club' and 'Canadian Club' was given in the phone receiver from which he poured it


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into a glass." The reviewer went on to say that the recording piano accordionist, Pietro, "delighted his hearers," and that Thru the Keyhole "registered." Stanley Gallini and Company presented "shadographlets," a European novelty, which the reviewer described as "a trifle different from the usual."31

The "drunk and friend" act in the succeeding week's program was called by the reviewer "tiresome because the 'drunk' stuff lasts too long."32 Others on the same bill included the Follies Girls, a skit, Mrs. Wellington's Surprise, Emmet Briscoe in a blackface act which the reviewer described as "painful," and the Whirlwind Macks in a novelty skating stunt, called "clever" by the reviewer.

The June 6 program headlined a Laurence Schwab production, The Rainbow Cocktail, with Bruce de Leete and Helen Coyne. Others on the same bill included Bender and Meehan in a gymnastic act, Alexandria, "the Master King of Syncopation," Alexander Brothers and Evelyn, "World's greatest ball bouncers," and Elise Schuyer in "Song oddities."33 The seven-act bill at the theater on June 13 was the last of the season and Interstate announced that during the summer months an "elaborate and costly motion picture policy will go into effect."34

The 1920-1921 Season

The season of 1920-1921 was the season in which the new Majestic

Theater was opened and also when there was a more heightened interest in vaudeville playlets featuring well-known actors. The season started on August 22. The first significant performer in the season was Ernest Thomas Seton, billed as the "world-famous athlete and naturalist," who appeared in a program of "imitations of the cries and sounds of wild animals." Two weeks later, Walter Huston and Bayonne Whipple presented a skit, Shoes, described in advertisements as "a clever combination of originality." Also on the same program was Ciccolini, billed as "the famous Italian Opera Star," Hilda Carling, "Prima Ballerina from the Royal Opera House, Stockholm, and her famous company of dancing beauties," Billy Beard, described as "the star of Al G. Field's Minstrels," was another of the entertainers. The playlet during the week of November 7 was The Moth, with Valerie Bergere. The reviewer called her "wonderful both as the doll and the little mother." He stated that her work was "thorough throughout," and that the audience interest was "well maintained." An interesting sidelight on movie practices of the day is provided by the reviewer's comment that "it is imposition on the part of the theater management to compel patrons who pay good money to be entertained to sit through a lot of advertisements." George Kelley, who later was to win renown as a playwright, was seen in his own satirical skit, The Flattering Word, during the week of December 26.

36 News, Mon., Nov. 8, 1920, 6.
New Year's Eve was celebrated at the theater with a "midnight frolic . . . a glittering ensemble of cabaret features." Alan Brooks, who had written and produced, and who was the principal actor in Dollars and Sense, given in the bill that began on January 30, 1921, had to "respond to curtain call after curtain call and came back for a speech before the audience would allow the other acts to go on." The critic added that "Mr. Brooks is an excellent actor and his little play is a vaudeville gem. He has a strong supporting cast."  

The week of February 6 saw June Elvidge, described as "well known to motion picture fans," acting in The Crystal Gazer, by Arthur Cowles, and Earle S. Dewey and Mabel "Billie" Rogers performing in a second playlet, No Tomorrow, written by Jack Lait. The reviewer wrote that "June Elvidge . . . conclusively proved to a Dallas audience Sunday afternoon . . . that she is a master of the spoken drama as well as a topnotcher of the movie world." He added that "Miss Elvidge with her charming personality and her ability as an emotional actress completely captivated her audience and easily won headline honors." J. E. Emmett and Mary E. Ryan, described in the advertisements as an acting team that had been absent from the stage for some time while they performed in motion pictures, were seen in The Test during the week of March 13, and the reviewer called the playlet "a gripping

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one of jealousy and reconciliation." He stated, however, that it suffered somewhat "from lack of distinct enunciation by the members of the cast."¹¹ On Sunday, March 28, and the week following, Mary Marble, who, the advance notices stated "has been delighting Dallas audiences for several years," was seen in a playlet, *My Home Town*, and the reviewer described the sketch as "one of those delightfully sentimental kind, full of homely sentiment and touching incidents that irresistibly carry one back ... to one's own home town and recall old scenes and associations."¹²

The *Guiding Star*, with Laura Pierpont, was described in the review of the bill for the week of April 3 as "probably the best one-act playlet seen on a vaudeville stage here this season." The reviewer called the playlet "unusual," because "it really has a plot," and stated that the acting of Laura Pierpont was "superb," particularly her portrayal of the dope fiend.¹³

The last vaudeville bill presented in the old Majestic Theater came during the week of April 4, 1921, and had the following acts: Corinne Tilton, "The Chatter Box Doll," in *A Chameleon Revue*; Lloyd and Good, "Two Gentlemen from Dixie;" Keegan and O’Rourke, *Something of Everything*; Barry and Layton, *The All Around Boy*; Gibson and Connelli in *The Honeymoon*; and the Wilhat Trio in *Just Running Around*.

¹³ *News*, Mon., Apr. 4, 1921, 4.

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On April 10, the last performance of vaudeville took place in the old Majestic.\(^4\)

When the new Majestic Theater opened on April 11, the acts of Gibson and Connelli, Lloyd and Good, Keegan and O'Rourke, Barry and Layton, comedy skaters, the Wilhat Trio and Corinne Tilton moved over to the new stage. As an added attraction during the opening week, Olga Petrova, famed actress, appeared at the theater. The advance notices stated that she had been "secured for the one week's engagement at the enormous salary of $3,500.\(^5\)

There was a definite improvement in the quality of the shows after the new theater opened and an increasing number of "name" stars were presented. During the new theater's second week Victor Moore and Emma Littlefield were seen in a skit, Change Your Act or Back to the Woods, described as "a peep into the 'inside stuff' of stage life."\(^6\)

Renee Doyris was on the stage in the farce comedy, The Counterfeiters, during the week of May 1,\(^7\) and as part of Musical Festival Week which began on May 8 the Dallas Symphony Orchestra presented music from Pagliacci before every performance.\(^8\) The 1920-1921 season closed on May 29 and the theater went into the customary summer policy of movies.\(^9\)

\(^{4,5}\)New, Sun., Apr. 10, 1921, II, 4.
\(^{6}\)New, Sun., Apr. 17, 1921, II, 4.
\(^{7}\)New, Sun., May 1, 1921, II, 4.
\(^{8}\)New, Wed., May 4, 1921, 4.
\(^{9}\)New, Sun., May 22, 1921, II, 5.
As a summer feature, the Mexican Government Presidential Orchestra with native singers and dancers was at the theater on July 1 and 2. At this point, it must be noted that, even with an all-movie policy, there was still live music in the theater. For example, when the David Griffith movie Way Down East was presented during the week of August 21, a special orchestra and staff of "stage mechanicians . . . together with a carload of elemental effects" were brought to Dallas from New York to provide the score and sound effects.

The 1921-1922 Season

Karl Hoblitzelle, president of Interstate, told the managers of the Majestic theaters, meeting in Dallas in late July, that "the people are demanding clean high-class vaudeville and that it is only by offering bills of real merit that the public approbation can be obtained." The decision to present vaudeville of a higher order in the various Majestic theaters was prompted, undoubtedly, by the growing competition from the motion picture houses. The Palace Theater had opened in Dallas in June, 1921, and presented combination programs consisting of movies and live entertainment of a semi-classical nature. The Melba was under construction and there was added competition to downtown vaudeville in Dallas from the dramatic stock company which opened in the fall of 1921 at the Capitol Theater, formerly the old

50 News, Fri., July 1, 1921, 4.
Majestic. It is interesting to note that while Interstate was planning to step up the quality of vaudeville shows at the new Majestic, the other theaters in Dallas which also had variety programs were not doing so well financially. The Jefferson Theater began the 1921-1922 season with its Pantages vaudeville shows, but by January of 1922 had abandoned straight vaudeville and had switched instead to resident musical stock companies. The Hippodrome, the third of the city's vaudeville houses, gave up vaudeville at the start of the 1921-1922 season and went into a policy of musical stock. When the Happyland Theater opened in March, 1922, it was to tabloid shows.

As live entertainment came into greater competition with the ever-improving motion pictures, only vaudeville of a high order could meet this threat. Interstate, with its tie-in with Keith-Orpheum, the largest of the nation's vaudeville circuits, and with its own circuit of theaters, could pay the necessary funds to bring in the better vaudeville performers. The smaller theaters could not foot this bill and had to turn instead to the more economical musical stock and tabloid shows. Increasingly, after 1921, the Majestic programs were headlined by performers of national reputation.

The 1921-1922 season, the sixteenth consecutive season there had been a Majestic Theater in Dallas, opened in the new Majestic with a bill headlined by Howard Smith and Mildred Barker in a playlet, Good Medicine. Vera Gordon, advertised as the "famous mother of the screen," who had played the role of "Mommer Kantor" in the film

Humoresque and who was on her first vaudeville tour, came to the Majestic for the week of September 11 in a playlet, Lullaby. The reviewer commented that the vehicle provided her "the opportunity to carry to the vaudeville stage the fervor of mother love that has brought her fame on the screen. . . . She completely swept the audience with her and was forced to respond to repeated encores." The supporting cast, described by the reviewer as "excellent," included Stanley Price, Adrenne Lampson and Charles Sims.\(^5\)

Two well-known actors from the legitimate stage, Julia Nash and C.H. O'Donnell, were seen in a playlet, Almost Single, during the week of October 30. The dramatic sketch was said in the advance billing to have drawn "universal applause from numerous theatrical critics."\(^5\)

Two weeks later, a cast that included Nace Murray, Oliver Reese, Lillian Barton, and George Gould presented an Oriental musical comedy piece, The Eyes of Buddha, and the reviewer called it "by far the most gorgeous spectacle to date . . . a Japanese comedy conception with a bevy of fascinating Geisha girls.\(^5\)

The playwright, Crane Wilbur, whose melodrama The Monster was to be presented later at the Majestic, appeared in person during the week of November 21 in a playlet, Right or Wrong, that also featured Martha Mansfield, and the reviewer described it as "a most novel act

\(^5\)News, Mon., Sept. 12, 1921, 4.


\(^5\)News, Mon., Nov. 14, 1921, 4.
that runs about thirty minutes and holds the interest of auditors every second." He pointed out that both Wilbur and Miss Mansfield had been prominent in motion pictures.\(^57\)

Tom Wise, a famous character actor who had played in theaters for forty years and who had, according to the advance notices, "impersonated 'Mr. Barnum,' 'The Gentleman from Mississippi,' and others well known," acted in a one-act play, Memories, written by Roy Briant, during the week of December 4. The review stated that the sketch "teemed with humor and pathos," and that Wise did "a fine bit of acting."\(^58\)

A week later, Elsa Ryan, who had succeeded Laurette Taylor in Peg O' My Heart, acted in Peg for Short at the Majestic opposite Rodney Ranous, said by the reviewer to be "well known in the theatrical world." The reviewer stated that the actress had "a fine outlet for her histrionic abilities." He continued: "Miss Ryan's Irish proclivity for extracting fun from every situation, her quaint brogue and her effective emotional work were given unanimous approval.\(^59\) David Schooler, known as "the boy Paderewski," was seen during Christmas week in Music Hath Charms, a skit that he and Herman Timberg had written. The advertisements stated that the skit dealt "in prose, verse and music with the origin of music," and that it "used eleven girls.\(^60\)

\(^57\)News, Mon., Nov. 21, 1921, 4.
\(^58\)News, Mon., Dec. 5, 1921, 4.
\(^59\)News, Mon., Dec. 12, 1921, 4.
\(^60\)News, Sun., Dec. 25, 1921, III, 3.
Wilbur Mack, described in the advance notices as "one of the best known names in theaterdom" and said to have "more productions to his credit than many of the veterans in the game," and also known as the "Beau Brummel of Broadway," appeared during the week that began on January 8, 1922, in a playlet, Two is Company, which had in its cast Elsie Rose, whom the reviewer stated was "press-agented as one of vaudeville's most beautiful women, and she is a beauty of the slender, blond type. . . ." The reviewer also commented on the clever dialogue.61 Sarah Padden returned to the Majestic for the week beginning January 22 in The Charwoman, described by the reviewer as "a 'legitimate gem' condensed in twenty-five minutes of acting." The reviewer described her as taking the part of a mother "who has sunk to the level of a scrubwoman, and who saves her son who thinks her dead, when he is about to be disgraced," and was, according to the reviewer, "warmly applauded at the conclusion."62

Helen Keller, assisted by Annie Sullivan Macy, was at the theater for the week that began on February 12,63 and in the program of March 20, George Moran and Charles Mack, the "Two Black Crows," were called by the reviewer "real laughmakers in the way they deliver their foolishness."64 Alice Gerstenberg's playlet, A Dress Rehearsal, described as

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a "travesty in one act," was at the theater the following week with Billy Barnes playing the role in which, according to the advance notices, George Choos had made one of his biggest hits in New York. Barnes was said in the review to be a "proud and bone-rimmed bespectacled playwright who crawls out over the foots and takes the audience into his confidence as the actors of his new production give a dress rehearsal." Also on the same bill was Marshall Montgomery, a ventriloquist, who, the reviewer stated, "has something new to show the perishing world." The reviewer continued:

It is the first time within memory that a ventriloquist has not trod upon the stage in Dallas, parked himself on a gilt chair before the street drop, perched a ghastly dummy upon either knee, and proceeded to his task of cracking chestnuts and wheezing songs. Montgomery dines with Lucille De Haven in a rather luxurious apartment and apparently eats a meal upon the stage. The program says the premier test of a ventriloquist is to eat while performing and that seems logical. Those granted, Marshall Montgomery is one of the premier performers of his class.

Paul Decker and his supporting cast, which included Frank W. Taylor, Nina Seville, and Helen Vallely, gave a playlet, I Heard, which was the headline act for the week beginning April 9. The review stated that the play was intended to teach "the slanderous unfairness of gossip."

The program for the week that began April 16, 1922, the first anniversary of the opening of the new Majestic, included Rubeville, starring Harry B. Watson; Tim and Kitty O'Meara in Memories of the Dance; Andrew Lewis and Pansy Norton in Touring from Coast to Coast;

65 *News, Mon., Mar. 27, 1922, 4.* The reviewer's statement not only sheds light on ventriloquism acts of the time but also on the descriptions of the acts in the printed theater programs.

66 *News, Mon., Apr. 10, 1922, 4.*
Grace Doro, a pianist; George Austin Moore in songs and stories; Nellie and Josephine Jordan, in an act described as "a singing, dancing and surprise offering;" and Jim Toney and Ann Norman in a playlet, You Know What I Mean. As part of the anniversary festivities, the spectators were entertained before every performance with the sight of thousands of roses that were "wafted from the skies among the audience during the spectacular storm effects." Prominent speakers were invited to speak at the theater and on the second day of the anniversary week Bishop Joseph Lynch of the Catholic Diocese told the patrons:

The vaudeville stage is an exhaustive study in philosophy. Our wit is quickened and our intellect sharpened, and we learn that things are not always what they seem. This magnificent structure meets a need in this community. It is truly a temple—a temple of humor and cheer—the home of legitimate recreation. I am glad to come here and join you tonight in the anniversary of the inauguration of this work, inspired as it is with wealth and beauty and grandeur, built by this ideal to uplift the stage and to give normal relaxation to the public.97

Richard Kean, the celebrated European character actor, was the headliner on the program for the week of May 2 with dramatic readings. In one of his rare signed criticisms, Chauncey Brown, amusements editor for the News, stated about Kean's performance:

It is most refreshing to see such an act in vaudeville as that presented by Richard Kean. This distinguished actor simply portrays three characters, a cockney soldier reciting "Gunga Din," Shylock and Peter the Miser—yet he stops every show. One reason is the hunger of theatergoers for real drama. The other is Richard Kean's wonderful work. While Dallas is the theatrical center of the Southwest, it has no place for the drama of the great masters. The Little Theater has partly filled the long-felt want, but it

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presents comedies almost entirely. In Cycle Park, Dallas has a summer theater of high quality, but farces and comedies are the rule there, and only a few heavier plays are presented each season.

That there is still a big place in the hearts of Dallas theategoers for Shakespeare is proven beyond a doubt by the enthusiastic reception which greets Mr. Kean's interpretation of the great Jewish character from "The Merchant of Venice." He gives a very forceful and rather vehement nature to Shylock in his defense of the Jew. Yet it is one which will make even the most careless hearer stop and think. . . .

It was a transcendent piece of work--real genuine drama--such tragedy as set the gallery gods agog in the good old days. The gallery gods have passed but the educated aristocratic audiences at the Majestic gave this effort of Mr. Kean's the stamp of approval as would have the established critics of the years of yore. There has not been a single performance so far this week that has not been marked by Mr. Kean being forced to come before the curtain after his act was concluded. Just these three characters--that is all there is to Richard Kean's act. But they constitute a taste of real drama, especially the latter two, which is offered in theatrical fare only now and then in these times.

The appreciation with which Mr. Kean's characterizations are received is ample indication that the distinguished old Thespian is giving the people just what they want. Such applause as has greeted him does not come from mere politeness or even mild enjoyment. It is spontaneous and insistent, and embodies the feeling of the audience that the real drama has its place in modern entertainment, even if it comes only by small parcels on the vaudeville stage. . . .

So popular was Kean's presentation that on Friday night of that week he gave a special program, appearing as Uriah Heap; as a character in An Old Bachelor; and in scenes from The Bells. . . .

The season closed on May 13 with an appearance by Ivan Bankoff, described in the advance notices as the "famous Russian ballet master." . . .

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During the summer, feature pictures were scheduled to be shown continuously.\footnote{\textit{News}, Sat., May 20, 1922, 4.}

The 1922-1923 Season

The Majestic was closed, however, during the summer months, and reopened on August 13 for the 1922-1923 season, but not before a basic change in policy had been announced that marked a significant turning point in Dallas entertainment history. Prior to this season, motion pictures had been shown at the theater only during the summer months, and programs during the regular season had been devoted to live entertainment only. On August 5, Karl Hoblitzelle announced that feature films would be added to the vaudeville programs. This change meant that all downtown theaters were now showing movies. The Interstate president also announced that three complete shows would be given each day instead of two, that the system of reserved seats would be abolished, and that admission prices would be cut in half. He stated that the prices had originally been raised because "the high cost of production during the war made this move necessary." The new price policy had all the lower floor seats going at 55¢ a seat, with children admitted for 25¢, while box and mezzanine seats sold for 75¢. Hoblitzelle stressed that this price reduction meant "anything but a cheapening of the high quality for which the Majestic has become famous." As for the reserved seat policy, Hoblitzelle stated that was being abandoned because the public felt that "discrimination was being shown in making reservations for seats."
At the same time that he made the announcement, he promulgated a philosophy of entertainment which was to guide Interstate policy throughout the 1920's and even into the 1930's:

When the Interstate Amusement Company decided to bring highclass vaudeville into Texas, this phase of amusement was comparatively little known in the State . . . but the phenomenal success of those early years taught us that the people appreciated the good things and prefer good clean and wholesome acts above any other form of amusement.

An evening of wholesome amusement is vitally essential to the people of the city and plays an equally vital part in the lives of those who live in the smaller communities.

One thing the Majestic has done, it has offered this, and the approval of the people is seen in their support of the theaters where the Interstate holds sway.

Since the advent of motion pictures many changes have taken place in the amusement world. First, the moving picture has taught us, as vaudeville taught us long ago—that the people craved a form of amusement that was not prohibitive in price. When the prices of motion pictures began soaring the crowds began dropping off, and the motion picture theater that held on to the high prices went the way of the spoken drama. . . . We are not looking for great fortunes. It is the sole idea of the Interstate Amusement Company to give to its patrons shows that will be within their means and at the same time meet their most exacting demands.

Bills that have been booked for the fall and winter season are the greatest that have ever been seen on the circuit.72

A week later, commenting on the new "three-a-day" policy, Hoblitzelle noted that it had been in effect during the war and had been well-patronized. He stated that its reinstatement was an indication of the optimism Interstate officials felt about their new policy.

The shows were to start at 2 p.m., at 6:45 p.m., and at 8:45 p.m.73

For the new season, the Interstate management decided to revive the theater tradition of the Family Circle. A popular institution in

the days of the opera houses, the Family Circle was located upstairs and was cheaper in price than first floor seats. Families using the Family Circle did not have to come to the theater dressed up. The plan at the Majestic was to have a circle of eight-hundred seats on the third floor. There was to be elevator service, and a hostess was to be on hand to welcome those who used the Circle.\textsuperscript{74}

The 1922-1923 season got off to an auspicious start during the week of August 20 with the appearance of Texas Guinan, described in the advance notices as "well-known in Hollywood circles for her Western pictures," in a playlet, \textit{The Spitfire}, especially written for her by Jack Lait.\textsuperscript{75} The reviewer described the sketch as beginning with a two-reel movie that showed Texas Guinan as the heroine. The curtain then rose, and she gave, according to the reviewer, "an exciting sketch of border life." The reviewer observed that the supporting company included a horse "which Miss Guinan rides right out into the stage."\textsuperscript{76}

Madame Besson, a former star of the legitimate stage, appeared in a playlet, \textit{The Woman Who Knew}, during the week beginning August 28.\textsuperscript{77} But there were indications that styles in vaudeville were changing. An item in the \textit{News} on September 3, 1922, pointed to the increasing

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{News}, Thurs., Aug. 31, 1922, 4.

\textsuperscript{75}\textit{News}, Sun., Aug. 20, 1922, II, 1. Jack Lait was well known as a writer of vaudeville playlets. He was to become even better known in later years as the author of books about the night life of various cities.

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{News}, Mon., Aug. 21, 1922, 4.

\textsuperscript{77}\textit{News}, Mon., Aug. 28, 1922, 4.
popularity of acts which featured song writers singing their own songs and particularly to the growing demand for orchestras. Both Keith Orpheum and the Interstate circuits, according to the article, had booked a number of the band acts for the next season. The vaudeville playlets were on their way out.78

The non-reserve seat policy at the Majestic did not last very long. On October 1, seats at the Majestic were again placed on reserve. Also, the new policy of giving two night performances was abandoned in favor of one night performance, at 7:30 p.m., during the week. There were to be the two nightly performances on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. The price policy remained the same.79

Baxley and Porter, popular vaudeville entertainers, brought their act, Neighbors, to the theater during the week that began September 25. According to the reviewer, Jack Baxley was a Dallasite who "appears as a gay old fellow to whom the songs of long ago are the finest, but who steps on his feet in glad caprice when the orchestra turns to a ragtime tune. His partner was Lillian Porter.80 Francis S. Donegan, who had been seen earlier in Dallas in the musical shows Hitchy Koo and Listen, Lester, and who had been with Otis Skinner when he brought Kismet to the city, returned in October as part of the dancing and singing team of Donegan and Stegar.81

One special vaudeville feature that lasted for a number of months and which was a kind of "boy-bishop's" treatment of vaudeville was the "clown night," popular in the East, but tried out at the Majestic for the first time on Friday, October 13:

Every performer on the bill, including the monkeys, had a part in the clowning and with the exception of the monkey act "The Four Musketeers," no acts were given as scheduled. Because of the fact that the first clown night was an experiment, it was carried on in rather conservative fashion. Since the clowns seemed to please the audience, the Majestic management has about decided to make it a regular Friday night event and to make it more hilarious in the future.

The fun started with the appearance of Henry F. Priest, 84-year old veteran of the Civil War, who plays old-time melodies on his violin. Bob Hall announced that this was National Anthem Week, requested the audience to rise and join in the verse of the National Anthem, and everybody arose. The orchestra then swung into the melody of "How Dry I Am", and the actors on the stage were singing it before the audience realized the joke.

Again while Creedon and Davis were performing, Mr. Priest came on the stage and remonstrated with Dan Creedon for abusing his wife. He threatened to tell his father and Dan asked him where his father lived. "Over in Oak Cliff with my grandfather," replied the former Confederate, and the audience roared.

So it went all through the performance. While Bob Hall was trying to make poetry reading a procession of actors followed by one of their number bearing a beer keg paraded across the stage as the orchestra played a dirge. The performance ended with an added number "The Sheik" in which everybody joined.

The Majestic management, realizing the popularity of this form of entertainment, gave it a prominent place in its advertising. A November 3 advertisement stated that "our third clown night will positively mangle melancholy, banish blues, dispel dejection, destroy depression, and make you laugh, laugh, laugh."

An illustration of the form that the "clown night" entertainment

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eventually took is seen in the following description:

Mystery clouded the stage . . . while the actors on this week's bill presented a playlet . . . "It is He" with little Billie, the midget headliner, playing the lead.

The occasion was "clown night" and the playlet was little Billie's idea. From the time the curtain went up on a forest scene which was modernized by the presence of a huge chandelier and a piano . . . "It is He" went over with a bang. The appearance of Edward Foley as "King of Tug" himself scored one of the big hits and his announcement that he had been asleep 3,000 years in Egypt and one week in Fort Worth literally took down the house.

The plot of the playlet . . . was mysterious. The mystery . . . centered around little Billie. At intervals, the lights went out and little Billie, mounted on a tricycle and smoking a big cigar, spurted across the stage, pursued by an aged veteran mounted on a pair of crutches.

But as in the mystery plays, this one . . . had an ending . . . unexpected at that. The aged veteran and his pair of crutches finally apprehended little Billie, the tricycle and the big cigar and the sudden flash of the lights revealed that the decrepit old man was in reality a messenger boy who had grown old in the service. His pursuit of the leading man was caused by a telegram addressed to little Billie which read "You can come back, the tailor is dead."

Marion Murray played the part of little Billie's wife, and Eldrie Gilmore the part of a French maid.83

Clarence Oliver and Georgie Olp, described in the advance notices as "favorites on the legitimate stage before entering vaudeville," presented a dramatic sketch, Wire Collect, taken from Six Cylinder Love, called in the notices "one of the most popular recent plays on Broadway," in the bill for the week that began on October 15,84 and Fritzi Scheff, advertised as the "well known musical comedy prima donna," who had planned to bring her own show to the city, came instead as a headliner on the bill that opened on October 22. 85

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The bill also included a skit, *Young America*, which had Ben Sweeney as Nutty Beemer, the tough boy. Originally a full-length play, *Young America* had been so successful that its authors, Fred Ballard and Pearl Franklin, had condensed it into a vaudeville sketch. Ben Sweeney had been picked, according to the advance notices, "from a Connecticut rug factory by George M. Cohan for the tough kid." The reviewer stated that Sweeney almost stole the honors from Fritzi Scheff. He added that "each of the six actors, including the dog, had a big part in making the juvenile court scene a success. There are tears as well as laughter hidden in this sketch which is remarkably true to human nature."87

Harry Langdon, of whom the preliminary publicity stated, "There are a favored few vaudeville performers whose names are synonymous with laughter, and one of these is Harry Langdon," was seen in a sketch, *After the Ball*, a "golf farce" that the reviewer described as "one of the oddest comedy acts of the season." He added, "Langdon's comedy is not only unique but really funny." The sketch was in three acts with stage settings for each.89

Described in the advertisements as "one of America's most famous stage beauties," Edith Taliaferro was presented in *Under the Same Old Moon*, called "a love tale of three continents," as headliner on a bill that also included *Dallas Follies*, a show made up of local

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aspirants to vaudeville careers. The reviewer called attention to the fact that Edith Taliaferro was both a Broadway and a Hollywood star and stated that she was "young . . . pretty . . . and she really can act." The sketch had a Dutch scene which the reviewer called "delicious comedy;" a Chinese episode which he stated was "deep tragedy;" and a Northwest scene which he described as "melodrama of the James Oliver Curwood type."

Typical of the playlets in vaudeville at the time was The Trimmer, presented during the week of November 12, in which, according to the review, "Grace Huff, as a manicurist . . . vamps a married man for the sake of his wife." Clarence Bellair played the "old rheumatic who still enjoys being vamped." The advance notices had described Grace Huff as "one of the most celebrated leading women in dramatic stock in the history of the United States," and had stated that during her engagement at Baltimore, Maryland, she had "played eighty-eight consecutive weeks, appearing in a new role every week."

Bowing to what he called "an insistent demand for a longer show," and also influenced by the fact that during the early fall it had been difficult to get the more important feature acts to come South because of the heat, Karl Hoblitzelle announced on November 16 that there would be six acts on the vaudeville bills instead of five, and

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90News, Sun., Nov. 5, 1922, II, 12.
91News, Mon., Nov. 6, 1922, 4.
93News, Sun., Nov. 12, 1922, II, 11.
that motion pictures would continue to be shown as part of the pro-
gram. Prices remained the same except that orchestra, box and loge
seats were to cost slightly more. Sheila Terry was the first head-
liner on the new length bills and she brought her own company during
the week of November 19 in May and December, called in the advertisements
"a romance in seven scenes." On the bill for the week of November 26,
Mildred Harris, former wife of Charles Chaplin, came to the theater in
Movie Mad, a one-act comedy.

During the next four months, a number of important stage and
motion picture stars were to appear at the theater as headliners. The
December 3 bill found two well-known stage personalities, Edward
Arnold and Harriet Rempel, both appearing in playlets. Arnold starred
in Langdon McCormick's The Storm, described in the advance notices as
a "spectacular melodrama" which was making its first appearance in
vaudeville after "its long run in New York, Chicago and London," com-
plete with "stupendous scenery and electrical effects." The supporting
cast included Guy Cunningham, Ann Hamilton, Max von Mitzel and Isis
Maynard. Harriet Rempel performed in The Heart of a Clown. The
critic called Miss Rempel's vehicle "wholly commendable with its tense
dramatic moments, the clever work of Miss Harriet Rempel in two con-
trasting difficult parts, and the ever delightful presence in the cast

of 'Tiny Tim,' admirable little child star." He added that the playlet threw "a spotlight straight into bared hearts," and that it was "exceptionally well enacted." As for The Storm, the reviewer commented that it "draws rapt attention, holds it, and scores the climax with a crash in which the character of the production does not fall, but rises to truly admirable heights." The reviewer particularly admired the staging of the forest fire, which, he observed, "lacks nothing in its reality and splendor," and he praised Neil Barnes who had the role of "the eccentric French girl," and Edward Arnold as "the mighty woodsman."^8

Mrs. Sidney Drew, who, according to the advertisements, had been "popular with her husband for their screen comedies up to the time of his death," came to the theater for the week beginning January 7 in a comedy sketch, Predestination.99 It was described by the reviewer as "a typical vaudeville offering . . . filled with amusing lines aided by a fast moving plot."100

Another motion picture star, Henry B. Walthall, recalled in the advance notices as "the 'Little Colonel' of 'The Birth of a Nation,'" and who had an established reputation on the legitimate stage, attracted the largest Sunday crowd of the season to the theater two weeks later when he appeared in a dramatic sketch, The Unknown. The

reviewer commented that Walthall "demonstrated that he is an actor of wonderful power." Thomas Shea, said in the advance notices to be "notable for his wonderful portrayal of dramatic scenes from great plays," headlined the February 18 bill doing scenes from his performances in The Cardinal, The Bells, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. W. C. Fields brought his company to the theater for the week of February 4 in Field's Family Ford. On the same program was Thompson, the Egyptian, described as "bringing his wonderful system of 'Zonery' which cures or relieves all human ills." The advance notices stated further that Thompson was "one of the sensations of the circuit last season" and that his "Zonery" was a method of cure that involved "nerve pressure." His act, according to the notices, "has considerable humor and it is claimed that he makes some marvelous cures." The reviewer stated about the W. C. Fields act:

> It would seem that the comedy possibilities of the lowly Lizzie are inexhaustible. W. C. Fields, with . . . his ridiculously-typical family . . . has established this fact beyond refuting. . . . If there be one who can sit unmoved by mirth through the antics of Mr. Fliverton, his powerful motor car, and his trouble, then that one should see Thompson, the exponent of "Zonery" and arrange to have his risible nerves loosened. . . . W. C. Fields with his "Family Ford" and its passengers is the biggest laugh on the program.

Wesley Barry, the motion picture star, appeared in a dramatic skit a week later, and during the week of March 4, the headliner was

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"Little Billie," a child actor who, the advance billing stated, had starred in *So Long, Letty* on Broadway, and whose appearance at the Majestic, according to the reviewer, "drew an ovation similar to that tendered Jackie Coogan." The reviewer added that Little Billie's interpretation of the loss of his dog "held the audience in marked silence and appreciation." On the same program were two other dramatic offerings, *Her Bashful Romeo*, with Eldric Gilmore and Frank Fisher, and *Likes and Dislikes*, with Marion Murray. The reviewer commented that *Likes and Dislikes* was "all too brief to suit the enthusiastic audience." He also stated that "such skits as these are rarely seen on the vaudeville stage, and deserve ample attention. Much philosophy was in evidence and was advanced with a logic that made it stick."106

The growing popularity of jazz was evidenced by the appearance for the week beginning March 13 of "Nobody's Jazz Band." During the following week, John Hyams and Leila McIntyre, advertised as "well known artists," were seen in *Honeysuckle*, a playlet set in a vacation bureau. A common practice of the times is illustrated by the reviewer's comment that "as was customary, there was a nice little curtain talk by Mr. Hyams and Miss McIntyre."107 Bessie Bariscale, advertised as a "noted film star," came to the theater on April 1 in *Picking Peaches*, in which she played four different parts, while Howard Hickman, the author, who was also in the sketch, performed three.108

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Miss Bariscale told a News reporter that week:

In all our experience I can't believe I have ever played to people who have been quicker to grasp subtle ideas. . . . Dallas people are as delightful as those of any of the cities in the Old South. 109

The second anniversary of the new Majestic was celebrated with the appearance of Theodore Roberts, described in the advance notices as "one of the greatest portrayers of character roles." Roberts, according to the newspaper account, was welcomed to the city "by representatives of practically every luncheon club and community aid organization in the city" at a special program held in the baseball park. 110 He appeared during the week at the Majestic in a dramatic sketch, The Man Higher Up, written for him by William De Mille. The reviewer's comments illustrate the tremendous popularity of playlets at the time:

Good old rugged Theodore Roberts, who admitted Sunday to Majestic audiences that the sound of applause is sweet in his ears, got a plentiful feast of handclapping.

Preceding his act proper, an introductory reel of pictures is shown, introducing him in his characters in the Paramount pictures. . . . Then the curtain rises, showing Roberts as a physician preparing to revenge himself on the man responsible for his sweetheart's death thirty years before.

On a table the doctor places a box which keeps ticking. . . . The victim is ushered into the room . . . the unusual revenge is achieved, all through the power of suggestion.

The great character actor took eight curtain calls before he stepped out of his character for a heart to heart talk. He ended by lighting a cigar and the crowd want wild again. He took three more curtain calls before the audience would permit the next actor to go on. 111

111 News, Mon., Apr. 9, 1923, 4.
Laura Pierpont made another appearance at the Majestic in mid-April, this time in *women Who Pass in the Night*.

The Summer Season, 1923

On April 21, Karl Hoblitzelle announced another radical departure in entertainment policy for the Majestic. He disclosed that during the summer season, which was to begin on April 29, the theater would house a resident musical comedy company. The Interstate executive maintained that "Dallas playgoers have asked for big Eastern attractions in conjunction with big-time vaudeville," and said that he had become convinced by the record breaking attendance at Raymond Hitchcock's *Hitchy-Koo*, presented as a touring attraction at the theater late in March, that the city's audiences wanted varied entertainment. He said he had negotiated with Milton Aborn, "a well-known operatic impresario," to bring the Manhattan Musical Comedy Company to the theater with its forty players and its chorus of twenty-five. During the summer, a different musical comedy was to be presented by the company each week until vaudeville was resumed again in August. Hoblitzelle stated that the principals of the company had been stars of such musical comedies as *Listen, Lester, Sweethearts, Going Up, The Firefly*, and others. The director of the company was Augustus Buell and the prima donna was Maude Gray. Rex Carter, the leading tenor, had, according to the advance notices, "just closed in George M. Cohan's 'The O'Brien Girl.'" Others in the company included George Shields, bass; Lee Daly, principal comedian; Dan Marble, comedian; and Irene Cattell, Virginia Watson.

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113 *News*, Sat., Apr. 21, 1923, 4.
Edith Bradford, Joseph Daniels and Frederick Rogers. The News amusement writer commented that "from all indications, the summer season of light opera and musical comedy will prove a huge success ... as this will be the first opportunity in many years for Dallasites to enjoy the late and tuneful musical shows without journeying to Chicago or New York."\textsuperscript{114}

Rudolf Friml's Firefly was the offering for the first week's stand of the Manhattan Company and opened on April 29, 1923. The reviewer stated that "when the famous Friml success is beautifully staged and performed by an excellent troupe headed by such a talented and delightful little lady as Miss Maude Gray, it makes the offering even more worth while." He commented that Virginia Watson "sings well and is a fine comedienne," and praised Irene Cattell as Geraldine and Joseph Daniels, who, he said, "did 'Sympathy' exceedingly well." The reviewer pronounced that George Shields, in his bass solo, "scored his greatest hit."\textsuperscript{115}

Going Up, called in the advertisements, the "Cohan and Harris 'mile-a-second' musical success," was given during the week that began May 6.\textsuperscript{116} It was followed by Sweethearts, in which Ralph Brainard joined the company to play the part of the prince.\textsuperscript{117} The reviewer stated

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114}News, Thurs., Apr. 26, 1923, 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{115}News, Mon., Apr. 30, 1923, 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{116}News, Sun., May 6, 1923, II, 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{117}News, Sun., May 13, 1923, II, 10.
\end{itemize}
that "a large audience attested the lasting popularity of the score and plot." Oh, Boy was the presentation for the week starting May 20, and Listen, Lester was said in the review to "make a bigger hit than any previous show given by the Manhattan Musical Comedy Company." The reviewer proclaimed the show to be "spicy, snappy and stylish," and added that it had "real song hits . . . all kinds of smart dancing, and a line of fun excelled." He made particular mention of Dillard Ward, who, he stated, "possesses a magnificent baritone voice . . . which kept the audience calling for more and more." Maude Gray, according to the reviewer, had to repeat "I'm a good Baby in the Daytime, but a Bad Baby at Night," several times, and he stated that "the most beautiful number was 'When the Shadows Fall.'"

The offering for the following week was Mary, acclaimed in the advertisements as George M. Cohan's greatest triumph. Her Soldier Boy, the Shubert musical comedy that featured the famous song, "Smile, Smile, Smile," was the presentation for the week of June 10, and the cast was assisted by a group of Dallas AEF veterans. The O'Brien Girl, the musical comedy for the following week, had Maude Gray in the leading role, and it was succeeded by The Time, The Place, The Girl.

120 News, Mon., May 21, 1923, 4.
called in the advance notices, "a seventeen-year old war horse of musical comedies," and said by the reviewer to have "pleased a large audience." He observed further that "though it perhaps doesn't fit as well now as when it brought fame to its first creator, it still is a pretty good vehicle for summer amusement."

Little Johnny Jones, given by the Manhattan Company during the week of July 1, had "made George M. Cohan famous with its songs, 'Give My Regards to Broadway,' 'Yankee Doodle Boy,' and other well-known tunes," according to the advance notices. Augustus Buell, director of the Manhattan Company, gave assurances that he would "produce the international success exactly as when it opened at the New York theater in September, 1903." As an added attraction, Buell was to appear in a series of his eccentric dances, assisted by an ensemble of Dallas girls that he had been training. Apparently, attendance at the musical comedies was dropping off, for the Majestic management offered to give two tickets to this musical for the price of one. The reviewer praised Lee Daly, the comedian, commenting that his work "stood out in an excellent characterization of a tipping tourist." He called the musical comedy "highly pleasing in its essentially Yankee humor and lilting music," and pointed out that although it was "a vehicle for George M. Cohan's peculiar capacities as a comedian, and although it

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126News, Sun., July 1, 1923, IV, 6.
automatically becomes a difficult piece to put over without his per-
sonality, the players did creditably." He observed that Joseph McCallion did well in the role which had been created by Cohan and that Maude Gray "was in excellent voice." Fred Rogers was described by the reviewer as "clever," and he observed that "Dan Marble's facility was hampered by an indifferent part." He praised the dancing revue which featured Buell and the Dallas girls as "a pleasing specialty, warmly applauded."\(^{128}\)

The Manhattan Musical Company abruptly withdrew from the Majestic Theater following the closing of the week's run on Saturday, July 6, 1923. As was so often the case, there was no public explanation. The theater closed temporarily and reopened on September 2 for the start of the regular "big time vaudeville season."

The 1923-1924 Season

The Interstate policy for the 1923-1924 season consisted of two vaudeville shows a day, each including seven acts of live entertainment, together with a feature film and short pictures such as *Pathé News*, *Aesop's Fables*, and *Topics of the Day*. This was also the season that the theater was used for touring road shows. It was stressed by the management that no permanent reservations would be accepted for either the vaudeville or the road shows, but that tickets would go on sale "one week in advance for vaudeville and five days for road shows," and that "patrons arriving during the progress of any act, whether vaudeville

\(^{128}\) *News*, Mon., July 2, 1923, 4.
or play, will positively not be seated until its conclusion.\textsuperscript{129}

The September 16 bill was headlined by the presentation of The Show Off, the one-act play by George Kelly which he later was to rewrite as the well-known three-act comedy. The cast of the Majestic production was headed by Fred Sumner. On the same program were Harry Norwood and Alpha Hall, described in the advance notices as "two actors who had forsaken the legitimate stage where both had attained no small degree of success," in a travesty, It May Have Happened to You.\textsuperscript{130}

For the week of September 23, Olga Petrova returned with the scene from Hurricane which she had used to open the new Majestic Theater.\textsuperscript{131}

Vincent Lopez and his "Red Cap Orchestra," together with Lew Seymour in a playlet, Are You a Lawyer?, were headliners on the October 21 bill,\textsuperscript{132}

and the following week, the well-known magician, Houdini, did his act on the Majestic stage.\textsuperscript{133}

Blossom Seeley, described in the advance notices as the "world-heralded queen of the art of syncopation," and Bennie Fields presented a jazz sketch during the week of November 4. It was the first appearance in the city of the noted musical team. Warner Gault and Charles Thorpe were also in the cast of the sketch.\textsuperscript{134}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{129}News, Sun., Aug. 26, 1923, IV, 7.
\item\textsuperscript{130}News, Sun., Sept. 16, 1923, IV, 4.
\item\textsuperscript{131}News, Sun., Sept. 23, 1923, IV, 4.
\item\textsuperscript{132}News, Sun., Oct. 21, 1923, IV, 5.
\item\textsuperscript{133}News, Sun., Oct. 28, 1923, IV, 5.
\item\textsuperscript{134}News, Sun., Nov. 4, 1923, IV, 4.
\end{itemize}
Charles Withers, a famous vaudeville performer, brought what was called "a travesty on the old-time melodrama" to the theater on December 10. The reviewer commented that "as Cy Scroggins, manager, orchestra, stage boss, etc. of a small town house, Withers is just as big a show as the program that is presented on a miniature stage." Lew Lehr, who was later to become a well-known comedian, appeared with Nancy Belle in *First Love*, described in the advance notices as an act that "concerns love affairs coated with songs, dances and comedy," for the bill of December 30, and a week later, Ben Bernie, who, according to the advance notices "gave up being a headline eccentric violinist in order to hitch his wagon to the star of jazz," brought his orchestra to the Majestic. It was said by the reviewer to be "a superb aggregation." He added that "these twelve men play in a manner all their own." And the review also made reference to "Ben's chatter between numbers and his weird directing," as helping the act to go over so well.

On February 15, the Majestic again reduced its prices for seats, and in the same announcement, Interstate laid claim to having "the largest chain of vaudeville houses in the entire South, with headquarters at Dallas." The top night price of the new schedule was 85¢ and for matinees it was 35¢. Borrah Minnevitch, who was to come back to Dallas several times in the next few years, came to the Majestic on

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March 16 for a week's engagement, advertised as playing "some of the most difficult and famous classics." The headliner for the same bill was Mae West, called in the advance notices an "eccentric comedienne" who had gone into Interstate vaudeville "after a very successful season at the Winter Garden, New York, and also after scoring a big hit in the musical comedy, 'Sometime.'" She was advertised as having "her own way of offering her 'ware' across the footlights," and described as "that hot mean blues singing lady."^39

The Mosconi Brothers, on the Majestic stage during the week of March 16, were praised by the reviewer, Curtis Vinson of the News, as registering "a pronounced vaudeville triumph."^40 Eva Tanguay, said in the advance notices to be a "famous comedienne," was described by the reviewer as "giving an example of what an eccentric personality can do," in her stage appearance that began on March 24. The reviewer continued:

She can't sing as well as many people on the stage, yet she puts her songs over in such a manner that her audiences understand almost every word. She doesn't dance, but she prances and struts around in a way that apparently gives the average spectator more joy than if she were executing difficult steps. Her songs are all original and mostly about herself, but the audience likes them. Miss Tanguay wears a number of startling and gaudy costumes, closing the act with one covered with tiny mirrors.

She performs in front of a number of gorgeous and bizarre drop curtains. She is certainly dynamic... keeps on the move... jokes about herself... distributes hokum with a lavish hand. Her best song, aside from "I don't care," is one built on her own name.\n
Irene Franklin headlined the bill for the Majestic's third anniversary week. Made famous by the "Redhead Gingerbread" song, she was said in the advance notices to introduce "a new collection of character studies in song." The bill for the week of April 20, the closing week of the regular season, had seven acts, one of which featured Bert Lahr and Mercedes, in what was called in the advance notices, "a snappy bit a melody and mirth." Others on the bill were Douglas Leavitt, described as "well-known in musical comedies," who did a number that introduced Ruth Mary Lockwood and "Brother" Ray; Sophie Kasmir, said in the advance notices to be "a prima donna featured in European and American opera;" Johnny Miller and James Mack doing "eccentric stage steps;" Lee Stafford and Mlle. Louise, dancers; Harry Seeback, "champion bag puncher of the world . . . punches seven bags at one time," according to the notices; and Sam Summers and Estelle Hunt, dancers.1

The Summer Season - 1924

With the comment that "the Majestic Theater realizes theater-goers are tired of silly, plotless musical comedies and want something worthwhile," Interstate announced that the summer season would be taken up with another resident company at the theater, this time the Garden Players, featuring Al and Loie Bridge, and boasting a "big beauty chorus." This musical stock company was described in the announcement as "a happy blending of tuneful music and hilarious comedy--free

1News, Sun., Apr. 6, 1924, III, 7.
from coarseness and double entendre." Feature pictures were also to be shown. The company included a quartet, The California Four, and was coming to Dallas, according to the advance notices, after having been together "more than five years during which time the organization set a record of more than 3,700 performances in Kansas City . . . seventy-five weeks in Los Angeles, and twenty-five in Oklahoma City."

Principals in the company, in addition to Al and Loie Bridge, included Bill Rader, character man; Clarence Wurdig, juvenile and leads; Allen McDonald, juvenile; Beulah Hayes, prima donna; and Dorothy Woodward, soubrette. The first presentation of the Garden Players, Look Your Best, opened on May 11.

Al and Loie Bridge were billed as the "Young Old Couple" because of their penchant for playing elderly roles. All of the scripts presented by the Players during the season were written by Margaret Echard. The plot of Sweethearts Again, given during the week of May 25, is typical of the presentations:

Playing upon the word "Sweetheart" . . . "Sweethearts Again" is the story of two old folks living in the home of their married daughter, where the children are all busy making plans for a golden wedding anniversary of their parents.

Although they are in the midst of preparations commemorating their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the couple are constantly quarrelling. They are both evidently of such a childish disposition that the young couple play a joke on them by having them sign supposed divorce papers after which they are forced apart.

That "absence makes the heart grow fonder," is the slogan used by the children to make their parents sweethearts again. Al and Loie Bridge have the roles of the crabbed old couple.

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Occasionally Loie and Al Bridge would discard their performance of elderly roles to do more youthful parts as in *A Gob of Relations*, presented by the Garden Players during the week that began on June 1.\(^{147}\)
The reviewer called it "a clever plot . . . that moves much faster than the previous offerings."\(^{148}\) As was customary with this type of musical offering—making it closely akin to the tabloid shows—there were specialty numbers by the quartet, and by members of the cast and chorus.\(^{149}\) *Warm and Cozy*, which opened on June 15, had to do with "two young married couples and the green-eyed monster."\(^{150}\) *The Opry*, which played during the week of June 22, was described in the advance notices as "a riproaring rural farce in one act and three scenes."\(^{151}\) Al and Loie Bridge, according to the notices, "played young again" in *Everybody's Daddy* the following week, and, as an added attraction, there was "blackface Eddie Ross with his African Harp."\(^{152}\) *The House of David*, played for the week of July 7, was called by the reviewer "foolishness and little else . . . but it is funny." He observed that "good singing supplements the action of the show," and that Eddie Ross "in dialogue and in his skillful manipulation of the banjo won applause."\(^{153}\) It was

\(^{147}\) *News*, Mon., June 2, 1924, 4.

\(^{148}\) *News*, Mon., June 2, 1924, 4.

\(^{149}\) *News*, Mon., June 2, 1924, 4.


\(^{151}\) *News*, Sun., June 22, 1924, III, 6.

\(^{152}\) *News*, Sun., June 29, 1924, III, 6.

a favorite device of the times to blend, wherever possible, movies with action on the stage, and for Movie Mad, done during the week starting August 3, the following technique was employed:

Loie takes the part of the stage-struck country woman who makes her family do the family washing while she peruses the movie magazines and tries out her histrionic ability. The celluloid portion of the next Majestic offering sees Loie on her way to the studios with Al following. The film gives way to the real Al, who opens the show by walking out of the film into action on the Majestic boards.\footnote{\textit{News}, Wed., July 30, 1924, 4.}

The final presentation of Al and Loie Bridge came during the week of August 17 with Not Tonight, Dearie, called in the advertisements a "scintillant comedy chock full of delightful comedy and tuneful music."\footnote{\textit{News}, Sun., Aug. 17, 1924, III, 6.}

The 1924-1925 Season

There was no break between the end of the summer season and the start of the fall programs. The theater, during the 1924-1925 season, was devoted to vaudeville acts and feature pictures.\footnote{In order to indicate the varied nature of the vaudeville offerings, more complete programs for each week will be listed in this section.}

Frances Arms, singer, and Henry Bergman and the Crips Sisters were the principal performers on the program that began August 24. Bill Dooley and his company, together with Viola Votruba, presented a comedy sketch, The Misfit Sailor.\footnote{\textit{News}, Sun., Aug. 24, 1924, III, 6.} Bobby McLean, billed as "the
world's greatest ice skater," presented an ice skating novelty the following week, and on the same bill were Arthur and Morton Havel in a playlet, Lovers Lane, which had in its cast Helen Lockhart, later to become well known as a movie actress. Frank Work and his company presented Three O'Clock in the Morning, and Arthur Angel and Violet Fuller were seen in "Music and Chatter."  

Eddie Pardo, who was later to come to Dallas as a well-known master of ceremonies, and Gloria Archer presented a skit, The Girl Next Door, during the week of September 7, and others on the program included the Wilson Brothers in their skit, The Lieutenant and the Cop, and Ina Hayward and Lynn Cantor in Harmonia.  

Anatol Friedland, billed as "the popular composer himself" with what was called his "newly-discovered talent" headlined the bill for September 14. Also on the same bill was Joe Bennett, "the blackface skipping nut" in Dark Moments. During the same week, the A. Harris and Company "Fall Symphony of Fashion" was presented on the stage. Others on the same bill included Mattylee Lippard, singer; Will Morris, an old-time vaudevillian, in Just Wheels; and Harry Holden and Lucy Harron in The Bill Poster.  

Henri Scott, advertised as the "famous American bass, formerly at Hammerstein's in Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera Company," headlined

160A leading Dallas department store.
the program for the week of September 21. Others on stage included Howard and Flo Lind in their celebrated act, *Wedding Belles*; Hazel Mann and Eugene Strong in a skit, *Garage Love*; and the "original" Pepito, Spanish clown.\(^{162}\) The following week, Josie Heather, English comedienne, presented "exclusive songs,"\(^ {163}\) and Lew Brice, brother of Fannie Brice, did a dancing act. Others in the same cast included Agnes Finlay and Charles J. Hill; Chong and Rosie Moey; and Moran and Wiser.\(^ {164}\) James J. Corbett, once the heavyweight champion of the world, did a vaudeville turn for the week of October 12 with Jack Norton, called *Taking the Air*, and the same bill included Doris Duncan in a song cycle; Leon Vavara in a "pianologue;" Walter and Dyer in songs and dances; and Joe Carson and Kitty Cane in a dancing act.\(^ {165}\)

Harry and Emma Sharrock did a comedy act, *Behind the Grand Stand*, on the bill for October 19 and the week following. Other entertainers on the same program included Bob Cook and Dot Catmull, singers; Clara Howard in "songs and stories;" Margie Clifton in "classical poses and balancing;" Ralph C. Bevan and Beatrice Flint, comedians; and Lou Lockett and Peggy Page, dancers.\(^ {166}\) Emmett Gilfoyle and Elsie Lange, a well-known vaudeville team, headlined the bill for October 26. Also on the same program were Walter and Emily Walters in a skit, *The Baby's...*
Cry; Elsie Clark, billed as a "popular phonograph artist;" the Evans Brothers and Maidie du Fresne, dancers; Don Valerio and Company, wire dancers; and Bob and Al Ward as "Bertie and Archie" in Penny Ante.\footnote{News, Sun., Oct. 26, 1924, III, 6.}

Duci de Kerek Jarto, violinist; Stan Stanley, who bore the sobriquet of "nature's nobleman in the theater;" Evelyn Phillips, Eddie Simms and Joe Devaney, dancers; Sally Fields, the "Ragtime Girl;" and McDevitt, Kelly and Quinn in a skit, \textit{The Piano Movers and the Actress}, were the entertainers for the week of November 2.\footnote{News, Sun., Nov. 2, 1924, III, 7.} Irving's Imperial Midgets were the principal attraction a week later, and the program also had Jimmy Russell and Peggy Burke in a skit, \textit{Johnny's New Car}; Frank Brown and Kay Lavelle in a comedy sketch, \textit{Don't Handle the Goods}; Hal Berg and Jack English, movie doubles for actors Snub Pollard and Harold Lloyd; and Jane Barber and Jerome Jackson in a comedy and song act.\footnote{News, Sun., Nov. 9, 1924, III, 9.}

Henry Santrey brought his orchestra to the theater on November 16, and was also seen in a comedy skit with Anne Seymour. The program also had Charles and Addie Wilkens in a comedy dance; Dora Maughan, singing comedienne; and Jim Felix, dancing comedian.\footnote{News, Sun., Nov. 16, 1924, III, 8.} The classics versus jazz was a popular controversy in the 1920's, and Eva Puck and Sam White, musical comedy favorites, did a skit, \textit{Opera versus Jazz}, on the Majestic stage the following week. Harry Burns, well-known Italian comedian,

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did his popular skit, I Think You Touch, on the same bill. The program also included Nat Leipsig, billed as an "international card expert;" the C. R. Four, a male quartette; and Fritzi Brunette, described as a "celebrated actress."

On November 30, the first Interstate-Orpheum-Keith vaudeville road show brought to Dallas by the Interstate management was given at the Majestic. The theater management announced that "every act on the bill is a standard big time offering," and added that "in booking the road show, every effort is made to select those that are above the average in each line and the bill as a whole is built to provide the cream of vaudeville entertainment." Acts on the bill included James P. Conlin and Myrtle Glass in a "miniature" comedy, The Four Seasons and the Four Reasons; Harry Breen, described in the billing as a "rapid fire songwriter and singing comedian;" Eddie Carr and his company in a comic sketch, Oil; Harris and company in Three Episodes; Alyce Sheldon and Lucille Dailey in Together Again; and Snell and Vernon in An Artistic Diversion. The bill, according to the notices, was to be "run off in the usual fashion and then all the artists in the bill will unite in presenting the afterpiece." An insight into the philosophy that underlay the grouping of the vaudeville acts is gathered from the comment in the advance announcement:

The comedy angle ... has the appearance of being the keynote, for each act is a humorous one, with honors about equally divided. Conlin and Glass offer comedy of the pure nut variety, as does Harry Breen. Breen's efforts run mostly to rapid fire comedy singing and song writing. His songs are ... sung on the spur of the moment and are not premeditated, for he chooses

171 _News_, Sun., Nov. 23, 1924, III, 6.
his subjects . . . from the actions of his audience.

Eddie Carr is one of vaudeville's ablest comedians and his playlet "Oil" is comedy pure and simple with most of the laughs coming from the dialogue between a small town wise boy and a city slicker oil stock salesman.\textsuperscript{172}

Ed Janis and his company; Billy Dale and his group in The Merry Widower; Pressler and Klaiss, and Ed and Blanche, two song and dance teams; Dunbar and Turner, a "nut" act; La Hoen and Dupreece, a team that did "shooting, singing and talking;" and Ryan, Weber and Ryan in numbers from musical comedies were the entertainers on the December 7 program.\textsuperscript{173}

Zena Keefe, called in the advance notices a motion picture actress who had forsaken the films, did a singing act on the next week's bill. The same program had Jean Granese in an act with her brother Charles and with Tito de Fiore; Wade Booth, a baritone; Kimball, Goman and Company in novelty acrobatic dances; Clarence Coley and Mattie Jaxon in a skit, The Minstrel and the Maid; and an animal act, Camilla's birds, described as "pure white cockatoos."\textsuperscript{174} For the week of December 21, Harry Kranz and Al B. White did a "song-and-patter" act; Val Eichen was seen in an unusual presentation, The Antique Shop, in which, according to the advertisement, "dancing principals introduce each dance by first appearing as a figure upon Colonial art pieces." The advertisement stated that the specialties were to be "humorously introduced by Val Eichen." Others on the same bill were Joe Keno and Rosie Green in comic singing and dancing; Jim Diamond and Sibyl

\textsuperscript{172}\textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 30, 1924, III, 8.
Brennan in a comedy skit, *Something for Sale*; and Rhode and Francis, "slack wire" artists.  

Doc Baker, a protean artist, came back to the Majestic for the December 28 program after an absence of several seasons. Other acts included Violet Follis and the Douglas Sisters in a revue, *Flashes*; Benny and Western, eccentric dancers; Lillian Werlein, described in the advance notice as a former musical comedy star, in a singing act with Charles Embler; Frank Darron doing Southern negro jokes and songs; Lowell B. Drew and Ruthe Valley in a comedy skit, *At the Drug Store*; nut comedians Milt Wood and Jack White; and the customary animal act, Sylvia Loyal and Company, with "70 pure white pigeons and a brace of French poodles."  

A review of the January 5 bill indicates the quality of the vaudeville entertainment which was on the Majestic stage during these months:  

Benny Meroff and his band, Herbert Clifton in a travesty on the weaker sex, Stutz and Bingham in "The Perfect 36" and three other headline acts combine to make this week's show at the Majestic what is known in the theatrical profession as a "wow". It is without question one of the season's best offerings, and Sunday's audiences insisted on stopping each show to plead for more of the fun.  

Meroff has an unusual band, and is himself not only a musician but a remarkably clever dancer. Meroff's work and that of Frank and Milt Britton in an interjected comedy musical stunt, "The Brown Derby" received encore after encore, Meroff finally being forced to ask for a rest.  

Herbert Clifton burlesques the art of female impersonation and incidentally the weaker sex in a hilarious singing and dancing skit. He has the ability to utilize either bass or alto in his songs, while his gestures and other mimicry maintains constant laughter. He was forced to make a curtain talk and it was almost as humorous as his act.

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Stutz and Bingham have closing place on the bill but made a hit... some of their lines have been used before. Jack Hamilton and Helene Barnes have a good bit too in 'Just Fun' chiefly humorous dialogue that kept their hearers in high good humor.

Pauline Saxon and Al Belasco in "A Box Office Attraction" received top approval with comedy lines and some clever dancing. Jules Furst, the "man on the blocks" opens the show with a clever acrobatic stunt.\textsuperscript{177}

Judge Lynch, the Dallas Little Theater one-act play by Dallas playwright, John W. Rogers Jr., which had just won the first-place prize in the Belasco Cup contest in New York, was presented at the Majestic for the week of January 11, and according to the reviewer, was "appreciatively received." Other acts mentioned by the reviewer as being on the bill were Moore and Freed in what he called a "freak musical act;" Klein Brothers in \textit{Jest Moments}, described by him as "goofy talk;" Paul Remos and his midget troupe; Vera Cole, in "songs of today and other days;" and Princess Radjah, an Oriental dancer, who, according to the review, danced with a "huge snake."\textsuperscript{178}

The January 19 bill was heavily loaded with singers and skits. Fred Ardah, Earl Hall and Grace Osbourne gave a skit; another, The \textit{Night Watchman}, was presented by McKay and Ardine. The dancers included Vera Kerinska and Eduard Gezard in classical numbers, and the Keller Sisters and Lynch in what was described as a "song and dance expression of 'The Spirit of Youth'"; Lillian Gresham, called in the advertisement, the "girl with the golden voice," was assisted by Louis Lazarin and Mario Palermo in a program of songs; and the acrobats were the Yoo

\textsuperscript{177}\textit{News}, Mon., Jan. 5, 1925, 4.
\textsuperscript{178}\textit{News}, Mon., Jan. 12, 1925, 4.
Lillian Hertz and her Moro Castle orchestra came to the Majestic for the week of January 26 in a program that also included acts by Frank Devoe and Tommy Dugan. A number of well-known vaudevillians were on the February 1 program. These included Billy Lytell and Tom Fant, billed as "the two chocolate cake eaters"; Frank Walmsley and Mae Keating, nut comedians, in a skit, The Lure of the Stage; Walter C. Kelley, in his well-known act, The Virginia Judge, a courtroom scene; and Polly and Oz in a singing act. Also on the same bill were the Lloyd Ibach entertainers, featuring Kendall Capps, dancer, and Allen Quirk, saxophonist; and George Downey and Gertrude Claridge in a novelty bicycle act.

Top-notch entertainers continued to be featured in the stage presentations. Benny Rubin, well-known comedian, appeared in what was described in the advance notices as "one of the most elaborate comedy acts ever on the Majestic stage, exactly as presented by George White's Scandals, with the original cast," on the February 8 bill. Bob Carleton and Julia Ballew, who was known as the "Sweet Papa Girl," were also featured. Other acts included Felix Bernard and Sydney Townes in what was advertised as a "rapid fire song number." Sydney Landfield, comedian, in A Good Little Bad Boy; Dudley Liddell and Del Gibson, female impersonators and comedians; and Berk and Saun, dancers.

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During the following week, Martin Jackson was seen in the playlet, A Striking Affair, in a program that also featured the Ash-Goodwin "comedy four"; Val Harris and Vera Griffin in The Sheik of '61; Cunningham and Bennett in Alma Mater Mary, described in the advertisement as "a combination song-dance-skit number" which also had in its cast Arthur and Lydia Wilson, Victor Valenti, Walter Monde and Alyce Talbot; Marion Mills and Grant Kimball in a singing number; Sim Collins and Lew Hart in a travesty on stage athletes; and Mantell's Manikins, an act made up of wooden figures presenting a sketch.183

The February 22 offering had Grace Hayes, described in the advertisements as "direct from European triumphs;" Frank Parish and Steven Peru; J. Francis Dooley and Corinne Sales in a skit, Cut That Out; two radio entertainers, Ford and Glenn, advertised as the "original 'How do you do' and 'Lullaby Boys' from WLS, Chicago"; Billy Glason in a "song-and-patter" number; and Harry Waiman and his orchestra.184

The two well-known comedians, Ole Olsen and Chick Johnson, headlined the bill for the following week. The program also had a Jack De Sylva revue; Bobby Barry and Dick Lancaster in "I don't want to dance"; Claude and Marion in a comedy skit, Still Arguing; Zelaya in an act which was described as "music, wit, philosophy"; and Miss Lendsey in an animal act with her horse Sultan.185

The bill for the succeeding week had some outstanding entertainers. They included

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Hughie Clark and his company in an act, Past and Present, with music supplied by Tommy Monaco’s orchestra; Tom Smith, referred to in the advertisements as "an artist, a scholar, a gentleman"; Broomstick Elliott and Babe Latour, rube comedians, in their act, My Daddy; Achilles and Newman in a comedy athletic act; Lew Murdock and Mildred Mayo, dancers; and the Bennett Twins in The Flapperkins.186 On March 15, first-rank entertainers again held the stage. Among them were Mel Klee who enjoyed the sobriquet, "a Gentleman in Black," in his well-known blackface offering, The Prince of Wails; Florence Brady, described as "The Southern Singer," and her partner Gilbert Wells, "The Gentleman from Mississippi," in a program of blues songs; and Ray and Everett in their comedy skit, At the Cloakroom. The program included, too, Gehan and Garretson in a musical number; Al Tucker and his Society Orchestra; and Amazon and Nile, contortionists.187

Another well-known blackface comedian, Eddie Ross, came to the theater on March 22. He was known for his performances on the "African Harp." Ned Norworthy, called "the musical comedy favorite" in the advertisement, was among the other entertainers, who also numbered Crissie and Daley, eccentric comedians; Norman Telma, said in the advertisement to be a "billiardist and pantomimist;" Helen Coyne and Henry French, dancers; and the Texas Four, a Western quartette.188

Marion Harris, described in the advertisement as "the distinguished

singer of distinctive songs," headlined the bill for March 29. On the same program also were M. Alphonse Berg, a fashion designer advertised as doing "Paris fashions while you wait"; the Alexander Brothers and Evelyn in a ball bouncing act; Eddie Weber and Marion Eidnour in a dancing act; Lew Reed and Joseph Termini, billed as "the two gentlemen from nowhere," in a comedy and musical instrument novelty act; and Murray and Alan, comedians and singers.189

The April 5 bill had Lester Lane and Elsie Travers in a dance revue, assisted by Doris Judy and a company of girls; the Quixy Four, a quartette; Billy Kelly and Katherine Dearborn in an act called Picking a Peach;190 Lottie Atherton, dancer; Bruce Morgan and Thomas Moran in Legitimate Legits; and Frank and Teddy Sabin in a comedy novelty act, I Quit.191 On the bill for the week of April 12, Frank Burt and Myrtle Rosedale, called in the advertisements, "Vaudeville's supreme laugh makers," were seen in a comedy and song number, If, which was written by William K. Wells, and which included in its cast Victory Henry and Dadette. Other performers on the same bill were Bob Yates and Evelyn Carlson in Getting Soaked; Nella Arnaut and her younger brother in Musical Dansology; Val and Ernie Stanton, billed as "The English Boys from America"; and Carl Nixon and Gussie Sans in a black-face act, Assorted Chocolates.192


190In many instances it is difficult to determine from the name given the act in the advertisements just what kind of entertainment was involved.


The Majestic Theater management announced the shows for the week of April 19 as "Banner Shows," and announced that there would be "dancing for theater patrons for one hour after each night show. The program for the week had Mabel Ford on stage, assisted by Lew Golden, Harry West and the Hope Twins; Milton Spielman and his "Golden Gate Syncopators"; Dixie Hamilton, a "blues" singer; Bee Jung, described as an aerialist; Charles Sargent and Burt Lewis, singers; Ray W. Snow and Narine, in an act described as You Pick Em, a "conversation" stunt; and the Four Camerons in a comedy, Like Father Like Son, by Jack Baxley.193

The combination feature and vaudeville policy at the theater was apparently popular, for on April 26, the Majestic officials announced that the same policy would be continued throughout the summer months, except that the theater would be open continuously from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. and that there would be three shows daily and four on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. The new bills were to open on Saturday instead of Sunday, and prices were to be reduced for the summer to 35¢ for any seat in the house at matinees, except for boxes, and to 35¢ and 50¢ for night admissions. Children were to be admitted for 35¢ at any time.194

The last program for the regular 1924-1925 season brought the Weaver Brothers, Cicero and Abner, to the theater during the week of April 26. Also on the stage was the movie actor, Snub Pollard, in a skit, Say Uncle. Others on the bill included Margit Hegedus, violinist;

William Newell and Elsa Most, dancers; Fannie Simpson and Earl Dean in a comedy skit, Chop Stewey; and Dippy Diers, assisted by Flo Bennett. 195

It was during the summer of 1925 that a new type of criticism began to appear in the Dallas Morning News. Although unsigned, it bears the earmark of having been written by John Rosenfield who was just beginning work as the News Amusements Editor.

Quiet, somnolent Hickory street, landmark of Dallas, enters the hall of fame this week when Jack Ryan, Majestic comedian, accuses his partner, Hazel Webster, of dwelling in "this fashionable thoroughfare." Vaudeville audiences, accustomed to allusions to "Deep Ellum" and Fort Worth for local color, keenly appreciated the jibes. The Ryan Webster act easily tops the program's entertainment.

This Ryan chap is a study. There is nothing much to his songs and chatter, but he puts it over with a bang. Miss Webster is an accomplished accompanist. The Youngers are a pair of the finest balancers seen here in some time. The first part of their act is devoted to statuesque poses, highly impressive.

Jack Mack and Gail Rossiter indulge in hard-boiled colloquy, some of which is amusing. Mack can prance but he cannot sing. The Town Topics Review is a loosely knit affair with insipid music and poor lines. The dancing and the blackface ukelele act are high spots. The sets and costumes are unusually artistic. . . .

The Lester Harris Orchestra has a saxophone novelty for an overture which scores a hit. 196

The Majestic moved into the 1925-1926 season with vaudeville more strongly entrenched than it had ever been. Vaudeville was probably never in greater esteem in Dallas than it was at the end of the 1925 season. Only the Majestic and the Melba were presenting vaudeville

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shows at the end of the five-year period, whereas at the start of the half-decade, the shows were being given at the Old Majestic, the Hippodrome and the Jefferson, but the new Majestic and the Melba not only had far greater seating capacity than did the other three theaters, but also they were presenting shows of much higher quality. The growing prestige of vaudeville was evidenced by the decision of the Majestic to continue its presentations through the summer of 1925. During previous summers, the Majestic had either adopted a straight movie policy or else had shown musical comedies or musical stock.

The success of vaudeville at the Majestic during the five-year period stimulated other downtown theaters to follow suit. The Melba adopted a policy of Loew's vaudeville at the start of the 1925-1926 season. The Jefferson reopened as the Pantages Theater with Pantages vaudeville in January, 1926, and in March, 1926, the Palace Theater began a policy of "unit" shows that closely resembled traditional vaudeville.

At the start of the 1920 season, the Majestic still occupied the old Dallas Opera House and was devoted exclusively to vaudeville. The dramatic playlets were an important part of each week's bill and former legitimate stars often appeared in them. The vaudeville programs were presented twice a day and prices for admission still reflected war time inflation. On March 21, 1920, the admission prices were reduced to a $1.50 to $1.10 for the orchestra seats and 55¢ to 25¢ for balcony and gallery seats. The most common type of entertainers were animal trainers, cyclists, athletes and comedians. The emphasis was on unusual skills rather than on straight humor.
During the 1920-1921 season, there was even greater emphasis put on the playlets and many programs had two or three of them. Occasionally, well-known operatic stars and ballet dancers would be featured as headliners of the programs. The new Majestic Theater opened on April 11 and there began a definite improvement in the quality of the shows. The emphasis began to be placed on name stars. This trend was accentuated during the 1921-1922 season. The competition from the motion pictures became more intense than ever and the only vaudeville that could survive was the type that specialized either in spectacular effects or in stars familiar to the public.

Such stars as Vera Gordon, Julia Nash, C. H. O'Donnell, Tom Wise, Elsa Ryan, Wilbur Mack, Sarah Padden, Helen Keller, Moran and Mack, and Richard Kean were seen at the theater. Because of weather conditions which made it difficult to find name stars who would be willing to go as far South as Dallas during the spring and summer months, the regular season generally ended in late April. Until the start of the 1925 season, the theater traditionally abandoned vaudeville during the summer months. A highlight of the 1922-1923 season was the appearance of Richard Kean during the week of May 2.

At the start of the 1922-1923 season, a radical change took place in the theater's policy when it was announced that feature films would be added to the vaudeville programs. Along with this departure went a switch to three vaudeville shows a day instead of two and a cut by half in admission prices. Under the new price policy, all lower floor seats were sold for 55¢ and box and mezzanine seats for 75¢. But Karl Hoblitzelle, president of Interstate, Inc., owners of the Majestic,
insisted there would be no cutback in the quality of the shows. Another innovation was the revival of the Family Circle which had been popular during the days of the Old Opera House.

Again, during the 1922-1923 season, the emphasis was on name stars. Among those seen at the theater were Texas Guinan and Madame Besson. It was during this season that the theater launched their "clown night" entertainments, a practice popular in the larger cities, in which the entertainers on a bill put on a burlesque act once a week. These became exceedingly popular and took a prominent place in the Majestic advertisements. It was during this season that there began a marked trend away from the more dramatic playlets toward comedy sketches. Also during this period, stage and motion picture stars appeared more frequently on the vaudeville bills. Edward Arnold, Harriet Rempel, Mrs. Sidney Drew, Henry B. Walthall, and Wesley Barry all made appearances. W. C. Fields brought one of his inimitable acts to the theater in February. The trend toward jazz became evident during the spring of 1923 and name orchestras began to be seen on the Majestic stage. A high spot of the 1923 season was the personal appearance of Theodore Roberts, a well-known stage star.

Another radical departure in theater policy came about during the summer of 1923 when the theater, instead of going into straight movies for the summer, was given over to the Manhattan Musical Company, a group specializing in musical comedies. Under the guidance of Augustus Buell, the Players presented a musical comedy each week, but in spite of favorable reviews, the audiences did not respond to this form of entertainment, and the season was abruptly ended on July 6.
The Majestic reverted back to two vaudeville presentations a day at the start of the 1923-1924 season, and, in addition to feature films and vaudeville shows, also presented short films. Playlets continued to enjoy some popularity during the season, but the trend toward musical entertainment in the form of orchestras, dancers and blues singers became more pronounced than ever. Ben Bernie, Borah Minnevitch, Eva Tanguay, and Irene Franklin were typical of the performers who achieved the greatest popularity during the season with Dallas audiences.

Admitting that the experiment with a resident musical comedy company had been unsuccessful, the Majestic management during the summer of 1924 attempted a season of musical stock with the Garden Players. Each week, a production, primarily spoken, and all written by the same playwright, was presented, and musical numbers were presented as entre'actes. The experiment was fairly successful for the Garden Players were able to finish out the season.

It was during the 1924-1925 season that the dramatic playlets were almost completely abandoned and the emphasis was placed on entertainment of a more evanescent nature. The trend was definitely toward comedy, blackface acts, singers and song-and-dance acts. The programs became more varied in nature and such name band leaders as Henry Santrey, Benny Meroff, Lillian Hertz and Milton Spielman brought their orchestras to the theater from time to time.

Interstate became more closely allied with Orpheum-Keith during the season and the first of the shows, featuring some of the better entertainers in vaudeville, came to the theater on November 30. Among these were Bob Carleton, Julia Ballew, Olsen and Johnson, Mel Klee,
Florence Brady, Gilbert Wells, Eddie Ross, Marion Harris, Lew Reed, Joseph Termini, Van and Ernie Stanton, Lew Golden and the Weaver Brothers--indicative of the greater stature Dallas had acquired in the vaudeville picture.

But in spite of the name stars and the gradual shifts in taste, the basic staple of vaudeville continued the same. The form continued to depend, for the most part, on the animal acts, the aerialists and athletes, the song-and-patter acts, the nut comedians and the novelty dancers. There was little evidence, however, at the end of the 1925 season, of the public dissatisfaction with the medium, brought about by its sameness year after year, that was to be a strong factor in its eventual decline and disappearance from the theatrical scene.
CHAPTER VIII

FROM VAUDEVILLE TO MUSICAL STOCK - THE JEFFERSON

One of the older vaudeville houses in the city, the Jefferson Theater had been on the Pantages circuit since 1918, and at the start of 1920 had a weekly policy of six vaudeville acts plus feature pictures. Vaudeville was thriving sufficiently in Dallas in 1920 to support three theaters. Both in terms of types of audiences and in terms of quality of programs, the downtown theaters constituted a hierarchy, with the Majestic at the top, the Jefferson next, and the Hippodrome on the lower rung. Below this came the various tabloid and musical stock houses. When the new Majestic, the Melba and the Palace theaters were constructed, this structure of rank became even more evident. The three new theaters were considered the quality houses. The Jefferson and Hippodrome, unable to compete with the high-class programs shown by the Majestic, changed to dramatic stock and to musical stock. The "big three" with their giant seating capacities, their tie-ins with nationally-prominent entertainment ventures, and their financial reserves that enabled them to weather poor weeks dominated the Dallas entertainment scene throughout the 1920's. But this was not the case at the start of 1920. The Majestic was still in its leased quarters at the Old Opera House and had not yet launched into the policy of vaudeville programs featuring headline entertainers.
The Jefferson and the Hippodrome both offered the Majestic lively competition. The Jefferson had weekly changes of programs and there were three shows daily—a matinee at 2:30 p.m. and night shows at 7:00 and 9:00 p.m. Its vaudeville continued through the summer months.

January through June 1920

The bill for the week of January 4 at the Jefferson is illustrative of the type of vaudeville entertainment offered at the theater. On the program were the Six Venetian Gypsies, "Frolicking in a Gypsy Camp"; Seven Royal Uyene Japs, "Marvelous and sensational Oriental pastimes, introducing Japan's foremost exponents of Risley and Equilibristic specialties"; Lady Alice's Pets, "Tiny Tots of Animaldom"; The Makarenkes, "Operatic singers and entertainers"; and Weber and Elliott, "Harmonious Songsters and Funsters."

Also typical is the style of humor purveyed by Winn Shaw and Lester Bernard in an act called The Mosquito Trust, which was presented at the theater during the following week, and which was said by the reviewer to "issue one-thousand shares of laughter in the Mosquito Trust to every patron." The reviewer continued:

Shaw tells the audience that by corraling all the mosquitoes in the world and charging ten cents a month to every individual not to let the skeets loose, a person would make a million. He's got the idea.

Dramatic playlets were popular on the Pantages vaudeville circuit, just as they were on the Keith-Orpheum vaudeville circuit which

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played the Majestic. For the week starting January 18, Earl B. Mountain and Harry Bulger, Jr., appeared in Oh, Billy. The Pantages circuit presented more miniature musical comedies than did the rival circuit. Elaine Gray, Jo Berg "and a Batch of Broadway Beauties," offered their musical comedy on the same bill. During the week of January 25, there was a "vaudevilleized Comic Opera in One Act," Oh, Teddy, with Tommy Toner and Hudson Freeborn. Others on the same bill included Frank Bush, "the Great American Story teller"; George Howard, violinist; Cook and Vernon in a comedy act; Heras and Preston in an acrobatic act.

The Three White Kuhns, western singers; the Three Bartos, athletes; the Four Leons, tight rope walkers; Gertrude Long and Spencer Ward in a "song and patter" act; and Bernice LaBarr and her company in a playlet, Tears, were on the stage during the week of February 1.

It can be seen that the Pantages followed the orthodox vaudeville pattern even more than did Keith-Orpheum. The pattern allowed for a variety of acts on each show—an athlete, a skit, a "song-and-dance" act; and a comedian.

The abbreviated musical comedy for the week of February 8 was Temptation with Bobby Vail and a company of ten persons. The program also had its eccentric comedians, Dunbar and Turner; its straight comedians, Quigley & Fitzgerald; and its patter artist, Frank Ward.

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Oriental "wonderworkers," K. T. Kuma and his company; a song-and-dance team, Wolfe and Patterson; a comedy skit, Mon Chapeau with Amoros and Jeanette; a ventriloquist, W. E. Whittle; and Louise Gilbert, singer and dancer were the performers the following week. Another revue, with Dixie White, "Isabelle" and Victoria Webster headlined the bill for the week of February 22. A midget act, Al Prince and Rita Bell in a comedy and song act, and Kusel & Greenwald in a "Telephone" skit were also on the program. The advertisement carried the announcement that the theater would have a "Country Store" event every Friday night.

This was a "giveaway" program.

Slatko's Midnight Rollickers, billed as "the world's fastest whirlwind dancers," together with their own orchestra, were the principal entertainers on the February 29 program. Others in the acts were the Bison City Four, a comedy singing quartet; Arnold & Florenz in a skit, The Man with the Bottles; Will Burns & Ed Lynn in a "tap" number, and Mabel Naynon and her "troupe of trained tropical birds." The Four Casting Campbells, comedians and aerialists; the Beatrice Morrell Sextette in mood dancing; Gene Mason and Fay Cole, and Jessie Maker and Billy Redford, were the entertainers for the March 7 program. For March 14, there was Harry Girard & Company; the Bernivici Brothers; Cardo and Noll, singers; Simpson & Dean; and

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Raymond Wilbert, "The Unusual Fellow."

An unusual novelty was presented during the week of March 21 at the theater when movie scenes were made on stage using local talent. Verna Mercereau and George McCormack did a dance drama, Reincarnation; the Gallons appeared with their "lunatic sticks;" Harry and Etta Conley presented At the Old Crossroad; and William Dick did an act of singing while playing instruments to round out the bill. A "kiddie revue" was presented the week of March 28 by Maude Daniels. There were echoes of the war in the skit, The War Zone, presented by Happy Jack Gardner and his company. The program also included Forest and Church in "A Vaudeville Rhapsody;" DePage and the Yorkov Sisters, a song trio; and Stephens and Brunelle in "bits of musical comedy."

One of the popular vaudeville circuses was seen the following week, featuring the "world-famed $50,000 herd of military elephants." They were said to be "Four of the largest elephants in the world." Carrying out the circus motif was another act, The International Nine, acrobatic tumblers and gymnasts; and the Novelle Brothers, musical clowns. Mier and the Gibson Sisters were also presented in a gymnastic novelty.

Another troupe of athletes, the Five Petrowars, were featured for the week of April 11. Herman Meyer, comedian, pianist, imitator,
and singer was on the same bill, as too were George and Mae LeFevre, novelty dancers with "costumes valued at $10,000"; Ran Lawrence, "Just an American Girl; Archer & Beford in a comedy skit, The New Janitor; and Ward and King in a song-and-dance act."\textsuperscript{15}

It can be seen from the tags attached to the description of the various acts that newspaper readers of the theater advertisements must have been hard put at times to know what the nature of the act was.

The tag "An American Girl" mentioned above is an example of this. Another is found in the \textit{News} advertisement for the April 18 program where the Norvellos were given the caption "An Artistic Studio." The same program had the Corinthians, called "Vaudeville's Most Wonderful Voices," in "A Melodious Memory of 100 years Age." The Hickman Brothers, "blackface funsters," and Howard and White in a comedy skit, The Gadabouts, were on the same bill.\textsuperscript{16} Still another troupe of acrobats, the Gelli Troupe, came to the theater the following week. The program also had Reach and McCurdy, rube comedians; Cowboy Frank Shield in a Will Rogers-like type of act, "a lariat novelty that is humorously presented"; and Patton, Yantis, and Rooney, "a trio of melodious beauties from Harmony Land."\textsuperscript{17}

The May 2 bill had two acts reminiscent of the late war, the Yip Yap Yaphankers in \textit{A Day at Camp}, and La France & Kennedy in \textit{After

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\textsuperscript{15}News, Sun., Apr. 11, 1920, II, 5.
\textsuperscript{16}News, Sun., Apr. 18, 1920, II, 4.
\textsuperscript{17}News, Sun., Apr. 25, 1920, II, 4.
the Battle. The ambiguous tag of Smiles accompanied the billing of Love and Wilbur Speed, and Naida Norraine, "The girl with the Phenomenal Voice," completed the program.\textsuperscript{18} There was good balance in the May 9 program with The Mellos, "aerialists;" Henry and Adelaide, dancers; The Great Howard, ventriloquist; the Chuang Haw Four, a Chinese quartette; and the "7 Glasgow Maids," in Scotch dances.\textsuperscript{19}

Another balanced combination of acts came on May 16 when J. C. Lewis, Jr., a midget comedian; Kenney, Mason & Schell, skaters; the Peerless Trio, comedians and musicians; Cecilia Rhoda and George Crampton, singers; and Bub Snyder & Joe Melini, comedians, were presented.\textsuperscript{20}

The advertisement for May 23 carried announcement of the theater's "typhoon cooling system," and the statement that it was "The coolest house in Dallas." And the bill for the week had a "hot weather touch" with the presentation of "Henriette de Serris and her famous models direct from the life classes of the noted French institute in Paris." The Three Mori Brothers on the same bill titled their act "Japanese Pastimes;" and Eldridge, Barlow and Eldridge did one of the familiar "rube" acts, \textit{A Rural Delivery}. Bert Stoddard was seen in a skit, \textit{The Forgetful Teacher}; and Austin Goltz and Fay Duffy were presented as "Manufacturers of Melody and Mirth."\textsuperscript{21} During the week of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{18}]\textit{News}, Sun., May 2, 1920, II, 4.
\item[\textsuperscript{19}]\textit{News}, Sun., May 9, 1920, II, 4.
\item[\textsuperscript{20}]\textit{News}, Sun., May 16, 1920, II, 4.
\item[\textsuperscript{21}]\textit{News}, Sun., May 23, 1920, II, 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
May 30, a "deluxe $500,000" movie, The Virgin of Stamboul, was seen at the theater as the sole attraction and an idea of the price range can be gained from that at which the film could be seen: matinee 11¢ and 22¢; night, 11¢, 22¢ and 33¢. On the June 6 bill were Frankie Keiley and Fred Lancaster in a "musical tabloid," The Brazilian Heiress; Martha Hamilton and her company in a comedy playlet, Oh, You Women; the Marconi Brothers, returning war veterans, billed as "convalescent entertainers"; Lieutenant Harry Berry in a sketch, The Army's Versatility; and James Luchter, advertised as the "discoverer of Piano Comedy."

The 1920-1921 Season

In July of 1920, the Jefferson was acquired by the Lynch-Hulsey interests from the Jefferson Theater Company for $176,700. The Hulsey-Lynch interests announced that there would be no change in policy and that Pantages vaudeville would be continued. The officials of Hulsey-Lynch, E. H. Hulsey, A. T. Morrison and L. L. Dent of Dallas organized Texas Enterprise, Inc., a venture designed "to buy and erect opera and playhouses." The 1920-1921 season at the theater started out in much the same manner as during the previous three years. The bill for the week of December 9, 1920, is a typical listing: The Dancing Serenaders; Delea and Orma in "Six Feet of Comedy"; King Brothers, "Herculean Comedy Athletes"; David S. Hall and Company in What Really Happened—"a clever domestic satire in three episodes"; and Charles

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Martin, "The Cowboy Baritone."  

One change made during the 1920-1921 season was that new programs were offered at the theater twice weekly, on Thursdays and Sundays, instead of once a week.

Occasionally the theater devoted its entire vaudeville time to a single musical revue. On December 23, Buzzin Around, a forty-minute version of what was advertised as "Broadway's dazzling spectacular musical comedy," was presented for a three-day run by Will Morrissey, and featured Jack Hallen and Little Margaret Osborn.

The reviewer of the show stated that "any lover of beauty either in femininity song or scenic effects... will revel in 'Buzzin Around'... Jack Hallen is a comedian of high order, Margaret Osborn a dancer of unusual merit, and Gladys Gerrish, Paul Murray and Horton Horrell complete the cast of capable principals." The reviewer called the music "tuneful," and the comedy "fast," and stated that "if there is a girl in the company who is not a good looker, she was too sick to appear Thursday."  

Maleta Bonconi, described in the advertisement as "celebrated European virtuoso... former accompanist of Mme. Schumann-Heink," was on the January 13 bill. Dramatic playlets became more frequent at about this time at the Jefferson, just as they did at the Majestic.

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The January 23 bill had Pearl E. Abbott in *Silver Threads*, and the March 6 program featured William E. Morris in *Did You Vote?* described in the advance notice as a "comedy satire that has a domestic theme and brings out the folly of being disinterested in civic affairs and the necessity of casting your vote intelligently." The reviewer commented about the sketch that "the jokes are not of the time-worn variety and the skit boasts three persons who can really act."

The playlet, *Breakfast for Three*, presented April 4, also drew praise from the reviewer who called it "a skit of a drunk who has a hard time finding his breakfast because the maid has given all the food on the place to the policeman on the beat." The reviewer took notice of the "many ludicrous situations" and commented that the playlet "makes a big hit with the crowd."

Neal Barrett, who presented the playlet *The Rounder of Old Broadway* on April 30, was called by the reviewer "an actor of rare ability who has surrounded himself with a group of artists that would do credit to any legitimate production."

Two weeks later, Harry Mason was seen in *Getting Money.*

The Jefferson went on the Loew's vaudeville circuit early in

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32 *News*, Mon., Apr. 4, 1921, 4.
33 *News*, Sun., May 1, 1921, II, 4.
June and part of the June 2 program was a playlet, *Show Me*, given by Walter Fenner and his company.\(^{35}\) Vaudeville continued at the theater throughout the summer with the Jefferson advertising itself in the summer months as "The Only vaudeville show in Dallas."\(^{36}\) A playlet, *The Frame-Up*, featuring Dena Cooper and advertised as "creating a sensation throughout the Loew's circuit," was given as part of the August 4 bill.\(^{37}\)

**The 1921-1922 Season**

Loew's vaudeville was at the Jefferson until January 6, 1922, when the theater policy underwent a basic change. Vaudeville acts were abandoned, and instead a resident company, headed by Tony and Virginia Klumker, "now using the name of Grey," former Dallas stage favorites who had played at the Feature Theater before they went into vaudeville, presented musical comedies.\(^{38}\) Others in the company were Loretta Ray, prima donna-ingenue; Blanche Schwed, soubrette; William A. Harney, Harold S. Orr, George Roland, and Ralph Wilson. There was also a ten-member "beautiful chorus."\(^{39}\) Known as Tonie Grey's Musical Revue, the company opened its first show on January 15, after the theater had been dark for a week for alterations. The advertisements stated that the theater was "ready for a season of musical comedies of

\(^{35}\) *News*, Thurs., June 2, 1921, 4.

\(^{36}\) *News*, Sun., June 26, 1921, II, 6.


\(^{38}\) *News*, Fri., Jan. 6, 1922, 4.

the higher standard. Productions that will thoroughly please every member of the family; attractions worthy of the regular attendance of ladies and gentlemen.  

The criticism of the show indicates the distinction that was drawn between tabloid shows and production type musicals:

An entertainment of class was presented yesterday at the Jefferson Theater . . . "Winners-Losers" a miniature musical comedy of the highest order. It is not really what is familiarly known as a "tab" show but comes in the production class.

The plot is clever, the comedy infectious, and the acting worthy of the name . . . Principals were Miss Loretta Ray, ingenue; Miss Blanche Schwed, soubrette; Harold Orr, George Roland, Ralph Wilson and William Harmey. They carried the subtle comedy of the story in fine style and laughs came from the audience so often that they might almost be said to have been continuous . . . Along with the musical comedy the Jefferson is showing "Moral Fiber", a moving picture of considerable class itself.

The titles of the productions seen at such theaters as the Jefferson and the Happyland indicate that the shows were written especially for the companies which presented them. This is borne out by a comment made in the News about Pete Pate whose company was at the Jefferson for extended stays during the 1923-1924 and the 1924-1925 seasons:

He not only takes a leading part in every play but finds time to write many of the lines, write the lyrics for several songs which have been hits, assist generally in the production, and write for several theatrical publications.

There is added evidence in the fact that the resident musical stock companies, unlike the resident legitimate companies, made no mention of

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royalties in their advertisements. Also, titles like *Winners-Losers*, *Be Careful, Father*, *Mama's Boy*, *All Tangled Up*, *In and Out*, etc., suggest this "home-made" quality.

*Be Careful, Father*, was presented on January 22, \(^{13}\) and the next day, Nash Weil, manager of the Jefferson, announced that Dot Keyes, "popular Dallas actress of a number of years," had joined the company as a soubrette for a limited engagement.

The review of the next production, *Mama's Boy*, indicates how close the Jefferson entertainment was to the tabloid show type:

Miss Keyes makes the company much more well-rounded than it was and "*Mama's Boy*" proved an altogether delightful musical comedy. . . . The plot is a scream. . . . Miss Grey, William Harney and Miss Keyes sang "Swanee Moon" as a trio in real artistic fashion. . . . The thing that stopped the show was "When Dan Riddle Played the Fiddle" first sung by Miss Keyes, after which the chorus accompanied, after which she played the violin while members of the chorus and others danced.

Eph Charminsky and his Jefferson orchestra opened the program with a specialty number playing "The Sheik," as beautiful art scenes giving the verses were thrown on the screen. . . . This feature drew a good round of applause.\(^{44}\)

For *All Tangled Up* given the week beginning February 12, the finale, described by the critic as "the most artistic yet presented by the Tonie Grey Musical Revue," had "the beauty chorus . . . driven out into the stage all garbed in white, with red ribbon reins gathered into the hands of little Buddy Rice as Cupid, and a swarm of big red hearts come fluttering down as the curtain falls." The plot, too, as described by the critic, was typical of the musical stock or tabloid show genre:


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The comedy is built around a triple love affair with all three women jealous of Suzette. They have heard of a French actress by that name—men, who have not, think of Suzette as a racehorse and gold mine and it surely is a tangled up affair before a series of telegrams straighten it all out.\(^6\)

Later in the season, specialty acts were added with other performers sometimes appearing as guest artists. Roscoe Humphrey, "late star of Lasses White Minstrels and Al G. Field's Greater Minstrels," was the added attraction when the Tonie Grey company presented *In and Out* during the week of March 12.\(^6\) On March 19, the management announced that they had "succeeded in securing two of the most talented musical comedy stars on the operatic stage, Lillian Bessent and Billie Hackett," as permanent members of the Grey company. Lillian Bessent had come from New York where she had been associated with "The Garden of Frolics," and Hackett had been "leading man for the Sherman Stock Company in Evansville, Indiana."\(^7\) A review of Lillian Bessent's debut in *The Policeman* at the Jefferson stated that "she simply holds the crowd in the hollow of her hand."\(^8\) Ada Driffill, a mezzo-soprano, joined the company on March 26 and her voice was said to be "much better than the average heard in musical stock."\(^9\)

An added feature during the week of April 17 was Vishnu, "World's most celebrated mystic marvel introducing for the first time hypnotism

\(^{45}\) *News, Mon., Feb. 13, 1922, 4.*  
\(^{46}\) *News, Sun., Mar. 12, 1922, II, 12.*  
\(^{48}\) *News, Mon., Mar. 20, 1922, 4.*  
\(^{49}\) *News, Mon., Mar. 26, 1922, 4.*
The review stated:

Vishnu called for volunteers and succeeded in getting several people on the stage. He hypnotized these men and put them through all sorts of stunts to the general amusement of the audience. It was announced that he would put a young woman into a hypnotic sleep by radio Tuesday night and that she would sleep twenty-four hours in one of the downtown store windows.

This was a feat that was to be attempted several times during the next fifteen years. Another type of program that was to prove very popular was the "sex advice" show. One given at the Jefferson for three days beginning May 3 was typical. The advertisement read:

Are you fit to marry? Women only admitted at matinee. Men only admitted at night. The selfish man and the sacrificing woman. Scenes of realism that baffle, stagger the imagination. Special attraction, Martha E. Lavacek, professional nurse and social worker will give a most interesting lecture to the ladies. Dr. H. J. Grooks will talk to the men. Revealing the darkest secrets of life. Come prepared to see something entirely new on the screen.

Tonie Grey's company ended its engagement with the performance of Honeymoon Isle and the scale of prices ranging from 10¢ to 30¢ went into effect for the summer on May 7.

During the summer season, itinerant musical comedy companies, furnished by the Hyatt Musical Comedy Circuit, played the Jefferson. The first of these was Martin's Footlight Follies, and its leading comedian was Jack Adair, a Dallas boy, "son of W. S. Adair of the Dallas News editorial department and ... quite well known around

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Others in the company included Leo Add, seen in Dallas earlier with the Olympia Opera Company and at the Coliseum during the fair several years earlier, and W. F. Martin, the original "Mutt" in the stage play based on the comic strip. Adair, a blackface comedian, was said by the reviewer to "vie with Babe Smith, petite and winsome little soubrette, for first honors in the show."

A week later the company at the Jefferson was Lake Reynolds' "Cute Little Devils," who presented Love, Sweetheart. According to the review:

The show is full of specialties that interrupt the plot here and there . . . Lake and May Reynolds, both home folks have a novelty singing act in which they do harmony yodeling, quite new to show business. A baritone of note, Fred G. Brown, is here . . . Three other boys try their hand in a songologue under the name of the Brimstone trio. Little Billy Stone is another of the specialty artists and dances upside down.

During the summer months, the programs were changed twice weekly and Lake Reynolds presented The New Recruit as his second offering.

On Sunday, May 21, Ed Gardner's "Echoes of Broadway" company opened at the theater for the week and featured a "Baby Vamp Chorus." The same company stayed another week, giving Derby Dal in Dixie, "a tale of the Kentucky Hills" and Going Some. The "Broadway Jingles Company"

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followed at the theater, highlighted by a specialty number featuring Moore and Shy, "Moore tips the scales at 160 while Shy weighs 90." 60 The rest of the summer season was taken up with motion pictures, changed four times a week and accompanied by a "photoplayer" organ. 61

The 1922-1923 Season

Except for an added tendency to become more of a straight tabloid theater, the Jefferson continued in 1922-23 much as it had during the previous year. Companies came and went, some staying a week, some for months at a time. In December, it was the Margaret Lillie Company, presenting musical revues interspersed with three acts of vaudeville. 62 The revue for Thursday, December 28, was My Aunt from Utah in which Miss Lillie was the aunt and George Hall "the hick sheriff who also has come to town." The bill was said in the advance notice to be one of the company's favorites "as it has quite a little of pathos mixed in with the humor." The notice also stated that the "specialties changed with the numbers," indicating that there were songs and dances between the acts. 63 A Pair of Old Kids was the presentation for December 31 and the review stated that "Margaret Lillie has done herself proud."

With all her usual colloquial humor and her homely countenance, she is assisted by George Hall, Jack Sneed, Art Hall, and eight of the best looking girls possible for a

chorus.
The versatile humor and the easy going conversation of the little comedienne is the hit of the show. Margaret is good and she has a clean show that is full of joy, color, comedy and suspense.

The extent to which entre-act entertainment had taken over the program was suggested by the reviewer when he wrote:

The subject of the playlet this week is "Mrs. Wood" and Art Hall dressed as a woman, causes a good deal of mirth. The little blond boy has a good pose and although he lacks the riotous humor that is characteristic of his parents, he has an easy grace and likeable personality.

Hope Emerson, who was later to achieve a national reputation as an entertainer, was one of the members of the company, and the reviewer stated about her:

Miss Hope Emerson standing 6 feet 2 and weighing more than two-hundred pounds is the best when it comes to size. She has an act that she gives as an intermission that brought cheers to the weary.

The review continued:

Three other vaudeville acts were presented. Miss Ruth Curry, the little red haired singer and dancer has a great deal of expression and feeling in her comic songs, "The Great Kinsner," with his remarkable lifting and balancing stunts, held the attention of the audience. He supported everything from a racing sulky to a turning plow and then back to a simple feather. "No Name," the human doll, was startling and clever. He first appears as a mechanical doll and then steps from the pose he has held so faithfully into that of an ordinary individual.

Will Debrow and his "Blue Grass Belles" moved into the theater on January 14, 1922, and Debrow's solo was praised in the review as was "a yodeling number with the chorus chirping the accompaniment." The bill was said by the reviewer to be "one of those comedies which all

\[\text{64}^{\text{61}}\text{News, Mon., Jan. 1, 1923, 4.}\]
tab show audiences know by heart . . . the audience got most of its entertainment out of the specialties, which are really good." As for the acts preceding the main show, the reviewer commented:

The young woman who was produced from the mammoth oyster shell was pretty and danced in satisfactory manner, but there wasn't much illusion to the act as it was staged.

The balcony was openly hostile to the magician, who pulled a lot of old tricks with equipment which was battered with age and too long service. The girl who assisted him however was good looking enough so that many in the audience watched her and rested their eyes instead of seeing her partner do just what everybody knew he would.65

By January 28, 1923, the Jefferson had passed into the hands of R. J. Stinnett. The first show under the new management was Jen Gladstone's "Merry Madcaps Musical Revue," featuring Gladstone as originator of "the violin dance;" the Hern Family, "comedians of the old school;" Billy Kent, "rube comedian;" and the Stewart Brothers, musicians.66 Then in February, Jimmie Allard, who was to become one of the city's most popular entertainers during the 1920's, came to the theater with his musical revue. Allard had already, for a number of years, been "one of the most popular tab show comedians."67 He was greeted, according to the review, "by a large and enthusiastic audience."

The description of the scenery for the show throws light upon scenic practices in the Jefferson and similar theaters:

Manager Ray Stinnett had scenic artists make this one of the prettiest sets ever seen here for a musical show. The backdrop shows a beautiful lake, the summer house to one side of the stage is a rustic bower and two handsome blue lamps are

at the entrance to the millionaire's residence.

As for Allard, the reviewer commented that "singing one of his 'blues' numbers . . . he took first honors. Jimmie worked with the chorus and then with dainty little Bessie Collar. . . . He finally had to beg for mercy before the crowd would let the show proceed."68

Harry Lewis and his "Honeymoon Town" company opened for the March 7 week after being proclaimed by Manager Ray Stinnett as "one of the finest tab show companies on the road,"69 and the reviewer particularly praised Frank Hughes as "the black face comedian," and William Mifflin as "the inebriate from Chicago."70

Marshall Walker and his "Whizz Bang Revue" company followed three days later,71 and then on April 8, Jimmie Allard returned.72 Margaret Lillie was back on April 15 for a week,73 and on May 24 the "Jazzmania Revue" presented a musical version of Lena Rivers. The event was advertised as "the first time 'Lena Rivers' has been offered in this form on any stage." The lead was taken by Lillian Colson, and other roles were played by Billie Earle as Durward; Vi Gilbert as Nancy; Laura Pollette as Caroline, the villainess; and F. Hap. Jones as Joel Slocum.74 The same company presented Rocking the Boat, described

in the advance notices as "one of the funniest plays in Mr. Wilson's repertoire." The theater closed for the summer season after this production.

The 1923-1924 Season

The Forth Bros. Musical Comedy company were at the theater when it reopened on October 6, 1923, headed by Russ Forth, an eccentric comedian, presenting as his first offering, Pals, a "crook" play. Others in the cast were Allen Forth, Mary Rollins, Vi Gilbert, Laura Pollette and Irene Forth. The notices carried the announcement that the following Wednesday the Jefferson scoreboard would "go into action . . . when the first world series game between the Yankees and the Giants will be shown. This scoreboard gives the game play by play." A similar device was to be employed in the downtown theaters later for championship boxing matches.

In October, 1923, the theater was sold by Ray Stinnett to Laskin Brothers, headed by Gabriel Laskin and his brother Aaron. Ray Stinnett, the veteran Dallas showman who sold the theater, stated that he had given it up so that he could give more time to the Capitol Theater which was being managed jointly by himself and Si Charminsky. The Laskin Brothers changed the theater back to a resident company policy and disclosed that they would bring in Pete Pate's "Syncopated Steppers," a musical comedy group with thirty persons. The Laskins stated:

We are giving Dallas what we consider to be the best tabloid musical company in America. It is headed by Pete Pate and Bud Morgan, blackface comedians, and Miss Lillian Murray will be the leading lady. Fred Fauntleroy, a talented young vaudeville entertainer, will be an added attraction on the same bill. Raleigh Dent will be the manager at the Jefferson.

The theater was shut down from October 19 to October 28, the day it officially changed hands, and in the interim was remodeled and redecorated. Raleigh Dent, the new manager, promised that the pace that would be set by the resident company would be "fast and furious, but absolutely clean in every respect." The opening show for the new company was *Hello, Dallas*, and included in the cast were Lillian Murray, comedienne, Ruby Pilgreen, "one of the most famous blues singers of the South"; Kitty McCoy, Betty Conners, Ethel Levy, Elmer Wright, Chuck Hoback, Fred Fauntleroy, and Bob McDaniel. Pete Pate, the company's principal comedian, was described in the advance notice as "a remarkable actor," and Dent's presentations were said to "run to musical dancing and comedy shows with the latest of footlight fashions."

Pete Pate and his company scored a remarkable success, for three weeks later, the *News* carried the following comment:

The popular appeal of Pete Pate and his associates, supported by the Syncopated Steppers, was evidenced Sunday when the Jefferson theater was packed at all performances. At times, the line before the box office assumed problematical proportions, and the jam in the foyer of the theater was but little relieved by those leaving when the shows were completed.

Pate and his company concentrated more on a straight dramatic

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offering the week of December 17 when they presented Lena Rivers, said by the reviewer to be a "creditable presentation." The reviewer praised Janet Kennedy as fitting "admirably into the title role," and he also lauded Kitty McCoy in the role of the half-sister. The witty interchange between Pete Pate in the role of Joel and Lillian Murray, cast as Lena's aunt, were described by the reviewer as "highly amusing," and he observed that "specialties are few." The review indicated that feature pictures were being shown on the Jefferson programs. 81

Pete Pate left the Jefferson for two weeks in January, 1924, and while he was gone, Lucy Paka and her Hawaiians, an act that had appeared during the previous week and that had "been such a hit here that Manager Dent has decided to hold them over for another week." 82

Pate, described in the announcement as "unquestionably one of the most popular comedians who ever pleased a Dallas audience," returned to the theater on February 10. 83

The stay of Pate and his company at the theater continued until June 29, closing their stay with the production, Pete's Secrets. The advertisements by this time were referring to Pate and his partner, Bud Morgan, as "Dallas' Greatest Idols." They were succeeded the following week by "The Pepper Box Revue." 84

The opening performance of the new company, according to the reviewer, ran into a Dallas-Shreveport double header on the electric

scoreboard "as opposition on their own stage. . . ." The reviewer observed that it was not until the Sunday night performance that the production, Stepping Time, "really got into action," and that it proved "extremely popular." He praised Morris Harding and Skinny Kimling, blackface artists and producers for the company, as "distinctly different both in work and appearance from Pete Pate and Bud Morgan, whom they succeeded. Their blackface double was one of the best liked spots on the program." He listed among the specialties performed as part of the entertainment the male chorus made up of Kimling, Billy Elliott, Bill Debrow and Tim Moore; the eight chorus girls; the Ragsdale sisters in a "classy song and dance number;" Harry Rollins singing a ballad; Virginia Thornton doing a song and buck dance; Bill and Kate Debrow in a double number; and Charlotte Earl, Bee Williams, Nellie Cooper, Tim Moore and Bill Elliott.85

Jolly Grimes, described in the advance notices as "the one-man band, said to be one of the greatest hits in the business," joined the Pepper Box Revue company late in July. Dent also brought in Leon Miller, "female impersonator and vaudeville star."86 The "Jolly Jolliers" company came into the Jefferson on July 27, advertised as having achieved "one of the most successful long runs ever made in Detroit." In announcing the new company, Dent stated: "I promised my Dallas friends that I would have nothing but the best in the way of amusements . . . Pete and Bud, who played seventy-five consecutive performances here were among the most popular comedians ever seen in

Dallas. In the cast of the new company were Jack (Gee) Van, juvenile and light comedy man; Walter Steffens, blackface comedian; Verne Phelps, blackface comedian and tenor; Dora Cullenbine; Hallene Stanzel, prima donna; Martin Burke, and Frances Strong, and the opening bill was called All Aboard for Denver.

The automatic scoreboard, used daily during the baseball season, kept interfering with the rest of the entertainment as is evidenced by the review of the production:

Although the automatic scoreboard at the Jefferson Theater is attracting most of the attention during the baseball season, the theater opened Sunday with a new show "The Jolly Jolliers" in All Aboard for Denver. Sunday afternoon only a ragged performance was given, but a regular show was given in the evening. Plans to give full shows each evening have been made as the afternoons are taken up with the baseball scoreboard.

The 1924-1925 Season

Pete Pate, Bud Morgan and the "Syncopated Steppers" returned to the Jefferson during the 1924-1925 season. The theater, in February, 1925, was advertised as the "greatest amusement bargain in the South," and priced were quoted as 10¢ and 25¢ both matinees and nights. On April 19 the company began its final week at the theater with the production of Unsettled Weather. Dent, the theater manager, announced that the two comedians "have played more than one hundred and fifty bills in Dallas without a repetition." They were replaced by Harley

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88 News, Mon., July 28, 1924, l.
89 News, Mon., Feb. 16, 1925, l.
Sadler's Own Company, a musical stock troupe that announced it would "present three and four act comedies and dramas, inaugurating a new stock policy which heretofore has presented plays of the tab variety."
The first presentation was *When Toby Hits New York*, given on April 26. Among members of Sadler's company were Kelly Masters, leading man; Ethel Snow, leading woman; Wayne Oliver, ingenue and vaudeville performer; Ted Chase, light comedy man and vaudeville performer; Bart Couch, "juvenile and song artist;" Bertha Creighton, "one of the greatest portrayers of 'mother roles' Dallas has ever known;" Marvin J. Landrum, "vaudeville artist from big time circuits and character actor;" Rose Gross, ingenue and juvenile;" and Ralph Edwards, "heavy actor." The program was also to include "a number of vaudeville features, a comedy, news reel and feature on the screen."^91^ The Sadler company had program changes on Thursdays and Sundays.
The April 30 presentation was *Jealous Wives;*^92^ that for May 3, *Honest Sinners and Saintly Hypocrites;*^93^ and for May 7, *The Country Boy.*^94^ On May 10, *The Man from Texas* by Jim Bailey was given featuring Billie Sadler, Harley Sadler, Ted Chase, Ethel Snow, Bertha Creighton, Marvin Landrum and the Jefferson Serenaders. The advertisement stated that "three thousand more persons attended the Jefferson last week than did the week before," and new vaudeville was promised between the acts.^95^

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The Lone Star Ranch, written by Charles Harrison, was offered on May 14, and for May 17 the presentation was Sonny Boy. Sputters was the presentation for May 22, and Shoplifters for May 24. The farewell offering of the company was named appropriately The Last Trail, and after its final presentation on Saturday, May 30, the Jefferson closed down for the summer.

The Jefferson had begun in 1920 as a leading Dallas vaudeville theater in 1920, and by 1925 had traveled the full route toward becoming a tabloid house. This marked a downward trend not only in prestige but also in the cost of the productions. The decline of the theater began with construction of the new Majestic. The Jefferson, smaller in size and lacking the funds of the Interstate company, could not hope to compete with such a theater as the Majestic in the style of its presentations and the importance of its performers. There is the added factor that the movies were gaining in popularity and only the best vaudeville could survive in the face of such competition. The Jefferson, unable to hold the high class clientele, had to make its bid for audiences that preferred entertainment on a lower level. It did this by lowering its price scale and by housing companies, both traveling and touring, that specialized in presentations catering to mass taste. This move was

96 News, Thurs., May 14, 1925, 16.
undoubtedly motivated also by the fact that it was less expensive to pay these companies than it was to pay vaudeville performers of the kind featured at the Majestic or on the Loew's circuit. The Jefferson did not immediately move into the tabloid show class. An attempt was made to keep alive the prestige of the theater with a resident company that presented musical comedies. This proved unprofitable and touring companies took over—the kind that had a repertoire of their own original scripts and that presented vaudeville acts of a popular nature between the acts and before and after performances. The theater had a good find in Pete Pate and Bud Morgan, tabloid performers, who gave more than one-hundred and fifty different shows. By 1925, Harley Sadlers and his company, devoted to musical stock, had moved into the theater.

The career of the Jefferson during the five-year period was being duplicated at similar theaters throughout the nation. Many of them had already abandoned live entertainment and had adopted an all-movie policy. But there was still enough interest in flesh and blood performances in a city the size of Dallas to keep it alive at the Jefferson, even though it declined greatly in quality.

There is an added factor. Even the Majestic management was to find that vaudeville of the old and established type was dropping in popular favor. The Majestic was able to meet the situation by insisting on the best vaudeville entertainers and by having name performers. The Jefferson found that it could not afford this, and at the same time followed the changing popular taste in live productions by switching to a kind of entertainment that seemed to be gaining in favor. We shall
see that during the next five year period, the theater management was
to experiment with the various forms in an effort to keep its audience--
returning to vaudeville, going back to musical stock and tabloid shows,
and finally becoming a straight film playhouse.
CHAPTER IX

FROM VAUDEVILLE TO TABLOID SHOWS - THE HIPPODROME

On Elm Street between Griffin and Field Streets, the Hippodrome Theater, third of the downtown vaudeville houses that were operating in Dallas at the start of 1920, followed much the same path as did the Jefferson—beginning with straight vaudeville, and moving into musical stock and tabloid shows—but went one step further. It housed a dramatic stock company during the 1922-1923 season before it finally disappeared from the city's theatrical scene.

January-June 1920

Unlike the Jefferson and the Majestic which had weekly changes of the programs in 1920, the Hippodrome had changes twice a week with new bills on Thursday and Sunday. During the first part of 1920 it was on the Loew's vaudeville circuit, but it switched to the Pantages circuit, which moved over from the Jefferson, at the start of the 1920-1921 season.

The bill presented on Thursday, January 1, 1920, had a playlet, Which One Shall I Marry which was described in the review as "capably acted." The reviewer praised Bell & Caron as having "the best act on the bill," but noted that "the male part of the partnership could easily make bigger time if he had the proper staging and a more lively partner."¹


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There were two dramatic offerings on the January 4 program, The Vamp, with Reginald Knorr and Eleanor Relia, a skit "dealing with a couple, who believing they are mismated, begin action for a divorce," and a comedy sketch, The Intruder, with Barnes and Freeman.\(^2\)

A week later, Ethel May Hall and her company were headlined in a playlet, The Wrong Guy, described by the reviewer as "of unusual merit."\(^3\) One of the war playlets which so commonly were performed on the vaudeville stage in the early 1920's, Arthur J. Finn and his company in Bagpipes in the Trenches, were on the January 22 bill. Appearing on the same program were Edah Delbridge and Tobe Gremmer, the authors and composers of Ko Ko San; a team of acrobats, the Walters; and a juggler, Alan Gray.\(^4\)

In February, 1920, the Hippodrome Theater came under the control of Players-Lasky Corporation, but its policy remained unchanged. For the program beginning on February 1, Jack and Tommy Weir presented At the Races and Carl and Emma Frabel were the "daring tricksters on the wire."\(^5\) Harry Leonard, "Nonsense on Wheels;" Fred Elliott in "songs, stories and dance;" and Will Stanton, described in the advertisement as the "late star of the New York Winter Garden in his laugh success 'His Last Drop,'" were the principal entertainers for the February 5 program.\(^6\) The following Sunday there was the sentimental Salvation

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Molly—a Story of Chinatown, together with Simmons & Bradley, "Dance on Rollers," and The Renalls, "amusing sensational physical exploits." The bill for the succeeding Thursday had the gymnasts Cross and Santorio; a "Western Absurdity, Dangerous Dan McGrew, a one-act comedy playlet with music;" and "The Odd Fellow, Harry Antrim." A "girlie" show called The New Mimic Show of 1920 headlined the February 15 bill which also included an appearance of B. Kelly Forrest, "Hobo president." The next Sunday as headliner there was Billy DeVere, and as a specialty on the same bill, Cook, Mortimer and Harvey, "basket ball experts who play in the dark on bicycles, using an illuminated ball." Mercedes, "the psychic eighth wonder of the world," was featured for the February 26 program and the following Sunday the engagement of Mercedes was extended. On the new bill also was included "the popular comedian George Randall" in a comedy playlet, Too Easy. Ethel Davis, popular vaudeville entertainer, came to the Hippodrome on Thursday, March 4, to appear jointly with Kate Homer Lind and da Currie and company in a musical comedy playlet, The Singing Teacher; Sheppard and Dunn, musicians; Long and Ling, dancing jugglers; Stryker in "body-twisting feats;" and Al Jennings in a war skit, The Lady of the Dugout.

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The reviewer said about Ethel Davis:

There are hundreds of folks in vaudeville who attempt to put over a "blues" song and the percentage of success is about the lowest of any attempts at entertainment. But Dallas theatergoers this week have the opportunity of hearing blues sung in a manner that to many will be a revelation... Miss Davis is at the Hippodrome and to those who have visited Los Angeles and dined at Levy's, she will not be a stranger. She sings jazz melodies in a style all her own.\(^1\)

Louise Mayo appeared with Fred Nevins in the succeeding program "presenting a comedy song and revue in which Miss Mayo wears some of the gowns that have won her fame as the most beautifully garbed woman on the American stage. On the same bill were the Kincaid Kilties; Conroy and O'Donnell in The Parcel Postman; Grace Leonard and company in The Little Tomboy; and Kinze, "the Oriental trickster."\(^3\) The succeeding bill had Will H. Fox, "direct from his European triumph;" Huyler and Bann in Scandal Mongers; Peggy Hyland in Black Shadow; William and Grace Bohn in The Well Balanced Girl; and Jack Hallen and Marie Goss, and Billy Brandell in Some Baby, a musical comedy.\(^4\)

Beth Stone and her company in character dances headlined the March 11th bill. Other entertainers were Buhla Pearl, singer; Will Kaufman & Katherine Lillian; Fred and Lydia Weaver in an act, The Butterfly and the Archer; and Frank Lewis in a farce comedy, Nine O'Clock.\(^5\)

\(^3\)News, Thurs., Mar. 11, 1920, 4.
The Melva Sisters, xylophonists, got particular mention from the reviewer for the March 21 performance as "coming closer to pleasing all tastes than any other act on the bill." He observed that the playlet by Frederick & Palmer, They Tell 'em and You Laugh, was one of the "time-worn domestic type which has been seen frequently in Dallas." The reviewer cast some light on vaudeville practice of the time when he stated that "Every vaudeville bill nowadays must have a girl somewhere during the show who brings to the audience a touch of gay Paree." And he commented that "Eddie Phillips sings and dances and tells some stories, most of them of ancient vintage." In this review we get a hint of two of the common complaints about vaudeville—the "sameness" of the acts and the staleness of the humor. The March 25 bill included Gilroy Dolan and Corriell, "nautical nonsense;" Wilber & Lykes, song-and-patter performers; Frank and Mazie Hughes in "A Dance Romance;" Phil Davis; and McEvoy and Wilson. On the March 28 program were Piggott, Bradshaw "and seven lonesome brides" in Honeymoon Inn, a musical farce; the Williams Sisters, in an act called The Italian Statesmen; Joe Ryan and Jessie Moore in Leave That to Me; Spencer and Rose in See Me Sarah, and the Rainbow Trio, eccentric comedians.

Lester Raymond and his company, Bertram May and company in The Dear Brute with Cecilia Rosewood; Dorothy Roys, singer; and the Tasmanian Girls in a "dervish dance" were at the theater on April 4, 1920, and on

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April 8 it was Frank Davis in a skit, Waiters Wanted; Lee Nash, comedian, Francis, Clark & Brown; the El Roy Sisters; Brown and Evans, singers and dancers; and the Royal Trio Daredevils, aerialists.\textsuperscript{22}

The April 11 program had Barnold's Animal actors in "A Hot Time in Dogville;" Jeff Healy and company in a one-act comedy, A Business Proposal; the University Trio; Kramer and Kennedy, dancers; and Halley and Hobble, eccentric comedians.\textsuperscript{23} Colonel Diamond and his granddaughter danced on the April 15 bill. Other entertainers were Marjorie Bonner and Billy Power in songs from musical shows; Art Harris and his company in a comedy, I'll Say So; Arthur Rigby, the "popular Minstrel Man;" and Montambo and Nap, "Agile envoys from Finland."\textsuperscript{24} Walmsley and Keating, comedians; Adolphus and Company, "premier dancer from the Opera Comique Paris assisted by Ethel Gilmore; Henry J. Kelly, the "little Irish American;" Jimmy Rosen and his company in a skit, Call me Papa; and the Bimboes, acrobats; played the theater on April 18.\textsuperscript{25} Such acts as Walmsley & Keating and Henry J. Kelly also appeared in other seasons on the Pantages and the Keith Orpheum circuits.\textsuperscript{26}

Leon Stanton and his company presented a one-act comedy, Money and Matrimony on the April 22 program. Animal acts were coming in force into the Loew's circuit, as typified by "Some Bull Brewster--the Clever

\textsuperscript{22}News, Thurs., Apr. 8, 1920, 6.
\textsuperscript{23}News, Sun., Apr. 11, 1920, II, 5.
\textsuperscript{24}News, Thurs., Apr. 15, 1920, 6.
\textsuperscript{25}News, Sun., Apr. 18, 1920, 4.
\textsuperscript{26}News, Apr. 18, 1920, II, 4.
Canine Comedian" on the same bill. Other acts were presented by Boudini and Bernard, accordionists; the Gordon Duo, singers; and Fox Benson and company in The New Member.27 The reviewer described Brewster as "a wonderfully trained bulldog," and called Money and Matrimony "great comedy situation . . . when the advent of a 16-year old girl in the home of a veteran of '61 arouses the jealousy of the old maid housekeeper who has long been in love with the veteran." Fox Benson was said by the reviewer to present "something new in the acrobatic line . . . a bit of comedy and some late song hits are mixed with the offering."28

The Volunteers, in "an amusing song festival of comedy and catchy music;" Cook and Oatman, singers; Hal & Frances in an act called Town and Country; Arthur Lloyd in The Humorous Card Index; and The Florenis in The Bell-Boy and the Maid; were the entertainers on April 25.29 Again it must be observed that it is often difficult to determine the nature of the act from the tag lines in the advertisements. The Military Revue, singers and dancers; Benny Harrison and Francis Reynolds in Special Delivery; Fred Driscoll and Eyelyn Wescott, singers and piano players; Mullally, Howell and McCarthy in a comedy, Anxious Moments; and The Linkos in "A Novel melange of versatile doings;" were on the April 29 program.30 On May 2, it was Vic Stone and the Moyer Sisters in singing and dancing entertainment; Arthur Deagon, singer and comedian; LeHoen and Leone Dupreece in Somewhere in Texas; Charles and

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Cecil McNaughton in *Getting Acquainted*; and Monte and Parte, accordionists and clarinetists. The reviewer praised Arthur Deagon, "former Broadway star," as doing a "clever and entertaining act." He stated that Deagon's "'cello' number is good and his new repertoire of jokes has plenty of comedy and pep to it." The reviewer called attention to the "daring costumes" worn by Cecil McNaughton "who dances and sings with Charles of the same name." He commented that Max Lehoene and Leon D. Dupreece "present some good sharpshooting," and that Victor Stone and the Moyers sisters closed the program "with a pretty dancing act." Harry Watkins was the comedian and *Fade and Frolics* the musical comedy offering on the May 6 program. Also on the bill were two "rube" comedians and a group of pantomimists. The "rubes" were Mills and Smith and the pantomimists, Cunningham and Doreto. The May 9 bill had Fred Gray and Nellie Graham in a war skit, *On Board the Transport*; Charles Blaugh and Rollie Lockhard; the George F. Allen Cheyenne Minstrels in *A Cowboy's Life at Twilight*; Jewell and Raymond, dancers and impersonators; and Frank Juhaz in a specialty act, *Bunkology*. Lew Payton and Jack Lum in an act called *The Fox Hunters*; Sam and Goldie Harris in a skit, *At the End of the Line*; Mme. Vera in *The Girl in the Basket*, described as "a spectacular and artistic song festival;" Dressler and Wilson, novelty dancers; and Harry Oaks and his company.

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in *The Fortune Teller* made up the May 13 program, while the headliners of the program for the following Sunday were Al Friend and Sam Downing in their skit, *My Friend Abe*. Others on the same program were William O'Clare and his company in Irish songs and dances; Charles O. Rice and Ruthie Francis in a song and dance skit, *My Winter Girl*; Clara Theodoras Trio, gymnasts; and Donahue and Fletcher in "a Hodge Podge of Variety." Trovato, "eccentric violinist;" the Arco Brothers, "equilibrists;" Al Johnson and Dixie Crane in a comedy act, *Copp’d*; Douglas Flint and company in a comedy skit, *Easy Money*; and Margaret Doherty and her company in a "musical review of songs old and new;" made up the May 20 program. This program illustrates the balance of entertainment which was striven for in vaudeville.

Al H. White and his company presented *The Mirror* for the May 23 program. On the same bill were Gene and Katherine King, singers and comedians; Allman and Gould, blackface comedians; Ford's Golden Whirl, aerialists; and Martin & Elliott, dancers. Senor Westony, called in the advertisement, "The world famous pianist," was teamed with Thera Jenson, "The Danish-American nightingale," to headline the May 27 program. The other acts were Daisy & Wilson, aerialists; Bobby Van Horn, "the jovial song jester;" and Hite-Reflor-Loehr, "melody and terpsichore."
The Maxine dancers; Tracy and Mohr, comedians; Blair and Crystal in a skit, The Reporter; Hugh Johnston, sleight-of-hand artist; and The Perrinis, equilibrists; were on the program for June 3, and the final bill for the season on June 6 had Bobby Stone and his company in Hearts and Flowers; the Two Ladellas, "A Mixture of Talent;" Mansfield and Riddle, dancers; the Nakaf Japs in a jiu jitsu act; and The Templetons, "graceful oddities."

The vaudeville offerings from January to the end of the 1919-1920 season have been given in detail to indicate the type of entertainment popular at the time. It can be observed that the Loew's vaudeville was orthodox in its approach, depending on the standard vaudeville fare and striving for balance in its programming.

The 1920-1921 Season

As already mentioned, the Hippodrome Theater became part of the Pantages circuit for the 1920-1921 season. The announcement of the changeover stated that "The Famous Pantages Road Shows that crowd Northern and Pacific Coast Theaters, such as the new $3,000,000 Pantages Theater in Los Angeles and the mammoth Miles Theater, Cleveland, with shouting, gleeful, enthusiastic crowds every week, will now, as the result of a new booking arrangement, be shown at the Hippodrome starting Sunday." Prices were announced as 10-15-20¢ for matinees and 25-50-75¢ for the evenings. The theater also went on a schedule of weekly program changes.

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Pantages offerings were somewhat more spectacular than those of Loew's. On November 25, for example, Herbert Evans presented *Submarine F-7*--"a Realistic representation of a submarine in action. Correct in every detail." Another "spectacular" came on January 16 when Ted Shawn presented *Xochitl*, "a dance drama based on a Toltec legend," which featured Martha Graham and a group of dancers. The dance drama was described in the advance notices as "gorgeous scenes, colorful costumes, all assembled into a magnificent pageantry of the ballet under the personal supervision of the Wizard of the Dance," and the reviewer commented:

Instead of wine, women and song it is wine, women and the dance, and the spectacle is a gorgeous one. One gathers from *Xochitl* that the modern girl's bathing suit would be fitting street wear for the Toltec maiden. The dancing is graceful and the girls good looking.

The "kid" shows, popular in all the vaudeville houses, also came to the Hippodrome. Maude Daniels presented *The Rising Generation*, featuring Mary Caroline Daniels, Buster Brown, Maxine Hamilton and Dominic Falumbo.

An example of the type of publicity that preceded vaudeville acts at the time is seen in the following:

On the stage, "Sweet Sixteen" will come back through the years in all its innocent loveliness. In this cast it will be in the shape of a miniature musical comedy with Jack Collins, Jack Morrissey and a company of Broadway beauties. A flock of charming flappers who haven't learned to use lipstick and vamp

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every little boy in sight will furnish the backing for the comedy antics of the pair of comedians. Refreshing melodies, new jokes and comedy situations galore will make this musical comedy one of the best of the year.⁴⁵

Jack Trainer was seen on the March 16 bill as a rich manufacturer whose problem was "in making his heart behave," when he acted in a Jack Lait playlet, Help.⁴⁶ A week later, Wilfred Clarke and his wife Grace Menken performed in Joseph Hart's farce, Now What? Clarke, according to the advertisement, "is rated in vaudeville circles as one of the best farce-comedy stars of the times."⁴⁷ It was said by the reviewer to have "many funny lines and the acting is good. This act received much applause."⁴⁸

Gloria Joy, nine-year old film star, daughter of a former Dallas woman, and described in the advance notice as the "divinity of filmland," was presented in a "serio-comic playlet called 'Heart Strings'" on the March 27 program. The critic said that she "proved herself an admirable actress . . . is an attractive little miss and the playlet in which she appears has real merit."⁴⁹ A week later Bob Capron, Ched Freeborn and Marcia Moore gave a playlet as headliner on the April 4 bill that was called "clever" by the reviewer. He commented that "Capron, the slim comedian, dances, sings and pulls wise cracks out of his 'black book' until he gets the audience nearly wild with his fun. Freeborn sings

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⁴⁹News, Mon., Mar. 28, 1921, 4.

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and falls in love with the heroine in a very satisfactory manner. On the last bill of the season, the playlet was The Unexpected Witness, "one of vaudeville's dramatic classics." It was presented by Agnes Johns and her company.51

The 1921-1922 Season

Even before the Jefferson adopted its "musical stock" policy, the Hippodrome pioneered in Dallas in this field. At the start of the 1921-22 season, the theater gave up Pantages vaudeville, and instead became the site for touring musical stock companies. Jack Parsons led off with his "Follies of 1921" company, in "a musical melange, Lovers and Lunatics." Parsons' company, according to the advertisement, had "40 people, 12 chorus beauties, 10 harmony singers, 6 comedians, 8 musical and novelty features." All of this was, the advertisement said, "A dollar show for 35¢."52 As always, the claims made by the company were extravagant. Parsons claimed he had "obtained some talent which will please the theategoers of Dallas. Six comedians of national reputation were signed, a double quintet of harmony singers obtained, and a big chorus of shapely girls who can also sing were carefully selected." It was all described in the advertisement as "Something new in Dallas."53 The audience that saw the first performance on October 9 was large and enthusiastic, according to the review. The reviewer said

50 News, Mon., Apr. 4, 1921, 4.
51 News, Sun., May 1, 1921, II, 4.
52 News, Thurs., Oct. 6, 1921, 4.
that Madeline Young, the prima donna, "has a sweet soprano voice of
great range and an excellent stage presence." As for Jimmie Allard and
Bobby Fitzsimmons, the two comedians, the reviewer placed them in the
"stellar" category. He said of the chorus, "six girls in the front
row . . . are not only shapely and comely but they can also sing a
little and dance a lot." The plot of Lovers and Lunatics was said to
be "not much," but the reviewer said it "gives the comedians opportunity
to put across a bunch of laughs." He noted that "In its balmiest days,
the Hippodrome never has had any better crowds."51

Jimmie Allard took the leading role in I'll Say She Does,
presented on October 17 for a week, and was called by the reviewer "a
scream, both vocally and metaphorically . . . as judged by the hearty
laughs which the audience got out of the many amusing and embarrassing
scenes in which Allard finds himself." Bobby Fitzsimmons was described
as "only a lesser light to Allard, due to a less important part." The
show, according to the review, drew a capacity crowd at all three
performances.55 The Good Old Summer Time, given during the week
starting October 23, was said in advance notices to have "one of the
most realistic rural settings seen on the Dallas stage in some time."
The setting called for "an old-style barn with a very much alive horse
thrusting out his head at the uncommon sight of ten milk maids." Other
props included "a hay mow, a number of live chickens and an old
homestead . . . the members of the quartet . . . will be perched in the

limbs of a cherry tree.\textsuperscript{56} The performance was described by the
reviewer as "one of the classiest openings ever provided for the
beginning of a rural musical comedy," and the plot, the reviewer noted,
"serves to form an excellent foundation for the uproarious rural wittic­
sisms of Jimmie Allard. . . .\textsuperscript{57} Allard got additional commendation
from the reviewer for his performance in \textit{A Bubble of Trouble}, presented
on October 31, "Jimmie Allard, representing the small-town hen-pecked
banker who goes to Chicago and takes along his masculine shrewlike wife
and beautiful daughters, is a scream from the time he meets the vamp,
until his wife declares him dead and a mock funeral is staged." The
action of the show was called "brisk" in the review.\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Shuffle Along},
played in the week of November 6, found Allard and Fitzsimmons in a
blackface revue, "something on the order of those made famous by Al
Jolson [it] has a Broadway roof garden as its setting and the special
settings and electrical features will be a big feature."\textsuperscript{59} "There
isn't any plot . . . ," observed the reviewer, "but there doesn't need
to be any so long as Jimmie Allard is there to spring his jokes. . . .\textsuperscript{60}
House records at the Hippodrome were broken on Sunday, November 13, when
Jesse James Jr. made a personal appearance, and the company presented a
musical comedy, \textit{Under the Black Flag} in which Allard played an escaped
lunatic, a role observed the reviewer, which "gives him ample

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\textsuperscript{56} \textit{News}, Sun., Oct. 23, 1921, II, 7. \\
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{News}, Mon., Oct. 24, 1921, 4. \\
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{News}, Mon., Oct. 31, 1921, 4. \\
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 6, 1921, II, 7. \\
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{News}, Mon., Nov. 7, 1921, 4. 
\end{flushright}
opportunity to pull just about any comical antic or remark that he
chooses." Allard also sang a new blues song that was "the hit of the
performance" according to the review. As for Jesse James, Jr., the
reviewer called his talk "interesting." James told about his outlaw
father, and pointed the moral that "breaking of the laws always leads
to punishment." 61

As an added feature on the December 4 program in which Jack
Parsons' company presented *The Detour*, Mystic Earle was seen "sawing a
woman in two with a crosscut saw." It was pointed out in the advance
notice that "this is the famous illusion that is now being presented
on all the big time vaudeville circuits by Horace Goldin, America's
premier illusionist and O. T. Selbit, England's leading exponent of
magic." 62 The reviewer observed about this performance that "the
chorus wears more fancy costumes than have been seen in many weeks," and that Allard, in his blues number with six girls in the chorus,"talks to them in mock Chinese and dances a Highland fling with the aid
of the two little blondes." 63 As his farewell offering, Parsons pre­

tated *The Fourth Floor Back*, "a farce comedy with music," and in the
cast was Bonny Allard, Jimmie's sister, who had played with Lasses
White Minstrels and with Wes Avey at the old Orpheum "and was popular
in those days when the gallery god was still in evidence." 64 The News
amusements critic commented about the company after it left: "Few have

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61 *News*, Mon., Nov. 11, 1921, 4.
63 *News*, Tues., Dec. 6, 1921, 4.
64 *News*, Sun., Dec. 11, 1921, II, 7.
been the comedians who have won such favor with Dallas theatergoers in an engagement of similar length."

Billy House, due in time to become nationally known, brought his "Midnight Whirl" company into the Hippodrome on December 19 for a four week stay. He offered musical revues along the same line as the "Follies of 1921," and changed bills twice each week. A review of the first presentation of the company will indicate its nature:

Big Billy House, one of the heaviest comedians traveling with a musical comedy company made a distinct hit at his initial appearance yesterday at the Hippodrome. With his company he appeared in a bright little play "The End of the Rainbow Trail," which pleased the audience.

It was House, himself, however, who went over big. The audience called him back a number of times and he shimmied and made a speech and sang the "phone song" from the opera "Luke." And then he had a heart-to-heart talk with his audience in which he said some of his shows would be good, some would be rotten, and some would be good and rotten, all of which provoked still more laughter.

Orlyvette Paul, a big, good looking girl plays opposite the comedian. Estelle Booth as the character woman, Beatrice Williams as the ingenue, Walter Wright as the juvenile, Herman Weber as the butler, were the other principals, and each is an actor of ability. Scenic effects were unusually effective. The chorus consists of a bunch of pretty girls who wear stunning costumes, dance a little and sing considerably. In passing, Billy House deserves special credit in that his show is absolutely clean and there wasn't a vulgar or suggestive line from curtain to curtain. But there was a lot of fast comedy."

Another indication of House's popularity is seen in this excerpt from a review of Runaway Match, given the first part of the week of January 1-7, 1922:

At the first show last night, Billy House had to beg the audience for mercy. He sang a song, danced the shimmy and tried

65 News, Mon., Dec. 19, 1921, l.
66 News, Tues., Dec. 20, 1921, l.
As the final offering of his four-week run at the Hippodrome, Billy House presented *The Trail of Arbutus* in which, according to the review, he and his company "proved as mirth-inspiring as ever ... catchy songs and well-enacted chorus work." 67

Following Billy House into the theater was Bert Smith's "Rag-Time Wonders" company, and the opening performance, the reviewer said, "won much applause from big audiences." He said also that "It wasn't musical comedy so much as a rip roaring burlesque, with all the smut taken out."

There are many fine points about Smith's show and his company in general. The plot of "Oh, Daddy, Oh" had to do with an owner of a race horse and a suspicious wife and the plot is really worked out in great style. The singers can sing—and do. The soubrette is a nifty little dancer as well. . . .

Billy Malone, the principal comedian, observes the tenets of the stage closely and gives straight comedy of a high sort. Dick Butler is convincing as the jockey . . . Stella Watson, the character woman, also had a good singing voice as has Sue Hale, soubrette, Christell Matthews, the ingenue who is a Dallas girl, playing her first engagement in her home town, Arlin Melvin and Helen Curtis, who is also a clever whistler and comedienne.

Accordion solos by Valle drew many encores and the Unique Harmony four, a local male quartet, which is an added feature, was forced to come back many times. 68

Bert Smith's company ended their stay after presenting three plays in their final week, *Are You an Elk*, *The Overland Limited*, and *The Man from Wall Street*. This last piece was called by the reviewer

"a bright little domestic comedy with musical and specialty settings."
The "most artistic specialty number," he wrote, "is the Chinese song by Buddy Clark, with male quartet accompaniment and with the chorus dressed in kimonos."

The "Isle of Roses" company followed in the theater, featuring as their soubrette the four-year old Baby Marie, and numbering in their cast Nick Wilkie, "the famous comedian," "the famous McLeod sextette," and Barney Duffy. This company every Friday night sponsored an "amateur night," then relatively new in the theater but soon to become a widespread practice. Baby Marie, the reviewer said after the opening performance, "proved a source of delight to the crowd. She executed the dance steps better than most of the chorus, and did some extremely good singing for a little girl." Some of the humor in the show was described as "a little broad," but the acrobatic dance of Barney Duffey "made a distinct hit." However, the reviewer said that "the company failed to live up to its flattering advance notices." The reviewer was kinder for the second show, Down on the Farm, which, he said, "made a distinct hit." A synopsis of the plot of On Ice, presented on Friday, February 3, indicates the nature of the entertainment:

An inventor believes he has found a substitute for the milk of human kindness. He gives some of it to a friend, with instructions to pour four drops in his wife's ear. The

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experiment is made, but fails to work, and things get badly mixed up for a few minutes. Then it turned out that the substitute really was some good after all.\textsuperscript{74}

The "Isle of Roses" group closed its stay with \textit{Ranch Life} in which "most of the men wear sombreros and corduroy trousers and boots and 'six guns.'" For the bill, "a novelty bathing girl opening is used, members of the chorus being behind summer umbrellas as the curtain goes up."

The critic said that "the number drew applause."\textsuperscript{75}

Hal Kiter, erstwhile vaudeville star who had played Dallas at the Majestic several years earlier, brought his "Live, Laugh and Love Revue" to the Hippodrome on February 12. It was said to be "one of the largest and most complete musical comedy organizations now on the road."\textsuperscript{76}

The opening night performance drew the following review in the \textit{News}:

\begin{quote}
Excellent principals, fast comedy, a pretty chorus, good costuming and scenic effects are all found in the first offering of Hal Kiter's "Live, Laugh and Love Revue." . . .

Two acts stopped the show . . . Charles and Halene [sic] Davis, eccentric dancers do not depend on unique costumes--it is the quality of their dancing. . . .

Hal Kiter scored a distinct hit with his political monologue. . . . this show changes from one scene to another and does not have the same background all the way . . . Kiter is an old time vaudevillian and knows . . . how to tickle a crowd's risibility.

There are ten girls in the chorus. Miss Leona Marble, the soprano; Gus Hogan, English comedian, and the two tiny tots, Dollie Mack, 4, and Ruth Haller, 2.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

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\item[\textsuperscript{74}]{\textit{News}, Fri., Feb. 3, 1922, 4.}
\item[\textsuperscript{75}]{\textit{News}, Fri., Feb. 10, 1922, 4.}
\item[\textsuperscript{76}]{\textit{News}, Fri., Feb. 10, 1922, 4.}
\item[\textsuperscript{77}]{\textit{News}, Mon., Feb. 13, 1922, 4.}
\end{itemize}
Another review, this time of The Beauty Parlor, presented on February 20, indicates the showmanship that Kiter injected into his presentations:

With one scene a veritable bower of handsome and fragrant cut flowers, "The Beauty Parlor" proved perhaps the best bill given here by Hal Kiter's . . . Revue. . . . cut flowers in profusion are a novelty on a musical comedy stage in Dallas and the novel idea proved extremely popular.

Miss Leona Marble opened the scene by coming on the stage carrying a huge bouquet. Her song was "Say it with flowers," and as she sang the members of the chorus walked gracefully, each attired in evening dress, and each carrying a bouquet or a basket of flowers. They were followed by the other principals and then a back curtain went up, revealing three children standing in the midst of flowers and green foliage.

"The Beauty Parlor" is a clever comedy built around the aspirations of a woman to get into society. She backs a young doctor in opening a beauty parlor, he promising to have the nobility as his patrons. Hal Kiter appears as a Jew tailor come to collect a bill for his clothes and he is pressed into service as a Turkish pasha . . . .

Kiter's monologue on the subject of eugenic marriages is largely in the form of a humorous poem.

Charles Davis, playing the part of a bellhop did a single eccentric dance which stopped the show. Miss Pearl Stevens also earned a number of recalls.78

Jack Hutchison's "Zigzag Revue," featuring Grace Hutchison and including also in its cast Gene Claude. The Mystic Dunbars, "mystifiers of two continents"; Midge Hiatt, The Nutty Four, Violet Fancier, Florence Thompson, and the two Tom Thumb midgets, succeeded Hal Kiter's company on February 26 and gave as its opening bill, Polly of the Follies.79 The group, commented the reviewer, "made a favorable impression."80 Billy, a play said in the advance notices to have been "written for Sidney Drew and the play he was giving at the time of his

death," was presented March 3. The reviewer commented:

It concerns the efforts of a young man to propose to his sweetheart, which are first thwarted by much interference and then by the loss of his false teeth. . . . The actors got the audience started laughing and it looked like some of them were never going to stop. 81

The Zigzag Revue ended its stay at the Hippodrome on March 12, giving as its last production The Man from Texas which "introduces an imitation Wild West Man who shoots things up until it is discovered that he is just masquerading. . . . Most of the audience seemed quite pleased with this portion of the offering." 82

Bert Bence and his "Hello Girls" revue featuring the "whirlwind" dancer Pauline Glenmarr was the next company at the Hippodrome, and the reviewer observed that "the dancing of Pauline Glenmarr stands out above everything else. . . . Miss Glenmarr is a regular whirlwind on her feet. . . ." Favorites of the audience were said in the review to be the Candle Brothers with their "topical" songs. 83

Bert Smith's "Ragtime Wonders" revue came back to play a week's engagement after the Bence group finished its stand at the theater, and as a new "twist" advertised that "on Thursday night the entire company will make up on the stage in full view of the audience. 'Nuf Sed, Boys.' No children under sixteen." Friday night was advertised as "amateur contest" night and the advertisement pointed out that "on Monday matinees ladies will be admitted for 10 cents." 84

Jimmie Allard returned to the Hippodrome on March 26 with his "Follies of 22" Company. The announcement stated:

After an absence of several months Jimmie Allard and his "Follies of 22" company will open today in "Turn to the Left," a typical Allard musical comedy. . . . Harry Cheshire, also an old Dallas favorite, will appear as the schoolmaster. . . . Singing of Madeline Young and the Southern City Four will also be featured. . . . Dallas is really the permanent address of most of the company, and Jimmie Allard himself graduated into the theater ranks from being a messenger boy in Dallas. Madeline Young started her career singing grand opera in St. Louis. From that she obtained a vaudeville engagement and the Allard company marked her first appearance in the musical comedy field. 85

Allard's company presented As Ye Sow on April 2;86 A Broken Promise on April 9;87 Papa Number 2 on April 13;88 and then on April 16 gave Pretty Baby as its final bill, in what proved to be the last musical comedy at the Hippodrome before it became a dramatic stock house.89

As mentioned earlier in the discussion on stock companies, the Hippodrome was leased by Robert J. Littlefield, Jr., in August of 1922, and was headquarters for the Hippodrome Players for most of the 1922-1923 season. When the stock company withdrew in April, 1923, the Standard Amusement Company announced that it would reopen the theater with musical comedy. The first production was to be presented by

87News, Sun., Apr. 9, 1922, II, 6.
Al Stevens and his "Buzzin Bee Girls," and the policy was also to include moving pictures and vaudeville acts.\(^{90}\)

The Hippodrome, unlike the Jefferson, was not able to carry on through the rest of the decade. It was, like the Jefferson, hard hit when the big theaters were built in the downtown section. The Hippodrome made the switch from the Loew's circuit with its more conventional type of vaudeville to the more spectacular Pantages circuit, but when the 1921-1922 season got under way, had adopted the lower cost policy of housing musical stock companies. Like the Jefferson, which was able to build its audience appeal around the entertainment of Pete Pate and Bud Morgan, the Hippodrome drew crowds with such popular tabloid show performers as Bert Smith, Billy House and Jimmie Allard.

Legitimate stock had done well at the Capitol Theater during the 1921-1922 season, and when that theater was damaged by fire, Robert J. Littlefield, owner and director of the Rex and Happyland theaters, attempted to capitalize on its current popularity by utilizing the Hippodrome for a stock company. The Hippodrome Players continued through April, 1923, and there is strong likelihood that stock would have been tried again at the theater if it had not been that the Circle Theater was under construction specifically for legitimate productions and was due to open in December.

It can be seen that such theaters as the Jefferson and the Hippodrome were leased from time to time by enterprising showmen who sought to capitalize on current theatrical tastes and to eke out a

margin of profit by cutting production costs, whereas the ownership of the larger theaters, the Majestic, the Melba and the Palace, was much more stable and the policies much slower to change. A change of policy at the Dallas' Majestic could not be made just locally because it would affect the Majestic theaters in Houston, San Antonio, Fort Worth and Austin as well. The Melba and the Palace were part of national theatrical chains, and decisions about their policies were arrived at in New York. The same did not hold true for the locally-controlled Hippodrome, Jefferson and Happyland theaters. When conditions in Dallas seemed to warrant a switch in the type of entertainment, this decision could be made swiftly. If one theater manager did not make a success of it, another was ready to step in. But the economic facts of competition from the top in the form of the big vaudeville shows at the Majestic, the semi-classical productions at the Palace, and, during the 1925 season, the vaudeville at the Melba, coupled with competition from "below" from such tabloid houses as the Happyland, caught theaters like the Jefferson and the Hippodrome in the squeeze between. Both of these theaters attempted to compete on both levels. Added to this was the competition from the stock companies at the Circle. The Jefferson and the Hippodrome managements responded by lowering prices, but the overhead of the theaters could not afford such cost reductions.
CHAPTER X

TABLOID AND VARIETY SHOWS - THE HAPPYLAND, THE LYRIC, AND THE GAIETY THEATERS

The Happyland Theater, located at Elm and Akard streets, is unique as far as Dallas' theaters of the 1920's are concerned for it was the only one built after 1920 specifically to serve as a tabloid musical house. Harry Simon, owner and manager, was a veteran showman who believed that he had a plan for live entertainment that would "make an instant hit when introduced to the Dallas public." He personally picked the personnel of the Happyland Musical Comedy Company and took them to Corsicana in February of 1922 to give them "experience on the road" before they opened at the Happyland. The new theater, located on Akard Street just off Elm, had a stage especially designed by Simon and was meant to present both movies and stage shows.\(^1\) It was a true "ten-twent-thirt"\(^2\) house with its admission prices exactly fitting that description. Advertised as "The Little Theater around the Corner," it had three complete shows daily and the entire bill was changed on Sundays and Thursdays.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Refers to the prices charged by the more popular movie and variety houses. This picturesque designation of such theaters was common in newspaper publicity of the time.
The 1921-1922 Season

The opening was originally scheduled for Saturday, March 18, but was delayed when materials failed to arrive, and when the Happyland opened on Wednesday, March 22, it was to capacity crowds at each performance. The reviewer commented:

The opening scene, which introduced the entire company, was not only novel but beautiful. A flower garden background had been built up and there was a hole in the canvas for each member of the cast to put his or her head through. Under each place was the name of the person.

Harry Simon did a good job of picking his chorus. He has eight shapely girls who can both sing and dance and their costumes were distinctive and bizarre. Babe De Mont, the soubrette, Midge Carroll, character woman, Leone Wahrmund, prima donna and Happy Lawson, comedian, all scored big hits in their song numbers, while Erin White, leading lady, Billy Earl, leading man, and Billie Lawson and Arthur Jackson, producer, all demonstrated themselves capable entertainers in the comedy sketch.

An oriental dance by Dorothy Sharpe was one specialty which drew a lot of applause, but then everything on the bill pleased. The show as a whole, was just the sort of entertainment for which Harry Simon is noted—clean, fast and full of laughs.

The second offering of the Happyland company, Western Land, was played to capacity crowds. The titles of some of the succeeding shows indicate their nature: Broadway Belles, The Baby Hospital, The Suffragettes and The Dancing Masters. Wednesday night was "amateur night," and on Friday night there was a "special cabaret show." The advertising was intended to catch the attention of a certain kind of clientele. When The Actress was scheduled, the advertisement read, "ten

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A Manager's Troubles, which marked the entrance of Ollie De Brow into the company was described in the review as "a riot of strikingly costumed chorus beauties." Debrow, said to be "of 'Coo Coo I'm a buzzard' fame" was said by the reviewer to have had "an awful time getting off the stage, so insistent was the applause, and he had to both sing and dance and do each several times during his specialty turn." To return to the advertisements, the captions for In and Out read "Smoking Pistols, Secret Passages, Ollie the Brave and Happy the Bold." On May 7, Miss Grace Martin became leading lady, Billy Holt was added to the chorus, and Pat Patterson, "alias 'Hank J. Spruceby!'" started an extended engagement. There was strong emphasis on the low price at the theater. The advertisement for Oh You Baby stated, "where your dimes do their duty." Pat Patterson became the featured player after he joined the company. The offering Uncle Hank from New York was advertised as given by Pat Patterson and his Merry Makers. The theater operated all year round with no break for the summer months, and on June 18 the Dallas favorite Jimmie Allard started an engagement there. Harry Simon, the manager and owner,

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9News, Mon., May 1, 1922, 4.


anticipating large crowds, "installed additional seats" and presented five shows on Sunday. The reviewer said that "Jimmie Allard proved as popular as ever" and he also credited Lettie Mae Etler, "a winsome bit of femininity" appearing for the first time at the theater, as having "quite a bit of talent and her act went over well." Others in the cast who attracted the reviewer's approving attention were Lillian Bessent, Billie Hackett, Tommy Warne and Evelyn Murray. The advance notice for _Lots of Noise_, presented July 9, stated that "it was written with the idea of working in a variety of specialty numbers." Laura Story, "well known in theatrical circles," became ingenue for the company on July 30.

The 1922-1923 Season

With presentation of _The Turkish Maiden_ on August 26, a new group of entertainers joined the company. They included the Keystone Comedy Four made up of Charles Kennedy, Wallace Kennedy, Karl Michael, Steve Powers, and Billy Mack, new soubrette, and on September 3, a "nut" called Whiffles was presented "with George Roland in his weird ... make-up and our new burnt cork artist, Jack Wylie, the Southern favorite." Wylie had played camp theaters at San Antonio.

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during the war and was a "veteran producer and blackface artist." On Sunday, September 10, Bob Greer, called "the highest salaried 'Tab' show actor in the South," and "The King of Irish Comedians," in the advance notices joined the company. An October 2 review is significant in showing the popularity both of the Happyland programs and of Bob Greer:

Beginning with the first matinee Sunday afternoon, the Happyland Theater was jammed at every performance and Manager Henry Simon said that the attendance figures of the day would set a new record for the house. "The Tourist," a comedy with musical interpolations, is the offering and it made a decided hit with the crowd.

Bob Greer is cast in the role of an Irish hotel keeper in a small town. Tommy Warne appears as a typical old hayseed, goatee and everything, while Charles Davis, a new member of the company is "the tourist" a slick oil stock salesman. These three furnish most of the comedy, which is of a hilarious nature.

Mr. Davis, last seen in Dallas with the Hal Kiter revue, also does a song and dance which proved popular at every performance. Miss Evelyn Murray, assisted by the chorus, warbles that ever pleasing old rural ditty about "Sweet Hortense" and was forced to come back and do it all over again every time.

Several parodies are offered by Bob Greer, who also stages some of his celebrated dances. Other members of the company also do pleasing numbers, among them Erin White and Adda Driffil.

During the State Fair season, the advertisements for the theater called attention to the "spicy" nature of the offerings, ostensibly in a bid for the out-of-town trade. The advertisements began to be more loquacious about this time. For A Western Romance, the advertisement stated: "Bang went the villain's gun but his aim is bad, and our hero,

old Doc Rye, knocked him for a row of somersaults with his trusty gat."

The play was said by the reviewer to be "Blood curdling western thriller but spiced with fun." The listing for Poor Old Billy read: "Comical musical farce about a tired business man who sneaks out to a questionable Burlesque show and gets caught." Charlie's Aunt was presented on November 5, and the reviewer stated:

S.R.O. was all that the Happyland had to offer Sunday night when the crowds tried to swamp the Little Theater Around the Corner. Standing room only was scarce during the early part of the evening and the new bill went over well.

Bob Greer makes the show this week, "Charlie's Aunt," a success, although he is materially aided by Babe DuMont in her musical hit of "I ain't giving nothing away." The skit is free from the cheapness of the bedroom farce that usually accompanies musical comedies. The work done by Mr. Greer deserves credit for his humorous presentation of Dona Lucia from Brazil.

Erin White, "famous blues songster," was featured in the billing for The Millionaire Girl presented on February 25, 1923, because of her song, "He May be your Man but he comes to see me sometimes." By March 4 of 1923, the Happyland advertisements had taken on a completely different tone from what they had been when the theater first opened. The advertisement that day for Rooms to Let read, "Snappy, spicy, rare, racy."

The Happyland company had broken all Dallas records by remaining intact for a year. On June 17, 1923, it was announced that the company

25 News, Mon., Nov. 6, 1922, 4.
was "going on the road for several weeks," and that Feldman's Musical
Comedy Company "with smashing chorus and two stellar comedians, Jack
Sylie and Harry Feldman," would entertain Happyland customers, starting
that day.²⁸ Two weeks later, on July 1, the original company was back.²⁹

The 1923-1924 Season - The Lyric

Then, on October 2, 1923, a News advertisement carried the
information that a "new musical comedy company" had taken over at the
theater, and that prices had been reduced to 10¢ and 15¢ for matinees
and 10¢ and 25¢ nights, and also that the theater was "under new
management."³⁰ A review identified the new Happyland producer as Tanny
Galloway, and the offering as Bigamy. The reviewer stated that Galloway
"has brought a number of actors with him," but that Tom Attaway, "long
a favorite in Dallas," had been retained.³¹

The Happyland ceased to exist under the same name on
November 25, 1923. It had been taken over by R. A. Carter, long associ­
ated with the Dalton Theater interests. The name of the theater was
changed by Carter to the Lyric, and a new company, headed by Carl
Armstrong, was to be seen beginning on November 25. According to Carter,
the new bill, The Minstrel Revue, had been brought from the Rialto
Theater in Fort Worth, and included among its features, Nellie Cooper,
character woman, Wilson and McKenna, dancing girls, Paul Scott of "big

time minstrel fame, and Rufus Armstrong, leading man. Charles Buttomor
was to be "featured in ballads and impersonations."32

Another change came on December 16 when vaudeville was launched
at the Lyric with the theater joining Bert Levey's Coast-to-Coast vaude-
ville circuit. On the bill for the week were William E. Bence, "known
as a Chinese impersonator. He is said to speak the Chinese language
fluently, and has been in China for four years." Tock and Toy, another
Chinese pair, were to do a "chop suey" number, and Lester and Vincent,
blackface comedians, were to have a conversation piece and do dog
numbers. The bill was completed by a "trick" dog.33

Apparently the vaudeville didn't satisfy the customers, for by
December 30, Carter, the manager, had "decided to bring 'tab'34 theater
back." The Hunter Comedy Players were to open that day for a number
of weeks. They were to give two plays a week—"miniature comedy dramas
with a full cast offering between act specialties of novel variety."
The opening play was The Woman Pays, and principals in the company,
"all new to Dallas," were Gladys Ludwick, Frank Anton, Raymond Dix,
Lena Ramon, Will J. Wilkoff, Hunter Keasey and Maxine Miles.35 St. Elmo
was done by the company on January 6, advertised as "the first time in
the history of this great play that it was ever offered at popular
prices—not a moving picture."36 When the Hunter Players presented

34The term "tab" was the popular designation for tabloid shows.
Thorns and Orange Blossoms on January 14, the reviewer commented:

Miss Vi Gilbert, who has been popular with Dallas audiences for a number of years in eccentric musical comedy roles, demonstrated ability to handle straight parts in "Thorns and Orange Blossoms," the four-act drama taken from the Bertha M. Clay novel which is the current offering at the Lyric.

Cast as Lady Rivers, Miss Gilbert appears as a haughty aristocrat and does it well. The cast is uniformly satisfactory however, others being Frank Kelton, Rolla Dix, Mary Toy, Marie Williams, John Double, John Wheeler, Hunter Keasey and Will J. Wilkoff.37

The presentation of the Hunter Players for the week of January 20 was Why Girls Leave Home, a four-act melodrama,38 and then on January 27 the Hunter Players opened in The Night Hawk, destined to be the last musical comedy done at the Lyric,39 for on Sunday, February 3, a change of policy went into effect bringing four vaudeville acts from the Bert Levey Coast-to-Coast circuit and a feature picture. The vaudeville bills only lasted one week, for, after announcement of this program, listings of the Lyric in the News stopped altogether and the theater ostensibly went on a straight movie policy. The new policy with the vaudeville called for the Lyric to run continuously on Saturday and to have a matinee performance and then to be open from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. on weekdays. In the vaudeville bill that marked the end of live entertainment at the theater were Hart and DeMars, "singers, talkers and dancers;" Kiljoy and Watson, acrobatic skaters; Lee Dana "in Spanish


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and Brazilian dances with special scenery;" and Fogarty and Foster in "Brazilian Nutology."40

The Happyland had been built to catch the trade that either did not enjoy or else did not want to pay the prices charged at the vaudeville houses. For two-and-one-half years, the theater prospered. It had its favorite entertainer, Bob Greer, who stayed there for a year with the same company. In October of 1923, R. A. Carter took over the theater, changed the name to the Lyric, and two months later, apparently in an effort to bolster sagging revenues, attempted vaudeville with Bert Levey's Coast-to-Coast circuit. The nature of the acts indicates that this was vaudeville entertainment of a much lower order than that presented by Keith-Orpheum, Pantages or Loew's. The customers who went to the Happyland didn't take to the vaudeville programs at the theater. It is evident that much of the trade came from following single performers such as Greer, Allard and Pate. Carter tried a new approach when he presented the Hunter Comedy Players, a musical stock group that did "miniature" dramas with specialties between the acts. This new group lasted at the theater a little over a month, and again Carter went back to vaudeville, only to have that fail to bring in trade, for a week later the Lyric had ceased to show live entertainment.

What happened at the Happyland demonstrates that the smaller theaters could make a go of it if they were under a manager who was a shrewd showman. Harry Simon, who built the Happyland and who managed it during the period of its prosperity, was described in the News as

"one of the best-known managers of variety shows in the Southwest." When he gave up the theater in October 1923, Carter, the new manager, tried tabloid shows, vaudeville and musical stock, but none of them succeeded in drawing back the theater patronage.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the Happyland, as well as from the Jefferson and the Hippodrome, is that these theaters enjoyed their greatest prosperity after 1920 when they were able to secure a good entertainer like Bob Greer, Pete Pate, Billy House or Jimmie Allard and keep him for a long period of time. This fits in with the pattern of the times, for in all realms of entertainment, Dallas was demanding name artists. The Majestic, for example, was bringing in vaudeville entertainment that included well-known performers. This trend was to become even more pronounced in the 1925-1930 period.

But there were other factors responsible for the eventual disappearance of live entertainment from the smaller houses. Such hybrid forms as musical stock and "tab" shows to which these theaters resorted because of the economics of show business at the time were feeling keenly the competition of the movies in the mid-1920's. The motion pictures took some time to "catch on" with a sizeable segment of the theatergoing public. There were enough people in 1920 who still demanded live entertainment to keep a number of theaters going in Dallas that provided it. By 1924, however, this situation was beginning to change. The movies were improving in quality and the live entertainment as presented in all but the biggest theaters—those that could afford "name" artists and the best acts—was beginning to pall. It was

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noticed in the discussion of touring musicals and legitimate shows that as Dallas became more metropolitan the city's audiences became wary of "second rate" or turkey productions. And it was also observed that by the start of the 1924-1925 season some of the newer types of drama and musical shows were beginning to come into the city. Dallas was beginning, also, to demand more of the "New York look" and more of the professional touch in its productions.

The same influences were operating with respect to the tabloid shows and musical stock. By 1924, the audiences were becoming jaded with them, and just as in vaudeville only the best could survive against the movies, so with these forms, only the top notch entertainers could attract the audiences.

The Happyland was built to fill a public demand for the tabloid shows. When that demand lessened, the theater changed its policy. Because the theater did not have the funds to compete with the Majestic in the quality of its live entertainment, there was nowhere else for the theater to go except to a straight motion picture policy.

One of the older variety houses in the city, the Gaiety, situated near the corner of Elm and Akard, apparently had very little status by 1920, for the News in 1920 and 1921 gave it very little publicity. The daily listings in the newspaper gave the names of the tabloid shows at the theater until April of 1921, but after that, the listings referred to the Gaiety programs simply as "stock vaudeville." The listings indicate that the shows were changed weekly. Those between March 23, 1921, and April 18, 1921, give the following titles for the Gaiety presentations: Wednesday, March 23, My Dardanella Girl; March 27, Isabelle; April 3, Saucy Baby; April 10, A Japanese Romance.
After August 7, 1921, the theater was not even listed in the newspaper. The Gaiety closed its doors on Sunday, December 18, 1921. It was to be torn down along with the Princess Theater, and a motion picture theater and a clothing store were to rise in their stead.

Although it had once attracted large audiences, the Gaiety by 1920 was attracting much the same kind of clientele who frequent the burlesque houses today. There are always such theaters in the large cities. The interesting fact is that there were a large number of them in Dallas before World War I and Dallas then was not in the big city class. This indicates the degree to which live entertainment had disappeared from the theaters by the early 1920's.
CHAPTER XI

THE DELUXE MOVIE HOUSES AND THEIR LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Both the Palace Theater at 1625 Elm Street and the Melba, 1913 Elm Street were built early in the decade to serve primarily as motion picture houses. The programs at the Palace included musical entertainment of a classical and quasi-classical nature whereas the Melba was more strictly limited to feature films. Both theaters during the 1925-1930 period were to feel the impact of the competition from the Majestic and other theaters and both resorted to live entertainment eventually. The Melba, by June, 1924, had vaudeville and the Palace during the 1925-1926 season abandoned its classical presentations in favor of the Publix unit shows.

The Palace

The new Majestic had been built so that movies could be shown as a supplement to the stage presentations whereas the Palace was intended to be primarily a de luxe motion picture house and any live entertainment was to serve merely as an adjunct to the feature films. As will be seen, the Palace stage acts as well as the entire format of the film program were geared for the "carriage" or more discriminating trade. They were pitched on a more formal and more classical level than the Majestic shows. When the Palace management responded to the upsurge in the demand for live entertainment, it was necessary to add dressing rooms and renovate the stage.
Opened on June 11, 1921, by Southern Enterprise Company, the Palace, with its 3,000 upholstered air cushioned seats "assuring the acme of comfort,"\(^1\) was described by experts as "the finest playhouse in the South."\(^2\) The theater's "switch and dimmer board," was said to be "one of the largest and most expensive in the entire country," and the seats were "nineteen inches wide, built on metal frames, and upholstered with air cushion spring bottoms." The theater had a thirty-piece symphony orchestra, led by Don Albert, "well-known Chicago conductor," which was a "daily headline attraction." In addition, there was a $50,000 Hope-Jones pipe organ, "one of the largest ever built ... presided over by a concert organist, and concert numbers were to be played at each performance. The staff was to include "sixty-six uniformed attendants to care for the patrons ... pages, ushers and attendants." Laurence F. Stuart, managing director of the theater, was described as "a genius in theater who has never known a failure." Stuart had been on the staff of Hulsey's Queen Theater when Hulsey and Lynch "joined hands after locking horns and formed the Southern Enterprises, the corporation which controls a large number of the leading playhouses of the Southwest." He had managed the Old Mill, Queen, Hippodrome, Jefferson and Crystal theaters "through the greatest period of prosperity they have ever enjoyed."\(^3\)

\(^1\)News, Sun., May 15, 1921, II, 4.
\(^3\)News, Sun., June 5, 1921, II, 4.
At the opening, a program was presented which was to be typical of this theater for several years:

An organ solo will open the festivities. This will be followed by a special news reel and "Topics of the Day." The reel will be known as the Palace Selected News and it will be a collection of the best from all the news reels on the market, compiled here in Dallas. In this manner, scenes of local interest can easily be incorporated in the news reel.

A big attraction to all of the Palace programs will be the thirty-piece symphony orchestra. . . . For the opening occasion the orchestra will render an overture "Evolution of Dixie" arranged by Lange. These selections by the orchestra will be part of the regular program.

Just preceding the pictures will be a reel of Palace Tours and a Palace Prelude, both an interesting innovation in motion picture presentation.

"The Guide," Clyde Cook's latest feature comedy, will follow the feature, "Sentimental Journey." An exit march will be played by the orchestra and the second show starts at 9:15.4

Prices at the theater ranged from 25¢ on the mezzanine to 55¢ in the loges until 6 p.m. and from 40¢ on the mezzanine to 99¢ in the loges after 6 p.m.5 That the opening of a big downtown theater was a major event in the city is evidenced by the fact that the Dallas Morning News carried special sections of as many as 16 pages for the opening days of the Majestic, Melba and the Palace.5

Occasionally a movie star made a personal appearance at the Palace in connection with his movie. Douglas MacLean was there three times daily on July 3 and 4, 1921.6 And the "preludes" often included singers, as on July 21, 1921, when Peggy Fears sang "Make Believe," as

4News, Sat., June 11, 1921, 4.
5News, Sun., June 12, 1921.
part of the *Butterfly Heart* prelude. Heat during the summer months was always a problem until the days of air conditioning. The Palace management had to put in ceiling fans during July, in spite of the fact that the air cooling capacity of the theater supplied it with 220,000 cubic feet of fresh air per minute. The *News* amusements editor commented that the installation of the ceiling fans did not "in the least affect the perfect acoustics of the theater." Experiments were made with various types of musical entertainment:

For the time being the Palace Symphony Orchestra takes a secondary place in the music. With a huge photograph of Rachmaninoff illuminated on the stage, the Knabe Ampico reproducing piano plays his famous "Prelude in G Minor" to the accompaniment of the orchestra. Edouard Potjes, Belgian pianist, now living in Dallas, follows this with a personal appearance playing his own "Gypsy Melodies" while his photograph occupies the screen. After he leaves the piano, it repeats his number note for note. The performance was a genuine musical treat, and was greeted with hearty applause.

In February, 1922, prices were lowered to 50¢ plus a 5¢ war tax for the lower floor, and for matinees in the balconies and the mezzanine, 15¢ to 35¢; 15¢ to 55¢ nights. The opening of the Hope Theater had been announced for that Spring and the price-lowering was undoubtedly intended to meet competition. From time to time, the Palace had live presentations on the stage. LaFell's Jazz Orchestra of Chicago

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10 The war tax had been imposed on amusements by the federal government during World War I and had not been lifted.
played there in February, 1922.\textsuperscript{12} When Pietro Yon, organist for the theater, left to become honorary organist at the Vatican in June, 1922, he played a concert at which "in giving one of his numbers, \( \frac{1167}{6} \) notes will be played in the course of three minutes."\textsuperscript{13} He drew so many persons to the theater "that it was impossible to accommodate them all."\textsuperscript{14}

The preludes were sometimes very elaborate:

The Garden of Allah, stage settings of which were suggested by Maxfield Parrish's well-known painting of the same name, will precede the feature picture. This production is elaborately staged. Japanese wisteria blooms in profusion and the highly colored lighting effects of all Palace masterpieces will be reflected.\textsuperscript{15}

It was customary in the early 1920's to have special programs for the holidays. In July, 1922, the 146th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence was marked by a "deluxe presentation of the Spirit of '76 staged by Don Albert." Also, the Palace each Sunday afternoon presented a symphonic concert.\textsuperscript{16} Don Albert, returning from a trip to New York, commented, "With the exception of the Capitol Theater in New York, I did not find a theater with any finer programs than those given regularly at the Palace."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{12}News, Sun., Feb. 19, 1922, II, 8.
\textsuperscript{13}News, Wed., June 7, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{14}News, Thurs., June 8, 1922, 4.
\textsuperscript{15}News, Sun., June 18, 1922, II, 13.
\textsuperscript{16}News, Sun., July 2, 1922, II, 7.
\textsuperscript{17}News, Sat., July 15, 1922, 4.
Beauty contests then were usually staged at the theaters, and the Palace in July, 1922, played host to Edith Mae Patterson, "the most beautiful girl in America" who had won over 7,000 other "pretty girls." The Sunday afternoon concert was often arranged to blend in with the featured motion picture. When Lovers of Pharaoh was shown during the week of August 6, 1922, Don Albert's concert included "Dance of the Hours," and his "atmospheric prologue" which preceded the movie, was called "The Song of the Siren" built around the musical selection "The Song of India." 18

Once a year the Neiman-Marcus department store held its "Promenade of Fashion," and it featured "dozens of Dallas' most beautiful women gowned in creations from the foremost designers of the world." The department store management shifted this style show from one theater to another in succeeding years, and it was held at the Palace in October, 1922.19

Greek Evans, "famous operatic baritone," got an ovation when he sang the prologue from Pagliacci during the week of October 29, 1922,20 and the theater, in November of the same year, launched its policy of presenting local talent when the seventy-member Dallas Male Chorus sang there. The reviewer stated that "an audience that taxed the theater to overflowing greeted the singers and warmly applauded every number." 21

18News, Sun., Aug. 6, 1922, II, 12.
Edna Wallace Hopper, advertised as a woman "in the neighborhood of the 60's who looks and dresses more like a modern flapper," appeared four times daily at the theater during the week of February 18, 1923, and when she gave a special performance for women only, "hundreds of Dallas women charged the box office." The reviewer continued:

The big pasteboard "cut out" sign in front of the box office was demolished, some dispositions were undoubtedly jarred, clothes were badly rumpled and hats knocked off. . . . It was a difficult matter to handle the crowd.

There wasn't a chance for a man to go in. . . . Women in charge guarded all entrances and all exits.

After the introductory film had been run off, a spotlight was turned on the stage, and there was Miss Hopper, apparently just getting out of bed.

She had whisked off most of her outer garments and then went through physical culture exercises.

Then the young lady of 62 years stepped into a bathtub—right on the stage. Miss Hopper told the women "how to keep young." She pointed to herself as an example.

The "tableaux" which were such a prominent part of Ziegfeld's Follies and the George White Scandals, also found their way into the movie houses. In April, 1923, Ben Ali Haggin presented tableaux which in the advance notices were "said to be the most beauteous combination ever offered to vaudeville." The reviewer commented:

It's almost barbaric to call the Haggin reproductions "living pictures" but such were they known in other days and ways of the vaudeville stage and that they will remain in the vernacular of the rude watchers. Though the theme of the act is founded upon the painting of a picture, the fantasy is a series of pictures that no artist can touch. Muriel Stryker, Edna French and Doris Lloyd, all from the Ziegfeld Follies, are in the act while Haggin has stripped his studio for rich hangings, ancient masks and brocades. The pictures glow with color and magnificence. The story tells in half a dozen scenes the love story of Simonetta, a great lady of Florence, and Botticelli, the painter, and how she posed for his "Birth of Venus" and died, and how her body was carried through the streets while all Florence mourned her. The story is told in

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dance and pantomime. It has poetry, artistic loveliness, and is "the sense of tears in mortal things."²⁴

The changing times are reflected in the decision by the Palace management to put in another entrance on Pacific avenue "especially for the convenience of the patrons who attend the theater in automobiles."²⁵ And another concession to new ideas was made when there was "for the first time in the history of the Palace theater, a midnight performance . . . offered the public at 11:30 o'clock Friday night." It was the second special "midnight matinee" in the city for a motion picture. The first had been at the Old Mill Theater.²⁶ The midnight shows were to become extremely popular in the city.

John J. Friedl became director of the theater in January of 1924²⁷ and promptly instituted some changes. He announced, the following month, installation of a $100,000 cooling plant with more melting capacity in pounds of ice per day "than the normal Dallas family would use in twenty years." The type of music presented at the theater came in for alteration. In March of that year, Paul Whiteman and his Collegians made an appearance on the stage.²⁹ Two months later, although Don Albert's symphonic concerts continued and were already in their 122nd week, a "syncopated revue" was presented with a jazz band,
with Eva Munster as soloist, May Lynn as dancer, and with Fred Bishop and Doris LaRue. Two weeks later Vincent Lopez Junior Band, "gifted young musicians ranging in age from 16 to 18 years organized by Vincent Lopez to go on tour and interpret the rhythmic ideas which have made him the idol of the public," were presented at the theater.

Don Albert, director of the Palace orchestra from the time it opened, left to go to St. Louis in August of 1924. The News made this comment:

Although still under 30, Don Albert has been a great influence for music during his stay in Dallas. Coming into the Palace this week as a guest conductor is Jay Stanley from Orchestra Hall, but if, as rumored, the Palace orchestra is to be reduced to sixteen pieces, Don Albert's friends doubt he will return.

In the years he was at the Palace, Don Albert became one of the most noted compilers of musical scores for motion pictures in the entire country.

Shortly after the Palace opened he inaugurated his Palace symphony concerts on Sunday afternoon and these were continued until this summer. Each of these featured masterpieces from the great composers with popular numbers added. They appealed particularly to music lovers.

Prologues and presentations became as integral a part of the Palace programs as the feature films and in these Don Albert drew liberally on the young musicians of the city. Many singers were given a real start through appearances in Don Albert presentations, as were several promising dancers and violinists.

On January 27, 1925, announcement came that John J. Friedl, Palace manager, planned a drastic revision in theater policy. He intended to bring a number of stage attractions to the theater and to

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31 News, Sun., June 1, 1924, III, 6.
hold a jazz revue twice each year. The first "Jazz Revue," which came the same week, included "gorgeously presented dances and song numbers," and its "superjazz band" was directed on the stage by Nicholas Mirskey, conductor of the Palace orchestra. The headliners were Bell and Mayhew. Bell was "a protege of Eddie Cantor," and Helen Mayhew, "the creator of the title role of John Cort's popular musical comedy, 'Flo Flo.'" The Revue was offered with the feature film If I Marry Again. In the same month, Julian Eltinge, "foremost portrayer of fads and fancies of the fair sex," and said to be "the highest priced artist ever to appear on the program of a motion picture theater," appeared on the Palace stage in the course of a "farewell tour." He said he planned to go into the hotel business in Southern California "after twenty years of triumphal show business." He brought with him for his appearance "the most beautiful and varied assortment of gowns which the artist has ever assembled."

After an appearance by Bernard and Robinson, "broadcasting artists, record makers and song writers," the Palace stage had "the Kansas school girl marvel of the age . . . the only living psychic today" with the unusual name of Eugene Dennis.37

A new type orchestra leader came to the Palace in August of 1925. Alexander Keese, described in the News as "a man who has made a national

33News, Tues., Jan. 27, 1925, l.
37News, Fri., Apr. 17, 1925, l.
mark," had, according to the article, "gained his reputation through his highly complicated and individual system of arranging the orchestral scores to accompany motion pictures." The article continued:

Mr. Keese's theory is that the accompanying music should be built as artistically and as completely as the picture itself . . . create the same moods, the same effects through music that the picture does. . . .

Scores are designed by Mr. Keese to attach the sub-conscious, leaving the more objective comprehension free to take in the picture. . . . He rejects as often as possible the more familiar numbers. 38

Keese later became a radio orchestra leader and at the time of his death in August, 1960, was an executive with WAAF-TV in Dallas.

In summarizing, it might be noted from the types of programs that were presented, that the Palace was a prestige theater catering to an audience that liked ostentatious grandeur in its programs. The music played by the thirty piece symphony orchestra was not of the heavy classical but veered toward the semi-classical. The dances and displays in the Preludes were spectacular and colorful.

This policy continued unchanged for three years until John J. Friedl became the theater manager and he initiated the revisions that were to bring the Palace into more competition with the Majestic Theater.

Friedl brought in jazz orchestras and syncopated revues. Although the theater during the Friedl regime did not get weekly vaudeville entertainment, the trend was established that eventually in 1926 was to result in the weekly Publix unit shows.

The Palace experience between 1920 and 1925 indicates clearly the growing desire of Dallas audiences for the best in entertainment. Until 1924, the Palace was able to attract audiences because its programs satisfied the desire of the public for the spectacular, an audience demand that could also be sensed in the response of the Dallas public to such traveling shows as *Hitchy Koo*. But there was a shift in audience taste in about 1924 and just as the touring musicals and legitimate productions changed in nature, so theaters like the Palace had to alter their entertainment. It is significant, for example, that the Sunday afternoon concerts by the Palace symphony orchestra steadily declined in favor at this time. The appeal of the Palace musical policy, of course, came because movies were silent and the elaborate scores provided by the large theater orchestras were a decided improvement over the musical accompaniments provided by a pianist or an organ.

The Palace, during the period, was the most conservative in its entertainment policies of all the Dallas theaters, not even excluding the Majestic. As has already been pointed out, decisions about these changes were made in New York on the basis of the national entertainment picture. Changes in styles of shows were slow to come at the Palace, but in one sense, the theater was an innovator. It was the first in Dallas to inaugurate the prologues, the first to have the symphonic concerts, the first to use Dallas talent in its stage presentations, and as will be seen in the discussion of the 1925-1930 period, the Palace pioneered with the stage orchestra and in the use of a master-of-ceremonies.
The Melba 1921-1925

It was on Sunday, June 29, 1921, that Pantages vaudeville finally came to the Melba. On the opening bill were the Fenwick Girls "from Harmony Bay;" the Six American Belfords, "world's finest Risley artists;" the Versatile Steppers, "five premier terpsichorean artists;" Whitfield and Ireland in their comedy sketch, Umpsville; and Louise and Mitchell, "The Belgian wonders—singing, dancing, comedy acrobatics." The picture was *A Self Made Failure* with Patsy Ruth Miller. The July 6 program had the Four Garton Girls, "Australian tomboys on wheels;" Palo and Palet, "musical artists supreme," Race and Edge, "The Two Wise Comics;" Alma Braham and Dorothy Morton in *Love's Fables, a romance of dance and song;" and Barto and Melvin, "America's foremost athletes."

Joe Jackson, pantomime comedian and hobo cyclist headlined the July 13 program. On the same bill were Torino, "master juggler;" Wallace and May in *Bird Seed;* Marie Weidman, "a little girl from Hollywood;" Lapine and Emery, comedians; and a skit, *The Salesman.* The reviewer praised Jackson's act:

Jackson does very little riding of the decrepit two-wheeled vehicle he uses in his act. He doesn't have to do much riding. His antics, his make-up, his screamingly funny pantomimic comedy are humorous enough in themselves to make bicycle riding secondary.

Tameo Kajiyama, "noted Japanese calligraphist and mental marvel," headlined the July 20 program. On the same program were the Gautiers

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40 *News, Sun., July 6, 1921, III, 7.
41 *News, Mon., July 14, 1921, 4.
42 *News, Mon., July 14, 1921, 4.
in an act called Bricklayers; Permane and Shelly in Pully Pully; Casper and Morrissey in Nobody's Business; an animal act, Mary's Pony Boy; and Donna Darling and Earle. Charles Ahearn brought his Millionaire Jazz Band, described as being made up of "bankers and brokers," as headliner to the theater on the July 27 program. On the same program Jack Strouse did an act, Over the Phone; Joseph E. Bernard and company did a Willard Mack comedy act, Who is She; Casson and Klem did a song-and-patter act; and the Rios were seen in a "novelty surprise." Earl Mountain and Cliff in a comedy skit, Wigginsville, headlined the August 3 bill. Others on the program included Beatrice Roma and the Crane Girls; Bayes and Smith; Sherwin Kelly, bicycle rider; Dorothy Lewis, mezzo contralto; Chuck Haas, cowboy comedian; and Adair and Adair, gymnasts. Dinus and the Belmont Players did a musical comedy act on the succeeding week's bill, assisted by Roland Travers, "illusionist;" Vann and Tyson, dancers; Lane and Freeman in a comedy act, Crullers and Doughnuts; and Weston's Models in "Life studies."

It can be observed at this point that the Melba vaudeville programs were much more along "orthodox" lines than were the Majestic shows in 1924. Henry Catalono and his company appeared together with the Three Strum Sisters and Hal Bishop in a musical comedy act for the August 17 program. Other acts included Gertrude Falls, the McCarthy Sisters, singers; the Jackson Troupe, cyclists; and Skipper, Kennedy and

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Reeves in College Campus Capers. Francis Renault, a female impersonator was the headliner on the August 24 bill. On the same program were Billy Wells and the Eclair Twins, singing comedians; Sonia de Calve, singer and violinist; Tilyou and Rogers, dancing "grandaddies;" Hart and Helene in an act called I've Got Another One; and Mack and Williams, novelty dancers. The August 31 program had La Rosarita, dancer, as the principal feature. The skit was Yes Means No with Nolan Leary and Helen Keith Johnstone; the dancing act was the Covey Sisters and a Russian ballet company. The show also included Moro and Yaco, novelty musicians; and Billy Purcelle in a musical comedy act. The theater prices were advertised for this bill as a $0 top; 35¢, 25¢ and 15¢.

Mme. DuBarry, who had been seen in Dallas before, appeared with her company of "operatic stars" in "Twelve Minutes in Melodyland," to headline the September 7 program. A xylophonist, Lamberti; dancers, Cherie and Romano Kito; acrobats, Irma Balmus and Milo; and a pair of blackface artists, George and Paul Hickman, completed the bill. On the September 11 program were the Sager Midgeley company in Oh Jonesey, a musical comedy act; Gates and Lee in a comedy sketch, Stateroom 19; Thomas and Williams, dancers; George LeShay on the "mirambaphone;" Rekoma, an "equilibrist;" and Clifford and Marion, comedians.

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Frank W. Stafford acted the dream scene from *Rip Van Winkle* with Marie Stone appearing as the daughter for the September 21 program. The program also included the Four Hamel Sisters and Stross, instrumentalists, singers and dancers; the Three White Kuhns in a similar act; North and South in a comedy sketch, *Friendly Enemies*, with songs and dancing; Winnie and Dollie, gymnasts; and Eastman and Moore in *Bargains*, a comedy skit.\(^{52}\) The following week had Harry Tusda, balancer; the Ten Butterfly Kiddies; Janis and Chaplow in a skit, *It Pays to Advertise*; LeMaire and Ralston, blackface comedians in *A Bad Move*; and Sandy Lang and company, skaters.\(^{53}\) The Three Reddingtons, gymnasts; Roy LaPearl, aerialist; a Cunningham and Bennett revue with the Beau Brummell orchestra, including in its cast Lady Fair, Beau Brummell, Erna Alma and Victor Valenti; Lillian Gonne in an act, *Merry Christmas*; and Carvet and Vierna, dancers, were on the October 12 bill.\(^{54}\) Lillian Hertz and her Moro Castle orchestra, who had also been seen in Dallas earlier, headlined the October 19 program. Pierlert and Scofield in a skit, *Helping Hubby*; Wills and Robins, comedians, in *The Wrong Impression*; Buddy Walker, singer, whistler and character impersonator; and Seoma Jupraner and company in *Bohemian Nights*, completed the bill.\(^{55}\)

Thelma Cannon and Ethel Lee, cyclists; Carol Chappel and the Moran Sisters; Madeline Patrice and Joseph Sullivan, singers; Dan

\(^{52}\) *News*, Sun., Sept. 21, 1924, III, 9.


\(^{54}\) *News*, Sun., Oct. 12, 1924, XIX, 8.


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Downing and Buddy, comedians in *The Cheerful Pessimist and His Pal*; and Joe Fanton, ring performer, made up the October 26 bill.\(^{56}\)

S. T. McDonald, manager of the Melba Theater, pointed out a problem peculiar to Dallas when he announced that the new shows in the future would begin on Monday instead of Sunday. He stated:

> It has long been a problem in the minds of the directors of the Melba Theater how it was best possible to route the vaudeville acts coming to Dallas so they could arrive in time for the opening show on Sunday. . . . The complete shows that have been coming to the Melba have been coming direct from Kansas City where they close Saturday night. It's a long jump and many times certain parts of baggage and a few times the actors themselves have missed connections, which threw the opening show at the Melba off.\(^{57}\)

An animal act, Mr. and Mrs. Newman Graham's "Lady Alice Pets," headlined the November 2 bill. Others on the bill included Currier and McWilliams; Sabbott and Brooks, dancers; Harry D. Ward and Harriet R. Raymond, comedians; and Olga Boehm and company in a song and dance act.\(^{58}\) Fred LaReine and company did "stunts with electricity," to top the November 9 program, a bill which also included George Lane and Byron Byrd in a "nut" act; Arch Stanley, "monopedic marvel;" the "Three-and-one-half Arleys, perch gymnasts;" and Mlle. Nine and her company, in a skating act.\(^{59}\)

Gus Hombrook did a "vaudeville rodeo" act titled *Cheyenne Days* on the following week's program which also included the Roletta Boys, accordionists; Jack and Reta La Pearl, "rube" comedians in *The Indiana*  

\(^{57}\) *News*, Fri., Oct. 31, 1924, 4.  
\(^{58}\) *News*, Sun., Nov. 2, 1924, III, 7.  
\(^{59}\) *News*, Sun., Nov. 9, 1924, III, 9.
Folks; Noel Travers, Irene Douglas and their company in a playlet, *Come Into the Kitchen*; and Anna Marston and Monocle Manley, eccentric comedians.  

An orchestra headed by Walter Clinton and by Julia Rooney, daughter of the late Pat Rooney and sister of the young Pat Rooney, headlined the December 21 program. On the same bill were the Arleys, "perch gymnasts;" Gromley and Caffery, acrobatic dancers and singers; Al Rickard and Ethel Gray, ventriloquists; and Emil Casper and Dolly Morrissey in a song-and-dance act. The same performers were showing up more than twice in the same season. The Arleys had been on the November 9 program, for example.

A musical act entitled *Review of Reviews* headlined the December 28 bill. On the same program were Peggy Fears and Harry Miller in a comedy and dancing act; Charles F. Semon in *Narrow Fellow*, an act which had "comic music, chatter, novelty musical instruments;" Billy DuVal and Merle Symonds in *Her Father*, a song and dance act; and The Lumars, "equilibrists." Jimmy Gildea and his company presented a musical farce, *The Great Lover*, as headliners on a bill that also had Cardo and Noll, advertised as "America's foremost tenor and prima donna;" Witt and Winters, "hand balancers;" Arthur Lloyd in *The Humorous Card Index*; and Arnold Grazor and Myrtle Lawlor, dancers. Arturo Bernardi, "unique quick change artist," according to the advertisement, who

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60 *News*, Sun., Nov. 16, 1924, III, 6.
"impersonates great musicians... presents two comedies, taking all of the characters," headlined the January 13 program. The Zaza and Adele Revue, said to include "dancing, piano, violin playing and singing," and featuring "The Apache Dance;" Tom Gremmer and Edah Belbridge in a story-telling and song act; the LaFrance Brothers in "chair stunts;" and Fagg and White, blackface comedians, made up the rest of the program.  

Clay Crouch, together with the Berg Sisters and Paul Murdoch, did a playlet, Back Stage, to headline the following week's bill. The program also had the Gaites Brothers in Quiet, Please; Nancy Decker, singer; the DeVries Troupe, "aerial gymnasts;" and May McKay and her sisters. During the following week the bill was headed by Jane Moore in a Wania-Seamon revue. The rest of the bill had Hodge and Lowell in a skit, Object Matrimony; Ranche and Royce in a blackface act; the Beasley Twins, pianists and violinists; and The Three Walters in a "horizontal bar and trapeze act." Pinto and Doyle headlined the bill for the following week with their comedy act. On the bill also were the Balkan Wanderers featuring Alexander Boschakoff and Olga Zicova; a skit, Cupid's Closeups, with Arthur Jarrett and his company. Bridie Kraemer, billed as "the little mocking bird--imitator of instruments;" and Hubert Dyer and his company, "pantomime and acrobatics." The Hubert Kinney revue "with host of Broadway favorites and beauties"

topped the bill for the week of February 8, and the same program had Warren and Hayes in a rube act, *Country versus City*; the Powers Duo, gymnasts; Teddy, a wrestling bear; and Al H. Wilson, "the natural comedian."\(^6\) Bob Nelson, billed as the "human dynamo," was the headliner for the following week in a bill that also had Bedford and Wall, jugglers; Barrett and Farnum, dancers; Billy Barnes and Jack Barton in *Kandy Krooks*, a "miniature musical comedy with eight people;" and Lola Brava and her company in Spanish songs and dances.\(^6\)

Toney and Norman were seen in *A Man about Town*, described in the advertisement as "business and whispered conversation;" the following week. The Eclaire Twins returned in a dancing act with Billy Wells, and Raymond and Kaufman were seen in a comedy skit, *Marriage and Divorce in Three Rounds*. The bill had, too, Juan Vernon of the team of Cook and Vernon, and the "Aerial De Groffs, gymnasts."\(^7\)

Vie [sic] Quinn's Sunnybrook orchestra was the featured act on the March 1 program. She was assisted by Palmer Young and Harry Young, and the act featured a "Bowery Dance" done by herself and Palmer Young. The program had also Jimmy Lyon in his act, *The Ambassador*, "a monologue on current topics, war, women and politics;" Bobby Jackson and Ida Mack in a dance act, *The Book Shop*; Frost and Morrison in "songs and patter;" and the McDonald Trio in a bicycle act.\(^7\) Van Avery, billed as "the original Rastus," together with Carrie Avery headlined the March 8

program. A monkey act, A Day at the Races; Lew Cantor in a Braille and Pallo revue with Lew Kessler, dancer; and Ralph R. Rogers and Elsie D. Donnelley in The Italian Count completed the program. The well-known Morton family, who had been seen in Dallas earlier, including the wife, Mamie, and the children, Linda and Alred, did a musical farce for the March 15 bill. On the stage also were Milo, an eccentric tramp who did animal imitations and comic singing; Evelyn Phillips, Eddie Sims and Joe Devaney, dancers; Sally Goldie and Madeline Beattie, singers; and Adair and Adair, "horizontal bar artists." Marcelline, the "famous clown," came to the Melba on March 22 in a Loew's vaudeville circus. The act was advertised as "the only circus appearing in entirety on the vaudeville stage, featuring as it does a regular circus troupe of clowns, performing animals, midair artists, and other denizens of the big top. Marcelline the featured clown has an international reputation as an entertainer." The Melba returned to Pantages shows on March 29 with Lewis and Doddy in an eccentric act, Hello, Hello, Hello or Chera-Bochca, headlining the bill. Others appearing were George Lloyd and Rosalee in a song-and-dance act; Myrtle Boland, singer, assisted by Ellen Hopkins at the piano; the Paramount Quintet, singers, and Booth and Nina, cyclists.

An aquatic act, Madeline Berlo and the Diving Girls, was the top feature on the April 5 program. Also on the bill were McDevitt,

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Kelly and Quinn in a skit, The Piano Movers and the Actress; Romine and Castle in a comedy, Dark and Light; Al Abbott in a skit, At a Home Talent Show; and a dog act featuring Max York's "Pupils." The Jack Powell Sextet, "drummers in blackface;" Bob Murphy and his company in a comedy skit; Robinson Janis and his troupe in a "comedy episode" The Woman Pays; Murray and Gerrish, song-and-dance team; and M. Gintaro in a "top spinning and block manipulating act" were on the April 12 program. The following week found Gell Mann's "Band Box Revue featuring Ruiz and Bunning" headlining the program. The other acts were Sue Creighton and Ellie Lynn in a "rube" act, The Follies of a Side Street; Billy Zeck and Gladys Randolph in a comedy skit, Grooming the Groom; Carol Racine and Dorothy Ray in a song-and-patter act; and Boyd and Wallin in a "novelty wire and iron jaw sensation." The final act of the 1924-1925 season was headlined by a song-dance-comedy act by Bill Adams, See America First. The rest of the program had Finlay and Hall in a comedy patter act, Vodvil a la Mode; Beeman and Grace in one of those "versatility" acts which included performing on the harmonica, mandolin and guitar and skating and dancing; Bussey and Case in another varied act that had "talk, fake tricks, accordion, juggling;" and an animal act done by Ponzini's monkeys.

The vaudeville policy continued at the Melba until July 5 and at that time the theater discontinued its vaudeville programs and

devoted itself exclusively to motion pictures.\textsuperscript{80} The musical background for The Ten Commandments, the first motion picture shown under the new policy, demonstrates to what ends theater managers went to provide sound for the silent movies.

The musical background is proving one of the most attractive features of the Southern premier showing of "The Ten Commandments," Cecil B. DeMille's production which is now showing at the Melba Theater for a limited engagement. As arranged by Director Karl Lambertz of the Melba Theater orchestra and Manager S. T. McDonald, the stage effects and atmospheric prologue are attracting a great deal of attention as being especially appropriate and entirely in keeping with the dignity of the picture. The original New York musical score comprising many pages of music selections is used in the episodes of the picture and a special stage presentation is offered at the 8 and 10 o'clock performances.

A double quartet singing back stage furnishes the atmospheric presentation. Local singers of prominence ... give a rendition of Rossini's "Inflammatum et Accensus" from "Stabat Mater," back stage with lighting and stage effects. The orchestral arrangement for this number was made by F. R. Fuller, local musician.

The overture presented by Karl Lambertz and the Melba Players is Leo Delibes "March and Procession of Bacchus," from the ballet "Sylvia."\textsuperscript{81}

In summary, the Melba, like the Palace, was able at first to ride the popularity of the movies, depending for its live entertainment on occasional stage presentations, the theater orchestra and the organ preludes. But as the Majestic stage shows improved in quality, both the Melba and the Palace found their attendances threatened. The Palace responded in 1924 by adopting a less "classical" approach in its programming. The Melba, taken over in 1924 by Southern Enterprises, the same corporation that controlled the Palace, launched its vaudeville

\textsuperscript{80}News, Wed., June 24, 1925
\textsuperscript{81}News, Wed., July 8, 1925, 4.
policy at the start of the 1924 season. The conventional vaudeville fare offered at the Melba through the Pantages circuit was successful enough to last for a year but eventually had to be discontinued. By 1926, both the Melba and the Palace were to have full scale live entertainment, the Melba with Loew's vaudeville and the Palace with its Publix unit shows. The resurgence of interest in live entertainment together with the threat from the highly successful Majestic Theater policy were undoubtedly factors that led to this activity.

The shortcomings of the Pantages vaudeville offerings as far as Dallas is concerned, are readily apparent. Dallas was demanding "name" stars; the Pantages vaudeville programs had few to offer. And there can be no doubt that Dallas audiences, like those elsewhere in the country, were becoming jaded with the same kind of entertainment, presented week after week. Of course the hub of the problem lies in the fact that there just were not enough good vaudeville artists to provide topnotch entertainers every week. While the movies were still in their infancy, the public had been willing to accept vaudeville in whatever form it appeared. But as the movies improved, the public could select between rival bids for its favor, and the public nod went to that medium which could best satisfy the insatiable craving for laughter, thrills and the novel.
CHAPTER XII

THE TEXAS STATE FAIR SHOWS

The annual Texas State Fair Shows were not only a unique aspect of the city's entertainment activity but were also the biggest theatrical event of the year in Dallas. Running from the time the Fair opened at the beginning of the second week in October until the time the Fair closed, generally about October 25, the Shows were not only more heavily publicized than any other single event in the city during the year, but also attracted the attention of the entire Southwest. Each year, from 600,000 to approximately 1,000,000 persons visited the Fair. And the Show was one of the principal attractions. Until 1924, it was held in the 3,200 seat Coliseum. In that year, while the new Fair Park Auditorium was under construction, it was housed in a giant tent. Then in 1925, the Shows moved into the new 5,000-seat Fair Park Auditorium where they are still housed.

It was in 1887 that the pattern of the State Fair Shows had been set. In that year, John Philip Sousa and his band had played to empty seats at the new musical hall on the Fair grounds while a vaudeville show, Battle of All Nations, had filled the house. Since that year, the Show had consisted of a "vaudeville show mixed with musical revue, musical comedy and novelty bands." The directors of the 1887 Fair had decided "that classical music and bands could not hold the
attention of a Fair audience and passed this judgment down to other
directors."

Partly by mutual agreement and partly because the booking agents
for dramatic and musical events realized the folly of competing with the
State Fair event, the Fair Show tended to divide the Dallas theatrical
year rather sharply. There were very few major touring dramatic or
musical shows seen in Dallas in the fall prior to the close of the State
Fair production. Because these shows did not usually begin appearing in
Dallas until after the Christmas holidays, this meant a relatively short
theatrical season for the city, as the season generally ended in late
April or early May due to the heat. From the end of October until the
lull caused by the pre-Christmas season, there was generally some
activity and this was generally called by the critics the "short season."
Then after the first of the year, the bulk of the entertainment was seen
in the city.

The 1920 Show

The Smiles of 1920 Revue, the State Fair Show for 1920, was
similar to those that had been held in the previous thirty-three years.
In announcing the show, W. H. Stratton, secretary of the State Fair
Association, said that the Fair revue marked the first time the show had
been produced in this country, and that it had ten principals, and
innumerable scenic artists." The producer of the show, De Recat, had
formerly been ballet master and designer of costumes for the Opera
Comique in Paris. It was agreed by the Fair Association that the

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"Smiles" name would be made "a permanent institution in Dallas, changing only in date from year to year."

An idea of the nature of the Smiles of 1920 Revue is gained from the advance description of its opening:

Lightning and thunder will herald the sudden aerial appearance of a vivid figure in the accoutrements of the planet Mars. He has made successfully the trip to this country and finds only darkness to greet him. He is searching for light when a fairy appears. She tells him where he is and asks him what he wants to see about this planet. Bearing in mind the stories and cries which have penetrated even to Mars, the young hero of the planet asks to be shown the cabarets of Paris. The fairy makes good her promise. The chorus, scenery and costumes will lend aid in portraying a variety of gorgeous scenes for the visitor. Mexico, harems of the Orient, mysteries of the silent Chinese and other vivid pictures are shown. Music will be made to harmonize with each scene and popular songs will be sung by the chorus during changes of scenery. The comedy will consist of four large acts.2

Among principals in the cast were Swan Wood, Oriental dancer; Bernice Martelle, prima donna and dramatic soprano; the three Romanos, dancers; Bruce Webster, basso; Jewel Shaw, soubrette; Grace Chester, ingenue; Frank Norton, comedian and character man; Ethel Tammings, lyric soprano; Fred Goodwin, baritone; Cecil Morgan, tenor; Mildred Rodiga, contralto; and the Fontenelle Five, musical and jazz band.3

According to the News reviewer, a record crowd greeted the show when it opened. He described the show as follows:

No words are spoken but everything is sung. . . . The appearance of the hero was greeted Saturday night by applause from the audience. Scenic beauty of the production won many an admiring glance. . . .

The polo scene follows the prologue, with a polo club as a background. The chorus takes a prominent part in every scene. The chorus is composed of twenty-four girls with costumes and


scenery to fit the nature of the scene and to carry on the story. . . . The part of the famous vampire of history is taken by Swan Wood, Oriental dancer. Miss Wood has danced her way through the late New York success, "Rose of China."

Preceding her entry on an elaborately decorated barge which is supposed to float down the river, the chorus of twenty-four provides a propitious entry. Cleopatra is surrounded by six of her maidens fanning her with palm leaves.

The scenes go from Egypt to Paris and then to America and Texas. One of the features of the show is the duplication of the Dallas sky-line, the photograph of which has been published in local newspapers. The scenery for the Dallas scenes consists of this skyline, hanging above a gigantic, white staircase.

One of De Recat's compositions provides a final and pleasing number for the last scene. The song "We're in Dallas and we're going to Stay," fits the chorus and the scene admirably and drew the enthusiastic approval of the audience last night. . . . It is expected that the Coliseum will be filled to capacity Sunday afternoon and night.4

The 1920 State Fair drew 1,023,563 visitors, the largest for any of the Fair seasons on record up to that time.5

The 1921 Show

In August, 1921, W. H. Stratton went to Chicago to make the final arrangements for the new State Fair show, Smiles of 1921, which was then playing at Riverside Park "to marked success." Another feature at the Fair was to be a Texas Centennial Pageant involving 5,000 performers and using the new 15,000-seat stadium on the Fair grounds. The stadium was to be covered with a canopy supported by four giant posts in either corner, in a manner similar to that employed by the Romans. Stratton described it as "the most spectacular feature ever attempted by the Association," and announced that the advice of descendants of the Texas pioneers would be sought in arranging the historical scenes. The arena

of the stadium was to be decorated to represent the world's famous gardens. The director of the pageant was to be Jack Webster Harkrider of Los Angeles, a native Texan who "has become widely known throughout the country as a producer of elaborate spectacles." Stratton commented also that completion of the new $75,000 stadium would make it possible to carry out "one of the most elaborate athletic programs in the history of the Fair," one that would include several football games.

The 1921 Fair attracted a total of only 647,935 persons, but the Fair officials stated that they considered this "most gratifying in view of unsettled conditions and high railroad rates."

The 1922 Show

The "Smiles" revues continued for only two Fair seasons, and for the 1922 Show a revue was presented which included the Royal European Midgets. The midget troupe was a complete theatrical unit.

Among them are a prima donna, a classic dancer, two women acrobats and a pianist. Among the men there is one Japanese, a clever clog dancer, two forty-five pound pugilists, a tight wire performer and a trapeze aerialist. Six of the men, with two of the women, form a music octette that is said to be as good as any similar organization weighing three times as much. All of them are musical to some degree, and as a finale to their regular number, the whole company appears in a twenty-four piece band, rendering popular selections. The company will come direct to Dallas from Canada where they appeared at the Toronto Fair immediately after landing in this country from Europe.

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8News, Fri., Oct. 6, 1922, 1.

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The reviewer for the News praised the show highly. He stated that "For sheer entertainment of varied nature, there probably never has been a Coliseum program to compare with the present one," and continued:

There were three big acts Friday night, each virtually a show in itself. The Thomas Saxotet and Dorothy Lang, the Four Bard Brothers and the Royal European Midgets were the three troupes, each of which was greeted with a prodigious amount of cheering.

Twenty-four tiny persons are introduced in the Midget portion of the program. If the performers had been of ordinary size, their act would have made a distinct hit, but staged by such a group of enthusiastic Lilliputians, it set the crowd wild with unalloyed enjoyment.

Feats of magic which are really mystifying, dancing, singing, acrobatic stunts and an orchestra are all contained in this portion of the bill.

The Four Bard Brothers are alone worth the price of admission. Hand-to-hand balancing, leaping and catching are their stock in trade. The act closes with a double exchange leap which is hard to believe, even when it is seen. The Thomas Saxotet consists of five men who play the saxophone and inject a lot of comedy into their melody. They had the crowd laughing before they had been on the stage a full minute.

Miss Dorothy Lang, ballet dancer de luxe, who did a solo dance with the full orchestra, came out with the Saxotet in an encore number. She is an exceedingly graceful little miss and gives an air of piquancy to the program.\textsuperscript{10}

Though the Fair Season as an experiment in this year had been shortened to ten days, there was a total attendance of 699,165. The Fair management commented after the close of the season that they were "not yet convinced that the Fair should not continue as heretofore for a full sixteen days."\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10}News, Sat., Oct. 7, 1922, 14.

\textsuperscript{11}News, Mon., Oct. 16, 1922, 1.
The 1923 Show

The sixteen-day season was restored in 1923, and the Fair show was to be of virtually the same type as it had been. The revue was produced by Ernie Young. He brought his Marigold Garden Revue to the State Fair and called it The Passing Parade of 1923. So big was the size of the show that the Coliseum stage was extended thirty feet forward for its whole width to accommodate the big production. The four principals in the company of seventy-five who were to present the revue included Marian Morgan, prima donna; Adele Jeanne, premier danseuse; Hazel Kirke; and Lew Jenkins, juvenile. The show was also to include Art Landry's "famous Chicago syncopators." Other features of the Coliseum show were a number of vaudeville acts, including such performers as Jim the Bear; the Six Belfords, "Wonderful Risley acrobats;" Rosse Brothers, "Midget Marvels;" the Four Phillips, "Perch Pole Equilibrist;" and the "Chicago Four" quartette. The admission price to the Coliseum for the revue was 50¢ for general admission and 75¢ for night reserved seats.

Considered one of the more spectacular acts of the revue was the "Song of the Pearls," a number in which Marian Morgan, the prima donna, and the chorus, wore costumes made of artificial pearls. According to the newspaper account, there were more than one-million imitation pearls in the costumes, and one worn by Miss Morgan weighed ninety pounds.

In another part of the Fair grounds, at the grandstand, a number of vaudeville acts were performed every afternoon at 1:15 p.m. These included the Sie Tahar troupe, "acrobatic marvels;" the Australian axmen; The Sells elephants, Toto and Billy Sunday; Manello and Company, "Equilibrist extraordinary;" The Nizzias, "unusual balancing;" "Finks screamingly funny mule circus;" The Cadonas, "Thrilling aerialists;" Choy Ling Foo troupe, "Chine Acrobat;" the Tunisian Sisters, "Bedouin dancers;" and Monsieur Alfredo, "The acme of grace." One particularly successful day at the Fair was "Ku Klux Klan Day" when "Klansmen from Texas and Oklahoma and many other states attended in large numbers." Fair officials pronounced the occasion "a phenomenal success." The 1923 Fair attracted 973,154 visitors.

The 1924 Show

The year 1924 was to mark a significant turning point for the State Fair Shows. It was to be the last year for the type of revue which had been presented each season at the Fair for the past thirty-seven years. A year later, the new Fair Park Auditorium was to be completed and was to house all succeeding State Fair Shows. There were to be revues presented at the Auditorium during the 1930's, but they were to be featured by well-known stars. It was in 1924 that the Coliseum, which had not only housed the Fair Shows since 1887, but which had also been the principal theater for touring musical productions, was

turned into an agricultural display building. Because the Auditorium was not yet completed, the 1924 show was given in a 150-foot by 200-foot tent theater, built at the east end of the Automobile and Manufacturing Building. The tent had a wood framework, and the stage and seats from the Coliseum were utilized.

Another Ernie Young revue, The Passing Parade of 1924, was the presentation and the featured principals included Lola Scofield, prima donna; the Marigold Trio; Burdy and Noway, "sensational dancers;" the Carlson Sisters; and Alberti Golden, producer of the ballet whose troupes, trained in the East, were popular in musical comedies.18

The reviewer for the News called the show "an applause getter from start to finish, with pretty girls, beautiful costumes, zippy, snappy, "hummy" music and a lot of pep and go. The reviewer pointed out that there was no attempt to provide scenery on the sixty-foot wide stage, "just a big curtain across the back through which entrances and exits are made. . . ." The show, as described by the reviewer, followed the traditional revue pattern:

"Carnival Time" is the opening number with Miss Lola Scofield, prima donna, singing "Save the Last Waltz for Me." The chorus is richly costumed, Miss Scofield's voice is true and her sweet manner and her stage presence most pleasing. Burdy and Noway, French dancers . . . are a popular feature.

The Marigold trio offers several vocal numbers, with the audience particularly applauding "When It's Night Time in Italy." Stanley Simmons, Howard Barger and Lawrence Reed are the trio.

"In the Evening," serves as an introduction of the Carlson Sisters, Misses Addie and Gene, versatile dancers . . . clever, charming and equally as versatile. They do soft shoe work, what might be called a parody on a Spanish dance . . . and some of the best sort of "tap" work in stiff soled dancing shoes.

Janet Adler's Syncopators, eleven girl musicians . . . lacked not a bit for the acclaim that was due them. Joe Thomas Saxotet, with Arthur Nicholson's clowning . . . went over big. Eddie Matthews, eccentric acrobatic dance, showed him a highly capable worker.¹⁹

One added feature of the opening day’s entertainment at the Fair was the presentation of Harry Houdini, the well-known disappearing artist, on a specially constructed stage in front of the grand stand. He was due to introduce his "famous expose of fraudulent spiritualistic materializations."²⁰

The 1920-1925 seasons at the State Fair, as has been indicated, were basically in the same tradition and of the same type that had been seen at the Fair since 1887. With completion of the State Fair Auditorium in 1925, there was to be a sharp difference both in the type and qualities of the shows that were given.

The Fair management were fundamentally very conservative in their approach to entertainment. If a show succeeded one season, they were more than likely to continue to use the same producer for the succeeding season. There was the realization that much of the Fair's attendance came from rural areas and emphasis was placed on size and spectacle, on dazzling the audiences with the magnificence of the productions, the beauty of the costumes, and the trickiness of the lighting effects, rather than on artistic merit.

The Fair Shows, at least until 1925, were generally brought intact from such places as Riverview Park and the Marigold Gardens in

Chicago, favorite sites for such entertainment "spectaculars." Supple-
menting these revues when they were presented in the Coliseum were
vaudeville acts, bands, and circus features.

Because they were intended for mass entertainment, the Fair
Shows followed the most well-established and the least experimental
patterns of presentation. But they were of a piece during this period,
with other musical extravaganzas that were brought to the city during
the regular theater season—with Chu Chin Chow, Hitchy Koo, Take it
From Me and Glorianna. However, they cannot be said to have been of
the same quality. Although in their touring musicals and legitimate
productions, Dallasites during this period were beginning to demand
Broadway standards and entertainers and were beginning to tire of the
spectaculars and tradition-bound revues, this influence did not make
itself felt in the State Fair Shows until 1925.
CHAPTER XIII

OTHER ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVITIES

The consideration of professional entertainment at the theaters gives only a partial picture of the great amount of amusements activity in Dallas during the 1920-1925 period. Not only were there many concerts and recitals but the city also had a number of dramatic readings, circuses, minstrel shows, tent shows and the performances of the Dallas Little Theater and other amateur groups. Because this study is limited to professional theater the present chapter will be concerned only with such entertainment activities as seem closely allied to such presentations. It must be borne in mind, however, that though tent shows and minstrel shows are to be discussed more fully, within the limitations of the publicity they received in the Dallas press, the discussion of dramatic readings, circuses, personal appearances by well-known entertainers and of operas is highly selective with only enough given to provide some idea of the many activities offered Dallas audiences during the period. Too, some attention is paid to devices used by theatrical managers to lure in patrons. Again, it must be stated that these are only a fragment both of the variety and of the number of such "gimmicks" that were employed.

Tent Shows

One form of dramatic entertainment which persisted in Dallas until well into the 1930's was the tent show. The tent shows had once
been common throughout the country, but by 1920, they were almost an anachronism. However, a few of them still survived. Generally, their playing schedule consisted of new plays each night. The admission prices for the Brunks Comedians company which played in Dallas in the spring of 1921 showed that the 1,000 seats in the tent went for a top price of 40¢ to adults and that children were admitted for 25¢. These tent show prices were to be sharply reduced in Dallas a few years later.

There was not much newspaper publicity about the tent shows, making it difficult to trace when they arrived in Dallas, how long they stayed, and their success or failure. John Rosenfield commented that he and his colleagues "never paid much attention to them," and said that their productions were "on an even lower level than the stock companies." 2

The tent shows had steady patronage, for one company which subsequently came to Dallas was able to play in Houston for five straight years.

The first and only tent show to attract newspaper attention during the 1920-1925 period was Drunk's Comedians. Brought to Dallas in March, 1921, under auspices of the American Legion, the troupe played in a tent at the old Postoffice site and the first production was The Man from out Yonder. The principal comedian of the company was Harley Sadler, a native of Dallas. Others in the company included Mildred Baxter, leading lady, and A. C. Hefner, male lead. One characteristic of these tent shows which made them resemble tabloid shows was the

2Rosenfield Interview.
introduction of vaudeville skits between the acts of the play. Mention was made in Chapter VIII of the fact that in the spring of 1925 Harley Sadler brought a company to the Jefferson Theater.

Brunk's Comedians only drew attention in the listings of the News for one week, that of March 27, 1921. Plays given during the week were *The Man from out Yonder*, March 27; *Was She to Blame?*, March 28; *The Turning Point*, March 29; *The Cowboy Detective*, March 30; *The Coward*, March 31; *The Tide of Life*, April 1; and *The Yankee Doodle Boy*, April 2.

After this week, the troupe was not mentioned, and it could not be determined how long the company stayed in the city.

In summary, the tent shows were, between 1920 and 1925, a little publicized part of the Dallas entertainment scene. Because of this scarcity of publicity, it is difficult to trace the exact appearances of these companies in Dallas. There was enough vitality in this form of entertainment to keep it going over a long stretch of years. As late as April, 1938, the Monroe Hopkins Players came to Dallas and set up their tent at Grand Avenue and Fourth street, the lot traditionally used by tent shows. The company played until November of that year. The policy of changing plays nightly leads one to believe that the quality of performance was on a relatively low level, and there is the statement of John Rosenfield to corroborate this fact. The tent shows in 1921 appear to have enjoyed more prestige than they did in the late 1930's. This can be inferred from the fact that the price of admission was much higher and also from the sponsorship of Brunk's Comedians by the American

\(^3\text{News, Sun., Mar. 27, 1921, II, 5.}\)

\(^4\text{News, Wed., Nov. 16, 1938, I, 8.}\)
Legion. As far as the main stream of theatrical activity in Dallas was concerned, the tent shows played only a minor role. Dallas was too big, even in 1921, to pay much attention to these itinerant players.

Minstrel Shows

Minstrel shows were extremely popular in Dallas during the 1920-1925 period. The public in general seemed to have an insatiable desire to see this peculiarly American form of entertainment and Dallas was a center for minstrel activities. In the early 1900's, blackface acts were extremely popular in the variety houses that lined Elm Street. A number of minstrel companies visited Dallas each season.

Bert Swor, a famous minstrel star who got his start in one of the small Elm Street showhouses, came to the Coliseum in November, 1920, with the Al G. Field's Minstrels, and according to the review, got a "big hand." The review indicates that the minstrel shows at the time paid great attention to scenic effects, and the reviewer commented that "a huge web is built out on the stage" for the contortion act of Henry Nelser "who impersonated a spider." The reviewer noted that when Swor "appeared in his first solo, he was presented with a big bouquet. Every time he opened his mouth, the applause was ready." Describing Swor as "minstrelsy's leading comedian," the reviewer observed that he "gave the homefolks his very best." The hit of the show, according to the review, was a song by Jimmie Cooper, "The World is Round, But It's Crooked Just the same," and the reviewer added that "Cooper responded to encore after encore using a new refrain each time until he finally either ran out or was tired out, for the last time he simply hummed the tune."

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Gus Hill's Minstrels were at the Coliseum in December of the same year and included among their "50 all white artists" George Wilson, Rudy Willing, James Barardi, Nick Glynn, Carolina Bronson, The syncopated jazz orchestra, the Musical Cates, the Markwith Brothers and the Saxophone Band. There was the usual "big street parade." Lasses White All Star Minstrels was another favorite organization in Dallas, and they played at the Coliseum in February, 1921, featuring a "gorgeous spectacular first part, 'The Isle of Flowers,' 'In the Land of Old Black Joe or Moonlight among the Moss,' and 'The Blackville Handicap.'" Also famous in minstrelsy circles was the Neil O'Brien group which played the Coliseum in March, 1920, and which had in its cast Bert Swor, "Sugarfoot Gaffney," Dan Fitch, and Miller and Strong. The troupe was described in the advance notice as "The greatest troupe of burnt cork artists on tour. Their success is now theatrical history." The reviewer described the program as "above the average, with never a dull moment . . . a program that has not been equaled of its kind in Dallas this season." The following March, the O'Brien Minstrels were back at the Coliseum, this time featuring Danny Duncan, Jack "Smoke" Gray, Pete Detzel and Joe Carroll. Prices for the performance ranged from $2 to 50¢.

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7 News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, II, 5.
When the Lasses White group came in February of 1922 to the Coliseum, presented by Spaeth and Company, the acts included Harmony Bay, Down Honolulu Way, Cruise of the Blackville Yacht Club, Looking for the North Pole, Lasses White as Zero Snow the Stowaway, The Solo Band and Orchestra and the Daily Noonday Street Parade. The O'Brien company returned in March of 1922 for a performance on the seventh. In the group were Jack "Smoke" Gray, Pete Detzel, Joe Carroll, Bell and Arliss, Gene Cobb, Frank (Cracker) Zuinn, Fred Miller, Claude Root, Speed McCarty, Henry Maher, J. Lester Habercorn, Tom Kane, David C. Morris, Wally B. Mersereau, Ed Larson, George Shone, Don Marshall, Charles R. Wright, Tom Wiggins, Andrew White, Jimmy Johnson, Nyle Verne and William Richards.

The Merry Minstrels of 1922 played at the City Hall auditorium on March 4, 1922, and Bert Swor appeared with the Al G. Field's Minstrels at the Coliseum on November 12 of the same year.

It was during 1923 that the minstrel shows began to appear in the downtown theaters. Lasses White and his group were at the Jefferson on January 4, 5, and 6, and the spectacular effects aimed at in these shows can be gathered from the description in the advertisement of the "Southern Sketch," Way Down South, "which involves an old plantation log cabin, the fields of cotton in bloom and the majestic Mississippi with a steamboat race between the Robert E. Lee and the

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Natchez." Assisting Lasses White in the cast were Slim Vermont, Zip Lee and Bobby Burns as comedians; Roscoe Humphrey, Norman Brown, Nate Talbot, Jimmie McDonald, Harold Morris, P. H. Bengher, Herbert Schultz, Jimmie Johnson, Robert Johnson, and George Milner, described as "the minstrel Tetrazzini." The O'Brien Minstrels were also at the Jefferson on March 2 and 3, 1923, and the review indicates that the minstrel shows were beginning to change in character:

Old-time favorites in old-time songs scored the greatest hits Friday night at the performance of Neil O'Brien's Minstrels at the Jefferson. The show was exquisitely staged and beautifully costumed, the singing was unusually good and the comedy sketches were really funny. For the vast majority of the audience, however, the performance was marred by a little too much broadness in some of the negro jokes.

Showmen say Dallas audiences are too squeamish and that lines which go over big in most places fall flat here. It was too bad that near-vulgarity was permitted to crop into what otherwise is a fine show. 17

So popular were the minstrel performances by the latter part of 1923 that they moved into the big downtown theaters. Al G. Field's Minstrels, with Nick Hufford, Jack Richards, John Healy, Pete Detzel, Billy Church and Rody Hordan among the featured artists, played a one-night stand at the Majestic on November 12, and the reviewer gave a good picture of how much the shows were departing from the traditional format:

Old favorites divided honors with new ideas . . . for the Al G. Field Minstrels have retained the popular songs of bygone days, and aside from that, have a show unique and almost entirely different from that of the past. As the result, two big audiences enjoyed themselves even more than they had expected to. . . .

John Healy sang "Old Black Joe." The veteran minstrel has appeared in this number almost countless times and, judging by the applause, the hearers hope he will be back with it many more seasons. Others may come and go, but Johnnie Healy is one member of the Field organization who would be sorely missed.

Arriving apparently in a huge airship, the minstrels get right down to business. Pete Detzel and Rody Hordon, end men de luxe, got a big lot of applause, but the matinee went wild with joy at the fine harmony singing of Jack Richards and Billy Church. Richards pleased most in "When you and I were Young, Maggie," but Church made his big hit with that new song, "The Babbling Brook." In their duets, they charmed as much as in their solos.

Eddie Jones did some excellent yodeling and the Doran brothers, Billy and Leo, proved as nimble footed as they have always been. In addition to being a good interlocutor, Leslie Berry made a hit with his illustrated song, "To the White House in Washington."

Upon Nick Hufford's plenty broad shoulders fell the duty of the monologue, which in times past, has been done by Bert Swor of Dallas. Nick elected to represent a darktown parson delivering a sermon and he set the crowd roaring with glee.

Reverting to King Tut's domain, the Field minstrels staged a comic sketch they called "Surprising the Sphinx." It was a scream from start to finish and the settings were gorgeous.

The second fantastic sketch was given its locale in the vast caves of Virginia. A moving picture director and his star drop into one of these caves, and with the assistance of the elves, a "filium" is made. Boni Mack delighted as the pulchritudinous female in each of these sketches.18

The blending of the old and the new in the minstrel presentations is indicated also in the review of the show put on by the Smart Set Minstrels at the City Hall Auditorium on January 6 and 7, 1924.

The opening scene is the characteristic minstrel setting. There are six end men, three on each side, and interlocutor. There are a number of girls in the show to liven up the offering with blues numbers.

It is the closing scene, which is set in U Croakum undertaking establishment that really produces the best laugh. Playing on the idea that a negro is afraid of a coffin or anything pertaining to an undertaker, the sketch goes over well. It is "Pork Chop" who produces a number of the best laughs.

An exceptional presentation of buck and wing dancing is also among the number of offerings in the olio. The usual comedy quartet is present and a number of monologues and blues numbers are given.\(^\text{19}\)

Neil O'Brien and Bert Swor with their minstrel troupe were at the Melba on March 14, 15, 1924, with top admission prices set at $2 and matinee prices set for a $1 top.\(^\text{20}\)

The Al G. Field Minstrels were in their thirty-eighth year when they played the Hippodrome in November, 1924, and the advance notice stated that "Dallas has been included in the itinerary for many seasons." Old favorites with the group included Jack Richards, Billy Church, Nick Hufford, Harry Shunk, Johnny Healy, and Billy and Lee Doran. One of the new comedy sketches was *An African Barber Shop*. There were scenes laid also in Holland and Spain, and the opening curtain "reveals a yacht with cabin boys, passengers and crew all stepping to the music of the rolling waves." The show also included items, which the advance notice stated, "have always proved popular with Dallas audiences." Among these were female impersonations by Boni Mack and the dancing of "Old Black Joe" by Johnny Healy.\(^\text{21}\)

The Neil O'Brien Minstrels were back in Dallas on March 15 and 16, 1925, playing at the Circle Theater.\(^\text{22}\)

It can be noted, in summary, that during the 1924-1925 season the number of minstrel shows appearing in the city definitely dropped

\(^{19}\) *News*, Mon., Jan. 7, 1924, 4.


\(^{21}\) *News*, Thurs., Nov. 6, 1924, 4.

\(^{22}\) *News*, Sun., Mar. 8, 1925, III, 6.
This trend was to continue even more sharply between 1925 and 1930 and by the end of the decade the minstrel shows had all but disappeared from the Dallas scene. The blackface acts went into vaudeville and the competition of such radio shows as the Sinclair Minstrels were to hasten the decline. The minstrel acts were never again to be as popular as they had been in 1923.

Dallas audiences, like those in other cities, were tiring of the spectacular effects in the shows. They could see far better displays in the motion pictures. The audiences, too, were demanding diversification in their entertainment, and although, as has been seen, the minstrel troupes made some effort in this direction, the form seems to have been too rigid to stand the competition from other entertainment forms. But during the 1920-1925 period, the minstrels were still enjoying considerable popularity. Dallas, with its long tradition of blackface acts and its negro variety houses was more hospitable than most cities to this kind of entertainment, and the fact that Bert Swor, one of the leaders in the field, had gotten his start in the city, helped sustain this interest. However, the entertainment provided by the Majestic, the Palace and other downtown houses, and the increasing tendency of touring shows to meet the big city tastes of Dallas theater-goers helped wean away audiences from the minstrel shows.

Publicity Devices

Before leaving the downtown theater scene perhaps a little should be said about the publicity devices used by the theater managers to draw in patrons, the use of what today are known as "gimmicks." All the large theaters at the time had their "departments of publicity and exploitation," and numerous were the methods employed. Sampling at
random from the many publicity stunts one is amazed at their variety and showmanship.

The score board meant to attract baseball fans was used as early as 1920. The Old Mill had a "Marvel Baseball Player Board" which recorded the scores "while the crowds are still cheering it at the park," as early as October, 1920, during the World Series. Baby contests were also a venerable appeal. The Palace Theater management announced in January, 1922, that in connection with the film "The Child Thou Gavest Me," slated to be seen at the theater the following week, a contest would be held "to determine the twelve most perfect babies of Dallas."24

The Majestic featured "See yourself" movies when it showed "exclusive pictures of the Queens Ball at the Adolphus."25 Amateur night programs became popular in the early 1920's. The Jefferson theater, announcing that the amateur night programs would be held every Wednesday night, offered $15 in cash prizes each week.26 When Rudolph Valentino appeared in a film at the Palace Theater, the management announced that a thousand souvenir photographs would be given away.

Long before the appointed time, the Palace Theater lobby and foyer was filled with eager anxious flappers, all inquiring of the pages if it was yet 2:30 o'clock and when would the pictures of Valentino be ready. The matinee was a huge success as far as the flappers were concerned.27

All through the 1920's and 1930's talent scouts visited the city, and on each occasion their visits were exploited to draw patronage to particular shows. Thomas A. Kirby, vaudeville scout "who discovered talent in Rosa Ponselle, Orville Harrold, Marie Gambrelli, Bob Milo and other well-known celebrities," came to Dallas in October, 1922, to stage "opportunity contests" at the Majestic. He insisted there were "not enough good vaudeville acts to go around any more," and attributed this to the "split-week" policy which made necessary fifteen or sixteen acts a week, and to the increasing tendency of theaters to stay open with vaudeville all year around. Kirby said he planned to have two or three performers give their acts each night. He promised that he would arrange a "Dallas Follies" from the rest of the talent. Kirby was "authorized to arrange bookings over the Interstate, Orpheum and Keith circuits for any acts which he may recommend."

When the Majestic showed the feature picture, The Covered Wagon in August, 1923, Dallas pioneers were invited to attend the first afternoon performance. They were to be interviewed by Dallas News reporters. The Majestic was also sponsor for a "beautiful back" contest with "one dozen 8x10 French etchings from the Majestic studio, value $75" given as prizes. Even the Circle Theater, home of dramatic stock, employed the publicity devices. A poetry contest, in which readers of the newspapers were asked to write a four line or six line verse "using the name of the Circle player shown below, with two free

\[\text{News, Wed., Oct. 18, 1922, l.}\]
\[\text{News, Thurs., Aug. 2, 1923, l.}\]
\[\text{News, Wed., Mar. 12, 1924, l.}\]
tickets to the play awaiting each of the authors of the three best verses," was held in December, 1924.\textsuperscript{31} And on March 23, 1925, a farmer living near Forney returned "a large captive balloon to the Majestic Theater ... and claimed the $10 reward offered by Eugene Oliver, manager." The balloon had gotten away from the roof of the Majestic Theater, "where it had been tied as an advertising stunt for Marion Harris, 'blues' singer who has the headline position on the Majestic bill starting Sunday."\textsuperscript{32}

All the theater advertisements in the newspapers of the day, of course, fall in the category of publicity, and, of course, much of the material in the editorial columns of the News was so written as to publicize favorably the theatrical events.

Other Theatrical Activity

Dramatic stock, touring musicals and legitimate productions, downtown vaudeville shows, tent shows, minstrel presentations and State Fair Shows were only part of the entertainment available to Dallas audiences during the 1920-1925 period. As has been noted, the Dallas Little Theater was nationally known, but there were a number of other amateur drama groups in the city, including the Oak Cliff Little Theater, the Junior and Senior Arden Clubs at Southern Methodist University, the Cathedral Players, the Kant Agree Club and others. There were the musical shows gotten up by Dallas organizations, the Mozart Choral Club, and other singing groups, and the numerous Schools of Expression with

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 21, 1924, III, 6.
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{News}, Sat., Mar. 28, 1925, 4.
their recitals and "closing exercises." In addition, Dallas was a well-known musical center and many prominent concert artists appeared in the city.

The following discussion will be limited, however, only to entertainment which can be considered "theatrical" in nature. The appearance of Rudolph Valentino and his wife at Gardner Park and the Adolphus Hotel in a dance performance on March 24, 1924, falls into this classification. The reviewer commented about this event:

Making two personal appearances Saturday in Dallas, Rudolph Valentino, famous as a screen lover, was enthusiastically received in each instance. By far, the larger audience greeted him at Gardner Park Auditorium Saturday night where it is estimated that 4,500 persons, the fair sex being in the vast majority, gathered to get a look at the star and his beautiful wife. The applause was peculiar, consisting mostly of shrieks of joy, for those present were standing so closely together that hand-clapping was practically impossible.  

Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra attracted an audience of 4,700 persons to Gardner Park on February 2, 1925.  

The circuses, which usually made their annual visit to the city in September or October, prior to the start of the regular theater season, generally located their tents in Gaston Park where the State Fair was held. One of the oldest of these touring circuses was that of John Robinson, which in 1920, was on its ninety-seventh tour.  

Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey, biggest of the circuses, came each year to the city. The size of the audiences which attended the

circuses can be gauged by the fact that the main tent of the John
Robinson circus seated 10,000 persons. The street parades, long a
feature of the circus visits, were abandoned in Dallas in the early
1920's because the distance from the circus grounds to the downtown
area was so great. Other circuses which came to the city included the
Al G. Barnes Show and Hagenbeck Wallace.

Another feature of the city's entertainment life was the
dramatic readings and the lecturers. As the decade went on, their
popularity waned, and the readers were to be supplanted eventually by
such "monoactors" as Ruth Draper and Cornelia Otis Skinner.

Among the prominent readers who came to the city during the five
year period was S. H. Clark, principal of the Chautauqua School of
Expression, who appeared at the City Hall Auditorium on February 2, 3,
and 4, 1920, came back to the city on January 13, 1921, and read
Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln; Brieux' Americans in France; and Dickens'
David Copperfield. The reviewer commented about this reading:

As a speaker and an interpreter of the different parts of
the play and the different humors of the characters, Mr. Clark
excelled. He carried the force of Lincoln's character in a
manner similar to that which the popular mind had imagined it.
The women's parts in the play were spoken in a manner which
gave the audience a clear idea of the women the author wished to
represent. As the play ended, with a recital of the shooting in
the theater, there was a moment of tense silence, as though
every person in the audience were witnessing the act itself.
Then one person broke the spell by handclapping, which was
immediately taken up by the rest of the crowd.

Other readers and lecturers between 1920 and 1925 included Edith Wynne Matthison and Charles Rann Kennedy who appeared in a joint recital at the City Hall Auditorium on March 21, 1921, and came back on November 7 of the same year for another recital.

Irvin S. Cobb also appeared twice in Dallas during the period, the first time at the Coliseum on February 1, 1920, when he delivered one of his well-known humorous lectures, Made in America, and the second time on March 17, 1921, when he talked on Home Folks at the City Hall Auditorium. Frederick Warde, described in the advance notices as "The Grand Old Man of the Stage," told about his fifty years as an actor in an appearance at the City Hall Auditorium on November 10, 1921.

Mrs. Jessie Eldridge Southwick, cousin to Bayard Taylor, read from his translation of Faust at the Jefferson Hotel Ballroom on March 21, 1923. Gay MacLaren, described in the notices as "the girl with the camera mind," recited all the parts from Salisbury Field's play Zander the Great, then being performed in New York City.

The interest in drama in Dallas is indicated by the variety of lectures given on the subject. Oliver Hinsdell, director of the Little Theater, gave a weekly series of play readings and led discussion groups for the Dallas Woman's Form. J. F. Roister, professor of

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10 News, Mon., Mar. 11, 1921, 4.
11 News, Fri., Nov. 4, 1921, 4.
12 News, Thurs., Nov. 10, 1921, 4.
English at the University of Texas, presented three lectures at the Arts Club on the modern drama in April, 1920.\textsuperscript{46} Dr. Stockton Axson of Rice Institute also spoke on the same topic before the Shakespeare Club on April 23, 1920.\textsuperscript{47} Marguerite Rothwell lectured on "The Significance of the Shakespeare Sonnets" at City Hall Auditorium on February 18, 1921.\textsuperscript{48}

"The Modern Drama" was the subject when Mrs. Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale, member of a famous British theater family, talked at the Scottish Rite Cathedral on March 7, 1921,\textsuperscript{49} and Alexander Dean, when he became director of the Little Theater, conducted a course of study on modern plays for the Woman's Forum.\textsuperscript{50}

Other miscellaneous events of theatrical interest, taken chronologically, included the appearance of the San Carlo Opera company in a presentation of five operas at the Fair Park Coliseum during a three day run that began on November 18, 1920.\textsuperscript{51} Eight Victor artists, Henry Burr, J. H. Meyers, Fred Van Eps, Billy Murray, Albert Campbell, Frank Croxton, Monroe Silver and Frank Banta gave a joint concert at the Coliseum on February 6, 1921.\textsuperscript{52} The Chicago Grand Opera Company gave five operatic performances on March 23, 24, and 25, 1921 at the Coliseum. Tickets ranged from $6 on the main floor to $2 at the top of

\textsuperscript{46} News, Wed., Apr. 7, 1920, 8.
\textsuperscript{47} News, Sat., Apr., 24, 1920, 6.
\textsuperscript{48} News, Wed., Feb. 16, 1921, 4.
\textsuperscript{49} News, Mon., Mar. 7, 1921, 4.
\textsuperscript{50} News, Sun., Feb. 4, 1923, 4.
\textsuperscript{52} News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1921, II, 5.
the balcony.\textsuperscript{53} Ted Shawn, who was to be seen a number of times in Dallas in the years that followed, presented a concert of dances in the Coliseum on November 12, 1921.\textsuperscript{54}

On March 2, 3, and 4, the Russian Grand Opera Company gave three operas at the Coliseum,\textsuperscript{55} and on January 7, 1924, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn with the Denishawn Dancers were seen in a recital at the Coliseum.\textsuperscript{56} Anna Pavlova and her Ballet Russe company presented Chopiana at the Coliseum on February 4, 1924,\textsuperscript{57} and the Chicago Grand Opera Company gave three operas on March 1 and 2, 1924, at the Coliseum, featuring Rosa Raisa, Chaliapin, and Mary Garden.\textsuperscript{58} As one instance of many similar lectures, McAlbert the Mysterious, Dr. "Q" and Maurice presented a "Gigantic exhibition of spirit phenomena," on May 1, 1924, at City Hall Auditorium.\textsuperscript{59}

Emile Coue, famed exponent of auto suggestion, gave two lectures at the City Hall Auditorium on February 14, 1924,\textsuperscript{60} and on February 15, 1925, under auspices of the Elks, a number of movie stars appeared in a revue presented at Gardner Park Auditorium. Among those seen were Jack Daugherty, Helen Holmes, June Haver, Bryant Washburn,

\textsuperscript{53}News, Sun., Feb. 20, 1921, II, 5.
\textsuperscript{54}News, Sun., Nov. 6, 1921, II, 6.
\textsuperscript{55}News, Sun., Feb. 12, 1922, II, 7.
\textsuperscript{56}News, Sun., Dec. 30, 1923, IV, 6.
\textsuperscript{57}News, Sun., Jan. 27, 1924, IV, 6.
\textsuperscript{58}News, Thurs., Feb. 29, 1924, 4.
\textsuperscript{59}News, Thurs., May 1, 1924, 4.
\textsuperscript{60}News, Wed., Feb. 13, 1924, 4.
Cullen Landis, Wanda Hawley, Carl Miller, Ruth Stonehouse, Anna May Wong, Ena Gregory and Joe Murphy. Again in 1925, the Chicago Civic Opera Company gave performances on March 2 and 3, this time at the Majestic Theater. Prices ranged from $8 to $1.€2

Enough of the various musical, dance and events of other kinds have been cited to indicate the great number and complexity of presentations seen by Dallas audiences between 1920 and 1925. It was all of this activity which made Dallasites feel that they lived in the cultural center of the Southwest and which made them refer to Dallas as "little New York." This feeling of civic pride was to become even more pronounced during the 1930's and 1940's. It was the ability of the city to command large audiences for well-known musical artists that led the city to also demand the best in drama and to insist on the "name" stars in the downtown movie house presentations.

SECTION II

THEATER IN TRANSITION - 1925-1930
CHAPTER XIV

A LOOK AT THE BACKGROUND

Many complex factors operated in the Dallas theatrical scene during the 1925-1930 period. It was a half-decade of dramatic change and readjustment brought about by the arrival of the sound motion pictures, the growing popularity of radio, the stock market crash and the onset of the depression. These were dynamic phenomena that changed the entertainment picture of the entire nation, and, it may be said, of the entire world. But with the focus of this study centered on Dallas, it will be possible to see how an expanding Southwestern city, increasingly conscious of its cultural responsibilities, proud of its position as the leading cultural and amusement center of the state, more and more self-conscious about the disadvantages inherent in being off the route of the touring show, and determined to do something about it, responded to these factors. It is the filtering of the macrocosmic pressures that were affecting the whole country through the microcosm that constituted the Dallas theater scene which will be particularized in the study of this period that was to prove so influential in determining the future course of American entertainment.

At the start of the 1925-1926 season, vaudeville was flourishing at the Majestic Theater and was about to be launched again at the Melba, and the Palace was preparing for a more popular type of stage
presentation. During the succeeding five years, the Melba was to drop its vaudeville policy, the Palace was to go even further away from the "classical" policy, which had prevailed at the theater in the early 1920's. But live entertainment in the downtown theaters was due to be hard pressed by the coming of the sound films and the depression. During the 1932-1933 season, Interstate Amusements, which, through a series of bankruptcies and mergers had come into control of all the big downtown theaters, bowed to the inevitable and abandoned weekly vaudeville at the Majestic, and only used the Palace, as far as live entertainment was concerned, for occasional local presentations.

In 1925, only silent movies were shown on Dallas screens. By 1930, all the Dallas theaters had an all-sound film policy. The Fair Park Auditorium was completed in 1925, the McFarlin Auditorium in 1926, stirring new hopes in the city for a larger number of touring musicals and legitimate plays. By 1930, it was realized that these auditoriums were inadequate for all but the largest productions. The stock company performances continued sporadically throughout the five year period and got gradually better in quality, but their audiences dwindled away, and by 1930, stock had all but disappeared in the city. The road, as far as Dallas was concerned, changed also during the five year period. The legitimate productions, at first, were limited largely to appearances of old time stars bringing their own companies. By the end of the period, however, though there was a sharp reduction in the number of shows, there was an upgrading of quality. Most of the touring musicals seen in the city between 1925 and 1930 were second companies presenting Ziegfeld and Carroll productions, but by the time the 1929-1930 season got under way, a few of
the better musicals were making their way to Dallas. The Dallas Little Theater was to enter its period of decline by 1930, and the State Fair throughout all the five years stood fast in its policy of presenting Shubert operettas. However, the 1930-1931 season was to mark the start of Broadway musicals for the Fair.

Theater business, in general, was enjoying relative prosperity in Dallas in 1925. By 1930, it was in the doldrums, although Dallas was not hurt as much either economically or theatrically by the depression as were most other cities of comparable or larger size.

One imponderable factor in the Dallas scene from 1925 on was the presence of John Rosenfield as Amusements Editor of the News. He became almost immediately the most important of the city's critics and exercised an important, if somewhat intangible, influence on the city's subsequent theatrical taste and development.

It is difficult to determine what is cause and what is effect in studying the events and trends that took place in the city during the 1925-1930 period. It is not too difficult to trace the relationship between the arrival of the sound motion pictures and the gradual disappearance of live entertainment in the downtown playhouses. It is less easy to discover why the movies had less of an impact on legitimate drama in the city. All that can be done here is to present the events as they took place, show relationships where they seem obvious, and inject explanatory and theoretical discussion where possible.

It will be the purpose of this section to consider certain broad areas of the theatrical scene which, when considered together, may provide a cross section view of the background for entertainment
in the city during the five year period. The dynamic factors that made for both change and stasis in the theatrical picture, the business conditions, the audience tastes, the competition between theaters and the theatrical mergers will be viewed. Some attention will be given to the censorship problem and the section will then proceed to the changeover from the silent to the sound motion pictures and to a brief consideration of the growing popularity of radio. The problem, so acute in the city, of adequate facilities for legitimate productions will then be discussed and the section will end with the promises held out in this regard for the McFarlin Auditorium.

The Theater Industry

It might be well to first investigate the milieu, the economics and the background which provided the setting for the entertainment activities.

There can be no doubt about the essential health of theater in Dallas at the start of the 1925-1930 period. Some enlightening statistics on the seating capacity of the seven first-run theaters in the city were published in October, 1925.

All together, approximately 15,000 persons could be accommodated at one time.

To this figure has been added 5,000 more, the capacity of the new Fair Park auditorium which is to be operated continuously.

It is estimated that during the entire day something like 50,000 admissions are paid into Dallas theater box offices, making the combined theater receipts for each day average between $12,000 and $18,000.

The largest of the theaters is the new auditorium which now seats 5,000 persons and can be developed to seat 1,500 more. The capacities of the Palace and Majestic theaters are given as 3,000 each. The Circle Theater seats 1,100, the Melba 2,400, the Capitol, 1,014, the Jefferson 1,400 and the Old Mill 2,000.

Since motion pictures are produced for the country ... and not for a single city, there are virtually as many first
run picture houses in Dallas as in New York. ... In Dallas first run pictures are shown in the Capitol, Palace, Melba, Old Mill, Majestic and Jefferson Theaters.¹

An insight both into the growth of Dallas and into the habits of its theatergoers was provided in a survey made by a group of Southern Methodist University students in June, 1928. They questioned five-hundred persons on their theater habits and found that by far the greatest number attended the downtown shows and that only twenty-eight and one-half per cent went less than once a week. The survey pointed out that the city had 35,279 theater seats for a population of approximately 352,790 in the attending area, and that the theaters were not yet "overseated." Four conclusions were reached by the survey group.

The public is not as large as it might be. With proper exploitation there is room for several other theaters. The Dallas public is too casual and habitual in its show attendance and theaters should make the public definitely aware of their attractions. Show business does not exercise the proper grip and direct drawing power that it should or could.²

In spite of this indictment of the theater managers for their failure to sell their product, there was evidence that Dallas was becoming a major entertainment center. In 1925, the downtown theaters were finding it possible, for the first time, to hold such big films as The Lost World, Phantom of the Opera and The Gold Rush for more than the usual seven days.³ The survey finding that there was room for several other theaters went unheeded during the next five years. Marcus Loew, motion picture and theater-owning magnate, announced

¹News, Sun., Oct. 11, 1925, XVII, 1.
his intentions early in 1926 of building a large downtown showhouse, but the project was never realized. The next downtown theaters that were built were the 1,100 seat Rialto, constructed on the site of the Old Mill Theater and opened on September 9, 1935, and the 1,200 seat Tower Theater, opened on February 19, 1937. The era of building the 3,000-seat movie houses had ended. By the time the sound films rejuvenated the motion picture industry in the late 1920's, the economic depression had set in and there was little thought given to adding to downtown theater facilities in the city. Another fact was the expansion of the neighborhood playhouses and their growing attendance, a fact which definitely cut into the habit of going to the downtown theaters.

Competition among the downtown theaters for patrons was intense during the period. This took several forms. One of these was the jockeying for position as to the best opening days for new programs, the answer to which was conditioned by several factors. There was, for example, the fact that the showhouses with live entertainment had to take into account the travel time necessary for the long trip from Oklahoma City or Kansas City, as the case might be. Also, there was the opening date set by competing theaters to be considered if the "jump" was to be gained on them. Too, the theater managers had to plan their opening date so that it came at a time when business otherwise might be expected to be slow. The appeal of the new program,

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it was hoped, would quicken attendance on that day. By June 5, 1926, all the downtown theaters except the Palace had switched to Saturday openings. The Palace management gave as the reason for its Sunday openings that they were necessary to accommodate the new "unit" presentations. Until a few weeks earlier, the Old Mill had been opening on Thursdays.

Another form that the competition took was in admission prices. When one theater lowered its prices, the others generally followed suit. The same seems to have held true when prices were raised. In October, 1927, for example, the Melba, about to reopen after being shut down for several months, announced that it would charge 60¢ for nights, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. The Majestic promptly raised its top price. The Capitol went up to 50¢ and the Palace remained at 60¢. A month later, the Palace extended its 35¢ matinee prices from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and admitted patrons to all but the last evening show for prices under 60¢. The Capitol and the Old Mill followed suit on the same day and it was anticipated that the Majestic and the Melba would extend their matinee prices to meet the competition.

The problem of satisfying public taste was difficult. John Rosenfield in 1926 attributed the new interest in vaudeville, the decline of the stock companies, and the changeover of the straight motion picture houses to "live" programming to the fact that "public taste has broken loose and is flitting about," and he asked the

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question, "Has the motion picture run its course as a single item of entertainment?" By April of the following year he wrote that "all Elm street has gone vaudeville and pictures." He commented that the theater operators had given up the notion of "high Art," making an obvious reference to the policy of the Palace, and stated that as a result, the theaters, "in spite of an alleged business inertia, are reporting the largest gross intakes in their histories." And he added that the public had never before "obtained so much entertainment at so little expense." 

The matter of drawing customers through providing an abundance of entertainment at low prices reached such an extreme that in July, 1928, Rosenfield lamented that "the shows are too long." He stated that the theaters had "abandoned even that brief respite between preliminary entertainment and the feature picture, when it was customary to silence all music and turn up the house lights for two precious minutes." 

The *Dallas Morning News*, in June, 1930, made an attempt to determine public taste with regard to live entertainment and the movies and came up with the following conclusions:

> The average Dallasite goes to the theater six times a month or one-and-one-half times a week, showing that he might be going oftener.
> Ninety-two out of every one hundred Dallasites want a "flesh and blood" orchestra and want it badly.

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Eighty-four out of every one hundred think screen drama is as good as stage drama, but forty-one prefer the stage. Seventy-one out of every one hundred think that a good stage musical comedy or revue has the talky kind beat a mile. This clearly indicates that the public is fed up on screen musical shows.\textsuperscript{13}

One curious fact about the late 1920's, particularly after the stock market crash, was the unwillingness of the American people to accept the fact that a long and deep depression was in the making. This is reflected in John Rosenfield's comment in September, 1929, that the reason the dramatic stock companies were doing so poorly in the city and the road shows drawing so few patrons was the high admission prices they charged. "The Syndicate system in motion pictures, groceries and department stores," he stated, "is making a 'cheap public' out of us. Give us our entertainment cheaply enough and we will buy it."\textsuperscript{14} The theater business had worsened in Dallas by January, 1930, when Rosenfield observed that "while show business is seeking solution to its many perplexities, there looms its most formidable competition--the radio." He added, "And yet it is a settled fact that the public is going out at night less than ever before."

He cited some approaches being taken by Dallas theaters to meet the problem--split weeks at the Palace which "would call for the presentation of a new picture and a new stage show every three and four days with Wednesday and Saturday as possible opening days;" use of the Old Mill by Publix as the "two-a-week" theater and the Melba as the "big" picture house; the mergers in the industry "which were abruptly

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{News}, Mon., June 2, 1930, 6.

halted when the Federal Trade Commission grew curious;" and the fact that it was a bad year for "turkey" shows.\textsuperscript{15}

But in the other sections of the \textit{News}, depression conditions were cited which suggested reasons other than radio competition for the slowdown in theater attendance. An item on January 18, 1930, read:

\begin{quote}
Just as the snow began falling Friday morning, hungry men from over the city gathered at the Salvation Army headquarters, 500 North Ervay street, fell into line and waited their turn to pass inside where warm wholesome food awaited them. Friday night another procession filed into the Army headquarters and other social centers over the city seeking shelter from the bitter cold. . . . Practically every service center in Dallas was overcrowded with men seeking shelter.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Rosenfield wrote off the 1929-1930 season in Dallas as "a red-letter year." He stated that its main distinction was "the summary firing of almost every professional musician in Dallas." He pointed out that Harriet Bacon MacDonald, who had been a booking agent in the city for fifteen years, had to dig into her reserve funds to pay off the Duncan dancers and had "publicly called it quits for the season and probably for several more." Other failures of the season cited by the critic were the Mischa Elman and Fritz Kreisler concerts and the presentation of \textit{Lucia di Lammermoor} by the Chicago Grand Opera Company. Rosenfield also noted that the Dallas Little Theater had been compelled to cut its projected season of twelve plays back to eight.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] \textit{News}, Sun., Apr. 20, 1930, III, 8.
\end{footnotes}
One result of the economic conditions was the trend for the theater chains and vaudeville circuits to merge into giant companies—a factor that was to profoundly affect the Dallas theater scene. The control of the nation's motion picture houses went more and more into the hands of New York interests. Until November, 1926, the Saenger interests, a company controlled by Dallas businessmen, had control of the Capitol and the Old Mill theaters. The Palace and the Melba theaters were owned by Publix, a New York firm. In that month, Saenger and Publix merged. A year later, a theatrical merger took place involving interests totaling approximately $100,000,000. The Orpheum Circuit, the B. F. Keith Corporation, the Greater New York Vaudeville Theaters Corporation and the B. F. Keith-Albee Vaudeville Exchange all consolidated to form Keith-Albee Orpheum. The merger created a centralized booking agency in New York for stage performers, replacing the two separate organizations that had been in operation. Booking exchanges in Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles were continued. The merger also made it possible for stage performers to count on much longer periods of consecutive routing, sometimes as much as four years, and through one agency. This reduced the periods of layoff for the performers. In Dallas, the merger primarily affected the Majestic Theater, for Interstate Amusements held the Orpheum franchise west of the Mississippi River. Interstate also had a booking affiliation with the Keith office. Interstate officials anticipated that the merger would mean a

strengthening of attractions at the Majestic. They argued that the promise of four-hundred weeks continuous booking would attract "the finest entertainers in the world, some of whom have . . . confined their activities to stage, radio, concerts and other forms of entertainment."19

Another significant merger took place in February, 1929, when the Keith-Albee and Orpheum vaudeville circuits combined their booking offices. They also acquired the Film Booking Office. As part of the same consolidation, Radio Corporation of America bought out Keith-Albee Orpheum and also acquired the Victor Talking Machine Company. The new organization was known as Radio-Keith Orpheum, or RKD. The tieup of the Radio Corporation of America, RCA, with the National Broadcasting Company meant a close alignment between vaudeville and radio. According to John Rosenfield, "the obvious intention of the new powers of the amusement world is to make vaudeville entertainers as familiar personalities as movie actors have been in the past." He added that "it won't be long before Dallas will see it work. It will be something brand new in entertainment."20

Interstate Amusement, headed by Karl Hoblitzelle and with headquarters in Dallas, participated in financial dealings which left it in a much stronger position by the end of the decade. On May 17, 1930, the announcement was made that Interstate had sold its majority stock to Radio-Keith Orpheum. During the previous fall, Interstate had

made a similar arrangement with the William Fox organization, but that financial arrangement had to be dissolved when Fox stock dropped in value during the Wall Street crash and the Fox firm had to be reorganized. Under Interstate's new arrangement with RKO, the two theater companies combined to form a new holding company, the RKO Southern Corporation, with Hoblitzelle as president. Hoblitzelle stated that the new arrangement might make possible a new luxury theater in Dallas because the Majestic, with its one-change-a-week policy could not "absorb the motion picture and vaudeville programs at its disposal." The forming of RKO Southern greatly expanded the scope of Hoblitzelle's area of operations. The chain now extended as far west as Arizona and El Paso and east to the Atlantic seaboard. The relative scarcity of RKO theaters in the vast area led to speculation that Hoblitzelle planned an "impressive building program." As far as stage entertainment was concerned, the organization of the new corporation meant few changes in the policies of Hoblitzelle's Texas theaters because Interstate had held the Keith and Orpheum vaudeville franchise in the state since it was organized, and had been showing Fox films for the past five seasons. Charles J. Freeman, who had been in charge of bookings for Interstate in New York for six years, became the head of the RKO booking office in May, 1930.

Although not within the province of this study, it may throw light on these mergers effected between 1925 and 1930 if the form

which the companies took during the 1930's under the impact of the
depression is examined. In January, 1933, the RKO Corporation went
into voluntary bankruptcy and Interstate was again revived, this time
under the name of Interstate Circuit, Inc. of Texas. Karl Hoblitzelle
again took personal control of the Majestic Theaters.23 The Publix
Corporation also went into receivership, and by March of 1934, the
Palace and the Old Mill, the two Publix houses in Dallas, had also
come under Interstate control.24 In this way, Interstate gained
jurisdiction over all the Dallas downtown theaters and many of the
suburban houses. The circle had come full swing. Interstate had
started as a Texas-controlled corporation, and was back where it
started, with the difference that it had gained vast new interests.
Hoblitzelle was now in a position to directly determine the entertain­
ment policies not only in Dallas, but also in every other major Texas
city. From 1925 to 1930, the entertainment policies of the downtown
theaters in Dallas were based on the exigencies of competition.
After 1933, they were to be decided through unified planning.

There were other theatrical events in Dallas between 1925
and 1930 that were more immediately localized in their effect. In
1926, the Saenger Amusement Company announced its intention of operating
a burlesque house in the city during the 1927 season that would form
part of the "Columbia Wheel," the circuit that ranked as the
"Metropolitan opera" of burlesque, according to the announcement.25

But Saenger merged with Publix in November of 1926, and the project was never realized. Another event that attracted considerable attention in the city was the death of Simon Chaminsky on Tuesday, May 8, 1928. Chaminsky, known as the "dean of local theater men," had been a partner for a number of years of R. J. Stinnett in the management of such theaters as the Jefferson, the Pantages and the Capitol. He was one of the older-type theater managers who were fast disappearing from the Dallas scene. Chaminsky, who was the only Dallas theater manager who was financially interested in his own theater, had always been listed as "the opposition" by the operators of the bigger theaters on Elm Street. But his judgment in theater matters, according to the account in his obituary, was "celebrated," and the obituary continued that "hardly an important step in policy was taken at any time without asking Si what he thought about it." When the theaters were faced with labor problems or with some other matter on which they wished to present a united front, Chaminsky was generally their spokesman. He was also noted for his charity. As the obituary put it, "If a visiting performer took sick in Dallas, it was Si who saw to it that he had proper medical attention and that his wife was cared for. Not infrequently, Si paid the bills." He had, according to the newspaper account, "an uncanny ability to handle the bugaboo of showmen, the 'nut' or overhead." Chaminsky was described as "an economical operator . . . but never a cheap one." The account stated that his ushers had uniforms and were well trained; nobody on his staff was overworked, and there were adequate shifts and relief time,
but that "he never threw money away." 26

The construction of the Arcadia Theater at Greenville Avenue and Sears Street in 1927 for Dent Theaters, Inc. created considerable interest in the city, both because the Arcadia was the prototype for a new type of suburban showhouse, and also because of its unique architectural features. The term "suburban" as applied to theaters in those days had reference to any which were not located in the immediate downtown area. The Arcadia was not expected to be in competition with the downtown theaters but its appeals, it was anticipated, would be directed instead "to those families who, because of the proximity of the house, may attend the performance en famille and still get the children to bed at an early hour." The stage was built large enough to accommodate stage attractions. It was twenty-five feet deep, fifty-eight feet wide, and had a proscenium opening of thirty feet. Opened on November 4, the Arcadia differed from other theaters in that the entrance for the audience, according to the newspaper account, was "to one side of the center leading to a cross aisle seven feet wide, to the front of which will lie the fore court and to the rear the amphitheater ... two equally attractive seating sections. There will be no balcony." 27

The Problem of Censorship

Another factor that must be taken into consideration in evaluating Dallas theater during the 1920's is that of censorship. Until 1929, the legal setup for theatrical censorship in the city consisted of a

city censor and an appeal board. Even in the 1920's, Dallas prided itself on its cosmopolitanism, but nevertheless, there were strong pressures on the censor to ban entertainment that might be salacious or suggestive. John Rosenfield, commenting in a different context about Dallas' taste in humor, had this to say:

There is a grave German tradition to our Trinity civilization and Germany is the home of flop and pop humor. We are, too, a community of churchgoers, and the pulpits some years ago left the impression that the theater was useless when it wasn't downright sinful. Hypocritical showmen got around this prejudice by advertising their shows as great lessons in history or ponderous discussions of morality. We have seen bedroom farces advertised as a debate on: "Resolved that it is better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all." Dallas has not been trained to regard the theater as a place of amusement.28

The major censorship problems in the city were to come in the late 1920's and early 1930's when the "girly" shows provided by Ziegfeld, Carroll, White, and others laid heavy stress on nudity and suggestiveness. But censorship and church antagonism to the theater was not felt as acutely in Dallas as it was, for example, in Houston, though even in Dallas these matters were constantly in the background of the theater scene. Texas had a Sunday closing law on its statute books but it was seldom, if ever, invoked in cities the size of Dallas.

In February, 1920, in nearby Fort Worth, a group of ministers had succeeded in having the downtown theaters closed for a few days.29 When downtown drug stores closed down also on Sunday, the back of the

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movement was broken, and Sheriff Sterling P. Clark announced on
February 28 that he would make no further efforts to invoke the statute
until "after it had been ascertained what Dallas intended doing toward
closing Sunday amusements in that city." The Dallas Pastors Association
met on March 1 and agreed that though they were in favor of enforcing
the Sunday closing, they did not want "to go off 'half-cocked,' as
happened in Forth Worth." The Dallas Episcopal Men's Club decried
"the interference with harmless Sunday amusements" on grounds that
"any effort to legislate the people into church attendance is not only
an unwarranted interference with personal liberty, but it would also
be harmful to the best interests of the church." 

Two days later, James J. Collins, city attorney, told the Mayor
and City Commissioners that "any movement to close amusements on Sunday
in Dallas is useless, because . . . no violation of the law is
involved." He maintained that it would be necessary for the citizens
to repeal an ordinance they had approved several years earlier in order
to "make unlawful the operation of amusements on Sundays here." The Pastors Association let the matter rest with the announcement that
they would conduct a campaign "to inform the people of Dallas of the
significance of the Sabbath Day." The Dallas Morning News editori-
alized that "permitting places of amusement to remain open on Sunday . . .

is salutary rather than harmful," and praised the stand taken by the Pastors Association as recognizing "the profound and important truth that no spiritual triumph is achieved by the use of the law's force." This was to prove the last serious attempt in Dallas to close down the theaters on Sunday. Ministers from time to time continued to take up the matter in their sermons as on Sunday, January 30, 1921, when Pastor P. B. Wells preached on "Why are the moving picture shows of Dallas open on Sunday? Will the Christian people of this city longer stand for this flagrant violation of law?" but the matter did not receive serious consideration again.

The problem of the censorship of screen and stage presentations, however, was to remain a much more potent issue. In 1921, to cite one example, a Negro theater, the Palace, at Elm and Central streets, was barred from presenting a motion picture, Yankee Doodle in Berlin, on grounds that the posters in front of the theater "showed white girls, nearly nude, in several inflaming situations." Mrs. Ethel Boyce, the city motion picture censor, stated that "the picture and posters might have had a bad effect on the morals of the negro patrons." In July, 1928, Mrs. Boyce wrote to every film exchange in the city "protesting against the crime wave in the movies." John Rosenfield had this comment to make about censorship in the city:

Relations between the censor and the theaters in Dallas have been uniformly amiable. In such high esteem is Mrs. Boyce held that theater managers seldom contest a ruling even when they are convinced that she is wrong... Mrs. Boyce is a rara avis among censors. One recalls no other so health-minded and constructive. To give a clean bill of health to an

36 News, Thurs., Sept. 8, 1921, 4.
entertainment is her chiefest satisfaction. . . . On "The White Sister," "The Scarlet Letter," and the play "Rain," she held that public exhibition should not depict clergymen in unclerical deportment. . . . She insisted on this in spite of the fact that all three stories had time honored literary background and one ranks as a classic suitable for study in high schools.

Anne Codee's vaudeville sketch in a graveyard was suppressed on the point that some persons in the audience might have buried their dead recently and would resent the frivolous treatment. It was asked at the time why Mrs. Boyce had never rejected the gravediggers scene in Hamlet.

In a war play presented here she caused the elimination of a brusque and ugly word denoting a woman of unkempt morals and the substitution of another word. The substitution fell on these ears as harsher than the first word. Oddly enough, the first word was a substitution for the substitution, inserted by the manager on his own initiative as a more euphemistic term.

Mrs. Boyce rejected a Vitaphone act, her first, on grounds that it disclosed a foreign comedian taking off George Washington. She concluded that this was unpatriotic. One felt that Mrs. Boyce was chauvinistic to a degree. 37

A few days after Mrs. Boyce had sent the letter, the Mayor declared "that the full force of the city legal staff will be turned over to her support . . . further . . . if moving picture operators continue to flout the censorship . . . I will take up the matter of closing the picture theaters on Sundays." Attorneys for the movie theaters argued that the board was "without authority to ban a picture," but the mayor retorted that "the wave of crime pictures . . . is a serious menace." 38

Another censorship battle raged over Gay Paree of 1928, a Shubert revue set for the Fair Park Auditorium on November 21, 1928. John Rosenfield stated that "censorship in Dallas is getting to be a lively matter," and he added that "recent suppressive actions by authorities

have drawn the attention and some fire of theatrical trade publications."

Agents for road shows . . . have written an asterisk beside Dallas to beware of the city hall. In truth, Dallas now shares with Houston and distinction as the most censored city in the Southwest.

Rosenfield pointed out that when the Folies Bergere had been in Dallas shortly before:

The censor had ruled out the strip scene, eliminated several lines meant for off-color comedy, particularly a stale joke that employed the harsh word "naked." For three days there raged an agitation with the result that police were stationed in the playhouse with orders to padlock the place the moment the orders were ignored.39

Out of that incident had come regulations to the effect that Women on the stage must be covered at least from the waistline to the neck. Off-color dialogue and monologue, if it gets by at all, must be cloaked in euphemism.

According to Rosenfield, the Folies complied in its second performance, but on the third night "opened an attack on the Dallas authorities. The nude model no longer appeared in her birthday suit, but wore a concealing sign across her person reading 'censored.'"40

Another incident cited by Rosenfield occurred when the adjective "saltatorial" was used on advertising cards for A Night in Spain. He explained:

Quite a few women brought it to the attention of the authorities and urged that shows should not be permitted to advertise their salacity. The city took it up with the Fair Park Auditorium. The Auditorium referred the official to the dictionary. . . . He found that "saltatorial" meant "leaping or bounding."41

Ned Alvord, the advance agent for the Shubert's shows, warned

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that Dallas stood to lose the Shubert revues altogether if the censors continued to take the stand they did. Alvord, who was to play a significant role in Dallas theater history as far as censorship was concerned, commented:

A revue is a sophisticated style of entertainment . . . which has been designed for the amusement of adults. . . . No producer has laid claim to its taking the place of Chataqua sic. To rob it of its spice and beauty would leave a revue neither a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale nor an extravaganza. It simply would not be a show . . . .

I can say without hesitation that my firm will not again so denude its attraction . . . as they did . . . with "A Night in Spain." "Gay Paree" will be presented in Dallas exactly as it is being seen in Indianapolis, Milwaukee, St. Louis and Kansas . . . . We feel that simply because the tableaux are of French origin and frank in their displays that we are not offending the proprieties.

If . . . there is any official complaint, the result will be that the Denver-Salt Lake Route will in the future be used to go to the Coast and Dallas eliminated . . . . Until recently Dallas has been generally regarded as one of the most liberal-minded cities in the country as regards stage productions.

Your civic bodies are spending thousands of dollars to place Dallas before the world as a metropolis, but the effort to make it a Salem of the twentieth century will go far to counteract the widely admired propaganda of your business interests.43

As it was, the censorship was made to apply to the outdoor posters for *Gay Paree* but did not interfere with the show itself. Mrs. Ethel Boyce inspected the advertising and two posters were rejected, the handbill, "designed after the French magazine La Vie Parisienne" was banned, and the window cards were not permitted to be displayed. It was believed to be the first time in American theater history that outdoor advertising material was censored before it was displayed.44

42 Alvord was to be engaged in a running battle with Dallas censors throughout the early 1930's.


44 *News*, Mon., Nov. 12, 1928, 4.
There was another censorship dispute going on in Houston at the same time. Mrs. T. H. Eggert, city censor there, had barred production of *What Price Glory* by the Houston Little Theater, and the audience who saw the show were all subscribers, "as exclusive as a private party." The Houston dramatic critics stated that the show was "eminently successful."\(^{45}\)

Mayor Tate finally, in May, 1929, ended the controversy in Dallas over the city censor's role by abolishing the position altogether with the statement that he had "faith in the Will Hayes organization." However, on the same day, John Rosenfield cautioned that the move taken by Dallas, in imitation of a similar step taken in Houston, did not really remove the censorship, for, as he put it, "another and more formidable censor remains, the chief of police." He pointed out that it was "in these circumstances that some of the most extraordinary and disgusting censorship battles take place."\(^{46}\) As Rosenfield had predicted, there were other censorship squabbles in the 1930's, but the situation was not to get as tense as it had been in 1925 and 1930.

As far as the entertainment itself was concerned, censorship did not have an entirely harmful effect. As a matter of fact, as will be seen, most shows prospered greatly in the city when they were threatened with censorship and the agents for the shows even went so far as to deliberately provoke censorship moves. An effect of the censorship was to give the touring musicals a reputation for raciness and nudity which they sometimes failed to present. Still another result

\(^{45}\) *News*, Mon., Nov. 5, 1928, 5.

\(^{46}\) *News*, Mon., May 6, 1929, 6.
was to make Dallasites more blase about their entertainment. As the city became larger, the entire matter of censorship receded more and more into the background.⁴⁷

Another kind of dispute came up in 1926 when the State Fair Auditorium was rented out to Negroes for a performance. This drew criticism from some sources, but Mayor Blaylock, according to the newspaper account, "flatly refused to give hearing to those who protested." An editorial in the News pronounced:

> When the auditorium is open for hire and negroes obtain it for creditable purposes, they ought not to be discouraged . . . . Until we are able to erect a public building of like character for negroes only, it is more than fair that negroes should be allowed to rent it on open dates just as whites are allowed to do.⁴⁸

Sound Motion Pictures Arrive

The coming of the sound movies profoundly affected the entertainment picture in Dallas, as it did elsewhere in the nation. The tendency was for the managers of the big downtown theaters to take a wait and see attitude when "sound synchronization" first appeared. There was uncertainty as to what type of synchronous device would finally become the established form, and also there was the feeling that sound movies were an experiment that might not succeed, or that at best would exist side by side with the silent films. But once the movement toward sound films began, its progress in the city was swift. The first sound motion picture was seen in Dallas in 1927. By 1930, all the theaters in Dallas were equipped with sound.

⁴⁷This was to be very evident during the State Fair Centennial in 1936 when much of the entertainment was of a risque nature.

The first theater in the city to have sound equipment was the Circle. The Circle was not a motion picture house, but showed the new type movies on a road show basis. The theater featured Vitaphone equipment, and the first sound picture presented in Dallas was Warner Brothers' *Don Juan*, with John Barrymore, which opened at the Circle on February 12, 1927. Following this movie, there came Syd Chaplin in *The Better Ole*. Prices for these performances at the Circle ranged from a matinee scale of 75¢ on the lower floor to 50¢ on the balcony, and a night scale of 90¢ lower floor and 50¢ in the balcony. It is interesting to note that the first sound picture short features drew their performers from the vaudeville and concert fields, accelerating the competition that was eventually to deplete vaudeville of its major artists and lead to its eventual disappearance. As early as April 3, 1928, a program at the Circle included short features that had among the performers Ernestine Schumann-Heink; Van and Schenck, comedians; the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; Fleeson and Baxter, a vaudeville team; and a male chorus singing "The Song of the Volga Boatman." By May, E. H. Hulsey, manager of the Circle, offered to move the leased Vitaphone equipment to a downtown theater, but had no takers. The Circle management discontinued the sound films, even though, according to the newspaper account, the films had "exhibited unusual strength with the public." John Rosenfield predicted prophetically at the time that "it is hardly likely that the Vitaphone will be missing in Dallas.

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next year.\textsuperscript{52} When the new Arcadia Theater opened on November 4, 1927, the capacity crowd which attended the opening were, according to the review, surprised to find that the theater had been equipped with a "synchronizer" device.\textsuperscript{53}

The big downtown theaters began moving into the sound film area in December, 1927. The first to take the step was the Majestic. In December, the Majestic management announced a short movie feature using Movietone, described in the announcement as "the most startling invention of the age" because it made it possible to both see and hear such public figures as Lindbergh and Coolidge.\textsuperscript{54}

The turning point, as far as the acceptance of the sound movies in Dallas was concerned, came with the presentation of The Jazz Singer at the Arcadia Theater during the first week of 1928. John Rosenfield, who attended a preview of the film, commented:

Most of the local exhibitors were present and not one witnessed the production without feeling a consuming desire to play it immediately. "The Jazz Singer" is a curious mixture of a 'talky' and a merely synchronized picture. For the most part it is a plain movie with the Vitaphone Orchestra playing a beautiful accompanying score. But there are spots in which the music is not merely incidental, but actually integral and part of it.\textsuperscript{55}

The critic noted in his review that the only two synchronized feature films that had been seen up to that time in Dallas were Don Juan and The Better Ole, both shown at the Circle, but that two other

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{News}, Sun., May 22, 1927, III, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{53} \textit{News}, Sat., Nov. 5, 1927, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{News}, Thurs., Dec. 22, 1927, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{News}, Sun., Jan. 1, 1928, III, 4.
\end{itemize}
synchronized films, The Missing Link and When a Man Loves had been presented at the Capitol, but without the Vitaphone equipment.56

In April, 1928, the Vitaphone equipment was moved from the Arcadia to the Melba Theater for the downtown presentation of The Jazz Singer, starting on April 7.57 The film set a new record for a continuous run of a motion picture at popular prices in Dallas. By April 22, the News reported that the picture had begun its third week and pointed out that the longest previous run of a popular-priced film had been two weeks.58 It was in June, 1928, that The Lion and the Mouse, described in the advance notices as "the first real talkie," came to the city and was presented at the Melba.59 The other downtown theaters quickly followed suit. John Rosenfield observed in July, 1928, that by January 1, 1929, "every first run Elm Street theater will have equipment for showing either Movietone or Vitaphone synchronized films and sometimes both." The Majestic and the Melba had already installed sound equipment and the Palace was to get both Movietone and Vitaphone by July 28.60 The change came even earlier than Rosenfield had anticipated. In mid-November the News reported that "there is no longer a firstrun downtown theater to be found without sound since the opening Thursday of the . . . all talking motion picture, 'The Melody of Love' at Elm Street's last silent playhouse, the Capitol Theater."61

57News, Mon., Apr. 9, 1928, 6.
61News, Fri., Nov. 16, 1928, 12.
There remained the puzzling question of what would happen to the theater organists and pianists. The same newspaper account stated that "George Perfect, veteran Dallas organist ... will be featured in solos and song slides." 62

There was some resistance in Dallas from the silent picture fans toward the sound movies. The News, the Dallas Journal and the Palace Theater combined forces in February, 1929, to survey motion picture tastes in the city and come up with the following distribution of answers from the seven hundred persons who were quizzed:

Do you prefer all talking motion pictures? Yes, 203. No, 505.
Do you prefer pictures that are part talky and part silent? Yes, 239. No, 564.
Do you prefer silent pictures with synchronized music? Yes, 251. No, 446.
Do you like stage stars of experience in talking pictures? Yes, 343. No, 358.
Do you like talking motion pictures made from stage hits? Yes, 266. No, 434.
Do you like the short all-talking comedy skits? Yes, 268. No, 498.
Do you prefer synchronized music to the theater's orchestra? Yes, 205. No, 509.63

During the week of February 2, In Old Arizona, the first all-dialogue film offered by Movietone, the sound on film process, to have the dialogue spoken in the outdoors, and, featuring Edmund Lowe, Warner Baxter and Dorothy Burgess, was shown at the Majestic Theater.64 But there was still enough attachment in the city to the silent motion pictures to prompt the Arcadia management to announce in March, 1929, that they would "present two silent pictures each week with organ

62News, Fri., Nov. 11, 1928, 12.
accompaniment ... with Vitaphone or Movietone acts." One program each week was to be given over to the "sound fans" and was to have synchronized features, special acts and a newsreel.65

In December, 1929, The Love Parade, the first sound film operetta, was presented at the Palace Theater. The admission price was $1, described in the announcement as the first time a sum this high had been asked by a first-run motion picture theater in the city, although there had been higher admission prices charged for road show films.66

One of the big questions associated with the arrival of the sound films was how they would affect live entertainment in the theaters. This problem was bound up not only with the shift of taste from stage to screen performances, but also with the movie shorts in which, during the late 1920's and early 1930's, vaudeville entertainers were often presented.

John Rosenfield commented about the role of the vaudevillian in the movie short features:

The "shorts" essentially are canned vaudeville acts ... and enlist the very best of variety talent. The "shorts" are perfecting a style of their own there has been nothing like it in the history of show business ... a wedding of the movie close-up with radio and phonograph.

In the "short" the performer usually makes his or her entrance in a long shot revealing the whole figure. When the execution of the number begins, the camera shoves up for a semi-closeup, never shifting save for an orthodox close up.

When the synchronizing entertainer gets into action he must sink or swim as a personality. The camera focuses attention on the mouth and eyes. Not even an accompanying pianist is preserved as a distraction. The stage setting offers no distraction. An actress ... getting by on her

65 News, Sat., Mar. 9, 1929, 10.
beauty . . . is scuttled . . . The auditor is interested in only voice and face, and Equity help her if she hasn't both.67

By 1929 the "shorts" were very popular in Dallas, and those that appeared to be the most appealing were the ones that featured orchestra and band numbers.68 In February, 1930, Sam Katz, president of the Publix Theaters Corporation, told Publix employes in Dallas via a filmed speech that a new series of short talking pictures were to be produced at the Paramount Long Island Studio, and that these would "surround the feature pictures on Publix programs and will introduce leading variety entertainers in the show business."69

There were those, like Karl Hoblitzelle, who predicted that both sound films and live entertainment could exist side by side in the theaters. He observed in April, 1930:

The one thing that strikes me most forcibly is that theater audiences now want motion pictures with their vaudeville and former picture devotees want vaudeville with their pictures.

The Majestic first tried giving a combination of stage and screen entertainment in 1921. We were doing two shows daily. We tried to give our patrons a motion picture with the vaudeville show, running a feature before and after each stage show. The patrons . . . didn't take the picture seriously. They strolled into their favorite seats at their accustomed hour, talking and greeting one another as they entered. Immediately after the last act of vaudeville, practically the entire audience got up and left. It didn't take us long to learn that the folks came down to see the stage shows and only a small portion . . . wanted both vaudeville and photoplays.

. . . after several months of picture and stage entertainment we returned to a policy of straight vaudeville . . . there was not a noticeable difference in attendance.

In 1924 we abolished reserved seats and went to three-a-day. . . . The Majestic management again put in pictures. By this time the audience reaction had changed and the patrons able to drop in any time and see a complete show took to the

68News, Sat., Sept. 11, 1929, 8.
pictures. From that date until now the Majestic has presented continuous shows of stage and screen features.

Now audiences demand both pictures and stage entertainment. Only once did we try to present a show with only a single feature . . . an unusually long picture. We learned . . . that the theatergoers want both. No matter what magnitude the picture, the Majestic will present also a vaudeville program.70

L. B. (Uncle Lou) Remy, a veteran Dallas showman and director of theaters for the Interstate Amusement Company, contributed his bit to the controversy:

There has been much controversy recently about the passing of stage shows. . . . In my opinion talking pictures themselves have strengthened stage productions. They have heightened public desire to see the flesh and blood performer. When phonograph records became popular there was much talk about singers being passe as stage entertainers. Vaudeville stepped along and booked singers famous on phonographic recordings. The attendance records they set are history. All of the really big phonograph stars were tremendous box office favorites. The folks wanted to see in flesh and blood the entertainers whose voices entertained them in wax.

Then came the radio with its varied entertainment and the calamity howlers set loose again seeing the end of that type entertainment on the stage. Vaudeville again presented radio entertainers in person . . . They were favorably received by audiences. Talking picture stars--particularly those of the short talking reels--already are popular as stage entertainers.

The Interstate circuit has been the trail blazer for stage shows in the South. The presentation of vaudeville always will be a part of the programs at the Majestic Theaters. I have watched vaudeville entertainment for more than 25 years and at no time has the outlook for success for this form of entertainment seemed brighter.71

But Milton Feld, general supervisor of the Publix Theater management, who came to Dallas in May, 1929, to consult with officials of the city's two Publix theaters, predicted:

The present stage unit which accompanies a feature picture will disappear because the talking screen offers such a wide field of entertainment that such a vaudeville show would but detract from the picture, or rather the vaudeville would show

so badly with the entertainment as to make it burdensome to the program.72

As it was, of course, Feld was to prove to be correct and Remy and Hoblitzelte wrong, but it was to be several years more before vaudeville and other live entertainment were finally forced out.

In connection with this, it may be noted that many theater managers looked to "flesh and blood" entertainment to pull them out of the red when the depression cut into movie attendance. This is illustrated by a dispatch from Hollywood that appeared in the Dallas Morning News in July, 1930. Tamar Lane, columnist, wrote that "the film colony is talking of nothing but the present slump in cinema theater attendance these days." and she added this interesting comment:

Those who originally held the opinion that the drop in attendance was due solely to temporary bad financial and employment conditions . . . have now cast aside this contention and admit that there is something else radically wrong with the cinema.

She reported that although the low admission prices to movies would prevent any comeback of legitimate drama, still the film magnates, trying another approach to recapture business, were "returning to the old policy of mammoth stage shows and vaudeville acts presented in conjunction with the feature picture."73

The Competition of Radio

The radio was perhaps as potent in its effect on the theatergoing habits of the public as the sound motion pictures were on the type of entertainment. Radio did not begin to reach widespread popularity until

72News, Tues., May 14, 1929, 12.
1928. By September 12 of that year there were three stations in Dallas, WFAA, KRLD and WRR. Like stations in other cities, those in Dallas at the time had a number of dramatic shows originating locally and over the networks. WFAA, for example, had its Radio Players, who were "paid for their services as actors before the microphone." The plays were done every Tuesday night at 10 p.m. Attempts were made to build up the local radio personalities, just as had been done with the stock, screen and stage stars. At the Majestic Theater on July 7, 1929, a Radio Revue was on stage and the KRLD performers who appeared included Sydney Smith, Earl Hatch, the Praetorian Quartet, K. Baird, Bill Saling, Larry Marsala, Charles Nichols, Carl Young, Lee Myres, Elizabeth Munns, Jack Caldwell, Ruth Clem, and Charles Paine and "Doc" Druggers, who served as masters of ceremony. The News carried a report in May, 1929, that there were 12,834,000 families in the country that owned radio sets and that eighty-one per cent of these families listened to the radio two hours or more daily.

Meanwhile, by the beginning of June, 1930, the shadow of television was being seen on the entertainment horizon. Tests from Schenectady, N.Y., according to the News, indicated the practicability of the new medium. Commenting on this, John Rosenfield quoted Frank Gilmore, president of Actors Equity, and Broadway Producers Arthur Hopkins and A. H. Woods, as predicting that television would make its

75News, Mon., June 17, 1929, 4.

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effect felt not on the legitimate drama, but on the motion pictures.

The Auditorium Problem

There had been high hopes when plans for the Fair Park Auditorium were first made in the early 1920's that it would provide a home for touring musicals and legitimate shows. Because it was built as a combination convention center and theater, the auditorium was purposely made large. As was indicated in the previous section, a plan to construct the hall so that it could be partitioned off for productions that could not command the 5,000 persons needed to fill it had been blocked by the Fair Park Association. The Erlanger Enterprises, the largest promoters of road shows in the country, proposed the partition scheme again in August, 1930, to the State Fair Association. The Erlanger plan would have made it possible to cut the size of the auditorium to about 1,500 persons. The Erlanger spokesman contended that "there is a public for road shows . . . Most of the old 'opera houses' have disappeared, leaving the road show managers with shows and no place to play them. Civic auditoriums . . . are unsuitable for most drama and music shows." Nothing came of this proposal.

Another vexing problem in the Fair Park Auditorium was its acoustics. In April, 1928, workmen attempted to improve the acoustics in the front sections of the hall. The News reported that when the auditorium was built, the stage opening and a false proscenium had been constructed on the boxed megaphones principle with a top lined in metal, a fact which had created interference in the first fifteen rows. The

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workmen relined the megaphone with a material which was intended to "give a more orderly distribution of sound."

Still another problem faced by the Auditorium management was the relative scarcity of touring shows. The Auditorium did get most of those that came to Dallas between 1925 and 1930, but the high guarantees demanded by the touring productions, together with the fact that there were few touring shows which could hope to attract enough people to make the appearance profitable for the traveling company led to two things. First, it meant that the Auditorium remained relatively unused, particularly after 1928. Second, it kept touring shows from including Dallas on their itinerary, particularly those in the area of legitimate drama. On December 22, 1929, John Rosenfield complained that "Dallas' sole operating facility for professional spoken drama is a hippodrome affair seating between 4,000 and 5,000 persons [and is] rarely full." It seems ludicrous to realize that such an intimate revue as Chauve-Souris was given at the vast Auditorium because no other theater was available.

For a time between 1925 and 1930, the Circle was on tap for traveling shows, but it also was inadequate in its facilities and had no air conditioning. It was not until the early 1930's, when Hoblitzelle made the Majestic and Melba theaters available for touring productions, that Dallas provided adequate facilities for them. It might be mentioned at this point that Dallas was not alone in its auditorium problem. Similar structures had been built in many other

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80 News, Mon., Apr. 9, 1928, 11.
cities and most of them were in similar straits.

In an effort to revive the use of the auditoriums, an "auditorium circuit" was proposed in the mid-1920's, but was not to go into practical operation until the early 1930's. Under this plan, Dallas, Memphis, Beaumont, Houston, San Antonio, Nashville, Wichita Falls, Little Rock, Wichita and Tulsa joined together to form a circuit that could house the touring shows. Because most of the better companies would not travel in the South and Southwest without guarantees, the cities in the circuit planned to put up percentages. Rosenfield noted in August of 1930 that the civic auditoriums and the Eastern road show managers were having a running battle over whether to guarantee the productions, as demanded by the managers of the shows, or to play the attraction on a percentage basis, as insisted upon by the auditorium officials. Rosenfield observed that the auditoriums, in most instances, had been built for civic purposes "and do not have to keep open ... with any attraction that comes its way." He commented that "on the other hand, the producers need the auditoriums," and he predicted a victory for the auditoriums.

The McFarlin Auditorium

For purposes of this study, the McFarlin Auditorium, hailed when it was dedicated on March 24, 1926, as the finest college auditorium in the nation, is actually of little significance. It did not house touring musical or legitimate productions until late in the 1930's when the Fair Park Auditorium was not in use because of the

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\(^{82}\) News, Thurs., June 6, 1930, 10.

\(^{83}\) News, Fri., Aug. 29, 1930, 11.
State Fair Centennial and the Pan-American Exposition. The non-relevance of the McFarlin Auditorium to a study of professional theater in Dallas between 1920 and 1930 does not imply that it did not play an important role in the entertainment life of the community. It was there that the popular Southern Methodist University musical and dramatic productions were presented, and McFarlin was also the concert site for a number of important musical events. Because there was hope that the McFarlin Auditorium might serve for productions that could not use the Fair Park Auditorium, some light might be shed on the need for professional productions had for a suitable theater if mention were made here of some of the physical aspects of the college auditorium.

Too, a description given shortly before its dedication, throws light on theatrical practices of the time:

... a stage of larger dimensions than the Metropolitan Opera House in New York; lighting and heating systems of the latest approved designs and a seven-unit pipe organ larger than any two now in Dallas combined. "Only two auditoriums in the United States compare favorably with this one in dimensions, quality or acoustics and interior beauty," said F. J. Brown... general manager of the Bellows Maclay Construction Company, general contractors for the building. "These two are the Cleveland and Los Angeles auditoriums, and in many respects this one is superior."

There is no stage in America equipped with better lighting apparatus or scenic effects. The stage is eighty-five feet long and thirty-five feet deep with a height of fifty-eight feet. ... This stage will accommodate any production, musical or dramatic, that has ever been assembled in the United States in a theater. The front drop curtain will be a thing of majestic beauty, a great square of black velvet set in a framework of ivory tinted lattice design.

Six complete sets of scenery, painted by the St. Louis Scenic Company, will arrive this week and constitute the stock scenic effects of the new auditorium. The lighting system is the latest design manufactured for larger theater buildings. It is known as the major selective system and is capable of producing forty separate tones of light.

The interior of the auditorium is finished in ivory and tan shades with the indirect lighting system which gives a soft but effective illumination. The only visible bulbs are those in the great central chandelier, a solid bronze, masterpiece...
of artistic design that cost $3,750. The heating system provides a fresh air supply in the spring, a refrigerated air supply in summer, and a warm air supply in winter.

Eight dressing rooms open on the stage proper, with other apartments that may be used for dressing rooms if needed. The building will house, in addition to the magnificent theater, the music department of SMU.

Dr. C. C. Selecman, president of the university, tested out the acoustic properties of the auditorium last week. Members of his family . . . heard distinctly every word uttered. Not only that, a nail was accidentally dropped on the stage and the sound was heard by workmen in the second balcony. Acoustic effects are heightened by the material used in the interior . . . a composition known as genitherm containing wood pulp ingredients. A cork flooring adds to the acoustic properties. . . .

The building, fully equipped, will cost in the neighborhood of $500,000.81

Shortly after the 2,550 seat auditorium was opened, the report came that six major musical concerts had been booked for it. John Rosenfield, commenting on the potentialities of the new structure, noted that "these artists could not be brought here were it not for the McFarlin Auditorium. The anticipated 'box office' would not justify the expense of placing them in the Fair Park auditorium, where, incidentally, a respectably sized audience would be lost in its vastness." Rosenfield commented also that the Fair Park management had decided "that it can not afford, at the present time, to give bookings to small draw attractions or to lease the building for such attractions without charging a rental that would consume the expected receipts--and then some." He pointed out the valuable service McFarlin could give the community in this regard, because in addition to its main hall which seated only about one-half of those that could be accommodated in the Fair Park Auditorium, it also had a smaller concert hall which could

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The 1925-1930 period was one of change and readjustment marked by dislocation of the entertainment picture because of the arrival of the sound films, the growing popularity of radio, the stock market crash and the beginning of the depression. Live entertainment in Dallas' downtown theaters felt the competition of the sound motion pictures and theater business in general was sharply affected by the economic decline.

At the start of the five-year period, professional entertainment in the city enjoyed a high degree of prosperity. By the end of the 1929-1930 season, the number of touring shows and the extent of vaudeville entertainment had sharply declined, but there was, at the same time, a sharp upgrading of quality.

In 1925, the downtown theaters with their total capacity of about 15,000 persons, took in a daily average of more than 50,000 admissions. But a study made by Southern Methodist University in 1928 indicated that theater business in the city was not exercising its maximum drawing power. There was, during the period, no building of downtown theaters but the neighborhood showhouses not only grew in number but also tended to attract customers away from the downtown area.

The downtown theaters competed not only as to the best day on which to open new attractions but also in their prices. They also extended their shows and gave up "classical" programs in favor of more popular types of entertainment. As the economic situation worsened,

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the competition grew keener, but Dallas critics, for the most part, tended to attribute the decline to competition from radio and sound films rather than to economic factors.

The economic situation was reflected in the giant mergers that took place in the period. These mergers, for the most part, originated in New York and the sum effect was to leave Interstate in control of more theaters. This trend was to be accentuated in the early 1930's.

One event of the period was the construction of the Arcadia Theater, a neighborhood playhouse which was to serve as a prototype for others built in the city.

Among problems faced by theater managers during the period was that of censorship. This censorship was aimed principally at the "girly" shows popular at the time but also affected the motion pictures. There had been some agitation in the early 1920's to close the theaters down on Sundays, but this was not seriously mentioned during the 1925-1930 period. However, Mrs. Ethel Boyce, the city censor, did make attempts to clean up some of the more flagrant musical road show violations. Mayor Tate, in 1929, abolished the position of city censor and placed the responsibility in the hands of the chief of police. Censorship, for the most part, served to boost attendance at the shows which were thus singled out, and advance agents for the shows sometimes provoked censorship disputes.

The most serious threat to live entertainment was the sound motion pictures. The Circle Theater was the first to have synchronized equipment, but after several months, abandoned the experiment. However, in the downtown theaters, both Vitaphone and Movietone equipment were soon installed, particularly after the success in 1928, of The Jazz
By November, 1928, all the downtown theaters in the city had sound equipment.

However, the Dallas theatergoing public for a time tended to favor the silent films coupled with live stage entertainment and as late as March, 1929, the Arcadia was presenting two silent shows to every sound motion picture.

As far as direct competition of sound motion pictures with vaudeville was concerned, the short films which featured concert and vaudeville artists proved the most potent in their effect upon the stage entertainment. Karl Hoblitzele, president of Interstate, for a time held to the belief that sound motion pictures and vaudeville could exist indefinitely side by side, but his view was contested by New York theater executives.

Radio, with its emphasis at the time on dramatic entertainment, and particularly because of the influence it exerted in keeping potential theatergoers at home, played a potent role in the late 1920's in causing a decline in theater attendance.

The theater problem in Dallas was aggravated by the scarcity of places where road show musicals and legitimate productions could be presented. The Fair Park Auditorium, both because of its size and also because of its acoustics, proved inadequate for most shows. Efforts were made to start an auditorium circuit that would encourage touring shows to come to Dallas and other Southern and Southwestern cities, but this was not realized until the 1930's.

Hope was held out in 1926 that the new McFarlin Auditorium might provide an answer to the situation, but as it turned out, this new structure was employed almost exclusively between 1926 and 1930 for
Southern Methodist University productions and for concerts by musical artists and groups.
CHAPTER XV

DRAMATIC STOCK IN CRISIS

The record of the stock companies in Dallas between 1925 and 1930 is one of repeated failures and declining influence. Summer stock had disappeared from the Dallas scene after the abortive efforts of Sam Bullman during the 1924-1925 season. After 1930, winter stock all but disappeared. The stock companies felt the full brunt of changing public taste, the onset of the depression, and the revival of vaudeville and other forms of stage entertainment in the movie houses. Not a single stock company after 1925 was able to stay in the city for an entire season. And from February, 1928, to April, 1929, there was no stock activity in Dallas. The stock companies made a brave attempt to meet the changing conditions. They attempted to overcome the onus which had become attached to stock productions by advertising themselves as repertory groups. They also made an honest effort to improve the quality of their plays and productions. But they were competing for a theater audience that was being curtailed by economic conditions, against four downtown theaters that were presenting entertainment on the stage. The stock companies also felt the full brunt of the sound movies. If legitimate drama was to continue to exist in the face of the sound films, it had to offer plays of exceptional quality, and this stock was not prepared to do. There can be no doubt that the continued failure of the stock companies in the city created a public attitude toward them of disillusionment and, at times even, a kind of contempt. This
attitude can be seen reflected in the critical comments of the times.

**Circle Theater 1925-1926**

All dramatic stock activity in Dallas during the five year period was to center around the Circle Theater, located on St. Paul Street opposite the Medical Arts Building. A similar theater, built specifically for legitimate drama also, was operating in Fort Worth, and Sam Bullman, the manager of the Cycle Park Players in Dallas during the 1924-1925 season, had a group playing at the theater in Fort Worth, known as the Ritz, early in September, 1925.¹

In August, 1925, E. H. Hulsey, owner of the Circle Theater, went East to arrange for a stock troupe.² By September 5, John L. Crovo, managing director of the new Circle Theater stock company had arrived in the city and was making plans for the new season, scheduled to start about September 28. Hulsey, who had engaged Crovo, disclosed that the theater was to be remodeled "to overcome certain defects in the audience room." Hulsey also, in defining the purpose of the stock company sounded the new approach that was to dominate stock publicity for the next few years:

> We are not going to offer a stock company. We are trying to give Dallas a permanent resident theatrical company. Our idea is to present Broadway successes with players who have been successful on Broadway. I believe Dallas will support first-class drama.³

The important new note in this type of publicity is the emphasis on the fact that the company was not going to be the usual type stock organization but rather a repertory company. Crovo apparently was

¹*News, Thurs., Sept. 3, 1925, 4.*  
²*News, Mon., Aug. 24, 1925, 4.*  
³*News, Sat., Sept. 5, 1925, 4.*
experienced in managing repertory for he had managed the Forsythe and Lyric Players in Atlanta for three years, a company that had been so highly regarded that it had frequently been asked by playwrights to try out their plays in advance of Broadway presentation. The leading woman of the new company was Edith Luckett and the leading man, Kenneth Daigneau. He had appeared in several New York Theater Guild productions. Crovo was quoted in the interview cited above as saying that the purpose of the new company was "to bring Broadway to Dallas."

Making the most of the new approach he was taking, Crovo, ten days later differentiated between the stock company and a resident theater by calling stock "an assembly of actors playing a short season of repertory plays," whereas a resident company had no repertoire. The latter, according to Crovo, was "the dramatic company of the city and selects its plays from among the most successful or most promising that are available." He said he anticipated that the new Circle company would affiliate with the Dallas drama schools and with the Dallas Little Theater and might even start a school of its own. He promised Dallas amateurs that they could break in with the Circle company as "extras," or even in small parts.¹

The advertisement that carried the announcement that the company would open on Monday,⁵ September 28, with The Best People by David Gray and Avery Hopwood, also carried the complete roster of the


⁵The Monday opening date was a new departure. All the previous stock companies had opened the week's run on Sunday.
company. The roster of actors named Edith Luckett, John Holden, Kenneth Daigneau, Thomas Ewing, Harriet Melford, Myra Marsh, Minna Phillips, Clyde Franklin, Lyle Clement, John Taylor, Rupert Clarke, Stanford MacNider and Louise Brown. Character roles were to be taken by Minna Phillips and Clyde Phillips and supporting leads by Myra Marsh and Lyle Clement. Francis Faunie was the stage director and Stanford MacNider the art director. Rupert Clarke served as stage manager and Louise Brown, John Taylor and Thomas Ewing, in addition to acting, also worked in the business office. George Caldwell led the orchestra.

Just prior to the opening, the remodeling work on the theater was completed. The theater had been made to look slightly "Bohemian" by the installation of an awning; the interior had been redone in pastel tints; more seats had been installed; and the wall boxes, which, according to John Rosenfield had been "unsightly," had been removed. Crovo stated that the stock company intended doing plays occasionally of literary merit. He promised that there would be times when the group would "probably venture into the field of the art theater."

Rosenfield, who introduced the practice in Dallas of signed criticisms, praised The Best People highly. "After the first

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8News, Sat., Sept. 26, 1925, 4. It should be observed at this point that publicity about the stock companies, and indeed about every form of theatrical activity in the city was intensified after John Rosenfield became Amusements Editor of the Dallas Morning News during the summer of 1925.
act . . . it was evident that the newcomers had dug in for the winter," he wrote. The critic called the play "big time stuff" and said it was done "with true big time ease and prodigality." He called the company "far removed from the usual run of troupers," and noted that "they knew their lines, something novel in these benighted backwoods." He commented that Edith Luckett was "youthful without being kittenish, is blessed with a caressing voice, was awfully good to look at, is obviously intelligent, and knows how to wear her clothes." He called Kenneth Daigneau a "find," and described him as "a tall, handsome fellow with distinguished features and manly bearing." The work of Clyde Franklin as the father of a hectic family was, according to the critic, "entirely outstanding," and he added that Franklin "played with admirable restraint working up to an impressive climax in the third act." John Holden was started by Rosenfield to have acted the prodigal son "with rare taste and skill." The critic observed that "many of the best people saw 'The Best People' Monday night." As a final compliment, he observed that it was "theatrical manna to receive a company with several changes of costume, a long variety of properties, players who can pronounce their French, and butlers who know how to serve tea."^9

The comment was made by John Rosenfield in the News shortly after the new company opened that "unless preceding dramatic companies have dulled the Dallas dramatic taste, the stage has taken a new lease on life here." Rosenfield, however, cited the "inflexible rule of casting" at the Circle, common to all stock companies. He stated

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that the system worked acceptably for The Best People, but expressed hope that it might be changed some day. The best talent in the company, according to Rosenfield, was that of Kenneth Daigneau, who, he stated, was the only one in the company without an extensive Broadway background.

An advertisement on the same day announced Kiki as the production for the week of October 4 and listed the prices which prevailed at the Circle during the season. They were $1.10, 75¢, and 50¢ nights, and 50¢ and 25¢ matinees.10

The 4 Flusher by Caesar Dunn was the presentation for the week of October 11,11 and the following week, Cornered, by Dodson Mitchell was given. The critic, who signed himself "CB," called the play "cleverly constructed and excellently presented," and maintained that it "aroused more enthusiasm . . . than has any play of the season to date." He praised Edith Luckett as rising "to true dramatic heights in her tense third act," and commented that Lyle Clement "carried a fat part . . . off excellently," and that Minna Phillips was "great."12

When the Circle Theater announced the intention of doing The Goose Hangs High, by Lewis Beach, the newspaper comment was that it was "a daring experiment," and that the troupe was "forsaking the purely box office and undertaking a more elevated type of play."13

John Rosenfield, in his review, called the performance "sincere and meritorious, but a trifle discursive," and stated that the play could have been given "by the artiest art theater in the country." He commented about the play that it was "too crude to demand entrance to dramatic Valhalla . . . but . . . sound in thought . . . enveloped in a delicate and charming sentiment." Rosenfield called Myra Marsh "a revelation," and commented that Kenneth Daigneau was an actor "who never allows his rank as leading man to upset the proper relation of things." On November 1, the Circle Theater surrendered its rights to Old Man Minick by George Kaufman to the Dallas Little Theater on grounds that the Circle had, with The Goose Hangs High trespassed on an area of drama that legitimately belonged to the little theaters.

The production for the week of November 1 was The Woman on the Jury, by Bernard K. Burns, and for November 8 and the week following, Scrambled Wives by Adelaide Matthews and Martha M. Stanley.

Apparently there were rumors in mid-November that the Circle company was not doing well financially, for on November 11, E. H. Hulsey, owner of the theater, denied reports that he was selling his interest in the company or that the season would be curtailed. He announced that The Show Off, by George Kelly, an outstanding Broadway success, had been secured for the week beginning November 23 and that a bonus and royalty of nearly $1,000 had been paid by

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17News, Nov. 8, 1925, III, 4.
the theater to secure it. According to Hulsey, the play was to have been given a road show production at the Fair Park Auditorium, but the Circle Theater had obtained the rights. He also disclosed that James H. Doyle, a "well-known stage director of New York," would produce the play at the Circle and would remain for the balance of the season.\(^{18}\)

The play for the week of November 15 was *In the Next Room* by Eleanor Robson and Harriet Ford.\(^{19}\)

John Rosenfield displayed the new note he had brought into Dallas theatrical criticism when, on November 15, in his column, *Along Amusement Row*, he took a backward look at the Circle plays that had been given so far in the season. He called *The Goose Hangs High* "a true and sound treatment of the parent-children problem;" stated that *The Best People* was "only a flapper girl;" described *Kiki* as "an utterly theatrical French farce;" stated that *The Four Flusher* was "trashy and silly;" and that *Scrambled Wives* was "a bedroom farce."\(^{20}\)

On November 17, the Circle management offered $200 for the best play written by a Texas author and $100 for any play thought suitable for production by the Circle Theater.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{18}\) *News*, Sat., Nov. 14, 1925, 4.

\(^{19}\) *News*, Sun., Nov. 15, 1925, III, 4.

\(^{20}\) *News*, Sun., Nov. 15, 1925, III, 4. One characteristic of Rosenfield's criticism was that he often would be enthusiastic over a production in his opening night review but in later statements would make detracting remarks about the same plays.

\(^{21}\) There was no further mention in the *News* about the contest and the company did not present any original plays.
James H. Doyle became the new production director and Francis Faunie who had held the position went to New York. His departure marked the first break in the company which had begun the season. The Show Off was advertised as "presented for the first time in America by a stock company," and the critic who reviewed it called the play "comedy of a new and infectious sort." He stated that Kenneth Daigneau, who played the part of Aubrey Piper, gave "such a fine performance that he commands the sympathy of his audience." But he maintained that Minna Phillips as Mrs. Fisher was "the hit of the show," commenting that "excellently does she work on the feelings of the spectator." He also praised Edith Luckett in the role of Amy, stating that "she has caught the very spirit of the character and the way she hangs on every utterance of her bombastic husband and fights when fault is found with him . . . makes for great acting." John Rosenfield, commenting on the play later in the month, makes a curious comment in the light of other critical opinion:

Excellent entertainment though it was, 'The Show Off' . . . lacks much of achieving first rank among modern plays. For one thing, the Horatio Alger touch imparted to the play by having the young brother awake overnight to find he has marketed an invention for a cold $100,000 savors too much of an old-fashioned deus ex machina.

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24The review was initialed "C.B." This may have been Chauncey Brown who held the position of Amusements Editor before John Rosenfield took it over and who was now Sports Editor.
During the last week of November Myra Marsh left the company and was replaced by Leah May, and late in December, Kenneth Daigneau resigned as leading man to go to California and his successor as leading man was announced as Coates Gwynne.

Mismates, a "crook" melodrama by Byron Fagan held the stage at the Circle during the week that began November 30, and on December 7, the play that opened was Nightie Night, by Adelaide Matthews and Martha M. Stanley. Rosenfield commented about the production:

Efforts of the Circle Company toward the grand old hokum were never so successful as on Monday night than "Nightie Night" a farce comedy. As diverting as anything else was the stage business, especially some expert clowning by Mr. Daigneau. The Circle Players showed themselves clever farceurs in this instance. . . . Mr. Daigneau's breezy playing was altogether the best he has given us. Miss Luckett always was the life of the party, looked pretty and was well gowned. . . . Harriet Melford was something of a scream as a movie-mad housegirl. . . . The strong hand of Mr. Doyle, the director, was apparent in the snappy action and brisk speed of the performance and the three acts were in excellent taste. In spite of its title "Nightie Night" is a joke that could be told in most parlors.

One of the difficulties that may have kept discriminating playgoers from attending stock productions was pointed up by Rosenfield that same week when he wrote:

. . . we can not understand why an audience is moved to applaud after a particularly feverish and excited exhibition of acting on the stage. This appears to us as the very easiest thing for an actor to do. Once he or she is worked up to

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27 News, Fri., Nov. 27, 1925, 4.
29 News, Sun., Nov. 29, 1925, 4.
it... all that is necessary is filling the lines and shouting.\textsuperscript{31}

The following week the presentation was the George M. Cohan success, \textit{The Song and Dance Man},\textsuperscript{32} and when \textit{Polly with a Past}, by David Belasco, was given during the week of December 21, the lead was played by John Holden. Rosenfield declared that "The Circle resident players\textsuperscript{33} really ring the bell this week with David Belasco's farce comedy 'Polly with a Past.' On Monday night they gave the best performance of it ever seen in Dallas. It was highly spiced with humor in lines and interpretation and the first nighters appeared eminently satisfied." The critic added that Edith Luckett "put over much clever mimicry, looked fetching and wore the most attractive costumes," and that John Holden in the leading male role "did wonders with it. His comedy was refined and sure and he made love with the most convincing lyricism heard on the Circle stage this year. ..."\textsuperscript{34}

Coates Gwynne, who had replaced Kenneth Daigneau, made his Dallas debut as the leading man in \textit{Captain Applejack}, by Walter Hackett, given during the week of December 29, and called in advance notices the "Circle theatre's first venture into costume."\textsuperscript{35}

On Wednesday of the same week, John Holden was called home to Toronto, Canada, where his father was seriously ill and the newspaper

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 6, 1925, III, 7.
\textsuperscript{33}The use of the title "resident company" rather than stock company is to be noted.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{News}, Tues., Dec. 22, 1925, 4.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{News}, Sun., Dec. 27, 1925, III, 3.
announcement carried the revealing comment that he "left his trunks as hostages for his return." The play for the week of January 5 was *Daddies*, by David Belasco, and two days after the play opened, two changes were announced in the company. Adeline Bushnell, described as having "an outstanding reputation in dramatic stock," replaced Edith Luckett as leading lady. E. H. Hulsey, the theater owner, commented that he was planning to pay her "the largest salary for any leading woman in dramatic stock." Arthur Allard replaced Lyle Clement as "second business man." In all, there had been five changes in the company's personnel since the season began.

The play for the week of January 11 was *Silence*, by Max Marcin, and John Rosenfield, commenting on the fact that it would mark the farewell appearance of Edith Luckett, stated that "there never has been a more popular leading woman in Dallas than the golden-haired Edith." He added that theaters like the Circle "must change faces during the season."

Apparently the Circle Theater was having financial problems, for on January 10 Hulsey announced that the prices of admission were being lowered. The new night prices were to range from 25¢ to 99¢. The previous admission schedule had ranged from night prices of 50¢ to $1.10. The 50¢ and 25¢ admission prices for matinees remained the same.
When Adelyn Bushnell\textsuperscript{1} arrived in the city on January 11, she was greeted by acting mayor John C. Harris, Albert Reed, manager of the Chamber of Commerce, and Frank Shoupe, representing the city's utility companies. She was driven to a hospital where Mayor Blaylock was convalescing from a broken ankle.\textsuperscript{2}

John Rosenfield in his review stated that he disliked Silence as a play, describing it as "one commonly known as 'strong' in which the actors square off and hurl dialogue at one another. The only thing new about it is the chronology which is slightly mixed," but he praised the acting of Coates Gwynne in the role of Jim Warren as "virile and moving." He stated also that Edith Luckett acted the two roles of the mother and daughter with effectiveness and skill. Arthur Allard, according to the critic, "made a distinctly favorable impression . . . and appeared to be an actor of variety and resourcefulness." In the part of the prison warden, Rupert Clarke, according to Rosenfield, was "the brightest of the minor parts," and Clyde Franklin and John Holden were both "excellent."\textsuperscript{3}

Further evidence that the Circle company was not doing too well came on January 13 when E. H. Hulsey disclosed that the theater would be used on Sunday afternoons and nights for touring road shows. The stock company was to add a Friday matinee to take the place of the omitted Sunday performances.

\textsuperscript{1}The difference in the spelling of the first name came after her arrival.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{News}, Tues., Jan. 12, 1926, 4.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{News}, Tues., Jan. 12, 1926, 4.
Grounds for Divorce, scheduled for performance for the week starting January 18, was advertised with the announcement that Adelyn Bushnell would wear $2,000 worth of her $25,000 wardrobe, including four Paris pairs of boots, said to cost $150. John Rosenfield called the play "the smartest rigged production the Circle has shown us this season." He described Adelyn Bushnell as "a youthful brunette, decidedly pretty ... and endowed with an excellent idea of what to do on the stage," and stated that she gave her complete attention "to creating the role of a sprightly French amoreuse and shows no annoying notions about center stage and adventitious poses." Rosenfield called the play "a French sex farce, one of those adaptations usually interpreted by stock as a problem melodrama," and commented that the Circle company played it "for what it is, a sophisticated farce." The performance of Coates Gwynne was, according to the review, "as finished a performance as is seen anywhere west of the Hudson river." Rosenfield described the audience as "the largest ... of any first night since the Circle opened this season."

When Enter Madame, by Gilda Varesi and Dolly Burne, was given during the week of January 26, Rosenfield was even more enthusiastic in his praise. He called it "a comedy not equalled in charm and wit by anything that the theater has done this year and described the performance of Adelyn Bushnell as "one intelligent triumph." He also lauded Coates Gwynne, Jack Holden and Leah May for their performances, but stated that the play "lacked a certain sureness in the stage

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business, something most unusual in a directorial effort of the usually reliable James H. Doyle.\(^6\)

On Sunday, January 31, The First Year by Frank Craven was announced as the production for the week, and then, two days later, the hammer blow fell. Hulsey posted a notice backstage that the stock season was coming to an end on February 13. He said his plans were "to book road shows into the theater from time to time."\(^7\)

The farewell offering of the company, which, in the advertisement, called itself "the best stock company ever assembled in Dallas," was Hell Bent Fer Heaven, by Hatcher Hughes. Rosenfield, in his review, commented that the audience must have wondered "just how this grim picture of primitive white trash in the Kentucky hills . . . could have met the noble Pulitzer criterion." But he stated that the play had merit and that its "presence in a stock theater . . . is surprising." He described the effect on the audience as "successful," giving credit to the actors' individual interpretations and the playwright's ability to clarify "the bewildering maze of emotions." He, however, commented about the play that "things become too obvious and vast stretches . . . are dry and dull." The critic described Arthur Allard, in the role of "a villain dealing woe in the name of the Lord," as "too sincere to be perfect," but commented that it was the finest acting he had seen done in stock in the city." He also praised John Holden as the mountaineer.

The one set, commented Rosenfield, was "adequate," and he added that


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"a thunderstorm was well staged, water and all."^48

The Circle Theater stock company, personally managed by E. H. Hulsey, owner of the theater, had lasted twenty weeks. From the point of view of personnel, it had been relatively stable. Hulsey stepped in soon after the season began and took over the active management from John L. Crovo. This was the first stock company in the city to lay claim to being a repertory group rather than strictly a stock organization. The same note was to be struck by all the succeeding stock companies. However, the rigid system of casting was in effect for this company as it had been for all the others that had been in the city earlier.

The revolution in playwriting which was sweeping New York at the time began to make its effects felt in stock during the season. Part of this may have been due to the great success of the Dallas Little Theater. In any event, the Circle Theater management promised Dallas playgoers that from time to time plays of more literary quality would be presented. The season saw two such plays given, The Goose Hangs High and Hell Bent Fer Heaven. Both of these plays are still widely produced. For the most part, however, the caliber of plays presented was rather low with emphasis on such farces as Nightie Night, Scrambled Wives and Mismates, or on melodramas like Cornered, Silence, and The Four Flusher.

With the entrance of John Rosenfield onto the critical scene, it becomes possible for the first time to evaluate the season somewhat objectively. The student of the period, however, will probably learn

to rely more on Rosenfield's judgments made in afterthought than on his enthusiasms of the moment, at least during these early years of his critical apprenticeship. Rosenfield, a week after the season had come to an abrupt halt, called it "superior to any other the city has ever known." And he listed as high points the presentation of *Kiki*, the second production; *The Goose Hangs High; The Show Off; Enter Madame;* and *Grounds for Divorce*. However, he gave top honors to *Hell Bent Fer Heaven*. What is interesting about Rosenfield's evaluation is that he gave the highest rating to plays that have proven themselves since then to be of dramatic merit.

There was evidence midway through the season that the company was in financial straits. Hulsey first tried lowering the admission prices and then had to resort to bringing in road shows on Sundays. If it is true that he was giving Adelaide Bushnell the highest price paid to a leading woman in stock then that may be indicative of the high costs of operating the company. Although there is little actual existing evidence, it may have been that attendance was good but that the high overhead demanded big houses every night and that this was not forthcoming. From a financial point of view, then, the season may be said to have ended disastrously, but if Rosenfield's word is to be taken, it can be called an artistic success.

The Edgar Mason Players - 1926

No sooner had the Circle Theater Resident Company cleared the theater than another group was knocking at the door. Edgar Mason,

leading man of the Ritz Players in Fort Worth, and R. H. Lightfoot, Fort Worth oil man, formed a partnership, the Texas Amusement Company, and subleased the theater from E. H. Hulsey for twenty weeks. Mason, who was to be actor-manager of the company which was to be known as the Edgar Mason Players announced that he intended to reduce the price of admission, to give nine instead of ten performances a week, and to present three musical comedies. He also made the familiar announcement that most of the company would be new to Dallas. 50

Mason found a company ready made when he persuaded Sam Bullman, manager of the Ritz Theater stock company in Fort Worth, to close his operations there and bring the entire group intact to the Circle, except for Gene Oliver, the leading woman, and Grace Young, who enacted "second woman" roles. Mason stated also that the Texas Amusement Company would run stock theaters in four other Texas cities. He announced that Paul Jones, publicity director for the Hulsey interests in the city, had been engaged to do publicity for the Edgar Mason Players. 51

When the season started on March 8, there were a number of persons in the company who had been seen in previous seasons by Dallas audiences. Edgar Mason was both the general manager and the leading man and Isabelle Mohr was the prima donna. Betty Wilkes, the second woman, was a newcomer to Dallas. The character man was Anthony Blair, and the juvenile was Ewing Cherry. Cherry had spent one summer with the Gene Lewis company in the city. John Cowell, second man, had

been with Sam Bullman at Cycle Park the previous summer. Joseph Remington, who had also been with Gene Lewis, devoted his entire time to managing the theater. The leading lady, Miami Campbell, was a newcomer to the city. However, Idabelle Arnold, the ingenue, and Larry Sullivan, the comedian, had been at Cycle Park. The director of the company was Charles Lammers. He had played at the old Dallas Opera House during the seasons of 1902 and 1903 and was with the Cycle Park Company in 1907. In 1912, he had returned to play at the Opera House as the principal comedian in "Miss Nobody from Starland," and in 1918 had played the lead in a trench act at the old Majestic Theater. The following year he had been featured in a variety act at the Jefferson and also during that year had played at the Majestic for four weeks with Gene Lewis. He also had been with the stock company at the Hippodrome and had spent five summers at Cycle Park. The character woman with the company was Isabelle Mohr.52

The opening production was Frank Craven's New Brooms, and the reviewer stated that "the success of the evening gave every indication that this latest try at dramatic stock will be successful." He commented that the house was well-filled, calling it "the largest first-night stock audience seen here this season." He praised Edgar Mason and Miami Campbell as being "young . . . unusually good looking, and having undeniable talents," adding that "two more personable leads are rarely found in stock." The rest of the company, he noted, "showed

Optimism was apparently running high at the Circle for at the end of the week R. H. Lightfoot, the financial backer of the company, said that the play was being so well attended that the management might hold it over for a second week. But this did not materialize.

54 The Mason Players, unlike other stock companies in the city, adopted a policy of opening their week on Sunday.
announced that if the Edgar Mason Players were successful, he might possibly build a new downtown legitimate theater. He never built the theater.

The Demi Virgin, by Avery Hopwood, was the production for the week of March 21, and the theater management advertised that coupons printed in the newspapers plus $1 would entitle the bears to two 83¢ tickets to the Monday night performance. The play got a severe panning from the unidentified reviewer. He called it "so much sex bosh, ... a typical Broadway confection calculated to make the patron gape and gasp in direct proportion to his or her suburbanity." The play was described by the reviewer as "part and parcel of the immense traffic in sex, best represented by the myriad of magazines with bathing girl covers," and he suggested that the Circle company "throw on the brakes in their dialogue. ... They all have a tendency to talk too fast." But he observed that the audience apparently liked the show.

Graustark, by Grace Hayward, was given on Sunday, March 28, and the week following. On April 4, the company opened with The Gingham Girl, by Daniel Kusell, and the reviewer, G.T.K., described it as a brave effort that had "many bald spots, some of which are hardly akin to musical comedy." He called it "more or less a musical comedy played in a dramatic style," and observed that Edgar Mason

"stole the show." 60

After presentation of The Bride, by R. M. Middleton and Stuart Oliver, during the week of April 11, 61 the Circle Theater management, apparently irked by the critics' lukewarm reviews, made public the results of a poll which had been made among Circle Theater patrons.

Anne Nichols' "Abie's Irish Rose" was by far the leader in the vote, and this play, enjoying an evidently perpetual life on Broadway, is not even available for stock. Musical comedies ran high and were tied in popularity by the vote for mystery melodrama.

The play "Rain" received a high vote, higher than the bedroom farces. Costume plays secured but two votes. Among the plays suggested by the patrons were "White Collars," "Civilian Clothes," "Three Weeks" and "Madame X." The poll is regarded by the Circle management as fairly representative of what the spoken drama patrons of Dallas want, and if the critics don't like the choice it's their misfortune. 62

My Lady Friends, by Emil Hyltray and Frank Mandel, was given during the week of April 19, and was described by the reviewer as "the funniest thing that ever happened." He commented that Tony Blair, "the portly Circle character man" who acted the role of a Spanish cook, "fired Monday night's audience to side-splitting laughter." The reviewer called it "comedy stuff of the old slap stick school" that broke up the show. Inez Holmes, a Dallas amateur, played the leading feminine role, and she was said to be "a winsome and beguiling package of charm." Miami Campbell, according to the reviewer, did very well in the part of a "frowsy wife," and Edgar Mason "fretted around the stage in a competently routine manner." The reviewer described the

60 News, Tues., Apr. 6, 1926, 4.


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play as "heartily amusing," and stated that the sets were excellent. John Rosenfield, later in the week, commended Edgar Mason for specifying in his actors' contracts that "they shall play the parts he casts." He cited the casting of Inez Holmes and stated that she "amassed considerable reputation." The critic declared that Mason had shown "more genuine intelligence and original lines of thought than any other stock manager who has operated in Dallas." He also declared that dramatic stock was suffering decline everywhere in the nation "except where the taste in drama is undiscerning and undiscriminating."  

The Rosary, by Edward E. Rose, was the production for the week of April 26, and the reviewer called it "an old but none the less beautiful religious drama." He particularly praised the casting of the play and commended Edgar Mason, in the role of the millionaire atheist, as doing "some of the best acting of his local career." Other actors the reviewer praised were Anthony Blair as Father Kelly, Miami Campbell in the dual roles of Vera Wilton and Alice Marsh, and Ewing Cherry as the "wise guy."  

The announcement was made on May 2 that the Edgar Mason troupe would move to the Garrick Theater in Milwaukee when the season ended. Mason announced his intention of returning to Dallas is September.  

The play that opened on May 3 was The Witch Doctor, by Walter

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67 The company had changed to a Monday opening date several weeks earlier.
Archer Frost. John Rosenfield praised the melodrama because, as he put it, it was not "a moral discourse on 'mammy palaver,' the sins of the missionary clergy or a threnody on 'damp rot.'" He praised Edgar Mason as having given an "excellent performance as the hero," and commented that Miami Campbell looked "fetching" and did well with a poorly written part. The best performance, according to the critic, was given by Anthony Blair, in the role of a "boorish Boer." He described the play as "a pretty fair thriller, evocative of some hysterical reactions in an action," but criticized the pace of the play, calling attention to "the racing speed with which the Edgar Mason Players habitually take their lines."  

A repeat performance of What Price Glory during the week of May 10 closed the season.

The Edgar Mason Players had leased the theater for twenty weeks, apparently with the intention of continuing through the summer, but closed their season on May 17, after ten productions had been given for a total of 100 performances. It was a remarkably stable troupe. The entire company, except for the leading man and the "second woman" came intact from the Ritz Theater in Fort Worth. There were no changes in personnel during the Dallas season and the entire company went intact to the Garrick Theater in Milwaukee.

Mason appears to have broken somewhat with the strict casting system that usually prevailed in stock but except for What Price Glory, which was so successful that it had a repeat performance, the quality

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of the plays selected for presentation was poor. The company came in for severe criticism, both because of the choice of plays and also due to the unusual speed with which the actors delivered their lines.

Taking cognizance of the success of *What Price Glory*, John Rosenfield commented on May 30 that "the record of dramatic stock for the season is not so melancholy as once reported." He called attention to the fact that throughout the country there were one hundred and twenty-six active companies, as compared to only ninety during the 1924-1925 season. The critic also called attention to a significant upgrading in public taste which made it possible for stock companies to present plays of better quality that had once been considered high brow and regarded "by the old time managers as 'suicidal,'" with "unexpected profits." 70

The company had promised three musical shows at the start of the season. Only one, *The Gingham Girl*, was actually produced, and it met with poor success. Either the company was having difficulty securing good scripts, or its management was committed to a policy of satisfying public taste with popular fare. The latter seems to be the more likely theory. In any event, faced as it was with severe competition from the Dallas Little Theater, from the movies, and from the road shows, the Mason Players felt the impact of popular disapproval of the French farces and "crook dramas" that were their stock in trade. Except for the phenomenal success of *What Price Glory*, of much higher caliber than the other plays presented, the season of the Mason players cannot be said to have been too successful. There was the added factor

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of the more objective attitude taken by John Rosenfield and the other critics toward stock productions.

The Gene Lewis Company - 1926-1927

By the end of June, it was known that Gene Lewis, who for eight seasons, together with his wife Olga Worth, had piloted the summer stock company at Cycle Park, was to move into the Circle Theater with his company in the fall. Prior to the start of the season, Lewis announced several innovations. Instead of the Sunday evening performances, Lewis stated plays would be given at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. He commented that "patrons like to go to bed early on Sunday night. ... This hour will also work to the advantage of out-of-town patrons."\(^71\) Lewis disclosed also that he intended to revive such old-time stage successes as Way Down East and Monsieur Beaucaire on, as he put it, "a hunch that they would prove popular with the audiences."\(^72\)

Lewis had grandiose schemes for the future. Announcing that the next season would be on the stage, he disclosed that he planned to start a circuit of stock companies throughout the South with headquarters in Dallas. The companies would all rehearse different plays, and then, after producing them locally, would take them around the circuit. And like his predecessor in the Circle, Lewis said he was "contemplating building a theater in Dallas."\(^73\)


\(^{72}\) News, Sun., July 18, 1926, III, 4.

He signed on a company of fifteen actors with contracts which were described in the News as "the most unusual in the history of dramatic stock." The contracts provided that "all actors play as 'cast'" and that there be no "types" in the company. Lewis explained this by stating that the old tradition of types was "one of the greatest handicaps to stock companies." As he put it:

We have no types in the company. Neither I nor my wife and partner, Olga Worth are leading man or leading woman. . . . We have no juveniles, ingenues, character men or women, second men and women. We are on an equal footing and if the play calls for a type of person different from myself in the leading parts, I will cast myself in a subordinate role. Miss Worth will be handled likewise. I expect to do this often next season. The other actors will be cast for fitness and not for rank.74

In Lewis' company, in addition to himself and his wife, were Arthur Allard, Garth Rogers, Richard Elliott, Sam Flint, Pauline LeRoy, Helen Redd, Ella Etheridge, Edward Beach, Lester Lang, Ollie Bland, Lucille Erwin, Frank Powell and Klock Ryder. The business manager was Walter Raleigh Dent, known in both Dallas and Memphis as a "showman," and the season was to open on September 5 with Spring Cleaning.75 The week's run was to begin with the Sunday twilight performance at 5 p.m. and downtown ticket offices were set up at Marvin's Drug Store, the Medical Arts Drug Store, the Baker Hotel Cigar Stand, the Owl Drug Company and the Adolphus Cigar Stand.76 When Olga Worth returned to Dallas on August 25 after an absence of three years, she was given what the News described as "one of the most

flattering receptions in recent years." The Mayor Pro-tem, John C. Harris, talked at a welcoming luncheon at which fifty guests were present, and E. H. Hulsey, owner of the Circle Theater, said at the luncheon that "if Gene and Olga can't put the Circle over, no one can." He stated that advance sale of tickets was heavier than "our fondest expectations." 77

On the eve of the season's opening, John Rosenfield joined in the general atmosphere of optimism about the success of the Lewis company with some comments of his own. He wrote in his column:

The manager and owner of the company, Gene Lewis, is one of the few dramatic stock impresarios in America to achieve unusual prosperity. Big theatrical interests throughout the country repeatedly have sought to make use of Mr. Lewis' talents for appealing to and satisfying the public. Mr. Lewis has never joined the chain for the good reason that his showmanship has paid himself . . . his wife and his more or less permanent company very handsomely in the past . . . .

Mr. Lewis . . . built Cycle Park here when ingress to the airdrome was through the mud and dirt. To reach the place nine years ago, a patron had to indulge in a healthy hike. Not only did the first season prosper but Cycle Park continued as a veritable mint for six years . . . .

Failures at the Circle in the past have been peculiar . . . not attributed solely to bad performances, improper management. . . . Much of the time the expenses of operating the theater have been too great for the patronage, no matter how generous that has been.

The first season 1923-1924 . . . Leona Powers . . . despite her atrocious diction—made friends and customers for the theater . . . . The next season brought Dorothy Beardsley, Kay Hammond and Helen Lewis . . . and the late lamented Victor Browne as leading man . . . .

Last season began with an excellent company . . . began prosperously enough. The fundamental weakness was back stage direction. Daigneau left to be succeeded worthily by Coates Gwynne . . . the theater acquired a new second man, Arthur Allard . . . the best stock company actor ever seen in Dallas . . . with Gene and Olga this year.

If there had been a dominating director backstage, less of a penny-wise-pound-foolish policy in the choice of plays and

better continuity of publicity, the company would have reaped a reward. . . . Edgar Mason took a chance. . . . the plays offered often were poorly set and badly rehearsed. . . . Mason gradually released his regular performers and filled in with amateurs.

Mr. Lewis' organization . . . should be free of the evils of the past. . . . there is no room for backstage dissen­sion. . . . He hires, chooses plays, designs sets, casts, directs, rehearses, is leading man, runs the theater. Noted for thoroughness (he) boasts that the prompt book is thrown away at dress rehearsal.78

In an effort to attract customers, the Lewis company early in the season offered two seats for the price of one for the Sunday twilight performance. In Love 'em and Leave 'em, the second play of the season, the Gene Lewis company was, according to Rosenfield, "a pretty good example of what a stock company ought to be." He described the production as "the rarest dramatic tidbit given here in exactly 13 months." He commented that the play, written by George Abbott and John V. A. Weaver, fitted the company much better than had Spring Cleaning, which, he described as "one of those drawing-room affairs for which a New York producer would cable to London for a cast to the teacups born." The characters in Love 'em and Leave 'em were, according to Rosenfield, the kind that "stock actors can do to perfection." He particularly praised Helen Redd, calling her "terribly attractive from tip to toe," and stated that she gave "an expert portrayal of the blonde with gold-digging talents." Olga Worth, according to the critic, played the "heavy" girl with an understanding that "brings out the only notes of pathos in the play." He commented about Lewis that the actor-director had "discarded the tricky mannerisms of yesterday" and had "gone in for real acting." He also praised Arthur Allard and Garth Rogers. Rosenfield

stated that the production was a finished one and commented, rather curiously, that the play was "reminiscent of 'The Show Off'" but was a better play. He noted that the house was filled almost to capacity.\(^7^9\)

The next play, Dancing Mothers, by Edgar Selwyn and Edmund Goulding, given during the week of September 18, saw Ella Ethridge make her final appearance with the company. Two new actresses, Ruth Lowe, radio performer, and Jeanne Haughton, motion picture performer, joined the company with this production.\(^8^0\) At the Sunday night opening performance, the audience was presented with two different endings to the play, one tragic and one happy, and was asked to choose between them. The audience vote was tied and Lewis stated that another vote would be taken Monday night.\(^8^1\) The production was described as "perhaps the most extravagantly gowned production seen in Dallas in many season."\(^8^2\)

As an aside on the complement of the company, Rosenfield called attention to Lester Lang, the stage manager, who, he noted, "belongs to the new school which takes the stage and drama very seriously." Lang had received his training at the Eastman Theater in Rochester, New York, where he had assisted Norman Edwards, the art director, and

\(^7^9\) *News*, Mon., Sept. 13, 1926, 4.

\(^8^0\) *News*, Thurs., Sept. 16, 1926, 4.

\(^8^1\) *News*, Mon., Sept. 20, 1926, 4.

\(^8^2\) *News*, Tues., Sept. 21, 1926, 4.
Ruben Mamoulian, the stage director. 83

The next production, opening on September 26, was The Gorilla, by Ralph Spence. Earlier, a road show production had been seen in the city, and John Rosenfield commented that the Lewis production was "fifty times better than the road company of the same name." The critic also stated, somewhat extravagantly, that "people are seriously looking toward this lovely little playhouse as the redeemer of the drama in Dallas." 84

Rosenfield's remark was undoubtedly intended to bolster sagging attendance at the theater, for on October 9, Gene Lewis had to deny publicly that the company had failed. Lewis attributed the bad attendance to the unseasonable Indian Summer weather, commenting that "our theater is uncomfortable in comparison with the refrigerated houses of the city." He stated that he anticipated big business with High Stakes, due for presentation the week of October 10, and with Rain, scheduled for the following week. Lewis admitted he had told his audiences that unless business got better, he would close the theater, but he added, "I said that the first week. . . . The fact is it looks as though we are here for this season and maybe next." 85

However, Lewis ran into another problem on the opening night

83 News, Sun., Sept. 19, 1926, 4. In the following season, Lang returned to the Dallas Little Theater as scene designer. He was later to become technical director at Vassar College under Hallie Flanagan. When Hallie Flanagan became director of the Federal Theater under WPA auspices, Lang became the assistant director of the program.


of High Stakes, by William Mack. The city censor, Mrs. Ethel Boyce, ordered the revision of two speeches in the second act. The lines, spoken by Lewis in a scene with Helen Redd, were to the effect "that a single standard of morality should prevail and that this standard should be the masculine, which is said to permit the sowing of wild oats." Mrs. Boyce stated that "the public would not stand for it."

A conference was arranged for Tuesday morning between Lewis and Mrs. Boyce. Rosenfield, commenting on the performance, called the play's dialogue "brisk, epigrammatic and at times literary, although there are occasional interpolations of broad profanity and graphic allusions to seldom discussed things, some of which appeared to be in bad taste." The critic stated that the audience gave the play a "cordial and at times enthusiastic" reception. He praised the performances of Lewis, Klock Ryder and Arthur Allard as "splendidly finished," and commented that Olga Worth in her blonde wig "looked enchanting and modeled seven striking sartorial creations." The critic pointed out that this was the first time the Lewis company had run into censorship problems. The year before, according to Rosenfield, several changes had been ordered, and each had been complied with.

The play continued to run with no revisions after John L. DeGrazier, chairman of the City Board of Censorship, saw the play on Tuesday night. Lewis sought a definite ruling, contending that publicity about improper lines would hurt the company. But DeGrazier refused comment. Lewis stated:

The part of the dialogue questioned by Mrs. Boyce is not primer

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stuff, but if I thought it would offend, I never would have given the play. I do not think these lines can be altered without injuring the play.87

Rumors were apparently rampant again that the theater would close, for on Wednesday of the same week, Lewis again issued denials, stating that the production for the week of October 21 would be The Cat and the Canary, by John Willard.88 However, three days later, he gave the customary two weeks notice to his stage crew that the company would close in two weeks. The production for the week of October 17 was Rain, by John Colton and Clemence Randolph, and the Sunday twilight performance was a sell-out. In addition, there was such heavy advance demand for tickets that Rosenfield speculated that Lewis might hold the play over for a second week. Lewis refused comment on conditions at the Circle other than to state that he had incurred losses of about $8,000 during the seven weeks his company had been at the Circle. He added:

I don't know the reason for this, except that Dallas doesn't want dramatic stock or doesn't want us. I came in with high hopes and it sure hurts to have to leave. I might have held on a bit longer, but closing seems imminent and I want to give those of my company who have had other offers a chance to accept before the fall season gets by them.89

Again Lewis blamed the poor attendance on the hot weather. He stated that he was considering an offer to go to the Ritz Theater in Fort Worth, a theater operated by Simon Charninsky and R. J. Stinnett of Dallas.90

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For *Rain*, according to Rosenfield, the Circle box office had "the rare exultation of turning away prospective customers." He stated that in the part of Sadie Thompson, Olga Worth had the first chance "to call into play her talents which at times are among the best before the public." Klock Ryder, as the missionary, was, according to the critic, "splendid," and Dick Elliott, as the inn-keeper, also turned in a good performance, according to Rosenfield. But he stated that he enjoyed most the acting of Sam Flint as the doctor. Rosenfield stated that the production was not as smooth as the usual Lewis presentation, but he added that the audience was very enthusiastic in its reception.91

During the run of the play, the *Dallas Morning News* editorialized on the failure of the company:

The announced failure of the latest effort to maintain a stock company in Dallas . . . occasions the usual controversy as to whether the city and section have so far fallen under the spell of the silver sheet that it is impossible to obtain adequate support for the so called 'legitimate.' Before the advent of the motion picture, the Thespian hailed the drama under this term as distinguished from vaudeville, musical comedy and possibly the operatic stage, but of late years, the pressure from the silent enemy has required cooperation to such an extent that the young man who has come into the profession only recently is inclined to lump under the old buskin terminology anything that is not concerned with Hollywood.

Here the question concerns apparently only the presentation of the serious drama, and that in stock form, since Dallas has proven a remunerative halting ground for road companies playing well-known successes. For a good many years, from one case and another, efforts to exploit stock here have not amounted to a success sufficient to justify continuation. Stock always faced one difficult problem. Its audiences had to believe that "the play's the thing." The necessity of getting along with hurried staging, hurried rehearsal, and of compromising on the adequacy of personnel, has always made the best of

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stock performances only mediocre in effect. Since stock seldom has a stage success available now within a year of its triumph, it finds its position aggravated by the fact that the adaptation of the same show has frequently already reached the screen, and that the man who says the show’s the thing is satisfied with that.

Dallas is no different from other cities of the same size. There is still interest and support for the drama, but stock simply has a hard row to hoe even when presented under the best of circumstances.92

Gene Lewis accepted the offer to take his company to the Ritz Theater93 in Fort Worth and was due to open there on October 31.

Rain was so successful that consideration was given to holding it over for a second week but Lewis decided to present the last play of the short-lived season, The Cat and the Canary, by John Willard, instead.94 The play opened on October 22 and closed on October 30.

Apparently conditions were more favorable in Fort Worth for Gene Lewis and his company than they had been in Dallas, for in April, 1927, it was announced by Rosenfield that the company had completed "a successful winter in Fort Worth," and was headed for a summer season in Memphis.95 The Circle Theater, in the meantime, went into a motion picture road show policy, with Ben Hur opening as the first attraction on October 31, the day after Gene Lewis and his troupe had departed.96

The failure of Gene Lewis and his company was the most dramatic of all the stock groups that came to Dallas between 1920 and 1930.

93The name of the Ritz had been changed to the Pantages Theater.
Lewis came to Dallas with a reputation that was already firmly established in the city. He and his wife Olga Worth had successfully conducted summer stock at Cycle Park for eight seasons. But in spite of all the factors in favor of an extended run, the season lasted only eight weeks. In all, eight plays had been presented for a total of seventy-two performances.

A survey of the plays presented by Lewis shows only one of the eight, The Cat and the Canary, as having any real merit. The season was culminated before Lewis had an opportunity to try out his theory that old-time favorites might prove successful with Dallas audiences.

Attendance was poor for most of the season as attested by the frequent reports that the company had folded and also by Lewis' own statement of the loss he had incurred.

Lewis attributed the bad attendance to the Indian Summer weather. There was no air conditioning in the theater and the unseasonable weather was undoubtedly a real factor in the company's failure. Whether the difficulties with the censor over the play High Stakes played its part in the attendance decline is difficult to determine. The prospect of seeing a play that had run into censor difficulties might have drawn some patrons, but Lewis, who himself was apparently a shrewd showman, observed that such publicity was harmful to the theater. It might be hazarded that Lewis' decision to accept the offer to move to Fort Worth with his company was in part due to his difficulties with the censor, for it was during the run of High Stakes that he gave the two weeks notice.

It is ironic that Rain, the next to the last production, was highly successful. And it attests to the vitality of the company that after having failed in Dallas it was able to have a highly successful season in Fort Worth that lasted five months. Again the question of whether Dallas was not becoming too sophisticated for stock performances suggests itself. The experience of the companies that followed Lewis and his troupe would serve to bear this out.

**Bartlett's Scheme for Stock - 1927**

In July, 1927, E. H. Hulsey, who had operated the Circle Theater for two seasons, gave up his lease, and the theater returned to its owner, G. G. Wright. Wright, in turn, retained W. Raleigh Dent as manager. Dent disclosed in July that dramatic stock would probably be tried again in the fall. Before a stock company did finally establish itself, two abortive attempts were made to set up stock at the theater. The first of these was by Aldis Bartlett, a young actor-manager from New York City, who went so far as to sign a five year lease for the theater which provided that its name be changed from the Circle to the Aldis. He announced he expected to begin his season on October 1 with "the production of popular and artistic plays contained in the whole literature of the drama." The group, which was to be known as the Civic Repertory Players, was to be made up of professional actors and of new talent developed in a school attached to the theater. Bartlett named Miss Ella Bartlett as head of the proposed school and said the project would be "in emulation of the

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work done by Stuart Walker." Bartlett held out the usual promises that he would not attempt dramatic stock but would hire talent that would play as "cast," and he suggested the scheme, novel to Dallas, of repertory theater, in which two to six productions would be held in readiness and played at the rate of two a week.

Bartlett commented publicly late in July that he had investigated the Dallas stock scene and had found that receipts at the Circle had averaged around $3,500 weekly, but that the managers had been paying out about $1,100 weekly for their production costs. He stated that he felt that by conducting a school and by deleting some costs, he could make a stock company prosper in the city, even assuming that attendance was not better than it had been for previous stock companies. He added that he knew of only two other theaters in the entire country that were conducted along repertory lines, such as he envisaged for his prospective troupe, and that both of these were successful. He noted that plays which he intended in his repertoire included such well-known dramas as Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, by Anita Loos; The Truth about Blayds, by A. A. Milne; What Every Woman Knows, by J. M. Barrie; The Devil's Disciple, by George Bernard Shaw; The Jest, by Sam Benelli; Paolo and Francesca, by Stephen Phillips; The Silver Cord, by Sidney Howard; Laff that Off, by Don Mullaly; Is Zat So, by James

99 A well-known stock producer who was experimenting with repertory theater and who launched the Portmanteau plays.

100 News, Thurs., July 21, 1927, 4. Although Bartlett never got the opportunity to try out his plan in Dallas, the suggestion was significant. The entire drift of stock in the city seemed to be toward some kind of repertory theater. This drift was to culminate much later in the Margo Jones Theater, begun in 1947, and even more precisely in the Dallas Theater Center, established in 1959.
Gleason and Richard Taber, and others.101

But in August, Barlett called off his plans, commenting that he could not secure "good professional actors at a figure to fit his pocket book," and he said that because he did not want a mediocre company, he had decided to give up the idea of setting up a stock company in the city.102

Ada Ludwig, prominent woman theatrical producer from New York, was the second person during the summer to look over the Dallas theater scene with an eye toward the possibility of establishing a company. The News reported that her plans were similar to those of Bartlett, but after this initial mention, nothing more was heard of the venture.

The Meikeljohn-Dunn Stock Company - 1927

In mid-September, Matthew Meikeljohn, Los Angeles producer, negotiated for a lease at the Circle. He announced that he intended to closed his stock company in Los Angeles on September 18 and open in Dallas on September 23. The rehearsals for the opening show were to be held on the train en route. The featured player was Arthur Lovejoy, who had performed for one-hundred and fifty-two consecutive weeks on the Pacific Coast. Others in the company included Elsie Gresham, True Boardman, Jr., son of a well-known screen actor, Rose Forester, Josephine Challen, and John Vosburgh, the leading man. Meikeljohn said that "the spirit of the troupe would be youth," and he announced

his intentions of presenting the latest New York and Los Angeles successes. His visit to Dallas, Meikeljohn observed, had convinced him that the city would support a dramatic stock company that presented plays "in a finished manner." His intended repertoire ran more to popular successes than toward the classics, including as it did such well-known contemporary plays as The Whole Town's Talking, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Laff That Off, If I Were Rich, and Seventh Heaven. Meikeljohn signed the lease on September 14 and announced that his company would be known as the Circle Players. The name of the theater was to be kept the same and the company was to present nine or ten performances each week. The prices for admission were to be 75¢ and 50¢ in the evenings, and 50¢ and 25¢ for matinees. Blanchard McKee, who had been associated with the Dallas Little Theater for a number of years, was named manager of the theater by G. G. Wright, its owner.104

The opening of the theater was postponed from September 25 to October 1. Just prior to the opening, Meikeljohn announced that he planned to start a second stock unit at the Pantages Theater in Fort Worth on October 15. He also listed others who were to be members of the Dallas company. They included Lois Corbet, Dorothy Howard, the leading woman; Martha Bell, ingenue; Forest Barnett, "general business man"; and Howard Nugent, described as "a veteran of New York, west coast and dramatic stock activities who had appeared in Dallas several

103 The more permanent merit of these plays can be gauged from the fact that only two of them, Laff That Off and Seventh Heaven, were listed in the Samuel French Catalogue for September, 1926.

times with road shows in dramatic stock activities," as the director. Meikeljohn predicted the group would not fail because it would keep costs down. He stated that the new company would be neither "high-brow ... nor low-brow," explaining that he was not going in for "art drama or cheap drama," but instead wanted to cater to "popular tastes ... the refined, discriminating taste of a majority of the public." John Rosenfield thought it significant that Meikeljohn had not "asked the mayor to kiss his leading woman, ... did not order great banks of flowers to be presented to his cast on opening night, ... did not shower the city with free admission tickets."
The critic observed that Meikeljohn produced his first show and advertised it with "legitimate, unspectacular methods." He commented that from what he had seen of the Meikeljohn style of operation," his departure from Dallas would be a great loss.»

The opening production was The Family Upstairs, by Harry Delf, and Rosenfield began his review with the comment that "if beauty and youth be the initial requisites of public performances, then the new dramatic stock company ... should fare somewhat better than its predecessors." He wrote that "Arthur Lovejoy, a good looking youth with the hulk of Goliath ... is a natural comedian ... a genuine stage wit," and called him "the most distinctive personality we can remember in local stock records." His observation about Martha Bell was that she had "the natural comedy spirit," and he commented that the leading man, John Vosburgh, played "smoothly enough in a straight


part, is a young Francis X. Bushman in looks and wears his clothes well." As for Dorothy Howard, he called her manner "rather stagey," and stated that her use of voice "recommends her for Katherine in 'The Taming of the Shrew.'" As for Howard Nugent, the director, who played the part of the father, Rosenfield stated that he "evidently gave more attention to his company than to himself, for he overplays consistently." The attendance was described by Rosenfield as "gratifying," and he noted that "the patrons were manifestly engrossed and took occasion to applaud a good delivery of lines at more than one spot." This was said by Rosenfield to be unusual because "the entire cast was strange and no member of it had been around long enough to be recognized as a celebrity." During the intermission, a string orchestra headed by Alexander Skavenna was heard.\(^{107}\)

Meikeljohn made good his promise of cutting costs, for during the run of The Family Upstairs, and for several weeks thereafter, he did not run the customary advertisements of the company in the News. However, he must have decided that cutting costs on advertisements hurt attendance, for on October 30 he began a series of sensational newspaper displays about Circle Theater productions.

The second production at the theater was Cheating Husbands by Max Marcin. Opening on October 9, the play was called by Rosenfield "the kind . . . wherein some member of the cast declares, 'Men may think they understand women, but they never do,'" but he called the production a personal triumph for Arthur Lovejoy, the juvenile comedian. He stated that the audience howled at Lovejoy's every

entrance, and even at an anticipated entrance, and described the behavior of the spectators as "strange indeed." The critic praised the cast for their handling of what we called the "long speeches pro and con the jazz age." He said "they rip them off and get them over with." Again Martha Bell drew praise from Rosenfield. He described her performance as "natural, artless and perenially breezy." He also lauded John Vosburgh for his style of acting, which, he commented, while "generally restrained, is manifestly agreeable." And he observed that Vosburgh went in for "prettiness" in makeup where he "might more profitably emphasize his natural virility." Rosenfield called attention to the company's niggardliness as far as production costs were concerned, stating that "the first and third act mounting was disappointing. In truth, it was nightmarish."108

Meikeljohn kept to his promise to present plays of a more popular nature. The production for the week of October 16 was The Sap, by William A. Grew.109 For the following week, the play was The Love Test, which the reviewer, who signed the article with his initials, L.P.H. Jr., stated drew a small audience which filled only half of the seats in the theater. The reviewer praised Arthur Lovejoy particularly, but also commented favorably on Martha Bell, about a newcomer to the company, Alfred Aldrich, and on Howard Nugent, the director, who played the role of a miser.110

The week of October 30 marked the aforementioned change in advertising policy by the Meikeljohn company. The advertisement for White Collars, by Edith Ellis, illustrates the sensational turn which the advertisements took:

What would you do . . . If you were an $18 a week man and had to keep up a million dollar appearance and How would you feel if your friends squandered their money and expected you to keep their pace. Cousin Henry knows. He doped the whole thing out. You'll roar at some of his philosophy. . . . And by the way, Arthur Lovejoy is Cousin Henry. The play of the age . . . three solid years in Los Angeles. First a hit, now a sensation.

John Rosenfield called attention in his review to the fact that White Collars had been used by Anne Nichols, author of Abie's Irish Rose, in an attempt to place a second success on Broadway, but had been received indifferently. He stated that the audience, "which filled the Circle to its limits," appeared to enjoy the play and "seemed to find it the best of the Meikeljohn & Dunn efforts this season."

According to the critic, Arthur Lovejoy turned lines in the play about the plight of the middle class into burlesque. Rosenfield praised John Vosburgh as giving the best performance of his stay in Dallas, commenting that he displayed "some unsurpassed talents as a laugh getter." He also commented that Vosburgh had "adjusted his grease paint to the peculiarities of the house lighting and now represents a virile, likeable hero type." As for the setting, the critic again called attention to unnecessary economies in the setting.

\[111\] News, Sun., Oct. 30, 1927, III, 5. It will be noted that full advantage was being taken of Arthur Lovejoy's popularity.

\[112\] Dunn was the theatrical partner of Meikeljohn. The Dallas company was sometimes referred to as the Meikeljohn & Dunn Players.
He made an interesting observation on stock acting when he observed that the director "has turned a trick by presenting the rear views of the actors as often as the front," noting that this was considered a novelty in Dallas.\(^{113}\)

For the presentation of *If I Were Rich*, by William Anthony McGuire, Meikeljohn started a policy that eventually was to be a source of friction between actors and the management. Because road shows were at the Pantages Theater in Fort Worth during the week of November 6, Meikeljohn combined the casts of his companies in Fort Worth and in Dallas for the play which needed fifteen characters.

Nancy Fair, leading woman of the Fort Worth troupe, was given the principal role in the Dallas production. Another actor imported from Fort Worth was Arthur Forester, the leading man of that company. At the same time, the announcement was made that Dorothy Howard, the Dallas company's leading lady, was concluding her stay with *White Collars* and was due to be succeeded by Margaret Wessner who was to share the leading feminine roles with Martha Bell.\(^{114}\) This marked the first major change in the company's complement. Another change came when Cora Caldwell and her Boys replaced the Skavenna Orchestra in the orchestra pit of the Circle.\(^{115}\)

Rosenfield commented about *If I Was Rich*\(^{116}\) that it dealt "with


\(^{115}\) *News*, Fri., Nov. 4, 1927, 6.

\(^{116}\) There appears to have been confusion among *News* writers as to whether the correct name of this play was *If I Were Rich* or *If I Was Rich*. Both titles were used on various occasions.
the somewhat familiar aspirations of a wage-earning family to enter the dwellings of tiled marble and perfumed servants." The critic called attention to the large audience on the opening night, but again severely condemned the settings, describing them as "atrocious." He stated that the play "prospered in the affections of its spectators." 117

Changes in the company became more numerous from this point on. Marian Sutherland made her debut on November 13 with Johnnie Get Your Gun, by Edwin L. Burke. 118 Three Dallas actors, Jeanne Haughton, Lewis Lacey and Jack Tuttle, were in the cast. 119

Commenting on the attendance at the Circle, Rosenfield observed that White Collars had been extremely successful and that If I Was Rich had a bad start but sold out the house for the Thursday matinee. He noted that the management was issuing few free passes and commented that "there appears to be no doubt that M&D have put the place over at 75¢ top price." 120

On November 20, Meikeljohn announced that he was breaking with "the time-honored traditions of dramatic stock" as far as casting was concerned. He stated that he had three leading women, Marian Sutherland, Martha Bell and Margaret Wessner, all capable of taking leading or ingenue roles, and two men, John Vosburgh and Arthur Lovejoy who can handle any heavy male parts. He said they would all play as cast. 121

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The production for the week of November 20 was Gentlemen Prefer Blondes by Anita Loos, and the critic, who signed the article "L.T.", commented that although it was not really a play, the sophisticated dialogue was ably handled by the Circle Players. He praised Martha Bell as giving the best performance of her stay at the theater and described Margaret Wessner as "decorative and sufficiently refined." Marian Sutherland, he described as "expert" in the role of Gloria. He commented that Mae Harvey, who also had come from the Dallas Little Theater, showed "a world of ease and finish in her professional debut," and that Lee Calder, another new performer, was "quite a favorite as a skittish old woman." The reviewer stated that the sets were in better taste than any previously done at the Circle by John Oglesby. The critic ended with an appeal for attendance "on general if not patriotic principles."

The production for the week of November 27 was Ghost Train, by Arnold Ridley, and for December 4, The Enemy, by Channing Pollock, advertised as the company’s "first excursion into serious drama." The Patsy, by Barry Conners, the production for the week of December 11, was described in a review by Rosenfield as "a strong favorite wherever dramatic companies have effervescent ingenues," and he stated that Martha Bell was well-suited for the role and performed it "better than she has done anything in Dallas." Her interpretation, he stated, was "well thought in detail." As for James Donlan, who had replaced

123 News, Mon., Nov. 28, 1927, 4.
Arthur Lovejoy in the company, Rosenfield observed that he lacked the comedy of Lovejoy but fulfilled a need in the company for a "middle-aged character or general business man." Rosenfield predicted that the play would please the audiences, but he observed that it returned the theater to a policy of comedy, which, he said, "has been followed with only one or two costly exceptions since it opened."\(^{125}\)

There were already indications that the company was beginning to disintegrate. Between December 10 and 24, two of the actors left the company. Margaret Wessner was replaced by Grace Brooks, and Arthur Lovejoy joined the Gene Lewis company at the Palace Theater in San Antonio, and was succeeded by James Donlan. The Meikeljohn & Dunn company in Fort Worth moved to Waco on December 12.\(^{126}\) Not So Fast, by Conrad Westervelt, given during the week of December 18, proved to be the last production the company did under Meikeljohn & Dunn auspices. Laff That Off, by Don Mullally, was due to open at a matinee performance on Sunday, December 25, but the customers were greeted by barred doors and by the announcement that the performance had been cancelled. The first reason given was that members of the cast were ill, but by 8 o'clock that night, the news came that the actors had refused to perform and that Matthew Meikeljohn and Percy Dunn, the two men who ran the company, had refused to open the curtain. James Donlan, a spokesman for the actors, said that the actors intended to present the play on their own and would resume performances Monday

\(^{125}\)News, Mon., Dec. 12, 1927, 4.

afternoon and evening. Donlan commented:

For some time there has been friction between the Meikeljohn and Dunn management and the actors. Choice of plays, casting, salaries, and the shifting of actors from one town to another, Fort Worth and Dallas, and now Waco and Dallas, have brought about disaffection. Operation of companies in two towns with interchangeable casts has not been a satisfactory arrangement. The company feels that it has a good opportunity in Dallas and prefers to promote on its own account a new organization. Although I am a comparative newcomer, the rest of the troupe have many friends and have frequently received offers of backing. One or more of these will be accepted and there is every indication that the company can continue at the Circle until warm weather.

Meikeljohn, in his turn, stated that the operation of his town companies had been "a losing game for us and we prefer to withdraw immediately." He added that the Circle company had proved popular with the public and he expressed confidence in the ability of the actors to continue the season.

The only actors left from the original Dallas company were Martha Bell, John Vosburgh and Forrest Barnes. Howard Nugent had left suddenly on the Sunday that Laff That Off went into rehearsal after difficulties with the management. The company in Fort Worth had also been disposed of by Meikeljohn. He had handed over its management to Richard LaSalle, the director.

Blanchard McKee, the manager for G. G. Wright, the Circle owner, commented that the Circle Players had only had two weeks of poor attendance, and that "many of the weeks were the most prosperous the theater has ever enjoyed."

The new acting company was to be under the direction of Donlan until a new director could arrive from the West Coast. Among those who planned to remain were Martha Bell, John Vosburgh, Marion Sutherland
and Forrest Barnes. Others in the revitalized company were Ross Forrester, Louis Lacey, Patricia Snowden and Jack Tuttle. The reviewer for Laff That Off observed that the Circle was more than half filled on opening night. But he stated that the audience, though small, was enthusiastic about the performance and that John Vosburgh got a round of applause on his first appearance.

Steve of the Movies, by Robert Dempster, opened on New Year's Eve, and the reviewer, who signed the article with his initials, L.H.H. Jr., commented that Vosburgh made "an excellent movie director in the title role of a none-too-interesting comedy" but that he was handicapped by the weak supporting cast. Two new players, J. R. Applegate and Rosebud Truelove, made their appearance in the play, and the reviewer commented that "neither . . . reveals exceptional ability as actors." He noted that Miss Truelove, who, as he stated, used excessive makeup, carried a cane for supporting her right hand while she was suffering from an injured left leg. Some of the lines in the play were said by the reviewer to have "approached the gutter," and he commented that "some seemingly unnecessary strong laughter" was noticed, indicating embarrassment on the part of the audience.

Poor reviews and poor attendance proved too much of a handicap for the company to combat and after the final performance of Steve of the Movies, the company ceased its operations. C. A. Hale, the Dallas business man who had been backing the company during the

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period of reorganization, stated that he had been unable to arouse the interest of other Dallas businessmen in the project and that he could not continue the financing singlehandedly.\(^{130}\) On Monday, January 9, the company members gave two benefit performances of *Laff That Off* in an effort to raise money for transportation out of Dallas.\(^{131}\)

**The Miller Players - 1928**

Another Dallas businessman, Joseph D. Miller, stepped forward, willing to underwrite a company that would continue the season. Miller, making his first try at show business, retained James Donlan as stage manager. "I have looked over the Circle theater and regard it as a promising business venture," Miller commented. He went on to state that "contrary to belief, the theater has a substantial and steady following and with proper business management should be a success eventually."\(^{132}\) The complement of the company was a combination of old and new talent. Logan Byron was engaged as leading man and Dorothy La Verne as leading woman. Also in the company were Marian Sutherland, the ingenue who had played several roles with the preceding Circle Company, and Ross Forrester who had played leads with the Meikeljohn & Dunn Company. Patricia Snowden was engaged as "second woman."\(^{133}\) Known as the Miller Players, the company set its opening


\(^{131}\) *News*, Mon., Jan. 9, 1928, 4.


date for January 22 and the first production as I Love You, by William LeBaron. Even prior to the start of the season, Miller sought to win favor with the Dallas public by announcing that he had rejected White Cargo as a possible second production because it had run into censorship trouble in the city. He commented, "Although 'White Cargo' has been given a clean bill of health by the Dallas Censorship Board, we are still inclined to reject it." He announced that instead Know Your Onions would be the play for the week of January 29.134

The prices for the company remained the same as they had been for the companies earlier in the season, 50¢ for matinees, which were performed on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and 50¢ and 75¢ for night performances.135

John Rosenfield described the comedy in I Love You as "frivolous but amusing," in his review, and stated that Logan Byron was "likeable as the electrician with a predilection for forensics," and that he was "handsome in the fashion of Gene Tunney and virile in the manner of Jack Dempsey." He described Dorothy La Verne as "an experienced worker," and added that her voice was "much more copious than any possessed by predecessors." The audience, according to Rosenfield, was "small but all paying customers," and he observed that they seemed to enjoy the play. He commented also that the stage set "was in better color, design and was furnished in better taste than any other seen at the Circle this season."136

Know Your Onions, by Norman Feusier, saw Blanchard McKee, the house manager, appear in the cast under the stage name of Kenneth Orr. Rosenfield called the Miller Players "somewhat improved" in this production. He praised McKee as "an excellent character actor," and stated also that James Donlan in his role did "nicely enough," and that Ross Forester as the "successful lover" gave a finished production. The critic stated also that Dorothy LaVerne won the audience favor for the first time.  

This turned out to be the last production of the Miller Players. Miller, apparently trying to win audience favor, made a decision to do White Cargo in spite of his earlier decision. Mrs. Ethel Boyce raised objections, despite a claim by Miller that he had a letter from her stating that she would give her approval for the production. Another reason Miller agreed to discontinue the season was because he admitted the company had had poor business both for I Love You and for Know Your Onions. On Thursday, February 2, Miller posted a two weeks closing notice but elected to pay the actors salaries for the following week instead of going ahead with another play, saving costs of royalties, production and the house rental.  

Reviewing the 1927-1928 stock season, it is apparent that stock, in Dallas at least, was in sharp decline. There had been three separate managements during the period from October 2 to February 5. The Meikeljohn-Dunn management had lasted thirteen weeks, from October 2 until December 25. A week had elapsed with no production.

137 News, Mon., Jan. 30, 1928, h.  
after the Meikeljohn & Dunn company left the theater on December 25. Again, when Donley attempted unsuccessfully to steer the company through to the end of the season and had to give up after one week on January 8, there was a two week lapse before the Miller Players presented *I Love You* on January 22. The Meikeljohn & Dunn company lasted a total of twelve weeks, from October 2, 1927 until December 25, 1927, and presented twelve plays for a total of one hundred and twenty performances. Under the guidance of Donley, the company lasted another week, and then for two more productions as the Miller Players.

John Rosenfield, commenting on the weakness of stock in the city, made the observation on April 17, 1928, that "it has long been suspected that the principal trouble with dramatic stock is not in the indifference of the public toward the spoken drama but the lack of intelligent standards on the part of dramatic stock producers." He called attention to the intense competition between dramatic stock and the motion pictures and stated that "the salvation of stock appears to be the production of 'meaty' worth-while drama enacted with skill and directed with some sort of taste and imagination." 139

Again, on September 6, Rosenfield commented on stock companies, observing that "stock actors are coming to the realization that stock is dead." He pointed out that the actors not only could not find jobs but also that the stock season had ended in May instead of continuing until September. The critic continued:

Most of the stock actors . . . blame talking pictures. They believe that the talkers sic have permanently weaned away stock audiences. In the *small* town, where stock was relied upon,

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the talkies now have clinched the stock audience for pictures. "The Trial of Mary Dugan" was ruined for stock when the play was made as a talking picture. Many other plays, standbys of the stock companies, are being made into talkers and stock is now becoming short on material.

Stock actors say that the fans who had a personal interest in them as such are now devoting their attention to the new film fad and prefer the screen stars on the talking screen to the stock players in person.

Many stock actors are headed for Broadway, and each day brings more, seeking jobs from shoestring producers. Some are taking talking tests, but fail to get anywhere, because their names mean nothing. The stock players are doomed apparently.

Rosenfield's observation that the stock companies were finding it difficult to get suitable plays was reflected in the offerings of the Dallas companies during the 1928 season. They had to depend on such farces as The Love Test, Cheating Husbands, I Love You and Know Your Onions, or give such outdated plays as White Collars, Ghost Train, or The Enemy. There was no emphasis during the 1928 season on the recent successes which the plays had enjoyed on Broadway. Two factors were responsible for this. First, it was getting harder to secure recent successes because they were being bought out for the movies, and second, the companies which operated in Dallas during the 1927-1928 season placed great stress on cutting down costs and were unwilling to pay the high royalties that would have been necessary to get outstanding plays. The trend in stock in the city during the year ran toward plays which were either several seasons old or which had been performed with success a number of years earlier.

Meikeljohn and Dunn were unwilling to risk stock in Dallas alone. They combined it with a company that also operated in Fort

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News, Fri., Sept. 6, 1928, 10.
by Philip Barry. Other stars cited as possibilities included Sidney Blackmer and Alice Brady. There was to be emphasis on presenting outstanding stage successes, such as *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, by Bayard Veiller; *Coquette*, by George Abbott and Anne Preston; *The Second Man*, by S. N. Behrman; as well as current successes.

Wagner, on his arrival in the city, disclosed elaborate plans for operating the Dallas stock company in conjunction with one in Memphis and for interchanging the casts. He described the new approach as "a civic repertory idea," and stated that it had been tried successfully in Atlanta, Georgia. He commented that if outstanding New York actors could be offered two weeks of performance on the road, one in Dallas and one in Memphis, such an offer would be attractive enough to encourage them to "vary their long year in New York without interfering with their production plans." He also disclosed that the four week trial season would get under way on Monday, April 15. A group of Dallas business men pledged $10,000 to underwrite a three-week season. Herbert Marcus, Dallas department store executive, was the chairman of the fund raising committee. Those who contributed were the same group of men who sponsored the grand opera season in the city. The play selected as the opening production was *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, and in the cast were Robert Williams, who had been seen in the part of Jimmy Dugan when the play was done on Broadway; Barbara Hastings as Mary Dugan; Wilton Lackaye Jr.,

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1 News, Thurs., Mar. 21, 1929, 12.
son of Wilton Lackaye, well-known actor of an earlier day; Margaret DeMille, daughter of William C. DeMille, motion picture director, and the niece of Cecil B. DeMille. The company was known as the Charles L. Wagner Producing Company. It took on aspects of a civic enterprise, and this was underscored by Herbert Marcus, chairman of the committee of underwriters, when he called it a project that would "test whether or not good plays appeal to the Dallas public." He stated that Wagner had given the committee the assurance "that he will bring Broadway productions to Dallas with Broadway casts," giving the city plays "equal to those that our people travel East to see." He expressed the opinion that previous stock companies had failed in the city because they had brought "inferior vehicles and inferior actors," and were not patronized "because they did not merit patronage." James R. Saville, manager of the Showhouse, in a talk before the Lions Club on April 12, reiterated this sentiment when he stated that the city "since 1914 has had only third or fourth rate stock companies," and he blamed the failure of the companies on the fact that Dallas audiences were too discriminating for such inferior companies.

Robert Wear, who reviewed the play for the News, described the audience as "the most numerous . . . that has gathered in the Showhouse in several seasons," and observed that the audience delighted in the

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1 News, Tues., Apr. 2, 1929, 10.
3 News, Tues., Apr. 9, 1929, 12.
4 News, Tues., Apr. 9, 1929, 12.
"smoothness with which professional actors of merit speak their lines."
Wear praised John Spacey, who played the part of the district attorney, as having "little mannerisms and gestures like those of a State's prosecutor," and stated that Robert Williams, in the role of Jimmy Dugan, had "a pleasingly modulated voice" and that he gauged "the emotional tempo with taste." The critic also praised Wilton Lackeeye in the role of the defense attorney. Others listed as being in the cast were Barbara Hastings, Horace Sinclair, Ada Sinclair, Eleanor Laudon, Margaret DeMille, Louise Liddell, Theodore Scharfe and David Munro. 

The second play was Paris Bound and, as had been promised by Wagner, Madge Kennedy was the guest star. She played opposite John Vosburgh who had been the leading man for the Meikeljohn & Dunn Stock Company when it was in Dallas during the 1928 season. The announcement was made on the opening night of the new production that The Trial of Mary Dugan had enjoyed receipts exceeding $7,500 for the week. The guarantee for the week had been $4,000 and the receipts also met the house and stage hand expenses. Leven Jester, representative for the committee of underwriters, stated that this kind of business assured a season of more than twenty weeks the following season. John Rosenfield reviewed Paris Bound, presented during the week of April 22, and described Madge Kennedy's performance as "a lovely, human thing enacted with full effect." He commented that she added "the chic and wardrobe that seem so necessary to female

\[\text{News, Tues., Apr. 16, 1929, 14.}\]
\[\text{News, Mon., Apr. 22, 1929, 10.}\]
customers' appreciation of dramatic art," and that "underlaying the mannerisms . . . are a sharp penetration of character and the trick of driving home a point with intelligible stage method." Rosenfield noted that the play "may be a little steep for North St. Paul Street," because, as he put it, "we must comprehend allusions of a musical composition that depicts in tone such things as test tubes, germs, lunch hour at Madison Square and New York traffic cops." The critic also praised John Vosburgh," who, he stated, was "a wholly acceptable leading man" after a season in New York "and the companionship of competent colleagues." He commented that Margaret DeMille brought "a slightly uncontrollable vocal equipment to the character of a blase matron," and said about the sets that they "impressed less for their splendor than for their good taste," following, as they did, the original designs of Robert Edmond Jones." The audience, he stated, was large and their reactions "ranged from satisfaction to delight."  

Madge Kennedy was also the guest star for the following week's play, Saturday's Children, by Maxwell Anderson, was directed by Horace Sinclair. Others in the cast included Barbara Hastings, John Spacey, Ada Sinclair, Frank Sylvestre, John Vosburgh, Clara Everett and David Munro. Rosenfield stated that the season at the Showhouse, with this production, ended "with resounding and amazing success," and he observed that on opening night there was "a fair sized and socially prominent audience." He commented that Madge Kennedy had taken on the difficult task of learning the role in one week, "an unusual experience for a production star," but that he gave her role "striking

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contrasts and stimulating variety," and that there was "little about her performance to suggest that she had not played the part for years." He praised her "thoroughgoing penetration and understanding of the part" and also lauded the rest of the cast, commenting that this demonstrated the superiority of the Wagner company over the earlier stock groups and proved Wagner's claim "that stock is stock and his company something else." Rosenfield felt that Vosburgh was "too handsome and heroic" for the role of a "clod," but that he gave an "able performance, the most convincing we have ever witnessed from him." He described Frank Sylvestre, in the part of an "emancipated father" as writing up "another triumph." The critic observed, however, that he had "never been satisfied with the settings of this company which sometimes show their canvas," but stated that they had "more taste and plausibility than we are used to from our allotment of professional companies."^157

Despite the enthusiastic review, the play did not do well at the box office. Leven Jester, the chairman of the guarantors' financial committee, stated that "it is conceivable that Dallasites would journey to New York merely to see Miss Kennedy in this play, then come home bragging about what they saw. Here it is in their home town and they have suddenly lost interest." Despite having received more favorable comments from all the Dallas reviewers than either of the preceding plays, it did not gross enough to cover expenses. Herbert Marcus, general chairman of the guarantors, had

Worth. C. A. Hale and J. D. Miller, the two Dallas businessmen who next risked backing stock in the city only stayed with their companies long enough to gather that they would not be profitable ventures. Stock in Dallas, as elsewhere in the nation, was in sharp decline by the end of the 1928 season. What probably accelerated this in Dallas was the presence in the city of the famed Dallas Little Theater. Too, Dallas also was able to offer, in addition to the sound films, stage entertainment as provided by the vaudeville and musical stock theaters.

The Wagner Company - 1929

It was more than a year after the Miller Players ended their brief run at the Circle Theater before stock was seen again in Dallas. In March, 1929, Charles L. Wagner, described in press releases as the "concert and stage manager, generally credited with launching the careers of John McCormack, Galli-Curci and Will Rogers," came to Dallas to launch a new stock company. During the year, the name of the Circle had been changed to the Showhouse Theater and the manager had become James R. Saville. Prior to Wagner's arrival, Saville had spoken with a number of prominent Dallas business and civic leaders about financing the venture. According to preliminary plans, the season was to open on April 8 and to run for four weeks. Seats were to sell for $1.50, $1, and 75 cents and the four week season was to be a pilot undertaking to determine whether a full stock season during the 1929-1930 season would be feasible. Wagner's plan called for a permanent repertory company which would be supplemented from time to time by outstanding stage stars. One of these was to be Madge Kennedy who was to be seen in her success of the previous season, Paris Bound,
This season is not a profit-taking enterprise. Charles L. Wagner is producing the plays at a loss and we have underwritten the necessary guarantee with full knowledge that no profit could be made. The purpose of the season was to test Dallas sentiment for spoken drama. If Dallas proved its affection, a long season would be arranged for next year. 'Paris Bound' of last week was one of the gambles of the show business. The play was enormously successful in New York and its failure to register here was one of the things we couldn't know until we tried. It was just a bad guess. There was no complaint, however, of the standards of production or the acting. This should not be held against the enterprise.

Four days later, it was reported in the News that the Wagner company would probably return again the following season. The blame for the box office failure of Saturday's Children was attributed to the bad weather during the week of production. The $1,500 loss was to be prorated among ten of the guarantors. Wagner himself did not sign an agreement for the return engagement, however, and Rosenfield stated that one reason for this was that there was a rumor that another legitimate playhouse was due to be built in the city near the new post office.

Wagner did bring a new note of professionalism and a new concept of stock to the city. The idea of bringing guest performers to the city for stock productions was new in Dallas and was to be repeated again in the early 1930's. The Trial of Mary Dugan grossed $7,300; Paris Bound took in a gross of $5,600. At the prevailing admission prices, this was quite good for the 1,500 seat Showhouse Theater. Despite the claim of the guarantors that the venture was

152 News, Thurs., May 2, 1929, 12.
not a profit making one, Wagner must have been convinced that merely clearing expenses was not enough and that he needed a larger theater. He did not return in the fall of 1930 and the reason was, undoubtedly, that he wanted a better theater than the Showhouse for his productions so that the twenty-week season contemplated for the fall of 1930 would yield larger returns. Stock in its traditional form had proved that it could not attract Dallas audiences. Wagner tried a new approach, more in keeping with the heightened sophistication of the city. But during his three-week experimental season, the line between success and failure depended so much on audience attendance at a single week's production that he could not hope to make the longer season go where the experimental season had resulted in a loss.

In order to provide perspective for the stock activity in the city during the 1925-1930 period, it might be well to give a brief summary of the stock companies that operated in the early 1930's, although it is recognized that the activities of theater companies in the 1930's do not fall within the province of this study.

As has been stated, Wagner did not bring his company back to the city in the fall of 1929, and there was no stock activity in the city until January 18, 1931, when James Hayden, an Eastern actor-manager launched the Hayden Players at the Showhouse. Like Wagner, Hayden also had a prominent New York actor as guest artist. Glenn Hunter appeared in Just Suppose, and in A. A. Milne's Michael and

\[15\text{News, Mon., Jan. 19, 1931, 6.}\]
\[155\text{News, Tues., Feb. 3, 1931, 10.}\]
Lysle Talbot, later to become a well-known actor in the movies, where his first name was changed to Lyle, was the leading man for the company after March 2. The most significant presentation done by the Hayden Players was Street Scene, by Elmer Rice, an outstanding success in Dallas which received enthusiastic praise from John Rosenfield. Florence Reed, the well-known Broadway actress, was Hayden's second guest performer. She acted during the week of April 12, 1931, in her celebrated vehicle, The Shanghai Gesture. Hayden closed his season on May 3, 1931, with Up Pops the Devil, by Hackett and Goodrich. Rosenfield stated that the Hayden company had "changed Dallas' whole idea of stock, for Dallas long ago had written an obituary for this form of entertainment."

In the fall of 1931, the Hayden company returned to the city, opening on October 18 with Death Takes a Holiday, by Alberto Cassella. When As Husbands Go, by Rachel Crothers, was given during the week of October 27, the guest star was Beverly Bayne. Florence Reed returned as guest performer during the week of November 22 in The Circle, by

161 News, Fri., May 1, 1931, 10.
The company was idle for three weeks, from December 5 to December 27, and reopened with *Whispering Friends*, by George M. Cohan. Stock companies were experiencing great difficulties in securing plays. Most of the New York stage successes were being bought up by the film companies. The last play done by the Hayden Players was *Louder, Please* by Norman Krasna. The company folded on Monday, January 24, 1932. Hayden attributed the failure to the high expenses of the company and to the fact that his savings had been wiped out by a bank failure in Massachusetts. Members of the company attempted to keep the season going as the Dallas Civic Players and did two plays, *The Command to Love*, by Rudolph Lothar and Fritz Gottwald, given during the week of January 31, and *White Cargo*, by Leon Gordon, presented the week of February 7. On Saturday, February 13, 1932, the Dallas Civic Players, formerly the Hayden Players, gave their final performance of *White Cargo* and then disbanded.

The Hayden Players were the last important effort at stock in Dallas. There were two more abortive attempts to revive stock in the

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161 *News*, Mon., Nov. 23, 1931, 8.
city. The Boyd B. Trousdale Players, under the leadership of Boyd Trousdale, opened on Sunday, April 1, 1934, with prices that ranged from 55¢ to 25¢ in *The Family Upstairs*, written by Harry Delf, and were contemptuously dismissed by John Rosenfield as a "tent show company." They continued at the Uptown Theater, formerly the Showhouse, until April 25 and then departed. A more serious attempt was launched on Sunday, January 6, 1935, when the Uptown Players, under the management of John B. McKee, who had been stage director for the Hayden Players during their first season in Dallas, opened with *Men in White*, by Sidney Kingsley. The company kept going until Saturday, March 2, 1935, when the final performance of *Elizabeth Sleeps Out* was given. This marked the end of dramatic stock in Dallas.

It can be seen from this brief survey of dramatic stock in Dallas during the 1930's that whereas during the 1925-1930 period one stock company had followed another in quick succession in the city, long periods elapsed between stock seasons after 1929. The Wagner company left the city on May 5, 1929. Twenty months passed before the Hayden Players opened their season on January 18, 1931. The same company returned in the fall of 1931 and performed from October 18 until February 13, 1932. Another twenty-five months passed before the Boyd B. Trousdale Players started their engagement in the city. They stayed only a month, until April 25, and it was another nine months

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before the Uptown Players finally rang down the curtain on stock in the city. They remained at the theater until March 2.

Another observation that might be made is that both the Wagner and the Hayden Players used guest performers and both were relatively successful. This indicates that Dallas was demanding a higher standard of performance than had been evidenced by other stock companies in the city. Wagner's innovations marked a radical departure from traditional stock. But even he did not fare well enough to justify for him a return to the city after his experimental three-week effort.

In looking back over the 1925-1930 stock seasons, a frank appraisal made by John Rosenfield in 1931, when the Hayden Players were about to start their first season, is enlightening:

From previous tenants they have inherited . . . a big electrical sign reading "The Showhouse" . . .

The theater opened in 1924 as a sort of descendant to the Capitol—not the movie house but the former Dallas Opera House which conveniently removed its senile self by burning down.

The 1924-25 season, we have learned, was well patronized but the expenses . . . exceeded the intake. . . . Mr. Hulsey's company seemed to be enjoying prosperity but his books told a different story . . . The troupe included Kenneth Daigneau, a rare personable leading man; Edith Luckett, a skillful and generally miscast ingenue; a first class character woman in Minna Phillips, now with the New York Theater Guild; a juvenile Jack Holden whose inexperience on the stage was compensated by his popularity around town, and . . . a second man, Arthur Allard . . . among the best troupers ever seen here.

Later that same season a Fort Worth troupe headed by Edgar Mason--Mason had good taste and one or two ideas. His lack was money. He couldn't keep his company peoples the right sort of actors and had to give up . . . Engagement was memorable for a production of "What Price Glory."

Mr. Hulsey . . . sublet . . . in October, 1926 to Gene Lewis who had spent seven seasons here at Cycle Park, a summer airdrome. In other days Mr. Lewis had produced cheap shows inexpensively and let in the customers for the cost of a banana split . . . quite a personality, youngish, curly-haired, gifted with a velvety voice and a facility to make curtain speeches that sounded like sermons.

A dynamic chap, he went into the Circle with phrases off Barnum's old handbills . . . spouted with more or less spontaneity.
If energy, ambition and a ready-made following could have established the Showhouse, Gene would have done it. Gene had gone slightly haywire with his own acting. Formerly a conscientious student of lines, he suddenly began to rely exclusively on his shock of curly hair. First night upon first night, we heard him ad lib his dialogue, sometimes betraying such a light familiarity with the play as to start something he couldn't finish with the plot. After a few noisy months Gene's bunch found it wise to fold up and go West.

In the fall of 1927 . . . Meikeljohn and Dunn arrived with imperial notions of a circuit of stock theaters through the South. Of this outfit we remember John Vosburgh, a mere actor with a deep voice and attractive looks and his wife Martha Bell, a charming ingenue of considerable talent. Then there was a gangling youth named Arthur Lovejoy who got considerable attention for a few weeks with tab show clowning. For reasons we might as well forget, this company cracked, broke and scattered.

The Circle Theater went dark to flicker now and then for a road show during 1928-29. James R. Saville substituted Showhouse. He was not a stock manager nor did he attempt to be . . . merely booked road shows and . . . musical concerts. . . . He booked Charles L. Wagner's dramatic attractions . . . a renowned concert manager and Broadway producer. . . . First offering 'Trial of Mary Dugan' which packed the place. The next two weeks, Madge Kennedy, real Broadway electric-lighted actress was seen in 'Paris Bound' and "Saturday's Children" . . . neither of which the city cared for. Mr. Wagner and his local guarantors dropped a trifling amount on this so-called experimental season. The theater remained closed during 1929-1930. 175

During the five seasons between 1925 and 1930, there was dramatic stock in Dallas for only fifty-seven weeks. The Circle Players opened on September 28, 1925 and closed on February 14, 1926, after twenty weeks of performances. On March 9, 1926, the Edgar Mason Players started a season at the Circle that lasted for ten weeks, until May 17. Gene Lewis and his company opened at the theater on September 5, 1926, and stayed eight weeks, until October 30, 1926. Almost a year elapsed before the Meikeljohn and Dunn company

came into the city, continuing twelve weeks until December 24, 1927. James Donlan attempted to keep the season alive but the company lasted only from December 26, 1927 until January 6, 1928. Three weeks later, the Miller Players opened, and they too remained only two weeks, from January 22 until February 5. More than a year later, Wagner and his company were at the theater, from April 15, 1929 until May 5, 1929.

It is interesting to note, in looking back over the stock companies, that the most successful productions were of plays that today are considered of merit, such plays as *Street Scene*, *What Price Glory* and *Hell Bent for Heaven*. These also were plays typical of the newer type drama being written at the time.

The necessity to cut costs appears to have been an ever-present consideration with the stock groups during the five year period. Evidence from the reviews indicates there was fairly good attendance, but the costs of plays and of actors was higher than it had been. Added to this was the increasing difficulty of securing current Broadway successes. This was especially true after the sound movies appeared. The film companies were purchasing any Broadway shows that had promise, anticipating that they could be made into pictures and they did not run the risk of having them first performed by the stock companies. Actors talking on the screen in the movie versions of well-known plays apparently satisfied the public better than did the stock productions which were rehearsed in one week and which were not able to compete in settings or in other aspects of production. Only the best plays could survive against this type of competition. The Dallas stock companies between 1925 and 1930 were of higher caliber.
than they had been in the previous five year period, and during the
1930's, when there were many highly-talented unemployed Broadway
actors available, the stock groups were even better. But stock had
too many odds against it in Dallas and elsewhere. Wagner provided
a partial answer when he brought in Madge Kennedy as a guest star.
By the winter of 1931, when Hayden continued Wagner's practice, all
entertainment was in the midst of economic doldrums and there was
little that could save stock. It is significant that just about the
time that Hayden's company quit in Dallas, the last stock company
also failed in Houston.176

After 1925, all the stock companies laid claim to being
repertory groups. The only Dallas company that made a real effort
in this direct was the Wagner troupe. What is surprising is not
that stock died in Dallas, but rather that it survived as long as
it did. Judged by the number of weeks played between 1925 and 1930,
Dallas' experience with stock was unfortunate for the most part. But
considering the scarcity of available plays, the changing tastes of
the audience and the competing media of entertainment, Dallas may be
said to have enjoyed a fairly active and perhaps a fairly typical
dramatic stock history.

been a partner of Hayden, closed his company in Houston. A week
earlier, he had closed a stock group in Cincinnati.
CHAPTER XVI

THE QUALITY OF THE ROAD IMPROVES - LEGITIMATE PRODUCTIONS

An important factor in the 1925-1930 road show season in the city of Dallas was the opening of the new Fair Park Auditorium. It was the availability of this 5,000-seat auditorium that made possible the presentation of such shows as Broadway and The Miracle. Although the principal effect was to be felt in the musical comedy field, still the fact that the public got an opportunity to see dramas with big casts and complex production problems not only helped create a demand in the city for the newer Broadway presentations, but also established a pattern that was to be fulfilled during the 1930's.

But in spite of the availability of the Fair Park structure, the 1925-1930 seasons in Dallas, as far as legitimate road show productions were concerned, remained relatively meager. It will be seen in the forthcoming discussion that only companies with well-known stars or plays that had established their reputations by virtue of long Broadway runs or that were well-known because of repeated stock presentations dared make the long trek to Dallas. Economic factors were paramount during this period in determining which plays left the main circuits in the Northeast and Middle West to go to the Southwest with its long jumps between shows.

The 1925-1926 Season

The first of the legitimate road shows to play in Dallas
during the season was The Rivals, presented on December 5 at the Fair
Park Auditorium with a notable cast that included Minnie Maddern
Fiske as Mrs. Malaprop; Thomas Wise as Sir Anthony Absolute; James
T. Powers as Bob Acres; and Lotus Robb as Lydia Languish.1 Chauncy
Olcott had been with the company on tour and was supposed to have
played the role of Sir Lucius O'Trigger in Dallas, but he became ill
and his place was taken by Brandon Tynan.2 Others in the cast were
Don Cook as Captain John Absolute; Fred Eric as Faulkland; Gerald
Rogers as Fag; Barlowe Borland as David; Herbert Belmore as Thomas;
Jean Ford as Julia Melville and Marie Carroll as Lucy, according to
the dramatis personae attached by John Rosenfield to his criticism
of the performance.3 The top admission proce for the Dallas per­
formance was $2.20, but balcony seats were available for $0.4.4

Rosenfield found the Dallas presentation "utterly charming... in
spite of its antiquity and the mellowness of its leading performers,"
and noted it was enjoyed by "two fair-sized audiences." He observed
that audience attention was focused on Minnie Maddern Fiske, who, he
stated gave "what appeared to be a flawless performance." He partic­
ularly praised her comedy technique. Tom Wise and James T. Powers,
according to the critic, did their roles in the "broad style of an­
other generation" but he stated it was suitable to the play.

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3Rosenfield, who became the Amusements Editor of the News in the
summer of 1925, was the first of the Dallas critics to list the entire
cast for plays and musical comedies. The practice was subsequently
adopted by other Dallas critics.
4News, Sun., Nov. 29, 1925, III, l.
Rosenfield singled out Lotus Robb as the outstanding performer, both because of her "maidenly loveliness" and for the beauty of her delivery. He complained about the acoustics in the State Fair Auditorium.\(^5\)

The reviewer for the *Times Herald* stated that the matinee audience was small but that there was a better crowd at night. He noted that Minnie Maddern Fiske's voice still retained its carrying power and called her "as great a 'Malaprop' as ever graced the part." He also praised Tom Wise and commented that "with all due credit to Joe Jefferson himself, full credit must be given to James T. Powers for his inspirational sensing of the personality of Bob Acres."\(^6\)

The next touring legitimate show seen in the city was *White Cargo*, presented at the Circle on January 21, for one performance. In the cast were Marshall Vincent as the doctor; Earl D. Wire as Witzel; Lawrence Keating as Ashley; Milton Boyle as the missionary; Willard Dashiell as the skipper; James Ryan as the engineer; Franklin George as Langford; Isabelle Herbert as Tondeloyo; Fred Hunt as Worthing and John Henry as Jim Fish.

John Rosenfield lambasted the production, stating that it was marked by "some of the almightiest yelling heard on an American stage since the late Salvini made his last curtain bow." He singled out Earl D. Wire as the chief offender. Recalling that the play had been withdrawn from production by the Circle stock company in the city, but when produced later, had played to packed houses because of the

\(^5\) *News*, Sun., Dec. 6, 1925, II, 7.

\(^6\) *Times Herald*, Sun., Dec. 6, 1925, VI, 5.
publicity, Rosenfield commented that the play was "now about as shocking as last year's bad jokes," and that the lines were not clever and the dialogue was not "illumined by any poetic fervor." He called the play dull but stated that Isabelle Herbert and Marshall Vincent gave good performances.\(^7\)

A week later, on Sunday, January 31, May Robson acted at the Circle for matinee and evening performances in the title role of Ma Pettingill. The cast also included Percy Kilbridge, Marjorie Hayes, Gordon Hicks, Edward M. Favor, Kenneth Miner, Maurice Burke, Robert Blaylock, Burke Clark, Harry Knapp, Leona Woodward, Franc Hale, Charner Batson and Lillian Harmer. The critic for the Dallas Journal commented that "the small crowd . . . was rewarded with one of the best pieces of entertainment offered in Dallas this season." He praised the way the company worked the comedy into "a delicious style," and added that the audience was either "in a veritable uproar over one of 'Ma's' pungent remarks or howling at some sarcastic wit loosed by the delightful 'Safety First' Timmins." The critic praised May Robson in her role and stated that her age did not interfere with her ability to give the needed characterization and also commented favorably on Edward M. Favor in the role of "Safety First" Timmins, who, he observed, was "unbelievably comical as a stingy old rancher who thought he could outsmart Ma Pettingill." He also lauded Marjorie Hayes as Nettie Hosford and Franc Hale as Vernabelle Smith.\(^8\)

\(^7\)News, Mon., Jan. 25, 1926, 4.

\(^8\)Journal, Mon., Feb. 1, 1926, 4.
The Gorilla, written by Ralph Spence, a former Texas newspaperman who had achieved a reputation in New York, was given at the Circle on February 7. Playing the two detectives were William Balfour as Mr. Mulligan and Tom Burton as Mr. Garrity. Also in the cast were Sid Williams, Edward Forsberg, Ellen Crown, Victor Browne, Clyde Dilson, Bertram Miller, James F. Ayres, James Kelo and Bernard Craney. The Journal reviewer, after describing the play as "a satire on the mystery play which swept the land three seasons ago," commented that "in the third act the thing sits down abruptly and then collapses all over the place." He called attention to the fact that Victor Browne, the hero of the play, had been a leading man in the Circle stock company, and called him "by far the best actor in the cast." The critic gave comedy honors to William Balfour.

The Times Herald critic stated that the play was thrilling and noted that "darkness was used generously . . . and strangely enough, the spectators commented on how dark that darkness was." He called attention to the device of having the gorilla run loose in the audience, added that the women enjoyed this thoroughly. He praised Tom Burton for his comedy and Sid Williams in the role of Jeff, the negro retainer, noting that "when he died quavering 'Old Black Joe,' the chuckling audience paid him a tribute of momentary stillness." This critic also praised Victor Browne and noted that he was received with great applause. The reviewer also thought the play was a farce with some good dialogue.

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11 Times Herald, Mon., Feb. 8, 1926, 8.
Through the Years, by Elliott Dexter, described in the advance billing as "a romance of old and new San Antonio," starred Sara Sothern. She was described in the notices as "one of the most gifted of the younger Broadway actresses," who had sprung into prominence two seasons earlier with her work in The Fool. Presented at the Circle on April 25, its cast also included Mary Louise Walker, Margaret Hollis, Percy Barbat, John Boah, Henry Stevens, and the playwright who had been popular as a stage and screen actor and had, according to the advance notices, been one of the first to use a technique of repressed acting on the screen.12

The Times Herald critic praised Sara Sothern for what he called "her good taste, her marvelous tonal inflections and her beauty," and described Marie sic Louise Walker as excellent in a sophisticated role "which she managed without any vulgarity or any coarseness, and with, in fact, a good deal of subtle irony." He called Henry Stevens as Herbert Quinn "passable"; Marjorie[sic] Hollis as Marion Harms "sufficient"; and added that Fred Mackay as Aaron Steele "liked himself for his pictorial qualities only." The critic derided the set, stating that changes of scene were indicated by shifting the curtain and other minor alterations. He also criticized the makeup of the judge, noting that he changed very little over a twenty-year period and even wore the same tuxedo, and commented that Charlotte did not change at all. But he summarized by stating that the plot and cast were good and that

"Miss Sothern had something rare and precious, not to be seen every day."\textsuperscript{13}

John Rosenfield summed up the season as far as he was concerned when, after it had ended, he described \textit{The Rivals} as "good"; \textit{The Gorilla} as "fair"; \textit{White Cargo} as "bad"; and \textit{Through the Years} as "atrocious."\textsuperscript{14} It may be observed that there were only five touring legitimate productions in Dallas during the season, a fact which indicated the moribund state into which the road had fallen. It may also be noted that, except for \textit{The Rivals} which was a revival of a classic, none of the other shows had any literary merit and did not at all reflect the newer type drama which was being produced on Broadway. As though to make up for the lack of literary merit, three of the productions did bring well-known stage stars to the city, but none of the presentations attracted large audiences.

Mention might be made of productions given at the McFarlin Memorial Auditorium on June 18 by Clifton Devereaux and his dramatic troupe of \textit{The Romancers}, by Rostand, in a matinee performance, and of \textit{The Barber of Seville}, by Beaumarchais, in a night presentation. The Devereaux Players toured American college campuses each year with classical plays.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Times Herald}, Mon., Apr. 26, 1926, I, 8.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{News}, Sun., May 16, 1926, III, 5.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{News}, Tues., June 15, 1926, 4.
The 1926-1927 Season

The first touring legitimate show to come to the city during the 1926-1927 season was Abie's Irish Rose, presented for the week starting Sunday, September 19, at the Fair Park Auditorium. The play was in its fifth year on Broadway and had already surpassed the all-time long run record of Lightnin'. The cast of the company that came to Dallas included Dorothy Coghlan, in the ingenue's role; James R. Waters as Isaac Cohen; Ada Jaffee as Mrs. Isaac Cohen; F. B. Hersome as Rabbi Jacob Samuels; William McFadden as Abraham Levy; Nat Koff as Solomon; Ray L. Royce as Patrick Murphy; and George Palmer Moore as Father Whalen. Admission prices ranged from 50¢ to $2.20.\(^{16}\)

In his review of the play, John Rosenfield stated he would not make any attempt to examine it critically. He declared that the New York critics abominated the play and still it was in its fifth year, and he described it as "the most supreme quintessence of hokumissimus [sic] on the stage today." Rosenfield observed that the audience enjoyed the play thoroughly. He called the performance "almost perfect," and approved particularly of the acting of Nat Koff. Commenting that even the disapproving critics enjoyed the play, he recommended it as "a necessity to one's education in public psychology."\(^{17}\)

The critic for the Journal also commended the performance and described the play as one "that satisfies everybody but a few mouldy highbrows." He praised Dorothy Coghlan as "a fetching ingenue," and


William McFadden as "a dignified but lively young Abraham." He also commended Nat Koff in the role of the immigrant, but criticized Ray L. Royce and George Palmer Moore as "hams."

Perhaps the most enthusiastic critical comment from the Dallas reviewers was made by the Times Herald critic who stated that the New York critics were all wrong in their judgment. He called the play "marvelously human . . . in parts genuinely poetic." He, too, praised Nat Koff, calling him "magnificent," and lauded the performances of F. B. Hersorne and Ray Royce. "The heady critics were wrong," he commented, "and the public, judging without knowledge of the wheels going around and certain poor stagecraft, but with sympathy of experience and long built-up psychological responses, were right."

After the run of the play had ended, Rosenfield described it as "one of the best cast and best set road shows ever seen here." The play returned in mid-November for another week's run at Fair Park Auditorium.

It was not until the following February that another legitimate roadshow came to the city. This time it was Robert Mantell and his Shakespearian company who were seen for a three-day run, February 3, 4, and 5. Robert Mantell was described in the advance notices as

"one of the best known actors of the day... performing successfully for fifty-one years and... famous for twenty-five years since his appearance as Richard III in New York in 1904." The notices for the appearance of his company at the Fair Park Auditorium held out to the public the prospect of seeing "Hamlet in golf trousers, Ophelia in evening gown and King Claudius in full dress," and stated that the repertoire of plays to be seen in the city was to be selected by write-in suggestions from Dallas theatergoers and from the city's public school authorities.  

Mantell, who had headed his own classical drama troupe since 1890, announced that he would present *The Merchant of Venice* on the night of Thursday, February 1; *Julius Caesar* on Friday night; *As You Like It* for the Saturday matinee; and *Hamlet*, in modern dress, on Saturday night. Prices, for what was called "the only Shakespearian organization on tour," ranged from a $1.10 top to 25¢.  

R. T. Fitzgerald, the critic for the *Times Herald*, called the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* "an unqualified success." He rhapsodically praised Robert Mantell's "Shylock," stating that "there were times when malevolence played from his eyes like Jove's lightnings." He stated that the sizable audience enjoyed the performance and applauded frequently and the reviewer called the sets "not too elaborate for easy shifting... but... effective." He particularly praised Genevieve Hamper in the role of Portia, stating that she acted the part with a

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"sympathetic interpretation," and that she was attractive and easily understood. John Alexander in the part of Bassanio and John Burke as Antonio also drew compliments from the critic. He thought that the use of music "taking up where the actors voices died away between acts" was very effective and he noted approvingly the speed of the scene shifts and the clear and distinct enunciation of the actors.\footnote{Times Herald, Fri., Feb. 4, 1927, I, 8.}

The \textit{Journal} reviewer was less kind. He felt that Mantell and Genevieve Hamper far overshadowed the rest of the cast and commented that Mantell's performance was "such an exhibition of acting in the manner of the old school as to make these young bucks fairly blanch with mortification."\footnote{Journal, Fri., Feb. 4, 1927, 15.}

The principals in the cast of \textit{Julius Caesar} were Robert Mantell as Brutus; John C. Hickey as Cassius; Bruce Adams as Julius Caesar; and Genevieve Hamper as Portia. According to John Rosenfield, Mantell played his role in a way that made Brutus "a philosophical soul, harassed by the inevitable paradoxes of life that confuse and wreck the finest powers of ratiocination." Rosenfield called Mantell's performances one of the grandest achievements seen on a Dallas stage in recent years. He also praised John Burke's Cassius as powerful and observed that John Alexander was resourceful and had a fine voice and that his delivery of the oration was "consummately thrilling." He felt that Genevieve Hamper was too declamatory and observed that
one of the mob, made up of college students, wore a wristwatch. But he described the mob scenes in the first and fourth acts as the best he had ever seen.26

Fitzgerald, writing in the Times Herald, also praised Mantell but criticized Bruce Adams, in the role of Caesar, as buried by the majesty of the part and as rather pompous, in spite of his acting ability. He also praised John Burke and John Alexander and described the production as "intensely interesting, gripping Shakespeare."27

The modern dress presentation of Hamlet, presented the following night, drew the comment from John Rosenfield that "archaic costumes are not essential to a satisfying production of Hamlet." John Burke acted the role of Claudius; John Forrest that of Bernardo; Mantell portrayed Hamlet; Bruce Adams was Horatio; James Hendrickson acted Polonius; and Genevieve Hamper enacted Ophelia. Rosenfield called Hamlet, as interpreted by Mantell, "a man of quick and exquisite feelings rather than of sharp intellect." The critic stated that Mantell stressed Hamlet's emotional instability and brought to the role a fine voice, graceful gestures, and good pantomime. He felt that the modern dress gave some of the lines more meaning and he praised Genevieve Hamper's acting in the mad scenes.28

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28News, Sun., Feb. 6, 1927, 1, 10.
R. T. Fitzgerald, writing in the *Times Herald*, observed that *Hamlet* drew the biggest crowd of Mantell's stay in Dallas and that the audience filled the auditorium. He commented that Mantell's performance displayed years of study of the role but stated that he liked the actor better as Shylock or Brutus than he did as *Hamlet*. Fitzgerald wrote: "Who can say whether it is the wing-collar, the shirt studs, or something else?" He called Mantell's *Hamlet* "certainly as mad as a hatter," and praised the sonorous quality of the actor's diction. Genevieve Hamper's interpretation of the role of Ophelia drew high praise from the critic and he lauded the finished performances of the rest of the cast.

The same review dealt with the performance of *As You Like It*, given as the matinee production on the same day, and Fitzgerald found it weaker than *Hamlet*. He praised Genevieve Hamper in the part of Rosalind, stating that she "found out every crevice of merriment along with the few of pathos in her part and turned them to account." He reproached Dallas audiences for not turning out for the play, observing that they had packed the auditorium for Will Rogers, "who was a genius," and should have done the same for the four performances of Mantell, another genius.29

The next touring event of the season was Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat*, presented February 16, 17, at the Fair Park Auditorium. It drew sharply varying reviews. John Rosenfield said about the production, which starred Charlotte Walker and Norman Hackett, two well-known stage performers, that it provided "one of the dreariest evenings known

in the local playhouse." He described it as lacking in charm and
called it "a perfect grand opera without the music." Rosenfield also
criticized the speeches for their long-windedness and called Hackett's
performance "stagey and ineffective." He stated about Charlotte
Walker that she "intoned her arias with due lachrymosity," and con-
demned the stagey British atmosphere. The cast, as listed by Rosenfield,
included, in addition to Hackett and Miss Walker, Allison Reid, Will
Spence, Hans Herbert, Edwin Forsberg, George Rand, Robert Noble, Horace
Cooper, Gwyneth Gordon, Raymond Voyes, Winthrop Nelson, Dorothy
Klendorn, Raquel Ramia, Paulina Ralska, Ernest Padden and Franklyn
Walsh.30

Fitzgerald, in the Times Herald, also condemned the play,
calling it "one of the bitterest emotional battles within memory," and
lamenting what he felt was "the almost complete waste of the beautiful
figure and charming face of Charlotte Walker." It was his opinion
that Gwyneth Gordon, who acted the minor role of Venice Pollen, was
the real star of the occasion, and he also lauded Horace Cooper.
Fitzgerald criticized the overacting of both Miss Walker and Norman
Hackett. He stated about Charlotte Walker that she had all the attributes
of a fine actress but that she was too much the actress in the
play to be a real star.31

The unsigned review in the Dallas Journal took sharp issue

with the remarks of Rosenfield and Fitzgerald. It stated:

The Green Hat is so overwhelming in every respect that to
give a worthy and deserving diagnosis would require the vocab-
ulary of the most fluent of the publicity species, for no
ordinary supply of words can fully and capably describe the
sensations deserved from this magnificent romantic drama.
Nothing that has been, or will be said of this literary
and theatrical masterpiece can be too superfluous in its
praise. . . .

The vital factor that impresses this presentation so
forcibly exists in the virtue of a competent cast . . .
every member of which . . . gave a finished performance. Miss
Walker's portrayal of Iris Fennick is done with vividness and
smacks of but a tiny fault; an old-fashioned sob racking of
the body in a crucial scene.

Second honors, as expected, were carried off by Norman
Hackett as Napier Harpenden, her lover, a role that is bitter
and unsympathetic until the last. Mr. Hackett retains his
famed prestige with this gripping characterization, fairly
making it live, so earnestly does he delve into it.

Gwyneth Gordon does Venice Pollen in an extraordinarily
vivacious manner, and except for the fact that she is too tall
for Mr. Hackett, accomplishes her ends in an alternately
amusing and pitiful character.

What little amount of comedy there is is allowed to break
in the hands of Edwin Forsberg and Horace Cooper. Both give
exaggerated examples of their walks of life.

An outstanding degree of information is utilized in the
references to the delicate subjects of sex, but these are
presented with such circumlocution that they are not offending
nor disgusting.32

The fourth and final legitimate roadshow of the season came to
the Old Mill Theater on Monday, May 10 and the week following, with
Cradle Snatchers, by Russell G. Medcraft and Norma Mitchell. The
unidentified reviewer for the News stated that only a small audience
attended the opening night of the play which he called "quite a sexy
affair without ever scratching the surface of the dreadful Freudian
stuff," and he observed that the audience enjoyed the lines. He praised
Helen Bolton as injecting good comedy touches in her role of one of the

wives, and also stated that William Eugene, another of the principals, acted skillfully. The cast also included John Merkyl, Florence Auer, Octavia Handsworth, Gordon de Main, Charles Coleman, Dorothy Dehn, Eddie Woods, Jack Graves, Norman Peck, Margaret Cullen Landis, June Lawrence and Gaya Sibbald.33

The *Journal* reviewer called the play "a lightning-fast opus that cracks and sputters with the vivacity of a loose trolley wire." He commented on the fast pace of the show, stating that "the lines were so rapid fire in their delivery the house almost exhausted itself trying to keep pace with the performers," and praised the ability of Helen Bolton.34

Just as in the previous season, there were only four legitimate companies that came to the city during the 1926-1927 season. The difference was that Robert Mantell and his Shakespearian troupe put on four plays, bringing the total number of productions in the later season to seven. It must be remembered also that *Abie's Irish Rose* drew excellent attendance whereas the Shakespearian dramas attracted only sparse houses, except for *Hamlet*. The success of *Abie's Irish Rose* in the city can undoubtedly be attributed in part to the reputation it had acquired during its long stay on Broadway. The failure of *The Green Hat* to attract large houses in the city indicates that in Dallas, as elsewhere in the nation, the public was losing its taste for the stars of the stage who had been popular in an earlier generation. It is also

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interesting to note that the companies which risked the trip to Dallas either brought plays that were considered sure box office or dramas with established stage performers. Cradle Snatchers, with its lesser known principals, was a gamble and failed to pay off in the city, even though it was presented at the Old Mill Theater, much smaller in its capacity than the Fair Park Auditorium.

The 1927-1928 Season

Norman Hackett and Charlotte Walker returned to Dallas with the first legitimate roadshow of the 1927-1928 season in a matinee and night performance on Tuesday, November 8, at Fair Park Auditorium. The play was The Constant Wife, with a cast that also included Lou Tellegen and Emma Bunting. The advance notices played up the fact that Tellegen was the ex-husband of Geraldine Farrar, and that the two had received wide publicity in a sensational divorce case. Tellegen had won his reputation on the French stage where he had been a leading man for Sarah Bernhardt. He had since been seen in American motion pictures in what the publicity described as "ridiculous parts." 32

The reviewer for the Journal noted that the audiences for the two performances were small, despite the fact that the play was "the nearest thing to Broadway that Dallas has seen in some time." He stated that Tellegen was the star performer and commented that he proved "everything for which his name has been synonymous--insouciant, fascinating and sartorially perfect . . . despite a thick voice and foreign accent." He praised the performance of Charlotte Walker and observed that the quality of her work was high in spite of her mannerisms. But he

criticized the acting of Norman Hackett as old-fashioned. Emma Bunting drew praise for her comedy techniques in the role of "the little butterfly," and so, too, did Edythe Tressider, who acted the part of the mother, and Diane Tellegen as the daughter. Margaret Temple's performance as the friend was called "satisfactory," and the reviewer noted also that W. Boyd Davis portrayed "the butterfly's husband."36

John Rosenfield found Charlotte Walker effective but called attention to her mannerisms. He felt that her acting was uneven, good in some scenes and "woefully affected" in others. The critic stated that Tellegen was miscast in the part of the husband and noted that some lines had to be interpolated because of his poor English, but he commended the French actor on his comedy technique. He also condemned the acting of Norman Hackett but praised thea of Edythe Tressider. But he called the play "a genuine contribution to Dallas amusement life."

The critic observed that the poor attendance would not encourage the State Fair Association to continue to open up the Auditorium for road-show performances.37

_Broadway_, a play that was widely publicized in the city because of its supposedly sensational treatment of New York night life, was the second legitimate roadshow of the season. It was performed at the Fair Park Auditorium on January 11, 12, 13, and the critic for the _Times Herald_ commented on its tense quality, on its backstage cynicism, and on its humor. Stating that the lines of the play made _What Price_ Journal, Wed., Nov. 9, 1927, 4.

36_Journal_, Wed., Nov. 9, 1927, 4.

37_News_, Wed., Nov. 9, 1927, 4.
"read like a prayer book," he particularly praised Cecil Holm in the role of the hoofer, who, he stated, gave a performance that was "vain, loud-mouthed, earnest, weak, rather pitiable, a corking good characterization." The reviewer also praised Donald Kirke, in the role of Steve Crandall, the bootlegger and killer; Doris Rich, the comedienne; Jules Bennett as the Greek proprietor; Constance Brown, the ingenue; and Jud Langill as the detective. He also observed that the backstage use of the orchestra was effective.

The *Journal* reviewer stated that the play held the large audience breathless and cited the nudity in the show and the unique characterizations, including such new stage types as voluble gangsters, gold diggers, and "an inflamed gunman who invades the lair of a rival gang without a gun on him." The critic maintained that sophisticated persons in the audience were fascinated by these new types and he called the back stage chatter of the cabaret set the bright spot in the production.

John Rosenfield stated that the play was an odd specimen of drama but pronounced it as conforming to the highest Broadway standards and described it as a melodrama with "earnest overtones suggesting a sermon on the precarious virtue of the poor working girl." He called attention to the breathless pace of the production and had words of high praise for Cecil Holm and for Donald Kirke. He described Constance

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Brown, the heroine, as "charming and physically appealing," and called the entire production the best road show seen in Dallas for many years."40

A few days later, Rosenfield observed in his column that there was a minority of patrons who did not like the play. He defended the production on grounds that "a drama that ran for 332 nights on Broadway must be exceptional." The critic also upheld the type of publicity which had preceded the play's arrival in the city on grounds that the producers had to attract clientele by all means possible, but he admitted that in this instance the advertising may have gone too far.41

Abie's Irish Rose came back to the city for the third time with a three-day run at Fair Park Auditorium on January 26, 27, 28. The cast on this occasion included Mildred Beverly, Guy Hitner, Herbert Glass, George Hurd, Kathleen Robinson, Jack Raffael and Oswell L. Jackson. Rosenfield wondered again how the play had managed to stay on Broadway for five-and-one-half years and noted wonderingly that many of the people in the audience seemed to be seeing the production for the second or third time.42

On February 7, the New York Theater Guild gave a performance of *The Guardsman* in Fort Worth with a cast that included Erskine Sanford, Hortense Alden, Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, George Gaul, Molly Pearson, Lawrence Cecil, Dorothy Fletcher and Leonard Loan.\textsuperscript{43} Several months earlier, Rosenfield had editorialized in his column that Dallas was not included in the Theater Guild itinerary, one which included Houston, Fort Worth and Austin, because no group in Dallas had shown itself willing to subsidize the appearance.\textsuperscript{44} Rosenfield attended the Fort Worth opening and commented that the play was enthusiastically received and that the audience particularly liked Florence Eldridge, who, he stated, gave a "gay and intelligent performance." He observed that the costumes and scenery were not what they could have been and that, because of labor troubles, an amateur crew did the stage crew work.\textsuperscript{45}

Broadway returned to Fair Park Auditorium on February 11, 12,\textsuperscript{46} and on February 20, Richard Bennett started a three-day run of *The Barker* at the same auditorium. The advance publicity stated that this was the only production of the play to be given in Texas. In the

\textsuperscript{43}News, Mon., Jan. 30, 1928, 4.
\textsuperscript{44}News, Sun., Sept. 18, 1927, III, 4.
\textsuperscript{46}News, Sun., Feb. 5, 1928, III, 4.
cast, in addition to Bennett, were Marjorie Wood, Edith Arnold, Sanford McCauley, Walter Law, Donald Macmillan, Tom Blake, Gwen de Lany and Adelaide Kendall.¹⁷

The reviewer for the Journal described the production as "the lowdown on what happens back of the mildewed and gaudy banners of a cheap carnival," and particularly praised the performance of Richard Bennett, stating that Bennett received many curtain calls and that at the end of the play the audience would not leave but insisted on calling him back again. The review continued:

It would be difficult to recall a more finished and more effective performance . . . than Mr. Bennett's. A poise which is almost a lost art on the stage; a marvelous voice; an absolute mastery of acting devices and an eloquence of movement and gesture that a modern playgoer does not expect were some of its recommendations.

The reviewer also praised Marjorie Wood in the role of Carrie, the hula dancer, and Donald MacMillan, who acted the part of Hap Spisael, the ticket seller and short-change artist.¹⁸

The review by R. T. Fitzgerald in the Times Herald, with its attention focused on Richard Bennett's curtain speech, throws light both on what Dallas critics thought were the shortcomings in the city's attitude toward legitimate drama and on what actors who came to the city thought of Fair Park Auditorium as a place to present their plays. Fitzgerald wrote:

The house, Mr. Bennett explained, was too large for legitimate drama. The cast was constantly aware that it was talking as through "megaphones." In spite of these handicaps, he could

hardly find words in which to thank the audience for its appreciation.

About what he said, he probably had good reason. Even from the extreme front of the auditorium Bennett's words occasionally were inaudible or barely distinct. The part of Nifty Miller, barker ... called for shadings of tone, for muttered undertones, for faint shades of irony that winged into the vast eaves. Just how the amplifiers distributed the lines to those somewhat further back is another matter ... .

He might well think of the theater's decay with about three-fourths or more of the seats inhabited by nothing more tangible than vague ghosts ... . Back of the crowd, condensed in the front, lay empty seats. It was not a disgracefully small audience, and it was highly appreciative. But it was nothing like what it should have been. 49

In his column on the following Sunday, Rosenfield stated that Bennett's remarks about the auditorium were a criticism of the city for not providing a more suitable hall and observed that the acoustical problems in the auditorium were all too well known. Noting that Bennett had also struck out against the movies, the critic observed that the movies had Dallas "and other provincial cities in the palm of hands none too clean." He continued:

The best and most comfortable theaters are devoted only to pictures and auxiliary programs . . . . the road shows must choose between a fairly adequate stock house available only between stock company failures, [the Circle] a college auditorium seven miles from the center of the town, [McFarlin Memorial Auditorium] a large convention hall four miles from the center of the activity, [Fair Park Auditorium] and three high school auditoriums all remote and forbidding. In Fort Worth there is only a high school auditorium. 50

In his review of The Barker, Rosenfield had kind words about Bennett but criticized the play. He described Bennett's performance as "the most finished ever seen in Dallas," and stated that the

49 Times Herald, Tues., Feb. 21, 1928, I, 8.

audience gave the actor an ovation after one of his melodramatic scenes. Rosenfield wrote that he was told by E. H. Fitzhugh, the auditorium manager, that this had never happened before in the Auditorium. The critic said about Bennett's work that it displayed genius and that he had "imagination, understanding and a . . . real unfeigned temperament . . . an arsenal of tricks founded chiefly on the practice of poise, eloquent silences, uncanny spacing and timing of speeches."

The rest of the cast, according to the critic, was uneven, and he singled out Walter Law for overacting. He called the sets "excellent."51

There were even fewer touring legitimate shows in Dallas during the 1927-1928 season than there had been in the previous three seasons, but what was lacking in quantity was more than made up for in quality. All three of the presentations, The Constant Wife, Broadway and The Barker got fine critical notices, but significantly, Broadway, a production that got advance billing as a sensational sex drama, was the only one of the three that drew a good opening-night audience. In fact, the play was so well-attended that it returned to the city for another engagement. In line with this, Abie's Irish Rose also came to Dallas during the season, playing its third run for Dallas audiences. The real significance of the failure of The Constant Wife and The Barker to draw good houses lay in the fact that both plays featured well-known stage stars of an earlier day. The motion pictures, coupled with the fact that Dallas audiences were not seeing many legitimate roadshows, combined to dim the luster of these established stage stars. The newer

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51 News, Tues., Feb. 21, 1928, h.
generation had grown up on the movies and had seen few plays and did not feel the appeal that once had been cast by the giants of the stage.

The 1928-1929 Season

The number of legitimate roadshows coming to Dallas during the 1928-1929 season hit a low point that recalled the situation a few years earlier. Only one company, the Fritz Leiber Shakespearian troupe made an appearance in the city, if we exclude the Yiddish Art Players who performed for a very limited group. Leiber and his company were at the State Fair Auditorium for a five-day run that started on Christmas Day. The entire lower floor had an admission price of $1 and balcony prices were 75¢ and 50¢. On his arrival in the city, Leiber ventured the opinion that Taming of the Shrew, the first of the plays to be presented, would never again be given in costume. He commented that modern dress improved the farcical nature of the play and added that in New Orleans hundreds of people had to be turned away from the performance.

Walter Holbrook, reviewer for the Times Herald, called the production of Taming of the Shrew, done, as he put it, "in chaps and dinner clothes," as being "thoroughly the . . . roistering farce Shakespeare intended it to be." He noted that many of the audience went to see the Leiber production in a respectful mood but that soon "in the boisterous tomfoolery of this modernized 'Shrew,' they forgot all about being respectful, relaxed and enjoyed themselves. . . . Here was vaudeville

\[52\text{News, Sun., Dec. 16, 1928, III, 4.}\]
\[53\text{News, Tues., Dec. 18, 1928, 14.}\]
they were used to, only it was better than they saw week in and week out. As for Hamlet, given in the night performance, Holbrook observed that it was "done in costume with admirable restraint and with almost all the respect a literary scholar has legitimate right to ask for."

The reviewer praised the Polonius of Philip Quin for its restrained quality and the Ophelia of Harriet Russell as suggesting "that she was repressed and that she was really in love with Hamlet." He criticized Virginia Bronson in the role of the Queen as not being sufficiently regal and Hart Jenks, in the part of Horatio, as "not distinctive."

He also commented that the use of the ghost was old-fashioned and conventional.54

Rosenfield, in his review, commented that the opening performances "conveyed as nothing else could the method of Leiber's Shakespeare in and out of costume." The critic explained that Leiber's approach was "to treat Shakespeare's plays not as literature but as plays to be played," and noted that in The Taming of the Shrew "the actors get downright familiar." Leiber and the rest of his cast, explained the critic, used a few modern gags. Christopher Sly sang "Sweet Adeline" and tried to climb a lamp pole and Biondello heralded Petruchio's arrival with "He is coming—and how." Leiber entered in sombrero and chaps "swinging a whip with one hand and firing a pistol with the other," and Grumio was played in blackface. Katherine wore knee-high skirts and "a Clara Bow bob," and cigarettes, cocktails and balloons were used "to round out the Cecil De Mille touch." Katherine and Petruchio came

back to Padua "on a motorcycle with a sidecar." Rosenfield noted that Leiber had restored the induction, added an epilogue of his own, and "tells the audience that the philosophy concerning the subjugation of women 'works well on the stage alone.'" Leiber's portrayal of Petruchio, stated Rosenfield, was done "with unerring intelligence and commanding magnetism . . . as genial and airy as could be asked," and Virginia Bronson made "a mature and somewhat strident Shrew." Rosenfield also praised Harriet Russell, a Dallas girl and former SMU student, as "personable and competent." He described the company as "numerous and talented," and observed that the setting was of the unit type. He commended the play as "considerably funnier than 'Abie's Irish Rose' and almost as good as 'The Student Prince.'" Others listed by Rosenfield as being members of the cast, in addition to those cited in the review, included D. R. Hodgin, Olga Leeds, Francis Woods, Philip Quin, Redmond Flood, Hart Jenks, John Burke, Josef Lazarovici, Robert Allen, Jack Forrest, Robert Strauss, Ruth Edwards and Jack Barron.

The Hamlet of Leiber was said by Rosenfield to be not that of Edwin Booth "nor has he the Websterian majesty which old-timers adore for the part." Instead, commented the critic, Leiber's character had "youth and grace, expressiveness and movement and variety of mood." Leiber's interpretation of the role, stated the critic, was that "Hamlet was certainly faking." Harriet Russell, in the part of Ophelia was said to be "accomplished" in the review, in spite of the fact that she was "still wanting perhaps in vocal strength and stage assurance."55

Robert Lunsford, critic for the *Journal*, could not be certain whether the modern costuming of *Taming of the Shrew* "added to or detracted from enjoyment of the comedy." Lunsford called Leiber's "get-up" as Petruchio strongly like "Will Rogers with a hearty dash of Douglas Fairbanks." The critic praised Leiber's company as maintaining "unusual quality throughout which can not be said of all such troupes venturing into Texas," and stated that the audience "liked its Shakespeare done that way." As for the *Hamlet* performance, Lunsford said Leiber "was hard to distinguish from any other Hamlet. He rants when other Hamlets rant and does any number of things as other Hamlets do them." He commented also on the fact that the women in Leiber's company were of "average size," observing that this was "novel," and cited particularly the fact that "Harriet Russell is the most diminutive Ophelia of any recalled on a Dallas stage." 56

As for Leiber's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, performed the night of December 26, Rosenfield called it "one of his sterner Shakespearean characterizations." He called the portrayal "his most striking yet done at the local Stratford debauch . . . most conspicuously marked by firmness of line and sharpness of contrast." The critic continued:

Here was a Shylock with patent villainy and as odious a countenance as ever a man did wear . . . . There was no absolution for the Jewish race in the portrayal, for Shylock's depravity springs from a racial consciousness alone. In Leiber's reading there was no other construction.

The critic maintained, however, that Leiber "failed to plumb the pathetic depths with a thoroughness that must have been premeditated." He wrote that "one can recall how touchingly Mantell or the older Schildkraut

called for the money and asked leave to go," and stated that Leiber's Shylock "was only a scoundrel." He praised Leiber's diction as "good, old American English for Americans, and English unadulterated by the inflections of the mother tongue." As for Virginia Bronson's Portia, the critic commented that it was "her outstanding achievement of the season," and that in the "Quality of Mercy" speech, she "took a leaf from Mr. Leiber's book and addressed it to Shylock as plain, colloquial remonstrance." The review praised John Burke's Antonio as "the best impersonation of this role that the writer can remember."57

The matinee performance on December 26 had been of Romeo and Juliet and J. North Bigbee, who did the review for the News, described Harriet Russell's Juliet as a pictorially beautiful presentation, and the entire production as "eminently satisfying . . . before an audience surprisingly large and surprisingly male."58

Walter Holbrook, reviewer for the Times Herald, observed that "when a man can play Shylock with the understanding Fritz Leiber did . . . and still . . . get away with Romeo, as he did in the afternoon, he is at the height of his power." The critic observed that "the extravagant romanticism of Romeo seems a bit silly to Leiber, for he is 45, but one would never think it from the eager signs with which he matched Harriet Russell's Juliet. . . . He gave a young performance." As for Leiber's Shylock, Holbrook called it "better than

58 Ibid.
his Romeo," and stated that "the Gentile became a Jew, a Jew whose fine emotions had been ground into wormwood and choking gall by the jeers and spittle of oppression... One sympathized less with Leiber's Shylock than one did, for instance, with Mantell's." He called Leiber's Shylock "human, intellectually and at times emotionally," but stated that "perhaps he was a trifle hearty." The critic also praised Virginia Bronson as "charming, good looking, mischievous, eloquent."59

John Rosenfield praised Macbeth, performed on December 27 with Leiber in the title role and Virginia Bronson as Lady Macbeth, as being "as exciting as anything seen in Dallas since the wave of crook pictures." He observed that Leiber avoided "reading too much into his Shakespeare," and that "here was an affair, blood, thunder and battle fit substance for smashing climaxes and impressive tableaux... Delivery was stentorian and gesture sweeping as become warriors among the thistles." The critic added that "the most devoted had little cause to quarrel with his masterful grasp and projection of the characterization." Virginia Bronson, according to the review, showed "forthrightness of interpretation... She did not play upon the heart, but when given scenes in which she can command the nerves and enthrall the vision she is magnificent." The critic described her sleep walking scene as "not sympathetic, but eerie, chilling, gripping." As for the staging and lighting, the reviewer stated:

Spotlights were played about the faces of the characters in hues that suggested the mood of lines. As a device to switch the play from the obvious to the occult, they were

59Times Herald, Thurs., Dec. 27, 1928, I, 8.
both ingenious and successful. For his revisit to the weird sisters, Macbeth perched high on a crag addressing the hags around a caldron center stage.

The prophecies were rendered by a head emerging from the cabalistic brew and speaking in a voice that sounded miles off in the wings. The banquet scene was given a huge attendance by merely placing four persons on the stage. Clever arrangement of walls conveyed the sense of space and population. In this act Banquo's ghost stalked only in Macbeth's mind. The episode was indicated by a shot of deathlike green light across Mr. Leiber's eyes.60

Walter Holbrook of the Times Herald took sharp issue with Rosenfield's all-out approval of Leiber's Macbeth. The Herald reviewer called the play "the weakest production thus far. The wonderful poetry seemed but words, words, words." He continued:

Macbeth must be eerie to go over. The tempo and atmosphere should be set by the witches scene, with which the play opens. There should be lots and lots of thunder, lightning and rain, and the voices of the hags, as they say their chants, should quaver and wail as do the violins in the second movement of Beethoven's ninth symphony. . . .

For the first time the work of Leiber himself lacked fire, lacked it more than Iago or Macbeth ever lacked iniquity to do him service. He was too strained, and yet too tame. In much the same way, Virginia Bronson's voice was too guttural as Lady Macbeth's. . . . For all his age, Mantell was much better as Macbeth when he was here two years ago, and his wife was much better as Lady Macbeth.

The unit sets used more or less in all the productions fitted the wild Scottish scene less than they did any play so far except the "Taming of the Shrew" in which they were even less appropriate.61

Leiber's repertory season in Dallas ended on a note of critical disapproval. His last presentation, Julius Caesar, was described by Walter Holbrook of the Times Herald as "the least distinctive of all

60 News, Fri., Dec. 28, 1928, 8.
the six productions with the single exception of 'Macbeth.'" But
the reviewer called the production "good enough for those who like
the play to enjoy it." Holbrook suggested that Leiber played the
part of Marc Antony rather than Brutus "since he sought rather to
help the presentation rather than to 'hog the stage,' as many another
star prefers to do." Although the critic described Hart Jenks as "too
young to be the noblest Roman of them all," he stated that Jenks' Brutus
"was his best work during the festival and it was much the hardest
part he had to play." As for John Burke in the role of Cassius, the
reviewer stated that "his voice might be too honeyed. He succeeds,
however, in taking some of the sweet melody out of it which marred his
MacDuff, and made a good, if maybe too tense a Cassius." The critic
stated that both Jenks and Burke ... started off too tamely," and
that Phillip Quin's Caesar "seemed a bit tame for such a grizzled old
soldier." Tame, also, according to the critic, was Olga Leeds as Caesar's
wife. The reviewer commended Redmond Flood as a "splendid Casca," and
criticized the unit set as suitable enough for the tent of Sardis and for
the room in Caesar's house but as inadequate for the Senate house and
for the Plains of Philippi. The reviewer also stated that the Forum
scene was done "only passing well. ... It needs a Bryan really to do
it justice or a Garrick."62

John Rosenfield in his review also called attention to the "tame"
beginning of the production, stating that: "the part of the play that
went before Marc Antony's entrance to the capital displayed some of the
very worst that the Fritz Leiber Company has offered in Dallas," but

62 Times Herald, Sat., Dec. 29, 1928, 2.

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Rosenfield described the rest as "some of the best," and explained that Leiber's entrance "sent the tragedy soaring." The critic for the News stated that Hart Jenks "acted with splendid diction and bronze voice... and little else," and that John Burke "gave his argument to Brutus in such high tension that one wondered why the wise Marcus didn't see through him." After Leiber's appearance on stage, the review continued, "Brutus and Cassius were magneticized [sic]... and Leiber gave Antony's oration with an insight seldom heard." The critic stated that the audience was large for a Shakespearian performance but small for the Auditorium and that Leiber won an ovation after the oration.63

The critical acclaim with which Leiber's company had been received in Dallas bears witness to the artistic merit of the troupe, a factor which was undoubtedly contributory toward the success the same group of players enjoyed in Chicago almost a year later.64 But after their run in Dallas, the only other company to bring a legitimate production to the city was a foreign-language group.

About this time, news dispatches from New York showed a recession in theater activities which was reflected in the relative few touring companies over the country.65

The Yiddish Art Players, a touring company, gave a performance on January 11, 1929, in Yiddish of Happiness and Joy at the Showhouse,66

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63News, Sat., Dec. 29, 1928, 8.
formerly the Circle Theater, with a cast that included Morris Thomaschefsky, Morris Conrad and Rosa Schwartzberg. A month later the New York Theater Guild again gave performances in Fort Worth which drew many persons from Dallas. Performed on April 9, 10, the Guild presentations were The Doctor's Dilemma, Ned McCobb's Daughter, as a matinee production, and The Second Man. Among those in the casts were Elizabeth Risdon, Robert Keith, Edwin Maxwell, Peg Entwhistle, Brandon Evans, Payson Edwards, Neal Caldwell, Lowden Adams, Jack Quigley and Beatrice Hendricks.

There was a report a month later that the Guild was again negotiating for an appearance in Dallas. In the repertoire of the Guild for the season ahead were R.U.R., Marco Millions, Volpone, and Strange Interlude. The same newspaper item reported that James R. Saville, Dallas theater manager, planned to build a six-story theater for legitimate productions at North Ervay and Federal Streets, and Saville stated that he had arranged with the Theater Guild to appear there in January of 1930. Saville commented later that the construction of the theater was being held up, pending the widening of North Ervay Street. Saville never built his theater but the Theater Guild did come to the


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city during the 1930-1931 season and presented *Strange Interlude* at the State Fair Auditorium on December 10, 11.70

The sharp recession in the theater business which was being felt across the nation drastically cut the number of touring companies and all but eliminated legitimate roadshow activity in Dallas during the 1928-1929 season. The only companies that came to the city were Fritz Leiber and his Shakespearian troupe, capable of putting on shows with low budgets and at relatively low admission prices, and the Yiddish Art Players who presented only one performance of a Yiddish play at the relatively small Showhouse Theater.

From a cultural point of view, however, the five-day run of Leiber and his company marked a definite step forward for the city. Lieber's company were received enthusiastically by the critics, save for adverse notices given *Julius Caesar*, the final presentation. The attendance, although it could not fill the large Fair Park Auditorium, was observed to be good for Shakespearian plays.

The 1929-1930 Season

The R. C. Sheriff war drama, *Journey's End*, the first legitimate touring show of the 1929-1930 season, was presented at Fair Park Auditorium on December 16, 17, and 18, 1929, and was said by John Rosenfield to be "one of the most remarkable and telling works that the year 1918 has inspired." The critic stated that William Sauter "straight and gray, somehow made Osborne the most touching characterization of the evening. It was a beautiful performance in rounded portrayal, forceful restraint

70_News, Thurs., Dec. 11, 1930, 14._

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and physical distinction." The critic praised Charles Cullum, in the part of Stanhope, and Frank Hearn, who played Raleigh. Rosenfield called it an evening of emotional stress but commented that there was no moral to the play. He criticized the drama as slight anemic, calling attention to the "righto's" and "cheero's," and to what he commented was the characters "frequent outbreaks of lyric sentiment; their repulsion at the more vulgar aspects of masculinity." The critic was of the opinion that Journey's End "is the play of these few years." He reported that the audience totaled about seven hundred and fifty, calling it "slightly below the average draft for an attraction of this sort." He observed that the acoustical problems in the auditorium were somewhat alleviated by a microphone hung on the wall. Others listed by him as in the cast were Ralph Sumpter, Victor Beecroft, Harry Ratcliffe, Richard Nicholls, Arthur Gilbert, Wilfred Jesson, Frederick Meacham and William Hitch.71

Jack Beall Jr., the reviewer for the Times Herald, was more outspoken in his praise, commenting that "all other war plays with their picturesque expletiving, are exposed as the shoddy stuffing of a doll by "Journey's End."" He observed that the audience paid the play the highest tribute, "silent contemplation of the curtains with only a scattering of applause." Although he believed that the entire cast was strong, he singled out Sauter also for special mention and stated that Cullum "gets under your skin most awfully." But he criticized Cullum for overacting. He also praised Harry Ratcliffe, [sic] in the

role of Lieutenant Trotter, as doing a fine job, especially with the accent, and Richard Nicholls, particularly for the scene in which he gets his wind up so completely that he asks to be shot," but added that his performance was "uneven elsewhere." The critic stated that Frank Hearn in his role of Lieutenant Raleigh did the part "well . . . in spots."72

The critic for the Journal found much to criticize in the play. He called it a "subjective, plotless, but fascinating study in emotional and mental stages of British officers in a front line dugout," but observed that "the strange stage picture never lagged in interest until the final curtain." He commended William Sauter for his "polished characterization" of Lieutenant Osborn; Charles Cullum for his "carefully gauged tempo and conviction" in his portrayal of Captain Stanhope; and Frank Hearn for his "more incidental and sometimes less accurate roles of Lieutenant Raleigh."73

It was in December, 1929, that Max Reinhardt's The Miracle was presented at Fair Park Auditorium by Morris Gest.74 This was undoubtedly the outstanding theatrical event of the entire 1920-1930 period in Dallas and certainly the most publicized. As early as

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72 Times Herald, Tues., Dec. 17, 1929, III, 8.
74 Because of the historic significance attached to the fact that this world-famed production was seen for the last time in Dallas, the play will be given fuller treatment than that accorded to the other touring productions.
January, 1926, there had been word that W. H. Stratton of the State Fair Association was trying to get *The Miracle* as the attraction for the Fair season of 1926. The production had been brought to the United States by Morris Gest. Max Reinhardt had conducted the rehearsals and Norman Bel Geddes had designed the sets. It had been presented at the Century Theater in New York which had been completely remodeled to resemble a cathedral for the production.75

It was not until 1929 that *The Miracle* was booked for the Fair Park Auditorium. By November 21, it was known that the Auditorium would be transformed into the cathedral-like setting demanded by the script. The description of the setting indicates the scope of the undertaking:

> The nature of "The Miracle" demands that the audience be divested of theatricality. The spectator must feel that he is seated within the cathedral and is observing the natural and supernatural events that have been handed down for four centuries as a European legend.

> The three acts and eight scenes in which the 'old, old story' are laid and in which the auditorium becomes a component part transpire in a medieval cathedral. Some idea of the magnitude compared to average theatrical settings may be gained from the following. . . .

> The stage occupies 6,500 square feet. Twenty huge columns, weight 14,689 pounds, with bases five feet in diameter and sun shafts 60 feet in the air, terminate in a vaulted ceiling weighing five tons at a height of 75 feet. There are 11 wings 13 1/2 feet wide by 60 feet in height, the largest ever placed in any building. An average stage wing is 13 1/2 x 15 feet. Behind these are 54 chapel columns with nine distant vaulted groups rising 50 feet in the air. The walls within the walls of the auditorium, conspicuous for their rose windows, will rise over 70 feet in height, and are to be 22 feet wide. . . . The scaffolding employed requires more lumber than enters into the construction of six eight-room cottages. The altar occupying the

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center of the stage will cover an area of 240 square feet and will be 27 feet high. Thirteen ornamental grills will screen this high altar with the chapels. The grills, eleven clerestory bays with windows, and the walls of the nine chapels with their windows, will be located in vertical tracks and operated by motors. They will be masked by a cyclorama of 14,000 square feet of black felt, sufficient to cover ten city blocks.

The proscenium is designed in a series of three arches forming a trinity arch and to the right of the arch is a turret, 60 feet in height, in which is incorporated a flight of 60 steps, used by only one character in the play and that for less than five minutes. A new ceiling over the vast edifice has nine chandeliers, each 12 feet in diameter. This construction alone requires 30 chandeliers, working 3,840 hours, and to build it takes 15,000 feet of molding and 5,000 feet of lumber.

The electrical equipment is specially designed. An enormous master switchboard and 12 portable switchboards are necessary to control the electrical current over 22½ miles of cable. There are 6,018 different properties, ranging from cathedral chilies to a bishop's crozier, used in the production. The heaviest of the chilies is of bronze and weighs in excess of 1,000 pounds.

A special organ with 40 unified stops, weighing 6,000 pounds, will be assembled in the balcony.

Ten tons of cast iron and ten tons of lead are used as counterweights to facilitate shifting of scenery.

Five and a half tons of white lead, two carloads of celotex, and 5,800 pounds of lampblack are used on construction. Thirty-six scenic craftsmen, working in three eight hour shifts for 22 days are necessary to finish the settings in schedule time.

The number of persons now employed is in excess of 200. The average weekly pay roll of "The Miracle" is in excess of $140,000.

Further advance publicity issued a week later disclosed that, in addition to the cathedral interior, the settings presented would include "the illusion of a great greenwood, the splendor of a sumptuous banquet in a baronial castle, the bridal chamber and throne room of a palace, the horrors of a gibbet and the desolate waste of a ruined forest." All of this was to be done not by changing the structural setting, but by the use of drops and lights.77

76 News, Thurs., Nov. 21, 1929, 4.
77 News, Thurs., Nov. 28, 1929, 10.
Max Reinhardt and Morris Gest had first presented the production, the advance notices pointed out, at the Olympia Theater in London, but it was not until it was given its first American production at the Century Theater that the two were able to realize their dream of putting the auditorium into the setting by constructing the cathedral setting. Otto H. Kahn, New York art patron, had assisted in financing the project.\textsuperscript{78}

The Dallas presentation was sponsored by a civic committee headed by Herbert Marcus. The dates for the production were from December 26 to January 12, each night except Sunday, with matinees on Thursdays and Saturdays. The prices for the performance ranged from $1.10 to $3.00 for seats in the first floor chancel; $3 for the first balcony; $2 for the second balcony; and $1 general admission.\textsuperscript{79}

The \textit{Miracle} had been before the public for eighteen years, and in America for three years, and yet no apt word to describe it had been found, according to advance items. When it had been presented in London with its Roman Catholic rites and ceremonies, the attempt had been considered "stark madness." The plan to repeat it in Vienna had been said to be "sheer lunacy," but Max Reinhardt had persisted. Eventually, England, Germany and the Scandinavian countries had hailed the production "just as enthusiastically as Austria, Bavaria, Rumania and other Eastern European countries." The score, written by Engelbert

\textsuperscript{78}News, Thurs., Nov. 28, 1929, 10.
\textsuperscript{79}News, Sun., Nov. 24, 1929, III, 3.
Humperdinck and Friedrich Schirmer, was said in advance notices, to offer "a curious example of music that makes a great pantomimic story possible . . . never obtrusive, but depicting each mood." It was used to bridge the gaps in the dramatic sequence.\(^8\)

Each day in the *News* for two weeks prior to the production there were column-long articles about the coming presentation. There was an announcement that special round-trip week-end rates to Dallas from other cities were being arranged by the railroads.\(^9\) When Morris Gest, called by John Rosenfield "the greatest bundle of imagination in the world theater," came to Dallas, it was page one news in the newspaper. Gest, in an interview upon his arrival, called the production "a miracle for Dallas," and said that "no other theatrical producer would have considered Dallas . . . for the exhibition of a $150,000 production . . . for it costs this sum to move and present the religious spectacle in Dallas." He added that he had been told in New York that he couldn't transport the "mammoth exhibition" throughout the country.

Gest continued:

So I took it on the road. I carried the cast and the scenery in two special trains. I had another train of engineers, carpenters, electricians and musicians go ahead of it. You have to insure the same lighting and musical effects that were developed in London and Salzburg . . . without these, "The Miracle" would not be "The Miracle."

I have . . . a sense of art . . . a faith of art . . . . "The Miracle" is art . . . nothing like it ever has been conceived or attempted . . . . "The Miracle" will be an experience in their lives.

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\(^8\) *News*, Mon., Nov. 25, 1929, 10.

\(^9\) *News*, Fri., Dec. 6, 1929, 13.
And then Gest broached an attitude to the Dallas presentation that later was to come under attack from John Rosenfield:

I bring it here because I am impressed with Dallas and like Dallas. . . . I would dread a failure in Dallas because of what that failure would do for my lifelong philosophy, my judgment of people, my faith in the inevitable acceptance of all great art.82

Heading the cast were Elizabeth Schirmer and Mari Carmi (the Princess Matchabelli), alternating in the role of the Madonna, and Vivienne Giesel in the part of the nun, Megildis. Others in the cast included Richard Dale as the Prince; Fritz Feld as the Piper; Lothar Mayring as the Emperor; Hans Hamsa as the Archbishop; Booth Franklin as the Knight; Lionel Brahms as the Robber Count; Claude Carlstadt Wheeler as the Abbess; Maria Cherer-Bekefi as a Czardas Dancer, and some six hundred other actors and singers, including the Slavenskaya Russian choir.83

Many of those who appeared in Dallas had been in the first American production. There was one notable exception. Princess Matchabelli, the Madonna in the European presentation, was appearing for the first time on an American stage outside of New York. Fritz Feld had achieved renown as the Piper and was coming from Hollywood where he had been in the movies. The entire three-hour performance was in pantomime, except for one brief moment when the distracted nun speaks the Lord's Prayer.84

83News, Sat., Nov. 23, 1929, 11.
Governor and Mrs. Dan Moody, accompanied by a party of about
eighteen Austin residents arrived on the day of the performance to
open it officially. The Governor was to introduce Gest after the
opening performance.85

The Amusement page of the News on December 26, was almost
entirely taken up with publicity about The Miracle. One of the items
quoted J. H. Tuman, personal representative of Gest, as saying, "The
local response is heavy, the out-of-town 'draft' good, with many taking
advantage of the week-end excursion rates offered by all railroad
centers in Dallas, and the advance sale is steady." He said he expected
a gross patronage of between 75,000 and 100,000 persons "depending
upon the weather and the popularity of The Miracle and commented that
he "entertained few fears about the public's acceptance." Two and
one-half columns on the Amusement page were devoted to "Facts About
The Miracle." John Rosenfield editorialized that "nobody who has
seen it has ever forgotten any part of it. Fifty years from now,
old people will be telling their grandchildren that once they saw
The Miracle and never since then have they seen anything like it."86

The criticism that John Rosenfield wrote of the production may
well have been the longest of his entire career. He wrote in part:

The finest and most grandiose adventure in modern dramaturgy
was revealed to Dallas and to some of the rest of Texas Thursday
night in what may be called a gallant and reckless box office
gamble. . . . "The Miracle" at the Auditorium . . . was the

Miracle of Reinhardt, the flowering of his genius. Whether or not this flower is to blush unseen on the Southwestern desert is the box office gamble.

No doubt Thursday night's performance was a sort of communion for many of the 2,000 persons present. . . . For this chronicler, "The Miracle" was an unparalleled theatrical experience, a bravura feat of showmanship. It was the employment of classical grandeur for the subtle ideology of the modern. It was a show . . . that reached its spectator by lordly disregard of the theatrical convention or by the making of its own convention. The far famed cathedral, the adaptation of a religious legend, the pageantry of the church, the eye filling pallette of the renaissance were merely the raw material of Reinhardt's laboratory. . . . a pantomimic drama is what it is. . . . If one is not church minded to excess, "The Miracle" becomes a grand story on a universal theme, a cunning plot invention and an affair of nervous suspense and thrilling climaxes.

The basis is an old Rhenish legend which inspired Masterlink's "Sister Beatrice." It is quite simple to follow and it easily engrosses one. Roughly speaking, our little nun, Megildis, is a female Faust. Though she makes no contact with the evil one, she barely resists his enticements. She strips herself of her veils and follows him to the arms of a stalwart knight. A gentle idyll soon is destroyed by worldly complications. A marauding Baron takes her by force. A callow Prince wins her by chance. Ambition lifts her to a throne shared with an imperial idiot. Stress of life sends her flying to the cloister to pick up the veil where she dropped it seven years before.

So far this is the old and tried battle of good and evil but now comes the factor that clinches the argument that "The Miracle" is drama with modern implications and not a moral of eternal principles.

During Megildis' defalcation, her place is taken by the Madonna herself, stepping down from her pedestal. It is the Madonna, by exercise of her supernatural endowments, who sends the girl through locked doors into the sunshine and storm of the world. Here is theological invention that veers strangely toward irony. Perhaps the Madonna judged little Megildis too young for the sisterhood. . . . If she were permitted to pass through an open door down a vista of promroses and travel through to troublesome clouds . . . she would return prepared to remain. . . . "The Miracle" . . . is not this explicit the conception is keyed in too lofty a mood. . . . The character . . . of the Madonna is noble, loving and gentle. But there is a tinge of pity, and what is pity but humor?

Youthful, agile, academically beautiful, temperamentally afire was Vivienne Giesen whose Megildis was easily the centrifugal force of the presentation. It was an amazing performance, reaching the extremities . . . no less than giving graphic representation of intermediate points. She was a figure of static beauty as the white clad girl receiving her consecration.
With fine show of fervor she ran her course, performing new duties as Sister Sacristan. When passion knocked at every door (an amazing piece of subjective representation) she was a creature possessed.

Gayly and eagerly she responded to her first caresses. Fearful and helpless, she was carried off by the robber baron. Desperation born of sorely bought experience caused her to ascend to the throne of the imbecile ruler. Exhaustion to the core brought her again to the floor of the cathedral. In the remarkable finale she was serenity and composure themselves, eligible at last for her duties, so detached from the material that the misdirected adoration of her sister nuns does not move her.

The evil spirit, half Puck and half Mephistopheles, is the impish Piper, played superbly by Fritz Feld. He threads together the spectacle and drew a line both fine and strong. Not so virtuosic were the opportunities of the Madonna assumed... by the Princess Matchabelli (Maria Carmi) with pantomime of graceful line, magnetic power. The Madonna stands motionless for forty minutes during the first scene... showing what a superb practitioner she is and inexorable the author and producer were when they thought it up. This is perhaps the most difficult role though it figures in comparatively few scenes... Claudia Carlstadt Wheeler as the abbess, Lionel Braham as the robber, Hans Hamsa as the macabre figure of homicide who caps each tragedy with a phosphorescent death's head and Lothar Mayring as the dotard Emperor were the most conspicuous of the unerring cast.

The hero of "The Miracle" is in Salzburg... Max Reinhardt... For this generation not to know first hand the mighty works of this mighty force would be the abysmal unawareness of provincialism... a classicist... in the sweeping line and broad neutral effects of antiquity, he found... techniques to project modern subtleties... a miracle of audible and ocular fusion... The heavy tone, bronze colored peal of cathedral bells, the rhythmic swish of moving mobs, off-stage sounds are worked into the ensemble. Few sequences were more impressive than that of Megildis' passion, disclosed by thunderous knocks on every wall and door of the auditorium.

The production has all advantages of mass movement. Regular performers and supernumeraries numbered will into the hundreds. These are, after all, the veritable protagonists of "The Miracle" for in their unison gestures, swirling maneuvers and density are the full score of the visual symphony.87

Both the Journal and the Times Herald critics echoed Rosenfield's rhapsodic praise. The Journal reviewer wrote:

87News, Fri., Dec. 27, 1929, 1. This was the first and only time during the 1920-1930 period that a criticism of a play appeared on page one of the News.
More than 2,000 people sat in reverent silence for three hours Thursday evening, awed by the solemn splendor of the most impressive production of the present century.

Rarely, if ever, has it been the fortune of a Texas audience to witness such a vision of beauty, grace and magnificence as was unveiled in the presentation of "The Miracle" whose romantic-religious theme was unfolded in song, picture and pantomime at Fair Park Auditorium, the interior of which was been transformed into an imposing medieval cathedral.

As the last peal of the cathedral bells knelled the close of the gorgeous spectacle the audience emerged from its silent thrall to break into thunderous waves of applause which brought the entire company back onto the stage, there to hear Governor Dan Moody express executive approval and voice the hope that every person in Texas could see it.

This hope of the Governor was repeated by Morris Gest, the producer of the play, who also made a brief curtain talk.

The auditorium was a real cathedral, rich in color and giving an atmosphere of loftiness and largeness. Rows of seats became a part of the great stage and the audience became the congregation. The lighting effects and the hushed assembly only tended to heighten the reality as the actors passed in and out among them. . . .

From the spectacle point of view the action of the masses was something to be watched. The ease of their movements, their silence and their reverence in that silence. . . . Too much was going on for one to keep in touch with everything, even with the aid of the story as told in the programs. . . .

The part of the nun was played by Vivienne Giesen, who gave a wonderful performance, portraying with her hands and quick springing movements what others could not accomplish with the aid of the spoken word. Especially realistic was her scene in which she was tied to the pillory, just preceding her sentence to be beheaded, but as for herself she was the most beautiful in her last scene—the return to the cathedral and her pardons and redemptions. . . .

Watches were in evidence during the first scene when the sexton uncovered the Madonna until she stepped from her pedestal. . . .

One of the most interesting performances was given by Fritz Feld, the trouble-making piper, who presents the enticements of pleasure most alluringly and celebrates the triumphs of evil most gleefully. It has been said by those who have seen "The Miracle" often that Mr. Feld grows better with each performance.86

Jack Beall, Jr. reviewed the play for the Times Herald and he commented:

86Journal, Fri., Dec. 27, 1929, 1.
It is a hypnotic sort of spectacle that casts a spell upon the audience. It is like nothing else that has ever come to Dallas. . . . Just go and sit and watch, and perhaps you will have a religious experience in the theater, a thing which can be entirely thrilling. . . .

It is a cracking good show as well. The eye-filling spaciousness of it with the whole front of the auditorium made over into the semblance of a Gothic basilica, with great surging crowds, colorful mobs and black and white nuns and priests, sets which have made the name of Reinhardt world-renowned, rising audaciously within the cathedral, with a forest suggested by a cluster of green carapaces [sic] thrown over the heads of supernumeraries; with a muptial couch towering to the skies, up black steps with the grim scaffolding of the gibbet crazily thrown together for the business of hanging an emperor; with the banquet board of a robber count, making it like nothing ever seen before. . . .

The setting of the cathedral is wonderfully done, although we wish that the entire sidewalls had been celotexed to carry the illusion of cathedral walls out in entirety. If we remember the Century production, it was so done.

The piper is the most sinister and interesting figure in the whole of "The Miracle." Action centers about him no less than the nun. He is all that is crack brained and wrongheaded in the scheme of earthly things, absolutely pagan and without conscience. Fritz Feld plays him for all he is worth, and we thought at times, a little more, too, with grimaces which closely skirted mere mugging. But he was graceful, alluring, sardonic and impish. . . .

The nun, as played by Vivienne Giesen, is effective, but she goes into extravagances of grief in the first scene which are not believable. Action lags more seriously in her sequence than in any other. . . .

Here we wish parenthetically to say that such acting in that other branch of pantomimic drama, the motion pictures, would not be tolerated. There is such tremendous overemphasis, at times, such repetition of an idea in form and movement that it loses some of its effectiveness and becomes like a charade--guess what the nun is doing. It is the traditional form of such things, we suppose, and that is its palliation and excuse.

The Madonna of the Princess Matchabelli is the essence of grace and beauty. Her motionless posturing for forty minutes, while a physical feat, is nothing comparable to the slow enchantment of her moment after she comes to life. Her hands are the most beautiful we have ever seen. There is a quiet benignity about her every action which bespeaks reverence for the part.

Two thousand people were enthralled at the performance.89

89*Times Herald*, Fri., Dec. 27, 1929, II, 1.
On December 31, Morris Gest reported "a tremendous box office sale for both current and future performances," and he predicted that his "Dallas gamble" would end happily. He stated that the production would go from Dallas to New Orleans to open there at the new coliseum. Then it would be taken to Atlanta and Baltimore.  

The day that *The Miracle* was to end its run brought information that the huge cathedral set would remain in Dallas, stored at the State Fair Auditorium ready to be shipped to New Orleans in the fall if that booking were arranged. Otherwise, the career of the production, begun in London in 1911, had come to an end all over the world. The statement was forthcoming from the management that the production grossed between $70,000 and $80,000 in Dallas, figuring in the probable receipts for the last performance. Milton Stiefel, co-manager for Gest, said, "Dallas is the smallest city in which 'The Miracle' has ever played and in view of this fact the city is to be congratulated for its wonderful support of this great play."  

The debacle came after the last performance. A front page story in the *News* carried the information:

Indignant actors and extras of "The Miracle" cast milled about the box office at the Fair Park Auditorium demanding their pay Saturday night, following the closing performance until two squads of policemen were called to expel them from the building. The story stated further that "many of the unpaid ones were local extras and singers." The actors claimed they had been promised their salaries

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91 *News*, Sat., Jan 11, 1930, 6. In the *News* of Tues., Feb. 11, 1930, p. 11, John Rosenfield stated that the production had made but $57,000 toward the $75,000 operating expenses.
following the final presentation and it was learned that attachment papers had been served on all properties for indebtedness. Equity members and some of the lesser paid New York members of the cast were paid during the day. During the first act, according to the newspaper account, union musicians, electricians and stage hands went on strike until they got their money, delaying the opening curtain thirty minutes. The cast had been paid through Wednesday night's performance, the protesting actors said, but pay was due them for five additional performances. The amounts due were said to be small. The cast had been assembled after the final curtain and the announcement made that the funds for their salaries were not available.92

A day earlier, Rosenfield had criticized Gest for "utter bad taste and worse judgment for making Dallas privy to his financial estate." He commented that Gest "with a deservedly great name stood before the public, self-confessedly penniless." Gest, according to the critic, had been given "the fate of his fortunes" by the unexpectedly small Dallas patronage, and Rosenfield told his readers to "spare your tears." He wrote that Gest had been penniless before, and that "when he rises Phoenix-like from the ruins of one venture to the glories of another, it is not topic for a story." Rosenfield called Gest "a type fast disappearing from America's theater . . . no shrewd merchandiser of footlight wares . . . in his own way, an artist of impresariodom." He observed that Gest "appears to have just enough business ability to

92News, Mon., Jan. 13, 1930, 1. Although the incident happened on Saturday night, it was not reported in the News until Monday.
dodge Sheriff's attachment and to pay actors." Searching for reasons for the failure of the production, the critic explained that Gest had been bitten by a tsetse fly shortly before he came to Dallas and that the bite had "poisoned his face and almost rendered him sightless."

Also, commented the critic, Gest was up against something in Dallas he did not understand.

By bringing "The Miracle" into a community such as this, he was faced with the spoiled children of the theater. The provincial audience has lived so long under the sycophantic solicitude of the theater managers that it has grown unbearably egotistical, too complacent for its own good . . . downright inimical to the cause this process is supposed to serve. "The Miracle" found a public accustomed to humoring its own whims. . . . Mr. Gest's greatest argument why one should see "The Miracle" went for nothing. . . . "It was something you should see." We of the provinces are not used to such compulsion.

And then Rosenfield did an amazing turnabout from the almost ecstatic attitude he had taken toward The Miracle when he first reviewed it.

Mr. Gest and his cathedral, his nuns and statues, his pipers and robber barons, his Wagnerian music, his "Lord's Prayer," sounded too much like church in good golf weather.

Those who patronized "The Miracle" were not exactly perambulating ballyhoos. Many were unashamed in their admission that a pantomime representation of a religious theme fails to throw them into ecstasy. They conceded that a cathedral setting was a most unusual sight for our auditorium, that the number of actors and the size the number of everything were vaguely affecting. Most of them, with stalwart Texas characteristics that make us love them, reared on their hind legs and said "I don't know what it was all about. I'm glad I went. I was sure glad when it was over."

There was a time . . . when the mere worthiness of a thing was sufficient to win support of a population trained to regard merit as a sacred responsibility. Our thoughts go back to 1901 and the story Will A. Watkins tells of the presentation of Wagner's "Parsifal" performed by the Metropolitan Opera Company.

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93 Rosenfield had undoubtedly written his column before the Saturday night incident at the box office.
in the Old Dallas House. . . . In those days . . . the crowd turned out without much urging. You can still hear them talk. . . . And they paid $12 a seat, which was equivalent to $24 of Andrew Mellon's greenbacks.

The critic maintained that the showing of The Miracle with its deficit was "no disgrace to this city's hospitality or curiosity." He pointed out that Dallas must have given Gest "between $60,000 and $65,000 . . . one swell contribution to art from 30,000 working burghers." And he concluded that "Mr. Gest has no business traveling with so expensive a show, which he knew as well as we. His Dallas engagement was a long chance. It was too long."^94

There was word from New York that Gest intended paying off those to whom he owned back salaries as soon as he got some money together. And in Dallas, Milton Stifel, co-manager of the company, predicted that the attachment papers on the scenery would be removed as soon as Gest got back to his desk in New York. Then in March it was learned that Morris Gest had declared bankruptcy in New York. He had come to America, according to Rosenfield's column, as a penniless immigrant and had "begun his career by painting sparrows yellow and selling them as canary birds." Gest had broken into the theater by speculating in theater tickets and had become acquainted with David Belasco. Later, he married Belasco's daughter. Among Gest's better known productions, observed Rosenfield, had been Chu Chin Chow, Aphrodite and Mecca. Gest had resurrected The Miracle, taken it on tour, and incurred a $200,000 loss. The set, as of March 11, 1930, was still in

storage at Fair Park Auditorium under sheriff's attachment. The Miracle was not revived again on the stage.

The next, and last, legitimate production of the season was the Freiburg Passion Play, presented at Fair Park Auditorium during the week of March 31 under auspices of the American Legion.

Jack Beall, Jr., critic for the Times Herald, wrote this about the presentation:

We must own to a certain disappointment in "The Freiburg Passion Play" as a humanly wrought play, as against the divinely wrought story.

It is very slow in movement, long-drawn out, and draggy through the first part, which lasted two hours without intermission, relieved only by the very wonderful "Last Supper" scene. The latter part, with the crucifixion, the descent from the cross, the entombment and the resurrection, were staged and acted with great mastery, and had movement and action as a spectacle should have. The first part seemed to smother drama of the thing under too many conspiracy scenes with Judas and the Pharisees. We counted three at least. The fact that it was produced entirely in German, save for the prologue, while not interfering in the slightest with the latter part, was something of a stumbling block in the first part to the understanding of those who are not overly familiar with the Bible and know no German.

We thought we never saw as effective a scene in the theater as the descent from the cross. We watched it with breathless interest. . . . The crucifixion itself was well handled, with its storm accompanied by "Andromeda and the Storm King," but the slow and painful ascent up Calvary with the heavy cross was not particularly well done by Adolph Fassnacht, who bore the cross.

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97 The News for Saturday, March 5, 1932, carried the report that the play was due to be revived immediately in London by Charles Cochran with the assistance of Max Reinhardt. The Lyceum Theater was to be converted into the Gothic Cathedral, according to the report. This project was never realized for on August 18, 1933, the News carried the report that the costumes, properties and scenery of the production had been given to the Little Theater of Dallas by officials of the American Transfer and Storage Company. The equipment had been taken from the Fair Park Auditorium to the warehouse and from there was carried to the stage of the Dallas Little Theater until space for it could be cleared in the Little Theater basement. The Oak Cliff Little Theater was to have full access to the material.

off, at first, as though it were a feather.

Leonardo Da Vinci himself might have painted the scene which met the eyes of 3,500 first nighters at the auditorium when the curtains drew apart on "The Last Supper." It was most faithfully reproduced and the lighting was simply marvelous. We might say that the lighting for the rest of it was hit or miss and the cloud stereoptican was positively mishandled, the clouds racing across the skies, and often leaping.

Adolf Fassnacht has a very repressed way of acting the part of the Savior. . . . He speaks in a rather high tenor voice and acts mechanically, we thought. No trace of emotion shows through. It may be intentional. We were puzzled with it all evening.

The real acting honors belong to Willi Erhardt as Judas, and to Paul Dietz as Pilate, whose great voice booms out to the mob, trying to save Jesus in the face of the public clamor, but finally giving in like any politician.

Heinrich Haud as Peter, is the rock of the church to the life, with his patriarchal beard and strong, kindly face. The women of the cast are not impressive, although they have ample opportunity in the crucifixion scenes.

The music throughout was most apt and well played and sung by a large orchestra and a chorus of voices recruited locally. . . .

All in all the script does not bear out the promise of the intrinsic drama in the last week of Christ's mission here on earth.

The action is slowed up to the point of standstill and boredom in many places, and the part of the Christus merely puzzles us. On the other hand, the costuming, the music, the Last Supper, and above all the "decent from the cross," makes it a play worth seeing.99

John Rosenfield was more approving of the production. He called it "worthy of the traditions of almost 700 years which lie behind it," and described it as "without dogma and without sermon." He praised the theatrical technique and the "seriousness of finished actors," but said it was unusual that there was only one intermission. Rosenfield also stated that the succession of scenes "might do well in an open-air

theater, but in a closed house it tended to create restlessness.  
Rosenfield noted that the prologue was given in English and Latin and
the words of the play in German, but "a foreign language seemed appro­
priate." He also praised the Last Supper scene and described Adolf
Fassnacht as "a Christus of power," and stated that Fritz Schoeller as
Caiphas "gave depth and color to the highly dramatic moments of the
play with perhaps the finest speaking voice ever heard in the auditorium."
Willie Erhardt, who, Rosenfield stated, had made a lifelong study of the
character of Judas, was said by the critic to "have carried through a
series of scenes vividly, the cunning scheming and finally the unbearable
remorse of the betrayer." The critic particularly praised the color and
texture of the costumes.  
The week's performances of the play grossed
\$25,000.  

Although there were only three legitimate touring shows that
came to the city during the 1929-1930 season, they were all productions
of decided merit. Again, the trend established in the previous season
of presenting productions that made a definite cultural appeal was
continued.  The Miracle, a vast gamble that ended in a fiasco, was

\textsuperscript{100}When the Passion Play returned to Dallas in the Spring of
1932 for a return engagement, James R. Saville, who booked the produc­
tion, made efforts to get an outdoor amphitheater. He petitioned the
Dallas Park Board to use Reverchon Park but was turned down. Saville
finally presented the production at Ownby Stadium of Southern Methodist
University for eight performances during the week of May 30.

\textsuperscript{101}News, Tues., Apr. 1, 1930, 12.

\textsuperscript{102}News, Mon., Apr. 7, 1930, 4.
perhaps the most significant theatrical event in the history of the city. The season may be said to mark a turning point as far as legitimate roadshows in Dallas are concerned. Beginning with the 1930-1931 season, Dallas began to get the finest stage stars in outstanding dramas. The 1920-1930 decade ended with Dallas far weaker in roadshow fare, if the number of touring companies that came to the city is taken as the index, but with Dallas far ahead in the way of prestige as a theatrical center and far more cosmopolitan and discriminating in its taste.

The 1925-1930 period saw far fewer touring productions come to Dallas than during the previous five-year period and the quality of road shows coming to the city was, for the most part, much higher than it had been. For example, there were only three road shows seen in the city in the 1920-1930 season, but these included Journey's End and The Miracle. The policy of bringing fewer but better plays to Dallas was to be accelerated in the 1930's. Before the start of the 1930-1931 season it was known that Strange Interlude, Strictly Dishonorable, and Cyrano de Bergerac with Walter Hampden, would be brought to the city during the 1930-1931 season.

In addition to an improvement in the quality of the touring legitimate productions, there was also evident a growing tendency for well-known actors and actresses, particularly those who had established their reputations in an earlier day, to leave the main circuit and to take the long trip to the Southwest. During the 1925-1930 period such well-known stars as Minnie Maddern Fiske, Thomas Wise, Lotus Robb, May
Robson, Sara Sothern, Robert Mantell, Charlotte Walker, Norman Hackett, Richard Bennett and Fritz Leiber were seen by Dallas audiences.

One other aspect of the five-year period must be noted and that was the growing reluctance of the Fair Park management to book shows for the new auditorium unless a sizable audience could be assured. Time and again, legitimate productions in the Auditorium failed to fill the 5,000 seats available. Nor was the size the only problem. As Richard Bennett pointed out in his curtain speech, the acoustics presented another formidable handicap. An audience that would be considered entirely adequate in a smaller theater was lost in the big structure. The lack of a suitable legitimate playhouse was certainly one factor in the unwillingness of many touring companies to come to Dallas, unless they had actors of established reputation, or had enjoyed unusual Broadway success like Abie's Irish Rose.

As for the failure of The Miracle, that must be attributed in part to the over-ambitiousness of Morris Gest who hoped to fill the Auditorium for twelve days, and to the fact that the audiences in the Southwest were decidedly unprepared for such fare, if we accept the opinion of so shrewd a critic of the contemporary scene as John Rosenfield.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the larger reasons why touring productions fell off during the 1925-1930 period and why those that did arrive tended to be of higher merit and to bring actors of greater stature to the city, still a word might be said of some of the general influences that operated to bring this about.

An Associated Press release which appeared in the Dallas Morning News indicated that what was happening in Dallas was also occurring in the larger theater centers. The critic reported that there were only
twenty-six plays and musical comedies to be seen throughout the nation on July 16, 1930. The release stated:

Chicago, for the first time in 98 years, has only one play this week, and New York has only fifteen, establishing this as the dullest July Broadway has seen since the World War summer of 1917.

Distributed about the rest of the country are ten more shows, according to producers' records. Included in the ten are two musical tabloids, five stock productions and one minstrel show.

The annual survey, to be made by Actors Equity Association on July 19, considered to be the dullest day in the whole year in New York, will reveal the lowest number of productions listed by Equity, whose records run back to 1922.

At this time a year ago, Broadway had 25 productions, but six of them had been closed by July 19. On July 29 in 1925 and 1926 there were 30 shows playing in New York....

Frank Gilmore, president of Equity said, "When people get hard up, they relinquish first of all their luxuries. The theater is, of course, a luxury."

Even prior to the stock market crash the road had suffered severe setbacks. As has already been stated the road began its decline in 1920, and actually by 1930 was beginning to make a slight comeback. This was particularly to be noted in the early 1930's when Interstate Amusements booked touring plays for the Melba and Majestic theaters. Because these plays could also be assured showings in San Antonio, Houston and Fort Worth on the Interstate circuit, it became both feasible and profitable for the companies to come to Texas. But such was not the situation before 1930. Touring plays had to depend on large auditoriums in the various cities, structures too big to make the appearance profitable for the auditorium interests.

The Circle Theater was available for some touring shows during

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101 _News_, Thurs., July 17, 1930, 10
the late 1920's, but it was primarily a stock theater. The absence of a legitimate theater in Dallas, and, more significantly, the absence of similar theaters in other cities in Texas which would have made the appearance of legitimate plays profitable if they chose to take the long jump to Texas from Kansas City or Oklahoma City, meant that only the strongest companies, or low-cost companies like the Shakespearean troupes, risked making a Dallas appearance.

In addition to the theater problem and the onset of the depression, there was also the factor that because touring plays did not appear frequently in the 1920's, the audience which would have made it a regular habit to frequent these productions gradually drifted away to other forms of amusement. Of course, one of these forms was the sound film which came into its own in the late 1920's.

It will be seen in the succeeding chapter that these factors affected not only legitimate road shows but touring musicals as well. They were, in a sense, the same factors which were responsible for the decline of stock and the ultimate failure of the Little Theater.
CHAPTER XVII

THE TOURING MUSICALS BRING THE STARS

Affected by virtually the same conditions that affected touring legitimate shows, the road show musicals were not seen too frequently during the 1925-1930 period, but they were greater in number than they had been during the previous five years. The availability of the new Fair Park Auditorium and of the Circle Theater, and the short period during which the Old Mill housed touring shows, gave the city three theaters at which musical productions could be seen. The musicals drew larger audiences than did the legitimate shows and did not present as great a problem acoustically as did the plays.

The 1925-1926 Season

The first touring musical presented at Fair Park, after the State Fair Show had opened the new auditorium was Ziegfeld's Sally, with book by Guy Bolton, music by Jerome Kern, and with a cast of seventy-five persons. It was presented for a matinee and night performance on November 22, 1925. In his review, John Rosenfield stated that the show was dated but he praised the star, Lou Powers, who, he observed, "had the original Leon Errol 'cave-in walk' down pat." He criticized the rest of the company and the settings. Rosenfield attributed the mediocrity of the sets to the fact that the company had been involved in a railroad accident near Fort Worth and one of
the luggage vans containing scenery and trunks had also overturned in Dallas just prior to the show. But he called attention to the full houses that attended both performances.¹

The reviewer for the Times Herald, R. T. Fitzgerald, also praised Powers and commented particularly on his rendition of "Schnitza Komisska," observing that it was "a song so foolish as to be funny." He also noted that the rest of the company did not draw a favorable response and made adverse comments about the dancing, the volume of the orchestra and the singing.²

Powers' antics were described by the Journal reviewer as being "as refreshing as a field of sunflowers after a deluge of cabbages." He stated that Powers dominated the stage and that it was lifeless otherwise. He also commended William H. Power, stating that he handled his role adequately and had the kind of enunciation necessary to put over his jokes but condemned John Kennedy, the male lead as performing "in a stiff and lifeless fashion," and as not having enough vocal power to rise above the orchestra. The chorus, he stated, was youthful enough but not qualified and it was his belief that the show lacked the dignity and beauty of The Student Prince which had preceded it in the Auditorium and that the audience unconsciously drew comparisons.³

No, No, Nanette was at Fair Park Auditorium on December 18, 19, and 20, with a matinee on Saturday the 19th. Its music had been

¹News, Mon., Nov. 23, 1925, 1.
²Times Herald, Mon., Nov. 23, 1925, 1, 8.
³Journal, Mon., Nov. 23, 1925, 4.
written by Vincent Youman and its cast included Julia Ring, Bonnie Shaw, Diana Stegman, John E. Young, Madeliene McMahon, Joseph Herbert, Jr., Myrtle Bordine, Jack LaFrack, Pearl LaDeaux and Adele Clifton. The advance notices stated that the music had run "for 500 capacity performances in Chicago and had been played around the world."\(^4\)

The Journal reviewer called the musical "a rare road attraction" and commented that the audience was highly amused by the witticisms of John E. Young. He added that Madeliene McMahon did a fine characterization of Nanette and stated that the musical surprised even the most ardent theatergoers with its capable cast. Observing that Miss McMahon was out of voice because of a cold and that the male chorus "were mere show-offs," he stated that these were only minor weaknesses and that the show came up to Chicago and New York standards. He particularly praised the dancing of Julie Ring and described Myrtle Bordine, who he said was "a half-pint maid with red hair scrambled over her head, eyes and face," as "a gem in the show" and called attention to her sharp voice and the clever way in which she handled her part. He also praised Joseph Herbert in the role of Smith's lawyer and Jack LaPrack, who, he stated, did several good bits of acting.\(^5\)

The production proved so successful that it had another three-day run at the Auditorium on December 3, 4, and 5, of the following season.\(^6\)

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\(^4\)News, Fri., Dec. 18, 1925, 4.


Blossom Time, called in the advance publicity "the loveliest musical play the world has ever known," was presented by the Shuberts at the Fair Park Auditorium on January 3, 4, and 5, 1926. The cast included Joseph Mendelsohn, Shep Camp, Arthur Hadley, Charlotte Lansing, Eugenia Leontovich, James Sheridan, Betty Shapelle, Lucille Hershey, William Webster, Isabel Vernon, and forty others. Shep Camp, the leading comedian, had held the part of Mr. Kranz, the court jeweler, since the show had opened five years earlier, according to the advance publicity.

The News review praised the principals and the costumes and sets and described Joseph Mendelsohn, in the role of Schubert, as "moving and appealing." But his major praise went to Eugenia Leontovich, the prima donna, who was later to achieve renown in the theater. He called her "a comely, sprightly, gazelle-like creature with a pretty little voice which she uses with mastery."

George Gershwin was the composer of the music for Lady Be Good which was at the Fair Park Auditorium on January 22, 23, and 24. A fair-sized audience saw the opening performance and John Rosenfield observed that they were both pleased and disappointed. He recalled that the show had been a hit in New York but that its merit was confined largely to the first act. He stated that the show tapered off after that and expressed the opinion that it had been "designed for towns

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9 News, Mon., Jan. 6, 1926, 4.
smaller and less discriminating than Dallas." Rosenfield praised Lolita Westman's dancing and singing but commented that she "injects a bit of rudeness into her work," and also commended the dancing of Leonard Sillman. He called the rest of the cast average and commented about the male chorus, "so's your old man." Others listed by Rosenfield as being in the cast were Richard La Marr, Irene Goodrich, Olga Nova, Wilfred Jessop, Sam A. Burton, Jerome Pierot, Bert Bennett, Jack Stanley, Tom Maynard, Fatsy Watkins and Royal Thayre.¹⁰

*My Girl*, a Broadway success of the previous season, was at the Auditorium on February 5 for a run of five performances. The *Journal* reviewer listed as cast members Elmira Lane, Pearl Hight, Katherine Morris, Leslie Jones, George Phelps, Vera Thomas, Alfred H. Knight, Tom Tempest, Mildred Gillars, Edwin H. Guhl, Joseph H. Mann, and Vera Rial. He called attention to the audience of nearly 4,000 and stated that there was much applause and laughter. The critic cited the many clever jokes in the show and the singing and dancing of the chorus of nine, which he stated, was small for a show of this kind. He praised the dancing of Bonnie Tebeau and observed that the leading man, Leslie Jones, was greatly applauded for his scenes with his mother-in-law, and that he drew a roar of approval for "his change of costume in the second act for something more modern." He described Katherine Morris as "delightful" in the role of Betty Brown and wrote that she "executed some very graceful dancing which was applauded considerably." Others

praised by the critic were Vera Thomas in the role of "a sophisticated modern" and Vera Rial as the mother-in-law, and he stated that her "stage faint was good for a long roar of laughter."\(^{11}\)

The *News* critic estimated the opening night audience at 3,000 and stated that they greeted the production, which he described as "superior," with genuine appreciation. He praised Elmira Lane, Katherine Morris, Vera Thomas and Mildred Gillars as completely competent and described Leslie Jones as a favorite of the audience. The show, he stated, was "well-directed, well-danced, well-sung," but he criticized the music as rather ordinary.\(^{12}\)

The sixth edition of *George White's Scandals* ran for a week at the Circle Theater, starting Sunday, February 21, and, according to the *Journal* reviewer, "made the old ville tremble when it arrived and when it finally unfolded the shock was furious." He called the show "a moving panorama of color, light and rhythm" and praised the music, which had been composed by George Gershwin. He observed that White "believes in the freedom of the body, he does, and the thirty good looking young women could wear their entire wardrobe at once, and still be able to getaway fast." He praised Myra Brown and stated that Fred Lightner was a comedian with fine prospects. Ace Headrick was said by the reviewer to have a pleasing personality and entertaining voice and Sonia De Calve was called the best looking woman in the show and a

\(^{11}\) *Journal*, Sat., Feb. 6, 1926, 5.

\(^{12}\) *News*, Sat., Feb. 6, 1926, 4.
capable singer. He commented, also, that Johnny Getz had a manner "reminiscent of the continental comedians." The reviewer noted that the auditorium was filled for the performance.13

John Rosenfield also thought the show was excellent and, making reference to the publicity which had preceded the show, commented that "the press agent has made it clear that a revue is not a vulgar burlesque show but a high and noble esthetic endeavor created for the cultivated sensibilities of those who revel in the flair of orange against black background with a tint of flesh colors to add naturalism." He added that the theater was "jammed with art patrons who received the famed and bruited George White's Scandals with evidences of satisfaction." Rosenfield observed that the claims of the press agent about the scenery proved truthful and he called the stage pictures "really sumptuous, if slightly gawdy." [sic] The favorites with the audience, according to the critic, were the curtain of feathers, the diamond-wedding scene and the giant Spanish shawl. He praised the attractiveness and training of the women in the cast and wrote that the show was "the completest public exhibition of undress ever shown in Dallas." He described it as "long on scenery and clothing and short on wit and music," and praised Freddie Lightner. But he criticized the skits as being dated.14

The production proved so popular that it was held over for two extra performances.15

The Greenwich Village Follies, with a company headed by Raymond Hitchcock and featuring Handers and Mills, Josephine Fontaine, Myrtle Pierce, Evelyn Hoey, and Lucille Peterson, was at Fair Park Auditorium on March 13 and 14, and was the first presentation of a John Murray Anderson production in the city. Raymond Hitchcock was described in the advance notices as being "as prominent as any American comedian" and was said to be the first recognized musical comedy star who appeared in the city during the season.

Robert T. Fitzgerald, reviewer for the Daily Times Herald, stated that "Raymond Hitchcock is the same as he has been for at least . . . the past five years; better if anything, but he has gathered about him in the Greenwich Village Follies a much better troupe than usually take to the road, particularly in respect to the more important parts." Fitzgerald praised Evelyn Hoey highly, calling her "a little blonde beauty . . . with the prettiest eyes and complexion this side of Helen of Troy," and he particularly noted the way she put over the song, "I Wonder Where My Baby is Tonight." Myrtle Pierce, a dancer, also was praised and be observed that the skits in which Hitchcock played a desk sergeant, a "rain-beau," and a neighbor, were well applauded. The critic also had words of praise for Eddie Leslie.

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16 John Murray Anderson was to become well known in Dallas later in the decade through unit shows he designed for the Publix Circuit which were presented at the Palace Theater.

who sang an "interruption" number between scenes. The house, according to the reviewer, was well filled. The Shuberts brought Artists and Models, billed as having "fifty models from the studios and the eighteen original Gertrude Hoffman girls* to Fair Park Auditorium for a week's run that began on Saturday, March 27. Principals in the production were Julia Strong, Dorothy Addison, Dorothy Negman and Helen Doyle. 

Fitzgerald, writing in the Times Herald, called the production "alternately devilishly pure and--well, purely devilish." He described some of the scenes as "absolutely scarlet," and cited what he called a "blistering" Charleston by the Hoffman girls, which he described as "absolutely the stoutest act of its kind seen here this winter or in many winters before. The girls wear black streamers that expose the whiteness of flesh. The effect is startling." He observed that many of the skits had been seen in New York as late as the previous spring and singled out Billy Stout, a former Dallas girl who had been played up as the local heroine in the publicity, as being pretty, a good dancer, and capable. He also praised the singing of Robert Cloy, the tenor. The reviewer pointed out that the show was almost entirely visual and that the skits "inclined mostly to risque in the plain and simple." 

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The reviewer for the *Journal* called attention to the scenes of the play that had been posted in the city and stated that this alone "would have endeared the show to the blase Dallasites as 'real Broadway stuff,'" but he commented that the production proved to be "a racy presentation that met the high favor of some 3,000 or more musical comedy fans and fanettes." He disclosed that the show was going to be given an extra performance on the following Sunday night and added that it was "generally considered the best show of its kind that has been here this season." He, too, praised Billy Stout and cited a dancer, billed only as Dolly, who, he commented, "made the rest of the girls look sick when it came to jazz stepping." He also mentioned Arthur G. Hadley who did "a fast chalk talk of comic characters," and described the Charleston as "the rarest part of the program."21

John Rosenfield also thought the show was the best of its kind seen in the city that season and observed that in two scenes "the tegument was served in job lots, than which there is nothing more chaste." He praised the beauty of the Hoffman girls but stated that the show "was undistinguished as to music and stale as to humor . . . not greatly different from the average new revue on Broadway this very day."22

A mixup about the run of the production drew caustic comments from Rosenfield. He noted that the producers had originally scheduled


the play to run for an entire week, but apparently had forgotten that it was Holy Week. This fact, stated Rosenfield, was not learned until after the show had arrived in the city. After the Saturday matinee and night performances on March 27, the cast laid over in Dallas for the rest of the week, then gave a Sunday night performance on April 5.23

The 1925-1926 season proved a fairly full one as far as musical roadshows were concerned with eight touring productions seen in the city. The discontent of the Dallas critics with some of the companies sent to the city was apparent. The practice of Broadway producers was to surround one or two principal entertainers with a mediocre cast and send the touring companies to the provinces. The receptions the Dallas critics gave Sally and Lady Be Good reflect the growing attitude in the city that local audiences were being shown inferior versions of the Broadway products. For the most part, the principals got high praise from the critics. During the season, shows began appearing in the city which were risque in nature and which played up nudity. They were preceded by much advance publicity and drew large audiences. But a show like No, No, Nanette, reminiscent of the Shubert operettas, drew such good audiences that it played the following season for another three-day run. This was the first season of criticism by John Rosenfield and he established a new level of reviewing in the city that very quickly was caught up by the other newspapers. The large crowds who attended the season's first musicals came, no doubt, as much to see the new Fair Park Auditorium as to see the shows. Once the

\[News, \text{Wed., Mar. 31, 1926, 4.}\]
season was well under way, attendance tapered off. George White's Scandals drew capacity crowds to the Circle Theater, but it must be remembered that the Circle seated 1,100 whereas the Auditorium seated 5,000. All in all, the season can be said to have been a successful one, both with respect to audiences and to the merit of the shows.

The 1926-1927 Season

Rose Marie was at the State Fair Auditorium for the week of November 1 as the opening musical roadshow of the 1926-1927 season. Included in the cast were Paul J. Gregory, the male lead; Beulah Berson, who sang the title role; Hazel Gaudreau, Harry Koler, Marie Eline, Edward Cianelli, William Gason, Thomas Chadwick, Paul E. Porter and Ramona Kogan. Rosenfield described the musical as a triumph and commented that "a public that had been burnt sundry times on Southern road show companies was regaled with rich and tuneful music, effective and talented performances, clever and inventive staging, sumptuous and artistic costuming and setting and general merit all around."2h

The season continued with George E. Wintz presenting George White's Scandals for a three-day run, starting Sunday, October 31, at Fair Park Auditorium. The reviewer for the Times Herald had this to say about the production:

Despite the most complete display of the "lady bare" ever presented in Dallas during this reporter's more or less limited tenure here—the seventh edition of George White's "Scandals" does outglorify Ziegfeld for this part of the country—Sunday's presentation of the Fair Park three-day attraction is not particularly heartening. . . .

2hNews, Fri., Nov. 5, 1926, 4.
We could find little to redeem the performance proper. A few pretty faces, a scattering of fair, bare figures, some extremely clever burlesque, a "cute tot," as the saying is, and a fair voice or two composed the scoring below the line.

Some of the effects were productive of that spark that sets off clapping hands, notably the fan scene.

The work of one man almost saved the night, Johnny Getz, with his burlesque of Irving Berlin and "All Alone," his subsequent "dramatic" scene in the old stone fort, and two or three other appearances that stand out like bas relief. And little Jeanette Creagon is one of the prettiest feminine bits extant, although her conversation did not improve the effect.

The burlesque, which we have already termed much the best of the show, included the act termed "Cheap!" which was provocative of a smile. The audience throughout the evening appeared lethargic in regard to both laughter and applause. Some of the gags were not new.

The bareback acts included "Rosetime," which, sung by Stanley Cable, the tenor of the evening, presented a trellis and the climbing "roses," the girls doing the climbing hung about with blossoms. "Fly Butterfly" was another, imbued with dancing and wings. The sable scene began to reveal below as well as above the equator; and "The Girl of Tomorrow," appears to be the one whence most of the poster-pictures about the city were taken.

On the whole we prefer the sixth "Scandal" edition rather than the seventh.

The house looked rather untenanted toward the rear. Fortunately Will Rogers and the De Reszke singers will be there by midweek.

John Rosenfield had some interesting comments to make about the producer of the show:

George White's "Scandals" or rather George Wintz's "Scandals" is back in town. George Wintz and George White are different persons. It is understood here that Mr. Wintz purchases the rights to Mr. White's show as he desires. At that, Mr. Wintz puts up a pretty fair show and the local patrons turned out in inspiring numbers for the matinee and evening performances Sunday.

Last year when the Wintz "Scandals" played at the Circle Theater the undraped female was put forth timorously and provocingly. Mr. Wintz was so engrossed with his daring that he forgot everything else—wit, cleverness, ideas and music.

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*Herald, Mon., Nov. 1, 1926, I, 8.*
This year Mr. Wintz is bold and unafraid. Human skins are exhibited as if they were stock in a fur shop. There is nothing nuder than nude. Mr. Wintz has gone the limit. There is nothing more . . . except vivisection.

The great undressed stage of the revue really works a benefit. In order for revue producers to outstrip one another, they must now turn cerebrate. As a result, George Wintz's "Scandals" is not totally devoid of wit, color, musical talent.26

May Valentine's Light Opera Company presented two operettas, The Bohemian Girl on January 13, and The Chimes of Normandy on January 14, at the Circle Theater. The critic for the News stated that The Bohemian Girl melodies were "surprisingly youthful for all their eighty-four years" and that it was an unexpectedly good performance before a surprisingly large audience. May Valentine, who directed the performance from the pit, was said by the critic to have shown good judgment in all phases of the production except for the size of her orchestra. He commented that it was because of the merit of her productions that "she is smiling this year while other show managers are weeping." The production was commended by the critic but he described some of the chorus stage routines as "sometimes ludicrous." He noted that drapes were used for interior settings and that these were not annoying and called the show "new and fresh."27

The Student Prince, which had scored a remarkable success as the State Fair Show of 1925, returned to Fair Park Auditorium on February 6, 7, and 8, with a cast that included Elize Gergley as Kathie; Lucius Metz as the Prince; Sylvia de Franklin as Gretchen, and Leo

Stark Buffo as Lutz. John Rosenfield, writing about the coming production, commented that "almost eighteen months have passed and the populace still hums and whistles its music and still talks about the production." 28

For three nights beginning on February 18, Earl Carroll's Vanities played at the Fair Park Auditorium. In the cast were Bert Swor, Lou Powers, Dave Chasen, Lew Miller, Mary Dowling, Harry Sharpe, Mary Mansfield, Mae Dickson, Mae Valle, Alice Bradford, Kenneth Lackey, Johnny Dove, Walter Hamilton, Tommy Dean, John Coyle, Aimee Swor, John Kirk, Marie Goode, Alice Edrique and Louise Brooks. John Rosenfield commented that the show was geared for mass taste and that its principal feature was "a familiar theatrical convention known as the cuticle." But he expressed the opinion that the show was no more undressed than others that had been in Dallas "for the good reason that absolutely zero has been arrived at long ere this." He called Bert Swor, who was well known in Dallas because of his minstrel performances, "as successful as ever" and praised Powers as a comedian "of unusual personal charm." The critic also had kind words for Mary Dowling, a dancer and blues singer, and for Aimee Swor, Bert Swor's wife. 29

Robert T. Fitzgerald, writing in the Times Herald, went all out in his praise of the show. He stated that it "opened up here with the best comedians, one of the best choruses, a very beautiful model, and by far the best all-round show of its musical and

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irresponsible kind that has appeared here in close to one and one half years." The critic stated that Lou Powers and Dave Chasen, two of the comedians, stole the show and were riotous at times and he singled out Powers' wrestling match with "Tarzan of the Apes" as being "one of the funniest and cleverest burlesques ever staged below the divisor latitude." The dancing of Louise Brooks met with the critic's disapproval but he praised her appearance and attractive personality. Regarding the nudity, he commented, "Dallas now has seen everything that her big brother of the island has." He noted that Powers and Chasen participated in a number of "triangle" and similar skits and stated that they were good. Also praised were the roller skating act of Johnny Dove and the "rajah seer" stunt of Chasen. Fitzgerald commented that the show was "cleaner than anyone has a right to expect."30

Irving Berlin's Music Box Revue, the next show of the season, had been staged by John Murray Anderson and produced by Sam H. Harris, and was presented at the Fair Park Auditorium on March 29 and 30. John Rosenfield called it "the finest show for children since 'Hansel and Gretel.'" He insisted that the performance was not censorable, in spite of the fact that the censors in Jackson, Mississippi, and in Waco had raised objections, and that the absence of nudity disappointed many of the Dallas patrons. The show in Dallas was altered, noted Rosenfield, so that the scene objected to elsewhere in the South in which the chorus took off clothing as long as the audience applauded, ended in Dallas

with the chorus dancing "that singularly ridiculous melange of self-
flagellation known as the black bottom in lingerie covering the collar
bones at the top and the knees at the bottom." Rosenfield also stated
that though many of the skits and jokes started out daringly they ended
innocently enough. He stated that the principal comedian, Dave Burns,
was successful in "utterly clean comedy," and he paid particular tribute
to the rendition of "Blue Skies" by Nyra Brown and Ace Browne. The
show as seen in Dallas, according to the critic, bore little resemblance
to the original, and he noted that the first night audience was small.
Other members of the cast listed by Rosenfield were Jenny Lind, Larry
Lee Besson, and Louise Holms.31

The Journal reviewer commented that "the revue has fallen from
the high graces of the personal eye, if ever he gazed upon it, of
Anderson." He also called attention to the modesty which prevailed in
the show and complimented Nyra Brown, who he said, was remembered from
George White's Scandals of 192$, as the outstanding performer in the
Music Box Revue, stating that her personality and the work of Dave Burns
saved the show. The reviewer particularly praised the "Bandanna Ball"
scene where the chorus, dressed in white, sang a Southern lullaby led
by the Lyons sisters and then, through lighting effects, were "transformed
into the colored gentry of New Orleans' Decatur street as it stops at the Mississippi front."32

It was during the 1926-1927 season that the decline in the number of musical roadshows began which by 1929 was to reduce their number to what they had been during the 1921-1922 season. There were only six companies that came to the city in the 1926-1927 season as compared with eight the season before. Of these, one, The Student Prince, had been in the city before, and the other, the May Valentine Company, was more closely akin to the music field than to musical comedy. The trend started during the 1925-1926 season of bringing shows to the city that emphasized sex and nudity was heightened with the presentation of George White's Scandals, Earl Carroll's Vanities, and the Music Box Revue. The critics continued to voice their disapproval of second-rate companies but were enthusiastic about such shows as Rose Marie and Earl Carroll's Vanities. Again, continued reference was made to the great amount of publicity that preceded shows that might have a salacious appeal.

The 1927-1928 Season

George E. Wintz presented Ziegfeld Follies for three performances that began on November 1 as the first roadshow musical of the season. Played at the Old Mill Theater, its cast was headlined by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn and their Denishawn dancers. Ziegfeld had recently declared that he intended to lead the Broadway stage "back to cleanliness and artistry" and proclaimed his Follies as the first step in that direction. It was his position that the Broadway chorus girls were forced to be so brazen because they had to earn a living.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{33} *New York Sun.*, Oct. 30, 1927, III, 9.
The production, which also had in its cast as principals Dave Burns, Ina Leeland, Margie Royce and Ellen Eckler, opened to high praise by Rosenfield. "George Wintz puts on a striking show when he tries," the critic commented. He stated that "the St. Denis combination of motion and color supply more esthetic satisfaction and elicit great applause from those who do and pretend to and those who do not understand what it is all about." He called Ted Shawn's "Cosmic Dance of Siva" comparable to the best that Nijinsky and Morukin had presented in Dallas in the past, and he stated that Nyra Brown (Mrs. Wintz) was a facile comedian, Margie Royce likeable as the premiere danseuse, and Dave Brown a successful comedian. Rosenfield praised the chorus for its ensemble work and described the settings by John Wenger, who also built the sets for the Metropolitan Opera, as "superb." Rosenfield also called attention to the unusual cleanliness and modesty of the show and noted that the theater was filled to capacity.  

The production drew full houses throughout the run and grossed about $8,000, a sum which far exceeded expectations, according to Rosenfield.  

On November 20 and 21, Ziegfeld's Kid Boots also had a two-day run at the Old Mill with a cast that included Pauline Blair, Charles Williams, Harriet V. Miller, Chunn Paula, George Bogues, John Faber, Fifi Dare, Alice Dera, Howard Quigley, James Donnelli, Ayres Tavitt, Fred Sibley, Wayne Terry, Rena Brand, Frances King, Patsy Ruth Clark,

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34 News, Sat., Nov. 5, 1927, 4.
Charles Prince, John Lynch, Elsie Fairbanks, and Jackie Stark. The production had originally starred Eddie Cantor when it had been produced several years earlier.\textsuperscript{36}

The \textit{News} reviewer called attention to the fact that the version shown in Dallas of \textit{Kid Boots} was the Joseph DeMilt roadshow version and described it as less entitled to the Ziegfeld name than the \textit{Follies}. He stated that the audience liked the "animated grace" of Pauline Blair and enjoyed the "good looks and singing" of Howard Quigley. Charles Williams, who filled the role once taken by Cantor, was said by the reviewer to be not as satisfactory. Williams, according to the reviewer, "put over an occasional laugh and lost as many more." The reviewer also observed that some of the comedy gags had been "thrown off the burlesque stage ten years ago as plain filth." He described the costumes and settings as adequate and commented that the chorus ranged in age "from 18 to 40 years." The reviewer summarized with the comment that the show was one "which can not please all the playgoers in a city of this size."\textsuperscript{37}

A Negro musical, 7-11, featuring Mamie Smith, noted Negro blues singer, played on November 24 and 25 at the Fair Park Auditorium and drew an opening night audience of about 2,500 persons. The \textit{News} reviewer noted that "not one real black Southern Negro was seen in the audience and called the chorus "one of the loveliest . . . that has appeared in a long while. . . . Something suggesting barbarous

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{News}, Sun., Nov. 20, 1927, Amusement Section, 5.

\textsuperscript{37}\textit{News}, Mon., Nov. 21, 1927, 4.
antecedents is discernible in their chanting and steps." The pro-
duction was to have its second and final performance before an all-Negro audience.\(^\text{38}\)

The Shuberts, who had been supplying the theatrical attractions
to the State Fair of Texas for three years, scheduled *My Maryland* for
a three-day run at Fair Park Auditorium beginning Friday, March 9.
This was a new operetta by Sigmund Romberg and Dorothy Donnelly, and
singing the principal role was Lucius Metz, who had also sung the lead
in *The Student Prince* on its return engagement in Dallas. The *Journal*
reviewer called the show a type new to the city because it was an
operetta with American music. He said about Ruth Urban, a soprano who
had not been heard of in the city before, that she was one of the most
pleasing women to appear in an operetta in Dallas. Lucius Metz was
described as "most pleasing when singing with Miss Urban," and the
critic also praised the comedy of Clarence Harvey. He lauded the
chorus as one of the best the Shuberts had sent to the city and added
that *My Maryland* was "a first rate operetta and pleased the good-sized
audience Friday night [that] filled about two-thirds of the seats in
the roomy auditorium."\(^\text{39}\)

John Rosenfield also called the production a novelty for
Dallas audiences who had had "their tastes cultivated by Balkan and
mid-European romances." He praised the singing of both Ruth Urban and
Lucius Metz, but said about Romberg's music that "when musical

\(^{38}\) *News*, Fri., Nov. 25, 1927, 4.

\(^{39}\) *Journal*, Sat., Mar. 10, 1928, 2.
invention fails . . . tricky orchestration comes to his rescue [and] when orchestration ideas run out, there is always a pretty tune by someone else to appropriate." Rosenfield thought that the show was one of the major events of the year in the city.\(^{10}\)

The final stage presentation at the Fair Park Auditorium for the season was *A Night in Spain*, a show in which Al Jolson had formerly appeared. Presented on May 29, it had an illustrious cast that included Phil Baker, Ted Healy, Aileen Stanley and the Gertrude Hoffman girls. More than eight thousand theatergoers crowded into the Auditorium for the two performances, and John Rosenfield called the musical "a sample of what will visit here if plans materialize to bring back original Broadway productions to . . . the road." He observed that "local censorship officials, grown panicky from the flesh tints of the advertising posters and circulars, succeeded in having one scene eliminated entirely and several others sheathed in transparent drapery." The show had more to recommend it than nudity, Rosenfield insisted. He particularly praised Aileen Stanley, a well-known recording artist, for her impersonations and also spoke highly of Ted Healy who acted as the master of ceremonies. Rosenfield stated about Phil Baker that he was "an accordionist, given more to patter than to the squeeze box."

Baker, according to Rosenfield, "tore up the running schedule with the aid of a fine 'straight' planted in one of the boxes." The blackouts and the front curtain sketches were more inventive than the ones

\(^{10}\) *News*, Sat., Mar. 10, 1928, 4.
usually seen in Dallas, according to the critic, and he pointed out that they did not deal much in innuendo.\textsuperscript{41}

The reviewer for the Journal found the musical entertaining and stated that it had "some excellent ensemble and solo dancing and more entertaining comedy." He expressed the opinion that many in the audience may have gone to the show because of the "visual attractions promised by the posters," but that the Dallas censors had made sure there was a minimum of nudity. He said that these patrons were not disappointed by the show, however. The reviewer also praised Phil Baker, Ted Healy and Aileen Stanley and commended Helba Huara, "Spanish dancer of Vanity Fair Pictures," Cortez and Peggy, "ballroom dancers of note," the Andreint Brothers band, and the Gertrude Hoffman girls. Phil Baker and his friend, according to the reviewer, provided the audience with some of the best entertainment ever supplied in the Auditorium and he commented on the applause with which Baker's impromptu comedy with Miss Stanley was received. He praised the naturalness of Aileen Stanley's voice and stated that though the production was not spectacularly staged the sets and costumes were attractive.\textsuperscript{42}

Although even fewer musical roadshows were seen in Dallas during the 1927-1928 season than in the previous one, those that did appear were of far greater merit, except for Kid Boots. The Follies, My Maryland, 7-11, and A Night in Spain were not only presented to enthusiastic critical acclaim but also attracted large audiences.


During this season and the ones that immediately followed there was noticeable an increasing tendency for the better-known performers to come to Dallas with the musical roadshows.

The 1928-1929 Season

Folies Bergere, the first musical of the 1928-1929 season, was booked into the Showhouse Theater for a week's run, beginning October 14, under the auspices of the American Legion. According to the advance publicity, the Legion had "brought the extravaganza from France" to present at the Legion convention in San Antonio. The show ran into censor trouble in Dallas because of its window cards and these had to be altered before it opened.\(^3\)

Featured in the cast were Will Morrissey, musical comedy star, who acted as master of ceremonies, and George Romanoff as the comedian, who did a novelty wrestling act. Robert T. Fitzgerald, reviewing for the *Times Herald*, commented that Doris Rue, a Dallas girl, did much to make the evening a success. He also praised the Ward Sisters as good singers and dancers but stated that "not even their clothes ... ever saw the Boulevard." He lauded Will Morrissey as a master of ceremonies but called attention to the fact that most of the acts were done in front of dark drops. Observing that the costumes were attractive, he stated that the girls, however, "might smile and smile and be a villain in front of the somber curtain." Fitzgerald noted that Romanoff's burlesque wrestling act had been seen in Dallas before, but praised

\(^3\)News, Sat., Sept. 29, 1928, 4.
Morrissey and Freddie Harper for their comedy "in the Dave Burns manner." He also had kind words for Carolyn Le Ruez, a dancer, and noted that there was little of the risque in the production. He reported that Colonel William E. Easterwood, who was instrumental in getting the show for San Antonio, announced at the opening performance that the top prices had been reduced from $4.40 to $3 and that Colonel Easterwood emphatically denied the show had been censored by the San Antonio police.\textsuperscript{14}

The Journal reviewer called the show "an entertaining American revue with some excellent and as much poor talent in the cast of more than fifty performers." He described the outstanding feature of the revue as its dancing but observed that the show lacked a capable vocalist and had stale humor. He complimented Bernard Lohmueller, the producer, on the costumes and sets considering the haste in which the show had been assembled, and praised Carolynne \textsuperscript{sic} Le Ruez and Freddie Harper for an acrobatic dance that almost stopped the show. But he lambasted the chorus line, calling them "Truehart ponies," and stated that one section was "downright amateurish." Will Morrissey drew compliments for his sense of humor and Doris Rue for her tap dancing. The Journal reviewer noted, too, that the show was "heavily clothed," but stated this was true only on opening night when the Dallas censor was on hand.\textsuperscript{45}

John Rosenfield also observed that the American version of Folies Bergere substituted "gaudily striking outfits" for nudity except

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14}Times Herald, Mon., Oct. 15, 1928, 8.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45}Journal, Tues., Oct. 16, 1928, 2.}
for the "presentation of one lonely miss in complete undress." He gave credit to Will Morrissey for keeping up interest in the show and stated that Freddie Harper was a better dancer than comedian and that Mac (Red) Carter was "a humorist of the old stripe." Rosenfield praised Sonia Svobda for her gymnastic dancing, and George Romanoff, the comedian. But Rosenfield, too, criticized the lack of skill of the chorus line and stated that "in order to live up to its name, the 'Folies Bergere' should have shocked, and this it failed to do." And he added that the success of the run would depend on the dancing, which, he observed, was "not up to metropolitan standards, but still good enough for us hicks."  

In spite of the shortcomings pointed out by the critics, the show grossed approximately $4,000 during a week that the State Fair was also being presented.

Naughty Marietta was revived again in Dallas on November 10 at Fair Park Auditorium in a matinee and night performance with a cast that included Era [sic] Briggs, Ferdinand Zegel, Julia de Revueltas, Aimee Torriani, James Blaine and Dan Marble. The reviewer for the Times Herald pointed out that only small audiences attended the two performances. He called Robert E. Griffin, "whose resonant baritone was given an opportunity to display itself in the theme song," the real star, and praised Era Briggs, the leading woman, as having "an interesting voice, a great deal of nerve and personality and the ability to dance." The singing ability of Ferdinand Zegel, the leading

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man, also drew praise. He thought that Dan Marble, the comedian, started slowly but ended well, and that Aimee Torriani, who was cast as a quadroon slave, appeared to be more interested "in the various personages on the stage in their real life roles than in the stage business."48

The Journal critic condemned the performance severely, contending that the cast was poor, the audience disappointed, and that the wrong interpretation was given the lines and music. The worst offender, according to the reviewer, was Ferdinand Zegel, cast as Captain Dick, who, he stated, "apparently had an obstruction in his voice that prevented its reaching more than two feet in front of him without great physical and mental strain." About Era Briggs, in the title role, the reviewer commented that she "started as if she intended to give a good performance, but evidently changed her mind." He stated that Julie de Revueltas, cast as Adah, had the best voice in the cast, but that the comedian "might have been good in his day." The reviewer called the orchestra "sleazy" and described it as a disappointing show.49

May Valentine and her company returned to Dallas on November 16, appearing at the Circle Theater with Rudolf Friml's The Firefly. The reviewer for the News called Ione Wilber, the female lead, "a capable soprano" who did an outstanding job, and commented that the operetta was well staged. He called the entire company, brought to

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48Times Herald, Sun., Nov. 11, 1928, I, 11.
49Journal, Mon., Nov. 12, 1928, 4.
Dallas by May Valentine, "who claims the distinction of being the only woman conductor of opera," the best she had come with to the city.\(^{50}\)

Again the *Journal* reviewer, who signed his article R. L., chose to disagree. "It is to be hoped," he wrote, "that 'the Firefly' was the worst thing the company has done." He pointed out that the performance was given on the night of a heavy rain and commented that "the jinx still seems to hover over the playhouse on North St. Paul Street."\(^{51}\)

The *Times Herald* reviewer had a different opinion. He stated that a "few more productions like 'The Firefly' and the blight that in the past has been directed against this theater will be removed and seats that have not been used for many a night will once again be filled." He called the crowd fair, in spite of the rain and "the after taste of 'Naughty Marietta' presented at the Fair Park Auditorium recently," and added that the first act was bad, but that once the show got under way, the music had "all the lilt, catchiness and color of the masters, Gilbert and Sullivan." The critic praised the singing ability of Ione Wilber.\(^{52}\)

*Gay Paree*, the first Winter Garden revue to play in Dallas before it reached New York, was presented for four performances at the Fair Park Auditorium, starting on Wednesday, November 22, and proved to be one of the high spots of the season. It had a cast headed by

\(^{50}\) *Times Herald*, Sat., Nov. 17, 1928, 11.

\(^{51}\) *Journal*, Sat., Nov. 17, 1928, 4. As expanded upon elsewhere in this study, the Circle was the setting for several unsuccessful stock company ventures.

\(^{52}\) *Times Herald*, Sat., Nov. 17, 1928, 5.
Chic Sale, Brennan and Rogers, La Pulchra, Sylvia Foos, Irene Cornell, the Kelo Brothers and Berjoff troupe.

In his review, John Rosenfield noted that though the show had some nudity it emphasized other entertainment. He gave high praise to the dancing of the female ensembles and to Chic Sale, who, he noted, made constant reference to local matters during his antics. Rosenfield stated that the big audience had come to see a show that compared with A Night in Spain. The critic observed that it wasn't quite as good as its predecessors because although it had excellent qualities it "lacked such moments of incontinent hilarity produced by one Phil Baker last year." The high point of the evening came, according to Rosenfield, when "the forty girls essayed a forest dance which combined the Tiller ribbon and snake effects with new touches of rare invention [sic] by LeRoy Prinz." Chic Sale did a burlesque church service that had already been seen in a Movietone film short at the Majestic Theater, and Rosenfield commented that "there is a vein of social satire in Sales' performances that gives one a sense of something more than buffoonery." The critic praised the State Fair Association for bringing Dallas its second authentic Broadway revue in two years and stated that the audience of four thousand and more that attended the opening night of Gay Paree answered the question as to "whether the tall grass wants road shows or not." He observed that Dallas wanted such shows when they had "the talent and mounting of a 'Gay Paree.'”

The *Times Herald* review, done by a critic whose initials were ROB, called the production "colorful, tuneful, with zip, zest, beauty and polish," and described it as "an unqualified success." He observed that the record-sized crowd proved that although Dallas audiences did not attend operas, tragedies or symphonies in record numbers they would turn out for a show like *Gay Paree*. He praised the sets as colorful and the dancing as better than anything that had been seen in Dallas for a long time, but sympathized with those who had been attracted to the performance by the posters advertising the show, for "all was as pure as the driven snow." Chic Sale was highly complimented by the critic but he commented on the stale quality of the jokes made by the other comedians. He observed that bedroom scenes were the staple of the other comics but that Sale's humor contained much satire. He found Sale's portrayal of an old soldier on his way to "the home" pathetic and his enactment of the preacher convincing. But Sale's greatest triumph, according to the critic, came when the comedian "dragged the customers back through the haze of years into the little red schoolhouse." The dancing drew favorable comment from the reviewer but he commented that there were "a few undraped numbers that bore no cards across their anatomies upon which was emblazoned the word 'Censored,' such as was the case with the little girl who appeared in the Legion's 'Folies Bergere,' given here and censored here recently." 54

Robert Lunsford, who reviewed *Gay Paree* for the *Journal*, found the chorus scenes spectacular, commenting that they met popular expectation, but stated that the comedy, apart from Sale's routines, lacked

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spontaneity. He, too, attributed the big audience to the "whispering campaign" that had been carried on about the show and observed that its pace was a bit too fast, noting that in at least two instances some of the jokes were missed by the audience and had to be explained by aides on the stage. He described the "great Chinese love boat scene," which had been much publicized in advance, as a failure and commented that the show went downhill after the middle of the final act. The "Mothers of the World" scene which displayed "representatives of six nations, with suitable choruses, then a scene that looked like a Christmas card in heroic size or a stained glass window in a cathedral," was the most spectacular of the evening, according to Lunsford.55

On November 25, Rio Rita began a four-day run at the Showhouse Theater.56 The next touring musical seen in the city was Hit the Deck, played at the Showhouse for three performances that began on Friday, February 8. Walter Holbrook, reviewing for the Times Herald, wrote about the show:

The chorus is fairly good. Most of the sailor boys really look tough enough to be sailors, the ladies of the ensemble are passable, and the chorus sings well enough to get by. After the mammy comedienne, Katherine Bingham, had failed to put over the best song in the show, "Hallelujah," the chorus succeeded in doing so. . . .

Perhaps it was not to be expected that the principals should sing . . . but it does seem as if one or two ought to be able to carry a tune. But apparently none can.

The show includes some acceptable dancing, however, and Sunny Dale is good looking, even if she is a bit large and flounces around over much. But at that she does not flounce


56News, Thurs., Nov. 22, 1928, 10. The Circle Theater had been renamed the Showhouse.
around any more than some of the others, notably Miriam Crosby, who has the part of prima donna. A small percentage of the comedy is good. But anyhow, Friday evening, for once on a wintry night, the Showhouse was comfortably warm.57

John Rosenfield also criticized the show for its poor music and singing and stated that, except for Katherine Bingham, none of the cast "could even carry a tune." He also attributed the failure of the comedy to amuse the audience to the fact that the show had "too good a story." He commented adversely on the dancing, describing it as "the most ungraceful set of calisthenics since WFAM58 discontinued its radio and health exercises" and had harsh words about the small orchestra. Rosenfield summed up his reaction by calling the evening one of "forced pep, unprovoked encores and a tepid audience of surprising size, considering the present condition of the 'Sunny South.'" The cast, as listed by the critic, included Edward Garr, Sunny Dale, Katherine Bingham, Ernie Mack, Betty Benton, Rita Carita, John Robb, George Scully, the Mannequin Four, Lois Landis, Dan de Leo, and Butler Mandeville.59

There were six musical roadshows seen in the city during the 1928-1929 season, and of these only one, Gay Paree, met with unanimous critical acclaim. Again the critics made reference to the demand by Dallas audiences for name stars and first rate companies. There was evidence in the reviews that the theatrical business in the South was already beginning to feel the effects of economic decline and one comment was made about the inadequacy of the Circle Theater for shows during the

57Times Herald, Sat., Feb. 9, 1929, 3.
58The Dallas Morning News radio station.
winter months. The impact of advance publicity that hinted at nudity and risque scenes in the shows was again observable. Both Folies Bergere and Gay Paree had been heavily publicized as possessing these attributes, and both drew large crowds. The highlight of the season came with Gay Paree which combined the things that Dallas seemed to want in a musical—big names plus excellence of performance and production.

The 1929-1930 Season

The first touring musical of the new season was The Vagabond King, given at Fair Park Auditorium for a night performance on Tuesday, November 5, and for a matinee and night performance on Wednesday, November 6. The title role was played by Paul Keast, and other lead roles were taken by Vida Hanna, Emma Wilcox and Joseph Miller.60

The show was presented by George Wintz, and John Rosenfield cast light on Wintz shows in general, and on The Vagabond King in particular, when he wrote in his Sunday column:

Ziegfeld may be "Ziggy" to New York but he is only Mr. Ziegfeld to us. More familiar by far is the ponderous figure of George Wintz whose "Vagabond King" visited Dallas last week. It is Mr. Wintz who provides the bulk of our musical shows and we had better be nice to him or he may quit—and then there won't be any more musical shows.

Almost alone of producers he seems able to perambulate a fifty to seventy-five man unit with profit. The rest are sticking in New York and wishing they were in the picture business. For... neither the talkies nor the little theaters nor silents drove the road shows to the warehouse. Railroad fares, wage scales of backstage and pit crews, and the tendency of the public to make two one-dollar bills buy tickets, pay

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60News, Sun., Nov. 3, 1929, Amusement Section, 4.
street car fares and purchase ice cream sodas have spoiled the peripatetic "legit."

A No. One road company or a bona fide Broadway cast in Dallas are accidents at best. Such a show is using the city as haven of refuge in a mad dash from the big town of the East to the metropolises of the West Coast. A producer who premeditatingly routes a first class and expensive troupe through the Southwest is a greater optimist than the astrologer who wig-wags Mars.

Conditions have left the boom cities like Dallas to the mercies of "turkey shows" and motion pictures. Mr. Wintz has penetrated the subject and concluded that a first rate public needs as first rate a show as second class conditions can provide. . . . This requires a setup . . . different from Broadway's.

Mr. Wintz's base of operations . . . is Dayton, O. He goes to New York only often enough to buy rights to a well exploited name . . . Ziegfeld Follies, George White's Scandals, Texas Guinan's Padlocks. The rest he does in Dayton. For salaries he can afford to pay, only broken down choristers or stage-struck flappers can be had. He chooses the stage-struck flapper, thereby differing from nine-tenths of his colleagues. A bit of self-conscious beauty, he has discovered, has more box office appeal than the lame and bovine competence. The Wintz chorus may be green, but it's fresh. Standard principals and comedians may be hired at reasonable stipends and present less of a problem. Scenery, compact and collapsible may be painted in Dayton, to carry sufficient suggestion of Josef Urban and Nicholas Roerich elegance. Enough of the Wayburn, Royce and Lee routines can be aped to project the sense of the thing.

In this way Mr. Wintz is able to concoct a production that ranks somewhere between a No. 1 road troupe and a No. 2. His "Vagabond King" rated nearer No. 1 than No. 2. It was deficient only in grandiosity. The spectacular element, the visual element, the overpowering ensemble effect were unavailable. Everything else was cared for conscientiously, even to the paradoxical but authentic Scotch mail of the warring feudalists. The "Vagabond King" was the leading man's show and Mr. Wintz obtained the understudy of Dennis King, who stirred Broadway considerably. Mr. Paul Keast is a highly promising operetta tenor and delivered himself of the best vocalisms heard at the Auditorium since "Student Prince." . . .

We thought Mr. Wintz's prima donna was weak. The lady was gifted with admirable vocal timbre but had the unfortunate propensity of singing flat --something that any Galli Curci can do and get away with. The rest of the company successfully projected whatever idea they had to represent.
The best thing about a Wintz show is its spirit. This is always alert and amiable. Any one of his companies can be found working hard to please.61

Padlocks of 1929, with a cast that featured Cecil Lean and Cleo Mayfield, played for a one night stand on Wednesday, December 11 at the Fair Park Auditorium. Others in the cast were Norma Galo, Richard Ryan, Dorothy Randolph, Danny Beck, Carl Byal, David Burns the English comedian, Bobby Burns, Patsie Dane, Sally Scott, "Billie" Ferris, Loretta Campeau, the Bower twins and Elaine Pring.62

Jack Beall, Jr., reviewing for the Times Herald, was lavish in his praise of the production:

As is so often the case when you go to a show expecting the worst, you get a million laughs. "Padlocks of 1929" is the funniest thing that has been here since "A Night in Spain," and if you ask us, assayed about 1,500 per cent more amusement value than those nice, heavy pretentious affairs they give us annually during the Fair.

With the exception of a couple of moments it was a clean show with only danse du ventre. And that was pinched by a stage cop, which saved the morality all around. It brought forward a team whom at one time any way, [sic] were prime names on Broadway, Cecil Lean and Cleo Mayfield, and they work together with great neatness, particularly in their William Tell scene, where they chatter the same words into each other's teeth at a clip which exceeds anything on the speaking stage. . . .

The high points of the evening to us were when Dave Burns was holding forth. Here is a comic. He takes Bobby Clark's makeup of painted-on eye glasses, and some of Ted Healy's mannerisms, and adds a terrific lot of Dave Burns. The total is a wallow in the aisle. . . . They had some Tiller girls who did all the approved routines; they had Norma Gallo, who can kick higher backwards than most girls can forwards, and best of all, the performers actually seemed to get a lot out of it themselves. The poorest show given at the auditorium last night was by the audience. It was a cold house. . . .

If this show were staying more than the one night, we think it would deserve, and get, a better crowd. It is too bad more people didn't get to see it and to form a new idea of a Wintz show. They can be very good, when they don't try to be elaborate.63

Advance publicity in Dallas for Nikita Balieff's Chauve-Souris which was presented by Morris Gest on December 12, 13, and 14 in Fair Park Auditorium, began as early as October 2, 1929, when the show was ready to start its transcontinental tour.64 Presented by Morris Gest, the show had been in existence for twenty-one years and before the American public for eight years. The Dallas publicity stated that the 1929 version was entirely new, except for an encore of the famous "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," and that the Chauve-Souris was a musical offshoot of the Moscow Art Theater that was known as the "Bat Theater of Moscow" because of the night when the first revue was launched, a bat flew out from the rafters. Gest had first seen the revue in 1921, according to the publicity, and had been its American impresario since then.65

When the Chauve-Souris opened in Dallas, it was described by John Rosenfield as "near to being . . . the very best show on earth." The critic stated that the opening night audience was surprisingly large and many of the patrons seemed to be transients who had seen the production

63_The Times Herald, Thurs., Dec. 12, 1929, III, 4._

64_The Dallas Morning News, after John Rosenfield became Amusements Editor, adopted a policy of beginning the buildup for a show well in advance. From time to time, stories appeared telling about the complement of the company and giving other background information. This publicity became intensified as the show date neared. The announcement that the show would be seen in Dallas came in the News, Wed., Oct. 2, 1929, 10._

65_News, Sun., Dec. 1, 1929, Amusement Section, 4._
earlier. As though attempting to counteract popular impressions that the show was too high-brow, Rosenfield described it as genuine vaudeville, and much of his very long review was taken up with comparing the Chauve-Souris acts with those on the American vaudeville stage. He observed that the "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" had been widely imitated but stated that the Chauve-Souris presentation with its "delightful costumes, puffed paste cheeks, stiff metronomic actions" gave it a genuineness that wiped away "desecrating memories." As for Nikita Balieff, Rosenfield commented on the way he articulated "slowly and labially in the finest of broken English" and the humorous manner in which he made reference to his own accent. The critic continued:

"His humor is broad, jovial and usually unbarbed. . . . "The ways he says it," applies specifically to his case. Otherwise why would his statement "you should all learn to speak it. It is an easy language—why in Russia even children of four speak it"—be so excruciatingly funny and so enormously clever?

Rosenfield described the show as "high brow vaudeville" and stated that its performers were artists having a good time. He called attention to the varieties of modern music and decor employed in the production and commented that it was "richer in novelty, invention, and humor than anything else you are likely to see this season or next."

Jack Beall, Jr., reviewer for the Times Herald, called the presence of only four hundred persons at the opening performance a blow to Dallas' reputation as "a connoisseur of the arts." He argued from personal knowledge that most of the acts were the same as those that had been originally done in New York in 1922 "when that town went Russian

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with such enthusiasm that Chauve Souris [sic] played sixty-five unbroken weeks at the Century and filled it at every performance," and stated that the Dallas presentation had virtually the same cast. He, too, called attention to the artistry of the performers:

Every actor in it is an artist. Everyone of them can, and do, take principal parts, and then can take small bits in other scenes and do them with the same care and artistry as are lavished in the larger parts. These are mature artists. They are not exactly the type of young and vapid vaudevillians you have grown to expect.

They are not distinguished by their youth, beauty or their "it." But they are infinitely distinguished by their spirit, their liveliness, which can be changed to a terrific pathos, in the next scene, as in the "Organ Grinder" number, and to unashamed sentimentality as in the "Souvenir of the Past." They are distinguished by their grotesquerie, their strange and bizarre makeup and costuming which causes them to appear just as though they had stepped out of an old Russian story book with pictures. They are distinguished above all else, perhaps, by bringing to the stage such disparate works of art as "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" . . . and "Song of the Volga Boatmen." It held our first night audience spellbound. . . . It is a timeless, universal thing. . . . Finally, the Chauve Souris is distinguished by the presence of Nikita Balieff, a vaudeville show in himself. . . .

He comes before the curtain and does things to the English language and to the French, too. He had his audience in the hollow of his hand from the first last night—and not because it was so small—and proved again his title to being the world's greatest conferencier. His moon face is illuminated by the greatest humor and intelligence as he comes out and sighs, more than says, "Villagers from the Souse of Roos-ia will not sink sadt sons!" or "The terrible Roos-i-an Cossaks!" and looks at you and shivers, as he fades slowly behind the curtain. Sometimes speech leaves him entirely. He will get to a dramatic height of description and then English fails him. He simply stops and sadly shakes his head and drifts curtainward. Such English does he use that for several years we have wondered . . . what it is that Balieff says when he comes out after each sketch. . . .

The settings for every scene are done . . . by artists of name and fame in Russia. . . . The costuming is another riot of color, done by the distinguished men of their line.

The spirit, dash and pathos of the folk songs, the swelling gypsy choruses that gather speed and more speed until the last . . . the ludicrous squalling and name calling of two fishwives who sing at each other in Russian, which is entirely understandable because of the perfect miming of the two, the takeoff on grand opera, the Popoff porcelains that become
animated and dance madly, the Knife grinders chorus, where
ten suitors appear only to be rejected, all these are com­
pletely popular and any butter-and-egg man in the world would
enjoy himself... .
The only act which is poor is a recently-engrafted one in
which the Moscow bat tries to become an American eagle. The
"Doorman at Maxims" is done by an artist, but his material
sounds a false note in such a show.
The only excuse for Dallas not turning out to see the
Chauve Souris, we hope, is that a large proportion of the
populace did not know what to expect. . . . Of course,
Christmas week and the weeks before, are notoriously bad
weeks for show business. . . . It is unfortunate in that
sense that Chauve Souris comes at this time.67

The production only drew between four hundred and six hundred
persons for each of its four performances, and Rosenfield defended the
Dallas turnout on grounds that the show had first been played on the
Century Theater Roof and not in the three-thousand seat Century Theater,
and that Morris Gest had "figured only 400 persons for his performances."
The critic asked: "By what strange reasoning did road show managers
expect 4,000 persons in the State Fair Auditorium." He noted that Gest
had yielded to the "invariable American temptation of large grosses and
many seats," whereas when he first introduced the show in this country
he had "figured on the four hundred." Rosenfield's comment was that
"Dallas has its four hundred as well as any other place."68

The last touring musical comedy of the 1929-1930 season pre­
sented in Dallas was A Connecticut Yankee, shown for three nights
beginning on Saturday, February 8, with matinees on Saturday and Sunday.
The show, according to advances notices, had played for a year at the

Vanderbilt Theater in New York, three months in Boston and in Phila-
delphia, five months in Chicago, and was coming to Dallas after six
weeks in Detroit. The principals in the cast were Richard Lane, Mary
Adams and Nina Bryant. Others in the cast included Strake Patterson,
George E. Mack, Paul Everton, Bert Saunders, Gordon Busby, Olive Bertram,
Helen Gates and Francella Waterbury.69

Jack Beall, Jr., in the Times Herald, described the show as
"an essentially amusing musical comedy with smart lines, adept actors
who can turn the comic phrase, music which boasts two hits, sets that
are refreshing to the eye and a chorus that isn't at all hard on the
self-same optic." Noting that approximately five hundred persons attended
the matinee performance which he was reviewing, he stated that they were
amused throughout the production. He cited a scene that brought down
the house and which may have unintentional. It occurred when a "chorus
man with a perfectly straight face danced through his routine while BVD's
peeked further and further below the coat of mail under which they had
been insecurely tucked." Richard Lane had an excellent sense of comedy
that caused the audience to forgive his poor singing ability, according
to the reviewer. And Beall also praised Mary Adams, who, he stated,
"can do almost everything but she chiefly can look adorable." He
particularly liked the scene between Lane and Miss Adams in which a play
was made on the word "slippus" as used in "slippus a kiss." He also
commended Nina Bryant in the role of Queen Morgan le Faye; Helen Gates,
whom he called a "cute dancing and singing Mistress Evelyn La Belle Mans;"

He also commended Paul Everton, who played King Arthur, noting that Everton would give his one-thousandth presentation of the role during the Dallas run. Rosenfield thought the dialogue witty and the lyrics by Lorenz Hart sophisticated and clever. He praised the John F. Hawkins costumes and scenery, observing they were very much like those of Willy Fogany with the same distortion of line." Rosenfield, too, censored the small size of the orchestra and said about the choruses that they sang "like so many Janet Gaynors and Charles Farrells." He also mentioned the small size of the audience and mused that everyone must have been thinking after the show: "What a show it must have been in 1927!"71

Immediately following the run of A Connecticut Yankee, Roy Rupard, secretary of the State Fair Association, announced that no more "institutional bookings" would be made at the Fair Park Auditorium for the rest of the season, in spite of the fact that the roadshow season ordinarily continued until the middle of May. Commenting on this announcement, John Rosenfield pointed out that the Auditorium, for several years, had guarded against losses by refusing to guarantee the fees for visiting shows. They all had to be played on a percentage basis. He noted that the touring shows during the 1929-1930 season had failed to show audience strength, and that A Connecticut Yankee, which had a total audience of less than five thousand persons for its five performances, had taken what he called the "booby prize" for attendance. He observed that the show had failed in the city in spite of favorable reviews and excellent audience reaction.72

71News, Sun., Feb. 9, 1930, Main News Section, 15.
and Strake Patterson in the part of Sir Galahad. About George E. Mack, who portrayed Merlin, the critic commented that he was "the jolliest old goat you ever saw." An entr' acte scene done before a curtain designed by Robert Benchley which showed the plan of the castle and its environs with "some of the Galahadians of John Erskine" worked into its details, also was complimented by the critic. The only adverse criticism he made was about the small size of the orchestra. He contended that the show was more highly amusing than any that had been in the city since A Night in Spain.70

John Rosenfield characterized the show as "musical insanity," maintaining that insanity, unlike imbecility, is marked by rigorous logic. Observing that the production had been stripped down for the road and was not seen in Dallas in its original form, he contended that enough was left to give Dallas audiences an idea of what it must have been like and that "if the audience can fill in the gaps on the Auditorium skeleton, it will see one of the best shows that ever made connections at Denison." The critic particularly praised the two leads, Mary Adams and Richard Lane, neither of whom, he pointed out, were from the original New York cast. He described Lane as "a youngish Lowell Sherman . . . with quick delivery of wit, effervescent manner and two solid wallops attached to his shoulders," and Miss Adams as "a beauteous blonde with excellent horizontal and vertical ratios, a serviceable singing voice, and bona fide technic and grace for the dance."

70Times Herald, Sun., Feb. 9, 1930, I, 11.
Economic conditions were keenly felt by the touring musicals that came to the city during the 1929-1930 season. Although all four of the presentations received good reviews, and two of them, Chauve-Souris and A Connecticut Yankee, won lavish praise from the reviewers, attendance was so poor that the State Fair management cut the season short by four months. The failure of Chauve-Souris in the city may be attributed, in part, to its sophisticated nature, but this does not explain the poor attendance at such a show as A Connecticut Yankee. However, Dallas stature as a theater center was definitely improving, for by the end of the decade it was beginning to get fine touring companies and major performers.

The overall picture of touring musicals in the city during the 1925-1930 period was dominated by the State Fair Auditorium. Too big, as has been seen, for the usual legitimate production, the Auditorium by 1930 was also too large for musicals that did not feature big name stars or emphasize nudity and sex. In 1925, Sally, pronounced mediocre by the reviewer, drew full houses. In the same season, No, No, Nanette was so successful that it was revived in the city the following season. Lady Be Good, also panned by the critics, drew fair-sized audiences and My Girl attracted three thousand persons on opening night.

The success of Sally may be attributed in part to the presence of Lou Powers in the cast, and in part to public curiosity about the new Auditorium. No, No, Nanette had attained an international reputation before it came, and Lady Be Good had no outstanding stars. But they came during the prosperous years of the half-decade. They were of better quality than Dallas theatergoers were accustomed to seeing. Roy Rupard,
secretary of the Fair Association, stated in February, 1930, that the Fair management had adopted a policy of keeping "turkey" shows, a trade name for cheap touring shows that used inferior talent, out of the city, and of bringing in only shows that had enjoyed "successful runs in cities the same size as Dallas or larger." The quality of the productions, the prosperous economic conditions, and the Auditorium itself, a facility adaptable for staging the shows in a large and opulent manner, all contributed to the success of these early productions.

But it was not until such "girlie-girlie" shows as the Scandals, the Follies, Artists and Models, and the Vanities came to Dallas under the aegis of George Wintz, press-agented in masterful manner so as to give audiences the impression they would see shows that were naughty and revealing, that Dallas theatergoers began flocking to the touring musicals in capacity numbers. These shows also starred well-known musical comedy performers. The Scandals, presented in February, 1926, packed the Auditorium with its revealing displays. The Greenwich Village Follies had the internationally-known comedian, Raymond Hitchcock, in its cast, and also starred Evelyn Hoey. Artists and Models, given during March, 1926, was racy and revealing.

The success of these shows during the 1925-1926 season brought more of the same type to the city the following season. The Scandals came back in October, 1926, and went to extremes in its undress scenes. When the Vanities came in February, 1927, the critics noted the way it catered to mass tastes. It also featured name stars like Lou Powers,

Bert Swor, Dave Chasen, and Mary Dowling. In contrast with the success of this presentation, the Music Box Revue, singled out by the reviewers because of its modesty, drew only small audiences. Some who attended the more risque productions were drawn by publicity about how the show had been censored elsewhere.

The Old Mill Theater housed touring musicals during the spring and fall of 1927. The seating capacity of the theater was only 2,000 as compared with the 5,000 who could be accommodated at Fair Park Auditorium. Yet there is significance in the fact that Ziegfeld Follies of 1928, a show that Ziegfeld himself declared was a step away from nudity and vulgarity and back to cleanliness and artistry, and which had as featured performers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, filled the Old Mill for four performances. My Maryland, given at Fair Park Auditorium in March, 1928, drew favorable reviews and attracted moderately large audiences.

Perhaps the most popular show of the entire five year period was A Night in Spain, a musical which combined the appeal of nudity with such name stars as Phil Baker, Ted Healy, Aileen Stanley and the Gertrude Hoffman girls. It attracted eight thousand theatergoers during its two performances at the Fair Park Auditorium. Folies Bergere, given at the Showhouse Theater during October, 1928, had Will Morrissey to recommend it as far as talent went and much advance publicity as far as sensationalism was concerned. And during a bad week, it managed to take in a $4,000 gross in a theater that seated about 1,500 persons.

Only small audiences attended the revival of Naughty Marietta given during November, 1928, at Fair Park. Its little-known mediocre cast doomed it to failure in the city.
Gay Paree had the same ingredients as Night in Spain and also drew huge audiences to Fair Park Auditorium in November, 1928.

Perhaps the most significant events of the five-year period insofar as the musical comedies were concerned were the failure of Chauve-Souris and A Connecticut Yankee. Here were two shows that received enthusiastic and lengthy reviews and which had enjoyed long runs elsewhere. Although the critics did not mention the stock market crash, undoubtedly this was a major cause of the poor houses.

The poor audience showings of the two musicals led the State Fair management to end the 1929-1930 season four months early and also led to the decision of greater caution in booking touring shows for the Auditorium, both legitimate and musical.

It was this decision which, early in the 1930's was to encourage Interstate, Inc., under leadership of Karl Hoblitzelle, to make the Majestic, Palace, and Melba theaters available for touring productions.

The State Fair management had made the attempt to bring better shows to the city. This trend toward bringing musicals with good casts and established reputations was to continue. The "turkey shows" which had prevailed in the 1920-1925 period were to disappear. So, too, were shows which had such impresarios as George Wintz as their producers. But after 1930, there were to be fewer touring musicals, and those that did come, were to feature name stars.

One other factor must be mentioned. The coming of the sound films brought severe competition to the touring musicals. When a show was successful on Broadway, it could be put on the screen with even more spectacular effects.
Dallas was perhaps more critical of poor musicals than other cities of comparable size. The city had long been victim to second-rate productions. But Dallas, like cities elsewhere in the country, was also to feel the effects of the sound films and the onset of the depression.

There was still a big audience for the touring musicals in 1925. Five years later, for a show to draw a big audience in the city, it had to have well-known stars or it had to have been presaged by sensational publicity.
CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAJESTIC PROVES ITS STABILITY

Trends in Vaudeville During the Period

A revival of interest in vaudeville marked the 1925-1930 period. The half-decade was characterized by new experimentation in the task of satisfying what appears to have been a constantly shifting public taste. The unit show, the introduction of the "conferencier" or master of ceremonies, the development of the big-time theater orchestra specializing in popular tunes, and the various attempts made at integrating the orchestra with the stage show were all signs not only of the revived interest in stage entertainment but also of the efforts to sustain this interest.

When the former Jefferson Theater reopened as the Pantages in January, 1926, with a new policy of live entertainment, the News noted that there was "a quickened interest in vaudeville in Dallas." This revival was said in the report to have gripped the entire nation and to have "forced the picture house impresarios to don their thinking caps." The Palace Theater had already announced its intentions of enlarging its orchestra and of supplementing its programs with "flesh and blood" entertainers, and the Publix roadshows were reported ready to be launched at both the Palace and Melba theaters. Both houses were being remodeled to meet the needs of more elaborate stage entertainment. There was even the rumor that the Capitol would adopt a vaudeville
policy.¹

A year later, John Rosenfield reported that vaudeville had been restored "to its eminence of 1909-10," and he also added significantly that "the Vitaphone shorts are intrenching themselves." Rosenfield stated further: "What a contrast with four years ago when apparently the only local interest was in a good movie, except for visits to the Majestic which somehow has always been beyond the fads and fancies of this town."²

Discussing the increased use of a master of ceremonies, Rosenfield wrote in July, 1927, that "practically all the chain operators are installing stage bands with clever conductors to 'talk' the show along. . . . Dallas has had this type of entertainer for a year. . . . In this . . . the Southwest has led the East." He attributed the introduction of the master of ceremonies in stage shows to the influence of the Chauve-Souris and stated that the demand for "clever stage band leaders now exceeds the supply." The critic commented further that "some ex-vaudevillians who could fake the business of directing the band and specialize in 'wise cracks, gags and novel stunts,' were being employed by the movie houses."³

Observing that "big-time vaudeville . . . ten and twelve acts presented but twice a day" were all but eliminated during the 1925-1930 period, Rosenfield stated:

The combination of vaudeville and pictures . . . seems to be the rage. The vaudeville houses themselves started it by

making picture affiliations and working their actors three and four times a day instead of two. The larger picture houses have elaborated stage presentations until the difference between them and vaudeville is negligible.

Vaudeville, of late, has been responsible for some of the most meritorious exhibits offered to the public. Most important of all has been the ballets, both classical and jazz. The quality of dancing that has been seen in this year's vaudeville certainly adds a paragraph or two to Terpsichore's biography. Slow, semi-gymnastic "adagio" dancing is accepted by supposedly restless vaudeville patrons as by no one else. Fine and authentic Egyptian, Grecian, Russian and formal dancing are commonplaces in the vaudeville houses.

This bow to vaudeville does not necessarily laud the local Majestic above the Palace. The Palace, in effect, is a combination house and the Publix has brought to these remote points some of the visual beauty of revue staging that in the past was seen rarely outside New York and Paris. 4

It can be seen that vaudeville was not only changing in format, but that also those acts which were traditionally associated with the form were being supplanted by new types of acts. This was pointed out as early as October, 1926, by Francis O. Starz, press director for the Majestic Theater, when he wrote in the News:

Back in 1826 . . . American entertainment seekers found to their liking performing animals, dogs and horses, tight rope walkers, tumblers, singers, and also the drama in its more frivolous garbs of travesty and farce.

Succeeding generations likewise had their variety shows. The original form has maintained. Variety from 1826 to 1926 has consisted of miscellaneous entertainment, a series of songs, short sketches, dances, acrobatic acts . . . .

There has been an impressive parade of temporary favorites . . . . half a century ago Barney Fagin whose vogue brought a regular avalanche of cloggers into variety . . . Howley and Doyle and the first Pat Rooney. . . .

There were the fire dancers . . . . fire eaters . . . . vastly popular twenty-five years ago [and now] relegated to oblivion along with leopard skins for acrobats.

Remember when the monologist craze swept vaudeville such artists as John Fuller Golden, Blackface Billy Van, Charlie Case, Stuart Barnes, Jim Thornton, R. G. Knowles and Walter Kelly . . . .

The introduction of dramatic stars into vaudeville . . . . credited to Robert Grau [for] getting such actresses as Clara Morris, Amelia Bingham, vogue which holds today.

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Protean act ... once piece de resistance of vaudeville, R. A. Roberts, Henry Lee and Charlotte Perry and Frigoli ... carried on in almost solitary splendor by Owen McGivney, peer of modern quick-change artists who played the Majestic here recently.

Twenty years back ... rathskeller acts [came] roaring out of San Francisco. [In them were] Stepp, Menlinger and King, Hedges Bros. and Jacobson, the Two Bobs, Three White Kuhns, Varden Perry and Wilbur, Mike Bernard and Willie Weston, finally Van and Schenck, present day favorites.

Trained dogs and accomplished animals ... had their day [but their] importance temporarily subdued.

Period brought on by Cinquevalli, king of jugglers, when such performers were hue and cry of variety. Sharpshooters enjoyed brief superiority.

Magic had ... great moments ... Ching Ling Foo ... Thurston, and Hermann the Great [and] modern magicians such as Houdini.

Acrobat prestige—days of Four Bards, ground acrobats ... Four Lukens, aerial artists, the Belle Claire Bros ... City of Reading, Pa., supplied American variety with ninety percent of its acrobats.

Legitimate wow of 1902 Floradora and immortal sextets responsible for introduction into vaudeville of girl ensembles, now a permanent fixture. ...

Immediately following ... came the stage's first toe dancer ... the first ballet worker to enter vaudeville.

Family acts had a great run at one time. The Sullys, the Mortons, the Cohans ... held first place in popularity. Some survive and thrive [including] the four Diamonds and the Mortons.

Vogue for novelty acts introduced by Staley and Birbeck, Musical Blacksmiths. Two men talking acts burst into prominence with Smith and Campbell.

Emma Carus, Clarice Vance, Artie Hall and Sophie Tucker ... introduced the coon shouter to vaudeville [and were] responsible for a wave of them.

Paul Whiteman brought ... outburst of enthusiasm for jazz bands. Last of the theatrical family [were the] blackface minstrels. Neil O'Brien ... making vaudeville debut this week at the Majestic.5

Rosenfield cited what appeared to be the strength of the more traditional forms of vaudeville when he wrote in December, 1928:

Some thirty months ago when the Publix introduced its unit shows, the end of vaudeville was prophesied in various quarters. The prophecies again proved what bad guessers showmen are. ... The revues designed to supplant vaudeville had to assume the character of vaudeville to keep up with vaudeville.

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Within the last two years . . . there have been many tricks . . . conférenciers . . . unit shows with performers running in and out. The best of these have never given the satisfaction afforded by an orthodox vaudeville program.

Yet all is not right with vaudeville. . . . Forty percent of what goes on behind the footlights eludes the comprehension. . . . Fully 60 percent of the vaudeville humor is show talk.  

As late as December, 1930, Karl Hoblitzelle of Interstate, operators of the Majestic, said optimistically that vaudeville "is attaining its greatest vogue in the country today." He pointed out that the RKO circuit provided "eighty-four weeks of engagements for vaudeville artists . . . from coast to coast and from Canada to the Texas border." And he cited the fact that the Majestic and other theaters were abandoning the "two a day" in favor of a greater number of daily presentations was proof of vaudeville's growing popularity.

Hoblitzelle attributed the success in part to the growth of the "intact show" (four or five acts playing a long route together) which was being booked by the RKO theaters." The Interstate executive stated that this system had been "inaugurated by Charles K. Freeman, now head of the RKO booking forces . . . when he booked only the Interstate circuit."

As will be seen when specific theaters in Dallas are discussed, Hoblitzelle was being over-optimistic. The revival of vaudeville which flared up in 1925 was largely dissipated by 1930 because of the competition of the sound films, the impact of the economic depression, and the fact that the better vaudeville performers were switching their allegiance to radio and films. But it will be seen as the stage entertainment at the Majestic, the Palace, the Melba and the Jefferson comes up for consideration, that this five year period was one of experimentation and

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adjustment, a last gasp of activity, as it were, before vaudeville faltered and succumbed.

The Majestic Theater - Preliminary Statement

Long the mainstay of straight vaudeville in the city, the Majestic, near the corner of Harwood and Elm, continued the same basic policy from 1925 through the end of the 1929-1930 season. It was essentially the same type of stage entertainment that had prevailed at the Majestic since it had occupied its first quarters at St. Paul and Commerce streets in 1906. The philosophy back of this policy was expressed by Karl Hoblitlzelle at the start of the 1925 season:

Vaudeville always was a favorite with the public, even when we started twenty years ago. And why shouldn't it be? There's a bit of every art of the theater on the average vaudeville bill.

The folks want their entertainment varied and they want this variety all on one evening. Today vaudeville has grown to such proportions that vaudeville theaters everywhere are either being rebuilt or replaced with larger houses.

I find everywhere that vaudeville theaters are the most popular. This is particularly true since feature photoplays have been added to the programs along with the vaudeville. You will notice that in the bigger cities, theaters that have always been devoted to the silent drama, are now including hits from the spoken stage in their programs.

To prepare for the expected influx of crowds the Majestic management removed the loges at the start of the 1925 season and added new first floor seats. The policy at the theater was to change programs on Sunday and to continue them through Saturday night.

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7 Straight vaudeville in its traditional form is the type of stage entertainment which consisted of a series of acts, not tied together by a unified theme or presided over by a master of ceremonies.

The 1925-1926 Season

Billy House, popular in Dallas for his tabloid show appearances, was the first entertainer of stature to appear in the 1925-1926 season on the Majestic stage. He was seen during the week of November 15 in a comedy sketch that, according to the reviewer, "showed the crowds that his stuff had improved even over what made him popular in tab productions here . . . and the audience reciprocated with lavish enthusiastic applause . . . compelling him to curtain talk at every performance."^9

Frank Fay, well-known Broadway comedian, headlined the bill for the week of November 22 and "introduced something surprising in the way of the charleston."^1 A week later it was Olsen and Johnson,^12 and on December 13 came Flo Brady and Gilbert Wells, who were described in the advance notices as "one of the most popular vaudeville teams on the Interstate circuit," who a year earlier had "stopped show after show with their repertoire of song and dance."^13 Lon Hollister and Lona Stephens, playwrights as well as performers and writers of many of the vaudeville playlets traveling the circuits, acted in a skit, The Morning After, during the week of February 7, and for the week of February 11, Ben Blue, together with Milt Britton and their original Brown Derby Band, ^

^9Because of limitations of space, it would be impossible to treat each of the five acts in the weekly programs or even to mention all of the headlining acts. Only the principal performers and those who had achieved some reputation can be cited.

^10News, Mon., Nov. 16, 1925, 4.


were top entertainers.\textsuperscript{15} The three Ritz Brothers, described by the reviewer as "a combination of attenuated youngsters whose forte is dancing [and] by no means ineffective as comedians, dressed in 'Jellybean' clothes, took the audience by storm during the first week in March,"\textsuperscript{16} and during June 21 and the week following York and King revived the "old family tintype" in their act, called by the reviewer, "one of the greatest comedy acts that has ever headlined the Majestic bill."\textsuperscript{17} Pepito, internationally-known clown, said by John Rosenfield to be "an alloy of the tumbling circus clown, the pie-slinging slapstick comedian and the gaily bedecked Harlequin of another age," made what the critic called a "success d'estime," when he played the Majestic the succeeding week. Rosenfield stated about Pepito:

\begin{quote}
Such nonsense as imitating the 'kut-kut-kaddaw-kut' of a hen belongs to buffoonery of the strolling Pagliacce of Latin Europe. His kaleidoscopic costumes, weird facial makeup, wrist watch large as an alarm clock, shoes that fall with leaden thud can be appreciated only when their geographic aptness is considered. Somehow they are not in the American humoristic idiom.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The 1926-1927 Season

The success in booking big-time acts for the late summer, fall and winter seasons of 1926-27 brought a claim in July, 1926, from the Interstate Circuit that it had grown from a little vaudeville route in Texas into one of the most important in the country.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{News}, Sun., Feb. 14, 1926, III, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{News}, Mon., Mar. 1, 1926, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{News}, Mon., June 21, 1926, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{News}, Mon., June 28, 1926, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{News}, Sun., July 4, 1926, III, 4.
\end{itemize}
During the week beginning July 18, Dan Fitch and his minstrels took over the stage portion of the entertainment at the Majestic. The News commented that "this is regarded as one of the most unique bookings in the history of vaudeville and the success with the public is being watched with interest by variety managers throughout the country."\(^{20}\)

The experiment was called by John Rosenfield, a "total success." He described it as the "least monotonous minstrel to play in Dallas within the memory of the present generation." The show, according to the reviewer, used only a fifteen-man circle, "rather sparse by orthodox standards, but quick shifts and doublings cleverly concealed the fact." Rosenfield noted that the following "chestnuts" were heard: "The story of the canary that sings Home Sweet Home so plaintively that tears run down her cheeks." "The story of the blackface who marries the mother of his stepmother and figures it out that he is the grandfather of his brother." "The computation whereby Houston is farther from Dallas than Dallas is from Houston by the syllogism that it is longer from New Years Day to Christmas than from Christmas to New Years." And the critic stated that "the audiences loved it all."\(^{21}\)

A trend toward bigger scale entertainment was noted in vaudeville by Rosenfield in July, 1926.\(^{22}\) Jack Norton, performer in many New York productions, entertained with "a hilarious travesty on the 'joiner'" during the week of August 8,\(^{23}\) and on the same program was Jimmy Savo, "a clown who elevates harlequinade to a fine art," according to

\(^{20}\)News, Mon., July 12, 1926, 4.

\(^{21}\)News, Mon., July 19, 1926, 3.

\(^{22}\)News, Mon., July 19, 1926, 3.

Rosenfield's review. A 10 x 15 foot oaken tank with a depth of more than ten feet, constructed on the Majestic stage when Ideal, "the only human ever to swim Niagara River's rapids" performed, was also used for an amateur diving contest the following week. Charles De Roche, international film star, brought his company on September 26, and Mickey Daniels and Mary Kornman of the "Our Gang Comedies" appeared during the week of November 28.

On December 11, the first of the RKO unit shows to appear in the South, came to the Majestic. It was headed by George McKay, described in the advertisements as an "all-time vaudeville favorite," who had five acts of vaudeville banded into a show that traveled intact over all the major vaudeville lanes. The unit shows were new in Dallas and were like other vaudeville bills, except that the headliner was asked to select the acts he himself thought would make a good background for his act. That week, the Majestic also installed a new velvet drop at a cost which would have paid for a complete stage setting twenty years earlier. The furnishings of theaters had to keep pace with the beauty of the stage costumes and there were appropriate sets and hangings to fit any kind of feature. Also in keeping with the new type of vaudeville shows were the dressing rooms, equipped at theaters like the Majestic like hotel rooms, with "a bath in each room, dressing tables,

\[\text{\tiny 21 News, Mon., Aug. 9, 1926, 4.}\]
\[\text{\tiny 25 News, Mon., Aug. 9, 1926, 4.}\]
\[\text{\tiny 26 News, Sun., Sept. 26, 1926, III, 4.}\]
\[\text{\tiny 27 News, Sat., Nov. 27, 1926, 4.}\]
\[\text{\tiny 28 News, Sun., Dec. 5, 1926, III, 3.}\]
carpeted floors, and ample electric sockets.\textsuperscript{29}

Baby Peggy, seven year old movie star, played a return engagement at the Majestic during Christmas week,\textsuperscript{30} and for the week of January 9, 1926, Benny Rubin whose "nize Debby" chatter was well known in the East but relatively strange to Dallas, was on the stage and, according to the review, had "about fifty-fifty luck with his comedy."\textsuperscript{31} Another unit show, resembling a revue more than a vaudeville bill,\textsuperscript{32} came to the theater for the week of January 23. Produced by Joseph Santley, it had a cast that included Roger Williams, comedian, Jack Kraft and Elsie Lamonte in a sketch, Bud and Jack Pearson, and Will Ferry, called in the advance publicity the "noted contortionist," and was so elaborate that the rope lines which carried the local stage drops, curtains, and hangings had to be cleared to accommodate the scenery. This clearance had only been necessary once before—when the Majestic had housed the Chicago Civic Opera Company.\textsuperscript{33} John Rosenfield described the show as "the first genuinely novel conception of the vaudeville stage within a generation," and wondered whether it would bring "youth and pictorial art to the vaudeville stage." He felt it would lure back to the theater "the numerous minority that disdains variety exhibits."\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{29}News, Fri., Dec. 10, 1926, 4.
\textsuperscript{30}News, Fri., Dec. 24, 1926, 4.
\textsuperscript{31}News, Mon., Jan. 10, 1927, 4.
\textsuperscript{32}The revue had the same performers throughout as distinguished from the vaudeville bill which had separate acts.
\textsuperscript{34}News, Mon., Jan. 31, 1927, 3.
Eddie Foy brought four of his seven famous children to the Majestic on March 6, and Eddie Foy, Jr., stopped the show with his imitations. Nick Lucas, "recording artist and singer of international note," delighted the audience, according to the reviewer of the program for the week of May 15, not only with his singing but also with his guitar playing. On June 5, an act known as The Fariesennes, a ten-man musical and dancing group which had Cully and Claire, otherwise Mr. and Mrs. Jack Culpepper of Dallas, was at the theater. Emile Boreo, author of the Parade of the Wooden Soldiers, the hit of the Chauve-Souris in which he had recently starred, was at the theater on June 11 and the week following, on his first vaudeville tour, and Don Baker, international quick change artist, performed a "protean" act the next week. The reviewer said of him that "Don is the fellow who steps behind a screen arrayed in Chinese effect and a few seconds later comes out all dressed up in evening togs." Don, according to the reviewer, had often been called on to decide bets on how fast he could make changes and had said that as many as four pairs of bettors "have stood backstage to see that it was really me who stepped from behind the screen each time a costume change was made." Dan Fitch and Cricker Quinn brought a blackface act to the theater on July 3, and, according to the review, pleased the audience.

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37 News, Sun., June 5, 1927, III, 4. Mrs. Jack Culpepper was later to become even better known as the movie star, Ginger Rogers.
"first with an Apache dance burlesque, then with a chatter round which riddles the audience with a machine gun volley of jokes." The same bill also had two female impersonators, "good for the surprise element." Occasionally, there was a "high-brow" show, as during the week of July 10 when Cesar Rivoli, tenor, headlined with "Memories of Opera, together with settings."

The 1927-1928 Season

At the start of the 1927-28 season, cities in the Southwest on the Interstate circuit, second largest of the touring circuits, included Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Muskogee, Oklahoma; Amarillo, Wichita Falls, Texarkana, Austin, Galveston, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth, Texas; and Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Fort Smith and Hot Springs, Arkansas. The circuit closed in Virginia.

Gene Austin, another crooner, about whom the News reviewer said, "the lines of admiration for this apple-cheeked boy extend into all homes equipped with a phonograph," brought crowds to the theater during the week of July 24 comparable to those that had attended for Nick Lucas." Austin's voice, the reviewer commented, "is a rather dry, white tenor voice, slightly under standards for the best church choirs. . . . His use of 'crooning' or rather a falsetto and a judicious mixture of mezzo voice singing impart to it the warmth necessary to put over the sentimental ballads." The reviewer also described Austin as a "first class pianist."

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The first of the new season's Orpheum unit shows was an Oriental fantasy featuring Ting Foo, and also included Buddy Doyle, monologist; Madeleine Patrice, singer; Eddie Shubert, chatter and dance; and Monroe and Grant, comedy-athletes, presented during the week of July 31. Another unit review, on August 21 and the following week, brought overflow crowds to the theater for the production which featured Florence Hodges and "a troupe of singers with capable and cultivated voices." They gave selections from Rose Marie, Blossom Time, and the Chocolate Soldier, and Florence Hodges was said by the reviewer to have a "rarely beautiful soprano." The production, called "colorful and interesting" by the reviewer, featured also "Broomstick" Elliott and Babe La Tour in a skit, My Daddy, that won "prolonged applause," according to the review.

Gus Edwards, "who has developed most of the brightest stars of the revue and dramatic stage and who has brought out many of the screen stars," according to advance billings, was at the theater the week of September with a new batch of talent. Among the new entertainers was Ray (Rubberlegs) Bolger, whom John Rosenfield described in his column as having "mastered the tricks of Leon Erroll, Eddie Cantor and Harry Langdon to the point where he has trained his legs to collapse like Erroll's, his ears to wiggle like Cantor's and his facial lines to remain static like Langdon's or Keaton's." Rosenfield commented that the bill "wins the sort of ovational thunder that sweeps the house," and said that "it is doubtful if any bill within years has scored so soundly with the
public." Ray Bolger and Senorita Armida, according to the critic, won the audience's "utmost devotion." He called Bolger "truly a marvel," and described Armida's dancing as "the kind recognized as authentically Spanish and Mexican." Also among the entertainers were Leota and Lola Lane, singers, and Jerry Dryden, tap dancer.  

Jimmy Allard, who had been so popular as a tabloid performer in Dallas, redeemed a poor show at the Majestic on September 11, Rosenfield stated, when he presented "the same homespun comedy . . . with an elementary plot and a poor supporting cast."

A few days later, Rosenfield noted that Allard "is now making the crowds snicker and roar at the Majestic . . . using the same tricks he did in the old Hippodrome days."

At every show Allard would sing a topical song, always good for anywhere from six to twenty encores. After the fourth encore he would rush to one exit and then the other, and few persons knew the reason why. Members of the company were waiting in each wing to whisper in his ear a gag line to be used in the next encore. . . . Tuesday afternoon's audience . . . he had to beg off singing so that the act could be concluded.

The Weaver Bros., described as "the highest paid 'two-team' in vaudeville" in the advance comment by Rosenfield, were at the Majestic the week of October 1. They had last been at the Majestic two years earlier, and subsequent attempts by the Majestic management to book them again had been unsuccessful because of previous engagements.

With the Weavers and their Sister Elviry came another act that

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ranked as a classic in Dallas—the "famous public petting party of Ballew and Carleton." The reviewer noted that "Julie drapes her dainty and graceful person over the grand piano to croon ardent 'sweet papa' songs to Bob, who is a rarely efficient performer," and added that "this team gives one of the most finished performances on vaudeville." The acts had to be cut short because of the crowds out in the lobby waiting to see the Dempsey-Tunney fight pictures. These same fight pictures, together with the stage show, were responsible for new box office records at the Majestic. During the week, 59,800 persons paid gross receipts of about $25,000.

Gilbert Wells returned on November 6 without his well-known partner, Florence Brady, who was doing a "single" at the nearby Palace Theater at the same time. His act was said to suffer because of it. Ken Murray, who brought a unit show the week of November 20, was called by the reviewer "an almost perfect master of ceremonies . . . who can sing, dance, wisecrack and play this and that musical instrument." Muriel Kaye, "the she dare-devil who flies her own plane from city to city and who plans a New York to Paris non-stop flight next summer," was headlined the week of December 1, and at the year's end the Majestic announced a new type of presentation headed by a "conférencier." Karl Hoblitzelle said he had been much impressed by the work of Nikita Balieff.

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53 News, Mon., Nov. 21, 1927, 4.
as "conferencier" of the Chauve-Souris and that he had engaged Eddie Pardo to be the first master of ceremonies at the Majestic Theater. Pardo was due to begin his engagement on January 11 for an indefinite stay.55

Pardo was described by John Rosenfield in his review as making vaudeville "appear to be something else besides vaudeville and vastly more entertaining." The critic predicted that Pardo would create "something brand new in entertainment and a unique position for himself in the show world," and that Pardo made the current bill go "like a Timberg or Carroll show."56 Bert Lytell, stage and screen star, acted in The Valiant the week of February 5, 1928, and the reviewer called the plot "not particularly arty but more than ordinarily dramatic." He described Lytell's "intense method" as effective, and commented that Lytell was touring, not because he was out of a movie job but because he "likes the work and believes it enhances his standing with the public."57 The Gibbs Twins, American-born Siamese pair, headlined the bill for March 4,58 and El Brendel, "the well-known comedian of many features" who was the headliner the following week, was called a "success" by the reviewer, who declared that his dissolving dress suit act was his "best offering." The reviewer also praised the act of Ray and Harrison on the same bill, and said of Miss Ray that "despite her immense proportions, she is a toe dancer and not half so clumsy as she appears to be."59

Billy House again was called a "really funny comic," when he returned the week of March 18, and on April 22, the seven-year old daughter of Joe Green and Rosie Keno, called "Little Mitzi," was billed as the headliner, but the reviewer commented that "the audience didn't think she was." He commented about the future star:

Little Mitzi, however, is a clever mimic. The only imitation she does is that of "Moran" in the "Two Black Crows" specialty with her father doing the Mack feeder part. She has Moran's drawl and intonation and evidently sat up nights listening to the phonograph record.

A trend for the violin to come back into vaudeville was noted by John Rosenfield, and the program for May 6 and the week following featured Larry Stoutsenburgh, "spectacular billiard player." Rosenfield commented that he "must have learned that too much skill is out of place on the vaudeville stage. Therefore he 'dubs' most of his shots before performing them. After starting the white ball on its last carom, he crashes into the stage furniture and scenery by way of convincing the audience that the trick is hard."

Toto, "the classic among modern harlequins," at the Majestic the week of May 13, was drawing the high-brows into the theater, according to John Rosenfield. The critic commented that the great mass of patrons ... seemed to like him too."

Toto's art is pure pantomime, divided carefully into scenes, and each unit worked with competence and sureness for its climaxes. The clown's showmanship is no less extraordinary than his imagination.

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61 News, Mon., Apr. 23, 1928, 4. Mitzi Green was later to become a well-known child movie star.


Toto is not a slave of the past, as witness his trick with a cigarette lighter, a huge tomato can produced from the folds of his copious garments. He utilizes sets and lights to advantage and employs the shadow box to good effect. He has a dance specialty performed in semi-darkness that is one of the most striking things in vaudeville. . . .

Toto is one of the treats of the season.61

Little Jack Little, "Radio's biggest star," played the theater the week of June 9.65 There was a portent of things to come when the Majestic canceled out its vaudeville program for the week of July 7 and substituted instead four acts of Movietone "shorts." These were the first of such motion picture presentation bills ever seen in Dallas, and entertainers seen on the screen during the week were Clark & McCullough, Joe Cooke, and Robert Benchley. The vaudeville and picture program were resumed the following week.66

The 1928-1929 Season

There was some talk in mid-July by the Majestic management of replacing one of the regular vaudeville acts with the Movietone shorts, but because of the lower cost of producing the shorts—$300 to $500 a week for each short, far less than that for an average vaudeville act—it was believed that the policy would depend on the length and expense of the regular vaudeville acts.67 Charley Withers brought his "Withers Op'ry" to the Majestic stage the week of August 12, and on the same bill was Jack Major, former theological student at Rice Institute who had been rebuffed by the Interstate management two years earlier. "He stops the

65News, Fri., June 8, 1928, 4.
show and leaves the audience screaming for more," John Rosenfield observed. On September 2 and the week following, it was Ben Turpin who headlined the bill, but his comic "turn" was said by the reviewer to be "not of the variety that naturally headlines an Interstate vaudeville program." Nick Lucas was at the theater again on September 31 and was said to put his patrons "in a state of ecstasy." Roscoe Ails, well-known dancer, introduced "The Five Step," when he was on the Majestic stage on October 13. Anatol Friedland brought his night club revue to the theater on November 31, and the advance publicity stated that "when federal authorities padlocked the Club Anatol in New York, the entire show was placed in vaudeville." With Friedland were Jack Waldron, Lucille Hayes, Le Blane and Du Charm and Al Jockers. Syd Moorhouse, the English comedian who was remembered for his rendition a year earlier of "Me and My Shadow," sang "Laugh Clown Laugh," with success, according to the reviewer, when he was at the Majestic the week of December 8. Lasses White, "Dallas' own boy who made the Deep Ellum blackface comedy famous," according to the advance notices, came to the theater on January 6, 1929. Lou Tellegen appeared the week of January 12 in one of the infrequently-presented dramatic playlets, and the French-born

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actor who had been seen by Dallasites a year earlier in *The Constant Wife* was said by the reviewer to have been liked enough by Majestic audiences to demand a curtain speech "in which the celebrated actor was dignified, naive and charming." Annually a "Blue Ribbon Show," so called because Interstate executives regarded it as the best grouping of vaudeville talent of the season, was presented at the theater, and the 1929 show during the week of January 20, brought Colonel Fred Lindsey, Australian hunter and screen actor who had taught Douglas Fairbanks the use of the Australian whip, "displaying his famous whip marksmanship by popping the ashes from a cigar smoked by an assistant, and tying a knot about a girl's neck." Others on the bill included Lew Brice, brother of Fanny Brice, a Ziegfeld star in his own right, paired with Mae Clark in a sketch of race track betting with "the novel aid of motion pictures of the races." The reviewer called this an example "of what vaudeville used to be." Yates and Lawley did a song act and Billy Edmunds and the Fanchon ensemble of dancers were also on the bill. Stevens, Nelson and Stevens entertained with a live, dancing bear. Jack Pepper, Dallas entertainer "whose ukelele wailing has been a sensation on vaudeville and in big Broadway shows," and who was known to Dallasites as Jack Culpepper was on stage the week of February 3, headlining the bill.

Pepper had begun his theatrical career with Pete Pate at the Jefferson Theater, and had joined Julian Eltinge's company and then

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toured with a partner in an act Salt and Pepper. When he had been on
stage at the Palace Theater, he had been a great success. The Salt and
Pepper act had since broken up.

On the February 24 bill, Powers and Wallace did a dramatic
sketch made up of bits of melodrama enacted in a taxicab, all taken
from a New York police blotter, and, according to the reviewer,
"projected with a greater degree of histrionic talent than any other
three-a-day play since Bert Lytell's 'Valiant.'"78

The Weaver Brothers and Elviry returned to the Majestic the week
of March 3, this time bringing with them a group of entertainers from
"Spring Mow and Li'l Rock, Ark," and Elviry was described by John
Rosenfield in this manner:

No genial entertainer is she. She bawls out Cicero, she
bawls out Abner, she scolds everybody else, she warns Lester
Harris that his "prop" ogling must stop, she screams at a fair-
headed Majestic usher whom she calls a chair-finder, and more
than once does she invite the audience to take its hat and go
home. The audience does nothing of the sort. It rolls in its
seat and holds its side. It is all very funny for the common
people. Even the self-constituted guardians of theatrical
discrimination titter involuntarily.79

The act was so popular that it was presented for four shows on
Friday instead of the usual three, and broke its own previously set box
office records at the Majestic.80

Florence Brady and Gilbert Wells were together on the act which
was on the stage the week of March 30, and also on the same bill were
John Hyams and Leila McIntyre "in a sketch of music and conversation,"

and Pat Henning in a novelty act.  

Harry K. Conley, "the greatest of the character comedians," according to his billing, headlined the April 20 bill, and on May 20, Harry Burns, famed Italian comedian, did another of his "I think you Touch" sketches. He had been playing variations on the same sketch for many seasons. Assisting him were Phyllis Soule and Tony DeLucca.

Flo Lewis, a red headed comedian, did her comedy bit at the Majestic the week of May 25. She never appeared on stage without a long-legged rag doll, "a doll of varied ideas," and a rag dog which she called in turn Lizzie, Charlie and Fritz, and had first incurred the ire of stage managers and Broadway producers "at the dirty rag dolls in their million-dollar productions," but had convinced them, because of her success that "perhaps there was something to this business of 'charm' props." June 8 found Jimmie Rodgers, "the yodeling brakeman from Mississippi" on the stage, singing songs like "You're in the Jailhouse Now," and "Railroad Blues," in what the reviewer called a "simple style and clear voice," and on June 24, the Majestic management announced that a permanent ballet made up of Ruth Laird's "Rockets," a Dallas group, would be added to the stage productions.

Gene Lewis, known in Dallas for his Cycle Park and Circle stock

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82 News, Fri., Apr. 19, 1929, 10.
83 News, Fri., May 17, 1929, 10.
85 News, Mon., June 10, 1929, 4.
86 News, Mon., June 24, 1929, 4.
companies, came to the Majestic the week of June 22 in a playlet, Apple Sauce, assisted by several locally-known stock players. He had, in April, closed a stock season in San Antonio, and he and Olga Worth were no longer in partnership. Lewis said on the eve of his Majestic appearance that he was leaving for Hollywood after his vaudeville stint to take over a director's chair, and he noted that "the talkies have given the dramatic stage a knockout play and the day of the touring dramatic organization is over." John Rosenfield commented in his review that Lewis never gave a worse performance than he did at the Majestic, and yet "never did his efforts go better with an audience." He said that Lewis played Applesauce, a cut down version of one of his stock plays, "as broad as the river bottom and gives triple underscoring to his gags." And Rosenfield noted that the reception "was the greatest given a skit at the Majestic since Bert Lytell played 'The Valiant.'"

The critic observed that when Lewis took his curtain call, it was "with the well-known impersonation of Gene Lewis overcome with emotion," and observed that "everybody in Texas knows that he would no more omit a curtain talk than he would fail to comb his still dark curls." And in his talk, Lewis "bade farewell to Texas and announced his intention to direct talking pictures." Then the critic waxed poetic with

Good luck, Gene. In the old Cycle Park days, where you played summer after summer, you nurtured the solid spoken drama with loyalty and valor. Dallas is indebted to you for its present eminence in spoken drama. What is more, Dallas has always admired your pluck and your talent, especially when you played serious roles and directed serious plays. Your first talking picture is awaited with great curiosity. Your friends in this vicinity have their four bits ready to

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88 *News*, Fri., June 21, 1929, 10.
patronize it just because it will be yours.  

Alex Hyde, vaudeville producer whose show was at the Majestic the week of July 14, commented that audiences were demanding everything in a faster tempo. Eddie Alexandria, "vaudeville's loosest nut," and Ole Olson were headliners in the "Cuckoo Week" program at the Majestic on July 20. Alexandria noted that customers were laughing more "at the funny man who got hit in the nose or with a stuffed club that isn't any too well stuffed." Alexandria, who had been part of the comedy team with Olson for eleven years, commented that "the comedian who goes through his lines with a dead pan or expressionless face usually goes over well, too." Harry Seymour, song writer, movie actor, comedian and musician, and featured entertainer in the stage offering at the Majestic on July 27, had another approach to the vaudeville trend when he said that "dance is the thing these days." He said that "plenty of good voices are passed up because there are no nimble toes." Bob Hope was one of the members of the WLS Showboat radio troupe which played at the Majestic on August 3. Others on the bill were Harry Dean Sadler, Tom Corwine, Velma Dean, Thelma Bow and Bernice. The program was said to receive 250,000 fan letters each year. The review made a brief comment about Hope: "Particularly well received bits included the jokes and patter of Bob Hope [who] clowned and joked himself into the favor of the audience almost immediately and

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89News, Mon., June 24, 1929, 5.
90News, Tues., July 9, 1929, 8.
92News, Fri., July 26, 1929, 10.
proved a distinct hit thereafter. Charles Ray, called in the review, "once one of the most important gentlemen in screendom," was a "vaudeville tenor" in the program of August 31. The critic commented that he was "magnetic and ingratiating," but that he was "no great shakes as a singer or stage entertainer."  

The 1929-1930 Season

Natacha Nattova, described by the critic as "a dancer of rare ability," headlined the October 5 show and, according to the reviewer, presented as her most novel routine, a "robot interpretation with three male dancers assisting her in this futuristic impression of machinery-made men. Another fantastic interpretation is given in her death dance with a skeleton." The reviewer called her dances "the most strikingly original presentation seen here in some time." Jimmy Allard played a return engagement on November 9, and Lita Gray Chaplin, said by John Rosenfield in his review to have a radio personality rather than a stage appearance, was the featured star on the November 23 bill. Also on the program was Jack Swor, one of the Swor brothers, assisted by Jack Goode, and Rosenfield observed that "the turn has its traditional references to Noah's Ark, jail, dice, cards and other staples of burnt cork. The boys put it over to healthy applause." The Majestic in Dallas and the entire Fox Interstate circuit went to Friday opening dates on December 27. It had been customary, commented Rosenfield, to open

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98 News, Mon., Nov. 25, 1929, 4.
on Saturdays because the country folks "came to town for the weekend." He stated that the new opening date was being selected "on the theory that Saturday is a natural show day and does not need the stimulation of a new opening. Friday, on the other hand, might pick up a few extra dollars from the new attractions." Rosenfield pointed out that "Monday now shows a slump" and that "campaigning is bringing washday back to its pristine theatrical strength." 99

Kitty Doner was the featured star on the vaudeville program for Saturday, December 21. The advance billing called Doner one of the most popular male impersonators on the stage, and stated that "she had, a few seasons back, won the prize for the best dressed of vaudeville's men, and had revealed the hoax after the award had been given." 100

A lion, "Princess Pat," and her tamer Bert Nelson, headlined the program that opened on Friday, December 25, 101 and Count Berni Vici, described in the billing as "expatriate Austrian nobleman, so they say," brought in an all-girl show for what the reviewer called "the most entertaining variety program we have witnessed since the Weaver Brothers and Elviry." 102

It might be noted at this point that vaudeville programs got very little attention during 1930 in the amusement pages of the News. One typical criticism which was tagged on to the end of a review by John Rosenfield of the movie Sunny Side Up stated in its entirety:

The Majestic makes a stab at a vaudeville show, although the picture is two hours in length, and contains more than

100News, Thurs., Dec. 19, 1929, 12.
enough entertainment for one sitting. The stage bill is meritorious with a flashing act of vaudeville dancing, a trained seal, and a harmonica specialist.\textsuperscript{103}

Herbie Williams, described in the advance announcement as a "comedian known to three generations of playgoers for his pet gags 'Hark, Hark,' and 'Spotlight,'" was at the Majestic on February 14, specializing "in a horrible inept epical recitation, a collapsible piano, and his gags."\textsuperscript{104} A touch of the classical was brought to the Majestic when Mme. Starkow Ryder, "soloist with the New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago symphony orchestras" appeared in special afternoon and evening programs as a special guest on Wednesday, February 17, in addition to the regular vaudeville "through the courtesy of the Radio Equipment Co. of Texas, distributors of Majestic radios."\textsuperscript{105} On Friday, February 21, the Majestic went to four shows a day.\textsuperscript{106} Val and Ernie Stanton, the reviewer commented, dominated the stage bill of Friday, March 21, "with their laughable telephone act and another blackout or two."\textsuperscript{107}

That the typical vaudeville show still provided touches of the older-style entertainment is illustrated by John Rosenfield's review of the April 11 bill:

Ted and Tom Hickey, comedians who have appeared in Dallas

\textsuperscript{103}News, Sat., Feb. 1, 1930, 6.

\textsuperscript{104}News, Sun., Feb. 9, 1930, 6. Williams had begun visiting Dallas in 1910 when he headlined a program at the Old Lake Cliff Casino. He had also been at the first and second Majestics and in 1927 had been at the new Majestic.

\textsuperscript{105}News, Wed., Feb. 19, 1930, 12.

\textsuperscript{106}News, Fri., Feb. 21, 1930, 10.

\textsuperscript{107}News, Sat., Mar. 22, 1930, 12.
oftener than we can remember, walk off with such glory as can be gained from the current Majestic vaudeville program. Whether these honors are won by merit or by default is something we haven’t made up our minds about. Their turn is a traditional song-and-dance act with clowning and music surely and soundly routined.

Ruiz and Bonita, assisted by a pair of harpists, a mandolinguatrist and a fiddler dance briskly but hardly suggest a music surely and soundly routined. The Highland Collies, who open the bill, start badly but wind up with a skit in which the canine talent outdoes Rin-Tin-Tin’s masterpiece. There is one lady dog who pulls "grief" at the deathbed in a style to break your heart. The latter half of the animal act is one of the most distinct vaudeville novelties we have observed for sometime,108

Eddie Pardo, "vaudeville's first official conferencier, who had played a stint at the Majestic in that capacity and then had been featured in several vaudeville unit shows, returned to the Majestic on May 2, and, according to the reviewer, "the audience went completely goofy and yelled for more. . . . He is the most individual singer in the theater outside of . . . Jolson . . . a lot funnier than Al." Also, as part of the same act, the reviewer added, "Marc Nathal dresses up as a gorilla and climbs all over the Majestic parterre, boxes and balconies for a genuinely entertaining athletic novelty."109

Paxton, billed as a "wizard of figures," was headliner on June 6. Rosenfield said about him:

He can tell you the exact population of any city in the country and passes around a check list so that the audience can see for themselves.

He can tell you also the names of the hotels and publications in these towns. Saturday afternoon he knew the newspapers of Dallas, reciting them in their proper order, too. He may juggle the order when representatives of lesser publications are in the audience. This makes him a showman as well as a marvel. One of his most amazing tricks is to memorize the

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eight-digit serial numbers on $1 bills, and repeat them forward, backward and any which way. Paxton is an undeniable hit. His so-called camera mind is not an unknown phenomenon but the demonstration is unusually interesting. The performer himself is an apple-cheeked juvenile on the Lindbergh type, sure to be liked for himself alone.  

Bob Hope again appeared at the Majestic on July 1, this time as part of Harry Webb's Entertainers, and the critic observed that his "best work is with the group, although he also did an act of his own." The July 18 bill featured "puppies and puppets," and Rosenfield stated, "The animals perform usual canine tricks to the baton of a little marionette. The turn winds up in a saucy little comedy which the dogs permit the audience to follow . . . only two actors we know could have been worse." He also commented about another act on the same bill:

Tack Murdock, an attenuated blond comedian, heads a sketch in which he woos three girls separately and has to extricate himself from the trio in convention assembled. There was spotty laughter for this effort, and we wondered why. Somebody told us that some of the gags were smutty.  

Henry Santrey, whom Rosenfield described as "the first man who ever put an orchestra on a vaudeville stage" and about which the critic commented, "whether he is to be honored for this or kicked is a matter of opinion," headlined the July 25 show. But in his review, Rosenfield called Santrey and the Majestic program "the brightest thing in stage entertainment that Our Fair City has seen during the dog days." Santrey, "ex-opera singer from La Scala and the Metropolitan," was said by Rosenfield to have an orchestra that "does more than play music."

110News, Sat., June 7, 1930, 10.
He called it "as nice a jazz frolic as any feverish soul could crave." Other acts praised by the critic were The Dakotas, "really a trio of Australian lariat swingers and whipcrackers [in an act which] calls for knocking a cigarette out of a girl's mouth with long-tongued switch;" and Tim Ryan and Iran Noblette, comedy act, "in which Mr. Ryan proves amusing and Miss Noblette outrightly [sic] hilarious."

The 1925-1930 period was crucial for vaudeville in Dallas. At the start of the period, a renascence of vaudeville's popularity seemed to be occurring. By 1930, vaudeville was definitely in decline. Two years later on October 27, 1932, the Majestic abandoned its policy of weekly vaudeville program changes and switched to presenting headline entertainers at irregular intervals.

The Majestic management during the five year period made attempts to cope with the declining popularity of vaudeville. Some of these included the use of a "conferencier" or master of ceremonies; the change in opening dates from Sunday to Friday nights; the use of stage orchestras; and increasing the number of daily performances from three to four. But there were too many influences operating against the continuation of vaudeville to make any of these measures of lasting value.

These influences were operating throughout the American entertainment world. One of them was the influence of sound films. When theater audiences could see the best of the vaudeville entertainers on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item News, Sat., July 26, 1930, 6. 
\item News, Tues., Oct. 18, 1932, 14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
film in Movietone and other "shorts," the run of the mill entertainers who came to such theaters as the Majestic week after week lost out in favor. Too, the influence of radio served to keep theatergoers at home.

One effect of radio and the movies was to make the audiences familiar with the best entertainers of the day and to create a craving in them to see these entertainers in person. The rather paradoxical situation developed in which the audiences thronged to see "name" entertainers but stayed away from the average vaudeville show. But when the sound films became popular, those entertainers who had formerly toured the vaudeville circuits went into the movies instead. The result was a scarcity of talent. A corollary of this shortage was that the well-known entertainers, when they did travel the vaudeville circuits, commanded fees which made it necessary that there be large audiences if the theaters were to make a profit.

The advent of sound into films vastly increased the popularity of the movies and, with such theaters as the Majestic, where vaudeville programs were combined with films, it was the movies that seemed to draw the audiences rather than the stage shows, unless a well-known entertainer was to be seen on stage.

To turn to the Dallas scene more specifically, the Majestic, during the 1925-1930 period, met strong competition for its stage presentations from the Palace, the Melba, and the Jefferson theaters.

The Palace, as will be seen in the next chapter of this study, launched weekly programs of vaudeville-type revues. The Melba, the Jefferson, the Old Mill, and the Lyric theaters all had vaudeville between 1925 and 1930 at some time or another.

Karl Hoblitzelle, head of Interstate, the operators of the
Majestic, believed strongly in vaudeville as has been seen. This theater was to be the last to abandon the form in Dallas and had the advantage of belonging to a chain of theaters in the Southwest, making it feasible for entertainers to go on the circuit. When theaters like the Majestic, which had been presenting the "three-a-day" for more than twenty-five years gave up vaudeville, then the form had truly died.

The effects, too, of the depression which began to set in as early as 1927 and which reached its full impact in 1931, cannot be minimized as far as vaudeville is concerned. Although it is popularly believed that during times of economic hardship people demand entertainment, the movies and radio seemed better able to do the job than did vaudeville.

One other factor must be mentioned and that is the growing sophistication of Dallas audiences. As the city grew in size and culture, the stock forms of vaudeville entertainment ceased to draw the crowds. And conversely, outstanding entertainers drew bigger audiences than ever.

Just as it had been in dramatic stock, road show musicals and touring legitimate productions, the 1925-1930 period was decisive for vaudeville.
CHAPTER XIX

FROM CLASSICAL TO POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT -

THE PALACE

The Palace Theater, which during the 1920-1925 period had been the most conservative of the downtown Dallas presentation houses, proved during the next five year period to be the most radical in its departures from traditional stage fare. Throughout the earlier half-decade the Palace had made its appeal to theatergoers who preferred a touch of the classical in their entertainment. Its stage entertainment from 1921 through the end of the 1924-1925 season had been devoted to semi-classical concerts, operalogues, guest appearances by movie stars, preludes and tableaux, and appearances by local singers and instrumentalists. When John J. Friedl became manager of the theater in January, 1924, he made a shift in policy, bringing in such orchestras as Paul Whiteman and Vincent Lopez, and presenting jazz revues; still the practice of prologues and concert presentations continued. Another major change came when Don Albert, who had been director of the Palace orchestra from the time the theater opened, left in August, 1924. A year later, Alexander Keese became the orchestra director, and an attempt was made by Barry Burke, the new manager, to revive the concert policy. But the trend toward a more popular type of programming was not to be denied.
The 1925-1926 Season

When Barry Burke took over the assignment as managing director of the Palace on September 21, 1925, the entertainment policy of the theater was much as it had been since the theater first opened—concerts on Sunday afternoons, the use of occasional singers and instrumentalists. Shortly after assuming the new position, Burke announced that the Sunday musical programs would be varied with "complete grand operas given with scenery and in costumes, but condensed to about one hour length." They were to be directed and conducted by Alexander Keese, the theater's musical director.1 A week later, John Rosenfield reported that the theater management was disappointed with the attendance at the Sunday afternoon symphony concerts. Rosenfield called these "the best of their kind Dallas has ever heard," and he attributed the small audiences to the early hour, "especially on Sundays in a city of 1 O'clock dinners."2 The first "operalogue" was Cavalleria Rusticana, given on Sunday, January 24, 1926, and Thursday, January 28, with a Dallas chorus and cast.3

In February, it was reported that the Palace Theater was building and equipping new dressing rooms and would have a total of "nearly twenty,"4 and then on March 3, the stage was remodeled to accommodate the John Murray Anderson productions which were to appear at the theater. Made up in New York, these were to tour the Publix theaters

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and the Palace was to be the only theater in Texas where they were to be shown. The remodeling brought the stage out to the organ pit and moved the organ console to the left side of the pit. The proscenium arch had a height of fifty-seven feet, giving the Palace one of the largest proscenium arches in the entire Southwest. The back stage arch was enlarged from twenty-two feet to fifty-seven feet, providing the stage crew with more room for fly lofts and gridirons. The brass rail surrounding the orchestra pit was replaced by a wooden rail, and the pit itself was raised fifteen inches, bringing the orchestra members into full view of the audience.\(^5\) On March 7, the Palace switched from a Saturday to a Sunday opening date to accommodate the new revues.\(^6\) The Palace was to get a new revue each week, to be produced by Anderson, Frank Cambria, Gus Edwards and "other famous Broadway producers." In the revues were to be "Broadway artists" and the shows were to be of such a "lavish splendor," that they could be "produced successfully for a circuit of theaters, but . . . would be far to expensive for any one theater to create." There were to be five complete performances on Sunday and four performances daily the rest of the week,\(^7\) and the revues were to "share the featured place on the program with the picture."

The Palace format prior to the arrival of the revues included "an orchestra, an occasional act, dance or song on the stage, symphonic overtures and others, chiefly musical numbers." This type of presentation

\(^7\)News, Sat., Mar. 13, 1926, 4.
had been created by Samuel (Roxy) Rothafel and Hugo Riesenfeld, and
Rosenfield said that the new unit shows would probably doom the
Riesenfeld-Rothafel style presentations. Each of the unit shows was an
independent revue with a cast of "thirty-five to forty girls, men,
singers and dancers." They opened in New York and were then sent on the
road. They were due to arrive in Dallas seven weeks after their New York
opening. Each carried its own musical director and the production
"in every respect is advertised as the same as that which appeared on
Broadway."^3

John Rosenfield's comments on The Melting Pot, the first of
these revues, presented during the week of March 11, 1926, is of interest
for the revues were to continue at the Palace for a number of months.

These productions have been hailed as something brand-
new in presentation, and they are.
The unit show might be described as dressed up vaudeville
with a thread of continuity. The variety forms observed are
distinctly vaudevillian in character.
The skater and whirler have the nature of opening the
closing acts. The intermediate sections are more on the revue
order, specializing in singing and dancing.
But in spite of the separate and distinct character of
each division, there is a central idea. . . .
The slightly stale theme is represented by dance and
song. . . .
The stage and the costumes are elaborate and possess
more color and quality of material than is found in the average
road show revue. . . .
The present troupe has considerable dancing and singing
ability but is singularly short on good looks. Oddly enough,
the men are more personable than the women.
"The Melting Pot" brought out a large attendance Sunday
afternoon. . . . The unit show is an innovation and any public
must see a few of them before it gets the hang of it."^9

The revue broke all attendance records at the Palace. The names selected for the revues were in keeping with their style. One Sunday, March 21, The Dime Museum, "based upon characters in a museum," was the offering, and on March 28 it was Gypsy Follies.

On April 18, what was billed as "John Murray Anderson's first laugh production," The Bughouse Cabaret, was presented, and it featured Herman and Seamon, "comedy acrobats"; Gugliere and Oliver, "musicians grotesque"; Frank Leslie; Howard Lee Davis, "the laughing Aida"; the Six English Tivoli Girls; Pantzer and Blaise, "comic contortionists," and others. Frank Cambria's first Palace production, Great Moments from Grand Opera, came on May 2.


Anna Ludmilla, "often called the 'second Pavlova,'" according to the advance notices, was the principal figure in the Anderson presentation, The Bridal Veil, seen at the Palace the week of July 3. Her partner was Leon Barte, who, according to the advance notices, had staged Gertrude Hoffman's First ballet, and who for some time had been Pavlova's partner.

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17 News, Thurs., July 1, 1926, 4.
Southern Memories, presented on July 11, and produced by Paul Oscard, had three scenes, the first, according to the advance notice,

... being an old-fashioned drawing-room where old-fashioned songs are sung and old-fashioned dances are danced. Then comes a brief interlude in which two whirlwind banjo players, Ban Joe and Dave Wallace are introduced. The final scene has a plantation background with the entire company offering a medley of Southern melodies and a series of dances.18

The 1926-1927 Season

Samuel Katz, president of Publix Theaters, said while in Dallas for a brief visit in August, 1926, that "for the first time in the history of the American stage the 'provinces' of the country are seeing and hearing the same kind of elaborate entertainment that has heretofore been restricted to New York and Chicago."19 A "Circus Week" was given at the theater beginning September 5 and featured the Franklin D'Amore Company, the Six Hassans, Alfred Latell, Don Holt and a "Pony Ballet," and was advertised with the prospect of offering "all the fun of a real circus and none of the discomfort."20

The theater matinee prices were extended until 6 o'clock, effective Tuesday, September 7, 1926. The existing policy had set the limit on the 35¢ matinee rate at 5:15 o'clock, and the change was made, according to Palace management, to allow employed people to take advantage of the matinee price. The new policy was effective Monday through Friday, with the exception of holidays.21 On October 2, Lou Forbes replaced

Alexander Keese as musical director. The arrival of Forbes was "related to the 'new Publix idea' . . . the placing of the orchestra on the stage to play specialty numbers and to accompany a weekly contingent of soloists and entertainers," as an added feature of the Palace program, according to the News. The policy of putting the orchestra on the stage had recently been successfully introduced in Chicago and Boston.\footnote{\textit{News}, Mon., Nov. 1, 1926, \textit{III}, 4.}

George Beban, "noted stage artist," brought his motion picture cast from the film, \textit{The Loves of Ricardo}, to the theater during the week of October 31, 1926. The reviewer commented that "he is a first class stage comedian and character man."\footnote{\textit{News}, Sun., Sept. 26, 1926, III, 4.} A plan to have Ted Weems Orchestra, then playing at the Baker Hotel, appear at a Palace "Midnight Matinee" on Saturday, November 6, had to be abandoned because the Dallas Musicians Union took the stand that "regular Palace orchestra musicians must be paid in the number equal to the personnel of the guest orchestra."\footnote{\textit{News}, Fri., Nov. 5, 1926, 4.}

Gilda Gray danced at the theater on the program for the week of November 11, and although, according to the review by John Rosenfield, people in Dallas didn't know whether "Gilda Gray was a snake charmer or a channel swimmer," she gave "one of the most spectacular premieres the town has ever known." Appearing in a dance and song interlude, Gilda Gray was preceded by the Royal Samoans who "do a war dance to highly aboriginal music." Rosenfield continued:

\begin{quote}
Tom Toms and clapping of hands punctuate the amorphous changes. The business gives way to a beautifully illuminated Polynesian set, the centerpiece of which is a thatched hut.
\end{quote}
The natives . . . sing "Aloha." . . . In the refrain Gilda Gray's voice is heard from the hut. . . . She appears in the doorway to wind up the song.

Next she breaks out into her wild and impassioned dance. This she performs with all the unconventional parts of the anatomy. One might call it an old-time "cooch" dance only it isn't. She has imparted a form and rhythm to the otherwise vulgar contortions that elevate them unquestionably to the plane of art. It is highly recognizing the poetic possibilities of movement and without resorting to cheap tricks which she may or may not and probably has in her repertoire. . . .

There was a report a month later that the tour of Gilda Gray, which ended on December 12 in Cleveland, had been "one of the most successful feats of amusement history in this country." In thirty weeks she had appeared before audiences that had paid more than $1,000,000.26

The Palace returned to the Saturday opening policy on December 25. New Publix houses in Houston and San Antonio made the shift necessary.27 Paul Oscard, one of the producers of the Publix stage shows, who was in Dallas for a visit in December, commented that "the public in this part of the country likes color, action and jazz and classics mixed in about equal proportions," and it was his observation that the Texas public was "just as finicky about perfect and efficient execution of dances, songs and the rest as is the New York public."28 Gertrude Ederle, "the girl who swam the English channel," was seen at the Palace in April, 1927, in a swimming act inside a 5,000 gallon glass tank.29 A week later, a Boris Petroff stage show was given, "built around harlequins, peirrots and

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pierettes. 30 The following Saturday, a benefit program, described as "the most elaborate midnight matinee ever attempted in Texas," was presented. Proceeds were to go toward furthering the career of Elizabeth Gerard, a Dallas operatic hopeful. In addition to Miss Gerard, others on the program included Pola Blust, former Charleston champion, Leila Mae Shiels, Boyd and Cy Landry of the "Opera vs. Jazz troupe," Daphne Campbell, the Foursome Quartet, and Bickle and Wild. 31 Approximately 2,100 persons attended, assuring Miss Gerard of at least a year's study in New York. 32

A New York release in the News on June 20 stated that the Publix stage presentations would be discontinued soon in New England, the South and the West, and a new type of program launched, which was to include stage bands led by conductors who were also qualified to act as masters of ceremonies. Talent from New York was to be sent through the circuits to appear with the stage bands, and the new type presentation was to "stress comedy and entertainment value rather than spectacular scenic effects." Currently, acts in which the stage orchestra appeared were booked locally. The Publix management was reported perturbed over the cost of the "spectaculars" in the smaller cities. Some of them cost from $20,000 to $30,000 to mount, not including railway and shipping expenses and salaries. The costs were pro-rated among the seventeen theaters, and, according to a newspaper account, the smaller towns' shares were said "to work too great a hardship on the sound operation of


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The final Publix Stage Show of the old type, during the week of July 17, featured Borrah Minevitch's Harmonica group.\(^{33}\)

**The 1927-1928 Season**

Publix Band Unit shows got under way on July 31. The unit included the Four Siberian Sweethearts, Markel and Faun, dancers, Chief Eagle Feather, tap dancer, Fulce and Sebastian, singers, Lillian Barnes, blues singer, and Alice Day, comedienne.\(^{35}\) A review of the August 21 bill gives an indication of the nature of these shows:

The current stage fare offered by the Palace-Publix performers, "Knick Knacks," includes acrobatics, bird mimicry, comedy, singing, dancing, also orchestral specialties by the Palace orchestra under the direction of Lou Forbes. The act, while not sensational, is good and goes over well with the audience.

Walter Vernon, billed as "The Laugh King," offers one of the tunes that stand out on the bill with his comic appearance and even funnier line, which would go over better if he would put a little more volume into his clever chatter. He is also a pretty good hoofer.

Another act which stands out on the bill is the offering of the Novelle Bros, who, dressed as circus clowns, present a good pantomime and bird mimicry turn and later present an acrobatic act while playing violins. Both of their acts received good applause, although their bird mimicry turn seems a little too long.

Adele Kellogg and Flo Lewis present two cute dance numbers with good coordination. The first is a collegiate dance turn in which they appear in swim suits, the trunks of which are somewhat the worse for wear as they make a novel exit, and their second number is a pony ballet. Both of these offerings went over well Saturday.

The singing part of the act is capably upheld by Woods Miller, baritone, and Loraine Tumier, soprano, who in solos and duet numbers show good voices.

Alice Lognova heads the ballet girls this week who go through their routine with precision and grace, their "black and white" turn being their best number.

Lou Forbes leads his "Merry Mad Gang" in another good jazz number, interpolated with much stamping of feet and clapping of

\(^{33}\)News, Mon., June 20, 1927, 4.

\(^{34}\)News, Sun., July 17, 1927, II, 4.

hands by the entire orchestra, while little Sonny Sunderland again plays the comic. Lou pulls his usual "wow" jokes again, only one of which scores especially, and that being on him. Dwight Brown offers as his organ selection "Me and My Shadow" with special stage effects and vocal interpolations. This number was well received.36

Announcement that the Publix Stage Shows produced by John Murray Anderson, Frank Cambria, Jack Parington, Boris Petroff and other directors would again be routed to the Palace Theater was made on October 25. However, the scheme of letting the orchestra occupy the stage was to continue.37

Florence Brady was the featured player during the week of November 6, while her partner husband, Gilbert Wells, was at the Majestic. Trouble over bookings had made necessary the separation of the husband-and-wife vaudeville team for the one theatrical season. However, Interstate, on which the Gilbert Wells act was booked, was allowing him to play his time "backward" so that he could be in the same cities with his wife.38 The Palace theater employed Sigmund Boguslawski as a second orchestra leader on November 11, 1927. He was to score the pictures and to produce the classical orchestral overtures, while Art Landry, who replaced Lou Forbes, was to lead the orchestra on the stage in the popular portion of the program. Only a few "deluxe" picture houses in the country had different stage and pit orchestra leaders, and the move placed the Palace "in a class with the Paramount Theater in New York, the Metropolitan in Boston, and Oriental in Chicago," according to Rosenfield.39
Milton H. Feld, traveling representative for the Publix home office, who was in Dallas on November 14, said that Texas was "now the most extensive of Publix 'deluxe' operations, with . . . four . . . in the state a larger number than in any other district."\textsuperscript{40} It was learned in December, 1927, that the Palace would install a $65,000 organ. The organ staff at the theater consisted of Dwight Brown, chief organist, Ray LaPere, first assistant, and Leonard Holland, second assistant and \textit{vox humana}.\textsuperscript{41}

Joe Penner, who headed the Publix stage show the week of January 21, was called in the review "a rarely efficient clown." He was said to be "perhaps the first one in months who has put a house in an uproar without off-color gags."\textsuperscript{42}

A local talent show called the "Body Beautiful Revue" was an additional feature on the Palace stage for the week of April 1, 1928, and, according to John Rosenfield's review, was intended "to show that one muscular man in trunks and sixteen well-developed girls in form-fitting bathing suits are highly acceptable to the ocular senses. The audience gets the point." The regular Publix Stage Show for the week had in its cast Jean Geddes, whom Rosenfield called a "voiceless but otherwise agreeable blues singer"; Paul Mall, described by the critic as "an amusing blackface comic"; Eddie and Freddie, said by him to be "a team of sensational tumblers and dancers"; Lyndon and Framan, whom Rosenfield termed "another prancing team with a burlesque Apache of interest"; and Affie

\textsuperscript{40}News, Mon., Nov. 14, 1927, 4.

\textsuperscript{41}News, Mon., Dec. 19, 1927, 4.

\textsuperscript{42}News, Mon., Jan. 23, 1928, 4.
Martyn, commented on as a "contortionist whose skill brings renown to her home town Galveston."

An improvement program, which it was anticipated would cost $200,000, was undertaken by the theater on May 9, and the changes were to include a new 48-foot high electric sign, "largest in the South"; new counterweight rigging, which would make pinrails unnecessary; and new dressing rooms. Also in May, the announcement was made that the Palace would get a new "soundsight" synchronizer, perfected by the General Electric Company, one that "captures sound in terms of light waves which are photographed along with the motion picture and reconverted into sound in the theater by the same beam of light that projects the picture on the screen." The new device was not to displace the pit and stage orchestras and the organ selections on the program were to be retained. Short movie subjects were to accompany the feature programs.

Eugene sic Dennis, 19 year old Kansas City high school girl "psychic," was at the theater the week of June 2, and while in Dallas she was consulted by Fort Worth detectives about a "recent murder case." The Palace manager, A. Hayden Mason, reported that "Miss Dennis' work on the case tied in closely with clues and theories of the Fort Worth detectives."

Lou Forbes returned as orchestra leader at the Palace on June 23 after an absence of nine months and received "one of the noisiest

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\(^{13}\)News, Mon., Apr. 2, 1928, 4.
\(^{14}\)News, Wed., May 9, 1928, 4.
\(^{15}\)News, Fri., May 18, 1928, 4.
\(^{16}\)News, Thurs., June 7, 1928, 4.
and most spontaneous demonstrations that the city has ever proffered." An insight into one of the theater practices of the times is provided by the comment of John Rosenfield that "the Palace had planned to corral a gang of urchins and spot them over the house with instructions to raise the roof when Forbes walked upon the stage. The theater neglected for some reason to consummate this rare trick of claquery. Events proved that the urchins were not needed. The entire audience raised sufficient din."⁷ A. Hayden Mason resigned as managing director of the Palace in July, 1928. Rosenfield noted that "he had discovered that midnight shows exercise a wise appeal among the younger element... He made midnight shows an instrument of charity." Rosenfield commented that Mason had also encouraged the use of local talent on the Palace stage through "Wednesday morning auditions and Thursday night discovery hours."⁸

The 1928-1929 Season

The week of July 29 found a "triple-barrelled" show bringing, according to John Rosenfield, "some of the grand old ovations of yester-year... at the Palace." Eddie Stanley, the new "personality leader," was praised in the review by Rosenfield for his "freshness of personality, unjaded spirit, oratorical but not-too-smart announcing, natural grace." And David Rubinoff, violinist, was said to have taken "the spotlight."

He did more than stop the show: he took it and tied it into a knot of Gordian hardness. After several encores, it becomes necessary to go on with the performance and let the audience rave. Rubinoff is both tricky and inventive. He takes the "Hallelujah" song from "Hit the Deck" and plays it as a Viennese waltz with

bits of "The Blue Danube" woven in. He also gives a unique arrangement of "Chloe." 49

On Saturday, August 4, the Palace introduced the first of the sound shorts that eventually were to help push live vaudeville out of the theater altogether. The shorts had Martinelli singing "Vesti La Guibba," and Hanford and Myers, "the Arkansaw Travellers," doing an act with musical saws. 50 Joe Penner came back on the stage during the week of September 22. His last appearance had made "wanna buy a duck" a vogue in Dallas, and in this new "turn," he "left out his ungodly laugh which bent spectators double" and substituted instead a violin solo. 51

Joe Darcey, a native of Dallas who was on the Palace stage the week of September 29, said in an interview that "he Darcey had as much to do with the vogue of the 'mammy' song as anyone except the unknown negro singers who originated it."

Dallas had cabarets, dance halls and kerosene-lighted pocket-sized theaters when I was a boy here twenty-three years ago. I began singing in these places and with my face blackened. Any song with "mammy" in it went over like a house afire, and so I kept it up. I worked hard, singing thirty or forty songs a day. That was my early training.

Rosenfield commented that Darcey organized a newsboy quartet later and used as material the songs he had written in Texas. 52 The Al Jolson movie, The Singing Fool, came to the Palace the week of October 14 and, because it was so long, the usual stage show was foregone. 53

On January 12, the name of the theater was changed to the Greater Palace.\textsuperscript{54} Ginger Rogers, Dallas girl destined for movie fame who had become the city's Charleston champion two years earlier and who was winning success as a performer in Publix stage shows, came to the Palace on February 9, 1929, in Parisian Nights, a John Murray Anderson revue.\textsuperscript{55} Rosenfield commented in his review that she had no voice, but that "she whips over a comic song with a great deal of charm and effect." And he added, "Strange, though, Publix won't let her dance."\textsuperscript{56}

Singer's Midgets, "the most famous of all Lilliputians," occupied the stage during the week of May 5, 1929, and had with them, according to Rosenfield's review, "three elephants, a Shetland pony, a camel and a donkey or two." The critic described the entertainment as "excellent," saying the midgets "strike a note of cuteness."\textsuperscript{57} Karvaeff, "one of the most noted Russian dancers of the present day," according to advance notices, was a featured soloist in Beauty Shop Blues, the Publix revue given during the week of June 8.\textsuperscript{58}

The 1929-1930 Season

On September 22, the Palace again changed its day for opening new shows, this time to Friday.\textsuperscript{59} Evidence that the audience was becoming more "sound movie conscious" came the week of September 28 when

\textsuperscript{54}News, Fri., Jan. 4, 1929, 1.
\textsuperscript{55}News, Thurs., Feb. 7, 1929, 1.
\textsuperscript{56}News, Mon., Feb. 11, 1929, 8.
\textsuperscript{57}News, Mon., May 6, 1929, 6.
\textsuperscript{58}News, Wed., June 5, 1929, 14.
\textsuperscript{59}News, Sun., Sept. 22, 1929, III, 5.
Rosenfield observed the results when Billy Muth, Palace organist, presented an interlude "devoted to an attempt to make the audience sing. The engaging little organist works hard, but he does not raise a chorus. The affair is stale stuff, but it seems that everything that can be done with organ periods has already been done."\(^{60}\)

Word came in November, 1929, that the Publix production department "has decided to cut its stage units in the future from a former average of four to a standard of three acts in each unit, with each act to be a 'punch' attraction." This was done, ostensibly, not only to "give the units more snap and comedy value," but also as an economy move, and according to Rosenfield, might "establish a new trend in picture house presentations."\(^{61}\)

John Boles, native of nearby Greenville and well-known movie singer, made a personal appearance at the theater on December 24. "Immediately after the performance," the announcement read, "there will be an informal reception in the lobby of the theater for patrons of the theater, movie fans and personal friends."\(^{62}\) A revue brought by Herman Timberg was the first of the "big name" productions "scheduled for ... stage presentation" at the Palace. Timberg introduced Barbara Blair, "pretty blonde dancer," and had the Farrar trio in his troupe. It was Timberg who had written the material used by Clark and McCullough and by Eugene and Willie Howard, and who had discovered the Four Marx Brothers, and

\(^{60}\)\textit{News}, Sat., Sept. 28, 1929, 10.


Rosita, a dancer.63

A change, which Rosenfield described as "the most revolutionary the Southwest has known in many years," was announced for the Palace Theater on January 3, 1930. As first announced, it provided for a "split weeks" system whereby the theater would have a new feature picture every Monday and Friday, with a new stage show on Monday to play through Thursday. The Palace would be without a stage show for three days but would use local musical talent and "elaborate" overtures for entertainment. The reasons for the change were cited by Rosenfield as "the large number of available pictures, the desire to play more expensive pictures longer than seven days, and the earnest search for a solution to 'blue Monday.'" Under the new arrangement, the average program picture would be at the Palace for three or four days, according to its anticipated box-office strength. The "super-special" film would be shown three days in the Palace and seven in the Melba.64

As finally outlined by Barry Burke, Southwestern division manager for Publix,65 the Publix stage shows would be shown Friday through Sunday, and from Monday through Thursday the picture would be supplemented with "production overtures." The stage shows were to go to the Texas Theater in San Antonio after completing their Palace run and the new policy was to go into effect on January 24. Burke attributed the need for the change to the motion picture industry, which was producing features that were not "standard in length, elaborateness or box office

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appeal. The rigid seven-day policy cannot accommodate them. John Rosenfield stated in a review about the new programming:

The surrounding program, minus the Publix stage show, takes us back to the days when we liked the Palace entertainment a great deal better than we do now. There is an orchestral overture of Gypsy airs conducted splendidly by Alexander Keese with one number well-sung by Jimmy Ellard. Johnny Winters has the inevitable organ interlude and there is a ballet of girls.

Another drastic change was announced on March 1 when Burke, the Publix division manager, disclosed that effective on March 21, "all musicians and employees attached to the Palace Theater will receive their 'two weeks' notice.'" The stage show and all other kinds of stage presentations, as well as the organ and orchestra features were to be discontinued. The "split" weeks policy was also to be abandoned and both the Palace and Melba were to revert to the former policy of seven-day picture engagements. The News article stated:

It is understood that the Publix-Paramount organization has embarked upon an elaborate schedule of short subject production. Variety acts, small revues, orchestra overtures and the like will be synchronized and photographed and released through the Publix circuit to replace the flesh-and-blood entertainers.

The first indication that this new policy was not to actually go into effect entirely as announced came on March 5 when it was learned that Johnny Winters, the organist, would remain at the

\[66\text{News, Thurs., Jan. 9, 1930, 10.}\]
\[67\text{News, Tues., Jan. 28, 1930, 10.}\]
\[68\text{News, Sat., Mar. 1, 1930, 5.}\]
theater and would play for each program. Then, on March 7, John Rosenfield stated that the reason Publix was discontinuing stage shows all over the circuit was "only in preparation for 'bigger and better' stage shows to come in four to six months."

The new Publix policy, noted Rosenfield, was going to be "to route an elaborate stage production with its own orchestra and master of ceremonies instead of sending a stage production to be accompanied by the theater orchestra and theater master of ceremonies." The first units were under construction in New York and from twenty to thirty "de luxe" theaters would be played before it reached Dallas. The new policy, he said, meant future employment for Dallas stage workers but not for Dallas musicians. The last of the Publix Stage Shows was Believe it or Not, presented during the week of March 15. The Palace orchestra was disbanded on Thursday, March 30. Three men who had been in the original orchestra when the theater opened in 1921 who were among those let go were Edward Cramer, Giuseppe Cinquemani, and Hyman Charminsky.

In April, according to John Rosenfield, the outlook was dim for an early return of stage shows to the Palace. The critic stated that Publix officials pointed out that the Palace business without the stage show "has struck an average of $12,000 or a loss of $5,000, but that $5,000 has been deducted from the cost of operations." One of the officials also commented, noted Rosenfield, that in order for the

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shows to return to Dallas, a need for them in Houston, San Antonio, and New Orleans had to be shown.73

A minor incident that took place during the same month illustrates the competition between Dallas entertainment houses:

Johnny Winters . . . at the Palace is now playing the conventional song slide. It was not a song slide that Mr. Winters used last Friday when the current program opened. It was a genuine pipe organ novelty consisting of photographs of prominent sights around Dallas with music to match. One of these sights was the State Fair Auditorium which carried the subtitle, "The Auditorium, where good music is played."

While a profile of the building occupied the screen, Mr. Winters played a snatch of the "Pilgrim's Chorus" . . . a gentle reminder of the opera season.

This was an offense, it appears to the Publix management, which ordered the whole feature killed. The management regarded the Auditorium shot as an undue exaltation of a competitive place of amusement and an unpleasant reminder of the music that was and is not at the Palace.74

The rumors had it in May, according to Rosenfield, that the orchestra was due to return to the Palace. He stated "that the Publix home office in New York is torn by dissension, one faction screaming the need of 'flesh' entertainment and the other still holding out for the 'canned' attractions." Rosenfield added that business critics were of the opinion that "talking motion pictures are exactly where silent pictures were three years ago. The novelty has worn off." Rosenfield expressed the opinion that the Palace weekly gross had fallen sharply since the abandonment of live entertainment, even though the Publix officials denied this.75

73News, Sun., Apr. 6, 1930, 11.
74News, Tues., Apr. 8, 1930, 4.
It was learned on May 26 that the stage shows were returning to the Palace on June 27. The orchestra of fourteen pieces was due to come back. Most of the orchestra men had taken jobs at radio station WFSA but had first option on their old positions under union rules. Rosenfield called the return of the orchestra and the shows as "a victory for vaudeville," and prophesied that the classical music policy at the theater "may never return unless the theaters decide that a touch of class is a tonic for the mass." He stated that such a policy "rarely has been a paying proposition, not because there is no audience for it, but because it costs so much to do right by the great masters."77

A "new and wide motion picture screen . . . for use with the Magnascope or wide-angle camera lens," was installed at the theater in June. The management was looking to the future, but, in the meantime, the stage presentations continued.

The new stage show, presented during the week of June 27 at the Palace, brought forth the comment from John Rosenfield that "the Palace Theater seemingly has resolved to be a different kind of place." He had kind words for the master of ceremonies as "youthful and vivacious," and stated that Helen Yorke and Virginia Johnson, sopranos, did a "clever routine." Most of the applause went to Kendall Capps, saxophonist and dancer, the critic observed. He also praised the dancing of Bobby Pincus. According to Rosenfield, the audience "displayed affection and gratitude"

for the stage entertainment, and "when the state band opened with 'Hail, Hail, the Gang's all Here,' the crowd, and it was a crowd, got the point and expressed its sentiments." The combination of the movie, Our Blushing Brides, with Joan Crawford; music in the "pit," the organist; and a stage "show," stated Rosenfield, promised a box office record at the Palace. And the critic said that if the people were "given something to relieve their minds, you can't keep them out," despite the depression. When the new Palace organ arrived on August 22, it was met by city officials and by Publix representatives, and the organ was dedicated by Mayor J. Waddy Tate.

As has been indicated, the trend at the Palace during the 1925-1930 period was toward a more popular type presentation. The 1925-1926 season began with an attempt to revive the classical-type programs and even to strengthen them with the presentation of grand operas, but this was abandoned even before the season was completed. Dressing rooms were added, the stage was enlarged, and by March of 1926, the weekly Publix revues were being seen on the Dallas stage. This was Publix' answer to the growing demand for stage entertainment that was so manifest at the start of the five year period. The Palace dropped almost completely the Rothafel-Riesenfeld type programming and adopted the unit type of presentations. This was a bold venture in Dallas and proved, for a time,

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highly successful. In October, 1927, the Palace tried another experiment, that of placing the orchestra on the stage. This practice was later to be adopted by the Majestic Theater. In July, 1927, another shift in policy, this time toward an even more popular type of presentation, one that stressed comedy and entertainment, was put into effect. It must be stressed at this point that Palace stage policy was being dictated at this time from the Publix New York headquarters. The new programs were more akin to traditional vaudeville than had been the unit revues. The Palace, in another experiment at this time, had two orchestras, one in the pit for the classical overtures and another, which was to play from the stage for the variety acts and for more popular orchestral numbers.

It is significant that so firm was the belief of the Palace management in the future of stage presentations that plans were made as late as December, 1928, for installation of a $65,000 organ.

Competition between the downtown theaters became even more intense during the 1927-1928 season. The Palace, for example, began midnight shows and had Wednesday morning auditions and Thursday night discovery hours.

It was in August, 1928, that the Palace began sound shorts featuring well-known artists of the entertainment world. It was these shorts that were to help sound the death knell for stage entertainment in the movie houses.

Like the Majestic, the Palace jockeyed for a better opening day for new programs, switching in September, 1929, from Saturday to Friday.

There was evidence that the audiences were, as Rosenfield put it, becoming more sound movie conscious, both in the growing reluctance of audiences to join in on songs played by the organ and also in the decision
of Publix to cut its stage units in each bill from four to three. This was, undoubtedly, also an economy move as it followed closely upon the stock market crash.

The depression, the sound films, the general decline of the popularity of stage entertainment, all contributed to a decision in January, 1930, by the Palace management to adopt a split-week policy, one that would see circuit acts on stage for only four days out of the week.

But this decision proved short lived. In June, 1930, new shows, with vaudeville acts, a master of ceremonies, organ interludes, film shorts and feature films were being seen weekly at the theater. Prospects at the end of the 1929-1930 season looked good for the Palace stage programs. But a year later, the theater was to drop the stage shows for months at a time, was to switch to the Fanchon & Marco Circuit, and, in an attempt to beat the problem of diminishing audiences brought about by the depression, was to revive its classical policy for a brief period. In the summer of 1933, the theater changed to a policy of presenting local artists, and by November, 1934, adopted an all-movie policy with only infrequent appearances by Dallas entertainers.

The Palace was built as a deluxe movie theater with major emphasis on its film presentations and with its live entertainment supplementing the movies. It seems to have catered to an audience somewhat more mature in its tastes than did such theaters as the Jefferson and the Majestic. The Majestic, on the other hand, was primarily a vaudeville house and its major emphasis was on its stage shows.

When the Palace management capitalized on the growing demand for stage shows in 1925, they brought to Dallas a new and more sophisticated
type of vaudeville. They inaugurated in the city the practices of the stage orchestra and the master of ceremonies and gave to Dallas a type of spectacular presentation that had become popular in the larger cities of the East.

But the same factors that operated to finally kill vaudeville at the Majestic and throughout the nation did not spare the deluxe houses. Palace stage entertainment became a victim to sound films, to the depression, and to competition.
CHAPTER XX

LOEW'S VAUDEVILLE AT THE MELBA AND THE OLD MILL

The Melba - Preliminary Statement

As was noted in Chapter XI, the Melba theater discontinued its stage entertainment on July 5, 1925. But with the revival of interest in stage entertainment, the Melba again, in April, 1926, resumed its stage presentations. However, the new policy was to last only two years.

The Melba had been purchased by Southern Enterprises in 1924 for a sum said to have been approximately $1,000,000. In 1925, Southern Enterprises amalgamated with the Balaban and Katz interests to form the Publix chain of theaters and both the Melba and Palace were in the new chain. On March 12, 1926, the Melba was leased by Publix to the Marcus Loew organization for the presentation of first run vaudeville and pictures. This gave Dallas three first-run vaudeville houses, the Majestic, the Melba, and the Pantages. The entry of Loew's into the city brought prospects of a theater war in the city. Following the Loew's announcement, for example, Simon Chaminisky, owner of the Pantages, advertised that admission prices in his theater would be reduced.

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1 News, Sat., Mar. 13, 1926, 4. The Pantages was formerly the Jefferson Theater.


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The 1925-1926 Season

The opening of the Loew's Melba, as the theater was now called, on Wednesday, April 7, 1926, brought a number of celebrities to Dallas for the occasion. They included Claire Windsor, Buster Keaton, Jack Mulhall, Dorothy Mackaill, Lew Cody, Dorothy Phillips, Lloyd Hamilton, Pauline Starke, William Russell, Eileen Percy, Charles de Roche, Rita Owen, Nondas Wayne, Athlone, N. T. G. of WhN, Marjorie Leet, Rose Wenzel, Dorothy Mason, Cyrilla Casey, Georgia Hall, Marion Dale, Jean Woodward, "Bugs" Baer, Marcus Loew, Ruby Keeler, and Renee Adoree.3 Entertainers on the opening bill were Miss Juliet, with "impersonations of famous stars;" Harry Pease and Ed G. Nelson, "America's popular song writers" with Ora Dawson; Tonie Grey and Company in "Run Down;" Howard Bennett; and Visser and Company. The picture was The Barrier, and prices were announced as 25¢ for the matinee until 5 p.m., and 50¢ for orchestra seats, 40¢ for balcony seats, and 60¢ for loges on Sundays, nights, and holidays.4 The theater was to maintain a Monday opening date until the new Loew's theater was completed in Houston in the fall, and then programs in Dallas were to open on Sunday. With the new Loew's Melba, Dallas was one of the few cities in the nation that could boast three "big-time" theaters. The prediction was made in the News5 that "competition should be intensely keen during the coming months."

3News, Tues., Apr. 6, 1926, 4.
On April 18, Zelda Santley brought her famous act, "Little Miss Everybody," to the Melba stage. Roscoe Ails, "a glossy-haired quick-tongued comedian," took the Melba audience by storm in his stage appearance the week of May 9. The reviewer stated:

His humor is instantaneous. For instance, he tells his partner that he has kissed every lady in the house. She doubts him and to prove it, he calls upon every lady that he has not kissed to stand up. One does, and Mr. Ails nonchalantly steps down from the stage and kisses her.”

The 1926-1927 Season

Fred LaReine, hypnotist on the Melba stage during the week of August 22, announced, according to the reviewer, that he would "put a young lady to sleep in the window of A. Harris and Co. and she will be awakened at 9:15 p.m. of the same day on the stage of the theater." In December, the floor of the theater, which had been built primarily for motion pictures, was raised to improve the sight lines, and in the same month, John Rosenfield, commenting on the act of Uncle Dave Macon, said about the "banjo player from the Tennessee mountains" that he was "a stranger to ordinary claptraps and 'theatricality.'"

Uncle Dave does not show unprecedented virtuosity with his instruments, relying chiefly on rustic philosophy, embodied in his own lyrics and songs to cheer his listeners. His allusions to red flannels, mothers, wives and mothers-in-law, bacon, molasses, hoe cakes, the Gospels, Methodists, Baptists,

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and "gals" are salty and indigenous humor. Three-fourths of the audience, but lately from such scenes as provide Uncle Dave's background, are boisterously happy about him. A minority view the offering somewhat stonily.  

Edna Wallace Hopper returned to the Melba on January 23, 1927, and on February 6, McIntyre and Heath, "the boys who made 'The Ham Tree' famous" in their first and only popular priced vaudeville engagement according to the advance notices, were greeted, the reviewer stated, "with the same old gales of laughter the king-pins of blackface comedy have aroused during the last decade or two." Their new vehicle, *Flying to Jail*, was said by the reviewer to be comparable to their earlier classic, *The Ham Tree*. Throughout the new sketch ran a soup-tree refrain, the reviewer observed, and the comedians also brought in "a cigar orchard and a bed of eucalyptus leaves." He commented that "it had the assembled guests, those across the footlights, convulsed from soup to nuts." McIntyre told reporters that he had first came to Dallas in 1873 "when the population more or less grouped about the courthouse square was 2,000 persons." The interviewer, who described McIntyre and Heath as "the oldest headliners in the business," expanded further on their early experiences in Dallas:

> J. W. Thompson, a friend of his was located here, and Thompson was induced to build a theater. The chief industry in Dallas then was buffalo hides, and McIntyre did some trading to raise money for a wagon. This vehicle he drove from Dallas to San Antonio, the metropolis, to engage talent for the Thompson Opera House. It was in San Antonio that he met Tom Heath, his one and only partner for over more than a half-century.

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McIntyre and Heath brought black-face comedy to Dallas during this time and also produced that famous old show "The Black Crook" which appeared at Thompson's off and on during the seasons of 1873-74, 1874-75 and 1875-76. This piece was put on in all its glory, even to securing of original costumes from London. During the years McIntyre and Heath rode the first railroad extended into Fort Worth . . . invited to make this journey . . . as they were celebrities.

Mr. Thompson implored the team to remain in Dallas and become the partners in an enterprise to build a bigger and better theater . . . for $150. Tom Heath and I thought more of our clothes than we did of the theater business. Instead of investing our fortune which was considerable, about $50, we spent it on a fine wardrobe.13

The Melba theater management had a run-in with the censor, Mrs. Ethel Boyce, about a film, Love's Greatest Mistake, starring Josephine Dunn, and the censorship board upheld Mrs. Boyce's edict. Mrs. Boyce commented that the picture "presented luridly the efforts of a young girl to find adventure in a large city, and a millionaire who offers her only money in return for her favor; that it showed the girl visiting the apartment of this man unchaperoned; and that 'the implied theme of the story is unconvincing and unsupportable.'"14 The theater manager appealed to Mayor Blaylock as a "court of last appeal," and after previewing it, the mayor commented "I've seen worse pictures," and it was agreed the film could be shown after two scenes were eliminated and a subtitle altered. The theater promptly advertised the film as "Passed by the Mayor."15

Frank Devoe, "celebrated Broadway entertainer," according to his advance billing, was on the Melba stage the week of February 27,16

and Al Heiman, "noted joker," was on the stage on March 13.  

Irene Franklin, perhaps the most famous red-headed vaudeville entertainer in America, according to the advance billing, headlined the March 13 bill, and Walter Clinton, was seen together with Julia Rooney, daughter of Pat Rooney, on March 27. For the week of April 10, the principal star was Hamid Bey, "noted Egyptian fakir," and the reviewer wrote:

His demonstrations mystified everyone.
The feature of his act involved a short burial in a wooden box covered with sand. Before attempting this, Bey goes into a catalepsy that is extremely realistic.

In this manner, he gains control of his nervous system, forces his body to do without oxygen and effects a perfectly rigid condition. Bey holds the attention and interest of each of his spectators, even with the blood-chilling temple chant that opens his turn. His minor operations include the hypnosis of a rabbit and a chicken, causing both to gain the same rigidity as in his own nervous fit. 

Francis White, star of the Ziegfeld Follies, The Hotel Mouse, and The Greenwich Village Follies, came to the Melba the week of May 1, and John Rosenfield noted that "her songs are all comic monologues set to pleasing enough music. It takes a dainty personality like Miss White and her 'blues' voice to put them over." He added that she was "a showstopper," and commented, "How many headliners stop shows these days?"

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The 1927-1928 Season

On the morning of July 18, 1927, fire of undetermined origin swept the stage and back section of the theater. The Loew's vaudeville shows were taken to the Old Mill Theater, at 1525 Elm Street. Wrecked in this blaze were the $85,000 cooling plant of the theater and the pipe organ, and members of the troupe lost valuable wardrobes. Two canaries "whose songs have greeted many Dallas people as they entered the theater" died in the fire, and "the stage was left a charred mass," according to the newspaper account. The flames did not go beyond the first row of seats and the heaviest losers were members of Buzzington's Rube Band who lost imported instruments that "cannot be replaced in America." No benefit show was planned for the actors because they were members of the National Vaudeville Artists Association and the newspaper reported that "any assistance they may need will be received from that organization."22

On October 22, the theater reopened, and following two weeks of all-picture bills, returned to the picture-and-vaudeville programs. The first stage program in the reopened theater, presented for the week of November 12, was headed by William Seabury, and by Irene Swor of the Dallas minstrel family. Ken Whitmore, Rome and Dunn, Steele & Winslow, Burt and Rosedale, Joe Fanton & Co., and Robert Earle were others on the vaudeville bill.23 The acoustics in the theater were reported by the reviewer as improved, and he observed that new stage drops, tormentors

and other decorations had been installed for the stage. As for the program the reviewer made the cryptic comment that "it does not differ greatly from the kind that Loew has already made known in Dallas."24 "The whispering pianist," Art Gillham, headed the bill for November 20, and on December 12, the critic had words of praise for Mary Haynes, "well known mimic," whom he called "something extraordinary."

She draws sundry character sketches by means of suggestive apparel. . . . She recalls Ruth Draper, but not, of course, in the delicacy of touch or sublime artistry of method. But the techniques of the two are similar and where the Draper girl astounds and amazes the highbrow audience the Haynes woman does the same with the vaudeville patrons. Among her impersonations are a gold-digging flapper, a Cook tourist, and the motley usually encountered on a trans-Atlantic voyage. She is decidedly worth while.25

Arthur Lovejoy, known in Dallas for his work in dramatic stock, was headliner of the December 18 bill, and impressed the critic "more as a natural comedian than as an actor." The review stated that Lovejoy stopped the show "with as poor an act as ever came this way." He commented that "Lovejoy needs a routine, but he has the comic appearance, a few clowning postures, and costumes himself appropriately in little Willie's flaring trousers."26

On January 2, the announcement came that Loew's vaudeville would be discontinued as of January 14, and that the Melba would return to the Publix Theaters Corporation which had formerly operated the theater and which still held the lease. It was estimated, according to the newspaper

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account, that from May, 1926 to January, 1927, the Loew's organization "dropped a $100,000 loss at the Melba." Good attractions had drawn patrons, but the house lacked "a steady, habitual patronage that would see it through in weeks of ordinary shows." The new Melba program was to include a symphonic orchestra, prologues, overtures, news reels and short features. The last show at the Melba before it gave up vaudeville had the Primrose Minstrels on a bill that also included Bernard and Kranz, Harry Breen, the Golden Bird and the Robbins Trio.

By May, the Melba was exhibiting Vitaphone shorts, and ceased to play a part in the vaudeville activity of the city.

The Old Mill

The Old Mill Theater fits into the vaudeville picture because it was there that the Loew's presentations were given while the Melba was closed for repairs. The Old Mill in 1925 was a first-run movie house. Occasionally there were stage shows, as when the Elks Jubilee Week vaudeville program was given there on May 1, 1926. The theater was converted by its owners, the Saenger Amusement Company, into a "long run" house in August, 1926. The theater was remodeled, the orchestra made larger, and a $22,000 organ was scheduled to be

installed. In November of the same year, a new policy of concerts, made up of classical, semi-classical and advanced forms of jazz and syncopation, and overtures with each performance, was inaugurated.

A month later, Sunday afternoon concerts were started, with local singers and instrumentalists as soloists. Pedro Avelar "America's youngest maestro" took over the Old Mill orchestra baton in March of 1927, and John Rosenfield predicted that in spite of the fact that Avelar was only nineteen years of age, he would become "one of the most popular orchestra leaders who charm this town," if he were permitted by the Old Mill management to remain. The theater began presenting miniature revues, built around the orchestra leader, in the spring of 1927.

Then in April, a new policy, that of using the Old Mill as a combination road show theater, music hall and first run picture house, was announced by A. R. Lever, city manager for the Saenger Amusement Company. The Old Mill had a seating capacity of 2,000 with twelve side boxes. It had a deep stage and ten dressing rooms, and a $30,000 organ. The decision, according to Lever, to use the theater in this manner "came after the road show motion picture 'Beau Geste' ... played in the Capitol Theater next door to twice as much business as anticipated." Lever stated that an auditorium on "the main drag" would be profitable. He described Fair Park auditorium as too large for the

"average available attraction," and said that the Old Mill would "make possible from two to three times as many musical events as have been booked here for one season within the last ten years."^37

**Vaudeville at the Old Mill 1927**

The plan for the summer months of 1927 was to have the theater operate on a split-week policy, with a "bargain shoppers" matinee,^38 but this was changed when the theater took over the Loew's vaudeville attractions after the fire at the Melba. The first vaudeville presentation at the Old Mill brought William Lawler, described in the advance notices as "the only surviving member of the famous Australian woodchoppers who were the sensation of vaudeville some years ago." Lawler, stated the reviewer, held three world championships and "has a standing challenge to meet any woodchopper alive today for a side bet."^39 Two weeks later, the Ritz Brothers were the headliners on a bill that also included Al Van and Al Shenk.^40 The Ritz Brothers were described by the reviewer as "three young roues . . . as collegians are fondly referred to in 1927, who whip over their stuff in acceptable fashion . . . although Oxford bags are passing from the picture and are being supplanted by trousers of more conservative cut." Van and Shenk were called "capable performers."^41 Two weeks later, it was announced

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that the Loew's program of pictures and vaudeville at the Old Mill
would be discontinued and that Saenger would take over the theater
again and resume the split week policy. The Loew's shows were not
presented again in Dallas until the $200,000 fire damage to the Melba
was repaired. Lionel H. Keene, Southern district manager for Loew's,
explained that it had been anticipated that the Melba repairs could be
done in time to open that theater again on August 27, and that the Old
Mill had only been temporarily leased for six weeks.42

The Subsequent Policy at the Old Mill 1927-1930

During the winter seasons, the Old Mill still continued to
have occasional stage shows. On March 1, 2, 1928, Sam and Henry,
"the world prominent negro dialect dialogue comedians of Station WGW,
Chicago, otherwise Freeman F. Gosden and Charles J. Correll,"43 played
an engagement there. The advance publicity stated that "for the last
year, six days a week, the comedians have performed over WGN. Their
fan mail is said to represent a small sized mountain. . . . The last
episode, given on February 2 of this year was No. 589.44

In June, 1928, the road show policy was declared to be a losing
proposition by the Old Mill management. The decision was made to return
the theater to its straight picture policy as soon as the last booking
was played.45 Then, in October, 1928, the Old Mill adopted Vitaphone

43They were to become even better known later as Amos and Andy.
and Movietone.\textsuperscript{46} A "nonsynchronous machine" that was used to "cue in the silent news reel," was discontinued in March, 1930, when Paramount Sound News was begun at the theater.\textsuperscript{47}

Loew's brought vaudeville of a high order to Dallas. Such stars as Zelda Santley, Edna Wallace Hopper, Irene Franklin, Walter Clinton and Francis White were all in the front rank of vaudeville entertainment. Perhaps the decisive factor in the decision to give up stage entertainment at the Melba theater came with the theater fire in 1927. Although the stage shows were of high quality, it became apparent that Dallas could not support three first run stage houses. The Majestic was well established, the Palace was bringing in spectacular extravaganzas, and the Melba could not attract the necessary crowds.

The Old Mill, oldest of the first run movie houses in the city, also attempted to capitalize on the growing interest in live entertainment. The six weeks in which the theater housed the Loew's presentations were entirely on a lease arrangement and ostensibly this was done to fulfill contracts with Loew's entertainers.

Under A. R. Lever, the Old Mill management conceived the scheme of serving as the downtown auditorium with the potential of becoming a first run movie house, a movie road show theater and a music hall that could also be utilized for legitimate drama. However, this new policy only continued for one year, and by July, 1928, the Old Mill was again back in the ranks of theaters with straight movie programs.

\textsuperscript{46}News, Sun., Oct. 21, 1928, III, 5.

\textsuperscript{47}News, Thurs., Mar. 6, 1930, 14.
The fate of live entertainment at the Old Mill and the Melba would indicate that although there was a revival of interest in vaudeville, the interest only continued until the sound films came along.
CHAPTER XXI

THE FAILURE OF TABLOID SHOWS AND MUSICAL STOCK

The Jefferson Theater

Lacking the size and stability of the Majestic, the Palace and the Melba, the Jefferson Theater, at 1517 Elm Street, was perhaps more responsive to the eddies in popular taste that swirled over the theatrical scene during the 1925-1930 period. In 1925 it was given over to tabloid shows. It switched to straight vaudeville when that form of entertainment had a revival, changed again to tabloid shows, went back to an abbreviated form of vaudeville, tried the tabloidi shows once more, and by 1930 had switched to an all "talkie-picture" policy.

Tabloid Shows - 1925

The 1925-1926 season was launched at the theater by Danny Duncan and his musical troupe in a production called Oh, Algie, Behave. There was to be an auxiliary program of first run pictures. Duncan came from a Grand Rapids summer engagement and had in his troupe the Avalon Four, said in the advance notices to be "musicians who have some vogue on the phonograph," and a chorus of twelve girls.¹ He ended his run on September 27 and was replaced by "The Charleston Steppers," described in their billing as having "an enviable reputation throughout the Middle West." Some of the Duncan players were retained. Among the newcomers

were Helen Willard, Ned Haverly and Louise King. The advertisement for the theater proclaimed:

The highest class, most entertaining of musical comedy productions are staged at this theater under the personal direction of Palmer Hines. "Little Jesse James." You can't pay more than 40 cents. The "Charleston Stepper," a musical comedy that played two years in New York. Also movie.

The Jefferson program for the week was called by the reviewer "by far the fastest, classiest and most entertaining of singing and dancing shows seen here in months." The reviewer stated that "the stage set . . . is a thing of beauty and art," and gave particular praise to Vi Gilbert as "one of the cleverest character women in this section of the country." He added that she was well known in the city and was greeted "with generous applause when she appeared on the stage."

Pantages Vaudeville 1925-1926

On December 2, 1925, the announcement came that as of December 13, the Jefferson Theater would be closed as a tabloid musical comedy house and would reopen on December 27 as the Pantages Theater, "playing big time Pantages vaudeville acts and first run motion pictures."

The new operators, the State Amusement Company, headed by Ray Stinnett and Si Chaminsky of Dallas, planned to spend $20,000 to "remodel, redecorate and reseat" the theater. By May of the following year, the State Amusement Company announced plans to build "a new theater on Elm Street to cost $250,000."

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The first bill at the Pantages Theater included "The Fad and Francis revue" with twelve people; Jane Courthope and Co. with Hal Jerome and Gloria Gray; The Caledonia Four-harmony funsters; and Murand and Leo. The policy also included a first-run feature picture. Eph Charminsky was orchestra conductor, and Jean Darnell, former Hollywood actress who had been active in Dallas publicity work for several years, was named in charge of publicity and advertising. John Rosenfield reported the day after the December 27 opening that "the audience found the theater clean, comfortably warm and attractively redecorated. Models of the new seats to be installed soon were on view in the lobby, obviating any possible criticism of the old and somewhat creaky chairs." He stated that "the opening bill manifestly pleased."  

In February, 1926, the Pantages changed its opening date from Sunday to Saturday. A month later, the theater cut its prices to 10¢, 25¢, 35¢, promising the "same super-vaudeville, same feature photoplays, continuous 1 p.m. to 11 p.m." The Pantages vaudeville was discontinued for the summer months in 1926, and the summer prices were 10¢ and 15¢ with picture changes on Saturday and Wednesday.  

Musical Stock at the Pantages 1926-1927

As the 1926-1927 season got under way, Si Charminsky, the

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manager, promised that the theater would reopen with "the largest stock musical comedy company which has ever played in Dallas." He said he was negotiating with the Bert Smith "Smiling Eyes" company which had a cast of forty people, and which, he said, "carries a carload of scenery and costumes and presents the latest Broadway hits." Among these "hits" slated for presentation in Dallas were Pitter Patter, Little Nellie Kelly, Not Tonight, Dearie, Getting Gertie's Garter, and others.\(^2\) Charminsky said a few days later that "this is going to be a real first class genuine musical comedy. . . . Please get it out of your head that this is a tab show."\(^3\) The first Bert Smith presentation was Lombardi, Ltd., and among those featured were Elinor Marshall, said, in the advertisement, "to have a voice and personality which she can adapt to almost any type of role," and Lillian Bessent, "the company 'blues' specialist."\(^4\) Jeff Holcomb, who was director of the Dallas Athletic Club Orchestra, relinquished that post to play with the Bert Smith musical comedy group. He had conducted the orchestra at the Majestic theaters in Dallas, San Antonio and Galveston, the Orpheum in Portland, and the Pantages in Fort Worth.\(^5\)

The reviewer called the Smith group "somewhat different from anything else that has been seen in Dallas within recent memory." He commented that it had "expensive costumes, fine quality of singing and dancing, and youth and beauty in the chorus of girls." The review

continued:

"Lombardi, Ltd." . . . is a breezy interesting show with a definite plot and enlists interest on its own score without the aid of the music, the girls and the high stepping.

In the company are singers and actors that undoubtedly will become familiar and popular figures to the Dallas public. Elinor Marshall, prima donna, is a young and vocal blonde of much charm. Ione O'Donnell is a capital dancer and rag-time singer and a good-looking girl to go with it. Lillian Bessent is a Junoesque who can sing "blues" songs about as well as anybody on the stage today.

The principal male is Joe Marion, chief comedian and stage director, who is an agreeable entertainer himself.

Ray Stinnett and Simon Charninsky have been somewhat daring in their plan to install an expensive company to give one bill a week. This policy again places the Pantages house among the "first-run" theaters of the street.

Just what luck Stinnett and Charninsky will have with their troupe can not be prophesied. It depends somewhat upon their ability to acquaint Dallas with the exact nature of their attraction and to appeal to the best class of patrons.16

An Orthodox "Tab" Policy - 1927

For the next two weeks the Bert Smith company kept going, offering Not Tonight, Dearie and The Vamp, and then on October 28, the manager announced that "this attraction, one of the most expensive tabloid shows ever brought to Dallas . . . has suffered from patronage insufficient to meet the 'nut' or overhead." He stated that "the elaborate programs offered by the vaudeville and picture houses at a 50¢ and 60¢ top price makes it impossible for stock companies to compete at the same or at a higher price."17 Two days later he announced that the theater would go on a more orthodox "tab" policy in three weeks, bringing back Pete and Bud, "the two tabloid comedians who a few years


ago gave the Jefferson Theater its longest run of prosperity. During the week of October 24, the Bert Smith company gave its last presentation, Stepping on the Gas. By November 12, a new policy of showing two acts of vaudeville with the feature picture was in effect.

Limited Vaudeville Returns 1927

In February of the following year, H. L. Youngblood of Dallas purchased the lease for the Pantages from R. J. Stinnett. The vaudeville program had been discontinued earlier and the house had reverted to a first run picture policy and then again to pictures with three acts of vaudeville. Youngblood announced his intentions of engaging Pete Pate, on March 19, for an indefinite engagement. In September, 1927, Bud Morgan's company held the stage. Morgan had been the partner of Pete Pate who had died in the interim.

Straight Movie Policy, The Ritz 1928-1930

In May, 1928, Stinnett subleased the theater to the Crystal Theater Operating Company, headed by W. G. Underwood. It was announced that Underwood would install vitaphone and movietone "synchronizers" in the theater "and be in position to give second runs to the hundreds of synchronized motion pictures to be produced next season." Underwood had operated the Crystal since it had been sold by Southern Enterprises

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three years earlier. It was due to be torn down and replaced by an office building. Then, on October 14, the Pantages, which had become the Ritz theater, opened as a second-run house. It was advertised as having "the most unique and unusual decorative scheme, the best of upholstered seats, courteous and efficient service, and the greatest programs in talking and synchronized pictures. Prices for Saturday, Sunday and Holidays were 25¢ for the lower floor with the balcony going at any time for 15¢. On weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. the price was 15¢ all over the house, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., 20¢ on the lower floor, after 6 p.m. 25¢.24

John Rosenfield commented on the day of the Ritz Theater opening that "the theater has been one of the most consistently profitable operations in Dallas amusement history. . . . Except during the expensive experiment of Pantages vaudeville, it has always enjoyed steady patronage. It is located on Elm street next to the Capitol Theater near the head of Stone street."25

Tab Shows at the Lyric Theater - 1926-1927

Slightly lower on the "theatrical scale" than the Jefferson was the Lyric Theater, formerly the Happyland. It was a "ten-twent-thirt" house and must have had a steady patronage for until it reverted to movies in the spring of 1927, it had the same company of "tab" stock actors for a twenty-seven week run.

The Lyric was acquired in August of 1926 by R. L. Browning of

Oklahoma City who operated the theater for the Griffith Bros. Amusement Company, owners of Griffith theaters throughout Oklahoma. Browning announced that beginning on August 15, 1926, the theater would have musical comedy and first run pictures. When the R. Frank Norton Players as of February 13 had opened their eighteenth week at the theater, they attracted their first mention in the News amusement section.

This little aggregation which came unheralded into a theater of no repute, has accomplished the seemingly impossible by presenting plays of a clean and respectable nature.

Mr. Norton himself is a comedian of both broad and light type. Ralph Moody came from the North Bros. Stock Company, Mr. Coggeshell from the Trousdale Players, Mr. Maze from the Murphy Players in California, and Mr. Gardner from the Oliver Players in Illinois.

Of the girls in the company Hazel McOwen was recently engaged with the Crawford Players in Kansas, Helene Tolvay is from Fred Stone's Company, and Alice Colloson from some of the larger stock companies of the east.

The orchestra is composed of eight men who play popular and semiclassical music. Some of the plays presented by the Norton Players included The Girl from Wyoming, Detouring Wives, Movie Madness. There was "vaudeville between acts." On March 12, 1927, the R. Frank Norton Players opened their twenty-second week, presenting "a new three-act comedy drama, 'Nobody's Business'" and the final presentation on March 31, 1927, was Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot. After that, the Lyric

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went into a policy of motion pictures.\textsuperscript{32}

The tabloid shows and musical stock appealed to a less catholic taste than did straight vaudeville. Their humor and stunts were geared to a less discriminating taste. It was in the 1925-1930 period that the tabloid shows and musical stock virtually disappeared in Dallas. They could not survive the competition from the vaudeville houses and the sound films. For a time, the tabloid shows and musical stock shared in the brief renewal of interest in live entertainment, but as sound films provided comedy and musicals, the stage forms lost their audiences.

Prices at the Jefferson, subsequently renamed the Pantages and later the Ritz, and at the Lyric, formerly the Happyland, were much lower than at the Palace and the Majestic, but the growing sophistication of taste in the city, the rising costs of live entertainment, and, as has been stated, the competition, made it inevitable that the two theaters would adopt all-film policies.

The Jefferson and the Lyric provided "poor man's entertainment." For a time, the Jefferson drew steady patronage, as pointed out by John Rosenfield. But the growing scarcity of musical stock and tabloid companies and the increased prices they charged for their entertainment, coupled with the low price policy of the theater, drove the Jefferson and similar theaters into straight film showings.

As for the Lyric, by the time it moved into the tabloid stock showings, the form was on its last legs. The R. Frank Norton Players

\textsuperscript{32}News, Mon., Mar. 28, 1927, l.
were able to continue for twenty-two weeks, catering to audiences' nostalgia for the old days and drawn to the theater by the extremely low prices, but after this experiment, the Lyric also became a straight motion picture house.
CHAPTER XXII

THE FAIR SHOWS REACH MATURITY

The opening of the new Auditorium at Fair Park in October, 1925, marked a new era for the State Fair shows. Throughout the entire 1920-1925 period, the shows had consisted of elaborate variety presentations. They had been given in the 2,500-seat Coliseum which had an inadequate stage and which could not be utilized for spectacular scenic effects. The entire 1925-1930 period was given over to the presentation of Shubert operettas. By 1930, the taste for the operettas in the city had jaded and it was in that State Fair season that the still existing policy of presenting outstanding Broadway musicals was first attempted.

The Student Prince 1925

It is interesting to note that the State Fair management made an attempt as early as 1925 to bring a successful Broadway musical to Dallas for performances during the Fair, but this miscarried. The success of The Student Prince persuaded the State Fair Association to continue the operettas for the next four years. The Auditorium had been under construction during the State Fair Show of 1924 and the Fair musical had been presented in a large tent.

As early as June, 1925, word was received in Dallas that Sky High, then playing on Broadway with Willie Howard in the principal role, was to be the Fair show that season with the entire New York company
of one hundred and eight persons. The News quoted an article in Billboard\(^1\) which stated that:

Fred M. Barnes, a well known amusement broker . . . made some new and unusual history this week when he completed arrangements and signed contracts to send the musical comedy . . . to appear for sixteen days at the State Fair. . . . Not only is it the first time a No. 1 Broadway company intact has been presented in an attraction at the State Fair but it is also the first of such companies to visit the State of Texas.\(^2\)

As late as September 20 the News carried advertisements stating that Sky High, with Willie Howard, was to be the State Fair attraction.\(^3\)

However, when the State Fair management announced that The Student Prince instead of Sky High would be given during the Fair season, the explanation was made that "difficulty with a 'Sky High' principal who declined to come South, precluded the possibility of the Shuberts complying with the former contract to send an original New York company to Dallas." Instead, the Shuberts and the Fair officials had arranged for the presentation of The Student Prince. John Rosenfield commented that Fair officials had originally selected The Student Prince when they had visited New York in the latter part of June, but because there had been the possibility that the operetta, which was high in popular favor, might continue its Broadway run indefinitely, Sky High had been contracted for. The critic stated that The Student Prince had been "hailed by New York critics at its opening on Broadway as 'the greatest singing show New York has ever known.'\(^4\)

\(^1\)Trade weekly for the entertainment world.


\(^3\)News, Sun., Sept. 20, 1925, III, 4.

Bob Langley, writing in the Times Herald, commented about the Dallas opening of the operetta:

Anyone who has been many months away from the centers where great musical comedies are produced hesitates to trust his enthusiasm for "The Student Prince of Heidelberg," shown Saturday night at the new auditorium. It might be just homesickness for the real thing. But unless memory has played us tricks, "The Student Prince" is the realest thing in the way of entertainment that has escaped from New York City in many a day—the best thing in the musical comedy line that Dallas has had in recent years. "The Student Prince" was full of music, musical score and musical voices. Olga Cook, who played Kathie the leading part, has a beautiful voice. The prince himself, who is Roy Cropper, can sing. Vernon Jacobson, who played Dr. Engel, has a beautiful baritone. And not only the soloists, but several others in the cast have good voices . . . worthy of solo parts.

But the glory of "The Student Prince" is its choruses. The male chorus takes the audience off its feet. Beautiful harmony are the choruses, made of wonderfully trained voices blending together. The students' drinking song is something to remember. The Heidelberg students, moreover, are refreshingly youthful and full of the joy of living—convincingly so to the audience at any rate.

The comedians deserve special mention. Lut, Percy Hemus, the pompous and absurd valet of the prince; Gretchen, played by Emme Niclas, and the Grand Duchess Anastasia, Bell Sylvia, did excellent comedy relief work. Another work of commendation for the management of the company: the costumes were clean, new and beautiful to a degree rarely seen on the road or even in the city after a season of showing . . .

The new auditorium was about half filled with an enthusiastic audience. The hall lived up to its reputation for acoustics, and every person, no matter where seated, could see everything on the stage.

The stage itself was ample for the large production, even for the court scene, where the gorgeously costumed ladies and gentlemen moved about in a gavotte. Lighting and stage setting would compare favorably with New York stages, while the scene shifting was even better than most, the intervals being gratefully short.

An excellent finished production in a beautifully practicable auditorium was "The Student Prince" Saturday night in the Fair Auditorium.5

5Times Herald, Sun., Oct. 11, 1925, I, 10.
Commenting on the attendance at the operetta on October 18 when the Fair season was at its midway point, John Rosenfield wrote:

Early last week the reviewer could sit in the best seat in the House. . . . Saturday night, in spite of the solicitude of the management, he was forced into row JJ, four tiers from the back of the mammoth hall.

The great distance from the viewer's eyes to the stage lent enchantment. The acoustics, really remarkable, carried every sound, even the sotto declamation of Nathaniel Sack as the mellow Toni, the waiter. . . .

The music tugged the heartstrings as before. . . . The drinking song was rousing, the waltz lilting, the serenade gratifying. . . .

After the disheartening start, "The Student Prince" has hit its stride and broken a few records. . . . It played to capacity Friday night, Saturday afternoon and evening, and Sunday afternoon and evening—25,000 persons in three days. Advance sales from Monday to the end of the run indicate capacity for the rest of the time.

E. H. Fitzhugh, the house manager of the new auditorium, stands for a statement that this is a larger crowd than saw the operetta in New York and Chicago a similar number of consecutive days. Friday night the new auditorium housed its first capacity audience. This is perhaps the largest crowd ever gathered under one roof in Dallas.!

So great was the success of The Student Prince that the Fair Park management continued the policy of operettas for the next four seasons. Its artistic worth so impressed John Rosenfield and the other critics that they measured the worth of the subsequent operettas in terms of the way they measured up to this presentation.

Princess Flavia - 1926

For the 1926 State Fair Show, the Shuberts provided Princess Flavia, a musical version of Anthony Hope's novel and stage play, The Prisoner of Zenda. Sigmund Romberg, who arranged the music for the

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6*News, Mon., Oct. 19, 1925, 4.*
operetta, had provided for a chorus of nearly one hundred soldiers. From Dallas, the operetta was scheduled to go to Chicago, where it had not yet appeared. Evelyn Herbert, prima donna of the operetta, was said, to be the only singer, according to the advance notices, to have been educated and sponsored by the late Enrico Caruso. Others in the cast included Frank Lalor, Douglas Dumbrille, James Marshall, William Pringle, Felicia Drenova, Florence Morrison and Gladys Walton. Sigmund Romberg, who according to the News, was elated about Princess Flavia going to Dallas because The Student Prince had drawn a total gross of $100,000 during the 1925 Fair season, was in Dallas for the opening performance and was scheduled to conduct the first performance. As it turned out, he only officiated at the interlude when the operetta opened on October 9.

Writing in the Times Herald, R. T. Fitzgerald said about the production:

With the memory of "The Student Prince" in their minds, first night audiences attended Saturday . . . the "Princess Flavia." . . . The feature of the whole thing, from an audiential [sic] standpoint, was the tenor and hero of the story, Howard Marsh. Mr. Marsh, with an ease of manner and a smoothness of delivery that could scarcely have been improved upon, put the audience at its ease in a most genial way. . . . Miss Evelyn Herbert also was rich in her soprano. Gladys Walton, as the Countess Helga, has not too good a voice, but


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she made an adorable picture, and her dancing was pretty enough. Her voice was clear, if not strong.

A comparison with the "Student Prince" . . . "Princess Flavia" is more of the palace . . . less serious . . . much less penetrating . . . has a larger company, more elaborate bric-a-brac, and more good looks, as well as a more pretentious set.

The latter is quite gorgeous at times.

Sigmund Romberg . . . was in the audience and was called to the stage by Company Manager Moe Wise and introduced. The celebrity directed the orchestra in several selections from "Blossom Time," "Maytime" and "Flavia." When he came to "Deep in My Heart, Love" from "The Student Prince," which was sung by Miss Herbert and Mr. Nash as a duet, the audience gave them . . . an ovation [which] old time theater men in the audience say has never been equalled in Dallas or anywhere else in history.

This was between the second and third acts.

The house was practically filled.

John Rosenfield said about the operetta that it was as good as The Student Prince "although the rest of the town may be pardoned for thinking otherwise."

Countess Maritza - 1927

The original New York cast was obtained for the 1927 Fair Show, Countess Maritza. Included among the cast were Marjorie Peterson, dancer; Ernestine Jeanne, mezzo soprano; Harry K. Morton, comedian; Walter Woolf, Odette Myrtih, Gladys Baxter, and a grand opera ensemble of eighty voices. Prices for the show ranged from a $2.50 top evenings on the lower floor to $1 on the balcony, and $2 to 75¢ for matinees.

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John Rosenfield commented that at the opening performance the audience filled about 3,500 seats and that it was "really the finest cast seen in Dallas within the years of the Shubert dominance of the Auditorium." He stated that Walter Woolf had a "lushious, resonant vocal organ" and that he "presented a sturdy graceful figure and an amiable demeanor." Gladys Baxter, a former grand opera star who was in the title role, was, according to the critic, "a versatile actress, young and handsome and precieuse in the choice of wardrobe," and he commented that with respect to her voice "only superlatives may be written." George Dobbs was described by Rosenfield as "a juvenile stepper ... with elfin spirit ... Puck come to life," and Odette Myrtil, French comedian, was stated by the critic to have "sustained a heavy share of the plot, played the violin, sang and danced."

The reviewer commented that Harry K. Morton, the principal comedian, was "as good at his dancing as he was at his comedy." Rosenfield observed that the audience "on various occasions ... stopped the show in honorable vaudeville manner." He described the two sets as "both rich in quantity and quality," and called the indoor setting "a traditional Shubert second act set ... a palatial interior that floods the vision with beauty and line. Its tones are wisteria, old gold and black, relatively sedate, but comparable in splendor with the carmine of the 'Student Prince.'"16

Fitzgerald, writing in the Times Herald, called the score of the show "easily superior to the 'Princess Flavia.'" He stated that

Gladys Baxter set "a new standard for sopranos," and that none of the "beautiful Shubert productions brought to Dallas anything in the soprano quality to compare with this full-throated star." The critic added that it was "a comfort that so brilliant a creature . . . should nevertheless possess such shapely legs." He praised the "unpretentious but very pleasing efforts" of Marjorie Peterson, a member of the cast from Houston, and stated that "Walter Woolf's stage presence is superior to his voice." As for Harry K. Morton, the critic stated that in the second act he "simply runs away with the show." Fitzgerald observed that in The Countess Maritza, the Shuberts "seem to be leaning back to the musical comedy of the old style. All the operetta music is there, but some of it approaches the pre-Shubert days and some of the skits are almost vaudevillian."

After the Fair season had ended, Rosenfield called Countess Maritza "the best show of the Dallas stage season," and stated that for Dallas "it represented skill and finish. It was truly a production." He estimated that the show earned about $80,000 during the two weeks it was at the State Fair Auditorium and that because of the big cast and the high priced performers, there could not have been a big profit, "but only enough earning power to justify it as a legitimate business investment." The critic stated that Harry K. Morton was paid $1,750 a week. The total attendance at the 1927 State Fair reached 1,028,317, setting a new record.

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Other acts presented at the 1927 Fair included a series of circus stunts presented twice daily in front of the grand stand. Among these were the Clarkonians; the Chicago Cadet band of sixteen musicians; the Nelson Family, acrobats; Will Morris, comedian; Shorty Flem, clown; the Lime Trio, called in the advertisements "three 'Boneless Boobs'"; the London Tiller Girls, dancers; the Auroras, acrobats; and the Clark Troupe, trapeze experts.20

The Desert Song - 1928

As early as May, 1928, it was reported that The Desert Song had been booked for the State Fair season. The price for the engagement was said to be $80,000.21 The operetta had enjoyed a run of fifteen months in New York, nine months in Chicago, and was in its second year in London. Among those in the company for the Dallas performance were Alexander Gray as the Red Shadow; Bernice Claire as the Little French Girl; Bernard Granville as the timid war correspondent; and Harold Stanton, John Philip Ryder, Edna Torrence and Carlotta Miles.22

Rosenfield traveled to St. Louis in September to see the production, performed by the same company that was to bring it to Dallas, and reported that St. Louis "managed to work itself into a state of giddiness . . . over the 'Desert Song.'" He wrote that Sigmund Romberg "has regained the freshness of melody and depth of orchestration that made 'Blossom Time' so famous . . . and 'The Student Prince' such a

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smashing hit recently." Rosenfield had nothing but praise for the "two extraordinary principals and several other remarkable ones."

Bernice Claire, according to the reviewer "is a perfect beauty and has a voice to match." He stated that "Alexander Gray looks like a handsome fullback. There is a fine virility to his singing . . . looks and stage deportment." As for Bernard Granville, "the best known member of the troupe," Rosenfield commented that "he handles the comedy in a style more original than usually found in an operetta." And the critic described Sally Sloan as "a soubrette who can be comical without resorting to outlandish makeup." He described the dancing as "the finest terpsichorean resources that Dallas [sic] has ever seen," and noted that "a great deal of speed and lightly romantic melodrama characterizes the entire production." Rosenfield stated that the operetta, which was scheduled to go from St. Louis to Kansas City, and from there to Dallas, was not slated to be performed in any other Southern or Southwestern city because, as he put it, it was "too elaborate for the customary destinies of Southern road shows."23

The two weeks preceding the opening of the State Fair season witnessed an enormous advertising campaign for the operetta. One typical advertisement stated in part:

There can be only one opening night. If you are not there you will miss The Flowers, The Gowns, The Celebrities, the Stage Reception, the Presentation, and all the other extra beauties and thrills that will stamp the opening of the Desert Song as the One outstanding event in Texas Musical and Dramatic History. Four days left to get your seats.24

Robert Lunsford reviewed the opening performance, given on October 6, for the *Dallas Journal*, and called the action of the play "so fast" and the movement of the characters "so swift," that, he added, "no doubt is left as to the reason for this Sigmund Romberg opus." He stated that "it pleases the audience ... and has the 'happy ending' which is something the public demands, as it can sleep better afterwards." Lunsford praised Bernice Claire as having "a voice of unusual sweetness, clarity and carrying quality," and described Bernard Granville as "an excellent interpreter." He stated that Edna Torrance had "a fiery, wiry part and this slender girl is well adapted to the difficult task of being actor and dancer at once." The critic praised Ben Hendricks, who portrayed the role of General Birabeau, as having "the bearing of a [sic] Marshal of France, and dignity which serves him well in rendering his lines," and described the choruses as "excellently trained and well matched, especially the women." He stated that "the costumes are fresh and the scenery looks as if it is being its first use on this engagement."  

The opening night performance, according to John Rosenfield, drew an audience "in excess of 1,000 persons." He stated further:

The magnitude of the production is well set off in the auditorium. "The Desert Song" looked 1,000 per cent better Saturday night than it did several weeks ago in the tiny Rialto Theater in St. Louis where this reviewer first saw it. By its beautiful music, splendid cast and fine balance of all popular elements such as action and comedy, "The Desert Song" will probably give State Fair audiences more pleasure than anything else since "The Student Prince."  

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Walter Woolf, who had played the principal role in Countess Maritza, was again the leading singer in The Red Robe, selected in April of 1929 as that year's State Fair production. Other featured players in the performance were Marjorie Peterson, Barry Lupino and Helen Gilliland. Lupino was a member of the famous English family of comedians. He was described in advance notices as "the most famous comedian ever to grace the boards of the local theater." An advance newspaper story stated:

For the last 200 years there has not been a season passed but some of this famous family was starred in the leading productions of the day. The Lupino family came into prominence when Georgius Luppino, as the name was then spelled, brought his puppet show from Italy to London. His children were the clowns in the puppet show and in 1729 this was the rage of the London Theater.

The family has always been a family of clowns. Today, there are more than forty Lupinos in various parts of the world, in stage productions and movies. At the time Georgius Luppino first became famous, there was a great rivalry between his family and the Gremaldi family, also a family of fun makers. Great and daring steps were taken by members of the two families to outdo the other. A trust in the fun making business was formed in the 18th century when Barry Lupino's grandfather married a sister of Joseph Gremaldi, and united the two famous families. The Gremaldi family finally became absorbed by the more famous of the two families.

When a Lupino is born it is as natural for him to be considered another one of the troupe as it is for him to grow up. Six of the Lupinos have been born in dressing rooms. Chevalier George Lupino, sage of the family who now resides in Birmingham, England, was born in a dressing room.

They are born on the stage and die on the stage, as nine members of the family have died while enacting comedy scenes in productions. Barry Lupino is perhaps the most famous of the family on this side of the water. He has been playing in Broadway productions for many years and reached the peak of his career in "The Red Robe."

According to the Shubert office, the part was not such a great one when the play first opened, but has been made one of the outstanding comedy creations of recent years by Lupino's performance.28

Changes made in the road company which played in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis before bringing the operetta to Dallas, found Desiree Tabor replacing Helen Gilliland as the principal soprano.29

Rosenfield wrote a glowing review of the October 12 opening:

The best show you have seen since the "Desert Song" and the best you will see until this time next year is the "Red Robe". . . . Anything so widely exploited naturally will provoke a torrent of discussion, although there is little room for argument. . . .

Whatever else you might think of "The Red Robe" you will have to admit that it abides by the audience tradition, established in 1925. It is a worthy successor to the line founded by the Heidelberg freshman. . . .

It is as good as the "Student Prince". . . . the "Red Robe" has three less song hits, two more spectacular settings, far richer costuming, considerably better singing, superior principals and a more interesting plot. . . .

. . . one can not regard its music of great importance. . . . Jean Gilbert. . . . inclines toward sprightly tone in jazz tempo and has an aversion for the beloved waltz, which is the backbone of the operetta. . . . We have subjects of France's thirteenth Louis cutting capers that belong to a piece with a title like "The Girl in the Taxi". . . . The best single number is "The Only Girl". . . . The rest. . . . commands unstinted admiration. . . .

The leading role returns Walter Woolf. . . . He looks better in blouse and doublet than any other stage figure we can recall just now. . . . He is an improved actor, or. . . . has a better role. . . . talks with skill and force, fences like one to the rapier born, dances about. . . . with the agility of Fairbanks and somewhat more grace; comports himself as one without a least notion that he is an idol. . . . His voice is a baritone of virile timbre and notable emission in the lower registers. . . .

28News, Sun., Aug. 18, 1929, III, 7. Although the facts about the Lupino family in this publicity, apparently written by the publicity staff of the State Fair, are essentially correct, the name "Gremaldi" used in the article should have been "Grimaldi." See The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (Oxford University Press: New York, 1951) p. 485, and p. 342.

Desiree Tabor ... has youth, grace, distinction of gesture and one of the most appealing voices in light opera. ... The comedy ... is pretty much as you take it. ... If you can derive a laugh you will split your togas over Mark Smith. The principal of fun is Barry Lupino. ... His British accent is given the funniest crack of the evening, "Familiarity Breeds Attempt." John Goldsworth's villainous Blunt and Edwin Brandt's clever makeup as Richelieu also are worthy of note. ...

A well filled house greeted the opening performance with scattered demonstrations of interest. ... The curtain rose forty five minutes late [and] did not find the folks in a responsive mood. ...

It is an attraction of considerable excellence and has been produced on as lavish a scale as the modern theater can provide.


Jack Beall, Jr., reviewer for the Times Herald, also praised Walter Woolf. He stated that Woolf "had a fine appearance and is a master of the tricks of the trade of being a baritone lead in Shubert operettas," and that "his performance has a deftness that makes one forget that his voice cracked badly on some of the higher notes Saturday night." Beall applauded the show and called attention to "some really good dancing by a group of Chester Hale girls and choral singing of a high order." He stated that he would "rank the 'Red Robe' immediately after 'The Student Prince'". He particularly praised Betty Byron, who, he said, was "the cutest thing to hit town in many a long semester." He

stated that she was "a small edition of Winnie Lightner, for pep, looks like what the doctor recommended for that tired feeling, and can do knockout clowning with the best." As for Barry Lupino, Beall described him as "a young man in whom blood is telling . . . a couple of hundred years ahead of most in his particular field." However, he described the work of Mark Smith as "poor," and stated that he was "a heavy comic both in wit and weight." The reviewer praised Desiree Tabor as "pretty and gracious" and stated that "she can sing, that girl." He singled out for high approval scenes between Betty Byron and Barry Lupino—one, "Whatever it is, I've got it," with ventriloquial [sic] by-play" and the other, "a gorgeous take-off on the adagio framed around 'The Thrill of a Kiss.'" Beall described the scenes as "two burlesque numbers which brought down the house." He, too, called attention to the long wait for the raising of the curtain, and commented that the first night audience "apparently enjoyed the show very much" but were "niggardly with applause." He stated that the house "contrary to expectation, was not full, there being a wide stretch on either side of the house of empty seats."31

Added features at the State Fair for the season included the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus, a rodeo, a band contest and a horse and style show.32

Sons o' Guns - 1930

As early as February, 1930, the State Fair officials were dickering with Broadway brokers for the October Fair Show. Ernie Young, Chicago

revue producer, offered one of his presentations. According to John Rosenfield, there was considerable sentiment among Fair officials against repetition of the operettas, the opinion being that there should be "diversification of policy," in spite of the fact that the operettas had been successful. Some of the officials favored "importation of a successful Broadway comedy of recent date," and Sons o' Guns was mentioned. By March 15, Sons o' Guns had been contracted for. The contract called for the show to come directly to Dallas from New York City, and for a return trip to New York with no other showings en route. This was reported to be the first time in this country that a show of such size had been transported such a distance with no intermediate stops. The show had been running in New York for three months with a cast that included Jack Donahue and Lily Damita, movie star, and enjoyed "the most successful run of any production of recent years," according to advance information.

In June, the News reported that the musical comedy would be performed in Kansas City before coming to Dallas, and that after leaving Dallas it would be presented at St. Louis and Chicago while on its way back to New York. Another change in plans had to be made by the State Fair officials when Jack Donahue, star of the show, became critically ill in Cincinnati. The Fair Association had guaranteed the production for $90,000 with the provision in the contract that Donahue and every other

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member of the New York cast, except Lily Damita who had been replaced by Gina Malo, was to be included in the Dallas production. According to John Rosenfield, the Association had counted on Donahue's reputation as a dancer and comedian "to attract the huge box office gross [and] to clear the overhead." Jack Haley took Donahue's place in the show when it played in St. Louis. The Fair Association had little time to book an alternative attraction.36

Donahue died on October 1 at his home in New York. In the meantime, the Fair directors went to St. Louis to see Jack Haley in the production and they announced that the show would fill its Dallas engagement.37 Besides Haley, others in the cast were William Frawley, Louise Mele, David Hutcheson, Eric Titus, Mary Horan, Richard Temple, Ellsworth Jones, Louis La Bey, Joseph Spree, Harry Holbrook, Jerry Downes, Firlie Banks, Vida Manuel, Adele Storey, the Albertina Rasch ballet and a dancing ensemble of one hundred and twenty-five persons. According to Rosenfield, the booking of the show at such a high guarantee attracted considerable attention because "it was one of the hugest theatrical deals ever consummated." The production had by far the largest cast ever presented at the State Fair.39

In his review, Rosenfield stated that the leading role was "self tailored for Donahue's great comic gifts," and that Haley "was filling

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the bill in all requirements." He added that "there isn't a chance in
the world that this musical comedy won't register with ninety-nine out
of every one-hundred Fair visitors." Gino Malo, according to the critic,
was a "better dancer and . . . more proficient vocalist than Lily Damita,"
and he predicted that she would be "the darling of Dallas musical memories
for a generation." He called Mary Horan "a songstress and dancer of as
much talent as any one else on the stage," and stated that William
Frawley and David Hutcheson were "responsible for much entertaining
comedy." He observed that the opening audience "filled the huge audi­
torium comfortably," but criticized the show on grounds that it was "so
utterly of and for Broadway that the idiom was unfamiliar at the start."
He suggested that Haley "needs the punctuation marks of eloquent silence
and pause" in order to project himself in "the indoor stadium." He

During the last week of the fair season, Harry Richman, who
was to take Haley's place in *Sons o' Guns* after the Fair show, came to
Dallas to study the part. Rosenfield observed that audiences for the
production were "moderate-sized, day in and day out." The Fair manage­
ment, in an effort to attract business, reduced prices of admission. The
musical earned approximately $72,000, according to Rosenfield. He
disclosed that the guarantee had been reduced from $90,000 to $70,000
when Donahue became ill. Rosenfield explained the moderate attendance

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on grounds that the show "was better known to Broadway than to the Road," and that it was "lacking in just those things that the road demands."

He observed also that Haley was not enthusiastically liked "although he played the part in almost the exact vein that Donahue adopted." And he called attention to the fact that there had been a jump in attendance when the Fair management had reduced the prices.

The failure of Sons o' Guns to achieve the success of the Shubert operettas in the previous five years led the Fair management in 1931 to turn to another Shubert operetta. In the interests of economy, the operettas were abandoned in 1932 and 1933, but again in 1934 an operetta was presented. That was the last try, however. There were no State Fair Shows from 1935 through 1937 because the Auditorium was remodeled for the Centennial and the Pan American expositions. In this sense, it may be said that from 1931 through 1939, the Fair Shows were accommodating either to the depression or to the expositions.

When The Student Prince was presented for the 1925 show instead of Sky High, Dallas taste appears to have been ripe for the Shubert operettas. So successful was The Student Prince that the merit of all the succeeding operettas was measured against it.

The Fair Park Association had to put up large guarantees for the operettas and in return tried to get as many of the original cast as possible. With presentation of The Student Prince, the Fair Shows immediately took on greater stature. The conservative tenor of the Fair Association's policy is evident. The operettas were continued for five

years and the Association depended on the success of previous shows to weigh in favor of the current production. The failure of Sons o' Guns to draw the anticipated crowds may have been due to the death of Jack Donahue. Also, by October of 1930, the effects of the depression were beginning to be severely felt in the city.

Of incidental interest is the changing attitude of the critics toward the Auditorium acoustics. Rosenfield, for example, made reference to its "excellent acoustics" in 1925, but in 1930 called the structure a "concrete stadium." This changed attitude was undoubtedly caused by the experience of audiences with legitimate plays in the 5,000-seat hall.

It may be stated that the reputation of the Fair Park Shows and of the Auditorium were both established by the Shubert operettas which held the stage from 1925 through 1929. The operettas brought to the city a new standard of elegance and music and they satisfied the Fair Show audiences' taste for the sumptuous and the baroque. The more hard-bitten attitude of the 1930's did not lend itself so readily to this type of entertainment.

The success of the operettas set the stage for the later world-wide renown of the Texas State Fair, achieved in 1936 and 1937 with the two expositions, and for the present nation-wide prestige of the Fair Shows.
CHAPTER XXIII
THE STARS GIVE CONCERTS

Legitimate drama, touring shows, dramatic stock and minstrel shows made up only a part of Dallas' entertainment during the 1925-1930 period. This study has not concerned itself with the city's many musical activities, with the Dallas Little Theater or with the lectures and dance recitals. But there were certain entertainment events which might be described as quasi-theatrical and of which brief mention may be made.

Major Quasi-Theatrical Events

On Friday, November 13, 1925, Will Rogers came to Fair Park Auditorium with the De Reszke Singers,¹ and was there again for a one-night stand on November 3, 1926, with the same group of singers.² Elsie Janis, called in the advance notices "The Sweetheart of the AEF," brought a company of entertainers to the same auditorium on November 18, 1926, for a one-night stand.³ It was her first concert tour of the country.⁴

Mikhail Mordkin, described in advance notices as "Russia's foremost dancer," and his Russian ballet supported by Vera Nemtchinova,

¹News, Sun., Nov. 8, 1925, III, 4.
⁴News, Tues., Nov. 16, 1926, 4.
Hilda Butsova and Pierre Vladimiroff and a company of sixty, together with a symphony orchestra, played the Fair Park Auditorium for two nights, December 27, 28, during the 1926-1927 season.5

W. C. Fields, Moran and Mack, Clifford O'Rourke and Joan Ruth appeared in what was described as a "concert" at Fair Park Auditorium on June 12, 1926. The event attracted 2,500 spectators. John Rosenfield made this comment:

If this was a concert, then the difference between a concert and vaudeville becomes exactly $1.60. . . .

Messrs. Moran and Mack delivered themselves of those blunt sallies that have been memorized by patrons of the phonograph. When the guard at the penal rock pile complained of the slack hammer work of the Two Black Crows, one knew that the officer would be told, "Thass awright, you can't fire anybody."

Joan Ruth has a fresh young voice, well-schooled, and is quite competent in coloratura work.

Mr. Fields, the stage-movie comedian, suffered from the fact that his two pet acts, a golf game and a picnic scene, have been appropriated and garbled by other vaudevillians . . . and barnstorming musical comedies. Field's style made the golf game rather humorous, but the picnic turn proved more roughhouse. . . .

Tenor O'Rourke . . . turned out to be a mediocre baritone.6

The Chicago Grand Opera Company was at Fair Park Auditorium on February 27, 28, of the next year for presentations of Faust and Lohengrin.7

Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn came to Fair Park Auditorium for one of their frequent appearances in the city on November 11, 1929,8

and on December 10, the Isadora Duncan Sisters danced at the Auditorium.9

Al Jolson, who, according to advance publicity, was to receive "the highest guarantee ever paid an artist in the history of show business" for his concert tour that was intended to take him around the world,10 and who had last been seen in Dallas in 1910 as a member of the "circle" when Lew Dockstadter's minstrels played at the Old Dallas Opera House, appeared at the Fair Park Auditorium on January 25, 1930.11

John Rosenfield observed that Jolson's appearance drew an audience of about 3,500 persons and that "the homefolks . . . paid grand opera prices." The critic stated that "the Jolson who appeared at the Auditorium . . . was the Jolson of the Broadway music halls . . . a patter and song man." He commented that "Jolson worked hard to give the audience its money's worth, a perspiring evening for him," and that one of his problems was that of "projecting in old-time style into the vastness of the auditorium." He remarked that the place reminded him of the Leland Stanford Stadium." The critic stated about the performance:

He put it over . . . with his consummate genius for effect. He began with his much-quoted movie songs, such as "A Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder," "Little Pal," "Sonny Boy," and introduced "Let Me Sing and I'm Happy," and "Albany Night Boat." . . . "Old Man River" was done, not too well, to show that he has a knack for straight singing. . . . To close the evening he did "Mammy" with accustomed fervor on the knees, on the toes, arms spread in mighty invocation, mouth wide open and lungs going like last week's blizzard.

Rosenfield described Jolson as a "sui generis" entertainer with clairvoyant genius for handling a mob," and commented that after he heard Jolson he could understand why Jolson "mingled in the foyer Saturday . . .

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night, inspecting the placards, autographing flappers' albums, darting into the box office to sell tickets. These are sometimes called Jolson eccentricities. They are not. They are his research activities."

Jolson came on stage, Rosenfield noted, "in blue shirt and a negligee shirt that might have been fresh Saturday morning." The critic stated that Jolson "apologized for this apparent discourtesy. The price of $5.50 a seat might entitle a patron to an artist in dinner jacket." Rosenfield described Jolson as having a "bright sense of humor running to Will Rogerian sarcasm without the cowboy's aptness for mots," and stated that "Jolson takes no pains to conceal his lowly origin and his deficient education." Calling attention to what he described as "a streak of native egotism in everything he says and does," Rosenfield compared Jolson with the late Enrico Caruso:

Both did their stuff in manners that violated every known principle of singing and entertaining. Jolson's musicianship outside of an infallible sense of rhythm, wouldn't pass muster at a country barn dance. Caruso's attack wouldn't win a diploma from a correspondence school of music. The efforts of both could throw their audience into ecstasy.

Anyone who imitated either would move a Dallas Woman's Club audience to hisses.  

Other major events of the 1929-1930 season included performances by the Chicago Civic Opera Company of Lucia de Lammermoor and Tannhauser, with Salvi, Schipa and Rosa Raisa at the Fair Park Auditorium on March 12, 13, 1930, at a $6 top price.

It was during the 1925-1930 period that the popularity of such "monoactors" as Ruth Draper and Cornelia Otis Skinner became established.

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Ruth Draper gave her only Dallas recital during the five year period on February 19, 20, 1926, at the Baker Hotel Roof Garden.\textsuperscript{14}

John Rosenfield wrote about the performance:

There are neither precedents nor traditions to provide a label for Miss Draper and her work. To call her a monologist would be to understate the case. She is the entire show but by a mere gesture or subtle insinuation populated her platform with auxiliary characters hardly less vivid than herself.

The overhead for her road journey must be enviably light. A table, a few chairs and a variety of shawls comprised the mise-en-scene. She walked before her audience completely patriarchian in her black velvet gown. She swung a shawl about her head and immediately became a creature of poverty. Wisps of unkempt hair fell across her cheeks and her plastic features lined themselves with the scars of adversity.

Miss Draper's effect on her audience was unmistakable. Here was really an artist who could hold her patrons in the hollow of her hand. She commanded not so much their eyes and ears as their mind's eyes. To enhance this, she did not resort to the bravura elocution trick of impersonating several characters at once.\textsuperscript{15}

E. H. Sothem, well-known actor who was making his first lecture tour, gave a "dramatic-lecture" recital in the city on February 15, 1929, at the Showhouse Theater. John Rosenfield found Sothem's viewpoint "so steeped in the past and so appreciative of the present as to be the most refreshing business of the evening."

He tacitly admitted that even his day is done. . . . He referred to the "give me a cigarette-give me an aspirin" motif of modern dialogue. He mildly scolded the public for conditions and urged an endowed theater. . . . His stress was laid on the actor. Wholly entertaining was his reading of Lord Dundreary's vaudevillian comedy in the old midcentury success, "Our American Cousin." This role and speech . . . identified with his father . . . conveyed the point that things aren't what they used to be.

He began his recital with scenes from "Othello" and "Hamlet"

\textsuperscript{14}News, Sat., Feb. 13, 1926, 4.

\textsuperscript{15}News, Sat., Feb. 20, 1926, 4.
divided his audience into two camps. His Shakespeare one thought is old fashioned with droning intonation, reverential pauses, ghastly stage whispers, prolonged ululations and climactic shouting. It arouses enthusiasm among listeners who have been sulking since Fritz Leiber debunked and humanized the Bard here. The rest conceded the authenticity of Mr. Sothren's style. It was a holiday for the Booth-and-Barretteers. Shakespearean readings reveal the playwright's utter dependence upon the complete theater, its many actors, its mise en scene. The Showhouse's flecked Venetian stage set and Mr. Sothren's dinner jacket didn't help the illusion. His singular monotony was not equal to the Protean requirements of playing Othello, Desdemona, Iago, Hamlet, Ophelia and Claudius at one time. His diction is admirable, but he's no Ruth Draper.

Although attention has not been focussed in this study on all the aspects of the many-sided entertainment picture in Dallas during the 1920's, it can be seen from this brief glimpse of some of the more outstanding events that Dallasites flocked to hear name stars. This tendency for the crowds to go to see and hear notables who had become well known in the movies and on radio was to become even more pronounced in the city during the 1930's. The desire of the public to view the stars in person was to extend into the area of the legitimate shows, into musical comedies, and into the vaudeville field.

The growing familiarity of the Dallas public, as in cities elsewhere in the nation, with the best talent in the entertainment field through the media of radio and the movies, was to eventually provide a death blow to vaudeville and to dramatic stock, and was to be one of the factors in the decline of the road. For as the stars in the entertainment world clung more and more to Broadway and to Hollywood, only

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venturing out on tours to the largest cities, Dallas audiences, comparing the work of the stars in films and on radio with the second-rate shows which were offered them as live entertainment, tended to drift away from the live forms of amusement.

The 1920's marked the decline of the lectures, the dramatic readers and the expression schools. It was during the same decade that the monologists and the popular singers rose to popularity. The trends might be described as anti-cultural for the more serious forms of entertainment tended increasingly to be restricted to the concert hall and to specific types of drama, whereas the trend that began in the 1920's with the personal appearances of Al Jolson and W. C. Fields and similar entertainers was climax ed in the 1930's by the emergence of the big name orchestra leaders with their well-known vocalists.

What happened in Dallas in this respect is no different from what happened elsewhere in the nation. The trend seems to have been related not only to shifting tastes in entertainment but also to broader and deeper movements in society itself.
CHAPTER XXIV

THE END OF THE MINSTREL SHOWS

For more than half a century prior to 1925, Dallas was a center for minstrel activity. Not only did the minstrel shows attract large audiences in the city, but a number of prominent minstrel men got their start in the variety houses that lined lower Elm Street prior to World War I. The minstrel show had begun its decline during the 1920-1925 period and by 1930 it had all but disappeared. This indigenous form of American entertainment, with its spectacular scenic effects, its native American humor and its rigid format was still popular enough in 1925 to play the Fair Park Auditorium, but the number of minstrel shows that came to the city was sharply curtailed from the shows that had appeared earlier.

The 1925, 1926, 1927 Seasons

The Al G. Field minstrels with Bert Swor played at the Fair Park Auditorium on November 17, 1925, and among the skits presented were Hunting the Eclipse, and The Submarine Club. Bert Swor was heard in one of his monologues based on The Fruit of Fruits. In the company were included Jack Richards, Billy Church, John Healey, Harvey Newland, Lee and Billy Doran, dancers, and Jack Kennedy and Joe McGee, doing the


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traditional Apache dance travesty.²

Minstrel performances were sometimes the subjects of the first sound pictures. A De Forest Radio talking picture, presented at the Circle Theater for six days beginning February 15, 1926, featured Lasses White, Billy Doss, Morris Nelson, Slim Vermont and Ernest Reeves.³ The Al G. Field Minstrels returned to the Circle Theater stage on November 18, 19, 20, 21, 1926.⁴

Nick Hufford, vaudeville and minstrel star, appeared at the Majestic Theater during the week of December 12, 1926, and commented that "a lot of old-time minstrels are doing their stuff on variety programs." He expressed the opinion that "the recent shifts and changes in popular priced amusement offers is due to the rampant taste of the public for diversification." This, he felt, was hurting the minstrel shows.⁵ Lasses White with his "All-Star Minstrels" was at Fair Park Auditorium on February 24, 1927.⁶ The Old Mill had the Al G. Field Minstrels on November 10, 11, 1927, featuring Hughie and Roy in Radio Troubles and an Up High Aerial Innovation. The cast included The Harmony Four, Russell Neff, Leslie Berry and Phil Pavey.⁷ Also in the cast was Emmett Miller, the blackface comedian who was known as "the man with the clarinet voice." The show, according to

²News, Thurs., Nov. 12, 1925, 4.
⁷News, Sun., Nov. 6, 1927, III, 5.
the review, had fifty singers, dancers, comedians and specialty persons. As was customary, there were outdoor features associated with the minstrel show, and for this one the Al G. Fields Gold Band gave free concerts at noon daily during the street parade, and in front of the theater before each performance.

The Up High aerial setting, used by the minstrels to present the first part of the show, showed a scene on top of a skyscraper with the tops of other buildings in silhouette. The performers supposedly arrived by airplane and the atmosphere was achieved through scenic effects.⁸

The Decline of the Minstrel Shows

There was much discussion in the Dallas Morning News about the decline of the minstrel shows. John Rosenfield on June 11, 1928, had this to say:

The last time Leroy (Lasses) White appeared in Dallas he probably never expected to play here again. This was in 1927 . . . he was the star of his own full length minstrel show playing at the Fair Park auditorium . . . . There were more seat backs than white shirts visible from the stage . . . .

The failure of Lasses White to outdraw grand opera in Dallas must be laid to the decline of the full length minstrel show as entertainment.

Nor can Lasses complain that his home town has given him the cold shoulder. Lasses got his start here and what is more has returned home in triumph more than once. . . . He found that the minstrel was dead in Dallas, a city that ranks almost as the cradle of the minstrel.

If the minstrel show is dead in Dallas, the art of minstrel is not. What has killed the 22 minstrel show is the 60¢ minstrel show. There is little essential difference between popular priced vaudeville and the minstrel. Most vaudeville bills have their black-face comedians. The minstrel material, such as African humor, mammy songs and dancing, survive in vaudeville.

⁸News, Fri., Nov. 11, 1927, 4.
The minstrel in the long run was a masculine vaudeville show. Not that the minstrel was off color. It is doubtful if any other form of entertainment lived as long in an atmosphere of conventional cleanliness. It was the appeal that was masculine. ... Jokes, songs and antics were all gauged for a man's sense of humor.

Unfortunately men do not or can not go to shows unescorted these days.

A newspaper story on July 7, 1929, carried the information that the minstrel stars were appearing on the radio. It stated that Percy Hemus and Al Bernard were the "end men" in the Dutch Winters Minstrel, the first radio minstrel show "which is broadcast weekly over NBC."

Lasses White, "one of the most famous of them all, was recently escorted through the NBC studios. He is interested and it is likely that he will be a radio recruit."

Nowhere was there a group of performers more devoted to their medium than the minstrel players. Year after year, Fields and Neal O'Brien took their shows from coast to coast. Gradually they lost their hold on the public and finally died. Sugarfoot, the famous end man, dies of a broken heart. Others dejectedly went into the one-act vaudeville minstrels ... a poor substitute. A few turned to radio.

Bert Swor, oldest of the five Swor Brothers, well-known minstrels who got their start in Dallas, was interviewed in July, 1929, in Hollywood where he had gone to appear in Why Bring that Up, a film that marked the motion picture debut of Moran and Mack, the "Two Black Crows." His comments provide interesting insights into some aspects of entertainment prior to World War I. Swor noted that he was born in Paris, Tennessee, and that his father at one time was considered "the best 'bone knocker' in Henry County. That's what they called the 'bones' in those days." The family moved to a small cotton

farm near Dallas while Swor was still a child, and to the town, which had a population of only five thousand at the time, when he was sixteen. Swor recalled that he was only fourteen when he "blacked up" and began work as a singer and dancer in one of the "honky tonks" that abounded in Dallas at that time. Swor observed:

They were called variety shows. We entertainers worked continuously. During the show girls invaded the boxes and sold beer for $1 a bottle, receiving 20¢ a bottle in commission. I used to sell beer in the aisles when I wasn't working.

Swor recalled that he became the "world champion buck and wing dancer" when he was only twenty years of age.

For three years he traveled with Dr. C. J. Clifton's "Herbs of Health" show. Swor reminisced:

We entertainers—a dozen in all—lived in small tents outside the big one. We ate in a mess hall. The show went summer and winter and it was cold in those tents. In our spare moments we made health herbs in huge crocks. Bottles, herbs, corks and all, the medicine cost the doctor 3¢ a bottle...

I found out... that the medicine created a disorder and after the doctor had inflicted the town, he left to be followed by a coworker who blew into town with a cure for this malady.

Swor also appeared with the Ben R. Warner Shows which played throughout the Middle West and learned to play every character in the shows, which were changed nightly. In 1901, he and his brother joined the Jack Haverly Mastodon Minstrel Show and appeared as end men and in eccentric songs, doing one-night stands in the smaller cities and week-long runs in the bigger communities. It was while playing at the Gilmore Theater in Philadelphia that the Swor Brothers were offered the opportunity to appear in the Montgomery and Stone Shows and began their careers as minstrels in the major shows.11

In April, 1930, Bert Swor became the new Moran of the Moran and Mack partnership. According to newspaper reports, Swor made a wager of $1,000 with Richard Wallace, director of the film, Why Bring That Up, that he could successfully tour with a minstrel show in a tent. Swor organized a twenty-five man minstrel show for the Southern tour and picked Dallas as the starting point. The tent for the show was a "square top," so called because its top was shaped like a theater roof, and had complete lighting equipment, dressing rooms, and seating capacity for 2,000 persons. To advertise the show, a beacon threw Swor's name on the side of a barn twenty-five miles away. The troupe was assembled at the Adolphus Hotel in the city for the May 16 opening of the show in Dallas.

The reviewer for the News stated that the Dallas performance was greeted enthusiastically by an audience of more than 1,500 persons. On stage with Swor were his brother Jim Swor, Roland Culpepper, George Hughes, Charles Kritzsinger, Gene Kirt, Roy Wright, Leon Harvey, Pat Wilde and others. Swor himself, according to the review, "did a turn as endman, a sermon on various subjects, a poker game, and his more familiar sketch of the secretary's report, concerning the money troubles caused by 'de ducks.'"

The Dallas success was not repeated elsewhere. John Rosenfield reported that poor attendance forced the show to disband during the

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first week of the tour. 15

Nothing more graphically illustrates the decline of the minstrel show in Dallas than the fact that during the entire 1925-1930 period there were only seven appearances in the city by professional minstrel companies. Equally significant is the fact that all these shows, except for the one presented by Bert Swor in a tent, were given by the Al G. Fields Minstrels and the Lasses White Minstrels. Both Lasses White and Bert Swor had served their apprenticeships in Dallas and may have been expected to draw good local patronage.

Indicative of the lack of drawing power of the minstrel shows during the period was the fact that only two of them were presented at Fair Park Auditorium and both of these were one-night stands. Except for Swor's tent performance, the other shows were at the Circle and Old Mill theaters.

The quick decline of the form led Lasses White, once one of the leading professional minstrels in the nation, to accept an invitation to be guest star for the Longview, Texas, Legionnaires when they presented their amateur minstrel show in September, 1929. 16

When Dallas, one of the most favored spots on the minstrel show itinerary, failed to produce audiences, then it was reasonably certain that this type of entertainment was languishing even more severely elsewhere in the nation.

A footnote on Dallas' influence on the early minstrel shows

was provided by John Rosenfield in his column of October 8, 1929:

Dallas has produced no end of stage and screen celebrities and many of them got their start in the old Happy Hour which was located in 1912 and 1913 on Main Street near Stone. It was here that the late Wes Avey started his career and here also that the numerous blackface comedians in the Swor family first used burnt cork with success.

Two other blackface artists, Moran and Mack, were features of the old Happy Hour program. This was in the days before they achieved their present fame and fortune and before they sold the well-known "early bird gets the worm" routine into millions of phonograph records and before the "two Black Crows" became a household word.17

The minstrel form did not die easily. As Rosenfield had pointed out, many of its features were incorporated into other branches of entertainment. But the fact remains that an audience ceased to exist in Dallas and elsewhere for minstrel entertainment in its traditional format.

The same factors operated with the minstrel shows as with vaudeville, dramatic stock and other types of entertainment that all but disappeared during the 1920's. The competition of the movies, radio, and of other forms of stage entertainment had their effect.

The dying out of a generation familiar with the minstrel shows and the infrequency with which the shows came to the city also contributed to the decline.

Vaudeville could survive longer because it was more flexible. When one type of program did not please, another could be substituted.

The minstrel shows were more rigid and could deviate only slightly from the traditional format. Literally, it was the audience for the minstrel shows which disappeared. Minstrelsy had enjoyed its period of popularity, and then, like dramatic stock, passed from the scene.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Although the course of Dallas professional theater during the 1920-1930 decade cannot be isolated from what had gone before and what was to come later, certain trends that derive from the larger national scene may be perceived, and factors may be ascertained that were peculiar to the city itself.

The procedure in this section will be, first, to determine the nature of those trends and factors as they influenced the entertainment picture in Dallas during the ten-year period, and second, to arrive at some conclusions.

Perhaps the overriding trend in Dallas during the 1920's, as elsewhere in the nation, was the one which saw live entertainment give way as a form of mass entertainment to the motion pictures, a tendency that was sharply accelerated in the final years of the decade when sound films became entrenched. Still another trend on the national level was the consolidation of theater into an industry—a heightening of competition between theaters and between various forms of entertainment. There was a gradual growth of theater monopolies, both in the areas of theater ownership and stage production, made possible in part by the rising costs of entertainment. Theater presenting live shows at the start of the decade often found it impossible to meet these rising costs and turned to the more assured incomes from motion pictures.

Another trend, which may in part be attributed to the growth of Dallas to metropolitan status and in part to the new drama that was
making itself felt on Broadway throughout the decade and being presented in the city by the Dallas Little Theater, was the growing sophistication of stage audiences and their dissatisfaction with the pre-war forms.

These trends were conditioned in Dallas by several factors. The city's geographical location coupled with the decline of the road and the rising costs of railroad travel meant that fewer roadshows came to the city during the decade. As the ten-year period proceeded, the dramatic and musical roadshows that did come to Dallas tended increasingly to star performers who had established their reputations in an earlier generation and who were willing to risk the exigencies of the road, or else were plays and productions already familiar to the Dallas public. For most of the decade, aside from presentations of the Dallas Little Theater, the city was isolated from the newer type drama which was revolutionizing theater in New York.

Another factor in the Dallas scene was the weather. The long hot summers not only made for a relatively short theatrical season but also discouraged the better-known entertainers from coming to the city except during the winter months. Until the middle of the decade, for example, the Majestic Theater regularly discontinued vaudeville during the summer months. On the other hand, Dallas' location in the center of a prosperous agricultural and marketing area served to draw audiences to its theatrical entertainment, and particularly to its State Fair Shows, from a wide region.

The attitude Dallas residents had toward their city was another conditioning factor. Dallasites self-consciously resented being considered provincial and took great pride in the city's cultural achievements. Particularly toward the end of the decade they demanded that
entertainment brought to the city meet Broadway standards. And conversely, the attitude Broadway producers had toward the "provinces" influenced the kinds of shows sent to the city. It was not until late in the decade that Dallas began getting Broadway casts or number one touring companies.

Also affecting the course of professional theater in Dallas throughout the decade was the lack of a suitable theater in the city where touring legitimate shows could be staged. Aggravating the problem was the similar absence of suitable facilities in other Southwestern cities near enough to Dallas to make the long train trip from Oklahoma City or Kansas City profitable for a touring company. It is significant to note in this respect that more and better roadshows came to Dallas during the 1923-1924 season when Karl Hoblitzelle not only made the Majestic Theater available for such productions but also arranged for the touring companies to play in the Interstate theaters in other Texas cities.

One other factor must be noted and that was the influence of Hoblitzelle, with his belief in live entertainment and his basically conservative entertainment policies, as a stabilizing element in the otherwise shifting theatrical milieu.

These trends and conditioning factors must all be viewed against the economic backdrop of the 1920's—a decade that began with the post-war boom and that ended with the Great Depression. Many of the decisions made as to theatrical policies were determined with the boxoffice in mind. The competition for patrons served to make the traditionally unstable theater industry even more volatile, accelerated changes, sped up experimentation, and intensified the efforts made by the theater owners to anticipate shifts in public taste. Undoubtedly, these shifts
were not all economically determined. Aesthetic considerations were also involved, the attempted analysis of which lies beyond the scope of this study. So complex were the social, economic and cultural causes for the changes in public taste that even astute showmen like Hoblitzelle were unable to predict them. Hoblitzelle, for instance, was unable to foresee the vast impact which motion pictures would have on the entertainment world. He was able, in part, to counter the competition from the films with well-known stage entertainers. But it must be remembered that after 1921 the stage shows at Hoblitzelle's Majestic Theater were coupled with motion pictures and it is difficult to know whether the movies or the live shows were more influential in attracting audiences.

It can readily be understood that these trends and conditioning factors affected professional entertainment "across the board," as it were. Although, for purposes of convenience, this dissertation has arbitrarily treated the development of each mode of entertainment separately, it must be borne in mind that what affected vaudeville at any given time, for example, was also simultaneously having an impact on dramatic stock, legitimate road shows and the minstrel shows. Conversely, the occurrence of any single theatrical event or marked change in public taste, the failure or success of any theatrical policy, cannot be said to have been the result of any single trend or to have been caused by any one factor.

The gradual replacement of live entertainment by the motion pictures as the entertainment for the masses can be observed by tracing in broad terms the relative strength which various forms of professional theater enjoyed during the decade. In 1920, the motion pictures were behind stage entertainment in drawing power. At the start of 1920, there were three downtown vaudeville houses in the city—the Hippodrome,
the Majestic, housed in what had formerly been the Dallas Opera House, and the Jefferson. Between March, 1921, and April, 1922, the new Majestic, the Melba and the Palace theaters were all opened. This construction reflected both the demands of the growing city and the increased patronage both at motion pictures and at vaudeville performances, for the new Majestic was given over at first to straight vaudeville, and the Melba and Palace primarily to movies, although the Palace fell into the "deluxe motion picture theater" class with considerable live entertainment of a semi-classical nature.

The two other sizeable downtown theaters in the city at the start of 1920 were the Old Mill and the Queen, both given over exclusively to motion pictures. In December, 1922, the 1,050-seat Capitol Theater was opened as a movie house, and in March, 1922, the Happyland was completed with a policy of tabloid stage performances. A year later, in December, 1923, the Circle Theater opened as a playhouse for dramatic stock. When the new Majestic was built, the name of the Dallas Opera House was changed to the Capitol, and a dramatic stock company, the Broadway Players used it until it was razed by fire in December, 1921.

Cycle Park Casino, a semi-outdoor theater where Gene Lewis and Olga Worth presented their stock company during the summer months, was located in Gaston Park. Also in Gaston Park was the Coliseum, a 2,500-seat outmoded structure where the State Fair Shows were presented and where the touring musicals and legitimate shows were housed in the 1920-1921 season.

The tradition of the Dallas Opera House was still strong in the city at the start of the decade and there was considerable agitation in 1920 for a downtown playhouse. However, this development was not
realized in Dallas during the ten-year period, for the emphasis shifted instead to a giant theater in Fair Park that could also serve as a convention site and as a new home for the State Fair Shows, and Fair Park Auditorium, opened at the start of the 1925-1926 season, was the result.

The vitality of live entertainment during the early years of the decade is demonstrated by the success which the dramatic stock companies enjoyed between 1921 and 1925. Both the Broadway Players, during the 1921-1922 season, and the Hippodrome Players, who went into the Hippodrome Theater after vaudeville was discontinued there, had good audiences for several months, although neither ran for a full season. The Broadway Players disbanded after the Capitol Theater fire, and the Hippodrome Players were able to continue only until April, 1923, making their season, nevertheless, the longest of any stock company in Dallas during the decade. After the Circle Theater was opened, it became the headquarters for all subsequent stock efforts. The Circle Players began there on Christmas Day, 1923, and continued until the end of the season, giving eighteen plays for a total of one-hundred and twenty-seven performances. By this time, faced with growing competition from the motion pictures and from a rejuvenated vaudeville, and plagued with rigid casting systems, with a growing difficulty in getting the better Broadway plays, and with a dependence upon outdated melodramas and farces, the stock companies found it progressively more difficult to keep going. The critics, particularly after John Rosenfield took over his post with the Dallas Morning News, commented more and more often on the poor choice of plays, the outmoded casting methods, and the inadequate rehearsals characteristic of dramatic stock. Most of
the Broadway plays written during the 1920's which today are regarded as worthwhile dramas were considered by the stock producers in the city to be the acting property of the Dallas Little Theater. Faced with higher costs and smaller audiences, the stock companies either experimented with some of these "art" plays, as they were called, or attempted to capture larger audiences by giving plays with supposedly more popular appeal. After 1927, the matter of finding good plays became even more difficult because the motion picture companies bought up the more promising Broadway scripts and prevented their presentation in stock until the movies had been made. It is significant that those plays presented by Dallas stock companies in the 1920's which have stood the test of time attracted the biggest audiences to the stock performances. The stock producers themselves recognized the limitations of their medium and after 1925 repeatedly laid claim to not being in reality stock companies at all but repertory groups instead. However, the economic circumstances in which stock companies found themselves—one in which a single poor week could lead to the collapse of a company—stifled any real attempt to establish repertory. The plight of the stock companies after 1925 was aggravated by the more objective newspaper criticism initiated by John Rosenfield.

The Circle Players during the 1925-1926 season won praise from the critics and drew good audiences with such "art plays as The Goose Hangs High, The Show Off, and Hell Bent For Heaven, but were able to continue only until mid-January of 1926 because most of the other shows were poorly received. The Edgar Mason Players, who followed in the same theater, won praise and audiences with What Price Glory, but had
a number of poor reviews for other plays. Gene Lewis and Olga Worth, amid wide civic acclaim, moved into the Circle with winter stock at the start of the 1926-1927 season, but gave up after six weeks because of heavy financial losses. The Circle was empty for several months in the fall of 1926, until Matthew Meikeljohn and Percy Dunn, both experienced Los Angeles producers, brought in their company. The top price for admission was cut, production costs were sliced, and shows catering to popular taste were presented, but this company could only keep going until December 25. It was January of 1929 before another dramatic stock company occupied the Circle, but this troupe, led by Joseph D. Miller, could only manage two productions before it also collapsed.

The last stock venture of the decade in Dallas came in the spring of 1929 when Charles J. Wagner, a well-known New York producer, gave a three-week experimental season which was underwritten by Dallas businessmen. Miller brought in Madge Kennedy, prominent Broadway star, as a guest performer, and attracted good audiences for Paris Bound, but did not do so well with Saturday's Children. During the early 1930's there were to be three more attempts to establish stock in the city, but all of them were abortive, and stock ceased to play a major role in Dallas entertainment after 1930. Dallas audiences were drawn in ever-greater numbers to the motion pictures, and the dwindling audience for legitimate plays was too conditioned by the performances of the Dallas Little Theater and by the improved quality of the touring shows to be satisfied with the lack of professional polish and the inferior quality of the plays given by the dramatic stock companies.

Direct evidence of the increasing tendency for live entertainment...
to give way to the motion pictures as the decade progressed can be gained by observing what happened to vaudeville and other similar forms of entertainment, and by following the careers of the various theaters. The popularity of vaudeville at the start of 1920 can be gauged from the aforementioned fact that there were three vaudeville houses—the Majestic, the Hippodrome and the Jefferson—operating in the downtown area. The Majestic, under the guidance of Karl Hoblitzelle, was the only theater in the city that was able to show vaudeville consistently throughout the ten-year period. Playlets were a part of practically every bill during the early years of the decade, indicating the still-present vitality of the dramatic form. Many of the leading actors and vaudeville performers of the day played on the Majestic stage. But by 1923, the theater was feeling the competition not only from the stock companies but also from the Palace and Melba theaters and at the start of the 1923 season broke its long-standing straight vaudeville tradition by going into a combined stage and motion picture policy. In another effort to meet competition, the Majestic management broke another tradition, that of closing down during the summers months, and during the summer of 1923 gave the stage over to the Manhattan Musical Company, a resident musical comedy group that attracted only fair attendance and lasted only until July. Again, in the summer of 1924, the management experimented, this time with musical stock, presenting the Garden Players who performed in stock scripts of a frothy nature. The Garden Players were somewhat more successful, lasting until August 17. The season of 1924-1925 was marked by greater emphasis on big name orchestras and musical entertainment and by the virtual disappearance of the playlets as a vaudeville piece. It was during this
season that vaudeville enjoyed a renascence and vaudeville was continued at the theater through the summer months.

The 1925-1930 period was one of new experimentation in vaudeville. It was during these five years that the unit shows, of masters of ceremonies and of well-known orchestras playing from the stage became popular. The programs tended to become more varied and more name stars came as headliners of the bills. By the start of the 1926-1927 season, Interstate had grown into one of the most important vaudeville circuits in the country and there was a growing trend toward the use of bigger scale entertainment. This trend was accentuated in December, 1926, when RKO unit shows began appearing on the Majestic stage. The use of name entertainers was accelerated during the 1927-1928 season. But it was during this season also that sound motion pictures became firmly established in the city. During the summer of 1928, motion picture shorts were presented at the Majestic instead of live entertainment. When the 1928-1929 season began, consideration was given by the management to replacing one of the vaudeville acts by the sound shorts, but this change was decided against because of the cost of producing the films. Vaudeville was again part of the entertainment in the summer of 1929 but the heightened competition was again reflected in the decision of the management in February, 1930, to present four vaudeville shows a day instead of three.

By the end of the decade, the golden era of vaudeville had passed. The Majestic management was able to maintain a relatively stable policy during the ten-year period by virtue of the Interstate resources which made it possible for the theater to command the best vaudeville entertainers of the day, satisfying the desire of Dallas
audiences for big-time stars, but even this was not enough to stem the
trend of the times, and before the 1930's were long under way, vaude­
ville was abandoned at the Majestic also.

The smaller theaters, less able to meet the rising costs of
vaudeville, did not fare so well with the live entertainment. The
Jefferson, on the Pantages circuit at the start of 1920, had a price
range of 11 cents to 33 cents compared to the Majestic scale of 35
cents to 85 cents, but the Jefferson was only able to continue its
vaudeville program until January, 1922. Vaudeville was discarded and
musical stock companies occupied the theater for the next few years.
The difficulties of the theater were aggravated during the 1925-1930
period when the management, in an effort to win audiences, alternated
between musical stock and tabloid shows. In May, 1928, the Jefferson
became the Ritz Theater and operated as a second-run motion picture
house.

Vaudeville at the Hippodrome lasted only until the start of the
1921 season when that theater, too, became a musical stock house.
During the 1922-1923 season, it was used by a dramatic stock company
and when that venture failed, became a tabloid playhouse. In 1926,
it was used again briefly for musical stock, and from October, 1926,
through March, 1927, the theater, renamed the Lyric, presented the
R. Frank Norton Players, a troupe that gave plays with entre'act
vaudeville entertainment. After March, 1927, the theater became a
straight motion picture house. During the decade, theaters like the
Jefferson and Hippodrome found it impossible to pay the high costs
of vaudeville and at the same time retain the low prices for admission.
which brought them their particular clientele.

The Happyland was built specifically in 1922 for the lower-cost tabloid shows. It had a low price policy and its resident company gave three shows daily, alternated with motion pictures. The company remained intact for more than a year, but under the impact of competition from the Jefferson and the Hippodrome, its owner cut admission prices and resorted to advertising the spicy nature of the shows. In 1923, the theater policy changed in turn from vaudeville, to tabloid, to an inferior kind of dramatic stock, and then to straight motion pictures.

The Palace and the Melba theaters during the 1920-1925 period were primarily prestige presentation houses where the emphasis was mainly on the motion picture features. At the Palace, the live entertainment was considered an adjunct to the pictures, and the programs on stage tended toward the classical and the spectacular. There were occasional appearances by well-known dance orchestras but most of the entertainment was decided upon by the theater's symphony orchestra leader. After 1924, however, the stage presentations tended to become more popular in nature. In the 1925-1930 period, the Palace made a radical departure from established tradition, abandoning its concerts and bringing to Dallas the Publix unit shows. It was at the Palace in October, 1926, that Dallas had its first taste of the policy, becoming popular in the larger cities, of placing the orchestra on the stage. The theater entered a period of relative instability before the year had ended, however, with its owners discontinuing the unit shows, replacing them with stage bands, then bringing back unit shows that more closely resembled vaudeville. During the 1927-1928 season,
the Palace experimented with two orchestras, one on the stage and the other in the orchestra pit. By the start of the 1929-1930 season, the unit shows were cut to three acts for reasons of economy, and in January, 1930, a split-week policy was announced, with films Monday through Thursday and the Publix stage presentations Friday through Sunday. The reason given was that it was sometimes necessary to play the fine motion pictures longer than seven days. The theater orchestra was discharged in March of 1930, but by May had returned to the theater, and by June, the Palace had variety acts again and an orchestra on the stage.

As for the Melba, it was primarily a first-run motion picture house until June, 1924, with little stage entertainment. It was then that Pantages vaudeville came to the theater, but faced with the competition from the quality offerings at the Palace and from the tabloid and musical stock presentations in the other theaters, vaudeville had to be discontinued from July, 1925, until April, 1926, when the theater was leased by Loew's and utilized for Loew's vaudeville. On July 18, 1926, fire destroyed part of the stage and rear section of the theater, and for six weeks the Loew's shows were played at the Old Mill Theater. The Melba reopened with vaudeville on November 12, but on January 14, 1928, vaudeville discontinued. Loew's officials estimated they had lost $100,000 on the vaudeville venture. The Melba had come into the vaudeville competition late and found it difficult to compete with the Majestic with its habitual patronage and its better-known entertainers.

The revival of vaudeville in 1925 may be attributed to the public apathy toward the silent motion pictures. After 1928, when sound
motion picture equipment had been installed in all the downtown theaters and when radio had begun to come into its own, only the kind of live entertainment given at the Majestic and the Palace could hope to survive. The last half of the decade was marked by a series of mergers on the national scene, and in the city by price wars, longer programs, and by jockeying as to the best opening days. The mergers brought better stage entertainment to the Majestic and the Palace, but the renewed popularity of vaudeville proved only short-lived, for the movies wooed away the better vaudeville stars and the costs of stage entertainment skyrocketed.

The impact of the motion pictures was felt, too, by the musical and legitimate roadshows which came to the city. Although the decline of the road, Dallas' geographical location, and the lack of a suitable theater for professional dramatic presentations were major factors in the relative scarcity of touring shows that came to the city during the decade, the effect of the growing popularity of the motion pictures was to cut deeply into that segment of the entertainment public which might have patronized the roadshows.

As mentioned before, the touring shows were given at the Coliseum during the 1920-1921 season. The road had not yet given way to the impact of the post-war recession and capacity audiences saw such plays as The Masque, with Guy Bates Post, during its four-night run, and The Better Ole, with De Wolf Hopper. A year later, the recession had set in and no legitimate plays came to the city. Touring plays continued scarce in the 1922-1923 season, with The Woman of Bronze, starring Margaret Anglin, and The Circle, featuring such well-known players as Wilton Lackaye, Henry E. Dixey, Amelia Bingham, Norman Hackett and Charlotte
Walker, and played for a one-night stand to enthusiastic reviews, constituting two of the three presentations.

The importance of having a suitable theater was apparent during the 1923-1924 season when the new Majestic Theater housed touring roadshows. There were eight legitimate productions that season, most of which drew good audiences. In the 1924-1925 season, the Circle Theater was the host theater and the highlight of the season was the appearance of Fritz Leiber and his Shakespearian company in a week's run of different productions.

The last five years of the decade were sparse as far as legitimate road shows were concerned but there was a sharp upturn in the quality of the productions. Fair Park Auditorium, the Circle and the Old Mill Theater were all used for the plays, although each theater in its own way was inadequate. Fair Park Auditorium was too large and had faulty acoustics; the Circle was badly heated; and the Old Mill stage was not designed for the newer plays. The state of the road make it feasible for only established stage stars or the best known plays to go to Dallas. In the last two years of the decade, economic depression cast its pall over theater. But it was during these five years that the kinds of plays which were revolutionizing the Broadway stage began to be seen in Dallas.

Five legitimate roadshows came to the city during the 1925-1926 season and the most enthusiastically received was The Rivals, with Minnie Maddern Fiske, Thomas Wise, James T. Powers and Lotus Robb in the principal roles. The presentation of Abie's Irish Rose was the highlight of the 1926-1927 season, and although the Dallas critics were
divided as to the merits of the play, audience response was so great that it returned a month later for another week's run, and again the following season. Another outstanding event of the season was the three-day appearance of Robert Mantell and his Shakespearian company with the presentation of some of the productions in modern dress.

The breakthrough in legitimate road productions came during the 1927-1928 season when Broadway, a sensational drama about night life and racketeering, not only drew big audiences to the State Fair Auditorium, but also came back the following month for another two-day run. The acceptance of this drama, with its realistic portrayals of gangsters and chorus girls, reflected both the demand for realism and the influence of the gangster motion pictures. Two long-time favorites in the theater, Richard Bennett, seen in The Barker, and Fritz Leiber, presented in five Shakespearian productions at a $1 top price, kept alive the older stage traditions in the city.

The 1929-1930 season marked a turning point in Dallas theater history. Only three legitimate roadshows were seen, but they were of outstanding quality. Journey's End, given at Fair Park Auditorium for three days, was highly praised by the critics and played to good audiences. The Miracle, staged by Max Reinhardt and brought to this country by Morris Gest, was far and away the most publicized theatrical event of the decade in the city and required that Fair Park Auditorium be converted into a replica of a medieval cathedral at great cost. Gest predicted that the production, during its twelve-day run, would draw between 75,000 and 100,000 persons, but only about 30,000 people paid in a $50,000 gross to see the performances. This sum was inadequate to pay completely expenses for the show, and in spite of Gest's plans...
to take the elaborate pantomimic presentation on tour, the scenery was attached by the sheriff and the production, which had been performed for a number of years in the principal cities of Europe and in New York City, finally ended its career in Dallas. The Freiburg Passion Play, given at Fair Park Auditorium, was performed to moderate sized audiences and only mixed reviews. As far as legitimate roadshows were concerned, Dallas came of age by the end of the decade. During the 1930's the roadshows that were seen were of high quality and starred the leading actors in the American theater.

As for the musical touring shows, Dallas theatergoers went to them in greater numbers than they did to the legitimate dramas. Neither the size of the Coliseum, nor later of the Fair Park Auditorium, proved as great a handicap for the musicals as they did for the dramatic shows. As the decade proceeded, the public taste in the city veered toward the shows with the name stars and to productions that laid stress on nudity and the obscene. Those musicals that ran into censorship trouble attracted the biggest audiences, unless the show could boast a nationally-known entertainer. The growth of the city had led to heightened cosmopolitanism and sophistication. The draining away of large segments of the theatergoing public to motion picture entertainment cut into the potential audience for the live shows and also caused the musical show producers, competing intensively for an audience, to cater more directly to the growing demand for the salacious and risque. This attitude was abetted in the case of cities like Dallas by the feeling on the part of New York producers that audiences in the so-called "provinces" preferred the "girly-girly" shows. Despite sporadic censorship, Dallas
police and city officials remained relatively tolerant toward such shows. As might be expected, the number of touring musicals which came to the city paralleled that of the legitimate shows. The Coliseum remained available for the musicals until the start of the 1923-1924 season, and the Majestic, the Jefferson, the Circle, the Old Mill, and after 1925, the State Fair Auditorium all housed the musical roadshows. The musicals seen in Dallas during the early years of the decade rarely had the original Broadway performers, but this fact was not complained about much in the newspapers until John Rosenfield began his duties with the News. Oh, Lady, Lady, and Glorianna attracted sizeable audiences in the spring of 1920, and Bringing Up Father at the Seashore, the only musical roadshow during the 1920-1921 season except for two Negro productions, got poor reviews. Chu Chin Chow, the only touring musical during the 1921-1922 season, was an elaborate and exotic presentation that failed to draw the anticipated crowds. In the following season, Up in the Clouds, and Take It From Me played at the Jefferson Theater to high praise from the reviewers, and Hitchy Koo, starring Raymond Hitchcock, attracted large audiences to the Majestic and was said by the critics to have set a new standard in musicals for the city. When Interstate brought musicals to the city in the 1923-1924 season and made it possible for them to play the other Interstate theaters in the state, the number and the quality of the touring musicals went up decidedly. Big audiences saw The Clinging Vine, Blossom Time and The Gingham Girl, but the outstanding show of the season was The Passing Show, starring Willie and Eugene Howard. Flashes of the Great White Way, presented at the Circle, was the only touring
musical of the 1924-1925 season.

The immediate effect of the opening of the State Fair Auditorium at the start of the 1925-1926 season was to bring more of the musical roadshows to the city. Shows given during the season included Ziegfeld's Sally, which attracted capacity crowds despite mixed reviews; No, No, Nanette, for a highly successful three-day run; Blossom Time; and Lady Be Good, a production that played to fair-sized audiences in spite of mediocre reviews. My Girl was the next show and was followed by a presentation of George White's Scandals at the Circle, a production praised for its scenery by the critics and notable for its degree of nudity. It had to be held over for two extra performances. Raymond Hitchcock and Evelyn Hoey starred in the Greenwich Village Follies at the Auditorium to great praise from the critics and Artists and Models played the Auditorium as the last show of the season. The season demonstrated that Dallas audiences were attracted in greatest numbers to musicals with name stars or with acts of a questionable nature.

The presentations for the 1926-1927 season veered between chaste light operas and racy revues, and the paradoxical thing is that both attracted big audiences. Rose Marie, The Bohemian Girl, The Chimes of Normandy and The Student Prince alternated with such productions as George White's Scandals, Earl Carroll's Vanities and Irving Berlin's Music Box Revue.

One of the most successful Dallas runs of the decade came at the start of the 1927-1928 season when capacity crowds paid a gross of approximately $80,000 to see Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, the Denishawn Dancers, Dave Burns, and Nyra Brown in the Ziegfeld Follies at the
Old Mill Theater. *Kid Boots* and *My Maryland* came later in the season, followed by *A Night in Spain*, a musical starring Phil Baker, Ted Healey and Aileen Stanley that was preceded by salacious advertising, and which drew near capacity audiences to two performances at the Auditorium.

The 1928-1929 season was marked by the most blatant attempt to capitalize on audience taste for the risque but was also the year when the reaction against nudity in the city set in. *Folies Bergere*, sponsored by the American Legion, was advertised as direct from Paris, and though the critics cast doubt as to its Parisian origin, the show grossed $4,000, even though its performances at the Circle Theater were given during the State Fair season. A near-capacity crowd also saw *Chic Sale in Gay Paree* at the Auditorium. The other musicals of the season, *Naughty Marietta*, *The Firefly*, *Rio Rita* and *Hit the Deck*, all above reproach, were without name stars and were attended only by fair-sized audiences.

As had happened with the touring legitimate shows, the number of musicals fell off during the 1929-1930 season, but what was lost in quantity was more than made up for in quality.

*The Vagabond King*, performed for one night at the Auditorium, won praise from the reviewers, although John Rosenfield called attention to the fact that it was a Number Two company. *Padlocks of 1929* was also given for one night at the Auditorium and was described by one reviewer as the funniest show since *A Night in Spain*. Akin to *The Miracle* in its experimental approach and in its appeal to sophisticated taste, the celebrated *Chauve-Souris* ran for four days at the Auditorium, but like *The Miracle*, was a financial fiasco. *Chauve-Souris* attracted between four hundred and six hundred persons to each performance in the 5,000 seat
theater, even though it was enthusiastically praised by all the reviewers. The last musical show of the season was *A Connecticut Yankee*, a production which had been highly successful on Broadway. Less than 5,000 persons saw the production during its four-day run at the Auditorium.

Despite the fact that the runs of the shows had been shortened, attendance at the musicals had been poor and the Fair Park Auditorium management closed down their season four months early. Not only were the effects of the depression being felt but also the sound motion pictures were firmly entrenched in the city during the season and musicals could now be seen and heard on the screen at a much lower price than the cost of attending a live musical.

The story of the State Fair Shows during the decade presents quite a different picture. While other forms of live entertainment declined in popularity in the ten-year period, the Fair Shows actually grew stronger and gained in audience appeal. A unique feature of the Dallas entertainment scene, the shows were so popular that the downtown theaters made little attempt to bring in touring legitimate or musical productions during the two-week Fair season, tending to divide the Dallas theater season into two parts. The Shows had a long tradition behind them at the start of the decade but had little prestige. From 1920 to 1925, extravaganzas, similar to those which had been given for a number of years, were presented. The names of the revues, *Smiles of 1920*, *Smiles of 1921*, The Royal European Midgets in 1922, The Passing Parade of 1923 and The Passing Parade of 1924 are suggestive of their nature.

However, with the opening of State Fair Auditorium in 1925, shows of better quality were sought by the State Fair Association. It was a lucky accident for the Fair management that the cast of the
Broadway success, *Sky High*, refused to go South after the show had already been announced as the Fair offering, for the Shubert operetta, *The Student Prince*, which was presented instead was so successful, attracting capacity audiences and grossing approximately $100,000, that musical operettas were presented at the Fair Shows with great success for the next four seasons as well. *Princess Flavia, Countess Maritza, The Desert Song* and *The Red Robe* were the successive offerings. By 1930, the Fair Association felt that a change was needed and contracted for the Broadway show, *Sons O' Guns*. The show's principal, Jack Donahue, died before the company reached Dallas and he was replaced by Jack Haley. The musical grossed only $72,000, but the policy of presenting well-known Broadway musicals became established.

It was the Shubert operettas that established the reputation of the Fair Shows. Featuring well-known singers and elaborately staged, they set a standard of excellence that has since been maintained. However, if the Shows had depended entirely on Dallas patronage, it is not likely that the operettas would have continued for five years. Most of the audience came from cities and rural areas of the Southwest that were not used to such scenic splendor, to such quality of singing, and to music by composers such as Sigmund Romberg.

The tent shows were a little publicized fringe form of entertainment which survived by virtue of extremely low admission prices. Held in low repute by the critics and ignored by most of the playgoing public, the tent shows played an insignificant role in the city during the ten-year period.

It was quite another story for the minstrel shows. Dallas had been the training spot for a number of prominent minstrel entertainers
and the popularity of the shows in the early years of the decade is seen in that a number of the major minstrel shows came to the city between 1920 and 1923 and played at the Coliseum, sometimes for a week's run. Bert Swor, Gus Hill, Lasses White, Neil O'Brien and Al G. Fields were among the prominent minstrel producers who brought their shows to the city. By 1923, the number of shows began to decline and they began performing for one-night stands. After 1925, the shows were seen much more rarely in Dallas and during the 1925-1930 period, only two companies, the Al G. Fields and Lasses White troupes, made appearances in Fair Park Auditorium, and then only for one performance. Bert Swor made an attempt in 1930 to revive the minstrel form in a large tent and selected Dallas as the starting point for his tour. The effort failed and minstrel shows were relegated to the radio, to motion pictures and to small town benefit appearances.

The minstrel shows were too rigid in format, too dependent upon fixed attitudes toward the Negro, too purely entertaining in nature to survive in a decade in which there was ever-increasing stress of theme and content and less on style and tradition. If the minstrel shows were entertaining, the motion pictures proved more so. And as the number of shows that came to the city dropped off, the public became less acquainted with them and ceased to patronize them. As with the rise and fall of the other types of professional theater, the disappearance of the minstrel shows from the Dallas scene was a reflection of what was happening simultaneously elsewhere in the nation.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the study of Dallas professional theater during the decade.

It may be noted first that all forms of live professional entertainment
lost ground during the 1920's to the motion pictures and to radio. Some of the types of entertainment such as the tabloid shows, musical stock and the minstrel shows disappeared entirely. Others like dramatic stock were greatly weakened in vitality by 1930.

Legitimate drama was handicapped throughout the decade by the lack of a suitable theater for productions. This situation was aggravated by the fact that Dallas was not on the regular circuit for touring shows after 1920 and there were so few adequate theaters in the Southwest that it was economically unfeasible for most touring companies to come to the city.

Dallas professional theater did not reflect the great changes the newer dramatists were making on the Broadway scene until very late in the decade. The newer plays were done in the city by the Dallas Little Theater.

The objectivity of Dallas theater criticism improved after John Rosenfield became Aumsements Editor for the Dallas Morning News in 1925.

As Dallas grew in size and sophistication during the decade, audiences in the city became jaded with second-rate touring companies and productions and demanded big name performers and Broadway standards. Those plays which have survived the period proved during the decade to be among the most popular in the city. However, the effort to draw Dallas audiences in large numbers to such culturally advanced presentations as The Miracle and Chauve-Souris proved premature.

Although the number of legitimate roadshows and touring musicals declined because of the condition of the road, they improved in quality.

In the middle years of the decade, musicals that stressed nudity and the risque proved to be the best audience-getters. Sporadic
censorship seemed only to whet the audience interest. There was a reaction against the risque shows in the last two years of the decade.

Vaudeville was very popular in the city at the start of the decade but declined from 1921 to 1925. In that year, vaudeville enjoyed a renascence that lasted until 1928 when the sound motion pictures became firmly entrenched in the city. The only theater that was able to keep vaudeville throughout the ten-year period was the Majestic. The resources of Interstate, owners of the Majestic, made it possible for that theater to provide the nationally-known performers and the kinds of acts that could successfully compete with the motion pictures. Theaters without these resources, such as the Jefferson and the Hippodrome, had to give up vaudeville because of its high costs and turned instead to the lower-cost musical stock and tabloid productions. But eventually, even these types of mass entertainment proved too costly and too inadequate to compete with the drift toward motion pictures and by the end of the decade the Majestic and the Palace were the only downtown theaters with the live entertainment. Vaudeville was hard hit by the onset of the sound films and was in sharp decline at the end of the decade.

Theaters such as the Melba, backed by Loew's, and the Palace, financed by Publix, came into the vaudeville and live entertainment field late and could not provide sustained competition against the Majestic.

Dramatic stock was popular in the early years of the decade but was unable to compete against vaudeville and the motion pictures. Although the Circle Theater was built specifically for stock in 1923, the companies could not go through a complete season and by 1930 had

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virtually disappeared from the city.

The experience of dramatic stock in the ten-year period demonstrated that its weaknesses lay in outworn systems of casting and production methods, in the growing difficulty stock producers found in getting recent Broadway successes, and in the unwillingness of the stock producers to infringe on the kinds of plays done by the Dallas Little Theater. There was evidence in the last part of the decade that the salvation of dramatic stock lay in a repertory system, but the stock companies found themselves unable to take decisive steps in this direction. Another way out for the stock companies was to use well-known guest performers and this was successfully tried in the city during the 1929-1930 season, but public taste had already shifted too sharply toward the sound films and economic conditions had become such that dramatic stock could no longer survive.

The success of the Shubert operettas at the State Fair Auditorium from 1925 through 1929 was a fortuitous anomaly that was made possible because the Fair Shows drew most of their attendance from areas where the elegance and music characteristic of such shows was unknown. It was this success, however, that firmly established the Fair Shows as the high point of the Dallas theatrical season and that set the high standards to which the Fair Shows have since been committed.

Like dramatic stock, the minstrel shows were popular early in the decade but declined greatly as the decade proceeded. The minstrel shows, like stock, were committed to outworn patterns of theater.

Dallas began the 1920-1930 decade as just another provincial city, off the beaten path, with a few touring roadshow, most of them mediocre in nature, but with quite a bit of vaudeville activity and
with little else to offer in the way of professional theater. The city ended the decade firmly established as the cultural leader of the Southwest, ready to enter the 1930's when audiences in the city were to see outstanding plays and musicals featuring Broadway's best known actors. The 1920's were a period of transition in the city, of ferment and change, but they were also years when the basic foundation stones were laid on which were built later the city's reputation as a leading center for professional entertainment.
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Jackson Davis was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on July 27, 1916. After attending the public schools of that city, he moved to Chicago where he did his undergraduate study at Central YMCA College and Northwestern University. He received his B.A. degree in Psychology in June, 1940, and then did graduate study in English Literature for eighteen months at the University of Chicago. In 1943, he began his graduate study in Drama at Goodman Memorial Theatre in Chicago, and from 1944 to 1947 he attended the Yale School of Drama where he received his M.F.A. degree. For the next ten years he alternately taught in college and did newspaper work and in 1957 began his two years of residency for the Ph.D. degree at Louisiana State University. Since completing his course work there he has taught at Arlington State College in Arlington, Texas, and at the College of Emporia, Emporia, Kansas.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Jackson Davis

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: A HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL THEATER IN DALLAS, TEXAS
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Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

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