

1838-1839

Coronation of Queen Victoria is great boost to theatre sales

Royal General Theatrical Fund

1838: With the power of the Patent Theatres weakened, the two separate charity funds of Covent Garden and Drury Lane have been merged into the Royal General Theatrical Fund.

1838, 28 June : The Coronation of Britain's new Queen, the 19 year old Victoria, has been a great cause of celebration throughout the country, and especially in London. Enormous crowds have flocked to the capital to witness the Coronation. The event has not only attracted crowds from the United Kingdom, but also a large number of tourists from abroad, especially from France and Germany. London's theatres have scheduled additional performances throughout the months of June and July - a period when theatres are usually closed for a summer break. The pleasure gardens and the "new" music halls have seen a spectacular increase in attendances at this time.

Limelight too expensive

1838 : Frederic Gye has created a much improved limelight for theatre use. The older form, first used nearly twenty years ago, is harsh and excessively "white". The new system involving a combination of lime and calcium is more mellow and versatile. Macready introduced it into the 1837/38 Covent Garden pantomime to give extra effect to the dioramic backdrops of designer Clarkson Stansfield. However, after one week its use was discontinued on the grounds that at 30 shillings a performance it is too expensive.

Quarrel with Ticket Agencies

1839 : A new business has arisen , that of the ticket agency. It enables people to get a guaranteed place at London's theatres without having to queue (or sending their servants to queue!) The agents, Messrs Andrews, Sams, Mitchell, Ebers and Hookham, quarrelled with Alfred Bunn over discount prices for block ticket purchases for Drury Lane. Covent Garden was also involved in the dispute. The matter was resolved, and Bunn invited the agents to a Reconciliation Dinner.

Drury Lane's standards decline: "Nothing more than a Circus"

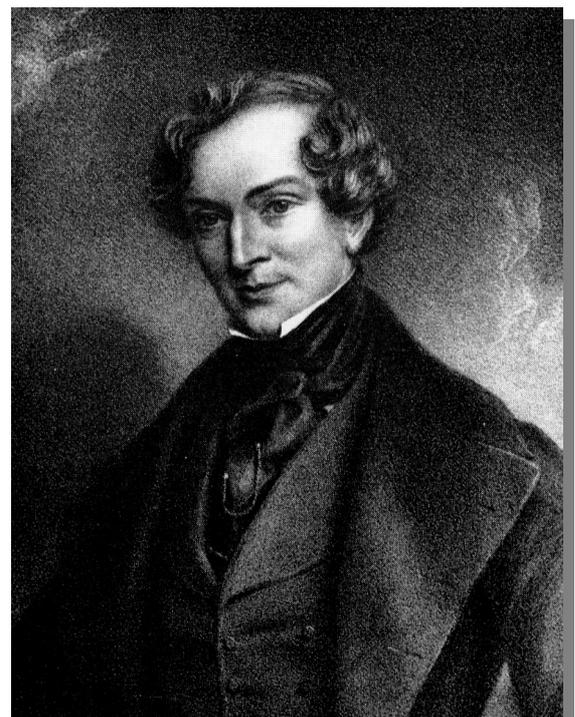
1839 : Alfred Bunn has dismissed accusations that he has debased the great traditions of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and turned it into nothing more than a circus. He reminded critics that Kemble and Mrs Siddons had presented "Bluebeard" and "Timour the Tartar" supported by a whole stud of Astley's horses - and even before his time, the Lane had presented "Hyder Ali, or the Lions of Mysore" with elephants, boa constrictors, and a whole menagerie onstage. He was replying to complaints about his latest attraction at Drury Lane, Van Ambergh's famous performing animals. Bunn points out that Queen Victoria has been to see the show three times - January 10th, 17th and 24th, and on the last occasion went backstage to watch the animals being fed.

Madame Lucy Vestris and Charles Matthews take over the management of Covent Garden

1839 : Madame Vestris, the famous opera singer, and Charles Matthews, her leading man at the Olympic and, since last year, her new husband, have taken over the management of Covent Garden following the financial collapse of Macready's company. Their opening production on 30 September was "Love's Labours Lost" - an occasion marked with hearty booing due to their decision to abolish the one shilling gallery seats.



Theatre Museum



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