

1842-1843

Macready fails as Bunn bounces back

1843 : With his artistic reputation intact and his status as high as ever, William Charles Macready has resigned the management of Drury Lane, defeated by the finances of the place. He has gone to America to recoup some of the personal money he has lost during his management. Along with much of the profession, he was shocked to discover that his successor is to be Alfred Bunn. Bunn, previously manager at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, was accused of cheapening the great traditions of English theatre, and declared bankrupt just three years ago.

Bohemian Girl great success

1843: Alfred Bunn has achieved a great success at Drury Lane with Michael Balfe's opera "The Bohemian Girl". The opening night, 27th November, was a great hit with the public, and after some initial drop in attendance, word-of-mouth got round. The show is set to run well into next year. Unusually for a British opera, there has already been a lot of foreign interest.

PARLIAMENT FREES ALL THEATRES

1843 : The Committee headed by Bulwer-Lytton has got an Act through Parliament which gives all theatres in the country the right to perform any sort of attraction they please, from Shakespeare downwards. The Act provides detailed regulations regarding structural and other requirements necessary before a licence will be granted by the Lord Chamberlain for London theatres and by the local authorities for provincial venues. The new regulations will not apply to the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and Covent Garden, to any theatres in Royal Windsor, nor to any theatres in the places of Royal residences. These theatres will remain, technically, directly under the control of the reigning monarch.

The Act also requires a copy of every new play to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain before performance, and no new play may be performed without permission from the official censor. This rule only applies to plays written from 1843 onwards, and earlier plays, whether they have been performed or not, are exempt. However, the Lord Chamberlain has the right to suppress any such production if he deems it fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or the public peace. The Act rules that no profanity or impropriety of language, no indecency of dress, dance or gesture and no representations of living persons will be permitted onstage.

Amongst other provisions, the Act bans the selling or drinking of alcohol in the auditorium when a play is presented. This does not apply to the music halls, where the selling of food and alcoholic drink is the sole source of income and the entertainment is provided at no charge.

Top actor drowns in shipwreck No more Candlelight

1843 : Edward William Elton, who was acclaimed for his "Walter Tyrrell" at Covent Garden six years ago and as Romeo in Macready's Drury Lane company last year, has been drowned in the shipwreck of the "Pegasus" whilst returning from an engagement in Ireland.

Elton began his career as a strolling player, and made his London debut twenty years ago at the Olympic. The son of a schoolmaster, he added writing and lecturing skills to his work as an actor.

Aged 49, he leaves seven small children. His fellow performers have announced a benefit performance for the orphans, and this will be given at the Haymarket

1843 : The Haymarket Theatre has been remodelled and has installed gas and oil lighting. It was the last theatre in London still using candlelight.

New suburban Theatre

1843 : As a result of the new freedom offered by Parliament, a new theatre, called the Queen's, has opened in the London suburb of Poplar.

Princess's Opera hit

1842: The first proper theatrical performance has taken place at the Princess's Theatre in London's Oxford Street - the premiere of Bellini's opera "La Sonnambula". The venue opened two years ago as a concert hall, but has failed to attract much support. The owner and manager, a silversmith called Mr Hamlet, has invested further money in the building and adapted it to take stage productions. In spite of the great success of the opera, it is felt that his accumulated losses are such that he will shortly be declared bankrupt, and the theatre will be for sale.

