

1859-1861

Alhambra Music Hall Opens

Pavilion and new "Oxford" compete for audiences

1861 : The "Salle Robin" Hall built in 1784, has been used in recent years as a "sing song saloon" attached to the Black Horse public house. It has now has been converted into the West End's first "music hall de luxe", called the London Pavilion. Charles Morton - the "Father of the Halls" whose Canterbury Music Hall pioneered the new industry seven years ago - has risen to the challenge from the new London Pavilion and the Alhambra. He has opened the Oxford Music Hall on the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. Built on the site of an old galleried inn, the Boar and Castle, it is a "respectable venue better than any of its rivals".



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The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze

1861 : Flying through the air with the greatest of ease, Monsieur Leotard, the trapeze artist at the Alhambra, is the hit of the season. Within days of Leotard's debut he was hailed with a popular song performed on the Halls by the famous comedian and singer, George Leybourne.

Theatres opening all over the country

1861 The decade 1851-1861 has seen considerable growth in the number of theatre buildings throughout the country.

In London, 23 new theatres have opened and 6 have closed. In the provinces 34 new theatres have been built, and 5 have either been demolished or replaced.

It is estimated that London now has around 92 major entertainment venues. This includes the larger music halls but excludes the hundreds of smaller entertainment saloons attached to public houses.

In the rest of the country it is estimated there are at least 160 major theatres.

The growth of theatrical entertainment has sounded the death knell for London's "Pleasure Gardens" - most of which have closed in the past ten years.

Prince of Wales in sex scandal with actress

1861 : 20 year old Edward, Prince of Wales, on summer vacation from Cambridge University, was encouraged by his parents to study army life at the Curragh army camp near Dublin. In an age of republicanism and revolution, it was felt that he needed to get closer to ordinary subjects. However, it appears he has got closer than Queen Victoria and Prince Albert would have wished! Egged on by his fellow officers, he decided to broaden his horizons with a local Dublin actress called Nellie Clifden. She is well known to the officers of the camp, and was not averse to being smuggled in to the Prince's tent for the night. Their light-hearted one-night affair became the subject of much gossip, and an outraged Prince Albert immediately recalled his son to Cambridge. In a letter, Prince Albert forecast that Nellie would become nicknamed the Princess of Wales, and would probably have a child which she would doubtless claim to be Prince Bertie's and drag him through the courts. He says that the monarchy must preserve the highest standards of behaviour and propriety if it is to survive. The Queen is said to be equally outraged.

Surrey Gardens Music Hall burns

1861 : The Surrey Gardens Music Hall and Pleasure Gardens has closed following a fire. The Vauxhall Gardens closed two years ago.

1860: Opened six years ago as the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art, it failed after just two years. It then became a circus and, when that failed, it decided to cash in on the current music hall craze. Accordingly, the Royal Panopticon has now been extensively rebuilt and has opened as the Alhambra, Leicester Square - claiming to be a music hall for the more genteel clientele.

Theatre condemned for opening on night of Prince Albert's death

1861 : Mr Deacon's Music Hall in Islington, near Sadlers Wells, had announced its Gala Opening for 14 December. Artists were booked, guests invited, everything prepared - when three days before it was announced that the Prince Consort was seriously ill. On the morning of Deacon's opening a bulletin announced that the Prince was near to death. Deacon decided to go ahead with his opening show. The Prince died at 10.50pm - as Deacon's Music Hall was at a height of jolly celebrations. The following morning's newspapers criticised him heavily. All other theatres and music halls closed immediately the "near to death" announcement was made, and will remain closed as a mark of respect.

"Colleen Bawn" is a great success for Dion Boucicault

1860 : The hugely prolific Irish playwright, Dion Boucicault, has had enormous success with his new melodrama "The Colleen Bawn" - an even greater success than last year's controversial play about inter-racial marriage, "The Octoroon". He is well established in America where his tours have been especially well received, and he is now being acclaimed as the best known playwright of the age.