

Music Hall "War" lasts for a month

Blackleg Elephants

1907: Marie Lloyd was prominent in the many picket lines which formed outside those music halls which attempted to stay open during the strike. She caused much hilarity by calling out "Blacklegs!" at Lockhart's troupe of performing elephants. When a fellow artist tried to stop Miss Belle Ellmore from entering the theatre, Miss Lloyd cried out "Don't be daft! Let her in and she'll empty the theatre".

Twenty Curtain-Calls for new Opera Star

1907: The 36 year old Italian soprano, Luisa Tetrazzini, has been performing in Italy and South America for 15 years. Her appearance in San Francisco three years ago achieved the first notable success of her career, but her debut at Covent Garden as Violetta in "La Traviata" and as Lucia in "Lucia di Lammermoor" has earned her sensational acclaim. She was hailed as the "new Patti" and received twenty curtain calls. She stopped the performance with her trills upon E in alt during "Ah, fors e lui", and Covent Garden's audience erupted in cheering. During her six weeks in London she was paid £100 a performance. Now she has been re-booked for four further seasons at Covent Garden and for three in New York at a fee said to be vastly higher.

Strike Manager Dies

1907: George Adney Payne died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 60. His widow blamed the pressures of the music hall strike for causing his early demise. Many a London chorus girl, however, blamed his persistent chasing after women! There is a story that one chorus girl confessed to another that she was pregnant. Her friend is said to have asked, "Ad any pain?" and the girl replied, "Certainly not! It's my boyfriend's!".

1907: A strike lasting four weeks has had a serious effect on London's music halls. The music-hall circuits owned by Mr Adney Payne and Mr Walter Gibbons have been denied product throughout this period. Other music halls have tried to keep open using "blackleg" artists or amateurs. Mrs Adney Payne attempted to assist her husband by returning to the stage to perform in his music halls, but her rendition of "The Holy City" was roundly booed by the first night audience. Around 300 artists have refused to appear, and these have been joined by a number of musicians and stage-hands. The music hall proprietors have issued ninety writs against variety artists (forty of them by Walter Gibbons) alleging breach of contract in refusing to appear.

The Music Hall Artists' demands are: Halls working two shows a night must pay for matinees at the rate of one-twelfth salary for each performance given; no artist can be transferred from one hall to another without his consent; no turn shall be squeezed out by changing the time of his appearance; disputes shall be referred to a board of arbitration; no commission is to be charged on an artist booked direct; a change in the "barring clause" which prevents artists from working in two different music halls on the same night; and a recognition of the Variety Artists Federation.

Marie Lloyd played an active role in the strike, urging the general public to understand that the fight was not about the "stars" who earned large sums of money, but about those artists lower on the bill who were being exploited by unscrupulous managers.

The strike began on January 21st, and was resolved by February 25th. The managers agreed to most of the artists' demands and agreed to withdraw all summonses and actions for breach of contract. An arbitration committee under George Askwith of the Board of Trade was set up to finalise the new contracts.

The Merry Widow is a world-wide hit

1907: Lily Elsie (pictured right) plays The Merry Widow in the new Franz Lehar operetta at Daly's Theatre. George Edwardes' production is overwhelmingly successful, with record box office takings, and is expected to run for some considerable time. A whole new sales industry has grown around this production, with the theatre selling a wide range of merchandising - songbooks, gramophone records, Merry Widow hats, Merry Widow fans, and so on.

"The Merry Widow" was first produced in Vienna and has since been a great success in Budapest and Paris, with a production in New York planned for later this year. Franz Lehar has been actively involved in all the productions staged so far, and seems to have created the first "international" musical comedy.



Protesting Actors form a new Union

1907: The Actors' Association, founded in 1891 under the Presidency of Henry Irving, has always been an association of actors and actor-managers. However, at its Annual General Meeting there was a call for managers to be excluded from membership. The proposers, Granville Barker and Cecil Raleigh, claimed that acting was neither a profession nor a calling, but was an industry, and as such, needed to "unionise". Its affairs should be conducted in the interest of actors and not by a manager-dominated Council. Of the Association's 1,400 members only 300 attended the meeting. They voted 164 to 136 in favour of excluding managers from membership. This was not the two-thirds majority required and so the motion was lost. However, all the manager-members promptly resigned en bloc. Following the meeting a group of disaffected actors, unhappy that the Association had failed to approve the motion, announced they would themselves be resigning and would form their own breakaway radical union, to be called the Actors' Union.