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### 3 Drivel for dregs

#### Perceptions of class, race and gender in British music hall, 1850–1914

*David Huxley and David James*

##### **Introduction**

In 1906, W.T. Stead, a pioneer in the burgeoning field of investigative journalism, was persuaded to attend a performance at the London Pavilion Music Hall. Stead was deeply religious, and his most famous campaign, as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, was an exposé on child prostitution in 1885 that had made him a nationally famous figure. His reaction to the music hall performance is revealing:

My first impression was one of unutterable boredom. For three and a half solid hours I sat patiently listening to the most insufferable banality and imbecility that ever fell on human ears.

(quoted in Anon., 1906: 3)

He continues to describe both the acts and their reception:

Poor mimes, who kick up their heels on the stage and snigger and laugh at dirty jokes, the more degraded creatures in the stalls who applaud and murmur very good, very clever, as one piece of vulgar inanity succeeds another.

(ibid.)

Thus Stead's attack is on both the performers and their audience. He finally sums up the performance as 'drivel for dregs'. The one act that Stead excused from his vitriolic attack was 'La Milo', the stage name of the star, Pansy Montague, who posed, painted white, as classical 'nude' statues. It might have been assumed that this 'pose plastique' would meet with his disapproval, but he described it as the one redeeming feature of the night. The nature of La Milo's act and the details of her successful career are described in Huxley (2013).

How did the music hall become the site of this vitriol, with its clear overtones of class tension? The ways in which the music hall became so controversial is indicative of the ways in which issues of class permeated almost all aspects of Victorian and Edwardian life in Britain. In this chapter, we will attempt to chart the way in which these changes developed, and using a little-known popular magazine, *Red Letter*, we will look at contemporary views of the music hall in the early twentieth century, and the surprising degree of freedom afforded to both female and black performers.

### **Class and the development of the music hall**

From the latter part of the nineteenth century until the First World War, the music hall and variety theatre provided the premier form of entertainment in Britain. In 1900, there were at least 167 major music halls in Britain, but the terms used here indicate something of the complexity of this form of entertainment. ‘The halls’ underwent a slow development through ‘penny gaffs’ and ‘song and supper clubs’, through music hall and variety, and then onto a slow decline in the face of the gramophone record and, most significantly, cinema. The music hall began as a raucous, often rude, working-class entertainment but became a huge industry that created stars that could earn thousands of pounds in the currency of the day – millions in modern terms. The mixing of folk culture and the folk song with an increasingly organised capitalist structure of theatre venues is a prime example of ‘compromise equilibrium’ (Gramsci, 1971: 161), whereby a continual tension exists between arguably ‘authentic’ performers, and controlling owners and managers. The burgeoning music hall also provides a site that is not purely bound by issues of class, but also a fascinating resource in terms of gender and ‘race’, as it is an area where both female and black performers, despite prejudice, could escape traditionally proscribed roles. However, it is issues of class that tend to dominate discussions of music hall and its audience, and class divisions and definitions are a site of much debate. Class in Britain can be seen as a hierarchical continuum from the aristocracy to the street dweller at the bottom, or as a tripartite model of upper, middle and working class. Equally, class can be seen as a dualistic them/us patrician/plebeian model or, drawing on Karl Marx (1976), it can be seen as being defined by the relationship to the means of production. Although these models are discrete and arguably mutually exclusive, David Cannadine argues that, ‘...all of them are ignorant over-simplifications of the complexity of society. Yet they have remained remarkably enduring...’ (Cannadine, 1998: 21).

As with many aspects of the music hall, the nature of the class of the audience is more complex than it first appears. In order to try and provide a more scientific approach, Dagmar Hoher has looked at the specific nature of audiences as revealed in a number of music hall disasters – fires, collapses and panics – the records of which reveal hitherto unknown details of the attendees. Thus this approach reveals that in a number of panics:

In Dundee, 11 out of 13 and in Manchester two-fifths of those whose occupation was given were textile-factory workers: victims and witnesses in Liverpool and Aberdeen a third of those whose occupation was given were seamen, ropeworkers and shore-labourers.

(1986: 80)

Hoher establishes that a range of occupations, ages and gender was represented, with more female attendees appearing in halls where the local industry – such as the textile industry of Manchester – employed more women workers. Equally, there were a huge range of different levels of workers from well-paid artisans to the poorest labourers, and different entrance fees—from 6d to 1d for different halls and the different parts of the hall – with private boxes being the most expensive section.

In order to try and ‘define’ – in some measure at least – the largely working-class nature of the audience, the work of Pierre Bourdieu is a useful guide, albeit in a somewhat simplified form. One of the ways Bourdieu characterises the various classes is through their tastes. He characterises the tastes of the working class as being formed out of necessity rather than choice, arguing that a virtue is made of this necessity. However, this necessity transcends its original practical purpose: ‘The working class indicat[ed] a preference for [the] realistic and practical... working men are forbidden every pretension’ (Harker et al., 1990: 121). Class for Bourdieu is also oppositional; it consists (in some part at least) of what you are not. Bourdieu asserts that the tastes of the ruling classes ‘can only assert themselves as such in relation to the tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of aesthetic and so defined as vulgar’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 56). Vulgar here can be thought of in the senses of both common or demotic, and crude and coarse. It is exactly these senses of vulgarity that the music hall audiences seemed to love, and the artists knew their audience. It is also exactly what the music hall proprietors (and those that sought to censor the artists) tried to eradicate in their search for respectability. There was also great resistance to the mixing of the classes at entertainment venues, which was most clearly seen at popular seaside resorts as cheap train travel allowed the working classes to make excursions to the coast. John Walton argues that:

During the nineteenth century the hegemony of the middle class values in the resorts was threatened on two fronts: by working class excursionists, not all of whom were thrifty and deferential and, later in the century, by the spread of an increasingly open, secular attitude to leisure activities, an apostasy from the strict controls of behaviour imposed by ‘respectable’ society at the mid-century.

(1989: 134)

The solution for the resorts was to try and separate the classes geographically or by timing, but it was this very separation that the music hall proprietors

were intent on dissolving. Walton points out that some resorts were able to limit 'excursionists' to Sunday rail trips (or even to ban such trips), whilst by 1862 Blackpool North Pier had a 'select lounge' that required a toll for entry, and Central Pier deliberately tried to attract the working class. The breadth of entertainment available to the Victorian public was huge, and encompassed everything from opera and serious plays, to melodrama, circuses, music hall, variety theatres and street performers. At the same time, the music hall did not operate in isolation, and could influence the 'legitimate' theatre. As Hugh Cunningham points out: 'Not only were individual performers rising to fame, but whole types of performance, popular in origin, were having a marked impact on high culture' (1982: 67)

Cunningham cites the example of the increasing use of animals in theatre productions at Drury Lane and Covent Garden by the 1850s, but perhaps the apotheosis of this upward mobility was Edward Moss's establishment of The Royal Variety performance in 1912. Moss, knighted in 1905, was a key figure in the music hall's search for respectability. Born in Manchester in 1852, the son of a music hall performer, he formed Moss Empires Limited in 1899 with Oswald Stoll which became the largest and most important of the theatre chains in the UK. The chain enforced strict censorship, and for the first Royal Variety Performance (then called The Royal Command Performance) they even excluded the biggest star of the day, Marie Lloyd, because her material was deemed to be too risqué for King George V and Queen Mary.

### **From folk song to sheet music**

Music hall songs – the mainstay of the halls' appeal, along with comedy – stemmed from a folk tradition. The problems of retrieving the 'true' folk song are described in Harker (1985), which demonstrates that the concept of 'authenticity' is highly fluid. But inevitably there were significant changes as these folk songs moved from the country to an urban setting. The bawdy folk song has a long and almost noble tradition and has been utilised (or sometimes written) by authors as diverse as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Burns. Hundreds of these songs, normally by anonymous authors, moved gradually from the amateur sphere to more organised venues. The way in which this happened, with street performers and country fairs gradually becoming less important, is probably impossible to detail at this distance. Waites et al. argue that:

Popular culture entails a system of production, although that is not all it entails and pinpointing its historical origins in Britain is not easy. Until recently, many historians would have accepted the idea of a 'Bleak Age' for the common people separating the popular pursuits of eighteenth century largely rural, society from the new pattern of working-class leisure of urban mid-Victorian Britain. Such an idea fitted the pessimistic interpretation

of the social consequences of early industrialisation. But what is certain is that the early unregulated forms of entertainment informed the later commercial forms of entertainment in quite a direct way.

(1986, p.15)

Yet they continue to describe:

A thriving popular culture dating from the 1820s, based on fairs, shows and travelling theatrical troupes, supplied by thrusting cultural entrepreneurs and common to rural and urban society.

(ibid.)

The change from a 'folk art' into an organised controlled industry was slow but, in the end, dramatic. An important step was the charging of admission – even if it was only a penny, which gave the 'penny gaffs' their name. H. Chance Newton, a veteran musical critic for *The Referee* under the pseudonym 'Curados', emphasised the importance of the pub origins of the music hall:

In those days every music hall was but the chief room or at best, a mere annexe, of this or that tavern or gin palace. They were run entirely on drinks, or what is usually known as 'Wet Money'. Indeed, at some admission was by at so-called 'refreshment ticket', half of the cost of which was given back to the patron in the form of liquids.

(1928: 1)

Liquor sales continued to be important, if not vital, to the financial success of the halls. This, however, fuelled the opposition to them from the strong temperance movement that flourished in nineteenth-century Britain. Although the methods of temperance crusaders varied, many were inspired by religious beliefs such as the missionary Frederick Charrington, who was ironically the son of a famous brewing family. In the 1880s, Charrington picketed several London music halls with such zeal that he was arrested. In 1885, 'Charrington was again in court charged with slander and libel of a music hall owner and an injunction was issued against his harassing techniques. He was found guilty, having called Lusby's music hall "a pit of hell"' (Shiman, 1988: 126).

The nature of the performances in the 'song and supper rooms' is demonstrated in Thackeray's 1855 novel *The Newcomes*. In the novel, Colonel Newcome goes to a real venue that the author himself had visited, the Cave of Harmony in Covent Garden. The upstanding Colonel is surprised at the nature of the entertainment:

Here Colonel Newcome brought his young son in the expectation of enjoying an evening of glee singing and old English ballads, but when

later in the evening Captain Costigan rose to his feet and gave voice to a song, it so offended the worthy Colonel that he called for silence. When some in the room urged the singer to go on, the Colonel retorted, 'Does any man who has a wife and sisters, or children at home, say, 'Go on' to such disgusting ribaldry? Do you dare sir, to call yourself a gentleman, and to say that you hold the King's commission, and to sit down amongst Christians and men of honour, and to defile the ears of young boys with this wicked balderdash?

(quoted in Speaight, 1975: 7)

A small number of these songs were printed from the 1830s onwards, another important step in the commercialisation of the form, and some of the authors and singers are known by name. Although heavy with euphemisms, these were performed in comparatively control-free spaces and were much less subtle than the later music hall songs. These pamphlets were produced by publishers of pornographic material, and there is no attempt to hide the nature of the songs; for example, the lyrics of 'The Wonderful Belly Physic' is introduced with the boast 'A Capital New Smutty Song'. The barely disguised nature of the lyrics is demonstrated in 'Sally's Thatched Cottage' where the ninth verse runs:

Said Sal, my door was tight and close,  
It would scarcely admit a mouse,  
But now it opened so often has been,  
A donkey might with ease get in.

(quoted in Speaight, 1975)

Some songs also have a more blatant style that would not survive into the era of the music hall, such as 'The Way to Come over a Maid', which ends:

If you seduce a maid,  
You must swear, and sigh, and flatter,  
But if you'd win a widow,  
You must down with your breeches and at her!

(*ibid.*)

These kinds of songs provide a link back to bawdy folk traditions that could not survive the restrictions of a more inclusive formalised entertainment.

For the successful music hall act with a popular song there was not just the potentially rich rewards of their wages in halls across the country, there was also the possibility of royalties from the sale of sheet music. Victorian homes of many different classes had musical instruments, often pianos, on which they could provide their own entertainment. Whilst some homes might favour hymns, others would want to recreate the latest 'hit' song. In America, publishers had been successful through most of the

nineteenth century and by 1893 could reputedly sell over a million copies of an individual song like 'After the Ball'. In Britain, Francis, Day and Hunter (formed in 1874) were the most successful of these publishers, and specialised in music hall songs. Royalties paid to composers and artists from a successful song could thus provide a sizeable adjunct to incomes from performing in the music hall.

In 1889, the recording system of Edison's phonograph cylinders provided homes with an actual recording of their favourite artists, and this would change the nature of the unique performance in the halls in a significant and lasting way.

### **Industry and regulation**

The containment of these performances in various venues such as the the Cider Cellar and The Coal Hole in London created liminal spaces that were, at this stage, largely a male preserve. Now that entertainment venues had been created, there was an increasing elaboration of performances, the establishment of a stage and more formal seating arrangements. In the search for greater profits, the proprietors of these venues tried to widen the appeal of their performances without destroying the broad appeal they had already established. This led to a long and sometimes bitter battle between, on the one hand, owners and censors, who wanted increasingly safe and respectable entertainment and, on the other hand, performers and audiences, who revelled in risqué material. The position of proprietors was particularly delicate, as they knew perfectly well that much of the appeal of their acts was their risqué nature, yet it was also this material that might offend the wider audience they hoped to attract.

One key to this was making these spaces acceptable to a more middle-class audience, and, in particular, encouraging a female clientele. Music hall pioneer Charles Morton, owner of the Canterbury Hall, introduced 'Ladies' Thursdays' in the early 1850s, ostensibly to mitigate against the raucous behaviour of the male audience, but this also encouraged the association of the halls with prostitution. In 1894, campaigner and author Mrs Ormiston Chant objected to the performances at Empire Theatre of Varieties in London and, more importantly, the prostitutes who frequented the promenade section of the theatre. The theatre was briefly closed, but opponents of Ormiston Chant (which included a young Winston Churchill) succeeded in having it reopened. Ormiston Chant has often been presented as an outmoded 'blue stocking' critic of the halls, but her campaigning against the evils of prostitution, along with other campaigners such as Stead, was much more serious. The number of prostitutes in London in 1870 is disputed, but it has been estimated at anything between 6,000 to 80,000, the latter figure probably an exaggerated estimate by the Bishop of Exeter, quoted in the contemporary research of William Acton. Certainly prostitution was very widespread, and it was in fact not just prevalent in music halls, but also in



the 'legitimate' theatre. Puckler-Müskau, a German prince, visited London in the 1820s and commented:

A second reason for the absence of decent families from the theatre is the attendance of several thousand filles de joie...during the intermissions they crowd the large and fairly elaborate foyer, where they put all their effrontery unrestrainedly on show. It is strange that such spectacles are in no country on earth more shamelessly displayed than in pious and decent England.

(quoted in Fisher, 2001: xxiii)

Nevertheless, the spectre of prostitution haunted the reputation of the halls, and even influenced the status of female performers, who were often regarded as less than 'respectable'. Sara Maitland describes the problems of public performance for women:

By the second half of the century 'decent' women were supposed neither to have nor to desire a public life...the actress who not only displayed herself in public, but did so for money, was the very antithesis of the Victorian 'Lady'.

(1986, p.65)

But, the female performer in patriarchal society nevertheless wielded a power unknown to the majority of women. Those who disapproved of the female performer did not understand, or resented, this power. As Faulk points out:

The social purity movement, adept at marshalling the media to defend women against rapacious male sexuality, had difficulty in imagining how women performers could be the agent rather than the subjects of their publicity.

(2004, p.186)

### **The role of female performers**

A small number of the smoking room songs are clearly meant to be sung by a female performer – which suggests that the early 'male space' might not have been quite as exclusive as it is normally supposed to be. The status of any female performer in such an environment in the early nineteenth century may well have been questionable, but this also indicates the problem of retrieving the detail of popular entertainment history at this distance. Even well-documented female performers are subject to myth and rumour. There is a story that Marie Lloyd, under censorship pressure, changed the lyrics of a song from 'She sits among the cabbages and peas' to 'She sits among the cabbages and leeks'. This appears in many sources, including

her Wikipedia entry, despite the fact that Farson proved that the story was apocryphal as early as 1972. Lloyd, however, was a major star – arguably the biggest star – that British music hall produced. Her status, and the existence of hundreds of other female performers, many of them hugely successful, calls into question the whole issue of the position of women during this period. Whilst there may have been huge restrictions on the roles of women in mainstream society, there is also clear proof that for the female performer, the music hall provided a freedom, both in the way she could act and also in her financial power that may have been unavailable outside this sphere. Also, Lloyd was by no means unique – extant posters and records at the National Fairground Archive at Sheffield University prove that there were hundreds of female comics and singers, many of whom, such as Bessie Bellwood and Vesta Tilley, were major, well-established stars. Tilley was the foremost amongst male impersonators, and a major star between 1870 and the First World War. Although very careful to stress her traditional ‘femininity’ in some publicity photographs, her performance on stage was another example of the freedom for women to ridicule traditional masculinity. This could not be taken too far, as Maitland points out:

For male-impersonators to survive, they have to find a supportive community of men; they cannot hold those men up to the same sort of ridicule that it is possible for men to hold women up to because they are dependent on them.

(1986: 101)

Nevertheless, her act often consisted of satirising foolish and deluded male ‘swells’. The records of the Argyle Theatre in Birkenhead also reveal the female performers could earn just as much as male stars.

*Red Letter* was a popular magazine published by D. C. Thompson. Positioning itself as a mainstream publication with wide appeal, it featured romantic or crime fiction, sport reports and entertainment reviews. In the early years of the twentieth century, the magazine ran a ‘how I made it to stardom’ strand for various music hall stars. One of these from February 1914 is titled ‘Florrie Forde lets you into a secret and tells how she climbed to the top of the bill’. Forde, despite being born in Australia, was by 1914 one of the great stars of the British music hall. She popularised songs such as ‘Down by the Old Bull and Bush’ and, during the First World War, ‘Pack up Your Troubles’ and ‘It’s a Long Way to Tipperary’. She begins the article by saying how she gets many letters each week from women asking how to ‘become a celebrated footlight favourite’ (*Red Letter*, February 17, 1912: 182). She divides these women into two categories; first, there are the:

Illiterate young women, disgusted by the daily drudgery of their days, and attracted by the glamour of the bright lights, the beautiful dresses and the merry music of the stage, to long for a life of luxurious ease and

all-conquering successes. Such are the dreams of ignorance that are fated to become nightmares when the dreamer awakes to realities. (ibid.)

There was also the other category though:

The letter before me, however, is not of this type. Both the handwriting and the phraseology prove it to be the letter of a well-educated girl whose head is screwed on the right way and who recognises that to make her way to the top of the profession, she must build a solid foundation and begin at the bottom of the ladder. She desires to join me in order to learn the rudiments of the business, and to become first of all a dancer. (ibid.)

Clearly, these two categories are divided along class lines. The uneducated and illiterate young woman is working class, 'disgusted by the daily drudgery' of her life. The implication seems to be that the working-class women expect instant success, whereas the more educated (middle-class) woman whose 'head is screwed on the right way' recognises that she needs to work her way up from the bottom. Interestingly, this corresponds to the trope of the working class being associated with instant gratification and the middle classes deferring gratification for a later but greater reward. She goes on to tell the reader that she herself has risen through the ranks from the chorus through to a ballad singer to musical comedy, a legitimate actress and a popular pantomime principal boy, and is thus qualified to give out advice on the subject. Her advice to the young lady on this occasion is that she cannot take her on, but that she should write to Mr Tiller and – if possible – place herself under his tutelage and join one of his dance troupes.

Forde herself was from a *petit bourgeois* background. Her mother was a theatrical costumier who had been a performer. What Forde is effectively saying is that in order to be successful, then hopeful young women should be like she was: presumably well educated and comfortably well off.

Similarly, Gertie Gitana (best remembered as the singer of 'Nellie Dean') stresses the hardship of a career on the stage, while noting that 'I had a good home with my uncle and aunt and could afford to wait until an engagement came up' (*Red Letter*, March 30, 1912: 350), and Florence Baines (largely forgotten now but a star in her day) stresses that although her first public engagement was singing in Blackburn Market Square, 'we were not so badly off at home that I had to help eke out the income in this way' (*Red Letter*, 1912: 98). Like Forde and Gitana, she goes on to stress the precarious financial nature of the profession, and describes her rise from 1 shilling a week to 2/6, to her sharing top billing with Dan Leno.

None of these female performers seem to have come from a particularly poor background, whereas some at least of the male performers make a particular point of the poverty of their background. For instance, George

Formby Sr, in an article entitled 'My Life when Singing for Coppers: George Formby Tells How He Rose from Street Arab to Star Comedian' begins 'Mine is not an isolated story of the stage. Which of the 'bhoys' I wonder, can say they never knew days of privation and distress? But of them all, which of them, I wonder, can tell a more pathetic story than I?' (*Red Letter*, November 25, 1911: 322–3).

### **The role of black performers**

The performance sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was increasingly international. Successful British acts could expect to tour not only the Empire (in particular South Africa and Australia) but also Europe and the USA. Importantly, American performers were also highly successful in Britain, and American influence permeated British acts. American 'nigger minstrel' shows had been popular in the USA since at least the 1840s, and Christy's Minstrels appeared in the UK in 1859. This group helped to establish the 'comedic' opportunities of white performers in 'blackface', and introduced minstrel songs and the 'cakewalk' dance. American influence was often seen as unfortunate by many British commentators, and some tried to create a backlash to trends such as the craze for ragtime music at the turn of the century. Yet 'blackface' performers were welcomed and imitated by the British. We have discussed elsewhere the inherent racism in much music hall performance (Huxley and James, 2012). Blackface comedians or singers, often, but not always white in reality, tended to pander to the worst stereotypes that were common in all popular culture of the period. Chirgwin, 'the White-Eyed Kaffir', G. H. Elliot, the 'Chocolate Coloured Coon', Eugene Stratton and many lesser stars performed acts that would seem offensive to modern audiences, and indeed by the early twentieth century there was already concern about these portrayals. Yet for a small number of highly paid black performers, often American but performing in the British halls, there was a similar sense of freedom and esteem that was also available to female performers. This is not to say that in the performance sphere they were able to escape pandering to the same racial prejudices.

However, probably the clearest example of the possibilities offered to black performers in the British music hall is shown in the careers of Eddie Whaley and his partner Harry Scott, who came from the American vaudeville circuit to appear in Britain in 1909. Whaley and Scott were featured in the weekly feature on music hall acts in the *Red Letter* of January 10th 1914. An indication of the endemic racism that permeated British society is encapsulated in the first few lines of the review 'Until I saw Whaley and Scott': the author states, 'I was never a keen enthusiast whenever coloured men attempted to create humour' (*Red Letter*, January 10, 1914: 39) The clear inference is that black performers are not funny, though Whaley and Scott are obviously exceptions here. The act was, in many ways, a standard double act with Whaley's 'Cuthbert' character acting as the straight man to Scott's

'Pussyfoot', the bumbling, foolish comic. This smart/foolish relationship is manifested in several ways. Whaley is dressed immaculately in evening wear whereas Scott's clothes 'suggest something that has just been imported from the tropics – the real negro' (ibid.). Whaley's speech, as transcribed in the magazine, is not obviously 'black' whereas Scott's clearly is. The article attempts to capture this with dialogue such as 'Wait till I ketch you alone' and 'Oh, don't Aa?' (ibid.). What the article fails to mention (perhaps failed to notice?) is that Scott performed in blackface, presumably to emphasis his simple stage persona. In fact, there is a fragment of film from 1933 that gives a flavour of their act where they engage in a bit of comic dialogue and end with a song. This short film does give an idea of their 'Pussyfoot and Cuthbert' stage personas. The idea of a black performer in blackface seems beyond absurd now, but as the entertainer Adelaide Hall observed:

In the old days, black comedians like Bert Williams, who starred in the ziegfield shows, were expected to black up. If they appeared on stage without it, they were booed off! Josephine Baker blacked up at the start of her career. Florence Mills and Paul Robeson were among the first performers to be accepted on stage without having to wear blackface. They broke away from tradition.

(Hall quoted in Bourne: 2001: 2)

Hall is here referring to American performers and audiences, and it is perhaps no coincidence that all of the performers named by Hall (as well as Hall herself) successfully toured in Britain and Europe where racial segregation, as practised in America at the time, was all but unknown (though racism per se was clearly endemic). With one blacked-up performer and one elegantly dressed, Whaley and Scott perhaps managed to navigate any racist expectations on the part of the audience. Having first come over in 1909, they had continued to tour the halls and by 1914 – the time of this review – they had become UK residents. They toured successfully for many years and went on to appear regularly from 1933 onwards in the BBC radio series 'Kentucky Minstrels'. They starred in a film of the same name in 1934, becoming the first black performers to star in a British film. They went on to feature in a further five films; *On the Air* (Herbert Smith, 1934), *Minstrel Days* (John Baxter, 1934); *Pathetone Parade* (Fred Watts, 1936); *Shooting Stars* (Eric Humphriss, 1937) and *Take Off That Hat* (Eric Humphriss, 1938). Their partnership continued until 1946; Harry Scott died in 1947 and Eddie Whaley retired to run a hotel in Brighton shortly afterwards, where he died in 1960. Their highly successful career in the UK was arguably unattainable in America because of the de facto apartheid conditions, even in the north. However, they clearly also had to navigate the endemic racism in the UK, especially in Scott's 'Pussyfoot' character.

## Conclusion

The music hall was accidentally complicit in its own decline as most music hall venues began to show films as part of the evening's entertainment from the 1890s onwards. 'Bioscope' operators, often near the bottom of the bill, showed short documentary films. These short films gradually moved up the bill, and by the early twentieth century some theatres converted into cinemas. The Victoria Theatre in London became the Victoria Picture Theatre in 1907. Inevitably, purpose-built cinemas followed, such as the Electric Theatre in York in 1911. The music hall and variety as live performance continued its decline, but its virtual demise by the 1950s led to an almost instant nostalgia, with the BBC screening the music hall tribute programme, 'The Good Old Days' from 1953 to 1983, filmed in the Leeds City Varieties Hall (built in 1865). The wider influence of music hall is perhaps less evident. Clearly it provided two of the famous stars of early cinema in Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel, and later comedians such as W.C. Fields and Will Hay, all of whom honed the skills learnt in the halls during their cinematic careers. By the 1950s, music hall, in the shape of variety, migrated to TV with hugely successful shows such as 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium' as well as less famous shows such as 'The Music Box'. It survives today in 'Britain's Got Talent', and the like.

Although the work of many of these music hall acts has disappeared, a more subtle influence remains in popular music, with performers as diverse as The Beatles, The Sex Pistols and Ian Dury of The Blockheads having expressed their debt to the British music hall tradition, recognising, perhaps, the irreverent nature of this form of popular culture. We would also argue that artists such as Lenny Henry and Jo Brand owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneers that made their living in the halls a century ago.

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