

Tricks of the Trade

"Record" Special

by

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*Your Eyes and Your Ears
Deceive You When Old
Troupers Get On The Job*

EVER been "had" in the theatre?

"Of course," you reply. "I've seen more foul vaudeville and flesh-and-blood shows than any other living theatre-goer."

But that really wasn't the substance of my question. Have you ever been "had at a flesh-and-blood show you thoroughly enjoyed?"

I'm willing to bet that you have seldom, if ever, seen a professional vaudeville show without being well and truly "had." The player's art is to pull your leg.

Think hard now—can you remember a pit band suddenly blaring forth into a noisy crescendo just as some singer has been about to hit a top note? You probably thought at the time, "Silly fool of a conductor, he's made me miss a great note." But—and this is a big "but"—was that note really there?

"Canary" Singing

"CANARY" singing is the term they use in the profession. It means faking notes which are beyond one's powers and getting away with it.

I once saw a massive soprano with a travelling vaudeville show. She was impressive, to say the least. Beautifully gowned and coiffured, she flourished an enormous ostrich feather fan with consummate skill. I will grant she had personality—but she had no voice. She had not got far with her song before we in the audience realised that it was pitched so high that it would take Galli-Curci at least to achieve it. What was going to happen—I held my breath. But I need not have worried. When the fatal note arrived she inflated her bosom to its magnificent uttermost, emulated the worthy Mr. Joe E. Brown with her mouth, flourished her ostrich plumes triumphantly—and made no sound at all. But that did not matter, for 99 per cent. of the audience thought that she had hit a top D sharp, for the conductor had forced the band up so loud that nobody could have heard it even if she had sung it. It was a triumph of "spoofing" and completely "had" the audience.

NEXT time you feel like murdering a conductor for spoiling a "perfect" note with too much volume, you ask yourself, "Was that note really as perfect as it appeared to be?"

You can bet your shirt he is concealing the failings of a baritone who's never heard of the tonic sol-fa, drowning a flat contralto, covering the limited range of an uncertain soprano, or racing to keep up with a booming basso who sings in a state of cheerful catalepsy with no regard to, or knowledge of, rhythm. It's the conductor's job to conceal the show's musical defects from the audience—and it is no easy job either.

And now those acrobats who resin their hands, tense their muscles, take a little preliminary canter to limber

up, pace out their distance with meticulous accuracy, measure a terrifying height with steady eye, murmur a sibilant "Allez-ooop," attempt the feat, and fail. Their audience is now doubly excited. When the trick is performed without hitch, the applause is twice as great, and that first failure is the direct cause of it. Was that failure intentional?

Kicking High

SKIRTS can make a high kick look twice as high.

Next time you see some ballerina high-kicking in diaphanous long skirts, pause and wonder whether it is not more likely to be inefficiency than modesty! When she kicks her hand and touches her cheek with her thigh, watch and see whether she is dipping both head and hand, and hoping you won't notice!

Then there is the fascinating technique of the curtain calls. The turn is finished, the curtain falls, pauses, quivers, and the audience, thinking that it is going to lift, automatically increases the applause. It's that quiver that does it!

The handsome male in a "double" turn chivalrously bows the lady off and takes the last bow by himself. Is it chivalry? You see, the claps which follow after she has left the stage are bound to be for him. And that ultra-glamorous blonde croonette who takes her final call well out from the curtains so that she can take at least two more bows on the way off. Also the oh-so-amusing gentleman who invariably gets all tangled up in the curtain while taking one of his bows. That's always good for a laugh.



She hit a top D sharp.

WHO has not seen the show in which the leading comedian was so funny that even the hardened troupers on the stage gave way to laughter? Don't believe it—those laughs are one of the oldest tricks of a trade which has some very ancient tricks indeed. Years ago I saw a "partner" turn in which the gentleman would rapidly reduce the lady to hysterics with his jokes. This lady must have a very low resistance to humour, for she has been reduced to uncontrollable mirth twice daily for at least three years now.

Not that I wish to decry the old stagers' effort to make a little laughter for their audiences—for laughter is a welcome thing, particularly these days.

But there are some actresses and actors who use tricks of the trade to their own advantage at the expense of other members of the company—the dialogue stealers, and the people who "mess about" on the stage so effectively that the audience thinks it must be for some good purpose and takes its attention away from the focal character.

NOR is this "faking" the prerogative of the artists.

abroad, where competition among "shows" is keen, the managers have to be on the alert in order to be able to regard the box-office prospects with (Contd. on page 35)