

"Charley's Aunt"

Rollicking Comedy from 3YA

Brandon Thomas's farcical comedy, "Charley's Aunt," which will be broadcast on relay by 3YA on Saturday next, is perhaps the best farce ever produced on an English stage. It created a tremendous sensation when first produced in London nearly forty years ago, and ran for 1466 consecutive nights. It is packed with the most ludicrous incidents and absurd situations, and varies from the stage of simmering amusement to the ridiculously and wildly funny. The central idea of "Charley's Aunt"—the substitution of a burlesque character for the genuine one—has been presented in a hundred different forms, but we have equalled the old favourite in wholesome comedy and absurdity of situation.

THE story of "Charley's Aunt" goes with a shriek from the first. Jack Chesney and Charlie Wyckham, two undergraduates of Ole's College, are very much in love with Kitty Verdun and Amy Spettigue. Mr. Spettigue, the pompous guardian of the two girls, does not approve of the young fellows who, though of good family, have the deplorable habit of living beyond their allowances.

Charley receives word to say that a rich aunt whom he has never seen, Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez, has returned to England and intends calling upon him at the college. This gives Charley and Jack a chance to invite the girls to luncheon in their rooms.

Just as the young scapegraces are working out their plan of campaign, Lord Fancourt Babberley, a fellow-student, arrives and coolly proceeds to empty the larder of the few bottles of champagne that remain. He is caught in the act, and Jack and Charley endeavour to persuade him to join the luncheon party in order to entertain Charley's aunt, while the other two make love to their innamoratas.

Lord Babs, as he is called, has a penchant for amateur theatricals, and asks to be allowed to rig himself out in the character of an old lady he has to play. While he is dressing in Jack's room the girls arrive.

Just at this stage Charley receives a telegram from his aunt stating that she has been delayed and will not be able to keep her appointment until later. The girls, on hearing this, become alarmed and say that they will go shopping until Charley's Aunt arrives. The lovers are disconsolate, until Babs appears in the guise of a very eccentric old lady. Then a brilliant idea occurs to Jack. Why not pass Babs off as Charley's aunt? They confide the plot to Babs, and obtain his grudging consent just as the girls return.

Both girls fall absolutely in love with the dear old lady, and Jack and Charley are driven frantic with jealousy as their sweethearts sit on the old lady's lap and fondly caress her. The appearance of Jack's father and Mr. Spettigue on the scene considerably complicates matters. The old gentlemen, no doubt attracted by the old lady's millions, lay violent siege to her heart, and the rivalry leads to open hostility.

Things go on merrily until the arrival of the real Charley's aunt complicates matters to a degree. Finding she is being impersonated in this mysterious way, she conceals her identity, and curiously watches the proceedings, occasionally causing dilemmas by asking awkward questions which the "lady" from Brazil finds difficult to answer.

In the meantime the colonel and the lawyer are still both desperately striving to

secure the hand of the bogus aunt. Finally, after being chased round the garden by the ardent Spettigue until "she" is at last cornered in the drawing-room, "she" accepts him, after wheedling him into giving a written consent to the marriage of the girls, for whom he is guardian.

He is pompously announcing his engagement when he is disillusioned, the young man, having disappeared as "auntie," reappearing in his ordinary dress. At the right time the real aunt discloses her identity, and when explanations ensue her forgiveness is graciously announced.

Sir Francis Chesney succeeds in winning the real Donna Lucia, and matters are arranged amicably and satisfactorily to all in the end, except to perhaps Spettigue, whose humiliation and disgust in discovering that he has proposed to a man is indescribable.

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"CHARLEY'S AUNT" was written by Brandon Thomas in 1892, and it made his fortune, as well as the fortunes of several others. It is said the author drew as much as £3000 a week in royalties at one time, while a city man who put £1000 into the first venture received a return of £37,000.

How "Charley's Aunt" came to be written was told by the author as follows: "Charley's Aunt" was the result of an accident. One day I was going down to Staines, and in the train I met Penley (an actor friend), who asked me to write him a three-act play. 'But,' I said, 'it is so difficult to know what to do for you. You have played nearly everything in your time, from the parson to the blackleg, from the monk to the rake. Whatever can I do for you?' A thought suddenly struck me. Prompted by an amusing likeness he bears to an elderly relative of mine, I asked him if he had ever played a woman. His eyes twinkled, and he said he had not, but that he had often thought he would (Continued on page 20.).



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Many listeners will remember Norman Aitken (pictured above, in the title role), who toured New Zealand in 1914-15 with an amateur company, playing "Charley's Aunt" and "The Private Secretary."

THE CAST

Jack Chesney Alan W. Brown
Charles Wyckham Harold Shaw
Lord Fancourt Babberley

Bernard Beeby

Sir Francis Chesney .. E. Worthington
Mr. Spettigue Cyril Collins
Brassett Claude Davies
Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez

Agnes Richardson

Kitty Verdun Audrey Cotterill
Amy Spettigue Pessy Hollander
Ella Delahay Mavis Ritchie

Producer: Bernard Beeby.