

# Who was Who



THOSE gay old pre-war days when musical comedies were musical comedies, when a row of sprightly girls kicked a discreet ankle across the footlights, when the pit roared its approval—or the reverse, when the shows were held up while a popular song was encored, and encored again—happy days and happy memories, that will stay with me till the “final curtain.”

Somewhere around September, 1908, I had arrived in London after working my passage on the tramp steamer Star of New Zealand, and as I had the proceeds of a voyage's work in my pocket (and was an optimistic youngster of 22) I thought I would like to see what I could of the old town while I had the cash. The first thing, naturally, that I looked to was the theatres, being always drawn thither, but as yet not one of the profession. I discovered, much to my joy, that running at Daly's Theatre was the musical comedy which the Press claimed great things for—and it was well worth the long wait to see and hear Lily Elsie play the part of the Merry Widow—for such was the name of the show.

Since that night, 25 years ago, I have seen the piece all over the world, played a small part in it myself in a musical comedy company in Australia, but my first impressions were the most vivid. To a young man on the threshold of adventure that first night in London meant everything. How many have danced to the entrancing strains of the “Merry Widow” waltz—I have danced to it played by a famous Hungarian band before the war; I have tripped the light fantastic to it played by a fiddle and an accordion on a back-country station in New South Wales; and, last, but not least, I have heard its strains played on a “mouf organ” by a wounded Tommy in hospital in Alexandria—way back in 1915—when this famous tune was the player's star piece.

Another great favourite of mine in the musical comedy line is that pretty little Japanese opera, “The Geisha,” by Sidney Jones. Huntly Wright in the role of Wun Hi was delightful. It may seem strange to some readers who may have seen the stately Marie

LAST week we announced Mr. F. G. E. Broad, of North Auckland, as one of the winners of the musical comedy section of the “Radio Record's” programme planning competition. Included in Mr. Broad's entry was an interesting article on early musical comedies—a precis of which appears below. Mr. Broad certainly knows his theatre—from both in front of the footlights and behind them.

Tempest when she toured New Zealand the last time, to associate her with the part of Mimosa San in “The Geisha,” but, strangely enough, she played the part and made a very petite Mimosa, too.

I HAVE seen “Floradora” more times than I can remember, from both the front of the house and behind; and I have seen some very fine people in the cast at different times. “Our Miss Gibbs” could easily bear revival, and if such were the case I for one would rush to see it again. The last time I saw it dainty little Blanche Browne played the part of Mary, and made a most charming Miss Gibbs. I fancy that fine old actor, W. S. Percy, took the part of her Yorkshire cousin, and I particularly remember their pretty little number, “It's a Nice Little Farm.” One of the most attractive numbers in the piece, I think, is “I Feel So Silly When the Moon Comes Out.” It always put the audience in a good mood, and soon all London was whistling or singing it.

Of the musical comedies of 30 years ago—in my boyhood days—I do not remember much, but there was one show, “The Girl from Kays,” of which I can still remember a lot of musical numbers. Then there was “The Circus Girl,” with its catchy music. I don't think it has ever been played in New Zealand. I suppose the very first musical comedy to be written was “The Gaiety Girl,” and I think that was produced in London in the first year of the 'nineties. Another old friend was “The Shop Girl,” with Edmund Payne playing the comedy role. By the way, Marie Studholme, of picture-postcard fame, played the title role in “The Circus Girl.”

“An Artist's Model” was perhaps one of the very earliest musical comedies, and contained some bright music, such as “Sunshine Above,” which went something like this:

*Then come, my lady fair, come back again,  
I sought thee everywhere, but sought in vain.  
With longing heart I wait and worship thee,  
Oh, do not hesitate, but come to me.*

Going back to “The Circus Girl” for just a minute, who, having once seen the show, could forget Connie Ediss singing her little song:

*Though I never cared to make a fuss,  
Unless a thing is positively shady,  
When you've run to catch a bus  
And you've had to stand, you know,  
Well it's not the proper way to treat a lady!*