Cincinnati Theater 1918-1919: A Season of Burlesque, Vaudeville & Legitimate Entertainment

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Paul R.

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CINCINNATI THEATER, 1918-1919;
A SEASON OF BURLESQUE, VAUDEVILLE, AND LEGITIMATE ENTERTAINMENT

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Master of Arts

by
Paul R. Thomas
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of Downtown Cincinnati</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Cincinnati and Its Theaters, 1918-1919</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Power Brokers of Show Business, 1918-1919</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Season Opens, September - November 1918</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Season Continues, December 1918 - February 1919</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Season Closes, March - May 1919</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Essay on Sources</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CINCINNATI THEATER, 1918-1919; A SEASON OF BURLESQUE, VAUDEVILLE, AND LEGITIMATE ENTERTAINMENT

Paul R. Thomas August 1980 197 pages

Directed by: James Bennett, Lowell Harrison, and Francis Thompson
Department of History Western Kentucky University

The legitimate theater, vaudeville, and burlesque presentations that composed the 1918-1919 theatrical season in Cincinnati, Ohio, were investigated. In order to understand the business practices that brought performers and productions to the Queen City, a study of the various entertainment circuits and the power brokers who controlled them was included. Cincinnati and its climate for professional entertainment in 1918-1919 also warranted attention. Such items as the theaters that housed the entertainment, the transportation systems that brought patrons to the entertainment, and the competition that rivaled the entertainment were probed so that the foundations of the 1918-1919 season might be understood. A week by week account of the season revealed the caliber of talent and quality of shows that stopped in Cincinnati. It demonstrated the kind of comedy, dancing, drama, and music that was enjoyed by Cincinnatians. Furthermore, the impact of such diverse occurrences as war, peace, labor difficulties, and health disorders was duly recorded.
THE THEATERS OF CINCINNATI, 1918-1919

Key to the Map: 1 Grand Opera House
2 Lyric Theater
3 B. F. Keith Theater
4 Empress Theater
5 Olympic Theater
6 Palace Theater
7 Fountain Square
CHAPTER ONE: CINCINNATI
AND ITS THEATERS, 1918-1919

The Four Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields, Fred and Adele Astaire, Eva Tanguay, Otis Skinner, Lionel Barrymore, Charlotte Greenwood, and Billy "Beef Trust" Watson were among the parade of personalities that graced the theatrical stages of Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1918-1919 season. Some were luminaries of the dramatic art; some vaudeville troopers; still others were the comics and chorines of burlesque. Regardless of which branch of show business they represented, the entertainers who toured Cincinnati from the autumn of 1918 through the spring of 1919 helped the city forget about its problems. In addition to the agonies of war and the perplexities of peace, Cincinnati had to cope with the Spanish influenza epidemic, the police and firemen strikes, and, equally troubling to many "thirsty" residents, the approach of Prohibition. In this time of turmoil, the city's theaters provided a release from daily tensions and gave wartime morale a needed boost. Whether the week's offerings included a Shakespearian tragedy, a merry musical comedy, a revealing revue, a mystifying magician, or a cantankerous kangaroo, the Queen City's theaters were filled with the diverting comedy and drama that Cincinnatians wanted and needed.

Cincinnati, with a population of over 400,000, was still considered
to be among the major cities of the nation, but by 1918 its position as the commercial and cultural center of the mid-west had been supplanted by Chicago, St. Louis, and other faster-growing urban areas to the west. Cincinnati was growing, however, as suburbs spread up and over the many hills that surrounded the river plain where the city had originated. The Ohio River was still a vital force in the city's life but the business and financial district had moved away from the river bank to a site along a slight elevation four blocks to the north. This area, bounded by 4th, Race, 7th, and Main streets, afforded greater protection from the periodic flooding of the Ohio and contained the banks, retail stores, railroad depots, hotels, and theaters that made downtown the heart of the city.

The vitality of this district was symbolized by Fountain Square, a rectangular parcel of land that divided 5th Street between Walnut and Vine. With its ornate Tyler-Davidson Fountain and stately trees, Fountain Square gave Cincinnatians a shady spot for relaxation and escape. So important was the Square that virtually all of the leading business establishments were within a few minutes walk from it. In general, this was also true of the theaters featuring live entertainment. The Grand Opera House, the Lyric, and the Empress faced Vine within a three block stroll to the northwest. The B. F. Keith, on Walnut, and the Olympic, on 7th, were also within a three block range but to

1The Williams Directory Company, Williams' Cincinnati Directory (Cincinnati, 1919), 5.
the northeast. The only exceptions were the Music Hall, on Race, and
the Emery Auditorium, on Walnut, which were beyond easy walking
distance but still within the downtown limits.\(^2\)

The patron wishing to attend one of the downtown theaters was en-
couraged to do so by Cincinnati's advanced urban transportation net-
work. The downtown area was connected to the suburbs by electric
streetcars and inclines, interurban connectors and steam-powered
locomotives. The city's drive over its surrounding hills had been
fostered by mass transit.\(^3\) With the availability of cheap and depend-
able transportation, the citizen could move to such developing neigh-
borhoods as Clifton, Price's Hill, Avondale, or St. Bernard and still
be in close proximity to places of work and recreation. In 1919, some
30,000,000 passengers made use of the city's interurban lines and
street railway traffic approached 118,000,000.\(^4\) Figures such as
these attest to the mobility of Cincinnatians. Yet the existing system
did not satisfy many citizens who wanted an integrated rapid transpor-
tation scheme. After many years of debate, Cincinnati entered 1918
anticipating the construction of a rapid transit system that would en-
circle the city using subways, elevated and surface trains. The

\(^2\)Ibid., 779.

\(^3\)Richard Rhoda, "Urban Transport and the Expansion of Cincinnati,
1858-1920," The Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin, XXXV (Sum-
mer 1977), 140.

\(^4\)Carl W. Condit, The Railroad and the City; A Technological and
Urbanistic History of Cincinnati (Columbus, 1977), 163-174.
managers of Cincinnati's theaters eagerly awaited the completion of the project since the main terminal would be downtown. Certainly, the more accessible the central city became, the better it would be for the theater box offices.

Furthermore, the railroads carried some 275 passenger trains per day into the city during 1919. While the bulk of those aboard were merely passing through the various depots, surely some of those thousands took time for a show. In fact, many traveled to Cincinnati for the express purpose of pleasure. Cincinnati was a commercial gateway to the South and was visited frequently by many on shopping sprees as well as business trips. Some people took advantage of the special theater trains that began operating in the 1870s from outlying communities in southern Ohio and Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia. The railroads were vital to the economic good health of Cincinnati's five live entertainment theaters.

Another industry crucial to the financial success of the theaters was the newspaper business. In 1918, four daily newspapers vied for readers in the city: the Commercial Tribune, Enquirer, Post, and Times Star. Early rising citizens could sip their morning coffee and read either the

5 Ibid., 141.
6 Ibid., 179.
7 Ibid.
Commercial Tribune or Enquirer. Afternoon commuters could choose between the Post or Times Star at the nearest newsstand. All four journals assisted the theaters in two ways: by selling advertising space and by reviewing the current offerings at the different theaters. While advertisements appeared daily, the theaters purchased considerable space in the Saturday editions of the Post and Times Star (no Sunday version of these two papers was published) and the Sunday editions of the Commercial Tribune and Enquirer. This enabled the managers to publicize their new attractions. The weekly reviews of the various offerings normally appeared in the Monday editions. Without exception, these reviews were handled by various critics working for each newspaper. Despite the numerous entertainment reporters, the critic whose comments carried the greatest weight was J. Herman Thuman, editor of the Sunday Enquirer's "Amusements" column. His opinions, along with those of the other reviewers, could help convince a would-be playgoer that a certain production was, or was not, worthy of attention. Like the railroads, the press was extremely important to live entertainment in Cincinnati.

Once downtown, having been brought by interurban, streetcar, train or maybe even by the automobile, a patron had to decide what form of theatrical amusement he desired. If his taste dictated "legitimate" entertainment, he could choose between that week's offerings at the Grand Opera House or the Lyric Theater. As the season progressed, such varied fare as revues, musical comedies, straight dramas and
comedies could be seen on the stages of these two Vine Street landmarks. The older of the two was the Grand Opera House. Dating from 1902, the Grand was a four story, classically designed structure on the west side of Vine, between 5th and 6th. The original occupant of the site, the Cincinnati Catholic Institute, contained a theater called Mozart Hall. In 1874, the building was extensively remodeled and renamed the Grand Opera House. A fire in 1901 destroyed the interior of the theater, but due to the efforts of its owner, Charles P. Taft, a leading Cincinnati philanthropist and a half brother to the future president, the Grand reopened within a few months. By 1918-1919, the Grand was the oldest theater in the city still in constant use. A dome above the auditorium, ceilings that featured art work executed by Covington-born artist Frank Duveneck, a rich red velour curtain, and 1,800 seats that were arranged in a modified semicircular pattern on the main floor, the balcony, and the gallery, highlighted the interior of the Grand Opera House.

The other showcase for "legit" presentations was the Lyric Theater. Constructed in 1907 by Henry Heuck, one of the city's leading theatrical

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10. Clara Longworth de Chambrun, Cincinnati; The Story of the Queen City (New York, 1939), 257; Cincinnati Post, July 20, 1939; Luke Feck, Yesterday's Cincinnati (Miami, 1975), 69; Caroline Williams, Mirrored Landmarks of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1939), 96; Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration, Cincinnati; A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors (Cincinnati, 1943), 183.
entrepreneurs, the Lyric was almost directly across Vine from the Grand. The building housing the auditorium was nine stories in height, but only wide enough along the street for the theater marquee. In this regard, the Lyric was similar to other theaters constructed at about the same time. The patron would pass down a short hallway and make a 90 degree turn to enter the rectangular shaped auditorium. In honor of its builder and his creation, the box seats were lettered "H," "E," "U," "C," "K," and "L," "Y," "R," "I," "L," "C." Altogether, the Lyric possessed a seating capacity of 1,500 on its main floor, balcony, and family circle. Office space filled the remaining portion of the building above the theater.

Those pleasure seekers preferring the kind of entertainment offered by the vaudeville stage could choose between B. F. Keith's or the Empress. If they wanted to see one of their favorite singers, dancers, comedians, or other variety performers, they would probably step to the box office of Keith's on Walnut, between 5th and 6th. The leading vaudeville acts of the day traveled the Keith Circuit and in Cincinnati performed at the theater of the same name. The site occupied by Keith's had begun as the Fountain Square Theater in 1892. In 1901, the new management team of Max C. Anderson and Henry M. Ziegler


13 Cincinnati Post, Aug. 11, 1952; Cincinnati Theatres, 22-23.

renamed it the Columbia Theater and began to offer a program of variety acts. Finally, in 1909, a major remodeling effort was made. The entrance was moved from Fountain Square Place around the corner to Walnut Street. The new lobby was lined with imported pink, gray, and black marble and decorative murals displaying classical scenes. Mahogany doors swung open to reveal the 1,500-seat auditorium above which hung a 24-light, cut crystal electrolier suspended from a circular panel of black Belgian marble. Marble was also featured in the grand staircase that led to the balcony. The elegance of the interior was carried into the ladies' and men's retiring rooms where silk damasks and velours embellished the surroundings. Although the name of B. F. Keith would not adorn the theater until 1911, "high class" vaudeville had a resplendent home in Cincinnati.

"Poor Man's Vaudeville" was offered by the Empress Theater on Vine, between 8th and 9th. Not built to be an amusement hall, the Empress was created in 1909 when the Vine Street Congregational Church was renovated into a 1,000-seat theater. Following this conversion, the activities at the Empress became more earthly than spiritual. Despite a further redecoration in 1915 that resulted in an interior of French gray, old ivory, and rose pink, the facade of the

15 Ibid.: Writers' Program, Guide to the Queen City, 183.

16 Cincinnati Post & Times Star, July 31, 1965; Cincinnati Theatres, 17-18.

Empress still betrayed its lack of pretense and seemed out of place along the city's "Rialto."\textsuperscript{18} Being farther from Fountain Square than the more prominent theaters, the Empress was closer to the old entertainment district that stretched up Vine from about Court Street across the Miami & Erie Canal and into the predominantly German "Over-the-Rhine" neighborhood.\textsuperscript{19} The Empress symbolized a neutral position between the newer, more urbane entertainment offered near the Square and the coarser amusement center along upper Vine Street.

For those patrons who enjoyed their humor without much sophistication and their chorus girls without much costume, the Olympic Theater provided the outlet for burlesque. Located on 7th, between Walnut and Main, the Olympic, which opened in 1907 as the first "fireproof" theater in the city, possessed a three story, classical facade that made it appear to be a perfectly respectable house of amusement. Its small seating capacity of 1,000 and its distance from the "white light district," however, relegated the Olympic to the revealing revelry of burlesque.\textsuperscript{20} Ticket holders to this bawdy brand of entertainment were greeted by an auditorium that contained no interior columns to block their view and seats on the main floor and in the balcony that

\textsuperscript{18}Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 12, 1915; Cincinnati Post, March 28, 1919.

\textsuperscript{19}Zane Miller, Boss Cox's Cincinnati; Urban Politics in the Progressive Era (New York, 1968), 11.

\textsuperscript{20}Cincinnati Theatres; Diagrams of Seats (Cincinnati, 1924), 31; Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 1, 1952.
fanned out from the proscenium. The Olympic proudly promoted its offerings as "Clean Cut, Classy Burlesque" and the intimate nature of the theater lent credence to the claim. 21 Although it did not cater to the cream of Cincinnati society, the Olympic did provide a better-than-average home for burlesque presentations.

The two remaining theaters that operated with some regularity in 1918-1919 were not theaters in the strictest sense. The Music Hall and the Emery Auditorium were not generally booked by the leading producers in the various fields of show business. They were occasionally rented by the promoters of special attractions that could not use the other theaters. Since the Music Hall and the Emery Auditorium were independent and not allied to any booking agency, they could handle such situations. In addition, these two facilities also differed from the other theaters in that they had a larger seating capacity and, since they were situated north of the old Miami & Erie Canal, they were on the outer fringes of downtown. The older and larger of the two was the Music Hall, on Race across from Washington Park. Completed in 1878, the Music Hall had been built to fill a vacuum. 22 The city was in need of an auditorium that could be the home of its symphony orchestra and its annual May Festival. Reuben R. Springer, a wealthy merchant, had contributed over half of the funds needed for its construction. 23

21 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 8, 1918.
22 Harlow, Serene Cincinnatians, 340.
23 Ibid.
With its 3,000 seats arranged on three floors, the Springer Music Hall was the largest auditorium in the city. The second largest hall was the Emery Auditorium, located in the Ohio Mechanics' Institute on Walnut. Opened in 1912 as a gift for the city by benefactress Mrs. Mary Hopkins Emery, the Emery, with its intimate atmosphere, became the new home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. The classic interior of the Emery, decorated in cream and gold tones, contained, as a portion of its 2,200 seats, boxes that were not only on the ground floor, but which were placed one-third of the way back from the stage so that the occupants might be seen by those sitting on all three levels. While both the Emery and the Music Hall remained dark for the better part of the season, the fact that they were available for random bookings gave Cincinnati theatergoers an occasional change of pace from their regular fare of burlesque, vaudeville, and legitimate entertainment.

The periphery of the downtown area also contained a number of other theaters that were reminders of an earlier era of theatrical history. Such landmarks as the National Theater, Sycamore between 3rd and 4th, Robinson's Opera House, 9th and Plum, Heuck's Opera House, Vine between 12th and 13th, and the People's Theater, 13th and Vine, were dark during the 1918-1919 season, but they bore witness to the city's continuing passion for entertainment. The National, 24

24 Ibid., 399; Cincinnati Theatres; Diagrams of Seats 1914, 5-7; Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 7, 1912; interview with Pope Coleman, Aug. 6, 1979.
or as it was often called, the "old Nash," was built in 1837, but the hard sandstone facade that fronted on Sycamore was not added until 1856. Despite being able to accommodate 2,500 patrons on its three floors, the National gradually lost its position of prominence and, within forty years of its construction, ceased to be a profitable undertaking. In 1882, the auditorium was converted into a tobacco factory and warehouse, leaving only the National's impressive entrance as a monument to the building's past. The Robinson Opera House was the property of circus-tycoon John Robinson. The circus owned by Robinson was one of the nation's leading such operations during the mid-19th century and he used Cincinnati as his headquarters. Wanting a theater, Robinson constructed his Opera House in 1872. In addition to playing host to many great stars and numerous road companies, Robinson's also housed, on occasion, unemployed circus animals. Never recovering from the disastrous stampede that followed a false fire alarm in 1876, the Robinson was not as successful as its main competitor, the Heuck Opera House. With its ability to hold 2,300 patrons, Heuck's, known as the Coliseum when it opened in 1882, rivaled the Grand Opera House as well as the Robinson. Henry Heuck, the proprietor, had previously established himself as one of the city's leading

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25 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 17, 1940; Cincinnati Post, July 14, 1934.

26 Harlow, Serene Cincinnatians, 371.

27 Ibid., 268.
theatrical managers with an earlier theater that carried his name. By 1890, to avoid confusion, the older property, built in 1866, was renamed the People's Theater and catered to those desiring variety and burlesque entertainment. Throughout the late 19th century, the National, Robinson's, Heuck's, and the People's offered professional entertainment to Cincinnatians. The new century, however, witnessed the opening of newer theaters closer to Fountain Square.

In addition to those theaters whose curtains had fallen but whose marquees still hung over the sidewalk, there was another theater, long gone by 1918, but still remembered by many old-timers. During its lifetime, the Pike Opera House was the most magnificent theater in the city. Erected in 1859, the Pike Opera House was situated on the southern side of 4th, between Vine and Walnut. Its premier position was acknowledged in 1860 when it was the site of a grand ball given by the city to honor the touring Prince of Wales. Shortly after this visit by the nineteen-year-old heir to the British throne, a disastrous fire leveled the hall. Although Samuel Pike rebuilt his theater in 1866, he designed the new auditorium as a concert hall. This, however, failed to meet community needs. Finally, in 1871, Pike installed a stage in his five story, gray stone edifice. Playing host to opera festivals

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 147.
30 Ibid., 180.
31 Ibid., 331-332; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 17, 1940.
and symphony concerts, Pike's remained a major cultural force in the city until another catastrophic fire struck the building in 1903. Although its ruins were demolished in 1905 to make way for the Sinton Hotel, the Pike Opera House was far from forgotten.

While the Pike, National, Robinson, Heuck, and People's were no competition to the theaters of 1918-1919, a major threat did exist. The photoplay, or silent drama, was growing in popularity and openly vied with the theaters for the amusement dollars spent in the city. Scattered throughout the city and its suburbs were some seventy movie halls. While most of these establishments were small and unimpressive, names like the Alhambra, the Colonial, the Lubin, the Strand, and the Walnut adorned many a downtown building and indicated that Hollywood was making permanent inroads into the leisure-time habits of millions. These silent picture halls were not as grand or splendid as were the live theaters, but they catered to the public in a way that the traditional theaters did not. With the advent of summer and its accompanying hot weather, the theaters closed their doors until fall. The two exceptions to this rule were the Lyric, which joined the enemy camp by showing moving pictures in the summer of 1919, and the Keith, which conducted a summer season of vaudeville that was far below the quality of their regular season. The movie houses were not air-conditioned

32 Williams, Williams' Cincinnati Directory, 2414.

33 Fred Allen, Much Ado About Me (Boston, 1959), 238.

34 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 11, 1919; Cincinnati Post, May 3, 1919.
either, but they lacked the tradition of summer closing and continued to provide inexpensive film entertainment with live music accompaniment throughout the months of June, July, and August.

The summer closing of the live theaters was also prompted by the availability of other forms of amusement during the hot weather. Professional baseball was represented by the Cincinnati Reds, whose home park was Redland Field in the city’s west end. The Reds, or Red Stockings as they were originally known, were the first professional baseball club in the nation, and in 1919, were involved in a tight race for the National League pennant. The combination of thrilling sports action and low ticket prices was enough to encourage an audience of middle and lower class patrons, the same groups attracted to vaudeville, burlesque, and the new summer institution called an amusement park. Cincinnati’s most prominent amusement park was Chester Park in the northern suburbs of the city. Built by a traction company to increase its ridership on weekends, Chester Park was a place where the family could go for a day’s diversion from the cares of life. Dancing, picnicking, and merry-go-rounds were available all summer long at Chester Park or at the Lagoon in Ludlow, for those who wished to make the short trolley car ride through the rolling hills of northern Kentucky. Racing fans could see their favorite horse run or trot, as the case might be, at Chester Park or at northern Kentucky’s famous track.

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35 Ritter Collett, The Cincinnati Reds; A Pictorical History of Professional Baseball’s Oldest Team (Virginia Beach, 1976), 47.
Latonia. This latter race course was located in the southern reaches of Covington and drew Cincinnatians by the hundreds.\textsuperscript{35} With the added competition of spectator sports, such as baseball and horse racing, and outings at various amusement parks, combined with the uncomfortable atmosphere of the live theaters during the summer, it is no wonder that most of the theaters remained dark until September.

Despite the year-round rivalry with the moving picture halls and the seasonal challenge from the outdoor amusements, the future looked bright for the live entertainment industry in Cincinnati. Judging by their commitment to new construction, the most optimistic branch of all was the vaudeville interests of the B. F. Keith Circuit. During the 1918-1919 season, this New York-based empire prepared two major projects for the Queen City. In November of 1918, plans to build an eight story office building around and above the existing Keith's Theater were announced.\textsuperscript{37} As the season progressed, the enlargement of the property underwent several revisions. By the spring of 1919, the adjoining buildings were in the process of being razed but, instead of retaining the theater, plans called for its destruction as well.\textsuperscript{38} This development meant that the small-time vaudeville bills which normally played the Keith during the summer would have to be cancelled.\textsuperscript{39} In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Harlow, Serene Cincinnatians, 292.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 23, 1918.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Variety, March 21, 1919.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., March 28, 1919.
\end{itemize}
May of 1919, the rebuilding project took another turn as the decision was made to construct a $3,000,000, twelve story office building which would include a 3,000-seat theater. 40 This new structure, however, was not to be under construction until later in 1919 or early in 1920. 41 This delay allowed the summer vaudeville season to play its usual run at Keith's from May until September of 1919.

The other major investment made by the Keith organization involved the erection of a home for the new combination of pop-vaudeville and pictures. This new theater, which would carry the same name as that of Keith's flagship in New York, the Palace, was to be built along the northern side of 6th, between Vine and Walnut, and was to present vaudeville acts sandwiched between photoplay features. 42 The plot on 6th had been purchased in 1917, but work did not begin on the estimated $500,000 theater until February of 1918. 43 At one point, the five story building was targeted to open in March, 1919, then postponed until August of that year. 44 The Palace Theater, costing some $1,000,000, finally opened its doors to the public on December 6, 1919. What

40 Ibid., May 16, 1919.
41 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 11, 1919.
42 Ibid., Dec. 7, 1919; Variety, March 28, 1919.
43 Melanie Pierson, "A History of the Palace Theater" (unpublished research project for the Cincinnati Institute, Cincinnati, 1976), 1.
44 Cincinnati Enquirer, Oct. 24, 1918; Variety, May 2, 1919.
45 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 6, 1919.
the public saw inside this theatrical palace was quite impressive and
worth waiting for: 2,600 mulberry leather chairs distributed over two
floors; five crystal chandeliers and a large drinking fountain in the lobby;
two graceful spiraling staircases embossed with gold leaf and delicate tinting;
ladies’ powder rooms on each level, one decorated in gold silk cloth and white,
and the other in mulberry silk cloth and white; men’s smoking rooms on each floor; cream, brown, and gilt walls frescoed in the French manner; an interior with no columns or uprights to obstruct the view; and a large frescoed dome above the balcony that was artistically designed as a special ventilator. The patron was pampered by one hundred attendants, provided with telephone service on each floor and current magazines in the lounges, and entertained by a Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra, a pipe organ and gigantic orchestra all rolled into one. Backstage, the Palace was equally plush with a system of call bells to alert performers, dressing rooms that came furnished with beveled mirrors, and faucets that controlled the flow of hot and cold water. While it was only under construction during the 1918-1919 season, the Palace Theater was physical evidence of the faith the theatrical moguls had in the future of live entertainment in Cincinnati.

Indeed, physical and economic indications pointed to continued

48 Pierson, "Palace Theater," 1; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 6, 1919.
growth for show business in Cincinnati. The 1918-1919 season, with its ups and downs, seemed to suggest that burlesque, vaudeville, and legitimate entertainment were moving into a time of enthusiastic expansion. The city's population growth, its fine transportation network, its outstanding newspapers, its five active theaters, and its rich heritage of cultural achievements all supported this optimistic outlook. The citizens of Cincinnati were fortunate to have a thriving entertainment industry in their midst. They had a choice when it came to amusement and, in 1918-1919, they could choose from both quantity and quality.
CHAPTER TWO: THE POWER BROKERS
OF SHOW BUSINESS, 1918-1919

For the most part, the quantity and quality of shows that played in Cincinnati during the 1918-1919 season were controlled by forces that operated out of New York. It was there, in offices located above such Broadway landmarks as the Palace and Shubert theaters, that the businessmen who owned the major burlesque, vaudeville, and legitimate circuits could be found. To these profit-minded accountants, entertaining the American public was seen as a lucrative enterprise. Their primary concern in planning the routes their shows would travel was how to minimize costs and maximize profits. The productions sent to Cincinnati by these show business capitalists were no different in many regards from the ones sent to other cities of comparable size. Since these bosses of show business controlled what Cincinnatians could see, they were obviously men of great power and influence. An investigation into the machinations of these entertainment entrepreneurs is necessary in order to put the 1918-1919 Cincinnati theatrical season into its proper perspective.

Since the aura of glamour that surrounded the legitimate stage could not be matched by vaudeville or burlesque, the world of musical comedy, revue, and drama, both tragic and comic, will be explored
This world was dominated by the likes of Abe Erlanger, Marc Klaw, David Belasco, George M. Cohan, Sam H. Harris, Florenz Ziegfeld, and Lee Shubert. These prominent producers frequently fought among themselves in an effort to create a theatrical empire whose capital would be Broadway. By 1918-1919 there was no clear victor in this struggle, but the Great White Way was the center of theatrical activity for the nation. Indeed, some fifty attractions occupied the stages of mid-town Manhattan. Despite the apparent vitality of New York theaters, the producers believed that the real profits were to be found "on the road," a phrase referring to the tour a show made after leaving Broadway. The inflation that accompanied America's participation in World War I, however, was altering this time-honored belief. Road productions were cheaper to mount than their Broadway counterparts, but they grossed less and their weekly operating costs were about the same. When the rising cost of rail transportation during the war and the post-Armistice business slowdown are also considered, the decline in road business becomes understandable.

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1 Eddie Cantor, *Take My Life* (Garden City, New York, 1957), 207.


3 Charles and Louise Samuels, *Once Upon A Stage; The Merry World of Vaudeville* (New York, 1974), 134.


ticket sales in many hinterland communities simply made it impractical or unprofitable to send many New York productions "on the road."

The steady growth of the movie industry was also striking at the economic foundations of the road shows. Hollywood had caught the martial spirit of the nation and exploited it completely.\(^6\) Legitimate presentations only occasionally employed the war as a theme.\(^7\) Furthermore, movies were becoming so popular that many a theater converted from live to film entertainment.\(^8\) Such was the case with the Walnut Theater in Cincinnati. Built as a home for cheap legitimate presentations, the Walnut abandoned stage shows for silent features in 1915. While the major vaudeville circuits attempted to find a way to incorporate the photoplay into their formats, the legitimate theaters found coexistence with movies difficult. Normally, legitimate houses presented silent dramas during the summer months, but once the cooler weather returned in the fall, the road companies out of New York again took the stage. Unfortunately for the Broadway producers, each autumn saw fewer legitimate houses return to live action. As a result, the legitimate shows were losing their lower income audience to the photoplay.\(^9\)

In fact, the only legitimate shows that could draw well on the road were

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\(^7\) Ibid., 108.

\(^8\) Poggi, Theater in America, 42.

\(^9\) Ibid., 41.
spectacles, musical comedies, and literary dramas, since these types of productions could not be duplicated by the silent screen.  

With the road shows in decline, due to inflation and competition from the movies, a vicious circle emerged: fewer road shows led to fewer initial Broadway productions, which in turn contributed to fewer road shows. The impact of this continuing crisis was so great that, between 1910 and 1925, the number of theaters across the nation that were ordinarily available for legitimate presentations dropped from 1,549 to 574. The old custom of keeping a show on Broadway for only a short time before sending it on the road was breaking down. By 1918-1919, the producers were facing a new game with different rules. Some realized that, despite the 1918 average of forty-one theatrical companies on tour and the 1919 average of forty-nine, the immediate future was not bright for legitimate shows outside of New York.  

The attitudes and vested interests of the producers had their own effects on the legitimate theater. Wanting power and profits, these ambitious men seldom concerned themselves with artistic considerations. This was particularly true of the two men whose booking offices regulated the tours Broadway shows took across the nation: Abraham

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10 Ibid., 35.
11 Ibid., 29.
12 Ibid.
13 Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 134.
14 Poggi, Theater in America, 30.
Lincoln Erlanger and Lee Shubert. While Erlanger and Shubert did produce shows on Broadway, their major influence was in the number of theaters they controlled along the road. The other prominent producers, such as David Belasco, who was known for realistic productions of melodramas, George M. Cohan, who was also famous as a singer, dancer, and songwriter, Sam H. Harris, who co-produced with Cohan from 1904 to 1920, and Florenz Ziegfeld, who glorified the American girl in his annual Follies, had to ally themselves with either Erlanger or Shubert if their shows were to be booked on a national tour.\textsuperscript{15} By 1918, the lines were drawn with Broadway's major producers in one camp or the other: Cohan & Harris, Charles Frohman, and 'the Great Ziegfeld' booked their shows through the agency operated by Erlanger and his partner, Marc Klaw; Al Woods, the Selwyns, and Comstock & Gest used Shubert's organization.\textsuperscript{16} For Cincinnatians, this meant that Klaw & Erlanger provided the shows for the Grand Opera House, while Shubert filled the Lyric Theater.

The older of the two rival booking concerns was Klaw & Erlanger. Created in 1895, the merger of Marc Klaw and Abe Erlanger was designed to bring organization and efficiency to the legitimate theater.\textsuperscript{17} Through the use of assimilation and intimidation, Klaw & Erlanger

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 24; Morehouse, George M. Cohan, 146; Barnard Hewitt, Theatre, U. S. A.; 1665 to 1957 (New York, 1959), 270.

\textsuperscript{16}Poggi, Theater in America, 24.

\textsuperscript{17}Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert (New York, 1968), 16.
quickly established a virtual monopoly over the booking of legitimate shows nationwide and had become known as the "Syndicate." Their power over theater owners was so vast that in larger cities, such as Cincinnati, they demanded that houses booking their productions pay a third of the profit realized during the weekly run of the shows. While a local manager could deduct expenses and his personal salary before computing the profit, this fee, collected throughout the circuit, poured millions into the coffers of Klaw & Erlanger. In addition to the power derived from money, Abe Erlanger, the dominant figure in the partnership, saw to it that his own Broadway productions were given the best routes and put into the finest theaters. This gave Klaw & Erlanger productions an advantage over the shows of Cohan & Harris, Frohmar, or Ziegfeld. This theatrical absolutism was not manipulated so as to improve the quality of the legitimate stage. Rather, it was wielded in such a way as to enrich the parent firm. Marc Klaw attempted to rationalize the Syndicate's heavy reliance on poorly written, but popular musical plays by explaining that the theater must "satisfy the public demand." This philosophy precluded any moves by the Syndicate toward dramatic forms that were not proven money makers. As a result,


19 Poggi, Theater in America, 14.


Klaw & Erlanger, through the careful booking of shows and the exorbitant fees charged local theaters, could control the public demand, but not without creating many enemies. By 1918, the Syndicate had lost a large portion of its monopoly. Two factors contributed to this erosion of power: a bitter personal quarrel between Klaw and Erlanger, and the rapid growth of competition in the person of Lee Shubert. 22

Destined to be one of Broadway's greatest and most hated impresarios, Lee Shubert had come to New York from Syracuse in 1900. Already a theatrical force in upstate New York, Lee and his older brother, Sam, decided to invade Broadway, the bastion of Klaw & Erlanger. Major strides had been made when Sam Shubert, the brother in charge of the family business, was injured in a train accident and died on May 12, 1905. 23 This tragedy not only moved Lee into the leadership role, it also made him more determined than ever to succeed in breaking the Syndicate's hold on the theater. Lee, joined on occasion by Jacob J. Shubert, his younger brother, continued to produce theatricals and moved to implement the Shubert plans of expansion. Needing funds for his ambitious program, Lee went into partnership with Cincinnati's infamous "boss," George B. Cox, and Covington Congressman Joseph Rhinock. The arrangement called for Cox and Rhinock to provide the capital for building additional theaters in various cities in the eastern half of the nation and for Shubert to provide the management for those

22 Poggi, Theater in America, 20.

23 Stagg, Brothers Shubert, 68.
theaters. While Cox's fortune was based on legally questionable activities, Shubert did not hesitate to use the money to acquire property in key cities throughout the east. Once his new theaters opened, Lee would have routes of his own that could challenge the Syndicate road tours. This was accomplished by 1912. Shubert was so successful that he managed to prevent Klaw & Erlanger from showing much of a profit. This victory was not to Cox's liking, however, as Shubert had spent so much to overtake the Syndicate that profits were small for them as well. This situation led to a 1912 meeting of Cox, Rhinock, J. J. Shubert, and Abe Erlanger. There a truce of sorts was agreed upon. Attractions were to be shared by the rival booking concerns and the various theaters they represented. The mere necessity of such an agreement, however, proved the growing strength of Shubert.

Lee Shubert, never one to worry over a show's critical success as long as the box office receipts were good, was not satisfied with the temporary measures gained by J. J. and moved to put all the reins of power in his own hands. In 1913, using money now pouring into Shubert strong-boxes, Lee bought out all the various investors except Rhinock and Cox. Then, in July of 1917, Lee took advantage of Cox's death and bought out the Cox estate, the largest single theatrical-property holding in the

24 Ibid., 72-74; Poggi, Theater in America, 17-21; Feck, Cincinnati, 81.

25 Stagg, Brothers Shubert, 124-125.

26 Ibid., 127.
world.\(^27\) With only Rhinock as a minor partner, Lee was the dictator of the Shubert empire. Still not content, Lee then broke the shaky peace with Klaw & Erlanger.\(^28\) The sharing of theaters and productions ceased. Lee would not allow a Syndicate show in a Shubert theater and forbid Shubert productions to perform in a Syndicate house. Since Lee had more shows on Broadway than any other producer and controlled more road theaters than anyone else, the outcome of this struggle was beyond doubt. By 1918-1919, the Shubert forces were well on their way toward a decisive victory over the Syndicate. In the early 1920s, Lee attempted to move into vaudeville in hopes of accomplishing the same degree of dominance he had already achieved in legitimate theater. This brief venture ended in failure, but it did little to diminish Shubert’s influence in the legitimate theater world.

The clash of personalities vying for power was not unique to legitimate theater; vaudeville was also dominated by treasure-hunting executives. While the history of vaudeville can count several such figures, by 1914 the prevailing force was Edward F. Albee, a man whose ruthlessness was equal to that of Lee Shubert or Abe Erlanger. From his suite of offices on the sixth floor of the Palace Theater Building on Times Square in New York, Albee ruled the B. F. Keith Vaudeville Circuit.\(^29\) While this mighty empire of variety entertainment had

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\(^{27}\) Ibid., 143.

\(^{28}\) Poggi, Theater in America, 20.

been created by Benjamin F. Keith of Boston before the turn of the century, Albee had been the energetic second-in-command who had led the Keith forces to their position of dominance in the field of vaudeville. He had been the actual boss for many years, but with Keith's death in 1914, Albee put pretense behind him and took complete control of Keith's numerous theaters east of the Rockies and of the United Booking Office, the agency that determined where vaudevillians would play. By managing the vaudeville theaters and through manipulating the artists who worked in them, Albee dictated the direction vaudeville would take as the 1920s approached.

Albee had used a variety of methods to guide the Keith Circuit to the top, but the most visible factor in the Keith victory was the chain of magnificent theaters Albee ordered built in every important city in the eastern half of the nation. Up until the early twentieth century, vaudeville normally played in old variety houses that were usually dark, cramped, and filthy. Albee changed all that. After the Keith Circuit came to a city, Albee would construct a theater that was designed to overwhelm a patron by its sheer size and elegance. Typically, a Keith-Albee "palace" would have marble-lined lobbies with expensive oil paintings on the walls and lush carpeting on the floors, sweeping staircases that led to a spacious balcony, trim on the walls of the

30 Joe Laurie, Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace (New York, 1953), 346.

31 Spitzer, The Palace, 35.
theater interior that emphasized gold tinting, huge chandeliers that hung from an ornately executed ceiling, and red curtains that parted to reveal a massive stage capable of handling the demands of various vaudeville acts. \footnote{Laurie, Vaudeville, 346.} The purpose behind these costly monuments to greed was to entice the public to spend the price of admission for an afternoon or evening's entertainment. The impersonal nature of the stone and steel cities of America appeared to take on a certain kind of warmth and passion when surrounded by the opulence of a Keith theater. \footnote{Albert F. McLean, American Vaudeville as Ritual (Lexington, Kentucky, 1965), 208.} With a fierce determination, Albee sought to create the impression that vaudeville performed in any less ornamental atmosphere was simply second-rate. This building program was extremely costly to the Keith interests and may have played a part in causing the eventual collapse of vaudeville in the late 1920s. \footnote{Laurie, Vaudeville, 347.} When audiences were lured out of these extravagant theaters due to the popularity and lower cost of the radio and the talking picture, Albee was forced to convert to movies in order to pay the enormous operating expenses of his million-dollar creations. This turn of events, however, was not anticipated in 1918-1919. Vaudeville theaters, such as Cincinnati's B. F. Keith and the rapidly-rising Palace, were testimonies to the success of E. F. Albee.
Another element of Albee's triumph was in his arbitrary use of censorship. According to the Albee theory of successful vaudeville, the acts on a theater's bill must be suitable for a family's entertainment. Any material or performance that threatened this middle-class standard of morality was forbidden. A performer receiving a blue envelope knew that it contained a message from the local Keith manager ordering him to delete such words as "hell," "damn," "spit," "devil," and "cockroach." "The Sunday School circuit" of E. F. Albee also banned such subjects as prostitution, divorce, adultery, religious differences, mental defects and physical deformities like lameness or blindness. Failure to abide by Albee's admonition to "remember this theater caters to ladies and gentlemen and children" could lead to an act's being purged from the United Booking Office's list of approved performers, an action tantamount to professional suicide. Albee's success in bowdlerizing anything that might be offensive to the middle-class patron, the backbone of vaudeville, helped keep the Keith Circuit the largest in the nation.

Once Albee had achieved his goal of dominance, he focused his attention on developing the profit potential of the Keith Circuit. As a

35 McLean, American Vaudeville, 204; Spitzer, The Palace, 37.
36 Spitzer, The Palace, 35-36; Sophie Tucker, Some of These Days (Garden City, New York, 1945), 148.
37 Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 97; Spitzer, The Palace, 37.
38 Spitzer, The Palace, 35-36.
part of the corporate structure, the United Booking Office, renamed the B. F. Keith Vaudeville Exchange in 1919, enabled Albee to extend his already considerable authority to include the artists who made up vaudeville. In order to be booked in a Keith theater, a performer's agent had to gain admittance to the UBO offices in New York's Palace Theater Building. This was not always a simple matter. If the performer or his agent had angered Albee in any way, winning an audience with John J. Murdock, the chief booker in the Keith domain, would be impossible. Murdock, who began his show business career as a stagehand at Pike's Opera House in Cincinnati during the 1890s, operated the booking agency much as a political "boss" ran a city. His job was to provide a cheap labor force for the circuit and to devise as many methods of making money as possible. One ingenious formula for fattening the circuit's cash flow worked as follows: after an agent won a booking at a Keith house and had paid the necessary fees to the UBO, the act then signed a separate contract with the local theater's manager who would have the responsibility of paying the performer. Before the act received its contracted salary, however, the manager would deduct five per cent from the total and forward it to the Keith office in New York. Such a system forced a vaudeville artist to pay Albee and company twice: first, for arranging the engagement.

39 Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Show Biz From Vaude to Video (New York, 1951), 268.
40 Laurie, Vaudeville, 352; Spitzer, The Palace, 67.
and, second, for the privilege of working on the circuit. Furthermore, the UBO charged vaudeville agents 50 per cent of their legal commission. Since an agent's commission was 5 per cent, this left an agent with only 2.5 per cent of his client's salary as his payment for services rendered. To keep this source of revenue secure, the Keith Collection Agency automatically deducted the agent's commission, and their portion thereof, from the act's earnings. The local managers, many of whom were recruited from big city newspapers because of their understanding of public opinion, could also improve the profit margin by cutting an act's contracted salary if they felt such action was warranted. Hoping to gain favor with the home office by keeping expenses down, some managers would declare a "cut week" if business had been slow due to the weather or if their city was considered to be a poor show town. Such strategies, whether the brainstorms of Albee or Murdock, were in addition to the normal income from Keith box offices across the nation. Clearly, Albee was determined to produce a profit out of the patrons and performers of vaudeville.

Profit being only one aspect of power, Albee plotted the total subjugation of the vaudevillians. It was not enough just to keep the variety performers in a constant state of financial insecurity. After all,

41 Spitzer, The Palace, 72.
42 Ibid., 72-73.
43 Ibid.; McLean, American Vaudeville, 60.
being in such a precarious condition could cause some vaudevillians to look upon a union as a possible means of salvation. Albee had fought the "White Rats," a loosely organized union of variety artists, early in the new century and had emerged triumphant. During the 1918-1919 season, he anticipated another struggle over unionization and decided to initiate a union of his own. Purchasing the old White Rats clubhouse on 46th Street in New York, Albee refurbished it to serve as the headquarters of his National Vaudeville Artists organization. 

This company union began enrolling members in 1919 and by the late 1920s some twelve thousand performers belonged. The NVA encouraged membership by publishing the Vaudeville News, by operating charities for elderly and afflicted vaudevillians, and by providing a variety of services to those whose dues were paid in full. One such bonus was the Protected Material Department. This division of the NVA was beneficial to members since, by the simple task of placing a copy of his material in a sealed envelope and entrusting it to the NVA office in New York, it afforded an artist a degree of safety from having his act stolen by another performer on the circuit. Albee stood to lose little from the courtesies offered by the National Vaudeville Artists. The costs involved were nominal and the goodwill gained was inestimable. As a result, no rival organization challenged Albee's cozy closed shop. The Keith Vaudeville Exchange went through the 1918-1919 season with all the

44 Laurie, Vaudeville, 315; Spitzer, The Palace, 144.

45 Allen, Much Ado About Me, 248.
usual amount of performer grievances. This time, however, the National Vaudeville Artists, Incorporated, managed to channel performer discontent away from confrontation with Albee.

Despite the absence of competition from employee unions, Albee did contend with a number of minor antagonists who managed to survive his near-monopoly of vaudeville. Many of these hardy firms did not threaten the Keith hold on big-time vaudeville. Since they were content to operate on a much smaller scale, Albee saw no immediate danger from them. One such practitioner of bush-league vaudeville was Alexander Pantages, a Greek who had immigrated to the United States as a young man. Although he was never able to read or write the English language, Pantages did establish a vaudeville circuit in the middle and far western sections of the nation. He occasionally booked the high salaried acts that normally played the big-time, but his theaters, such as the Empress in Cincinnati, usually presented acts that could not win a permanent spot on the Keith Circuit. Another agency that was a home for the little known performers of the small-time was the Sullivan & Considine Circuit. Sullivan & Considine, like Pantages, sent its clients to theaters in mid-western cities that were humble cottages compared to Albee's palatial playhouses. On the other hand, the Orpheum Circuit of the west prospered beyond its modest beginnings. During the war years of 1914-1918, the

46 Laurie, Vaudeville, 401-403.
47 Ibid.
Orpheum Circuit became large enough to attract the roving eye of E. F. Albee. With the acquisition of the Orpheum Circuit, Albee could complete the Keith chain across the country. This annexation and consolidation was accomplished by 1919. While Pantages and Sullivan & Considine followed the low road of variety entertainment, the Keith-Orpheum Circuit confidently and profitably traveled the high road of "high class" vaudeville.

As the 1918-1919 season progressed, there was the rumbling of further dynastic struggles in vaudeville. The rapid development of the photoplay as a popular artform gave rise to the "vaudfilm" innovation. As early as 1915, some managers began showing silent features along with a reduced number of vaudeville acts. The major growth of this artistic amalgamation came under the leadership of Marcus Loewe. At one time the owner of an amusement arcade in Cincinnati, Loewe had built a series of theaters throughout the northeast that featured movies and vaudeville acts. While the top price at most Keith houses in 1919 was $1, the best seat in a Loewe theater was 50c. Since he had fewer acts to pay, Loewe could continue to undersell Albee. Furthermore, Loewe was not alone in this potentially lucrative business. In 1920, William Fox added forty vaudfilm theaters to the thirty he already had built.

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48 Green and Laurie, Show Biz, 268.


50 Laurie, Vaudeville, 375.
Clearly, this trend would continue in the 1920s. Albee recognized this and geared his future theaters for "pop vaude," the term he used for the combination of movies and vaudeville. The Palace Theater in Cincinnati, which opened in late 1919, was an example of Albee's interest in cornering this type of vaudeville. Unfortunately for Albee, he was never able to establish the same degree of control over "pop vaude" as he had over straight vaudeville.

The situation in burlesque was similar to that of vaudeville with the Columbia Amusement Company the rough equivalent of the Keith Circuit. Early in the new century, the Columbia Amusement Company formed the Columbia Wheel, an arrangement whereby a burlesque show would be given a specified tour of so many weeks from theater to theater and from city to city. Each production followed the preceding show regularly and in turn was succeeded by another Columbia attraction. The Cincinnati cog in the "wheel" was the Olympic Theater and its stage was the scene of a series of shows that were pale imitations of each other. The Columbia Wheel, sometimes referred to as the Eastern Wheel, spent little money on production improvements. The result was humor that got staler, chorus girls that got older, and sets that got shoddier.

51 Green and Laurie, Show Biz, 251.
53 Ibid., 55.
Indeed, cheap seemed to be the byword of the Columbia Wheel. In 1912, the Wheel consisted of a hundred theaters, employed some 5,000 people, and had about seventy productions on its various routes. Yet the average production, with a cast of thirty-five to forty, could range in cost from only $5,000 to $10,000 for an entire season. One reason for such low operating expenses was that Columbia paid its talent as little as possible. If a burlesque comic or chorus girl became popular, he or she would normally use that popularity to move into better paying positions in vaudeville or musical comedy. Oddly enough, chorus girls were paid relatively well. Due to a continuing shortage in this most critical area, salaries ranging from $20 to $25 a week were common. Such high wages, however, were not available for the writing of new comedy material or musical numbers. Formula scenes that cost nothing and changed little through the years were used, along with the standard "exotic" dances performed by the females of the show. In addition, Columbia had little to fear from collective action by burlesque performers. The few union organizing attempts made in show business up to the 1920s had had no real impact on burlesque.

All of this had the effect of keeping costs down, but Columbia also had

54 Ibid., 65.
55 Ibid., 88.
57 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 216-217.
an effective method of extracting money from its local operators. Managers were exploited by having to pay fifty per cent of their box office receipts to the Wheel. 58

Even with such a high booking fee to pay, the local Wheel theaters prospered during the World War I years. At the onset of hostilities and the accompanying need for conscription, burlesque managers feared a drop in male patronage. While this fear proved groundless, Columbia officials, hoping to draw more women into their audiences, did decide to clean up their acts. 59 They banned the use of topics such as Prohibition and women's suffrage, cut words like "hell" and "damn" out of routines, and ordered that ankle-length skirts be worn instead of body tights. 60 Cincinnati's Olympic Theater, following the dictates of the New York office, proclaimed that "Every Day is Ladies Day" and urged patrons, presumably males, to "Bring Your Mother, Wife or Sweetheart." 61 Other Wheel theaters advertised their attractions as "family shows." 62 At the same time Columbia was attempting to clean up burlesque, the legitimate shows of Ziegfeld and others were busy revealing the fairer sex in all her glory. 63 The once clearly

58 Ibid., 88.
59 Ibid., 79-83.
60 Ibid., 80; Green and Laurie, Show Biz, 302.
62 Crichton, Marx Brothers, 55.
63 Green and Laurie, Show Biz, 302.
defined line drawn between the wholesome, uplifting entertainment of
the legitimate theater and the gaudy, suggestive, commercialized sex
show offered in burlesque houses was being blurred. This attempt at
cleanliness would continue until the early 1920s when the Wheel col-
lapsed. Sex, with a capital "S," then returned and burlesque slid back
into the murky world of slapstick and smut.

In all, fifty-five legitimate productions and thirty-one burlesque
shows played in Cincinnati during 1918-1919. In addition, some three
hundred and ninety vaudeville acts performed in the city that season.
Each of these productions came to Cincinnati as a regular stop on the
circuit to which it belonged. In this way, the average patron of the
Queen City was tremendously affected by the personalities and the
power politics of front office show business. Whether they chose the
Klaw & Erlanger production at the Grand, the Shubert show at the
Lyric, the Albee offering at the Keith, the Pantages bill at the Emp-
press, or the Columbia attraction at the Olympic, Cincinnatians
witnessed live entertainment that frequently was not as lively as the
turmoil among the backstage bosses. This turmoil was caused by
years of struggle for show business supremacy and by vast changes
in the world at large. To many patrons, these conflicts and changes
may have been imperceptible but, nevertheless, they did have an im-
pact on the quantity and the quality of the shows that played in Cincin-
nati during 1918-1919.
The 1918-1919 season began, as had previous seasons, in early September. The passing of the severely hot weather of August was the annual sign that quality professional live entertainment was returning to the Queen City. While the proprietors of the Grand, Lyric, Keith, Empress, and Olympic theaters prepared for their fall openings, the public anticipated shows that could lighten their wartime load of work and worry. The various theaters began their seasons on different Sundays throughout September and into October. As a result, the public's first opportunity to experience the new offerings of 1918-1919 came on September 8 at the Lyric and Olympic.

The Lyric's premiere piece of the season was "Friendly Enemies," a comedy-drama inspired by the war. The show, authored by Samuel Shipman and Aaron Hoffman, was an Al Woods production and was booked into the Lyric by the Shubert interests. The advertising for "Friendly Enemies" promised a "cast of distinction" and featured comments from President Woodrow Wilson that seemed to suggest that the play supported his own goals in fighting the war: "All that I can say has already been said most admirably in this beautiful play. All the sentiments I could express have been admirably represented - sentiments
that I hope will soon grip the world."\(^1\) Of course, the quote failed to say what sentiments exactly were expressed in the play, but then the Lyric's manager, C. Hubert Heuck, did not want to divulge the plot any more than that hinted by the title. The newspaper spot did, however, post the admission for the show: evenings, 50c to $2.00; Saturday matinee, 25c to $1.50; popular Wednesday matinee with best seats, $1.00.

Despite the Presidential endorsement, the reviews that greeted "Friendly Enemies" were mixed. Both the Post and Enquirer complained about the weakness of the plot. In brief, "Friendly Enemies" was the tale of a German-American who turns against the Fatherland after his only son is almost killed by a German torpedo while crossing the Atlantic to join the doughboys on the Western Front. The Enquirer referred to it as "little more than an ancient and decrepit melodrama of the mawkishly sentimental kind" and blamed the Hun war lords for creating a situation where war melodrama, like "Friendly Enemies," could thrive.\(^2\) The Post argued that "it was written in haste and shows it."\(^3\) The notices also agreed about the low quality of the performances. The Post declared that "the company was assembled...with the idea of making the westbound train" and the Enquirer summed up the acting in general with the observation that "the whole performance is carried forward without any gradations of dynamics, everybody shouting most of

\(^1\)Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 8, 1918.

\(^2\)Ibid., Sept. 9, 1918.

\(^3\)Cincinnati Post, Sept. 9, 1918.
the time when not weeping.\textsuperscript{4}

The reviews did manage to find some merit in the play. While the Post credited the production "for being stimulating to the pulse and delightfully humorous as well," the Enquirer offered faint praise "because it provides that unfailing mixture of laughs and tears which will assure any piece a liberal modicum of success."\textsuperscript{5} The Times Star and Commercial Tribune, not as critical as their colleagues, thought that it was "splendid entertainment."\textsuperscript{6} The newspapers also reported that the opening night audience was "enthusiastic" and "most friendly disposed, if not altogether discriminating."\textsuperscript{7} Considering that the Grand was featuring the motion picture "Salome," the large crowds for "Friendly Enemies" may have been due to a lack of competition. Even Theda Bara as the infamous dancing daughter of Herodias, "her blood was fire, her heart was ice, her soul the devil's own," failed to diminish the throngs that came to see "Friendly Enemies." In fact, the drama managed to be held over for a second week. Though this was due primarily to the high cost of traveling, the run would not have been extended if "Friendly Enemies" had not been able to pull audiences in sufficient numbers.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.; Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 9, 1918.

\textsuperscript{5} Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 9, 1918.

\textsuperscript{6} Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 9, 1918.

\textsuperscript{7} Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Sept. 9, 1918.

\textsuperscript{8} Variety, Sept. 20, 1918.
The only other live entertainment house to open on September 8 was the Olympic. This burlesque theater opened its season with Al Reeves as the headliner. Reeves, a "banana" or comedian, was making his twentieth-seventh annual appearance as the producer and manager of his own burlesque company. He was joined by the Free Set-ters Quartet, a vocalizing group from Cincinnati, a team of Yiddish comedians, a banjo soloist, and various female performers. The result was what the Enquirer called "a spick and span outfit." The program consisted of numerous "specialty" numbers and scenes. Ada Morris, an "artistic" dancer, performed in the harem scene, a locale used repeatedly by burlesque in the decades following Little Egypt's introduction of the hootchy-kootchy dance at Chicago's Columbian Ex-position of 1893. A one act farce, "The Wrong Room," had an unmistakable sexual theme, as did the "Chinatown at Midnight" sketch in the second act. The show's finale, the beauties of the cast in a display of Grecian art models, also employed sex as an audience-pleaser.

While the Olympic management made considerable use of sex in their opening show, they had to contend with competition for their male audience in the form of baseball's World Series. To meet this season-al challenge, the Olympic advertised that the latest scores from the


10 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 9, 1918.

11 Burton, In Memorium, 48.
games would be announced as available from the stage. If a patron was a fan of the Chicago Cubs, the Boston Red Sox, or of the chorus line, the Olympic tried to meet that need and fill the theater at the same time.

Since all of the theater managers wanted as full a house as possible, the prospect of an increase in the tax on theater admissions was a cloud that hung over the horizon of the 1918-1919 season. Even as the Lyric and Olympic opened to business, Congress was giving serious consideration to raising the current federal tax of ten per cent to twenty per cent. The managers argued that the result of the new taxing proposal would be fewer people purchasing tickets and, thus, an actual decline in tax receipts. J. Herman Thuman, the Enquirer's "Amusements" editor, pointed out that the original tax, levied to help finance the war against the Central Powers, had been fought by the managers who claimed "that the art of the drama would go to the bow-wows if Congress passed a ten per cent tax." Of course, nothing of the sort had happened. Thuman then warned the New York-based producers against sending out "inferior" and "cheapening productions." Conversely, he reasoned that shows of quality would continue to attract an audience. For their part, the major producers could only speculate about an immediate future that included higher admission taxes that

12 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 8, 1918.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
discouraged attendance and higher production costs designed to encourage attendance.

Before the second week of the season got under way, the city faced the first police strike to gain national attention. The trouble began on September 13 when four officers were suspended for having conferred with an American Federation of Labor organizer. This was followed by a walkout of 800 policemen on September 14, the day set for a parade of 50,000 draft registrants. Some 3,000 members of the home guard patrolled the streets during the crisis. Even with the aid of the guard, the managers were worried that such civil unrest might adversely affect theater attendance. The strike, however, was over by September 16 as the city threatened to replace the entire police force with discharged soldiers. The prompt return of the city's law enforcement personnel allowed the managers to breathe a little easier.

The only theater to join the Lyric and Olympic on Sunday, September 15, was the B. F. Keith. The first bill of the winter season at Cincinnati's foremost vaudeville house was graced by the presence of J. J. Murdock, the general manager and chief booking agent of the United Booking Office. Murdock's one day visit was a part of a continuing effort at keeping all Keith theaters in line with corporate policy as established by Edward F. Albee, the guiding force of the Keith


16 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 16, 1918.
Vaudeville Exchange. Murdock inspected the theater from the angle of the audience, the artist, and the management. A good word from the Keith hierarchy was given the manager, Ned Hastings, for his success in obtaining 1,800 season order patrons. This total was more than any other Keith theater on the circuit. In addition to his quick tour of the Keith, Murdock found time to visit the construction site of the Palace, soon to be the circuit's outlet for "pop vaude" in the city, before departing for a fact-finding mission in another city privileged enough to have a Keith theater.

The opening night bill that Murdock saw was a typical Keith offering. The first act to occupy the stage was the Aerial Shaws, an acrobatic act known in the trade as a "dumb" act. The purpose behind opening with such an act was that the audience was still arriving and causing a great deal of confusion. A "dumb" act was visual in nature and could be enjoyed by those seated despite the noise made by late-comers.

Fred Miller and Bert Chapman followed the "flying" demonstration and presented a skit that emphasized dancing. This was followed by the comedy team of Fred Whitfield and Marie Ireland in a rural satire, "The Belle of Bingville." Ireland, as the eccentric comedienne, was the hit of the act according to the Enquirer. The very important spot before the intermission was filled by a playlet entitled "Within the

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17 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 7, 1918.

18 George Burns, Living It Up, or, They Still Love Me in Altoona (New York, 1976), 240; Laurie, Vaudeville, 20-21; Bill Smith, The Vaudevillians (New York, 1976), 25.
While most playlets were designed to fit either a parlor, kitchen, or office set, "Within the Zone" was set in the forecastle of a tramp steamer sailing through the war zone around Great Britain.\(^{19}\) The Enquirer, Post, and Times Star concurred in giving it high marks, both for the thrilling and suspenseful quality of the writing and for the excellence of the acting. The Commercial Tribune dissented by complaining that it lacked "dramatic punch."\(^{20}\)

Following the intermission, a young comic, recently returned from Australia, moved "in one," the stage area in front of the curtain.\(^{21}\) His name was Fred Allen. Later to be one of radio's greatest stars, Allen billed himself as "a young fella trying to get along." His opening jokes, according to the Enquirer, were "of ancient vintage," but his act also included a few juggling tricks, ventriloquism, and guitar antics. By the end of the act, Allen, who had been known as Freddy James until a booking agent changed his name, had the audience howling. His finish exploited patriotism by having portraits of Presidents Washington and Wilson and a U. S. flag dropped from the fly space as he left the stage. This maneuver caused the audience to applaud wildly. Allen then strolled back on stage for numerous bows.\(^{22}\) Allen's "class" appearance, an

\(^{19}\) McLean, American Vaudeville, 192.

\(^{20}\) Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 16, 1918.

\(^{21}\) Allen, Much Ado, 178; Donald Day, Will Rogers; A Biography (New York, 1962), 67; Spitzer, The Palace, 94; Tucker, Some of These Days, 48.

\(^{22}\) Allen, Much Ado, 213.
immaculate suit, a snappy new derby, and shoes of the latest style, was different from most comedians of the day and, in time, it helped him establish a unique identity in vaudeville.

A telepathic act, "The Miracle," was next. Its particular specialty was in "musical thought transferrence." The audience would whisper a song title to the male half of the act and his female partner on the stage would then sing it. Though none of the reviews paid many compliments to "The Miracle," the headliners of the bill, Billie Montgomery and George Perry, scored heavily. Occupying the stellar position of next-to-closing, Montgomery and Perry presented a "nut" comedy routine that consisted of considerable screaming, frantic activity, and the breaking of various objects. 23 Entitled "The Newlyweds," this sketch "had the audience in an uproar." 24 The Keith bill concluded with another "dumb" or silent act. This one was a non-athletically inclined act featuring the "living pictures" of Elsie La Bergere. Calling her offering "an art potpourri," Miss Bergere did a series of nine poses, aided by three posing dogs.

The Keith's opening presentation was, according to the Enquirer, "up to the standard of the house." 25 Its eight acts of acrobatics, comedy, dance, drama, mind-reading, and posturing played two shows a


24 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 16, 1918.

25 Ibid.
day: "thrift matinee daily at 2:15, nights at 8:15." This busy schedule and the theater's house orchestra of eight musicians qualified Keith's in Cincinnati as the "big-time." This designation carried with it the necessity of preparing programs that were popular with the public. Having seven matinees weekly meant that Keith's had to appeal to the women of the city. For that reason, the manager enforced the Albee code of decency and cancelled the contracts on Monday of any artist who had been poorly received on Sunday. A manager had to pamper the public or risk losing both the theater's "big-time" status and his job.

The Olympic's second show of the season was "The Beauty Trust." The Commercial Tribune called the entire show an "extravaganza" and the Times Star proclaimed that it would be "hard to find a better entertainment of its kind." The girls of the chorus were featured in this production and were reportedly the hit of the evening. The Post commented favorably, yet vaguely, on their "willingness" and the Enquirer complimented them for being "cheerful." Joining the chorus girls were comedians depicting various ethnic types that were the stock-in-trade of burlesque humor. The Hebrew comic portrayed a mercenary

26 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 15, 1918.
27 Allen, Much Ado, 244; Smith, Vaudevillians, 7.
28 Tucker, Some of These Days, 106.
29 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 16, 1918.
30 Cincinnati Post, Sept. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 16, 1918.
Jew, the blackface comic depicted an illiterate, childish Negro, and the rube comic played an ignorant, unsophisticated farmboy. "The Beauty Trust" included a scene where Francis Farr played Nedra, the sleeping Queen of Atlantis. The numerous musical numbers interspersed throughout the show prompted Harry Hedges, the manager, to advertise "The Beauty Trust" as the "only musical show in town." 31

Before the week was over, the theatrical managers faced a new problem. Uncle Sam's administration of the railroads was resulting in the elimination of the trains that departed Cincinnati at midnight for points north and west, making it necessary for northward or westward bound actors to catch a train at 11:00 p.m. The difficulty in this arrangement was that the theaters were forced to begin their shows earlier than normal in order to accommodate the revised railway schedule. The Grand and Lyric instituted an 8:00 p.m. curtain, while the Keith got under way at 7:30. 32 This departure from routine did not last long as the fighting in Europe unexpectedly ended in November, but it was another example of the impact of war on the theater business.

The week of September 22 saw four of the five theaters in operation. While the Grand was still showing motion pictures, the Empress joined the Lyric, Keith, and Olympic in offering live entertainment. Although the season was just under way, attendance at the burlesque, vaudeville, and legitimate productions already presented was quite good. Concern

31 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 15, 1918.
32 Variety, Sept. 20, 1918.
however, was building as to how long this would be true. The man-
ers cautiously awaited some indication of the impact the newest round of conscription would have on their ticket sales. Some felt that many women would hesitate to attend the theater unescorted. To compound this possibility was the fear that the draft would take sorely needed stage hands and actors. If this situation materialized, the local entertainment industry would be crippled. Luckily, the November Armistice prevented any serious manpower shortage from developing.

After two weeks with the same show, the Lyric prepared to present the Shubert production "Doing Our Bit." This musical comedy was promoted as a "spectacle with 100 people, 15 gorgeous scenes, and 60 of the most ravishingly beautiful and youthful girls ever seen here." The play had a definite military flavor to it, but it was flexible enough to allow for singing, dancing, and comedy routines. The critical remarks about "Doing Our Bit" were mixed. The Enquirer referred to it as "an excellent entertainment," the Post enthusiastically noted that "we can't recall a musical piece showing any more vim or verve," and the Times Star energetically joined the chorus of praise by calling it a "high speed performance." The negative comment came from the Commercial Tribune. This morning publication echoed the New York critics when it termed the music "dull" and the book no more than

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33 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 22, 1918.

34 Ibid., Sept. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Sept. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 23, 1918.
"commonplace."  

All the reviewers noticed that feminine beauty was missing in the chorus. This absence of girlish charm may have been partially responsible for the poor reception the play received from the public. After closing on Saturday, September 28, "Doing Our Bit" returned to New York as one of the biggest flops in Shubert history.  

The Keith bill for the week of September 22 opened with Lady Alice's Pets, a novelty act that featured several "tiny tots of animal-dom," cats, rats, doves, and pigeons, and closed with the Five Pandurs, an acrobatic and posing display. Sandwiched between these silent acts were six offerings that ranged from a violin soloist to a rural comedy sketch. This later act, entitled "Rubeville," was a "big-act" that played in vaudeville for many years. There was both humor and music in this scene that involved a brass band in a country store. The violin act was performed by Nonette. In her spot, this former pupil of the great violinist Eugene Ysaye and accompanist to Madame Schuman-Heink played both classical and popular selections and was recalled to the stage several times by the audience's applause.  

The remaining portion of what Keith's called "a smashing, dashing show" was filled by a variety of laugh-provoking acts. Comedy was

36 Variety, Sept. 27, 1918.
37 Laurie, Vaudeville, 233.
38 Ibid., 69; Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 23, 1918.
performed by Sally Fields and Charlie Conway in the sketch "What's Your Alibi?", by the English skit "On London Bridge," performed by the team of Race and Edge, and by Thomas R. Martin in his "A Regular Businessman" scene. Claudia Coleman, "the girl with the smile," impersonated "well known feminine types" as her way of provoking laughter. Reports in the Post and Enquirer credited Sally Fields and Thomas R. Martin with being the most successful of the many mirth-makers on Keith's program for the week. The Times Star gave the bill a good endorsement, but the Commercial Tribune, while wild about Nonette, panned Race and Edge for using old jokes.

The Empress competed with Keith's by presenting six acts of vaudeville at three shows daily: 2:30, 7:30, and 9:10, with all seats costing 10¢. Furthermore, all uniformed service men were given free admission on Mondays once they paid a penny, the ten per cent war tax. This patriotic gesture was a part of the changes brought about by the new management team of Henry G. Clarke, owner, and Pat Tighe, manager. While they would later acquire their talent through Pantages, Clarke and Tighe used the Sullivan & Considine agency to provide the acts for their first month of shows. Their first bill featured an "all wool" company performing in "Holiday in Dixie." Despite the novelty

39 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Sept. 23, 1918.

40 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 23, 1918.

41 Ibid.
of headlining a Negro troupe, the remaining acts were standard fare. 42

Adams and Guhl, one of the leading two-men acts in vaudeville, donned burnt cork and did a blackface act of storytelling and singing. 43

The country brand of humor was to be found in Harvey and Hanlon's sketch "Who's A Rube?" Edwin Fox, the resident impersonator of the week, did an act consisting of Hoosier characters. Ventriloquism was the specialty of Valentine Vox, while the Two Sternards manipulated the xylophone. This collection of comedians, dancers, musicians, and singers was greeted by a large opening performance audience.

Burlesque fans were offered "The Behman Show" at the Olympic. The music and dialogue of the show were all new, reflecting the Columbia Amusement Company's efforts at upgrading their product. Basically, the new production was in the format of a musical comedy. While there was the semblance of a plot, various monologues, dances and other specialty numbers, all common burlesque offerings, were also included. Two capacity audiences on September 22, the opening, witnessed a show that contained five male comedians as well as "nifty" girls. 44 One such appealing creature was Ameta Pynes who danced in the traditional "Arabian Nights" scene. The large crowds seemed to indicate that the Wheel's improvement campaign was succeeding.

There was, however, enough "hokum" in "The Behman Show" to

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42 Cincinnati Post, Sept. 23, 1918.

43 Laurie, Vaudeville, 86.

44 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 23, 1918.
remind a patron that he was still in a burlesque house.

The fourth week of the season saw the Grand continuing to show a photodrama. This left the other four theaters fighting among themselves for a piece of the live entertainment audience. To that date, the Olympic burlesque and Empress vaudeville shows had drawn more than their share of the crowds. The Keith's attendance had been fair, but the Lyric was suffering. "Doing Our Bit" had been an expensive production to mount and whether its failure was blamed on having a lackluster cast or to the disruption of regular theatergoing habits by wartime activity, the empty seats in the Lyric meant a financial loss for the past week. 45 Furthermore, the Lyric management, as well as that of the Grand, was apprehensive about the long term effects the war would have on their business. J. Herman Thuman of the Enquirer echoed their anxiety. He wrote that "the regular theatergoer is following a habit which can easily be broken should a few weeks pass by without his attendance at a theater." 46 Thuman theorized that the only remedy for this malady was for the legitimate theaters to offer "productions of quality." The burlesque and "pop" vaudeville houses did not cater to what Thuman called "the better element of patrons" who were involved in war work and, as a result, were not ailing from poor attendance. 47

Hoping to recoup from the previous week's losses, the Lyric

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
debuted the Shubert musical "Maytime." Prospects for success were high. "Maytime," with book and lyrics by Rita Johnson Young and music by Sigmund Romberg, had been playing for two years in New York and was greeted by a large Sunday night audience who expected the play to live up to its reputation. Also in the house that evening was Jacob J. Shubert, the Shubert brother who had been in charge of the original Broadway production. After viewing the show and gauging the public's reaction to it, Shubert realized that "Maytime" was in trouble. The critics shared Shubert's appraisal and let their feelings be known in the Monday editions. In their most stringent attack yet, the journals concentrated their invectives against the actors. The Enquirer blasted the performers as being "an incompetent aggregation of players," while the Post accused the actors of being "unfitted to the frock." Citizens who read the Commercial Tribune found its theater section damning the production for its lack of good singing voices and its uniformly unattractive chorus line. The Times Star reviewer called the production "an insult to Cincinnati." Even though the music was characterized as "lovely" and "charming" and the four act story of unrequited love was given the critical blessing of the reviews, "Maytime"

48 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 324; Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 30, 1918.

49 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Sept. 30, 1918.

50 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Sept. 30, 1918.

51 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 30, 1918.
could not overcome the extreme weakness of the cast. Before leaving
the city, Shubert spoke to the press about the serious shortage of bag-
gage cars and the growing use of females in place of men in legitimate
productions, but he left no hint as to what he intended to do about "May-
time." The mystery did not last long as Shubert ordered "Maytime" to
join him in New York as soon as it closed on Saturday, October 5. 52
There a major overhauling of the company took place before it was sent
out on tour again. This action, however, came too late to prevent the
Lyric from experiencing its second straight box office disaster.

The Lyric was not the only theater in town confronted with a weak
show. The Keith also faced rough going the week of September 29. Al-
though their playbills were not ready for Sunday's opening, the Keith had
to go on with their "uneventful" show. 53 Their main draw consisted of
the Rigoletto Brothers, who were, oddly enough, real brothers. To-
gether professionally for thirty-five years, Charles and Henry Rigoletto
did several bits of acrobatics, art posing, juggling, and magic. 54 Cred-
ited with being the best on a "not so good" bill, the Rigoletto Brothers
were supported by a singing sister act, a solo vocalist, a comedy team,
a bicyclist, a singing-and-comedy duo, a xylophonist, and a bag punch-
ing demonstration. 55

52 Variety, Oct. 4, 1918.
53 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 30, 1918.
54 Laurie, Vaudeville, 153.
55 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 30, 1918.
Maude Earl, "the Vocal Verdict," won the accolade of "pleasing" in her performance of classical and popular songs. The Four Haley Sisters, Grace, Bernice, Mabel, and Lucille, were a leading female quartet in vaudeville, but this week they only received passing notice. A mixture of music and jokes was attempted by Jack Conley and Margaret Webb in their "A Tangle or Tuneful Fun." Labeled as "hopeless" by the Times Star, Conley and Webb were far less successful than was the duo of Phil Kelly and Joe Galvin. Their turn consisted of an ethnic skit entitled "The Actor and the Italian." Galvin, as the "wop" character, stirred up many laughs. Elmer El Cleve played a xylophone in his "A Bit O' Scotch" routine. The "dumb" acts for the week were Harry and Harriet Seeback, in "Fun in a Gymnasium," and Charlie Ahern, a stunt bicyclist. The Seebacks were champion bag-punchers and, during this time when such activity was a major method of home exercise, they were a major attraction for many years. Stars of two-wheel comedy antics, Ahern and his "men with the funny wheels" were to close the bill, but train troubles delayed their arrival until Monday, September 30. Despite the varied program and martial advertising, "a beauty barrage and amusement attack," the absence of any first-rate headline act was primarily responsible for the Keith's poor showing that week.

Rare as it was, the Empress succeeded where the Keith faltered.

56 Laurie, Vaudeville, 76.
57 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 30, 1918.
58 Laurie, Vaudeville, 33.
For the week of September 29, the Empress, not known for "star" attractions, presented one of vaudeville's outstanding dialect storytellers, Frank Bush. Although he had been a star for years, Bush remained a top entertainer by rewriting his act each season. He had begun as a "jew comic" in 1876 and, as the years passed, he mastered numerous dialects. On stage, Bush embellished his tales with these vocal characterizations. The success he achieved during the course of his twenty minute performance, the time allotted a star, was due to his ability in making each member of the audience feel as though he alone was the object of Bush's attention.

The sketch "Why Men Go Wrong" attacked women reformers of the day and was meant to be the kind of playlet that would "make wives laugh." This "sermon" was criticized by the Enquirer, however, for being unfit for children. George Schlindler, who referred to his mouth organ as a "juvenile orchestra," Vivian and Nagle, who provided the show with "melody and harmonics," James and Parson, who played "jazz that's jazz," and Maurice and Artaine, who performed acrobatics, completed the bill, but they were eclipsed by Frank Bush.

"Million Dollar Dolls" was the Olympic's draw for the week. It featured Cliff Bragdon as the principal comic and Ede Mae as the "prima donna." The notable novelties of the show included three musical

59 Ibid., 30; Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 30, 1918.
60 Cincinnati Post, Sept. 30, 1918; Smith, Vaudevillians, 85.
61 Cincinnati Enquirer, Sept. 30, 1918.
numbers: "Lady Nicotine," "Ragtime Flower Girl," and "Girl of My Dreams." The "shapely girls" of the chorus also presented "Work or Fight," a patriotic crowdpleaser that included drill maneuvers. All in all, the reviewers felt that "Million Dollar Dolls" was another example of the improving quality of Olympic burlesque.

The Grand Opera House, a month behind the other theaters, prepared to begin its season on Sunday, October 6, with "Tillie," a dramatization of Helen Martin's successful novel Tillie, A Mennonite Maid. The show, a Klaw & Erlanger production, featured "dainty and charming" Patricia Collinge. Primarily known for her portrayal of "Pollyanna," Collinge was an up-and-coming star. To counter her appeal among men, the Lyric booked the popular vaudeville star Jack Norworth and his "Odds and Ends of 1917" musical revue. Norworth, husband of superstar Nora Bayes, was a noted matinee idol and a war of the sexes was expected between the ingenue Collinge and the handsome Norworth. Such a box office battle never materialized. On October 5, the theaters of Cincinnati, motion picture as well as live entertainment, were ordered closed by city health officials due to the rapidly spreading Spanish influenza epidemic. 

The health hazard posed by this exotic disease had been growing throughout the nation for several weeks. Although doctors were baffled by its causes, some imaginative patriots believed that the influenza germs had been introduced by German spies brought to American shores.

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62 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 30, 1918.
by U-boats. While this was mere conjecture, the one certainty about the Spanish influenza was that it was highly contagious. Knowing this, many medical officials realized that the increased mobility brought on by the war had influenced the development and, subsequent, spread of the virus. Those hardest hit by the outbreak were those between the ages of twenty and forty. The scourge was so severe that it caused the nation’s mortality rate to be fifty times larger than usual. The only advice doctors could give frightened citizens was to stay out of crowded places and to avoid physical contact with people. By October, many eastern urban centers, such as Boston, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Washington, had placed a ban on most public gatherings. The Broadway district in New York was not shut down, but the curtain times of the different theaters were staggered in order to avoid congestion on the streetcars.

Cincinnati’s reaction to the crisis was similar to that of other large cities. The closing order of Health Officer Oscar M. Craven halted operation of the theaters until further notice starting on Sunday, October 6. Many other emergency measures were also taken: schools and churches were closed, barbers and elevator operators had to wear facial masks, workers were encouraged to bring their lunches from home in order to minimize the noontime crowding in downtown eating

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64 Ibid., 196.
65 Cincinnati Enquirer, Oct. 20, 1918.
Suggestions for further anti-flu action included flushing city streets every night with a powerful disinfectant, adding a few gallons of formaldehyde to the contents of sprinkling carts that were used in settling the dust during the day, having citizens gargle with a solution of sterilized water and one-and-a-fourth grains of quinine, and passing a city ordinance making it unlawful for theaters to admit persons afflicted with any communicable disease. All of these actions taken or suggestions given were in response to a situation where scores of new cases were being reported daily. On October 9 some 50 cases were received at city hospitals, but by October 19 some 465 victims were discovered. The disease and the pneumonia that accompanied it lessened its grip on the community in early November only after claiming the lives of 984 people. As high as it was, Cincinnati's average of 2.4 per cent deaths per 1,000 afflicted was far lower than most urban areas in the east.

The theaters remained empty for nearly six weeks. This was the longest compulsory shut down since 1912 when twelve theaters, primarily "nickelodeons," were closed for being fire hazards.

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., Oct. 19, 1918.
68 Ibid., Oct. 9, 1918.
69 Ibid., Nov. 16, 1918.
70 Ibid.
71 Miller, Boss Cox's Cincinnati, 220.
managers fought the Board of Health ruling, but to no avail. As each week without business ended, the managers optimistically anticipated the lifting of the ban by the next week. To add to their woes, reports reached the managers that once Chicago reopened its theaters attendance had sagged behind pre-epidemic standards. Chicago had found that many patrons were still frightened of being in close proximity to masses of people. This lingering fear, if it struck Cincinnati once the "all clear" signal was given, would worsen an already bleak financial picture. The autumn months were normally a banner time for the theaters. With no income for October and the first two weeks of November, however, the entire season's profit potential was in jeopardy. The estimated loss for the thirty-seven days the ban was in effect came to $135,000. The chances for making this up before the season ended in May of 1919 were slim. In addition, the city was hurt by the unemployment such a closure created among the 190 employees of the live entertainment theaters, as well as the auxiliary personnel who earned a part of their living from the theaters. The Stage Employees' Union and the Musicians Union had even petitioned the Board of Health to lift the closing order as soon as possible.

72 Variety, Oct. 11, 18, 25, Nov. 1, 6, 1918.
73 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 10, 1918.
74 Ibid., Nov. 17, 1918.
75 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 9, 1918.
76 Ibid.
Concerned about the theater's problems, the Enquirer's J. Herman Thuman tried to use his weekly column in such a way as to increase confidence in the theater's ability to entertain and divert. He insisted that in the wake of the wars against the Spanish flu and the German Kaiser people needed amusement. As the theater's buoyant spokesman, Thuman declared that "the idea that entertainment is a matter of indolence, wasteful luxury or even badly directed taste is gone - gone forever with such dreams as German invincibility and 25¢ butter." 77

Thuman's campaign to restore confidence helped in re-establishing the theater as a viable industry that contributed to the city's welfare by providing both a needed service and needed employment.

The resumption of the season took place when the quarantine was lifted on Tuesday, November 12. Since the Grand and Keith could not be ready with their new shows until Wednesday, and the Lyric and Empress did not plan to resume their regular season until Sunday, the Olympic had the honor of being the first theater to reopen its doors. The management was so anxious to sell tickets that it presented "The Maids of America" at a half hour past midnight, Tuesday morning. 78

The Olympic was able to accomplish this sudden opening by rushing the performers, scenery, and costumes from Dayton, Ohio, where they had just finished a week's run. One of burlesque's most prominent comics, Al. K. Hall, was featured in the show. Hall, who used

77 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 3, 1918.

78 Ibid., Nov. 12, 1918; Variety, Nov. 15, 1918.
his middle initial in order to make his name synonymous with intoxicating beverages, was joined by another well known funnyman, Bobby Barry. Although "Maids of America" marked Barry's last appearance in burlesque, his teaming with Hall made the show memorable for the large, noisy crowd that filled the Olympic in the wee hours of the morning to celebrate the return of live entertainment. 79

The Grand Opera House finally began its season of stage presentations on Wednesday, November 13, with the popular farce "Twin Beds." In its fourth engagement at the Grand, "Twin Beds" was billed as "the Ben-Hur of comedy." 80 The original 1912 production had made a star of Madge Kennedy and this latest edition was attempting to do the same for Lois Bolton. The plot revolved around a young married couple who get tangled up in a series of misadventures with an Italian singer and his "amazonian" wife. Always exploiting every comic opportunity, "Twin Beds" was a solid choice with which to premiere manager John Havlin's new season. With the best seats selling at $1.50 for the evening shows and $1.00 for the Wednesday and Saturday matinees, the Grand could undersell the Lyric. Even with this advantage, however, the Grand only managed to do "average business" during its first week. 82

79 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 233; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 12, 1918.
80 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 12, 1918.
82 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 17, 1918.
Big-time vaudeville picked up at the Keith on Wednesday afternoon. Deprived of offering the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt because of the length of the closing order, the new bill showcased the talents of "Princess Radjah." Starting as a "cooch" dancer at New York's Coney Island before the century changed, Radjah became a "snake charmer" at the bidding of Willie Hammerstein, the operator of Hammerstein's Victoria Theater on Broadway. By 1918, her act was a series of "oriental fantasies" that climaxed with her interpretation of Cleopatra. As fortune would have it, the vamping Queen of the Nile was actually bitten by her asp on the final performance of the week.

Due to join the Princess as the headline act was Broadway star Victor Moore. The sudden reopening of the Keith found Moore already engaged on another Keith stage. This forced Ned Hastings, the manager, to make do with the artists on hand. The first act that greeted Keith patrons was "Gerard's Monkeys." This menagerie of mirth makers was followed by Ben Deely and Company in his classic comedy caper "The New Bell Boy." To follow this exhibition of pratfalls was the aerialist act of Sabini La Pearl. After a slow start, La Pearl managed to complete his display of might and music with style and energy.

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83 Cincinnati Times Star, Sept. 21, 1918.
84 Laurie, Vaudeville, 392-396; Variety, Sept. 20, 1918.
85 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 23, 1918.
86 Ibid., Nov. 13, 1918.
87 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 14, 1918.
Winning high praise was the duo of Spencer and Williams.\textsuperscript{88} This man and woman pairing offered humor and harmonizing. The solo act of Francis Kennedy was composed of banter and song. The abbreviated bill of seven acts closed with a gymnastic display done by the Wilson Aubrey Trio. Unfortunately, this Keith offering was not the well balanced program that a patron expected when at a Keith theater. Normally, the bill was very carefully assembled and contrived.\textsuperscript{89} The extraordinary situation of a mid-week opening brought about by the end of influenza epidemic necessitated the formation of a show comprised of any seven acts that were available. Princess Radjah and her fellow travelers were the best the Keith could muster on such short notice.

The Wednesday evening performance at the Keith, Grand, and Olympic vied for the public’s attention with an unusual competitor, the city’s churches. The "war to end all wars" had been brought to a close on Monday, November 11. That evening Fountain Square had played host to thousands of cheerful people celebrating the war’s end. The honking of horns, the blast of whistles, the screaming of sirens, the banging of tin pans, all contributed to the festive occasion.\textsuperscript{90} Wednesday, November 13, however, was set aside for more solemn thanksgiving ceremonies. That evening many churches throughout the city

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89}McLean, American Vaudeville, 93.

\textsuperscript{90}Dick Perry, \textit{Was You Ever in Zinzinnati?} (Garden City, New York, 1966), 131.
opened for services of praise to the Almighty for having brought the war to a successful conclusion. 91 To many citizens, the entertainment offered by secular theaters paled in importance next to the need to celebrate God's gift of victory. The managers, while thankful the war and the epidemic were over, hoped for a speedy return to "normalcy."

The post-war era of entertainment came to the city on Sunday, November 17. For the first time since the season had begun in September, the stages of all five theaters were filled with entertainers working hard to earn the favor of Cincinnati. The Lyric offered, for the seventh time, the Hawaiian romance "The Bird of Paradise." The play had originally been slated for October, but the influenza crisis had forced a postponement. 92 Finally, with smoking volcano and waving palmtrees, the production opened to a full house. The cast was headed by Florence Rockwell performing the role of "Princess Luana" who sacrifices her life for her American lover. The play's popularity had already helped Laurette Taylor and Lenore Ulric to stardom and the large audiences at the Lyric attested to its continued success as a box office attraction. 93 Though far from glowing, the reviews found little to be negative about and united in giving the actors a vote of confidence. The *Enquirer* even spoke highly of the job done by supporting actress

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91 *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Nov. 13, 1918.

92 *Cincinnati Times Star*, Nov. 2, 1918.

93 *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Nov. 17, 1918; *Cincinnati Post*, Nov. 18, 1918.
Spring Byington. "The Bird of Paradise," escapist drama of the first order, was a sure fire draw even if it was a bit of old-hat.

Far more pleasing to the press was the Grand’s production of Cohan & Harris’ "Going Up." This long-running musical comedy featured songs by Louis Hirsch and lyrics by Otto Harbach. Although it did not claim to have the original New York cast, "Going Up" was promoted as "the most distinctive musical show in the Cosmic Universe." Based on the play "The Aviator," this version was applauded for having a plot that followed the original narrative, for possessing a capable, if not unknown, company, and for displaying "ankles, sparkling music, and lingerie." The farce did well in attracting customers throughout the week and was held over for the Sunday, November 24, performance because the Grand’s next show could not arrive until Monday.

"A Victory Vaudeville" played the Keith the week of November 17 with a bill "which has the kick of gunpowder and the smash of TNT." The hand balancing artistry of Leo Zarrell opened the program. This was followed by the toe dancing of Mazie King. An Irish act, "The

94 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 18, 1918.
95 Garff B. Wilson, Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre From Ye Bare and Ye Cubb to Hair (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1973), 335.
96 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 17, 1918.
97 Bordman, American Musical, 328; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 18, 1918.
98 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 17, 1918.
Minstrel of Kerry," was performed by Larry Reilly, who at one point in his career worked with Gracie Allen in the Three Allen Sisters act. A real favorite that week was A. Robins' "the walking music store." Strolling on stage dressed in a green suit, coat with long tails, hat with feather, and a red tie, Robins pulled various musical instruments, a musical stand, and a campstool out of his coat. Being a ventriloquist of musical instruments, he made it appear that he could play the instruments that he produced out of his greatcoat. Numerous encores were accorded Robins before he vacated the stage. The spotlight then fell on one of the greatest song-and-dance teams in vaudeville, Pat Rooney and his wife, Marion Bent. Known for his Irish clog to the tune of "The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady," Rooney was one of the first Irish comics to be recognized as a star. Even though they were called "favorites among favorites" and given twenty minutes on stage, Rooney and Bent were not the headline act. That honor fell to a posing exhibition known as "Art Inspired by War." Several leading Liberty Loan posters from the late war were reproduced on the stage by appropriately dressed models. The display was said to have been personally devised by A. Paul Keith, son of the founder of the Keith Circuit, and E.

99 Laurie, Vaudeville, 150.
100 Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 161; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 18, 1918.
101 Laurie, Vaudeville, 319.
102 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 18, 1918.
F. Albee, the reigning tsar of the two-a-day. Called "unique" and "clever," "Art Inspired by War" was warmly received by the audience. In fact, the entire bill proved to be popular with the public.

The Empress returned to action with a program provided by the Chicago office of the Pantages Circuit. The management team of Clarke and Tighe had used the extended layoff caused by the Health Board's ban to form an alliance with a vaudeville agency that could provide a better grade of artist than Sullivan & Considine. The Commercial Tribune felt that the bill of November 17 was the best ever and all four journals agreed that the headline act, the Four Radium Models, was superb. Advertised as "a Parisian Novelty Posing Display," the Four Radium Models executed a series of poses based on famous works of sculpture and were described as "the acme of perfection" and "artistic."

The remaining acts, Harry Seibert Smith in the comedy-drama "Thou Shalt Not Kill," James Dunn, mimic artist, Roland and Ray, singing comics, La Pearl and Blondell, a comedy team, and Krämen and Cross, marvels of athletic skills, gave the Empress a varied offering of variety performers. Even though La Pearl and Blondell did

103 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 18, 1918.

104 Variety, Nov. 22, 1918.

105 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 18, 1918.

106 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 17, 18, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 18, 1918.
not arrive in time for the Sunday matinee, the act that replaced them, Mrs. Robert Stickney and her canine show, maintained the bill's overall strength. In addition to the show's inherent quality, Tighe used the recent Armistice to begin the proceedings on a patriotic note. As Tighe delivered a memorial to the Allied war dead, spotlights caught portraits of Generals Pershing and Joffre placed on either side of the stage and the theater's flag at half mast. When finished speaking, he invited the audience to sing "America" and the national anthem. The flag was slowly raised to full mast as the capacity crowd sang "The Star Spangled Banner." The six acts of vaudeville followed this chauvinistic display. Tighe again employed love of country on Monday evening when Mrs. Nellie Sullivan, a prominent Cincinnati club matron, sang a number of patriotic songs. On both occasions, Tighe heightened the audience's enjoyment by making use of current events and common emotions.

The most popular show yet to occupy the Olympic was in residence the week of November 17. "Cheer Up, America" had a "breezy style" that "lived up to its title." The principal comedians were Edward Lambert, whose Yiddish character "Jacob Pearlstone" proved to be quite funny, and Frankie Niblo, who as a female humorist did "fairly

107 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 18, 1918.
108 Ibid.
109 Cincinnati Post, Nov. 18, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 18, 1918.
well at times."\textsuperscript{110} As was normal in burlesque, the show contained a travesty. In this case, the scene "Miserere" was taken from Verdi's "Il trovatore."\textsuperscript{111} "The Market Place of Bagdad" gave the chorus a chance to showcase their feminine charms. "Cheer Up, America" was enthusiastically received by the burlesque patrons of the city.

For those Cincinnatians who were attracted to both the theater and classical music, the concerts of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra presented a potential conflict. This was easily avoided, however, by careful scheduling. Since the theater attractions were in town for a week, citizens could attend the symphony one evening and the theater another. This kind of arrangement was necessary the week of November 17 as the great violinist Jascha Heifetz was to be in concert at the Emery Auditorium on November 20. Referred to as "the twentieth century Paganini," Heifetz was expected to draw a large and appreciative audience.\textsuperscript{112} With prices ranging from 50c to $2.00, hearing the famous Heifetz cost no more than a ticket to "The Bird of Paradise," "Going Up," or the vaudeville offering at the Keith.\textsuperscript{113} The expectations of a large house proved to be correct as Heifetz filled the Emery.

November 24 saw the Cincinnati premiere of a play that had won the 1917 Columbia University Pulitzer Prize. This critical success was

\textsuperscript{110}Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 18, 1918.
\textsuperscript{111}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., Nov. 17, 1918.
\textsuperscript{113}Ibid.
Jesse Lynch Williams' sophisticated comedy "Why Marry?" A Selwyn production, "Why Marry?" was the Lyric's most critically acclaimed offering yet. The plot dealt with an issue that was hotly debated at the time: does marriage handicap a gifted man? The dialogue was clever, witty, wise, and lively. The reviewers had unanimous praise for a play that the Times Star called "high class, pungent theatrical stuff." The Post credited the show with having "a lot of satire and broad philosophy," while the Commercial Tribune was grateful that it was "not pedagogical." The warmest words were found in the Enquirer as "Why Marry?" and its playwright were favorably compared to "Man and Superman" and its genius of a creator, George Bernard Shaw. The performing company, the original New York cast, was also given bravos for its superb handling of the well written script. Indeed, "Why Marry?" was as heartily received by the public as it was by the press.

Across Vine Street, the Grand countered "Why Marry?" with the Klaw & Erlanger production of "The Rainbow Girl," a musical comedy with songs by Louis Hirsch and lyrics by Rennold Wolf. Compared to its competition, "The Rainbow Girl" was met by a cool reception.

114 Burns Mantle and Garrison P. Sherwood, eds., The Best Plays of 1909-1919 and the Year Book of the Drama in America (New York, 1945), ix; Wilson, Three Hundred Years, 329.

115 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 25, 1918.

116 Cincinnati Post, Nov. 25, 1918; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 25, 1918.

117 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 25, 1918.
Words like "agreeable," "adequate," "ordinary," and "conventional" were used by the critics in reviewing this story of an actress who falls in love with an English lord.\(^{118}\) The complication in the romance occurs when the aristocrat learns that his ardent admirer is actually the niece of his butler. What positive remarks that were given to this class conscious caper went to comedian Billy Van, who had been in burlesque and vaudeville before making the grade of musical comedy, Beth Lydy, whose voice enhanced the title role, and Sydney Greenstreet, whose portrayal of the "pompous" and "sanctimonial" butler gave added distinction to the cast.\(^ {119}\) "The Rainbow Girl" was enjoyable to an audience, but as a literary work it could not compete with "Why Marry?"

The last week in November found the Keith presenting a bill that included a number of old favorites. As the headliner, Herman Timberg appeared in "The Viol-Inn," a "big act" that was complete with pretty girls, fancy costumes, elaborate scenery, special music, flashy dancing, and a comic monologue.\(^ {120}\) Although Timberg and his five violin girls were in the featured spot, they were seriously challenged by another act that was well known in vaudeville circles. Gus Van and Joe Schenck were the leading two-man singing act in vaudeville and among

\(^{118}\) Ibid., Nov. 26, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 26, 1918; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 26, 1918; Bordman, *American Musical Theatre*, 328.

\(^{119}\) Burton, *In Memorium*, 77; Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 26, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 26, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 26, 1918.

\(^{120}\) Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 25, 1918; Burns, *Living It Up*, 235; Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 232.
the highest paid of any artists. Van, a heavy set, black haired baritone, was noted for dialect singing and Schenck, slim, blond, and blue-eyed, was famous for his tenor voice that was reputed to reach higher notes than Caruso. As a pair, their ability to bring down a house was legendary. During the war they had belted out many a patriotic air and had brought tears to the public's eyes with their emotional rendering of heart-throbbing melodies. Van and Schenck, frequent performers at New York's Palace Theater, also evoked laughter with their constant stream of funny patter. According to witnesses, the team, "just about the most entertaining singing comedians on the Keith vaudeville stage," "electrified" the audience with their "bright and snappy program." There was little doubt that Van and Schenck lived up to their billing of being the "pennant winning battery of songland."

J. C. Nugent, an old-timer who started his career in medicine shows, appeared in a sketch entitled "The Meal Hound." While the Commercial Tribune thought the skit was "too old and well-known," the other critics reported that Nugent, a "droll humorist," was still getting a large number of laughs. The "futuristic dancing" of Harold Du Kane, the "breezy bits of mirth and melody" of Harry and

121 Laurie, Vaudeville, 80, 254.
122 Churchill, Over Here, 105; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 204.
123 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 25, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 25, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 25, 1918.
124 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 25, 1918; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 25, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Nov. 25, 1918.
Anna Seymour, the "clever little mimicry" of La Petite Mignon, the "ambidextrous juggling" of the Three Maxims, and the "remarkable exhibition of intelligence" of Teschow's Felines rounded out a bill that the Times Star called "the best in a long, long time." 125

The six acts presented at the Empress the week of November 24 were generally regarded as a match for the Keith, if not in quantity or fame, at least in quality. As with the previous week, Pat Tighe, manager, personally opened the show. This time his appeal was for any old keys that the audience might be willing to part with. Tighe explained that the keys would be sold as scrap metal by the Stage Women's War Relief Committee and the proceeds would go for providing Christmas dinner for the soldiers still in Europe. 126 With the patriotic plea over, the show began with Toto, a contortionist, who was characterized as having "more twists in his body than a street in Boston." 127 Toto was followed by Willie Missen who offered comedy, dancing, and juggling. Elizabeth Nelson and the Barry Brothers presented a little vaudeville show of their own. "Outclassed," a scene dealing with the efforts of a mother to prevent her daughter from making a grievous error, featured Mattie Choate and Company. Although its theme was "serious," it was actually a satire of burlesque. 128 The singing team of Hager and

125 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 25, 1918.
126 Ibid.
127 Cincinnati Enquirer, Nov. 25, 1918.
128 Ibid.
Sullivan, while no Van and Schenck, did go over big with the Empress audience. 129 These two young men were so well liked that they earned several encores. This "solid" bill concluded with the comedy antics of the Gordon Brothers and Fighting Bob, their "fighting kangaroo." 130

From Toto, the "human frog," to Fighting Bob, a "punch hitter," the Empress gave their customers a real "cheer-em-up show." 131

The musical comedy trend at the Olympic continued the week of November 24 with "The Burlesque Wonder Show." The story involved a Swiss watch maker, played by George P. Murphy, who has marital difficulties. Murphy, one of burlesque's foremost German-dialect comics, stepped out of his character role several times in order to present specialty numbers. 132 One such specialty was entitled "My Wife Won't Let Me." This diversion from the storyline happened frequently throughout the show. Lulla Coates, a featured female, did a specialty number in blackface that had no relation to the plot. Despite the wandering nature of the narrative, "The Burlesque Wonder Show," a "meritorious performance," contained enough of the musical comedy idioms to lend further credence to the Columbia Wheel's legitimatizing of burlesque. 133

The first three months of the 1918-1919 season had seen Cincinnati's

129 Ibid.
130 Cincinnati Times Star, Nov. 25, 1918.
131 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 25, 1918.
132 Ibid.; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 34.
133 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Nov. 25, 1918.
live entertainment theaters face the severe difficulty of the Spanish influenza epidemic and the problems of a police strike, a possible tax increase and, for some, poor attendance. The vaudeville and burlesque theaters had been more successful than the legitimate playhouses, but this was a small comfort to Hastings of the Keith, Tighe of the Empress, and Hedges of the Olympic. These managers simply joined Heuck of the Lyric and Havlin of the Grand in counting their losses. With strong attractions, good health, clear weather, and continued prosperity, the theaters hoped to see a vast improvement in box office sales during the next three months of the season.
As the month of December opened, the newspaper headlines spoke of chaos in defeated Germany, turmoil in revolutionary Russia, and confusion among the victorious Allies. Cincinnatians who wished to flee from these harbingers of change and discord could find refuge in the city's amusement houses. Comedy, with its ability to make an audience forget its troubles, was the drawing card at the theaters as the final month of a bloody and unsettling year got under way.

The Lyric, whose offering was "Business Before Pleasure," got a headstart over the Grand on Sunday, December 1, as the latter's new presentation could not arrive until Monday. "Business Before Pleasure" was the latest in a series of plays that featured "Abe Potash" and "Mawruss Pearlmutter," two "genial East Side Hebrews." Created by Montague Glass, this new episode moved the "argumentative partners" out of the garment industry and into the film-producing business. The local drama critics, with few reservations, approved of the setting change. The Enquirer, however, felt that the play was little more than a "cheap

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2 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 2, 1918.
melodrama." The Times Star agreed that the elements of melodrama detracted from the comedy in the piece. The casting of Gus Yorke as "Potash" and Robert Leonard as "Pearlmutter" was given high marks by three of the dailies, but the Enquirer felt that Leonard was no more than "adequate" and that the entire company was only "mediocre." Nevertheless, the four reviewers spoke highly of its ability to "cause laughter" and to "inspire the most in mirth." "Business Before Pleasure," a Broadway success that ran for two years, was the kind of attraction that was certain to sell tickets.

Keith's premiere bill for December was promoted as a "Peace Jubilee" and featured ten acts rather than the usual eight. Bert and Betty Wheeler opened the show with a pantomime entitled "Troubles of a Journey Bus." Weber and Ridnor followed with a dance routine. The "amusing" dog impersonations of "animal actor" Alfred Latell preceded the piano virtuosity of Alexander MacFayden, one of vaudeville's leading keyboard specialists. The next act was the team of Ben and Hazel Mann.

3 Ibid.
4 Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 2, 1918.
6 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 2, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 2, 1918.
7 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 1, 1918; Blum, Pictorial History, 163.
8 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 1, 1918.
9 Ibid., Dec. 2, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 2, 1918; Laurie, Vaudeville, 68.
As unusual as it was, Hazel was the "straight" part of this comic twosome. The strength of Keith's line-up followed with the performances of Bert Swor, a blackface monologist who sometimes worked as a female impersonator; Arthur Havel, a former burlesque comic; and Miss Juliet, a mimic who ranked among vaudeville's finest. These three turns won critical acceptance as did the Ishikawa Brothers, the hand balancing act that ended the show. The only portion of this "program of quality" that received failing notices was "Some Bride," a musical comedy in three scenes that was accused of being "without continuity of thought" and "rather ordinary." Despite this one weak spot, Keith's offering for the week of December 1 contained enough favorites to assure steady patronage.

The headline feature at the Empress that same week was the tabloid musical comedy "The Farmerettes." While given credit by some critics for its "good tunes" and "clever songs," the Enquirer's final judgement was that the humor was "antique" and the story "conventional." "The Kidnaper," a dramatic playlet ignored by three of the reviewers, was condemned by the Enquirer because it "lacked punch." The other

10 Laurie, Vaudeville, 230.
11 Ibid., 88, 100, 142, 191; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 233.
14 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 2, 1918.
acts included Violet and Clarke, an acrobatic partnership, Chester Gruber, a ventriloquist who worked with several manikins, Stickney's dog and pony show, a last-minute replacement act, and McCarver and Robinson, two blackface comedians who put over "hurricane dancing that caught on." For at least the first week in December, the Empress' variety show could not match Keith's for quality or quantity.

The "Big Burlesque Review" at the Olympic the week of December 1 was yet another in a series of burlesque productions built around a plot. In this instance, the story was set in Bagdad some 2,000 years ago. The keeper of the Caliph's harem was Harry K. Morton, a comic who would soon graduate to vaudeville and who was described as being "good," a "finished comedian," and "the comedy of the piece." The performance of Zella Russell, the leading lady, was said to be "as good as will be met on the vaudeville stage" and the chorus of "slaves" was rated "up to snuff" and "fair." After many weeks of attractions that won praise for their scenery and costumes, the "Big Burlesque Review" earned its favorable comments for the talent that actually put on the show.

The Grand's first December production, "Hitchy-Koo of 1918," made its debut on Monday, December 2. It starred Raymond Hitchcock, a


16 Ibid.; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 2, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 2, 1918; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 103.

wiry comic with a rasping voice who began producing his own revues in 1917. The New York cast of his 1918 version included Irene Bordoni and Leon Errol, but neither of these stars was in the current road company. The production was built around Hitchcock's talents and such was his reputation that great things were expected. The critical columns in Tuesday's editions, however, reflected severe disappointment in the final product. The reviews noted that the evening had been filled with "old jokes," "mediocre lines," and "dull moments." As "disappointing" as "Hitchy-Koo of 1918" was, it did introduce Ray Dooley, a comedienne the Enquirer claimed was a "veritable whirlwind." The critics admitted that Hitchcock was still a funny man, but concluded that the revue as a whole was not as entertaining as they had been led to believe it would be. Hitchcock's reaction to the reviews was swift as he declared that "Cincinnati doesn't appreciate my show and this will be the last time I play here."

After a week with a show that the reviewers disliked, the Grand was

18 Daniel Blum, Great Stars of the American Stage (New York, 1952), 51.

19 Blum, Pictorial History, 173; Burton, In Memorium, 71.


23 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 8, 1918.
fortunate to have an attraction opening on December 8 that caused the critics to rave. Entitled "The Little Teacher," the play was greeted by such superlatives as "rare," "excellent," "lovable," and "delightful." The plot revolved around the efforts of a teacher to remove two children from a hostile environment. The Enquirer, while admitting it was not "great drama," felt that it was written with "tenderness" and "charm." The other theatrical columns echoed those sentiments and paid glowing tributes to Mary Ryan, the actress who played the title role. The Commercial Tribune, in agreement with its morning rival, declared that it was the best drama to play the city for quite some time.

Joining Ryan were most of the other members of the original Broadway company. One notable cast change was the dropping of Edward G. Robinson. Despite Robinson's absence, "The Little Teacher" was uniformly praised and the public was urged to see the show.

The week of December 8 saw the Lyric stay with "Business Before Pleasure." Since Potash and Pearlmutter were still in town, legitimate patrons were given a choice between ethnic humor and sentimental drama. Both selections came recommended and, in the midst of a new surge of Spanish influenza cases, the public could only be coaxed into the theaters.

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24 Ibid., Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 9, 1918.

25 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918.

26 Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 9, 1918.

27 Blum, Pictorial History, 171.
if the prospects for quality entertainment were high. 28 The public schools were closed again and the Health Board banned children under sixteen from attending the theaters. 29 Recent history seemed to be repeating itself, but the managers were encouraged by the lines that formed in front of theater box offices early in the week. 30 Furthermore, the war was over and, hopefully, this resurgence of the flu would soon pass.

The optimistic outlook for the week of December 8 was strengthened by the talent on display at the Keith. Since the railroads were back on their pre-war schedules, the Keith raised the curtain on a bill that "hasn't a weak spot" at its normal times of 2:15 and 8:15 daily. 31 The "piece de resistance" of the show was "An American Ace," a patriotic melodrama that recreated the Western Front with such realism that it was said to be "a hair-raiser" that "smells with powder of bursting shells, grenades and air bombs." 32 Taylor Grenville, an English actor/producer, and Laura Pierpont were featured in this playlet that included an aerial "dogfight" and a simulation of trench warfare. 33 The press was unanimous in its praise for the piece as it was for the entire program.

28 Variety, Dec. 6, 1918.
30 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 9, 1918.
31 Ibid., Dec. 8, 9, 1913.
32 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 9, 1918.
33 Laurie, Vaudeville, 232.
The remaining acts included Helene Jackley in a "sensational" aerial exhibition, the Caîtes Brothers in an "elite" dancing routine, Herbert Clifton in a female impersonation act, William Seabury and Jeanette Hackett in a singing and dancing routine, Lillian Shaw in a comedy turn that utilized her skill as a dialect comedienne, and Claude and Fanny Usher in their dramatic sketch "Fagan's Decision." 34

The Empress' array of acts for the week of December 8 was noted for its variety. The wide range of offerings began prior to the curtain going up. Sunday, December 8 was chosen for the debut of the Empress Symphony Orchestra. 35 This enlarged house band treated the audience to several classical selections before providing the background music for the Aerial Rooneys, a circus act that opened the show. Harry Sterling, comic, "The Mail Carrier," a humorous skit starring Benny Harrison, "The Tenor and the Bellboy," a routine performed by Weir and Temple, Herbert Brooks, an illusionist who also employed a humorous line of chatter, and "Circus Day in Georgia," a sketch built around the efforts of a Negro to learn the art of lion-taming performed by the blackface trio of Gruet, Kramer, and Gruet, rounded out a bill characterized as "a regular cracker-jack show." 36

The only show to receive divided notices the week of December 8 was

34 Ibid., 90; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 9, 1918.

35 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 9, 1918.

36 Ibid.
the "Bowery Burlesquers" at the Olympic. Frank Harcourt as "Dr. J.
Hamberger Bone," Billy Foster as "Sledgehammer Doodlebeck," and
Pam Lawrence as the leading soubrette of the company won the bless-
ings of the four theatrical columnists, but opinion was split when it
came to other aspects of the production. The Post found the chorus to
be lacking in looks and the Commercial Tribune charged that the show
"offers little that is new" and suffered from "poor lyrics and lines." 37
The Enquirer and Times Star spoke highly of the music and comedy in
"Bowery Burlesquers." 38 The mixed responses of the critics, how-
ever, seemed to have little negative impact on the Olympic's box of-
face sales. 39

The shadow of another forced closing due to the renewed activity of
the influenza virus dissipated before the opening of the new week's of-
ferings on Sunday, December 15. The Board of Health had expressed
a desire to close various business activities, including the theaters,
but Mayor John Galvin, responding to pressure from the Theatrical
Managers Association, overruled any such action. 40 J. Herman Thu-
man of the Enquirer tried to calm anxious citizens who might be con-
cerned that the theaters were not safe places to be during a flu scare.

37 Ibid.; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 9, 1918.

38 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec.
9, 1918.

39 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 9, 1918.

40 Variety, Dec. 13, 20, 1918.
He assured his readers that the five "regular" theaters were "all equipped with ventilation systems of the most improved pattern, and all in all the physical condition of Cincinnati's theatrical structures is above par."\textsuperscript{41}

The immediate impact of Thuman's reassurances was minimal as Sunday afternoon and evening crowds were characterized as "fair sized."\textsuperscript{42} In all fairness, however, the Enquirer critic's campaign on behalf of the theaters was somewhat negated by a series of attractions that were "regarded as the dullest of the year."\textsuperscript{43}

The week of December 15 was also different in that there were only four new attractions at the theaters. The Lyric, after two weeks with "Business Before Pleasure," presented motion pictures throughout the week. This left the Grand's feature, "Tiger Rose," without competition in the area of legitimate drama. A David Belasco presentation, "Tiger Rose" opened on Monday, December 16 and received compliments for the acting and the manner in which it was produced. Belasco was praised by the four drama reviewers for the stunning "realism" he incorporated into the play.\textsuperscript{44} The storm scene in the second act and the gradual dawn in the third act were two examples of the kind of realistic stage effects that made Belasco productions famous. The story, a tale of love

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Cincinnati Enquirer}, Dec. 15, 1918.

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, Dec. 16, 1918.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}

and revenge in the Canadian wilderness, was not as acclaimed as the play’s leading lady, Lenore Ulric. Of Spanish-German heritage, Miss Ulric was cast in the title role. Considering that the Cincinnati critics praised her ability to gauge "just the right degree for each emotion," claimed that she "brought unconquerable impulses to the role," thanked her for playing the character "with a variety of color," and complimented her for the "vivid and human" quality of her acting, it is no surprise that Lenore Ulric was able to use "Tiger Rose" as a stepping stone to even greater stardom. 45

Since "Tiger Rose" was not the cause of the week’s classification of "dull," the Keith had to accept part of the blame. Its vaudeville fare for the week of December 15 was headlined by "Somewhere With Pershing," a playlet taken from Jack Norworth’s musical revue "Odds and Ends of 1917." The Enquirer and Post gave it passing marks, but the Commercial Tribune faulted it for having a poor script and bad acting and the Times Star simply dismissed it as not measuring up to expectations. 46

The most popular act was Farrel Taylor and Company in "The African Duke," a blackface routine of music and old time minstrel "coon" farce. "Jed’s Vacation," a comedy sketch performed by Charley Grapewin, a former parachute jumper in a circus, provoked laughter and critical

45 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 17, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 17, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 17, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 17, 1918; Blum, Pictorial History, 163.

46 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 16, 1918.
The only other turn to receive much notice was Fink's Mules, an animal act that frequented the Palace Theater in New York. The other performers, all singers, included two soloists, Jessie Stan-dish and Frank Arnold, and the team of Bryan Lee and Mary Cranston.

The vaudeville attractions at the Empress the week of December 15 were headed by the Marco Twins. Consisting of two Irish comics, one short and the other tall, the Marco Twins evoked "storms of laughter" and were complimented by the reviewers. The other acts, Ethel and Burt Burtinos, wire cyclists, Roush and La Velle, performers in an Arizona romance, Ricky Craig, a comic who worked with a "talking machine," Gladys Vance, a dancer whose novelty was her mirror dress, and Lew Fuller, a stand-up comedian, failed to arouse much critical acclaim.

The Olympic's draw for the week of December 15, "Sporting Widows," moved away from musical comedy and toward vaudeville. Harry Cooper, the featured comic, was termed an "old reliable" and thanked for putting his lines across in "a clever manner." The trio of Wright,

47 Laurie, Vaudeville, 15.
48 Berle, Autobiography, 86.
49 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati En-quirer, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 16, 1918.
50 Ibid.
51 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 16, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 16, 1918.
Wiest, and Meyers won high praise for their singing, as did Henry Ward for his work with several manikins. Compliments were paid to the chorus for being "good looking," for wearing "striking costumes," and for having applied their cosmetics with "discrimination." The production also included patriotic finales at the end of the first and second acts. "Sporting Widows" was virtually plotless and, in this regard, was somewhat different from the previous Olympic offerings of the season.

With the holiday season rapidly approaching, the theatrical managers could be thankful that they were not the targets of a renewed drive to enforce an Ohio law banning film entertainment and baseball exhibitions on Sundays. This enforcement campaign was led by the prohibitionists of Ohio who had recently carried the state's liquor referendum by some 25,000 votes. The Associated Film Exchange of the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, along with the Ohio State Screen League, was preparing to fight this new crusade by "drys." The theatrical managers, while grateful that the statute in question exempted live performances, sympathized with their cinematic competitors. The entertainment industry, of which the theaters were merely a part, had lost a major battle to the anti-liquor forces in the November elections and now another defeat could lead toward a new wave of restrictive legislation. The theatrical managers realized that their tradition of Sunday performances

52 Ibid.; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 16, 1918.

53 Variety, Dec. 20, 1918.
might not be able to withstand such a surge of anti-entertainment hysteria. Theaters, both live and film, had to stand together on the issue of Sunday closings.

Christmas week saw the Grand presenting a Booth Tarkington tale entitled "The Country Cousin." The play told the story of an Ohio girl whose inherited wealth placed her among the high society swirl of the Long Island gentry. The fact that Tarkington used a female as his central character was attributed by the Commercial Tribune to the growth of the equal suffrage movement in the nation. Whether Tarkington's motives were so political or not, the actress who portrayed the title role, Alexandra Carlisle, was not only not an Ohioan, she was not even an American. A British star, Miss Carlisle had been with the show in New York where it had been a success. The Cincinnati production did differ from the original in that its leading man was a handsome, young actor named Alfred Lunt. While Miss Carlisle's performance was called "charming" and she was complimented for her "womanly sweetness" and sympathetic characterization, the critics were no less effusive about Mr. Lunt who was referred to as "a light comedy artist of rare qualities" and "the finest kind of actor." "The Country Cousin" was the city's first look at this six foot, brown eyed, brown haired, flexible

54 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 23, 1918.

55 Blum, Pictorial History, 163.

56 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.
voiced, gesticulating actor who would go on to become, along with his wife, Lynn Fontanne, one of the legitimate stage's outstanding stars. Although the plot was termed "pleasing" and "exceedingly well written," the Cincinnati debut of Alfred Lunt was the most noteworthy aspect of "The Country Cousin."

The Lyric's holiday week offering was an innovative musical comedy that had played for over a year in New York. With music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by the team of P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, "Oh, Boy!", one of a series of musical shows that were presented at Manhattan's Princess Theater, has come to be known as the play that inaugurated the American musical. The story was light and amusing, the music was in the popular voice range and contributed to the action, and the lyrics were clever, graceful, and wittily rhymed. In its second run at the Lyric, "Oh, Boy!", was not recognized as a hallmark production, but it was considered to be "sparkling entertainment" and "far above the ordinary." The story dealt with a couple who marry in secret because they fear an aunt's wrath. All ends well, as the aunt

57 Blum, Great Stars, 93.


59 Lerner, Street, 40; David A. Jasen, P. G. Wodehouse; A Portrait of a Master (New York, 1974), 68; David Ewen, The Story of America's Musical Theater (Philadelphia, 1961), 434; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 320.

60 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.
turns out to be a "good fellow." Although the show did not boast of any major stars, the chorus won praise for being "handsome, young, and agile" and Anna Wheaton's performance received favorable notice. To the critics, the show was highlighted by the song "Till the Clouds Roll By." Indeed, if "Oh, Boy!" were noted for nothing else, the presence of this classic Kern melody would insure its importance.

The Keith's holiday week bill was headlined by Elsa Ryan, famous for her long-running hit, "Peg o' My Heart." Miss Ryan was showcased in "Peg For Short," an Irish-dialect sketch based on her earlier success. While two of the dailies felt that her spot was the brightest on the program, the Post complained that Miss Ryan "deserved a better vehicle" and the Enquirer pronounced her material "inferior." Stuart Barnes, a monologist, was encouraged to come up with new jokes. The blackface team of Coakley and Dunlevy needed no such advice as they were the popular favorite in "Over There," a farce set in the battlefields of the Western Front. The remaining acts, Elkins, Fay, and

61 Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918.
63 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.
64 Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.
65 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.
Elkins, a singing and dancing trio, McIntosh and his Musical Maids, dancers, singers, and instrumentalists, "The Man Off the Ice Wagon," an anonymous vocalist, the Lamont Trio, wire walkers, and the Bush Brothers, a real brother act that combined acrobatics with slapstick comedy, completed a program called "delightful," "overbalanced with singing," and "average." 66

The Christmas offering at the Empress had an international flavor about it. The featured act was "Cheyenne Days," a Wild West routine in which cowboys frolicked across the stage doing rope tricks and feats of horsemanship. The mysterious Orient contributed Lee Hing Chin, a celestial novelty artist who wrote with both hands simultaneously. The highlands of Scotland were the inspiration of the Scotch Family Robinson, a kilted clan of singers, dancers, and bagpipe players. The land of the leaning tower was the musical source for the Naio Trio, Italian serenaders who were billed as "Merry Musical Men." The final two acts, W. J. Mack, an eccentric comedian, and Gladys Gillen in the comedy caper "A Slippery Duck," a tale of an outlaw outwitting the law, were of the more traditional vein of vaudeville entertainment.

The Olympic's Christmas gift to the burlesque patrons of Cincinnati was the "Bon Ton Girls." This production featured the diminutive tramp comedian Lester Allen. Allen, a veteran of minstrel shows, weighed only one hundred pounds, but his small physical presence did not prevent

66 Laurie, Vaudeville, 28-29; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 23, 1918.
him from being called "the whole show in himself." The theme of the show was a satire on the motion picture industry. This plot was not followed religiously. Allen and the second comic, John Barry, performed bits straight out of the "old school" and the chorus girls did an "exotic" routine entitled "India." The show received favorable comments for its "pretentious" scenery, "snappy" costuming, and songs described as "good and are not, as customary, drowned in wild syncopation." The Enquirer sounded the only sour note as it felt that the chorus, good looking though it was, was "lacking in vocal qualifications."

The final week of 1918 at the Grand featured "Flo-Flo." Promoted as "a facetious feast of frivolity," the show contained only the thinnest outline of a plot. The main draw of the entertainment was the chorus of "perfect thirty-sixes" and it was to the lovelies of the chorus line that the critics directed most of their attention. After agreeing that "Flo-Flo" was only "typical," "ordinary," "mildly sensational," and "light and bright," the reviews went on to comment about the show's costuming, or the lack thereof. While the Post called "Flo-Flo" "a

67 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 102; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 23, 1918.

68 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918.


70 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 23, 1918.

71 Ibid., Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 30, 1918.
lingerie shop set to music" and the *Times Star* termed it an "anatomical exposition unlimited," the *Enquirer* said that not only were the show's costumes "lavish," but it also used the adjective to describe the display of feminine shoulders on the stage.  

The *Commercial Tribune* also complimented the girls for their "forms and voices," but it concluded that they "would hardly do for 'The Follies.'"  

Silvio Hein's music, supposedly "songs the whole nation sang," received no more than passing notice, as did the other elements of the show.  

All in all, the critics did not pan "Flo-Flo," but they were most restrained in their praise.

"Rock-A-Bye Baby," a show that promised "rippling, tinkling music, and bewitching, ravishing girls," opened on December 29 at the Lyric. The story told of a marital misunderstanding that is resolved when the wife involved, in order to save her marriage, attempts to bring a child into her home by means of kidnapping. The comedy of the piece rested on confusion and was gleaned from the 1911 Margaret Mayo play "Baby Mine" by Edgar Allan Woolf, a leading writer of playlets for the vaudeville stage.  

The reviewers were split in their appraisals of the farce. The *Post* considered the Jerome Kern score "catchy," the performers "high-calibered," and the book "witty," while the *Commercial Tribune*

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72 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Dec. 30, 1918; *Cincinnati Post*, Dec. 30, 1918; *Cincinnati Times Star*, Dec. 30, 1918.

73 *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1918.


proclaimed the show to be "interesting from beginning to end." The Times Star and Enquirer were more restrained as the latter called the songs "average" and the former labeled the entire show "without any distinctive feature." "Rock-A-Bye Baby" received a critical endorsement that was only a few degrees warmer than that given to "Flo-Flo" across Vine Street at the Grand.

As the final week of 1918 opened on December 29 at the Keith, the management, through its Sunday advertisement, urged the public to make a New Year's resolution to attend Keith's every week during 1919. The bill that closed out 1918 was of the quality that could cause many patrons to make such a resolution. The headline honors went to Hermine Shone. Miss Shone and her company of performers presented a burlesque entitled "Best Sellers." Although she "drew forth great applause," Hermine Shone was not the hit of the bill. That honor went to the "rapid-fire" comedy team of J. Francis Dooley and Corrine Sayles. Dooley, the man who had some years earlier suggested to a young Al Jolson that he perform in blackface, and Sayles, who was the comedy focus of the duo, caused the audience to "laugh until its many sides were sore" and was easily awarded the accolade "a screaming

76 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 30, 1918.

77 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 30, 1918.

78 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 30, 1918.

79 Cincinnati Post, Dec. 30, 1918.
The other attractions that emphasized humor included Adrian, a burnt cork, slapstick specialist. Robbie Gordone, a posing artist who recreated the works of the old masters, Dugan and Raymond, a man and woman pairing who presented "They Auto Know Better," Maretelle, an impersonator, and Stanley Gallini, a premier shadographist.

The Keith closed the old year and opened the new with a solid, if not spectacular, array of talent.

The Keith's lower-priced rival, the Empress, closed 1918 with a bill that showcased "Diamond Daisy," a detective comedy authored by Jack Lait that the critics called "clever" and the "best thriller ever at the Empress." Ray and Faulkner, a pair of "nutty" comedians who appeared in "Doughnut Hunters," the Zara Carmen Trio, jugglers, Stuart and Keeley, a team of dancers who presented their routine costumed in white leather cowboy garb, Sol Berns, a monologist whose Hebrew character was billed as "The Train Announcer," and Howard and Convers, a local singing duo who replaced a missing act, rounded out an "evenly balanced bill" of "pleasing variety."

The New Year's week offering at the Olympic was "Irwin's Big
Show." Produced by Fred Irwin, one of the most inventive managers in burlesque, the "Big Show" was more noted for its musical numbers than its comic turns. The Commercial Tribune underscored this reputation as it blasted the principal "bananas" for not being funny and complained that, despite the outstanding female cast, the "show drags on for two hours." The other journals were not as harsh. The Times Star felt that the "Big Show" had "diversity of talent," the Post praised the girls for their appearance and ability to sing, and the Enquirer, after calling the comedians "average," wrote at length about the production's musical gems. "Irwin's Big Show" got the Olympic's New Year off to little more than a sluggish start.

With the World War over and the New Year under way, the managers looked forward to an end to the problems caused by the wartime mobilization of the railroads. The regular curtain times at the theaters had been re-established and, hopefully, the amusement business could anticipate a return to the days when the railroads were an ally of the theatrical arts. By the first week in January, 1919, however, this much desired for renewal of the mutually advantageous relationship between the theaters and the trains suffered a setback. The Railroad Administration in Washington, D. C., announced that, in order to secure a baggage car

84 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 30, 1918; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 59; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 30, 1918.

85 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Dec. 30, 1918.

86 Cincinnati Enquirer, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Post, Dec. 30, 1918; Cincinnati Times Star, Dec. 30, 1918.
for scenery, etc., a theatrical company had to purchase fifty tickets, instead of twenty-five, as heretofore. In order to obtain two baggage cars, one hundred fares had to be bought. This new ruling meant that a traveling company had to pay for the extra tickets whether they filled the seats or not. The impact of this regulation would hit the box offices rather quickly. The smaller road shows would have higher costs and an increase in theater admissions would most surely follow. The theatrical managers united in forwarding a protest to William G. McAdoo, the Director of the Railroad Administration, but there was little else they could do. Although the influenza and the war had come and gone, the disturbing railroad situation proved that all was not bright for the theaters as 1919 dawned in the Queen City.

"Blind Youth," a dramatic vehicle co-authored by and starring Lou Tellegen, opened at the Grand on Sunday, January 5. The Enquirer editorialized that the season's remaining legitimate attractions should be "important productions" and "Blind Youth" merited such a label. Although the story of an American artist in Paris who drinks his life away after his mistress abandons him for a wealthy man was described as "trite" by the Times Star and "conventional" by the Enquirer, the Post recommended it as "good." The quality of the cast, however,

87 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 4, 1919.
88 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 5, 1919.
89 Ibid., Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 6, 1919.
received unanimous praise. Tellegen, who had worked with Sarah Bernhardt for many years, received high marks from the four dailies, but the warmest words about his performance came from the Commercial Tribune as it declared, "Tellegen combines the intellectual beauty of the Greek with the fiery impetuosity of the French in his acting." The remaining members of the company, many of whom were also trained in the art of French drama, won commendations from the press. If "Blind Youth" was any indication of things to come in 1919, patrons of the Grand were in store for productions of rare quality.

With its Vine Street competitor presenting a fine French actor in a strong dramatic performance, the Lyric was fortunate in that its January 5 offering, while equally outstanding, was of a different milieu. "Oh, Look!" was a musical comedy that featured a score by Harry Carroll and lyrics by Joseph McCarthy. Its strongest drawing point was the casting of the Dolly Sisters as the female leads. Even with the popular song hit "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," "Oh, Look!" drew attention primarily by the presence of Yansci and Rozicka, the twin sisters of Hungarian birth who had become headliners as dancers in Ziegfeld productions in the pre-war years. Their petite size, almond-shaped eyes, dark complexions, lovely figures, oriental looks, and chic wardrobes earned them reputations as exotic beauties and the leading sister act in show business. By the 1920s, the twins did most of their

90 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 6, 1919.
91 Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 146; Burton, In Memorium, 72.
performing in Europe and were courted by wealthy royalty and by rich gentry whose lowly births matched their own. In 1919, however, their much publicized romances belonged to the future, but their popularity was well recognized. The plot, a tale of a young promoter who has difficulty selling shares of stock in his gold mine, was well thought of by the critics. While never explaining what roles the Dolly Sisters played in the storyline, the reviewers rhapsodized about their physical charm and dancing talent. Harry Fox, the principal comedian and erstwhile spouse of Yansci, was accorded critical compliments for his comedic style, but the clear implication of the columnists was that, without the Dolly Sisters, "Oh, Look!" would be due only passing notice. This had happened in the New York production as it lacked the box office punch that these two Hungarian headliners carried with them. The Lyric benefited from the decision to build the road company of "Oh, Look!" around the Dolly Sisters. At least for the week of January 5, the Lyric, as well as the Grand, supported the Enquirer's contention that the national producers would "do better" in their booking of shows for Cincinnati. 92

The Keith joined the legitimate theaters in focusing its January 5 shows around the talents of one of entertainment's leading personalities, Blossom Seeley. Miss Seeley's act was billed as "Seeley's Syncopated Studio" and its accent was on up-beat, fast tempo songs. The first performer to incorporate finger-snapping into her delivery, Miss Seeley

92 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 5, 1919.
differed from many female headliners in that she surrounded herself with men. The presence of four handsome young men whose singing and dancing complimented Blossom's own talent gave the act variety. This variety enabled Blossom Seeley and her supporting male quartet to remain a top attraction on the Keith Circuit for many years. On this occasion, Blossom's foursome included Bennie Fields, a comedian who would soon marry his boss. Even though he was not yet "Mr. Blossom Seeley," Fields received favorable notice for his songs and "droll" manner. As for the star, the critics were split. Three of the dailies gave her glowing reviews, but the Enquirer failed to see "why so much fuss is made about Blossom Seeley." Other features on the bill, but in Seeley's shadow, were Doc O'Neill, a "chipper" monologist, Bowers, Walters, and Crocker, a comedy-acrobatic trio whose sketch "The Three Rubes" was described as "familiar." Joe Parsons and Dave Irwin, whose singing and comedy spot was termed "a syncopated opera," Captain Max Gruber, an animal trainer whose elephant, horse, pony, and dog act was "very good," the Three Daring Sisters, an acrobatic team that provided thrills, and Patten and Marks, a song-and-dance pair that won little enthusiasm from the critics.

93 Laurie, Vaudeville, 324.
94 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 6, 1919.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 6, 1919.
As was generally the case, the Empress could not boast of a major headliner like the Keith and had to rely upon a cheaper admission price to draw patrons to its six acts of little known talent. The bill opened with the Guy Baldwin Trio, an aerial exhibition, and was followed by "Monocle" Manly and Miss Marston, two British humorists who scored well once the audience became accustomed to their delivery and subject matter. 97 The slight-of-hand trickery and funny patter of E. J. Moore were next. The stage was then occupied by George Van Hoff and his "laughable mimicry." 98 The stellar position was filled by the Muros, a pair of speed painters who amazed the audience with their rapid painting of Flemish China. 99 The Empress' bill for the week of January 5 closed with the "Shine Comicalities" of Jack George and company, judged as the most popular act on the bill according to the applause they received. 100 Despite the absence of big names, the Empress managed capacity business in its two Sunday shows. 101

Mollie Williams and her "Greatest Show" occupied the Olympic throughout the week of January 5. Variously described as "one of burlesque's queens," "one of the brightest lights in the burlesque world," and "Columbia's sauciest soubrette," Mollie Williams had emerged from

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97 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 6, 1919.
98 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 6, 1919.
99 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 6, 1919.
100 Ibid.
101 Cincinnati Post, Jan. 6, 1919.
the chorus line to be a headliner in 1910. Her Cincinnati show premiered to full houses that were treated to a mixture of "old-fashioned burlesque" and "modern musical comedy." In one number, Miss Williams appeared as the "Queen of Hearts" and in another she gave her interpretation of motion picture "vamping." Other parts of the show featured Evelyn Ramsey, a "dainty" redhead, singing "I Don't Know How to Say It in English," the chorus girls performing in the Famous Fashion Review, and several nameless lovelies in a comedy scene set in a Pullman sleeper. For Olympic patrons, the presence of Mollie Williams gave them a star equal in rank to Lou Tellegen, the Dolly Sisters, or Blossom Seeley.

Amid the optimism that was caused by the climbing attendance figures that all five theaters reported for the week of January 5 came the welcome news from Washington that the recently enacted ruling concerning railway baggage cars was to be lifted. The Railroad Administration's decision to withdraw its regulation stating that fifty tickets had to be purchased by a traveling company in order to obtain a baggage car for scenery was prompted by the wails of protest that descended on Washington from the major producers in New York and the managers of road

102 Ibid.; Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 6, 1919; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 67, 100.

103 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 6, 1919.

104 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 6, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 6, 1919; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 181.
theaters throughout the nation. With this cost inflating measure out of the picture, the theatrical managers could keep their prices at current levels and anticipate even higher attendance figures as the warmer weather approached.

The second week in the new year got under way on Sunday, January 12, with the management of the Grand Opera House presenting the comedy "Pollyanna" and protesting the rumor that its lease was for sale. John H. Havlin, the owner of the lease, had recently sold his Hotel Havlin on Fourth Street and reports that he was anxious to divest himself of the theater property as well abounded in the city's business community. In that the Grand was considered to be a prime investment, Havlin's denial of any intention to sell, made from his vacation home in Florida, disappointed a number of would-be investors.

Meanwhile, "Pollyanna," in its second visit to the city, was receiving four solid recommendations from the press. The Enquirer led the chorus of complimentary copy by saying that the play's 'glad' doctrine is promulgated with effectiveness." The Commercial Tribune, in much the same vein, felt that "every line and situation speaks of gladness, and speaks the great truth that there is more gladness than sorrow, and more sunshine than rain, in this vale of tears." Claire Mersereau, the

105 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 11, 1919.
107 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 13, 1919.
actress in the title role, was following in the dramatic footsteps of Helen Hayes and Patricia Collinge and was credited by the Post as knowing "how to pull the heartstrings of her audience." The closest any review came to a negative comment was the Times Star's contention that the supporting cast was "adequate." The sentimentality of the popular novel had been recaptured in the stage version. As a result, "Pollyanna" was the kind of attraction that made the Grand's lease a much sought after document.

The Lyric countered the heart-warming comedy of "Pollyanna" by presenting "Experience," an allegorical melodrama. In its fifth engagement in the city, "Experience" told the tale of "Youth," a young man who is confronted by "Experience." Other characters in this twentieth century morality play included "Grouch," "Pleasure," "Ambition," "Frailty," "Excitement," "Passion," "Crime," and "Delusion." For the most part, the drama columnists liked the play and used such comments as "good entertainment," "ingenious adaptation," "should be seen by every youth," and "still attractive" to express their sentiments.

Although there were no major personalities in the cast, the performing company was viewed as a capable one. The producers attempt to save money by having many of the actors play more than one role bothered

109 Cincinnati Post, Jan. 13, 1919; Blum, Pictorial History, 157, 165.


the *Times Star*, but this was the only negative remark to surface in the press. In its own way, "Experience" was similar to "Pollyanna" in that its popular appeal seemed to be as strong as ever.

The lack of a major vaudeville star did not seem to hurt the Keith's ticket sales for the week of January 12. The headlining position was held by "The Weaker One," a war-inspired drama about a cowardly son, his brave mother, and courageous sister. The acting of the four member cast was applauded, as was the singing, dancing, and comedy patter of the Four Mortons. Led by Sam and Kitty, the parents, the act also included their two youngest children, Joe and Martha. As the most famous vaudeville family since the Cohans, the Mortons lived up to their reputation as star entertainers.  

Dolly Connolly, once a vocalist in the Connolly Sisters quartet, sang "Every Day Will Be Sunday When the Town Goes Dry" and "Everything Is Peaches Down in Georgia," two novelty numbers that "brought down the house." The musical portion of the program also included the Bison City Four, a harmonizing group that had first formed in 1891, and Klass and Termini, two musicians who "ripped rag" from a violin and an accordion. Nash and O'Donnell added comedy in their domestic farce "Three G. M." The

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113 Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 47, 147.

114 Ibid., 76; *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1919; *Cincinnati Post*, Jan. 13, 1919.

115 *Cincinnati Times Star*, Jan. 13, 1919; Laurie, *Vaudeville*, 75.
"dumb" acts on the bill were the Moraks, four sisters who performed acrobatic stunts, and the Randalls, a sharpshooting act that employed optical illusions in its display of marksmanship. Despite the absence of a single star, the Keith line-up was diversified and demonstrated considerable strength from top to bottom.

This kind of balance was not achieved by the Empress in its January 12 offering. Florence Randall, appearing in the comedy sketch "A Temperate Woman," was presented in the headliner's spot, but she was far from the only mirth maker on the bill. Miss Randall was joined by such funsters as Donald and Geraldine, two singing comedians in "Bits of Sagebrush Humor," Greve and Green, two blackface artists in "Page From Minstrelsy," Grace Ayer and Brother, a beautiful girl joined by her short, stout brother in a comical roller skating display, George and Marie Brown, a married couple who billed themselves as "The Singer and the Boob," and the Rainbow Trio, comic acrobats who called their aerial antics "How to Treat Misbehaving Husbands." The patron who did not mind six similar assaults on his funnybone was the kind of patron the Empress wanted during the week of January 12.

The Olympic's attraction for that same week was the "Harry Hastings's Show." Dan Coleman, the "jolly and rotund" principal comic, won recognition from the reviewers for his rendition of "After the First of July, We'll All Be Dry." While this song was a crowd pleaser,

116 Ibid., 35.
the Oriental scene with its Egyptian dance number was also well re-
ceived. Another aspect of the show that warranted special mention
was the inclusion of several vaudeville style acts: Adelaide, a vio-
linist, Alice Guilmette, a vocalist, and Marjorie Manderville, a
singing contortionist. Although very little mention was made of the
physical attributes of the chorus, the "Harry Hasting's Show" easily
won the endorsement of the critics with the Commercial Tribune go-
ing so far as to say that it was "the best production seen at the local
Columbia Wheel house this season."118

The middle of January witnessed a new wave of concern among the
local managers that Congress might yet raise the tax on theater admis-
sions from ten per cent to twenty per cent. In order to arouse public
opinion in their favor, the Theatrical Managers Association placed a
series of advertisements in the four daily newspapers. These adver-
tisements opposing the tax increase were in the form of a cut-out state-
ment. Patrons were urged to sign these protests and either leave them
at one of the live theater box offices or mail them to their Congressman. 119

Within a few days, some 15,000 of these messages had been clipped from
the newspapers of Cincinnati and forwarded to Washington.120 A total of
350,000 similar messages descended upon Capital Hill from across the
nation. By the end of January, the Congress was absorbed in other

118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., Jan. 19, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 18, 1919.
120 Ibid., Jan. 22, 1919.
business and the proposed theater tax increase was dropped from consideration. The managers, already encouraged by rising attendance figures, were jubilant over their ability to mobilize public opinion and make it count in such a dramatic fashion.

An eagerly awaited comedy moved into the Grand on Sunday, January 19. A Cohan and Harris production, "A Tailor-Made Man" chronicled the rapid rise of a tailor's assistant who borrows a fine suit of clothes from his employer, attends an elegant party, gives valuable advice to an industrialist, and is rewarded by being given an executive position in the business world. The reviews stressed the essential American nature of this rags-to-riches plot. The Enquirer felt that the play underscored the "democratic idea that a man ... is judged by what he accomplishes and not whence he came," and the Post came to the conclusion that the tale better explained why "Abraham Lincoln, James J. Hill, Napoleon, and others rose from nothing to everything." The Times Star, in like fashion, pronounced it to be an "exhilarating gospel of self-confidence," and the Commercial Tribune simply declared that "A Tailor-Made Man" was the "best attraction at the Grand this season."

While most of the press coverage dealt with the storyline

121 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 26, 1919.
122 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 19, 1919.
123 Ibid., Jan. 20, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 20, 1919.
and its broader implications, the acting quality of the cast, including the performance of Richard Sterling as the "tailor-made man," was also hailed by the critics. "A Tailor-Made Man," penned by Harry James Smith, came to Cincinnati as a production that had played in New York for over a year and in Chicago for six months. Its popularity in these larger centers of theatrical activity was based on its appeal to the widely held belief that such success stories were still possible in modern America. Cincinnati audiences came to the Grand in large numbers throughout the week for much the same reason.

The emphasis on laughter continued the week of January 19 as the Lyric premiered the farce "She Walked in Her Sleep." Mark Swan wrote this complicated plot of a beautiful, young, female somnambulist whose nocturnal wanderings cause numerous comic conflicts. As with "A Tailor-Made Man," the critics centered their comments around a similar theme. In this case, the fragile nature of farce was the common target and all four gentlemen of the press agreed that "She Walked in Her Sleep" was blessed with an extraordinarily fine, if unknown, company that understood the demands of this particular dramatic form. Laughter, whether "hearty," "hilarious," "rollicking," or "screaming," was present during the play's two and one half hour running time and was reason enough for the critics to recommend the play.

Another week without a top-of-the-line attraction faced the Keith on

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125 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 20, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 20, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 20, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 20, 1919.
January 19. The headline spot went to "The Sirens," a one-act musical comedy that starred dancer and comedian, Frank Dobson. The "shape-ly" chorus girls were also featured in this turn that one reviewer complained was "more burlesque than farce." Despite this critical observation, the audience displayed a great deal of enthusiasm for "The Sirens." This popularity was also evidenced in that, at one point in its career, "The Sirens" played for one hundred and fifty straight weeks on the Keith Circuit. The rest of the bill, termed "ordinary to the point of mediocrity" by one daily, included Marie Stoddard, a monologist who was "apparently a clever artist," Sergeants Bowman and Shea, two discharged soldiers in a song and dialogue act who were criticized for depending on their uniforms to gain acceptance, Hugh J. Emmett, a musical ventriloquist, Maurice Burkhardt, a vocalist, Nelusco and Hurley, a shadowgraph and juggling act, and the Four Roeders, an acrobatic display that was "something out of the ordinary." While the Enquirer and Times Star found little to attack in the Keith program, the Post and Commercial Tribune found little to support. The latter publication went so far as to damn the material used by most of the artists as "old, out-of-date, and lifeless."

126 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 20, 1919.
127 Laurie, Vaudeville, 233.
128 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 20, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 20, 1919.
129 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 20, 1919.
The press was not as lively in its appraisal of the Empress' January 19 show. A partial explanation for this is that no review appeared in either the Enquirer or Post. The other two dailies did print complimentary comments about the program. The lead act was Billy "Swede" Hall in the dialect comedy "A Black Sheep." Another act that leaned on ethnic humor was the burnt cork duo of Rose and Hendrix, self-styled "slayers of sadness." Comedy was also evident in Rice and Newton's singing and acrobatic display and William De Hollis' juggling and "furniture tossing" exhibition. Popular songs of the day were sung by Raye M'Kenna and performed by the Karseys on their "myriophone," a musical instrument composed of 2,000 harp strings. The Empress' offering for January 19 was intended for those patrons whose musical taste was uneducated and whose sense of humor was unsophisticated.

"America's Best," an attraction starring Dave Marion, occupied the Olympic the week of January 19. One of burlesque's foremost funnymen, Marion was known for his "Snuffy" character, a harelipped cabman. Joining him were the normal assortment of burlesque troopers including Mickey Markwood as "Hesabum," the singing Biff Bang Trio, numerous soubrettes, and the indispensable chorus line. The major credit, however, for the success of "America's Best" was given to Marion. In the person of Dave "Snuffy" Marion, the Olympic had a stellar personality, albeit in burlesque, that the competing theaters could not rival.

The prospect of new competition for the existing five theaters livened

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130 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 57.
up the theatrical columns by the end of January. Reports hit the city that new management teams were interested in reopening the Heuck Opera House and the People's Theater. If the plans materialized, Warren B. Irons, manager of theaters in Chicago and Detroit, intended to use the Heuck as a home for stock burlesque, an arrangement involving a regular company of twenty girls to be augmented by different principals every four to five weeks. 131 C. Hubert Heuck, lease holder of the Heuck, had also been approached by local investors about the possibility of turning the vacant People's into a vaudeville and motion picture house. 132 While the installation of burlesque into the Heuck was never accomplished due to financial problems encountered by its out-of-town promoter, 10c-a-seat vaudeville opened in the People's on Sunday, February 2, but its semi-professional performers and low quality films prevented its attractions from being reviewed in any of the dailies. 133 Although it continued to operate through the rest of the season, the People's was not in the same league with the other variety establishments.

The stirrings of new burlesque and vaudeville outlets caused little excitement in legitimate circles. Of more immediate concern to the management of the Grand was their new January 26 show, "Fiddlers Three." A comic operetta that was considered "old-fashioned" and


132 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 21, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 21, 1919; Variety, Feb. 7, 1919.

133 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 2, 1919.
"absolutely Victorian" by New York reviewers, "Fiddlers Three" was better received by the Cincinnati critics. The weak storyline was set in Cremona, Italy, and involved various participants in a violin-making contest. Little newspaper space, however, was devoted to the plot. The strongest words of praise were given to Tavie Belge, the Belgian prima donna in the starring role. Her singing was so well received that the press regretted that she only had two numbers in the show. The explanation for this light load may have been identified by the Times Star when it noted that "Mlle. Belge is weak in speaking English," but the reason may also be found in the fact that "Fiddlers Three" contained many deviations from the plot. Dancing, singing, and monologues filled the show with a variety of entertainment forms that did little to further the story. Despite this lack of artistic purity, the reviewers found "Fiddlers Three" worthy of a strong endorsement.

Far from the unrealistic pretensions of an operetta was the Lyric's attraction, Booth Tarkington's "Seventeen." Having played the city the previous season on its pre-Broadway tour, "Seventeen" and its cast, which included Ruth Gordon, were not new to Cincinnati patrons. The story of young love had "something deeper than simple humor" and its human comedy was based on the antics of romantic teenagers.

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134 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 334.

135 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 27, 1919.

136 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 27, 1919; Wilson, Three Hundred Years, 325.
addition to the solid support given to the script, kind remarks for the
cast were also in abundance. Flattering though the reviews were to
Gregory Kelly, the male lead, the kindest comments went to Ruth Gor-
don. Miss Gordon, a 5'0", 102 pound, brown-haired, brown-eyed,
22 year-old actress, received her biggest break playing the role of
"Lola Pratt," the "baby talk" girl. The press enthusiastically
wrote that Miss Gordon did "the character better than ever" and "an
excellent piece of character work." The combination of a strong
story and a capable company led the Enquirer to conclude that "Seventeen" would "become one of the classics of our theater."

The biggest names on the Keith bill for January 26 were Lillian
Fitzgerald and Wellington Cross, both favorites on the circuit, but
hardly artists of the first rank. Miss Fitzgerald, accompanied by
pianist Charles Senna, created a sensation with her comic routine
"Agonizing the Ivories." Her act, which included music and impers-
sonations, was rewarded with numerous encores and was compared to
Eva Tanguay and Anna Held, two of vaudeville's top box office attrac-
tions. Wellington Cross, a singing storyteller, shared the critical

137 Blum, Great Stars, 108.
138 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 27, 1919; Cincinnati Commercial
Tribune, Jan. 27, 1919.
139 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 27, 1919.
140 Laurie, Vaudeville, 59.
141 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 27, 1919.
and popular honors with Fitzgerald. His "drolleries" were "subtle" and delivered with a "punch."\(^{142}\) Although the reviews were kind to Fitzgerald and Cross, the Post regretted that "two fairly good acts can't make a good show."\(^{143}\) In general, however, the balance of the bill won press approval. These remaining spots included "Maid of France," a melodrama in which a statue of Joan of Arc comes to life and comments on the camaraderie of British and French soldiers, Nick Basil and Dick Allen in the comic skit "Recruiting," Henry Keane and Bernice Golden in the mystery sketch "The Unexpected," Eddy Janis and Rene Chaplow in the tuneful turn "Music Hath Charms," Lolette, a skating bear, and a living picture display entitled "Study in Sculpture." The lack of a major headliner did not prevent Keith's from offering a diversity of talent for the week of January 26.

The lead act at the Empress for the same week was Anderson's Junior Circus. This menagerie consisted of Maude Hee Haw, a mule comic, Showball, a talking pony, singing and dancing poodles, and mirth making monkeys. These animals were joined by the La Chap- erone Minstrel Maids, seven girls in a parody of an old-time minstrel show, Hunter and Shaw, two banjo-playing, clever talking females, "The Two Painters," a slapstick skit starring Harry Evans, Challis and Challis, a pair of comic singers, and the Carson Brothers.

\(^{142}\) Ibid.; Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 27, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 27, 1919.

\(^{143}\) Cincinnati Post, Jan. 27, 1919.
athletes who were labeled "modern Samsons." This artistic array, described as "one of the best of the season," was so popular that many patrons were turned away from the three Sunday shows.

Large crowds also greeted the January 26 opening of "Liberty Girls," a burlesque production that featured Jack Conway as the principal comic. Conway's Irish wit was applauded by the press as was the "straight man" performance of James J. Collins. The featured females, Norma Jerome and Hilda Giles, won endorsements, but the critical community disagreed about the effectiveness of the chorus line. While the Enquirer said that the girls had "no talent for singing or harmonizing" and the Post faintly praised them for being "satisfactory," the other two dailies gave a more positive picture of the chorus' ability to entertain. Although "Liberty Girls" was little changed from its last trip to Cincinnati, Conway and his fellow travelers did well at the Olympic box office.

Toward the end of the week of January 26, the live theaters, particularly the legitimate houses, faced competition from a touring grand opera company. The Music Hall had been procured by Guiseppe Creatore, the famous bandmaster, for matinee and evening performances.

144 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Jan. 27, 1919.
146 Cincinnati Times Star, Jan. 27, 1919.
147 Cincinnati Enquirer, Jan. 27, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Jan. 27, 1919.
on January 31 and February 1 of "Pagliacci," "Cavalleria Rusticana," "Aida," and "Rigoletto." The cost of this cultural experience, ranging from $3.00 to 75¢, meant that opera lovers could satisfy their cravings for about what it cost to enter the Grand or Lyric. Creatore's company, without any operatic stars, drew well in a city more attuned to Germanic opera than to Italian music drama.

For those legitimate patrons who wanted a play that offered both a superb script and a powerful lead performer, the week of February 2 was a time to treasure. The Grand presented Otis Skinner, one of the era's most celebrated actors, in "The Honor of the Family," one of his many successes, and the Lyric countered with Lionel Barrymore, a distinguished member of a theatrical dynasty, in "The Copperhead," the play that established him as an actor of merit. In that the playhouses preferred not to compete directly with similar productions, the booking twist that brought these two luminaries to the city simultaneously was anticipated with anxiety by the managers. The fear was that theatergoers might decide to see one of the shows or the other, but not both. 148 Fortunately, this unprofitable prophecy proved to be unfounded as hundreds of patrons, many of whom seldom attended the theater, availed themselves of the unique opportunity to see both Skinner and Barrymore during the same week.

"The Honor of the Family" was a play that Skinner had first toured with in 1909. In it, he appeared as "Colonel Phillippe Bridau," an

148 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 1, 1919.
early 19th century Frenchman who saves his aged uncle from the clutches of a scheming woman. Prior to this role, Skinner was noted for his virtuoso versatility. The great dramatic actors of the late 19th century were expected to play a variety of roles and Skinner, whose stardom dated from 1894, performed over three hundred different characters, many of them Shakespearian. The superlatives from the press reinforced the notion that the sixty-year-old Skinner was one actor whose performance should not be missed. Such comments as "a real treat," "one of the real delicacies of the season," "that sterling American actor," and "Skinner at his best" were to be found in the dramatic columns. Indeed, with Otis Skinner at the helm, "The Honor of the Family" was an honor bestowed by the management of the Grand Opera House upon the theatergoing public.

The Lyric was also giving theater habitues a special treat in the person of Lionel Barrymore. While he had not had as many triumphs as Skinner, Barrymore's family connections and the effusive greetings he received for his performance in "The Copperhead" made his appearance a cause for celebration. Written by Augustus Thomas, "The Copperhead" was the story of a Yankee patriot who is asked by President Abraham Lincoln to pose as a pro-Confederate "copperhead" in order to gain valuable information about these treasonous northerners. Milt

149 Blum, Great Stars, 20; Wilson, Three Hundred Years, 280.

Shanks, Barrymore's fictional character, is so expert at this deception that many of his midwestern friends turn against him until they learn the truth of his mission forty years after the event. The demands of the role were tremendous. The character was on stage for virtually the entire three acts and, after each intermission, returned substantially older than in the previous scene. Barrymore's handling of the part merited critical braves that rang louder than those accorded Skinner. The New York reviewers placed the 38-year-old Barrymore along side his brother John and sister Ethel as a result of his performance and the Cincinnati columnists concurred. 151 The Enquirer lavished praise on Barrymore by saying that his work was "as beautiful as it is technically marvelous, as human as it is dramatically moving and as lovable as it is seemingly rough" and pronounced the current season as "indelibly marked by [Barrymore's] performance." 152 The Commercial Tribune reported that "Barrymore brought an evening of the most wonderful acting which has been seen in this city for many seasons." 153 The Times Star observed that Barrymore's characterization "surpasses anything that's played the area in several years." 154 The Post's reaction to Barrymore's artistry was to say

151 Hewitt, Theatre, U.S.A., 323-326; Blum, Great Stars, 55; Lionel Barrymore and Cameron Shipp, We Barrymores (New York, 1951), 183.

152 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 4, 1919.


154 Cincinnati Times Star, Feb. 4, 1919.
that "he becomes the character" and, considering the study that Barrymore did of the Civil War era prior to his New York debut, this was quite conceivable. 155 The play was also rewarded with words of support, but they hardly compared to the flowing prose that was used to describe Barrymore's brilliance. Furthermore, the newspaper space devoted to Lionel Barrymore, a relative newcomer to the halls of dramatic stardom, was considerably greater than that dealing with Otis Skinner, a prominent, proven, and durable legitimate performer.

The week of February 2 at the Keith featured a "flash act" musical comedy entitled "Not Yet, Marie." This brand of variety entertainment consisted of a two-man act, a singing and dancing soubrette, and a line of ten chorus girls whose various stages of dress and undress were commented upon by the Cincinnati theatrical press corps. 156 "Not Yet, Marie" contained a plot, but the lightly clad chorus was the main topic of critical discussion. Emily Darrell, a comedienne who worked with a bull terrier, Edmond Hayes, normally a "nut" comic who played it straight in the sketch "Moonshine," Lee Rose and Katheryn Moon, a dancing duo whose novelty was in dancing back to back, "Tarzan," a man dressed in an ape suit who kept the audience guessing as to whether he was man or beast, Arthur Moso and Edward Frye, a pair of fast-talking Negro comedians who were on the circuit for

155 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 4, 1919; Barrymore and Shipp, We, 178.

many years, and the Ankers, a gymnastic quartet, completed a Keith roster referred to as "exceptionally good" and "excellent."\(^{157}\)

The Empress' February 2 program failed to win the high marks given to the Keith bill. The Koplin Brothers opened a show that was described as "not up to the usual standard."\(^{158}\) Entitled "Fun in a Chinese Laundry," the Koplin's specialty was that of pantomime. Leona Remington and Nina Powell, "Two Comely Comediennes," did a comedy routine that was rated as "fair."\(^{159}\) The stage was next occupied by "Down and Out," a dramatic playlet that was of "average interest."\(^{160}\) Worden's Cockatoos, "Birds in Dreamland," followed and were termed "pleasing" and "artistic."\(^{161}\) Next to closing was filled by Clay and Robinson in an ethnic skit called "The Girl and the Wop." The final act, and the one that earned the most applause from the capacity Sunday crowds, was that of Miller and King, a duo who boasted of being "rushing comedians." This array of variety artists was lacking in creative quality when compared to the talent showcased at the Keith.

Old fashioned burlesque was offered in the Olympic's February 2


\(^{158}\) Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 3, 1919.

\(^{159}\) Cincinnati Post, Feb. 3, 1919.

\(^{160}\) Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 3, 1919.

show, "The Girls De Looks." While the chorus was large, attractive, and able to sing, the real stars were the comics, Joseph K. Watson and William H. Cohan. These two diminutive funsters did a courtroom scene in which they appeared as "Slotkin" and "Slitkin," two quarrelsome lawyers. At another point in the show, Watson portrayed "Abe Kabibble," a Jewish characterization that was popular in burlesque. Cohan's reputation was for clean comedy and his work in "The Girls De Looks" supported this claim. The show was so dominated by Watson and Cohan that no mention was made in the columns about specific numbers and scenes that featured the ladies of the cast. Perhaps, that is why the Commercial Tribune went so far as to state that the show contained "nothing that would offend even the most straight-laced of the 'holier-than-thou' aggregation." Not patterned on a musical comedy format, "The Girls De Looks" appealed to those patrons who preferred vintage burlesque.

Before the week of February 2 was over, another major entertainment personality put in an appearance in Cincinnati. On the night of Wednesday, February 5, the Music Hall played host to the most popular of Irish tenors, John McCormick. Despite the competition from Barrymore, Skinner, and the other performers in the middle of their

162 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 87.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid., 50.
weekly runs, McCormick's recital played to "the usual packed house." 166

Having come off a week that capitalized on the "star system," the legitimate theaters went into February 9 with dramas that had to draw customers by their plots rather than their personalities. The Grand's offering was an espionage mystery, "Three Faces East." The story involved the machinations of double and triple agents operating in England during the late war. According to the Monday reviews, the melodrama's strengths were its realistic air raid scene, its casting of unknown players, and its tightly written script that kept the audience in suspense as to the identity of the real German spies. 167

"Every Man's Castle," the Lyric's drama for the week of February 9, was soundly criticized for its subject matter: birth control. The press agreed that the play was performed by a strong company of capable actors, but the script was attacked in each of the notices. The Post's attitude echoed its rivals when it charged that asking a superior cast to perform "Every Man's Castle" was "as though Demosthenes should be called upon to recite 'Hickory, Dickory, Dock.'" 168 The plot dealt with a husband learning that his wife had recently gone through an operation that she believed was an abortion. His anger and repulsion leads him to attempt the murder of the physician caught

166 Cincinnati Times Star, Feb. 6, 1919.


168 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 10, 1919.
up in the case. The doctor manages to escape death and reunites the couple as the curtain falls. The phrases "race suicide" and "propaganda play" were used in describing the story and the press made its condemnation of these concepts quite clear. Cincinnati was not ready for a frank and open discussion of a subject that was virtually taboo at the time. The Lyric, in the span of one week, went from its most acclaimed attraction of the season, Lionel Barrymore in "The Copperhead," to one of its most disappointing presentations.

Headlining honors at the Keith the week of February 9 went to Leona La Mar, a mind-reader who proclaimed herself to be the "girl with 1,000 eyes," and Valerie Bergere, an actress who was making her fifth annual appearance in the Far Eastern playlet "Little Cherry Blossom." Neither act sent the critics into prosaic ecstasy, but some of the other items on the bill were more heartily received. Although Florenze Tempest, "America's most lovable boy and vaudeville's daintest girl," appeared wearing trousers, she still earned the classification of "a classy bit on character singing." Touted as a former member of the renowned Sousa Band, Susan Tompkins performed a violin solo that was rated as a crowd pleaser. Also in this category was the "nut" comedienne Katie Williams. Along with Harry Keene, Miss Williams appeared in "A Roadside Flirtation" and her portrayal of a naive rural


lass caused "an abundance of hilarity."\textsuperscript{171} Little more than pleasantries greeted the efforts of Catherine Powell, a toe dancer, and the team of Bud Synder and Bud Malino, acrobatic bicyclists. Less fortunate was the song and dance duo of Leon Kimberly and Helen Page. Entitled "Spring is Calling," the Kimberly and Page offering was belittled for not working "as well as hoped for" and for being "of little possibilities."\textsuperscript{172} The Keith's eight acts for the second week in February, although undistinguished, could still be called well balanced.

Jap Murdock in the farce "Furnished Rooms" topped the February 9 bill at the Empress. Miss Murdock's efforts were met by comments ranging from "hilarious" to "bright and breezy."\textsuperscript{173} Another highly touted feature was the equine posing of Snowflake, "an animal intellectual" who astounded the audience by performing without a trainer on stage. A song and dance team, Kenny and La France, a comedy pair, James Crowley and Billie Emerson, a gymnastic act, Zemater and Smith, and a vaguely labeled "character" singer, Lou Elliot, made up the remaining spots on the February 9 program. For this week, the Empress' line-up was about as lackluster as that of the Keith.

The Star and Garter Company's "Typical, Topical Review" moved into the Olympic on February 9 and was greeted by mixed notices.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{171} \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer}, Feb. 10, 1919.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} \textit{Cincinnati Commercial Tribune}, Feb. 10, 1919; \textit{Cincinnati Times Star}, Feb. 10, 1919.
  \item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The Commercial Tribune and Times Star found merit in the "For Art's Sake" review and the Highland fling routine. The Post, however, dissented by categorizing the show as "ordinary." The Enquirer referred to the attraction as being "old-fashioned" and this appraisal adequately described the kind of entertainment offered at Chicago's Star and Garter Theater, the first theater in America built exclusively for burlesque. The "Typical, Topical Review," patterned on the successful formula of clean and censored burlesque engineered by this Chicago pacesetter, appealed to Olympic patrons even if some of the critics found it less than appealing.

"Turn to the Right," a "welcome favorite" that was a "substantial" hit in New York, occupied the Grand the week of February 16. The play's popularity was rooted in its comic plot. Described as a "crook comedy with a rural background," the story was of a pickpocket who abandons his evil ways after he encounters the people of a small town. The show's chances for success were increased by the casting of Mike Donlin, a former Cincinnati Reds baseball player, as "Muggs," the thief around whom the tale revolved. Despite his lack of theatrical experience, Donlin's performance was complimented with such remarks

174 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 10, 1919.
175 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 10, 1919; Zeidman, American Burlesque, 65.
177 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 17, 1919.
As "a distinct success," "does well," and "scores as an actor." Following a week when a drama dealing with abortion played the city, "Turn to the Right" was appreciated, not only for its acting, but also for being a "clean play" and "not a sex discussion."

The Lyric's February 16 attraction, "Oh Lady! Lady!" was destined to be considered one of the finest of the season. With a book by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse and music provided by Jerome Kern, "Oh Lady! Lady!" was the fifth, and second-to-last, of the series of intimate little musical comedies called the Princess Theater shows. Known for their superb blending of strong characterizations and songs that furthered the plot, these Princess Theater shows were pioneering efforts at creating what would become the modern American musical. The story fashioned by Bolton and Wodehouse concerned a young couple whose marriage plans are interrupted by a girl who poses as a childhood friend of the groom's, but who is actually scheming to steal jewels belonging to the bride. Jerome Kern's melodies, a synthesis of European operetta idioms and the syncopated rhythms of American jazz, and the lyrics of Bolton and Wodehouse, known for their wit and


181 Green, World of Musical Comedy, 73; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 330.
sophistication, advanced the plot toward its happy conclusion. 182 Although several of the show's songs sold well in the sheet music stores, what would become its most famous melody was deleted prior to the 1917 Broadway premiere and later inserted into Kern's 1927 score for "Showboat." While audiences would have to wait another eight years before hearing the haunting "Bill," the reaction to the music, book, and cast was overwhelming. Labeled "delightful," "fresh," "clever," and "a winner," "Oh Lady! Lady!" was recognized to be an outstanding and unusual musical comedy. 183 High marks were also accorded to Vivienne Segal, the female lead whose profile was described as "distracting" and whose personality was called "girlish." 184 An important contribution to the American musical tradition, "Oh Lady! Lady!" was accepted by Cincinnatians as an thoroughly entertaining diversion.

Mayhem, in the persons of Julius, Herbert, Leonard, and Arthur Marx, was the Keith's drawing card for the week of February 16. Although not yet known by the nicknames they would acquire from vaudevilian Art Fisher in the early 1920s, the Marx Brothers appeared as the wild characters they would later be remembered for in a musical tabloid that was patterned after a typical, but much longer, musical

182 Ewen, America's Musical Theater, 86; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 330.


comedy. Entitled "'N Everything," the spot included music, dancing, and a five girl chorus. According to the columnists, the Marx Brothers "stopped the show" and were recalled several times by an applauding audience. The other artists on the bill included James Watts, a leading female impersonator, Harry Mayo and Basil Lynn, partners in a "Racy Conversation," Ethel MacDonough, a character singer, the Boyarr Troupe, a company of Russian folk performers, Lowell B. Drew and Venta Wallace, a couple engaged in "A Flirtatious Fizz at the Soda Fountain," Emma Francis and Arabs, a jazz dancing act, and York's Educated Canine Pupils, a collection of performing puppies. With everything from madcap comedy to dancing dogs, the Keith's February 16 show, topped by an act destined to become a show business legend, was one of the season's most varied.

Variety was also evident in the Empress bill of February 16. Headlining was the sketch "Two Weeks Notice." Compliments were paid to Maxine Alton for her character acting in this war-inspired melodrama and to the song-and-dance team of Sully and Hyer. Zellner, a quick-change artist, Jim and Irene Marlyn, a singing act, Lew Huff, a juggler who billed himself as "the nutty hatter," and Howe Barlow, a

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186 Crichton, Marx Brothers, 126-127.
188 Cincinnati Post, Feb. 17, 1919.
strong man with an "iron jaw" and assisted by a dog, rounded out the line-up. While it contained no future stars, the Empress' program demonstrated the kind of balance that resulted in box office success.

"The Butterflies of Broadway" was the Olympic's February 16 attraction. The comedy chores were handled by Sam Howe, well known for his "Hebe" character, while Hattie Beall was the soubrette. Such numbers as "Tame Wild Women," "Mothers of the World," "Pickaninnies Paradise," along with the "Lingerie" exhibit that made up the finale, were highlights of the show. Although it was not among burlesque's finest offerings, "The Butterflies of Broadway" was typical of the kind of entertainment found week after week at the Olympic.

A rare opportunity availed itself to Cincinnatians the night of Monday, February 17. That evening the Emery Auditorium hosted one of the great entertainers of the era, Harry Lauder. Labeled a "consummate artist" and "inimitable," the Scottish comedian and singer presented an eighty minute program consisting of Highland melodies, humorous anecdotes, and post-war observations. One such comment came when the kilted Lauder told the near capacity crowd that returning veterans should be rewarded with prompt employment. Those Rotarians in the audience had heard Lauder speak in a similar vein earlier at an afternoon meeting held in the Sinton Hotel. On that occasion,

189 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 56.

190 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, Feb. 18, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, Feb. 18, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 18, 1919.
Lauder urged that the Kaiser be brought to justice and he championed the crusade aimed at stopping the use of the German language in American schools. Lauder's remarks while on the Emery stage were not so political, but he used the occasion to elicit funds for the rehabilitation of crippled soldiers. Even though he was joined by a vaudeville bill of various performers, the presence of Harry Lauder, a truly international star, made the evening memorable.

The final week in February was ushered in at the Grand by "The Girl Behind the Gun." While the book and lyrics were written by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, the music was created by Ivan Caryll rather than by their usual collaborator, Jerome Kern. The title suggested a martial theme, but the plot, the amorous adventures of a Parisian playwright, was better revealed in the English title, "Kissing Time." Cincinnati was treated to the original New York cast which starred Donald Brian. A native of Newfoundland, Brian's matinee idol reputation rested on his tall, thin frame that was crowned by a thick crop of black curly hair. Brian's appeal to the ladies did not escape notice as he was described as "the most gazelle-like male of them all" and credited with filling "the ladies with delight."

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191 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 18, 1919.
192 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 334; Jasen, Wodehouse, 81.
193 Blum, Great Stars, 72.
194 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 24, 1919; Cincinnati Post, Feb. 24, 1919.
Wilda Bennett, the principal prima donnas, did not fare so well as their flat singing voices merited mentioning by the reviewers. On a more positive note, the chorus, billed as a "rose-bud garden of girls," won favor for being "light-stepping," "handsome," and "meat-fed." Charles Previn, the original New York conductor, was even applauded for his gesticulating style of directing the orchestra. The show featured an advertising campaign that assured newspaper readers that "the Klaw & Erlanger trademark is a sufficient guarantee of good faith." In the case of "The Girl Behind the Gun," the Klaw & Erlanger name was a guarantee of a good, solid, if not ordinary, musical comedy.

If the Grand's attraction overstated its merits, the Lyric's offering for the week of February 23 came close to promising more than it could deliver. "Seven Days Leave" was an espionage thriller that claimed to be the "most sublimely sensational spectacle ever staged." The special effects were the stars of the show and they received strong endorsements in the press. In particular, the scene depicting an American warship shelling a German submarine was praised for its realism. A special effect of a different kind, a glimpse of a girl in a one-piece bathing suit, also warranted attention. The cast, however, failed to win unanimous support as one daily commented that the "company is not

196 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 23, 1919.
197 Ibid.
of marked ability." Even with this disclaimer, "Seven Days Leave" was recognized as an effective piece of wartime propaganda.

The Keith's final bill for February featured the "1919 Dance Review," a headline act that starred toe dancer Bessie Clayton and Spanish dancers Elisa and Eduardo Cansino. Miss Clayton's performance, judging by the lack of press coverage, was not nearly as effective as that of "Oklahoma" Bob Albright, a western-style singer who involved the audience in his act, or Nellie V. Nichols, an appropriately costumed "coon" vocalist. The dancing of Beaumont and Arnold, the juggling of Martyn and Florence, and the trapeze demonstration of the Four Sensational Boises were given passing marks by the dramatic columnists, but the comedy skit performed by Jack Clifford and Miriam Wells was criticized for Clifford's impersonation of a drug fiend. With dancing dominating, the overall quality of the Keith program for the week of February 23 was rated as little better than average.

The act that was accorded the biggest reception at the Empress' February 23 show was that of Katherine Hoch, a Cincinnati soprano. Allowing for local pride, the top honors went to Miss Hoch despite the fact that "Sherman Was Wrong," a tabloid comedy that was labeled "meritorious" and "one of the best," was actually in the headline spot.


The bill of "six sparkling acts" opened with the Shermans, Hawaiian instrumentalists, and closed with "Jane's Lovers," a travesty built around the talents of James Crowley. The remaining spots were filled by Infield and Nobelet, a dancing, singing, and comic dialogue team, and Faber and Bernet, a dancing duo that was, according to the Times Star, destined for the "big time." Once again, the critics considered the "Poor Man's Vaudeville" offered at the Empress to be of a better quality than the higher class competition at the Keith.

The Olympic closed February with the "Follies of the Day," a show that starred Harry Welsh, Chester Nelson, and Gertrude Hayes. The show's strengths were its music, "from the singing standpoint the show is one of the best that has appeared this season," its humor, "Nelson and Welsh furnish excellent comedy," and its chorus, "petite, thin-limbed girls who seem of boarding school age." Miss Hayes, one of the Wheel's leading ingenues, got credit for adding "pep" to the production. The only sour note in the chorus of compliments was sounded by the Commercial Tribune as it complained that the show's "gags date back almost to prehistoric times." The "Follies of the

201 Cincinnati Enquirer, Feb. 24, 1919.
Day" was yet another attraction that was better in some respects and weaker in others than the steady flow of burlesque offerings that had preceded it into the Olympic.

As February ended, so also did the second third of the 1918-1919 season. December, January, and February had been free of epidemics and business at the five amusement houses had registered strong gains. The booking of popular productions and prominent personalities, the avoidance of counter programing by the Shubert and Syndicate forces, the snowless month of January, and the people's hunger for professional entertainment were all factors in the box office success shared by the theaters. 206 Certainly, stars of the caliber of Lionel Barrymore, Otis Skinner, Blossom Seeley, the Four Marx Brothers, Harry Lauder, John McCormick, the Dolly Sisters, and others were enough to fill the seats of Cincinnati's entertainment halls. With only a little over two months remaining, the 1918-1919 season, its quantity stymied in the first three months by the Spanish influenza, was well on the way toward fulfilling its promise of quality.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SEASON CLOSES,  
MARCH - MAY 1919

Although the season had already been graced by the presence of several outstanding show business personalities, the final eleven weeks would bring a host of major stars to Cincinnati. Traditionally, theater attendance dropped as the warm weather of spring approached, but the booking of strong attractions and well known talent, along with the abbreviated nature of the season, kept the box offices busy. As bad as its first three months had been, the 1918-1919 season, during its last three months, concluded on a note of success.

The Grand Opera House began March in a successful way by offering the Edgar Allan Woolf and Jerome Kern musical comedy "Head Over Heels." Mitzi, a petite actress who had dropped her family name of Hajos, starred as an European acrobat who fails in love with an American, follows him to New York, and ends up married to his brother. Admiringly called "irrepressible," "a bundle of vivacity," a "dynamic hundred pounds of femininity," and an "ingratiating little comedienne," Mitzi was hailed by the local press despite the fact that, being no gymnast, she "performed" her acrobatic feats off-stage. ¹

Also earning favorable, if less effusive, comments were Kern's melodies and the supporting company. Woolf's book, however, merited little notice. Whether or not it was "the gayest music play," as promised by the advertisements, "Head Over Heels" proved to be popular primarily because of the presence of Mitzi.

Across Vine Street, the Lyric countered the Grand's personality-based presentation with a "gripping," "mystifying," and "powerful" melodrama. Entitled "The Thirteenth Chair," the plot involved a seance scene in which one of the thirteen participants is murdered. The remaining portion of the play dealt with the solution of the crime. Written by Bayard Villiere, "The Thirteenth Chair" was considered to be a superior example of the detective drama and had successfully played the city during the previous season. This time, however, the reviewers attempted to preclude any chances the play had of repeating its earlier success by criticizing the performing company. While praising Villiere's creation and admitting that there were a few adequate performances, the Enquirer, in a tone shared by the other three dailies, charged that the cast had "the marks of an aggregation gathered for the purpose of exploiting a success already secured." The Lyric's March

2 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 3, 1919.
4 Wilson, Three Hundred Years, 327; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 3, 1919.
5 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 3, 1919.
2 show, although a good "who-done-it," failed because it did not possess the actors required by the genre of "cloak-and-dagger" drama.

The vaudeville bill that greeted Keith patrons on March 2 was headlined by Helen Ware, a legitimate actress who appeared in "The Eternal Barrier," a one-woman playlet. Miss Ware portrayed a war widow who imagines the conversation she must shortly have with her in-laws when she tells them of her husband's death. The reviews of her performance were complimentary, but certain elements in the gallery on Sunday evening were far from kind. During the run of the sketch, coins were thrown at Miss Ware from the top balcony. While she continued unabated, George MacFarlane, a baritone who followed the actress to the stage, made a short speech criticizing the rude behavior of the demonstrators that won the applause of the other patrons. Although MacFarlane's singing was well received, the Commercial Tribune advised him to avoid "the rag and patter stuff." "In the Pest House," a comedy skit performed by Imhof, Conn, and Coreene, was another popular turn. The three funsters involved had been presenting the same burlesque-style routine for many years, but the customers continued to laugh despite the age of the material. Bert and Harry Gordon, a leading brother act, Dolly Grey and Bert Lyon, a


7 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 3, 1919.

8 Ibid.; Berle, Autobiography, 131; Laurie, Vaudeville, 22; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 115.

laughs were also the Empress' main feature for the same week. The cavalcade of comedy included Bob Sperry in "Finnigan's Finish," "one of the funniest comedy playlets ever seen on the Empress vaudeville stage," Ernest Wood in "The Red Fox Trot," a dancing turn that provoked laughter, Fred Howard, a blackface comic who portrayed "the Black Monk Rasputin," and Vincent and Raymond, a team that actually told "some new jokes." 10 Vocal music was furnished by Sophie Schaefer and the duo of Holzman and Perry. Humor was as much a mainstay at the Empress as it was at the Keith.

The Olympic opened in March with a show headlined by Lew Kelly, a comedian known widely for his "Professor Dope" character. For the most part, the show was a repetition of Kelly's earlier efforts in the city. This time, however, Kelly spoke of his experiences as a trench line entertainer during the war. Other war-related features were Leona Earl's singing of "I Want To Be Loved By a Soldier" and Kelly's recitation of "Hunka Tin," a travesty on Kipling's "Gunga Din." Oddly, the chorus line was mentioned only in passing. This underscored the

fact that the March 2 Olympic production was totally dominated by Lew Kelly, a burlesque star who neither sang nor danced.

Before the new round of shows opened on March 9, the city's playgoers had two unusual opportunities. On March 7, at 1:45 in the afternoon, the Grand hosted a benefit show consisting of talent gleaned from the various companies playing at the theaters. The proceeds went to the Actors' Fund, a charity designed to assist elderly members of the stage professions. The show was deemed important enough for Daniel Frohman, a New York producer and President of the Actors' Fund, to personally supervise the event. The celebrities to be on display included Mitzi, Helen Ware, George MacFarlane, Lew Kelly, the cast of "The Thirteenth Chair" doing a comedy sketch, and a chorus line of girls provided by the Grand, Lyric, and Olympic. In addition to this conglomeration of entertainment styles, Friday offered a concert by "the master of the keyboard," Rachmaninoff.  

At 8:15 in the evening, this renowned Russian pianist took to the stage of the Emery Auditorium to perform works of his own as well as pieces composed by others. Both special performances ranged in cost from 50¢ to $2.00. While the Actors' Fund benefit merely combined the talent already in the city, the Rachmaninoff appearance was the kind that made the week memorable.

On Sunday, March 9, the Grand premiered "The Violation," a play that was panned by all four drama columnists. King Baggot, a leading

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11 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 2, 1919.
screen actor who was attempting a revival of his stage career, played a governor who becomes romantically entangled with the sister of a condemned murderer. The plot, Baggot's diction, and virtually all other aspects of the production were found wanting. Such comments as "'The Violation' is hopeless," "it was an evening peculiarly painful," "it is an impossible and ridiculous affair," and "it violates all the ten commandments of dramatic construction and play acting" summed up the press' appraisal of Henry Sheldon's drama. The public responded to such harsh criticism by avoiding the Grand in droves. Although scheduled to remain in Cincinnati through Sunday evening, March 16, light attendance forced "The Violation" to move on to Detroit after the Saturday night performance. Fortunately, the failure of "The Violation" was mitigated by advance ticket sales for the Grand's next offering, the "Ziegfeld Follies of 1918."

A modern-day version of "the prodigal son" parable came to the Lyric the week of March 9. Entitled "The Man Who Came Back," the melodrama, written by Jules Eckert Goodman, was not new to the Queen City as it had appeared the previous season. The moral nature of the play appealed to the reviewers as did the work of an unknown supporting actress. Termed "an actress of talent," Katherine Cornell was credited with giving "a notable performance" and praised for

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12 Ibid., March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, March 10, 1919.

13 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 17, 1919.
"The Man Who Came Back," a play whose plot and performers were not particularly remarkable, was important in that it introduced Katherine Cornell, soon to be one of America's most acclaimed stage practitioners, to Cincinnati audiences.

A vaudeville bill that merited split notices filled the Keith throughout the week of March 9. As a novelty, James J. Morton, a dead pan monologist who was famous for singing songs with no music and without rhyme and for telling pointless jokes, served as the announcer of the various acts and his "droll" delivery proved to be effective. Nit-ta Jo, an "Apache girl of Paris," won favor as the headliner for her "chic" and "grace." Clifton Crawford, an English musical comedy performer, did a pantomime scene, recited "Gunga Din," and sang songs which prompted the Times Star to suggest that he "could choose his songs to better advantage." The romantic sketch "The Tale of a Shirt" with Erwin and Jane Connolly was admired by two dailies, but the Commercial Tribune and Times Star felt that it was ineffective. All four journals, however, found "On the Scaffold," a blackface skit by Roy Rice and Mary Werner, to be quite funny. Fred Barrens won

14 Ibid., March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 10, 1919.

15 Laurie, Vaudeville, 182; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 10, 1919.

16 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 10, 1919.

17 Laurie, Vaudeville, 133; Cincinnati Times Star, March 10, 1919.
notice as a violinist who was accompanied by an electrically controlled piano. The "dumb" acts, Les Kelliors, a circus strongman, and the Three Johns, equilibrists, rounded out a program that was accused by the Commercial Tribune of presenting "very little that is novel or new."  

The Empress' March 9 show was highlighted by two musical turns. The Misses Malcolm and Le Mar, a concert pianist and society singer, presented a well received act, but Paul Earle's ukulele playing scored the biggest hit as he was recalled to the stage four times by the sustained applause. The bill's comedy chores were handled by the Stratford Comedy Four who romped through a schoolroom skit, Bernard and Collins who clowned around in a Klondike caper called "A Yukon Yokel," and Marlette's Mannikins who appeared as popular comic strip characters. Charles Edenbury, an athletic equilibrist, completed the Empress' varied program.

"Step Lively Girls" greeted Olympic burlesque fans throughout the week of March 9. This production differed from others on the Columbia Wheel in that it starred a team of comics. Richard "Shorty" McAllister and Harry Shannon were on stage for most of the show doing, among other routines, a dancing specialty, a burlesque of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, and a pool room sketch that went over big with the Sunday crowd. The soubrette role was filled by Anna Prop, a dainty performer who thrilled the audience with her rendering of "You

18 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 10, 1919.
Get Me So Excited." Referred to as "youthful," "capable," and "well
dressed," the chorus line shared in the compliments that were liberal-
ly paid by the gentlemen of the press. Indeed, "Step Lively Girls"
was not met by any negative comments.

A troupe consisting of Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, W. C. Fields,
Ann Pennington, Marilyn Miller, and many others made up the 1918
edition of the "Ziegfeld Follies" that opened at the Grand on Monday,
March 17. All the opulence, luxury, splendor, beauty, wit, and so-
phestication that made Florenz Ziegfeld spectacles world famous were
present in the current Cincinnati engagement. The sets of master de-
signer Joseph Urban, particularly a Japanese garden complete with a
cherry tree and bridge, were so lavish that they led the Enquirer to
conclude that "Urban is the star of the production." A patriotic tab-
leau staged by Ben Ali Haggin, "Forward Allies," won praise for glo-
ifying the American girl despite that fact that it presented bare breast-
ed chorines as the "Spirit of the Allies." Topical humor, which in-
cluded pokes at the approaching Prohibition period, was the specialty
of Will Rogers, Ziegfeld's personal favorite among the many comics
he employed. Famed for his large, popping brown eyes, burnt cork

19 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 10, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 10,
1919.

20 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 333; Cincinnati Enquirer,
March 18, 1919.

21 Churchill, Over Here, 172.

22 Carter, World of Ziegfeld, 88.
make-up, straw hat, white-rimmed eye glasses, white gloves, flowing black artist's tie, and tight checked trousers, Eddie Cantor treated the audience to his blackface routine. Cantor, born Isador Iskowitz, also appeared without his usual trappings in a recruiting office scene and in a skit with W. C. Fields. 23 Primarily known as a pantomimist, Fields, a juggler-turned-comedian who was intensely disliked by Ziegfeld, performed in a wordless golf sketch he had created. 24 Although Ann Pennington had top billing among the females, Marilyn Miller, an eighteen year old dancer who was snatched away from the Shuberts in 1917 by Ziegfeld, became the surprise hit as her youth, talent, beauty, and charm combined to make an instant impression on "Follies" audiences. 25 While the contributions of Urban, Haggin, Rogers, Cantor, Fields, and Miller were largely given the credit for making the twenty-five scenes in the "Follies of 1918" a success, the music employed was questioned. The Louis Hirsch and Dave Stamper melodies were said to be "somewhat reminiscent" of earlier tunes and Frank Carter, the leading male vocalist, "seemed to be bored by his own singing." 26 In spite of the less-than-perfect score, the bravos for the "Follies" were enthusiastic

23 Blum, Great Stars, 85; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 333.

24 Blum, Great Stars, 100; Cantor, Take My Life, 43; Carter, World of Ziegfeld, 85.

25 Blum, Great Stars, 100; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 333; Carter, World of Ziegfeld, 96; Ewen, America's Musical Theater, 596.

26 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 333; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 18, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, March 18, 1919.
with the notable exception of the Times Star. Entitling its review
"'Follies' Not Up To Standard," the Times Star, after complimenting
Urban, Rogers, and Fields, found little else to praise and sarcastic-
ally told its readers that the "Follies" was the best show at the Grand
"since King Baggot" was in town the previous week. 27 Despite this ad-
verse notice, the "Follies," with a top price of $3.00, grossed some
$29,000 by selling out the house at all nine of its performances. 28 The
"Ziegfeld Follies" gave patrons of the Grand a week to remember.

In order to compete with the Grand's blockbuster attraction, the
Lyric presented Robert Mantell, a Scottish born Shakespearean actor,
in a repertory of seven plays. Besides "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Mac-
beth," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Richard III," Mantell included
"Richelieu" and "Louis XI" as two dramas with classical pretensions.
At sixty-four, Mantell's reputation as an outstanding thespian was up-
held by the columnists as they labeled him "this sterling actor," "the
dean of contemporary American tragedians," and "America's greatest
exponent of Shakespearean drama."29 Reference to Mantell's age was
made in several of the reviews, but the Times Star went beyond its
colleagues as it bluntly urged patrons to see Mantell before he died. 30

27 Cincinnati Times Star, March 18, 1919.

28 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 23, 1919.

29 Ibid., March 17, 1919; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 17, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, March 17, 1919; Blum, Great Stars, 4.

30 Cincinnati Times Star, March 17, 1919.
The supporting cast, while deemed worthy of their task, did not receive the tributes paid to Mantell. Although he lacked the broad appeal of Ziegfeld's extravaganza, Mantell's stay at the Lyric afforded playgoers an opportunity to see a classic actor in classic dramatic roles.

The Keith tried to entice patrons to its March 16 variety show with the suggestion that "a weekly visit to Keith's is a sound, happy, healthful habit enjoyed by thousands of Cincinnatians, rich and poor alike, because Keith's rejuvenates and satisfies." The critics for the Times Star and Enquirer, however, were not satisfied with what they saw. The headline act was "Hands Across the Sea," a routine that featured Estelle and Adelaide Lovenberg performing English, Irish, Italian, and American dances. The funsters on the program included Joe Laurie and Aileen Bronson, a duo whose skit was filled with "nonsense," Harry Cooper, a "Hebe" comic who incorporated a "raw" Prohibition ditty into his act, Sylvia Clark, a self-styled "Klassy Little Klown," and Grace Dunbar Niles, a comedienne who was showcased in a bedroom farce. Prosper and Marel, a pair of hand balancers, and Nestor and Vincent, a juggling twosome, filled in as the silent turns. With no stellar personality to draw in the customers, the Keith's line-up seemed lackluster when compared to Ziegfeld's roster of stars on stage at the Grand.

The bush league vaudevillians who played the Empress the week of

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32. Ibid., March 17, 1919; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 17, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, March 17, 1919; Laurie, Vaudeville, 76.
March 16 were less well known than their colleagues at the Keith. Betty Frederick, the headliner, presented "Betty's Mistake," a one act farce that was a hit with audiences. Charlotte Russell, a speed dresser who made ten character costume changes in twelve minutes, closely rivaled Miss Frederick's popular appeal. The opening act of Willa and Harold Browne gained approval as they formed pictures out of colored silk rags. Three teams completed the bill: Glenn and Jenkins, two Negroes who were known as "street manicurists" because of their "broom dance," Morgan and Ray, a singing and talking pair called "The Dope and the Girl," and the King Sisters, two girls who sang and played a cornet and saxophone. This diverse program was augmented by an overture of Irish melodies performed by the house band in honor of St. Patrick's Day. By Empress standards, the six acts that displayed their wares the week of March 16 were of average quality.

Music was the notable feature of the Olympic's March 16 production, "Oh, Girl!" Although Johnnie Jess and Danny Murphy were the principal comics, two duets, the choral numbers, and a famous paintings tableau were the strengths of the show. "Don't You Remember the Day," a song handled by the "attractively costumed and energetic" chorus line, was enjoyed to the point that it led the Enquirer to admit that, while the chorus girls were no more than average in appearance, they "worked hard to please." In general, however, the critics were

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33 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 17, 1919.
34 Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 17, 1919.
reserved in their comments and they failed to urge patrons to catch the show. Normally, the Olympic's offerings were not appreciated by those theatergoers who wanted entertainment they perceived as stylish and sophisticated. In this week dominated by Ziegfeld's cast of luminaries, "Oh, Girl!" was conspicuous for the absence of both these commodities.

Any show that followed the "Follies" into the Grand would have the difficult task of following a runaway success. It would be easy for such a show to seem pale by comparison. This predicament was faced by "Polly With A Past" as it entered the Grand on Monday, March 24.

Written by George Middleton and Guy Bolton, "Polly With A Past" overcame the potential booking problems and scored as a hit with all four columnists. Ina Claire, a former Ziegfeld girl and the female lead in the original Broadway company, starred in this comedy as a lowly maid who uses her ability to speak French to masquerade as a Parisian siren in order to win the love of a young, wealthy, Long Island gentleman.

Although the story was well received, the critics wrote glowing tributes to Miss Claire. She was termed "a full-fledged actress," "as much an actress as vocalist," and "an actress of delightful personality, splendid ability, and finely polished method."35 "Polly With A Past" was an important stepping-stone toward stardom for this twenty-five year old blonde as the acclaim she garnered from the Cincinnati press was matched by similar sentiments coming from reviewers throughout the

35 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 25, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 25, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, March 25, 1919.
nation. "Polly With A Past" was the kind of frothy and frivolous show that could come upon the heels of the "Follies" without stumbling.

"The Climax," a play that was last seen in the city some ten years before, was the Lyric's presentation for the week of March 23. It was similar to "Polly With A Past" in that it featured a lady in the leading role. Eleanor Painter, primarily known for her work in light opera, portrayed a young singer whose fiancé, a doctor, attempts to end her career by performing a minor throat operation. The title of the play was suggested by its climax when the singer discovers that her voice is still intact. The plot was given passing marks even though "it has not the qualities of the classic." Miss Painter's performance, however, was seen as "pleasing," "effective," "surprisingly good," and one deserving of "respect and admiration." The incidental music of Joseph Carl Brell and the three remaining cast members came in for a lesser share of the compliments. In "The Climax," the Lyric had a play that relied upon melodrama while its competitor across Vine Street was dealing with farce.

For the week of March 23, the Keith's variety show fell "below the usual standard set by that house" and had "no one act of real headline

36 Blum, Great Stars, 92; Blum, Pictorial History, 163.
37 Cincinnati Times Star, March 24, 1919.
38 Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 24, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 24, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 24, 1919.
qualities." The most popular act was the character singing of the Texas Comedy Four, but the headliner's spot was held by the Grenadier Girls, nine ladies who performed martial music on a variety of instruments. Harry Hines, who billed himself as "the 58th Variety," was criticized by the Commercial Tribune for telling old jokes, but was applauded by the other journals. The comedy dancing of Palfrey, Hall, and Brown was paid little attention, but Helene Davis' impersonation of the "Follies Girl" caused the Times Star to comment that "it is well that she ceases her costume diminution just when she does." The Four Readings did a gymnastic demonstration that won notice, as did the bicycle antics of Paul Gordon and America. The Keith's bill for March 23 was one of its most undistinguished of the season.

Equally undistinguished, but more worthy of its surroundings, was the March 23 vaudeville bill at the Empress. The show opened with the Karuzos in a shadowgraphic exhibition that was recommended for youngsters. Scoville and Diehl followed with singing, dancing, and comedy patter. The next turn was George J. Jordan who did "songs and stories of darkeyland." Jordan's blackface routine was succeeded by Maher and Myers, self-proclaimed "missing links" whose piano and singing act was called "Tales From Monkeyland." The headline honors went to

39 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 24, 1919; Cincinnati Post, March 24, 1919.

40 Cincinnati Times Star, March 24, 1919.

41 Ibid.
Kingsbury and Munson in a skit that made fun of fast changing women's fashions entitled "The Devil in Possession." The show concluded with the swinging trapeze artistry of Enos Frazere. Since the Empress seldom booked "name" talent, it could present a series of second-class acts, like the March 23 bill, without earning critical condemnation.

"Hip-Hip-Hooray Girls" was the Olympic's newest offering. It featured Benny Pierce, the main comic, Perrin Somers, a blackface humorist, Helen McClain, the prima donna, and Thelma Seaville, the soubrette. The highlights included Pierce's dodging of rubber balls thrown from the audience, Somers' interpolation of "Peach-Jam-Making Time," McClain's rendering of "Mountain Love," and Seaville's vocalizing of "Oh, Paris." The Six Diving Belles, "shapely" beauties who "possessed everything that diving girls ought to have," added an aquatic touch with their specialty.\(^{42}\) Besides the positive reviews, "Hip-Hip-Hooray Girls" received newspaper coverage when Miss McClain, one of burlesque's youngest prima donnas, married George Belfrage, a manager of the traveling company, on Sunday. This demonstration of domesticity was the kind of publicity that the Columbia Wheel wanted as it advertised for patrons to "bring your mother, wife, or sweetheart."

Monday, March 31, saw the opening of "The Canary" at the Grand. A musical comedy with songs by Ivan Caryll, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and Harry Tierney, "The Canary" brought with it the original

\(^{42}\)Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 24, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, March 24, 1919.
Broadway cast headed by Julia Sanderson and Joseph Cawthorn. The story, based on a French farce, concerned an antique shop clerk, portrayed by Mr. Cawthorn, who accidently swallows a diamond belonging to an artist, played by Miss Sanderson. The conflict ends as Miss Sanderson gets the gem back and picks up Mr. Cawthorn as a husband. In discussing the play, the critics found common ground in recommending the performances of the two stars, but they questioned the quality of the score and book. The Times Star, in a spirit similar to the other dailies, said that the tunes "will do" and all four reviews virtually ignored Harry B. Smith's work as the playwright. Miss Sanderson's appearance, however, caused considerably more enthusiasm. The blue-eyed brunette was said to be "engaging," "very charming," "never, somehow, quite so dear," and "the most indefatigable musical comedy artiste seen here this season." While not as glowing, the endorsement of Joseph Cawthorn was equally kind. "The Canary" continued the Grand's fortunate string of popular attractions.

Sunday, March 30, marked the debut of the Lyric's answer to the "Follies," "The Passing Show of 1918." This Shubert-produced extravaganza was patterned after Ziegfeld's successful formula: spectacle, girls, comedy, girls, fantasy, girls, music, and girls. As it opened,

43 Cincinnati Times Star, April 1, 1919.

44 Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 1, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 1, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 1, 1919; Blum, Great Stars, 71.

45 Stagg, Brothers Shubert, 119.
Cincinnatians were already familiar with two songs that had been interpolated into the show: "Smiles" and "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." These tunes, along with a multi-talented cast, helped to lure a large and responsive opening night crowd. The comedy leads were Eugene and Willie Howard, two brothers who had appeared in several Shubert shows. Willie, the younger of the two, was a small Jewish comic. Eugene, who was known as a snappy dresser, played the straight man in their routines and was a solo vocalist. Their main sketch was a travesty on opera in which, while costumed as two buxom divas, they rendered "The Galli-Curci Rag," a Sigmund Romberg creation. Charlie Ruggles, a juvenile comic, sang Romberg's "My Holiday Girl." Frank Fay also delivered a Romberg melody as he vocalized about "My Baby-Talk Lady!" In these musical numbers, the Howards, Ruggles, Fay, and the chorus of one hundred girls made use of a specially installed runway that extended into the house. This conveyance was of particular value to the chorines as it enabled them to better display their wares to the men in the audience. The show's dancing was handled by the little known team of Fred and Adele Astaire. This brother and sister duo was showcased in "Birdland," a lavish scene in which they were decked out as chicks and surrounded by a chorus of poultry. Fred also appeared as a waiter in a skit with Sammy White and Lou Clayton in which

46 Allen, Much Ado, 270; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 201-203.

47 Fred Astaire, Steps in Time (New York, 1959), 64; Baral, Revue, 111; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 333; Ewen, America's Musical Theater, 413-414.
they served food by sliding over the tables. The leading lady was Nita Naldi, a future silent screen star. The reviewers reacted to this sensation of sight and sound by complaining about the amount of noise it contained, the poor quality of the singing, the sparsity of high-class humor, and the lack of clothing for the chorus girls. This latter problem, which warranted little attention when Ziegfeld's show was in town, prompted the Times Star to hope that "the stage at the Lyric Theater is draft-proof." Despite the deficiencies detected by the critics, large crowds packed the Lyric to see "The Passing Show of 1918."

The Keith's March 30 show contrasted with the previous week's bill. Instead of a program below the Keith standard, the new line-up was riveted with talent. At the top was Blanche Ring, a petite, blue-eyed brunette who was one of vaudeville's highest paid women.  

She was famous for such songs as "Rings On My Fingers," "Come, Josephine, In My Flying Machine," and "Waltz Me Around Again, Willie," but her ability as a comedienne was also recognized. Her current routine was called "Topics and Tunes of the Times," and she appeared wearing a series of expensive wraps and hats. The press did not have a negative word to say about her or any of the other acts. The Avon Comedy Four, a group that had started in 1900, were applauded for their singing and side-splitting antics in "The Hungarian Rhapsody."  

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48 Cincinnati Times Star, March 31, 1919.

49 Blum, Great Stars, 50; Laurie, Vaudeville, 251.

50 Laurie, Vaudeville, 75.
comic skit was performed by Herbert Williams, a piano-playing prankster, and Hilda Wolfus, the straight portion of the team. Bagpipe melodies were provided by Jack Wyatt's Scotch Lads and Lassies, a troupe of kilted musicians. Vocal numbers were the specialty of Harry Kranz and Bob La Salle. Dancing, both on and off roller skates, was presented by Gold, Reese, and Edwards. The Duttons, a leading equestrian act, closed a show that, even for the Keith, was an outstanding collection of variety artists.

"The New Boarder," a sketch that furnished "some clever comedy situations" in dealing with the importance of fashion to a woman, was the major feature of the Empress' March 30 program. Also gaining recognition was "The Girl From Starland," an unnamed lady who sang while being suspended over the audience. Music was also provided by Florine, an accordionist. Comedy came from Taylor Trout, a blackface artist who was also a "grotesque dancer," and Saunders and Boomer, two "eccentric comedians." "Sky-scrapping stunts" were promised by the Aerial Butters, the closing act. As entertaining as this bill was to the Empress audience, it could not match the publicity and popularity of the Keith's March 30 offering.

"The Bostonians" with Frank Finney as the lead comic was the

51 Ibid., 74, 230.
52 Ibid., 160.
53 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 31, 1919.
Olympic's draw for March 30. Finney, an Irish funster who had written the material used in "The Bostonians," included a sketch that depicted life in the wartime trenches. The presence of Jack Watts as a "better than average" male singer made the show different from many on the Wheel. This unusual departure from form was joined by other more typical burlesque fare. The chorus appeared as "The Laundry Girls" and supported the principals in the "Dynamite Lunch" and "The Country Poorhouse" scenes. As for the leading ladies, the soubrette was term "jolly" and the prima donna had "a voice of some quality." Taken as a whole, Finney's "The Bostonians" was rated as little better than average for a burlesque production.

The first full week of April was different from all the preceding weeks of the season as far as the legitimate houses were concerned. Neither the Grand or Lyric, for the week of April 6, presented a musical comedy or drama. Rather, they differed by offering shows built around the talents of a different star. The Grand's celebrity was Julian Eltinge, the leading female impersonator of the day. Born as William Julian Dalton in 1882, Eltinge, producer A. H. Woods' greatest money-making personality, was famous for his pure falsetto voice and the stunning wardrobe that he wore while on stage. His latest

55 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, March 31, 1919.
56 Cincinnati Enquirer, March 31, 1919.
57 Blum, Pictorial History, 83.
58 Ibid., 146; Blum, Great Stars, 70.
vehicle was "The Julian Eltinge Revue" and it consisted of several acts besides his own. Eltinge sang a number of songs and appeared as "a stunning vampire, a winsome bride, and a bathing girl most alluring." The press was restrained in its appraisal of Eltinge, but they agreed that the vaudeville portion of the program was lacking in merit. The Times Star, so concerned in recent weeks about the absence of suitable costuming for the chorus girls, accused Gorhada and Majorie Carville, oriental dancers, of having "not one shred of originality and but few shreds of anything else." The reviewers, after dismissing the other performers, concluded that Julian Eltinge was the sole reason to attend the Grand the week of April 7.

While Eltinge was mystifying audiences by his skill as a female impersonator, Howard Thurston was mystifying Lyric patrons with his skill as a magician. Promoted as "the wonder show of the universe," Thurston performed card tricks, practiced hypnotism, caused rabbits and birds to disappear, and did other illusions that were termed "Hindoo magic." This was not Thurston's first stop in the Queen City and the critics were grateful that he had enlivened his show with new magical features and comic bits. Indeed, the critical community felt that Thurston's wizardry at the Lyric was a better entertainment bargain than Eltinge's brief appearances in his revue at the Grand.

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59 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 7, 1919.
60 Cincinnati Times Star, April 7, 1919.
61 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 6, 1919.
The highest paid performer in vaudeville played the Keith the week of April 6. Promoted as "cyclonic," "the world's greatest eccentric comedienne," and "the bombshell of joy," Eva Tanguay, famed for her on-stage energy and backstage fights, disheveled hair and wild costuming, treated her audiences to "I Don't Care," "Keep On Knocking Me More," "That's Why They Call Me Tabasco," and "Go As Far As You Like." Her most responsive number, however, was "The Marsailles" which she sang while draped in a French flag. Born a French-Canadian in 1878, Miss Tanguay had been in show business since the age of eight. In 1908, she created a sensation by doing a Salome dance without any veils. Subsequently, her career was based on sex appeal. While performing, every part of her body was in motion and she had her expensive gowns tailor-made so as to make the most of her kicking, shaking, waggling, and wriggling. The local reviewers reflected their New York counterparts as they hinted that Miss Tanguay was not as talented as her extensive publicity would lead one to believe. Regardless of this critical assessment, the crowds poured into the Keith throughout the week. While it was Eva Tanguay most people wanted to

62 Tucker, Some of These Days, 80.
63 Burton, In Memorium, 71; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 7, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 6, 1919; Laurie, Vaudeville, 53; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 55.
64 Burton, In Memorium, 71; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 57.
65 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 7, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 7, 1919; Samuels, Once Upon A Stage, 56.
see, Keith audiences also saw Will Cressy and Blanche Davis in "The Man Who Remembered," Wilbur and Nella Mack in a flirtation scene, Marconi and Fitzibbon play an accordion and xylophone, John Gardner and Marie Hartman perform a marriage burlesque, the Ara Sisters do a dance routine, and the Adroit Brothers somersault across the stage. This was the second week in a row that the Keith showcased a vaudeville star whose brilliance and popularity caused the other acts to seem inconsequential.

The Empress' headlining act for April 6 bore little resemblance to Eva Tanguay in appearance or style, but they were also well received by the public. Little Hip, a baby elephant, and Napoleon, a chimpanzee, were credited with offering "a lot of monkey business and a trunk full of funny stunts." These animal actors were joined by McPherson and Armitage, two girls who performed Scottish dances and played the bagpipes, Bob White, a whistling veteran, Martindale and Young, two chattering songsters, Hall and Shapiro, a Jewish comic and his straight man, and the Flying Howards, an aerial act. As "extraordinary" as this program was, the Empress' array could not rival the Keith's bill topped by Eva Tanguay.

An old-time burlesque show with Billy Watson, one of the classic clowns of the Columbia Wheel, came to the Olympic on Sunday, April 6. "The Big Show" was a production built around Watson's comic

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66 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 7, 1919.

67 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 7, 1919.
routine called "Krausemeyer's Alley" and a hefty chorus that earned the nickname of "the Beef Trust." Watson's character, complete with red nose and baggy pants, ran rampant through the show pinching the ample posteriors of the chorines, pounding his fellow comics with mallets, and employing every bit known to a slapstick artist.\(^6^8\) Besides Watson's racial caricature, another highlight of "The Big Show" was Kathryn Pearl and the well fed chorus doing "Toreador Belle," a bump-and-grind number. A chorus girl, unidentified except by the adjective "stout," gained recognition for her handling of a "coon shouting song." Billy Watson's show had not followed the Wheel's purification trend, but it was welcomed by one critic because it was "funny to the degree that it made our fathers laugh."\(^6^9\) Billy Watson joined Julian Eltinge, Howard Thurston, and Eva Tanguay in making April 6 the beginning of an outstanding week of personality-based entertainment.

Before the curtain went up on a new week, labor troubles again threatened to disrupt city life. This time it was the Firemen's Union that had clashed with Mayor John Galvin and, as a result, four hundred and thirty-four firefighters resigned their positions on Saturday, April 12. Mayor Galvin, following the same procedure he had used in fighting the policemen's union, ordered the Home Guard to assist the remaining ninety-eight firemen as he advertised for new city firemen.\(^7^0\)

\(^{68}\) Zeidman, American Burlesque, 46, 202, 207.

\(^{69}\) Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 7, 1919.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., April 12, 1919.
This struggle, which the Mayor emphasized was not a strike, continued for a week before a resolution was reached. On April 19, the Mayor accepted the reapplications of the former firemen with the understood proviso that there be no further union activity in the department. 71 The lack of trained firefighters for a week caused dismay to the theatrical managers who realized that the public feared the outbreak of fire in a crowded theater. Reports appeared in the press assuring citizens that the city's amusement halls were safe, but the week of April 13, whether due to the lack of professional firemen, the spring weather, or it being "the dullest week in the season," was not a good one at the box offices. 72

Frank Tinney, a "Follies" graduate, was the main draw of "Atta Boy," the Grand's April 13 show. The cast was composed entirely of former sailors and soldiers with Tinney, also a veteran of the war, as the only big name personality. The show had run a dismal three weeks in New York and the critical comments in the Cincinnati newspapers reflected its woeful condition. After admitting that Tinney was a success in his burnt cork routine, the reviewers found little quality in this company of "ex-Hun exterminators." 73 "Atta Boy," they agreed, was a show that tried hard to entertain. Such novelties as men dressed as a female chorus line and a corporal doing a Salome dance were conceded to be funny, if you liked horseplay. The only reason to see "Atta Boy,"

71 Ibid., April 19, 1919.

72 Ibid., April 14, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 14, 1919.

73 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 14, 1919.
when all was said and done, was that it was patriotic.

The Lyric's April 13 production, a Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern collaboration, leaned on America's growing enthusiasm for football. "Leave It To Jane," taken from George Ade's "The College Widow," involved the efforts of Jane Witherspoon, the daughter of a college president played by Juanita Fletcher, to recruit Billy Bolton, a star halfback portrayed by Earle Fox. As with other musical comedies of the day, all ended well as Billy won the big game and the heart of Jane. Although it was created by the trio that had popularized Princess Theater shows, "Leave It To Jane" was a full-scale musical comedy rather than a small, intimate, sophisticated show like "Oh, Boy!" or "Oh, Lady! Lady!" Even so, it was similar to other Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern creative efforts. Guy Bolton's solid libretto was unusual in that it was a close adaptation of Ade's humorous play. P. G. Wodehouse's free-flowing lyrics earned him a favorable comparison to Sir William Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame. Jerome Kern's exuberant score continued to exemplify the pure, uncontrived melodic line in such songs as "Siren's Song," "The Crickets Are Calling," and "Cleopatterer," a comic hit with audiences. "Leave It To Jane" was recognized as fine entertainment, but the columnists were also aware of

74 Ewen, America's Musical Theater, 296.

75 Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 324; Jasen, Wodehouse, 70.

the vocal weaknesses contained in the current company. "Good singers are sadly lacking" was the Post's opinion and it was shared by the other dailies. 77 "Leave It To Jane" was another important turn in the evolution of the American musical, but its impact on Cincinnati audiences was curbed by ineffective singing.

No names the equal of Blanche Ring or Eva Tanguay tempted Keith patrons the week of April 13. There were, however, three acts that had played the city on numerous occasions: Fred Hallen and Mollie Fuller, a reminiscing team in "The Corridors of Time," Paul Morton and Naomi Glass, a married couple in the domestic scene "1919-1950," and the Leighton Brothers, a blackface troupe who harmonized "with thoroughly absurd songs of the river front and the Southern levees."78 The headline act was a miniature vaudeville of its own entitled "What Girls Have Done." This turn consisted of the Morin Sisters, the Warren Girls, Queenie Dunedin, Ardelle Cleavers, and Pauline Chambers demonstrating the show that they did for the boys in France. The remaining acts were newcomers to Cincinnati: the Florenze Duo, a magician and his assistant, the Nelsons, five jugglers, and Eddie Foyer, a monologist and poem reciter who claimed to have some five hundred poems stored in his memory. 79 Even without the big names that had headed the last two Keith bills, the critics recommended the show.

77 Cincinnati Post, April 14, 1919.
78 Cincinnati Times Star, April 14, 1919.
79 Laurie, Vaudeville, 191.
Henry G. Clarke, owner of the Empress, announced in the Sunday, April 13, newspapers that a change of policy would follow that week's variety show. Beginning of April 20, the Vine Street house would drop vaudeville and substitute dramatic productions in its place. Whether this move was to be permanent was not explained as the final bill went on display. The headliner and the only "dumb" act on the program was Asaki, a Japanese juggler and roller skater who was termed "one of the best." Musical offerings were made by Bobby Van Horn, a self-styled "bareytone," Fairfax and Stafford, a comedy, song, and dance team, and De Vaux, a ventriloquist who sang through his dummy. The most popular turns were the comedy routines of Laurence Gordon and Miss Jolice, whose "Nearly A Home Run" was "a funny exposition of domestic battling," and Abbott and Mills, whose skit depicted a husband returning home in the wee hours of the morning. The Empress' last vaudeville presentation was strongly endorsed by the reviewers.

"The Best Show in Town" was the Olympic's draw for April 13. Its featured comic, Frank Hunter, was given kind words for his "wop" and "darkey" characterizations. A "second banana" destined to win fame as the most cowardly lion in the mythical Land of Oz was also in the show. Bert Lahr was lauded for showing "a marked improvement this season" and for wearing "as funny make-up as has been seen in a long

80 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 13, 1919.
81 Ibid., April 14, 1919.
82 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 14, 1919.
while. "83 In addition to visual humor, Lahr concocted laughs by his catch phrase. After telling a joke, he would do a double take toward the audience and growl "gnong, gnong, gnong, gnong."84 This trademark would stay with Lahr throughout his illustrious career. Besides Hunter and Lahr, Margie Winters and the chorus won mention for their exciting performance of "Everybody Shimmies Now." While it was debatable as to whether it was actually the best show in town, "The Best Show in Town" was an important production in that Bert Lahr, one of show business' foremost clowns, gained valuable experience that would pay dividends to audiences for years to come.

Margaret Anglin, one of the legitimate stage's most prominent personalities, came to the Grand on Monday, April 21, in the original New York cast of "Billeted." The title suggested a martial theme, but the advertisements, reflecting the concern that military drama was no longer popular, insisted that "Billeted" was "a merry comedy of love, not a war play."85 In truth, the late conflict was a backdrop to the plot. Miss Anglin appeared as an Englishwoman whose country house was shared by two officers. Although most of the local townsfolk and the two officers believed her to be a widow, she was actually married to a man who had disappeared in Africa several years earlier. The complication set in as more soldiers, including her now bearded husband who uses an

83 Ibid.; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 14, 1919.
84 Lahr, Notes, 45.
85 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 20, 1919.
assumed name, were billeted in her home. While the plot left some of
the critics unsatisfied, the leading lady received rave notices. "Irre-
sistible," "charming," "incomparable," and "sterling" were some of
the adjectives used to describe the performance of Miss Anglin, a
forty-three year old native-born Canadian. Two reviewers termed
the dialogue "bright, witty, and entertaining" and "intellectually sub-
tle and sparkling," but the Times Star dismissed the entire play as
"thin stuff." The disagreement over the artistic merit of the comedy
had little impact on the box office success of "Billeted" as people
came to see Margaret Anglin, a star of the legitimate theater.

The Lyric's attraction for Sunday, April 20, had neither a big name
to mount on its marquee or a hit Broadway play about which to boast.
"I Love You," in just its third week on the road, was on its way to New
York with a cast of "uniformly good," "capable," and "clever" play-
ers. The element of the piece that most caught the attention of the
critics was the cleanliness of the plot. The story told of a man who wa-
gered with a friend that he could induce any man and woman, regardless
of social position, into falling in love. By the curtain's fall, the money
had been lost as Cupid followed his own course. The columnists were

86 Ibid., April 22, 1919; Blum, Great Stars, 21; Cincinnati Enquirer,
April 22, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 22, 1919.

87 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 22, 1919; Cincinnati En-
quiner, April 22, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 22, 1919.

88 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 21, 1919; Cincinnati Post,
April 21, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 21, 1919.
grateful that "I Love You" was "of the front veranda rather than the bedroom" and that it did not contain a line or situation "which could offend a Vermont preacher." As with "Billeted," there were detractors. In this case, the Enquirer labeled the farce "of flimsy texture," but this lone criticism was lost among notices that gave it positive references. "I Love You" went on to do respectable business at the ticket counter.

The new dramatic format at the Empress premiered on April 20 with "In Old Kentucky," a melodrama from the last century complete with a virtuous heroine, dastardly villain, exciting horse race, and high-stepping pickaninny band. Two capacity crowds on Sunday made the change from low-priced vaudeville to inexpensive drama a profitable one. Under the new policy, seats went from 15¢ to 75¢. This kept the Empress below the price of admission to the other Vine Street houses. The cast, mostly unknown to Cincinnatians, and scenery were considered to be good and this helped make "In Old Kentucky" a success from both the critical and popular points of view.

The same week that the Grand was stressing that its attraction was not a war play, the Keith headlined "On the High Seas," a North Atlantic melodrama in which a German U-boat attempts to sink an American transport. Of the act's four scenes, the ones that included a burning

89 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 21, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 21, 1919.

90 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 21, 1919.

91 Burton, In Memorium, 40; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 21, 1919.
vessel and a fleet of warships chasing the submarine were singled out as being especially exciting. This "top notch show" included three comedy turns: Al and Fanny Steadman, a "whirlwind" piano act, Grace De Mar, an "inimitable" impersonator, and Harry Holman, an "uproariously funny" comic actor. 92 The musical offerings were presented by the "pleasing" Frank Crumit and a "plump" Narine Velmar. 93 The opening act, the Aerial Mitchells, were novel in their use of a revolving ladder. The critics were pleased with the show and the Keith, hoping to entice patrons to leave the gentle breezes and blooming flowers of spring, promoted it as "crackerjack strong." 94 This combined effort was successful in giving the Keith a satisfactory week.

The Olympic's Easter week burlesque production was "The Golden Crook," a name derived from a scandalous show of the last century. 95 Billy Arlington, a tramp comedian, was the "top banana" and was praised for not using slapstick as a comic device. Arlington was joined by "singers who can sing, dancers who can dance, and a chorus four ranks deep and not an 'old hen' in it." 96 The numbers that warranted attention were "2000 A. D.," "Planet of Mars," and "The Ballet of the Allied Nations."

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92 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 21, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 21, 1919.
93 Cincinnati Times Star, April 21, 1919.
94 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 20, 1919.
95 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 23.
96 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 21, 1919.
These scenes featured the "youthful" chorus wearing a variety of "exotic" costumes.\textsuperscript{97} Other than a passing reference to the loudness of the house orchestra, "The Golden Crook" was favorably compared with the entire Olympic season to date.

The Music Hall opened its doors to a special attraction on Tuesday evening, April 23. With prices ranging from 50¢ to $2.00, the public was urged to purchase tickets to see and hear America's "Ace of Aces," Captain Eddie Rickenbacker.\textsuperscript{98} Besides the great war hero, motion pictures of the late conflict were promised. Evidently, the war was losing its drawing power, the other attractions were perceived as being of a greater entertainment potential, or the weather was too pleasant. For whatever reason, Rickenbacker managed to pull only a small crowd into the 3,000-seat facility.\textsuperscript{99}

"A distorted affair of misplaced emphasis and without the atmosphere essential to a costume play" entered the Grand on Sunday, April 27.\textsuperscript{100} "Remnant," a comedy exported from France, was the title and it involved the adventures of a Parisian ragamuffin, described as "the sweetest of the sweet, the purest of the pure, the dearest of the dear," who gave hope and happiness to everyone she met.\textsuperscript{101} As admirable as

\textsuperscript{97}Cincinnati Times Star, April 21, 1919.

\textsuperscript{98}Cincinnati Enquirer, April 13, 1919.

\textsuperscript{99}Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 23, 1919.

\textsuperscript{100}Cincinnati Times Star, April 28, 1919.

\textsuperscript{101}Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.
this heroine from the 1840s was, the reviewers pointed out several facets of the show that were less than admirable. The Times Star, harshest of the critics, did not care for the script or the star, Florence Nash. The Enquirer also attacked the playwright’s efforts when it argued that "Remnant" was "devoid of incident and dramatic potency," but it defended the leading lady by saying that she made "it seem plausible."  

Miss Nash and the entire production won support from the Post as it pronounced her to be "charming" and the play a "delicate comedy fantasy."  

"The play is not great" was the Commercial Tribune’s conclusion, but it credited Miss Nash with having done "very well." "Remnant" was a play that attempted to instruct as well as amuse. The critics, however, could not agree as to whether it had accomplished either goal.

Producer Oliver Morosco, a California-based operator, was responsible for the Charlotte Greenwood vehicle that moved into the Lyric on Sunday, April 27. "So Long, Letty" was the most recent in a series of "Letty" musicals that had begun in 1914. All in the collection had starred Miss Greenwood, a 5'10", golden-haired, "elongated," "high-kicking," "universally-jointed," and "gracefully awkward" comedienne. The plot, unusual in its treatment of marriage, told of two couples who,

102 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 28, 1919.

103 Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.

104 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 28, 1919.

105 Ibid.; Blum, Great Stars, 78; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 317; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 28, 1919.
after exchanging partners, discovered that they were no happier with their new spouses. The couples soon returned to their original mates. The score was supplied by Earl Carroll, who would abandon composing for producing in the 1920s, Harry Tierney, and Walter Donaldson. Neither the story or music elicited much enthusiasm. The leading lady, however, was another matter. Her performance aroused the Post to charge that "there is something decidedly wrong with anyone who cannot laugh at Charlotte Greenwood." Apparently, the Lyric did not contain any such person as she received a "warm welcome." "So Long, Letty," unlike its competition at the Grand, made no pretense of having a serious theme. It was simply entertainment.

The Empress, in its Sunday advertisements, urged the ladies to see their new play with its "strange facts concerning marriage and divorce." The drama to which the newspaper spots were referring was "The Revelations of a Wife." No mention was made as to who was the author of this mystery melodrama. Although the Post highly regarded the anonymous script for causing "the audience to hold its collective breath expecting somebody to be slain in each scene," the Enquirer condemned it for being "very inferior" and "a bore." The remaining reviews fell between these two extremes. The cast of little renown was given words

106 Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.
107 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 28, 1919.
108 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 27, 1919.
109 Ibid., April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.
of encouragement by the Commercial Tribune and Times Star, while the other dailies simply listed their names. The split in Monday's notices, however, could not be blamed for the small crowds that attended the Sunday performances of "The Revelations of a Wife." Whether the low attendance was due to the pleasant weather, a competing baseball game at Redland Field, or the absence of a name attraction, this sharp drop in box office sales from the previous Sunday when "In Old Kentucky" played to capacity portended a dismal week at the Empress. 110

Melodrama, or rather a travesty on this art form, was more successful as the headline feature at the Keith the week of April 27. "For Pity's Sake," a "rip-roaring" piece of "buffoonery," was followed in popularity by "Somewhere in France," a combat sketch complete with singing soldiers. 111 Music, classical and contemporary, was also supplied by Chilson-Ohrman, a coloratura soprano, and Kharum, a Persian pianist. Comedy came from the "mildly applauded" team of Hamilton and Barnes and the "tolerably good" skit "Divorced" performed by James Norval and Julie Ring, sister of Blanche. 112 Bessie Clifford's posing exhibition opened the show and it closed with the slight-of-hand trickery of the Great Koban. "Not one of the topnotch programs of the season" was the Enquirer's summation of the Keith's effort for

110 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 21, 28, 1919.
111 Ibid., April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, April 28, 1919.
112 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.
April 27 and the other dramatic columnists agreed in principle. 113

Rose Sydell, a Kentucky girl who claimed to have studied at London's Royal Academy of Music, produced "London Belles," the Olympic's April 27 offering. 114 George Hays, an old school comic, was the only male mentioned in this female-dominated show. Kate Pullman's singing and dancing in "Whoop-Dee-Doo," Elsie Meadows as "Miss Fatima Puff," and the "well clothed" and "good looking" chorus' patriotic finale were the only aspects of the entertainment to warrant attention. 115 The brevity of the reviews was a clear indication that "London Belles" was not the Olympic's most outstanding hit of the season.

As May rolled in, the close of the 1918-1919 season was only days away. The theaters had been experiencing attendance problems for the past few weeks and the decline in ticket sales was a keen reminder that the indoor amusement season was approaching its end. 116 The Grand's second-to-last attraction was a musical dramatization of Captain Bruce Bairnsfeather's wartime cartoon serial, "The Better 'Ole." This English creation, which opened on Sunday, May 4, related the adventures of "Old Bill," a grumbling private in His Royal Majesty's service, who wins a French decoration by foiling the plans set by a German spy. "The

113 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 28, 1919.

114 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 69.

115 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 28, 1919; Cincinnati Post, April 28, 1919.

Better 'Ole," a mixture of comedy, melodrama, music, and satire, was still playing in New York when five companies were sent on tour. The local version starred De Wolf Hopper as the central character. Hopper, a 6'3" heavy-set comedian in his sixty-first year, was noted for his "cellar-like," "executioner's" voice. His performance was considered "excellent," "immense," and "delightfully imperturbable." Hopper's cohorts in the caper also received flattering notices. The music was the entertainment's only weak link. As a rule, the songs were established favorites rather than specially written for the show and they bore little relation to the story. Since this was common for musical comedies of the era, the critics overlooked the score's liabilities and advised playgoers not to miss "The Better 'Ole."

May 4 saw the Lyric present its final live show of the season. "Sunshine" was its optimistic title and it promised to be "another rollicking, romantic, scintillating musical play." With book, lyrics, and music by the creators of "Fiddlers Three," "Sunshine" hoped to duplicate the success garnered by that earlier effort. The story of this Broadway-bound venture was set in Spain and it told of a famous bull fighter who

117 Ibid., May 4, 1919; Blum, Pictorial History, 168; Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 335; Cincinnati Times Star, May 5, 1919.
118 Blum, Great Stars, 31; Cincinnati Enquirer, May 5, 1919; Cincinnati Post, May 5, 1919.
120 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 4, 1919.
decides to leave the ring in order to win the senorita he loves. Alexander Johnstone's melodies were "haunting," "tuneful rather than jazzy," and "bright and cheerful."\(^1\)\(^{121}\) The acting was not as highly touted and the book was termed "stupid" by the *Times Star*.\(^1\)\(^{122}\) The singing in the show was endorsed, but it was noted that the "Shimmying Senoritas" were not Castillian in appearance. Allowances, however, were made since "Sunshine" was only in its third week before an audience. The reviewers recommended that improvements in the casting and directing be made before "Sunshine" could hope to succeed in New York.

"Freckles" came into the Empress on May 4 "endorsed by the clergy of every denomination."\(^1\)\(^{123}\) Based on a Gene Stratton-Porter novel, "Freckles" was the tale of a "waif who makes a name for himself which the world respects."\(^1\)\(^{124}\) The play's three acts took place in a lumber camp and the forest scenery was effective. No credit was given to any composer or lyricist, but the untitled numbers sung by the lumberjacks quartet were well liked. Gertrude Larzelire, the play's ingenue, received notice for her "charming" performance and for being a native of Price's Hill, a Cincinnati suburb.\(^1\)\(^{125}\) Charles Wilson,  

\(^{121}\) Ibid., May 5, 1919; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 5, 1919; Cincinnati Post, May 5, 1919.  
\(^{122}\) Cincinnati Times Star, May 5, 1919.  
\(^{123}\) Cincinnati Enquirer, May 4, 1919.  
\(^{124}\) Ibid., May 5, 1919.  
\(^{125}\) Ibid.; Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 5, 1919.
the leading man, was commended as was every aspect of "Freckles."

Ten acts were on the Keith's May 4 bill. The program was such that there were two turns of headline quality: the Yip, Yip, Yaphankers, twelve former soldiers who did tumbling, acrobatics, and comedy, and Rita Mario and her "good to look upon" all-girl orchestra. Humor was the business of Ed Brendel and Flo Bert, a couple who "could make a mule laugh," Jean and Arthur Kelly, a bag punching team, Kitner and Reany, a burnt cork duo, and Professor J. Edmund Magee, a comic who did a travesty on magicians. The musical arts were presented by the Imperial Quintet, singers of operatic selections, Katherine Murray, a vocalist of "shimmy" songs, and Cartmell and Harris, dancers who also sang. The Cycling Brunettes offered beautiful girls doing bicycle stunts. Referred to as "a May Festival Bill," the Keith's elongated May 4 show was admired for 'being enjoyable' and having 'much good stuff.'

James Barton, a tramp comic who was known as "Box Car Bennie," was the star of the Olympic's next-to-last attraction, "The Twentieth Century Maids." A "good-sized crowd" viewed the Sunday evening performance of a show that was labeled "a musical absurdity."

126 Cincinnati Times Star, May 5, 1919.

127 Cincinnati Post, May 5, 1919.


who would leave burlesque the next season for a Shubert extravaganza
in New York, had a fine reputation as a laugh-maker. Florence Bel-
mont, "pretty of face and figure," and Juliette Belmont, "a clever inge-
nue," were the lead females. The song hits included "Pals," "Peaches
in Georgia," and "Pickaninnies in Paradise." "The Twentieth Century
Maids," with a chorus that the critics ignored, was not able to reverse
the Olympic’s sagging ticket sales. Leo Ditrichstein, "an artist of consummate ability," both starred in
and co-authored the Grand’s final live production of the season. Augustus Thomas, creator of "The Copperhead," assisted Ditrichstein in
writing "The Matinee Hero," the story of an actor’s struggle to find
meaning in his life. "Trivial," "insufferably commonplace," and "by no
means a 'big' play" were some of the reactions the press had to the dra-
ma. The critics, however, had a more favorable impression of the
leading man. Ditrichstein’s delivery of Hamlet’s soliloquy caused the
Enquirer to call him "an actor of unction and security," while the Post
said that he handled it with "sagacity and experience." "The Mati-
nee Hero" had Leo Ditrichstein and the absence of competition from the

130 Cincinnati Times Star, May 5, 1919.
131 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 5, 1919; Cincinnati En-
quirer, May 5, 1919.
132 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 12, 1919.
133 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 12, 1919; Cincinnati Post, May 12, 1919;
Cincinnati Times Star, May 12, 1919.
134 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 12, 1919; Cincinnati Post, May 12, 1919.
Lyric as the only reason for its limited box office success.

A "capable" and "quite good" cast appeared in the allegorical drama "Which One Shall I Marry?" which played the Empress the week of May 11. Ralph Thomas Kettering was the playwright responsible for this tale of a girl who must decide whether to marry for wealth or love. By the final curtain, the girl has opted for love by becoming the bride of her impoverished suitor. Kind words greeted both the play and its performers. Hilda Graham, the actress who portrayed the heroine, received the most attention as she did "admirably" and "very well." "Which One Shall I Marry?" concluded the Empress' four week run of popular-priced drama on a prosperous note.

"The Sea Wolf," one of vaudeville's major dramatic playlets, was the feature act in the Keith's last regular season show. Based on Jack London's novel of the same name, "The Sea Wolf" starred Herbert Bosworth as a "red-blooded, trip-hammered, two-fisted" ship captain. Bosworth, who had performed the same role in the film version, was applauded for his ability to "hold the audience."

135 Ibid.
136 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 12, 1919; Cincinnati Times-Star, May 12, 1919.
137 Cincinnati Post, May 16, 1919.
138 Laurie, Vaudeville, 50.
139 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 12, 1919.
140 Ibid.
addition to Bosworth, the Keith bill contained Roman sculpture poses by the Rinaldo Brothers, flirtation comedy by Lillian Berse, "nut" comedy by Jimmy Lucas, humorous singing by Al Shayne, ventriloquy by Ray Conlin, and dancing by Tom Bryan and Lillian Broderick. The verdict on the season's "big time" vaudeville finale was that it maintained the Keith's high standard of excellence.

On Sunday, May 11, "good sized" crowds came to see the Olympic's concluding burlesque attraction, Ben Welch and his "Big Show." The entire effort was built around Welch and his Hebrew character "Izzy." With slouched shoulders, distorted facial expressions, gesticulating mannerisms, and distinct accent, Welch's Jewish caricature was one of burlesque's best. The current show had Welch romping through "Izzy, the Diamond King" and "Izzy at the Movies." A chorus "full of pep and ginger" as well as a "platoon of clever entertainers" assisted Welch in the merry-making, but they could not rival him as the favorite. Having Ben Welch in its final show, the Olympic assured itself of steady patronage throughout the week of May 11.

By Saturday evening, May 17, the 1918-1919 theatrical season was over. When it had opened in September 1918, few people in the Cincinnati entertainment community would have predicted that, in the next

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141 Cincinnati Enquirer, May 12, 1919.
142 Zeidman, American Burlesque, 56.
143 Cincinnati Commercial Tribune, May 12, 1919; Cincinnati Times Star, May 12, 1919.
eight and one-half months, the World War would end, the police and fire-
men would stage job actions against the city. Prohibition would be a fast-
approaching reality, and an influenza epidemic would close the theaters 
for six weeks. By May 1919, these unlikely events had materialized.

In September 1918, theatergoers had looked forward to seeing popu-
lar performers in appearances at the Grand Opera House and Lyric Thea-
ter. By May 1919, those same theater-lovers relished their memories 
of John McCormick, Julian Eltinge, Ina Claire, W. C. Fields, Robert 
Mantell, Margaret Anglin, Eddie Cantor, Harry Lauder, Lenore Ulric, 
Lionel Barrymore, Will Rogers, Charlotte Greenwood, Donald Brian, 
Otis Skinner, De Wolf Hopper, the Dolly Sisters, and countless others.

In September 1918, Cincinnatians had anticipated making the ac-
quaintance of artists who were just beginning to climb the ladder of 
stage success. By May 1919, the city had gotten its first look at the 
likes of Fred Astaire, Spring Byington, Katherine Cornell, Ruth Gor-
don, Sidney Greenstreet, Alfred Lunt, and Marilyn Miller.

In September 1918, vaudeville fans had hoped that their favorites 
would play the Keith or Empress theaters. By May 1919, these vari-
ety houses had hosted such stars as Eva Tanguay, Blanche Ring, Fred 
Allen, Frank Bush, the Four Mortons, the Four Marx Brothers, Bloss-
som Seeley, Herman Timberg, Gus Van, and Joe Schenck.

In September 1918, followers of burlesque had desired a full mea-
sure of their kind of amusement. By May 1919, the Olympic Theater 
had brought these patrons of pratfalls and pranksters such celebrities
as Dave Marion, Frank Hunter, Ben Welch, Mollie Williams, Billy Watson, James Barton, Lew Kelly, and Bert Lahr.

In September 1918, the quality and quantity of the 1918-1919 season was a promise to be kept. By May 1919, the management of the Grand, Lyric, Keith, Empress, and Olympic theaters had done their best, despite autocratic producers in New York, wartime mobilization of talent and transportation, the spread of a crippling disease, and all the other hindrances that had come their way, to keep their promise of providing the citizens of Cincinnati with the quantity of entertainment they desired and the quality they deserved.
EPILOGUE

The great changes that have occurred in the amusement world since 1918-1919 have been matched by great changes in the theaters that housed that earlier era's entertainment. Of Cincinnati's five live theaters that throughout the 1918-1919 season offered presentations for the public's approval, not one remains in 1980. However, the two auxiliary amusement halls and the home for pop-vaude that was under construction in 1918-1919 are still in use.

The Grand Opera House was razed in 1939 and replaced by a motion picture house that retained the name. Currently, the Grand Theater is still standing, but it is no longer in use as a film exhibition hall.

The Lyric Theater was razed in 1953 and replaced by a parking lot. Currently, the site is occupied by the central office of the Fifth Third Bank which was constructed as a part of the city's redevelopment of Core Block A, the block bounded by 5th, 6th, Vine, and Walnut streets.

The B. F. Keith Theater was razed in 1965 and replaced by a retail store that was constructed as a part of Core Block A's redevelopment.

The Empress Theater became the Gayety Theater in 1937 and began specializing in burlesque. The Gayety was razed in 1970 and replaced by a parking lot. Currently, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County is expanding on to the site.
The Olympic Theater was razed in 1930 and replaced by an eight-story parking structure. Currently, the Olympic Garage continues to remind citizens of the site's earlier occupant.

The Music Hall still stands. In 1974-1975, it was restored to its original opulence and air-conditioned in the process. Currently, it is the home of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Cincinnati Summer Opera, and the annual May Festival.

The Emery Auditorium still stands, but its deteriorating condition has led to the closing to the public of the balcony and gallery levels. Currently, it is owned by the University of Cincinnati and is used for chamber music concerts and film presentations by the Ohio Valley Chapter of the American Theater Organists' Society. This latter group was responsible for the installation in the Emery of a Wurlitzer organ that had been rescued in 1978 from the now-demolished Albee Theater, a 1927 vintage theater that was razed for the redevelopment of the block opposite Fountain Square.

The Palace Theater still stands. In 1978, it was restored to its 1919 appearance. Currently, it is used by various touring theatrical companies and musical groups.
A quick glance through the pages of this study will reveal that the most outstanding sources consulted were the four Cincinnati newspapers of the 1918-1919 period. The *Enquirer* provided the greatest help in that its Sunday issues featured entertainment-oriented editorials by J. Herman Thuman. As the "Amusements" editor, Thuman used these columns to vent his opinions about the federal government's impact on the entertainment business, the current trends in the industry, or any other subject that he felt like addressing. The *Commercial Tribune*, *Post*, and *Times Star* did not provide as much space for the purpose of editorializing about entertainment topics. All four dailies, however, reviewed the latest attractions on a weekly basis and reported theatrical gossip. Again, the *Enquirer* usually had more to say about the various shows than did the other newspapers. The aforementioned members of the press were also invaluable in obtaining information regarding the construction and maintenance of the live entertainment theaters.

Although not a local newspaper, *Variety*, the weekly show business publication, was helpful in providing material about Cincinnati's 1918-1919 season. *Variety* published news items with datelines from across the nation. Those stories labeled "Cincinnati" furnished information
concerning numerous activities that affected the city's theaters.

Other original sources that provided assistance in researching the 1918-1919 theaters were the Williams Directory Company, Williams' Cincinnati Directory (Cincinnati, 1919), Cincinnati Theatres; Diagrams of Seats (Cincinnati, 1914), and Cincinnati Theatres; Diagrams of Seats (Cincinnati, 1924). Of the latter two pamphlets, the 1914 editions contained seating plans for the Grand, Lyric, Keith, Empress, Music Hall, and Emery Auditorium. In the 1924 editions, the Olympic's arrangement of seats was added to those that were in the earlier version.

Of the non-newspaper sources that concerned the physical aspects and historical backgrounds of the theaters, some of the material offered contemporary photographs. Such works as Book of Views of Cincinnati, Ohio (Portland, Maine, 1904), Luke Feck, Yesterday's Cincinnati (Miami, Fla., 1975), and Caroline Williams, Mirrored Landmarks of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1939), were in this category. Other sources gave limited written accounts of the theaters. The works that fell under this heading included Clara Longworth De Chambrun, Cincinnati, The Story of the Queen City (New York, 1939), Alvin F. Harlow, The Serene Cincinnatians (New York, 1950), Zane Miller, Boss Cox's Cincinnati; Urban Politics in the Progressive Era (New York, 1968), Dick Perry, Vas You Ever in Zinzinnati? (Garden City, N. Y., 1966), and Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration, Cincinnati; A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors (Cincinnati, 1943). Of the above, Alvin F. Harlow's general history of the city was particularly useful.
Three sources gave insights to specific theaters. Don Leshner, "Gaily the Gayety Goes," *Cincinnati Magazine*, 3 (May 1970), 38-41, 51-52, provided information relative to the Empress. A new perspective about the Emery Auditorium came from Pope Coleman (interview by author, August 6, 1979). Knowledge of the Palace was obtained from Melanie Pierson, "A History of the Palace Theater" (unpublished research project for the Cincinnati Institute, Cincinnati, 1970). This latter work can be found in the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

While not a theatrical enterprise, baseball was a part of the city's total entertainment package in 1918-1919 and a glimpse into its role was furnished by Ritter Collett, *The Cincinnati Reds; A Pictorial History of Professional Baseball's Oldest Team* (Virginia Beach, 1976).

Assistance in dealing with the city's 1918-1919 transportation systems came from Carl W. Condit, *The Railroad and the City; A Technological and Urbanistic History of Cincinnati* (Columbus, Ohio, 1977), and Richard Rhoda, "Urban Transport and the Expansion of Cincinnati, 1858 to 1920," *The Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin*, 35 (Summer 1977), 131-143. Both supplied statistics and maps that were useful.

The theaters were also affected by the labor unrest between the city and the police and firefighters unions. In addition to contemporary newspaper accounts, Francis Russell, *A City in Terror: 1919, The Boston Police Strike* (New York, 1975), was helpful in identifying the national significance of Cincinnati's difficulties. Statistical evidence from Robert S. Vexler, *Cincinnati; A Chronological & Documentary*
History (Dobbs Ferry, N. Y., 1975), was also utilized.


Since musical comedies and revues were a major portion of the legitimate theater, Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York, 1978), a work that not only gave plot summaries of the era's musical productions, but also spoke critically of the


There were a number of legitimate theater personalities whose autobiographies and biographies were of value. The producing team of Marc Klaw and Abe Erlanger was defended in Marc Klaw, "The Theatrical Syndicate - The Other Side," *Cosmopolitan*, XXXVIII (Dec. 1904), 199-201. George M. Cohan's role as an important producer was courtesy of Ward Morehouse, *George M. Cohan: Prince of the American Theater* (Philadelphia, 1943). Two perspectives of the "Ziegfeld Follies" came by way of Eddie Cantor, *Take My Life* (Garden City, N. Y., 1957), and Donald Day, *Will Rogers: A Biography* (New York, 1962). The first major steps toward stardom made by Fred Astaire and Lionel Barrymore came during the 1918-1919 season and their personal view of the
shows that catapulted them to fame was expounded in Fred Astaire, Steps in Time (New York, 1959), and Lionel Barrymore and Cameron Shipp, We Barrymores (New York, 1951).

By far the most valuable source in researching the artists and artistry of vaudeville was Joe Laurie, Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace (New York, 1953). Laurie, a veteran of the two-a-day routine, wrote lovingly of his profession and hundreds of its practitioners. Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Show Biz From Vaude to Video (New York, 1951), was not as informative as Laurie's later solo work. The business aspects of vaudeville were also handled by Marian Spitzer, The Palace (New York, 1969). Variety entertainment's broader implications were thoroughly analyzed in Albert F. McLean, American Vaudeville as Ritual (Lexington, Ky., 1965). Additional personality profiles that proved useful were found in Charles and Louise Samuels, Once Upon A Stage; The Merry World of Vaudeville (New York, 1974), and Jack Burton, In Memorium - Oldtime Show Biz (New York, 1965). Of very limited aid was the collection of remembrances contained in Bill Smith, The Vaudevillians (New York, 1976). For the most part, the vaudevillians who contributed to Smith's book were veterans of vaudeville's latter days in the 1920s and 1930s.

An autobiography by a variety artist who performed in Cincinnati during the 1918-1919 season added a contemporary note. Fred Allen, Much Ado About Me (New York, 1954), was an intelligent, interesting, and introspective look into the world of vaudeville. A biography of the
Four Marx Brothers and one dealing just with Groucho also contributed an entertaining and enlightening quality to the effort. Both Kyle Crichton, The Marx Brothers (Garden City, N. Y., 1950), and Arthur Marx, Life With Groucho (New York, 1954), gave a glimpse into why the Marxian style of madcap comedy appealed to Cincinnatians.

Several autobiographies and biographies of vaudevillians who did not appear in the city during 1918-1919 were consulted for their insights into the secret of vaudeville's success. These works included Milton Berle and Haskel Frankel, Milton Berle; An Autobiography (New York, 1974), George Burns, Living It Up, or, They Still Love Me in Altoona (New York, 1976), Sophie Tucker, Some of These Days; The Autobiography of Sophie Tucker (Garden City, N. Y., 1945), Irving Fein, Jack Benny; An Intimate Biography (New York, 1976), and William Moulton Marston and John Henry Feller, F. F. Proctor, Vaudeville Pioneer (New York, 1943).

The bawdy and brash brand of entertainment known as burlesque offered a difficult job to the researcher. The only in-depth work on the subject was Irving Zeidman, The American Burlesque Show (New York, 1967). Far from holding his punches, Zeidman spoke critically and with candor about the Columbia Wheel, its craft and craftsmen. The only biography of a burlesque comic who played the city in 1918-1919 was John Lahr, Notes On A Cowardly Lion; The Biography of Bert Lahr (New York, 1969). Lahr's book went into detail about his father's burlesque career and it was quite helpful because of it.