

LINES FROM LANCES

James Hartley reporting

THE Blackpool Tower Circus which opened its doors for the season at Easter and will not close down again until mid-October is 70 years old—but it contrives to be as topical as the latest hit song. And this without sacrificing any of the traditional and perennial appeal of the authentic Big Top.

Charlie Carroll, himself in his twenty-fourth season at the Tower, contributes handsomely to the modern touch in this dual appeal. His "take-off" of The Beatles, for example, brought the youngsters to their feet on opening night.

The whole programme indeed is definitely "with it"—from the "Top 20" musical numbers put across extremely well by Tommy Jones and his Orchestra to the comic "all-in" wrestling sequence in which the referee and an interfering spectator end up in water surrounding the ring.

As usual, the circus acts come from all over the world, recruited by Bernard Crabtree, who spends several of the winter months travelling abroad, personally seeking out top talent. Bears from the Arctic metaphorically rub shoulders with horses from behind the Iron Curtain; a troupe of Chinese acrobats are in the next dressing room to a Mexican quartet; there are clowns from Spain, equestrians from Denmark, chimps, the world's champion plate-spinner, and a tremendously daring high trapeze act from the United States.

Over half a million people will see this super show before the circus closes its doors for the winter.

"STARS OF THE BLITZ" which I sat through twice at Salford Victoria last week, was satisfying entertainment. Production was neat, appropriate, and in excellent taste. In fact, some of the scenes, particu-

larly the opening with a most realistic full-scale reproduction of an air-raid, were notably good. Young patrons were conspicuous by their absence, but there was sufficient mums' and dads' appreciation to infer that Arthur English, Leon Cortez and Herschel Henlere are still a magical influence. The Amazing Zarcada lived well up to his name, and there was sound support from Roy Rolland, Kay Butler, Aubrey Phillips, Johnny St. George, Mike Arnold and Paul Denver. Currently topping here, in Jimmy Sabole's "Variety '64", is Craig Douglas.

PETER WEBSTER is about the busiest showman in Blackpool right now—preparing for what is likely to be his most successful season ever at Central Pier (what else could he expect with names like Al Read, The Bachelors, Dick Francis, Ray Fell, Johnny Hackett?) and his first summer show at St. Annes Pier Pavilion—next to mention the famous Blackpool annual, the "Uncle Peter Show" in which he himself stars three times a day from June till late autumn. All the artists he has lined up for St. Annes—Duggie Clark, Arthur Toich, Helen Turner, Dave McGrail, Sam Bass, Steve Lewis and Pam—are new to this resort.

Incidentally Peter is presenting a Sunday concert series in St. Annes this summer—first of its kind to be tried at the Pavilion.



Andy Stewart, while on a short holiday with his parents in Arbroath, Angus, meets veteran musical-hall ballad singer Jimmy Reid. It was at Jimmy's 76th birthday party on March 29, Jimmy, who used to be billed as "The Canadian Scot," has been a favourite with Scottish audiences for forty years. Now in semi-retirement, he occasionally takes a job in variety. He once studied with Caruso's first teacher, and can still hit a good top C!

CLUB CORNER

MIND OVER MATTER

EXCEPT that Hammond-organist Vic Rawlings seems to take life at a leisurely pace—impeccable and always so neat—his transactions with the artists for whom he plays—there is no clue about his appearance, nor how he is partially paralysed. Not without good reason this one-time Army sergeant who saw active service with the famous Rifles Brigade in the Far East, fought in Italy, France, and the Low Countries and emerged practically unscathed has been credited as a physical phenomenon.

He had undergone rehabilitation and was settling comfortably into Croy Street again when his promising career in Showland was suddenly shattered in an accident—en route home from a job he crashed a motor-cycle and broke his back. "He will never walk again," predicted the surgeons who operated on him at the Canterbury and Kent Hospital. "He is extremely lucky to be alive."

But survival was not enough. For months and months Vic lay helpless in that hospital—unable to stir. Then, gradually, with the help of physiotherapists, and his own dogged determination, his muscles started to function. Slightly at first—but through persistent exercise he re-discovered how to manipulate his arms and legs and learned to walk again. Then began the slow, painful process of reviving the musical talent on which his livelihood and the upkeep of a family depended.

Just how completely he overcame his disability can now be judged by his performances as resident organist at Brian Tattersall's Cabaret Club in Bury.

Even today, 15 years after the accident, he has no feeling below his knees—a condition which makes his facile control of the organ foot pedals a remarkable feat of this modern mind-over-matter miracle.

A NATIVE of Margate, Vic Rawlings is well remembered in some southern resorts for effective managerial and agency work, and his popular dance band. One of his

well-favoured protégés was songstress Jill Westlake. He still fancies his chance at picking winners and his latest find is 21-year-old Julie Davies, a former photographic model of Sunning Gold.

Julie was singing with a Midlands dance band until she was encouraged to turn solo. She sought Vic's guidance and since he signed her up in January she has appeared with increasing frequency—and marked success—in some of the top northern clubs.

AT least one ex-P.O.W. retains pleasant memories of captivity in an enemy camp—he is Archie Bamford of Warrington, comedian and dancer currently doubling at Burnley's "77" and Cabaret clubs. The former airman recollects that his buddy on active service in the Far East with the R.A.F. was Albert Stevenson, the BBC television producer. They were captured together by the Japs, chummed up with fellow-internee Ronnie Lane—also BBC TV—and the three co-operated in putting on shows for their companions—even in the dreadful jungle camps. They have been firm friends ever since. Archie is to have charge of entertainment at Howstrake, the Manx holiday camp, during the forthcoming season. He will take part in the shows presenting his latest routines in company with a new partner, Carol Estock of Bury. Between them Archie and Carol have five different acts and can provide non-stop entertainment for one and a half hours.

THREE well-favoured northern groups hope to figure in the best-selling record charts in the near future. Yorkshire impresario Bernard Hinchcliffe sends me an excellent report of the first recording session. Sunny and the Volkairs have made—"What's The Secret?" to be released very soon by H.M.V. Parlophone have just issued an attractive sample by the Valkyries of Birkenhead; and the first Decca recording of David John and the Mood (a Preston group) will be on sale before the end of the month.

JAMES HARTLEY.

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BRIMBEAT

Jack Delaney Reports from Birmingham

AT Bilston Labour Club recently with that golden voiced Coventry tenor Cliff Martin was another Coventry artist—shapely Yvonne Warner, whose last-tapping feet are a delight to watch and whose voice is a joy to the ear.

This was originally a small club two converted semi-detached houses. It has now been completely re-built to include a large

concert room seating about 350-400 people. It has a large stage and drapes, complete with brand new Hammond organ.

"STARS OF VARIETY" is the name of an organisation functioning in Birmingham, whose object is to supply artists to clubs. Their headquarters are at "The Arcot", Wheeler Street, probably one of the oldest licensed houses in Birmingham dealing in "Music Hall" type of entertainment. Last week this organisation held their annual dinner, and some 90 people, consisting of local artists and their wives, girl friends and relations sat down to an excellent meal, during which music was supplied, as it was throughout the whole proceedings, by that very well known Midlands band, Abie Guard and his trio.

It had been decided by the committee of this organisation, that this year, instead of asking members of their own club to supply the after-dinner entertainment they would book artists that were not members, and this was supplied by Ena and her hunko from Coventry, Billy Breen, Nuneaton, and yours truly from Birmingham handling the comedy.

From the word "Go" the evening was a success, due mainly to the amount of hard work put in by the club members.

Word was spread the other week that Harold Lane, the well-known organist/accompanist was seriously ill in hospital. IT WAS JUST NOT TRUE! Harold's wife, Mrs. Lane, WAS in hospital—but I am glad to report that she has returned home now, and I am sure everyone is wishing her a speedy recovery to full health.

Their son, Les (Bronco) Lane, who is the resident organist doing the Guild monthly, at "The Crown" Wyndford, is off soon for an 18-

Gordon Irving in Scotland says:

DAVE WILLIS IS STILL ONE OF THE FUNNIEST

"IT has taken an English agent to book me back to this theatre I know so well." Thus, rather pointedly, Dave Willis, the veteran Scots comic, summed up the position as he took a warm-hearted Glasgow curtain-call at the King's Theatre the other night. At 69 he had earned one of the warmest receptions given to a Scots comedian for a long time.

Dave puts the current show-biz situation in a nutshell. Nobody in Scotland does anything any more; everything is left to people in London or the south.

This "Evening of Old-Time Music-Hall" wasn't music-hall at its best. It lacked in good chorus singing. But the audience response did reflect a desire by the customers for virile music-hall with good solo performers.

I found Dave Willis in his dressing-room, the applause still ringing in his ears. Hopefully, he was reading the script of "Running Riot", a farcical comedy by Derek Benfield.

"They'd like me to do this on tour," said Dave, ever the show-business optimist. "I'd love to." Seventy on September 6, he's still the funniest of comics. Yet currently he hasn't a date in his book. Not even the humblest of summer shows. That's show biz!

IN another dressing-room at the King's I found Jimmy Plant, Dave's former foil, now the beer-swilling chairman of this "Music-Hall" show.

Jimmy lost his wife last August, when she died at their home in Blackpool. The variety world knew her as Elaine Rosslyn, the girl from Nottingham, who met Jimmy first in "Rockets" at the London Palladium and became his stage and life partner.

Together, as Plant and Rosslyn, they toured Britain, South Africa, Australia, and settled latterly as Mine Hosts of the Grosvenor Hotel, Blackpool, which they made a favourite rendezvous for theatricals. Their actress daughter, Pamela, is now the wife of actor Larry Noble, of the Whitehall Theatre farces; daughter Gay, who started with Dave Willis and her dad at Ayr Gaiety, is a housewife in Loughton, Epping.

NEXT "Old Time Music-Hall" dates for Jimmy Plant are at Oxford on April 20, and then at Wimbledon. Then he'll return to his Blackpool, where he runs a concert agency.

"I'm feeling very lonely now

without my wife," he says. "But he still has his memories . . . many and happy ones . . . of music-hall in its hey-day. After all, he knew entertainment when it had a capital 'E'."

KEEP your eye on the McKinley Sisters, Jeanette and Sheila, who are seen on tour with the Pops, when it's broadcast from Scotland next Wednesday, April 15. These two girls from Little France, Edinburgh, are climbing steadily to stardom.

The girls' new record, "Somebody Cares For Me," is selling nicely—have even been offered a 16-weeks' season in Tokyo. P.S.—The Beatles' bill in both Edinburgh and Glasgow will have singer-comedian Charlie Sim as compere. I don't envy him the job, top honour though it is.

KEN SWAN, the Glasgow ventriloquist, has been touring the Near and Middle East with the C.S.E. show "In the Swing." With him, of course, has been his partner McGhee, and it's difficult to believe that the little three-foot chunk of wood is not really alive! With Ken on tour were Tom Memard, The Peter Gores Trio, dances Pepita Ramirez, and Yorkshire-born singer Sylvia Norman.

SUMMER show bookings: Dave and Joe O'Duffy for the Winter Gardens, Rothsay, leading Clyde resort. . . The Alexander Brothers for Perth Theatre. . . Graic Clark and Colin Murray for Largs. . . Andy Stewart for H.M. Theatre Aberdeen. . . Johnnie Victory for Palladium Theatre, Edinburgh. . . Lex McLean, with Cormack and Sharp, The H-F's, Scots Boys for Pavilion Glasgow. . . Calum Kennedy for the Metropole, Glasgow. . . Rhiki Fulton and Jack Milroy for King's Theatre, Edinburgh. . . Johnnie Beattie for Ayr Gaiety. . . (Gordon Irving is at The Viewers, Dickens Press Ltd., c/o Theatre Royal, Glasgow. Tel.: DOUGLAS 9999, Ext. 355).

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