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Information
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CLUB STAGE

Are you
something
'Special'?
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James Hartley Takes A Look At Specialities: His Verdict Is That The...



The magical hands of Magician Granville Taylor (better known as 'Faust').



A young act, but already scoring like seasoned veterans in the Manchester area—Mo and Steve Diamond.



Prince of mimists Bruce Allen.



Good for a laugh, a gag, a song—the debonair sophisticates Pauline and Tony Dru.



A most attractive vocal and instrumental act, the kilted Scot, Arnold.



The Duo Russmar—one of the best dressed and most stylish specialities in the business.

ROAD IS HARD —BUT REWARDS ARE GREAT

AS the seasoning is to even the choicest dish, so is the speciality turn to the variety bill. It matters not how great the star names are—they still must have the support of the speciality. Otherwise the appetite palls.

It's true the best specialities seem only seldom to attain top billing—yet the really good acts in the class could work 52 weeks to the year, and still have a waiting list at their disposal.

There are, of course, exceptions to the general rule of not achieving star status. Tommy Cooper, for example, but after all Tommy is noted not so much as a magician, as for his failure precisely to be a successful one. Almost unique among puppeteers, the Dalbors have pushed Pinky, Perky, and the rest of the outfit to the top—but, again, the puppet appeal is reinforced by the liberal use of pop media. Harry Corbett's Sooty has also made the grade—but the comedy appeal here is very strong.

Ventriloquists are in a class by themselves—they are speciality acts, with actual ventriloquism as merely a prop to push over the personality of the operator. That, as in the case of Arthur Worsley, Ray Alan, Terry Hall, and one or two others, the dolls seem to have taken on independent personalities of their own, is a tribute to the artistry of the presenter.

There are all too few puppeteers, ventriloquists, and comic specialists, and there is a dearth too of out-of-the-rut jugglers, acrobats, magicians, balancers, mimists, unicyclists, tap-dancers, and the like.

At one time, when the music hall was at its zenith, there were so many specialities around that they were rather condescendingly used as bill fillers: often they opened the bill, worked to patrons drifting back from the bars after the interval, and were generally used as stop-gaps. But now producers are at their wits end to find specialities with which to embellish their programmes.

To produce a tip top speciality admittedly calls for a native talent brought to perfection by years of strenuous practice. Many such demand a strict physical discipline that allows little in the way of indulgence and side interests. Is it that, much as they crave renown, the young aspirants of today pin their faith to magical overnight success achieved by the fashion in voices, rather than in the sheer hard work which would assure them of at least modest recognition?

The rewards of the trained speciality performer who can bring to his act a touch of originality are high and constant—and it is a field where there is abundant room.

As in so many other cases, the clubs have become the principal source of recruitment for such specialities as are around—and it is worth noting the meteoric progress of the few good turns of this type—like Bobby Bennett, Bruce Allan, Jim Gordon, the Flinstones, Ken Goodwin, John Anthony, Tony Holland, Lawrie Adam, Jackie Farn, Arnold, Jackie and Ricky Day, Vadell, Pauline and Tony Dru, Denville and Marcia, Mo and Steve Diamond—which have emerged lately.

There are too some prize examples of persistent hard work which is at last showing signs of paying off in a big way. Take Carl Franz and Pat: Carl has been dabbling in magic ever since he was a child of seven he was taken around by his magician-father Jack Brennand, Pop

Brennand met up with all the "greats" in his field—and while they wouldn't obviously reveal their secrets to him, a potential competitor, they let the young engaging lad see much.

Carl took note and he practised assiduously until his sleight-of-hand, even in his early teens was quite astonishing. As a junior and an amateur it earned him several television appearances and good places in more than one international programme. Once through school and having served a full apprenticeship as an electrician, Carl took to the working men's clubs, correctly believing that here in intimate working, was the real test in his sphere—and the most critical audiences. He took a most attractive young girl as his assistant—and made sure of retaining her services by marrying her!

The association has been most happy from every angle. As a professional in big demand, Carl and Pat (pictured right) could well have "sociocred along" on their unusually extensive repertoire—but Carl seems limitless in his ambition. He is unceasing in his search, and invention of new tricks. What he achieves he polishes to diamond perfection. Moreover, he has developed a great capacity for crazy comedy which already rivals that of Tommy Cooper—but with a line of its own.

The path to the first presentation of a speciality act is hard—often calling for years of tedious work before it can command even an audience of mum, dad, and the aunts—and even when it reaches public presentation standard, it needs constant polishing, plenty of self-discipline, and an unending quest for novel angles. But the rewards are great—not instant stardom but something much more enduring: a constant demand which remains unaffected by changes in taste for other types of entertainment. Just look how long Wilson, Keppel and Betty lasted! What's more, the true speciality is independent of language—it is international, its author able to crash through all barriers of politics and tongues.

The route is open—and the perfect training ground after the hard preliminaries is eager and waiting: the clubs love novelty and physical skills.

CARL
FRANZ
AND
PAT
★



A REAL GOOD-WIN



MIKE GOODWIN — a new comedian which is something of an event these days. Mike has all the confidence and humour to reach the top.

ANOTHER QUALITY FORD



• DEREK JOHNS, who runs an agency, books for Bill Kerfoot's circuit of clubs, The Gainborough and Riverboat in Salford, and El Bosa Novo in Manchester, as well as competing the show at the Gainborough is very thrilled with a new acquisition. This is young Terry Ford whose yodelling, singing and guitar-playing are well above the ordinary standard for a club act. In fact, Derek is firmly of the opinion that Terry has a great future; and with the number of acts that Derek handles he is in a good position to judge.

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