

INES from LANCES

by JAMES HARTLEY

THE BLUEBELLS are blooming at Blackpool—some of the loveliest, leggiest lasses in Showland, resident at the Opera House and all so chuffed to be stepping out with Ken Dodd again in "The Big Show" (Ross Taylor's magnum opus), voted by first-nighters the best production the Black Brothers have put on at this theatre for many a year.

Like that master-musician and batonier Larry Macklin, long associated with Ken as musical adviser, it seems the Bluebells who the comedian originally introduced to Blackpool and who shared his spectacular triumph at the London Palladium, are becoming as much a permanent part of Dodd's entourage as his Diddymen. Their mentor, coach, and shoulder to lean on, is Madame Leibovitch (widow of French composer Marcel Leibovitch who died tragically in a motor accident), the Paris-based choreographer with an international reputation for turning out top troupes. She is Irish—a Dubliner. The doctor who brought her into the world declared: "Were she my daughter, with eyes like those, I'd call her Bluebell." She was christened Margaret Bluebell Kelly, and her middle name has since become the hallmark of showbiz's bonniest and best-drilled dancing belles, now winning fresh laurels, with star-studded resident shows in Las Vegas, Bangkok, Madrid, Paris—and, of course, Blackpool.

ZARADEA is the sort of subject the ladies love to analyse under the hair-drier, topicalise at mothers' meetings, or produce as a follow-up to the latest episode of Mrs. Dale's Diary. Some there—men and women—who wear Z is omniscient, others impressed but not, and the rest, plain unbelievers, I personally find him amazing, a natural and true clairvoyant, the very much of an artist, and a very distinctive one at that. How many entertainers can you call to mind able to top the bill as hypnotist and clairvoyant, and bottom it a follow-up to the impersonator? Zaradea, alias Odele Rae, filled such dual rôles for a long summer season in Ireland last year—and maintained separate identities all the while.

This summer he is specialising in just one of his lines, mind-reading at Blackpool Sands Casino, headlining for 20 weeks, and rapidly building up a following which already includes a number of resident show folk.

I am but one of many who credit him with remarkable foresight and rare understanding. Some of his amazing predictions in the past 18 months have proved uncannily accurate. During a March (1967) week at Doncaster Scala he must a lady members of the audience (without family after 16 years of marriage) she would bear a child the following January. The lady described his prophesy as preposterous and quite impossible. Her daughter, Amanda, was born on New Year's Day 1968, and Z was invited to become a godfather. On stage at Spennywood Variety Club during May 1967 Zaradea foretold that Robert Kennedy would suffer a similar fate as his brother, the late American President, in the near future.

This week Zaradea is accepting an invitation from Mowbray Hall at nearby Kirkcubbin to exorcise the ghosts that have been troubling residents of this famous old mansion for well over a century.

ROY LESTER and Paula Lee wound up a coast-to-coast tour with a unique experience—work in Bodmin Gaol. This former fortress for delinquents I'm told has been transformed into one of the most elegant night-spots in the West Country. "The happiest sentence I ever served," cracked Roy.

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CLUB CORNER

THE publicity potential of the give-away gimmick has long been realised by Players No. 6 propagandists and the incorporation of the original London Palladium "Beat the Clock" game as mainstay of their touring show—presented by enthusiasts like Tony Scott, Judy Mason, Maureen Lane, Jackie Leaman, Sue Ashmore, Colin Caldwell and Neville Denton—is largely responsible for the popular acceptance and sustained success of the formula as crowd-pulling entertainment. With a wealth of theatrical experience behind him Tony, as comedy-comper and games/quizz-master, sets a cracking pace. He is one of the most eloquent wise-crackers seen around the Blackpool/Morecambe area. For him, winning the active co-operation needed from audience-participants, presents no problem at all. Of course the smooth-run of this hour-long presentation owes much to the spot-on back-stage manipulation, not to mention united efforts on the part of the No. 6 Girl Friends. "Such teamwork is the key to slick presentation with the impact of this sort of show depends," Tony made it clear.

Players-Please fun and games have led to Standing Room Only business an hour earlier than ordinary on Tuesday nights at Blackpool Gaitey, a marked increase on Friday attendance at the Sands, and Wednesday capacity for Fleetwood's Cala Gran.

IN the workmen's clubs of the North West at any rate cloth caps and scarves, spittoons and sawdust, and the battered piano, are a fading memory of the primitive past. Enterprising managements and committees—often backed by the breweries—have adopted "Only the best will do" for their slogan, and vie one with another at setting the highest standards in comfort and amenities.

Blackpool has many examples of the trend, notably in Central where interior and exterior improvements—with a doubling of the balcony area, decoration of the spacious concert hall, installation of the latest electronic organ, etc.—have cost something like £20,000 over the past two years. The Stanley, another of the resort's most attractive haunts for family folk, has paid out in the region of £65,000 for a transformation process which, for sheer elegance, puts it in a class of its own. The Loco, with its handsome concert room complete with adequate changing rooms for artists, super sound and lighting equipment, has spent £40,000 on alterations which have just about trebled its size. The Brunswick concert-room's recent face-lift (with a brand new ventilation system) is worth every penny of £38,000 outlay. The Ivy Leaf's luxury look also ran into five figures, and the modernisation of the BAF cost a small fortune.

Yet they tell me "Money is tight" (or words to that effect) when I wonder why the rate for club artists in Blackpool is the lowest in the provinces.

YOUNG performers, pretty girls particularly, authentic in appearance and able to sustain an old-time rôle are harder to find—which is why "The Garter Girl" (lovely Moira Fraser of Northallerton) shines. At 26 this effed York lass is not merely a well-trained vocalist with an exceptionally wide range of vintage material, she possesses the sort of face and figure that give some of the old fashions an edge over the new, and goes to great pains to look the part. For instance, there's a multi-coloured garter he glimpse occasionally—definitely genuine emblem of the Victorian era—she sports just above a shapely knee. Once it belonged to grand-mama—I can well believe—and it's eye-catching to say the least. Moira who made such a hit in Old Time Variety at Blackpool Tower—she was even allowed to retain her garter—is equally au fait with modern media and the expert "the songs my mother sang." She should go places—already the TV and radio spotters have her in focus.

GARTER GIRL



● MOIRA FRASER—Story foot of Column 2.

BRADFORD SHOWCASE

By Andrew McLachlan

I WENT along to Groves WMC, York with a group of Bradford artists who presented their own Showcase to a full house that included many Con. Secs.

The show opened with Chester and Royd, two boys with one guitar who make vocal harmony seem comparatively simple in their own arrangements of old and modern ditties. Pianist comedian Matchless Monte followed with a slick cabaret act of topical humour and impressions of the top piano stars of today and yesterday.

The gentler set filled third spot, and in this Irene Metcalf staked her claim as one of the most inventive of jazz singers in twenty minutes of spot-on continuity. What a great performer this girl is.

More comedy, and this from Harry Foster, a little man with a gag showing in every face muscle. His proportions may not have increased physically but his flair for making people laugh has.

Vocalist Ronnie Spence handled the pops confidently, with strong support from a first class resident trio, and the versatile Robbie Platts—although having a late spot—scored with his version of the show-bus song "Astoner".

The show was arranged and compered by York entertainer Pat Lowton, who plans more of these in the future.

This pilot showcase proved so successful that many of the artists indicated they would be happy to take the show to other parts of the country.

Anyone interested can contact me personally and I will arrange for this first class package show to play at venues suitable to agents, managements, Con. Secs. and artists alike. My address: 16 Kirkwall Drive, Bradford, 4.

LEEDS comedian Bill Edwards returned to the scene of former triumphs at the Lyceum the other week, this time as a cabaret act in his own right. Bill was once resident comper at this venue some time ago and has since had a principal rôle in a major West End production but is now chiefly on the cabaret band-wagon, and doing very nicely too.

WHEN local boys make good it is indeed something to write home about, and this is exactly what a group formerly known as the Tomboys have done. The group emigrated to Canada a few years ago and eventually reached the U.S.A., where they have been resident for the past two years at the Francis Drake Hotel.

The boys are due home next month to holiday and rest (mainly rest) but before they leave the States, their first disc will be released with advance orders exceeding the 11,000 mark.

On lead, bass and rhythm guitars are Emil K. Hardin, Bernie Beaumont and Jeff Miller respectively, while Pete Anchor drums and doubles with Bernie vocally.

A big welcome awaits them on their return to Bradford and let's hope they accept a few engagements. New name? The Bradfords.

SNIPPETS

Formerly of the Martell Agency, Trevor Bunney has been appointed manager at the Bubbline Well, Huddersfield. The new Concert Hall of Wyke Non-Pol. Club opens on Thursday, July 27, the artists, Mina Hall and Bill Dixon and Dick Pleasant.

Great ovation for the Carrolls on the Lyceum/Paradise double last week. The 20th anniversary of Siddle's Ex-Servicemen's Club was celebrated in customary fashion, with Blackpool entertainer Norman Slater guest for the evening.

Vocalist Rick Lomas, who works quite a lot for agent Jean Charles in the Kent area, tells me to pass the word on to any artist visiting Folkestone that they would be well advised to call at the Rhodesia Hotel, where Fred and Edna welcome the pros.

Saw and heard a nice spot from glamorous opriano, Pat Allwood at Holme Stakes, where he reported the death of Leeds baritone Ernest Broadbent at the age of 62.

Guesting for the NVAAs at East Hovey's Club last week was Nottingham tenor Alec Owen, who made a favourable impression.

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YORKSHIRE RELISH

by James Towler

LOUIS ARMSTRONG apart, the past fortnight has been something of a vintage one. "Satchmo" himself would, I believe, be the first to congratulate Salena Jones who impressed everyone with some superlative singing on the same bill at the Batley Variety Club. Her rendering of "I'm Yours" was exceptionally good.

The Cockney who unashamedly admits his origin to folk to the North of Leicester is taking a calculated risk. To go one further and actually tell a golfing story at Greasbro' would be sheer suicide unless the name happens to be Joe Brown.

Joe is the complete master of his audience in a spot noted both for its informality of presentation and the professionalism of his vocals. I like, too, his "Bye Bye Blues" on muted trumpet while, such was the intensity of "Zorba's Dance", that one fully expected an appearance by Lionel and the Girls to complete the picture. He was well backed by an eight-piece orchestra.

There was a good backing, too, for John Rowles up at the Barmley Ba-Ba. His style is Humperdickian and he registers strongly on the up-tempo numbers. The "Old Man River" arrangement was tip top and reminiscent of that used by the Mather Maori groups.

Finally a word about a clubland singer who's vastly increased in stature. Norman Boyd has improved out of all recognition in recent months. His work is stamped with authority and he has poise and confidence that could make him a great clubland star. His rendering of the C. & L. U. National Anthem, "I'm Gonna Be a Strong" just couldn't be failed.

A SECOND viewing of Tali and her Tallones confirmed my earlier impression. This is a lively little outfit comprising of the attractive auburn haired hip swaying mini-skirted Tali and her two guitarist chaperons Terry Howard and Dave Pearson, augmented on this occasion by the Scala's Al Kingstone.

"Who Can I Turn To", "Big Spender" and an excellent Supremes selection are among numbers delivered at a terrific pace, so much so that it is a rather breathless Tali who finally concludes with her "What I'd Say". A pause in the middle for an instrumental for the boys (and a dress change for Tali) would add to the variety of what is already a first-class offering.

FAMILIARITY, if not breeding contempt, can certainly encourage neglect. Time after time when I've looked into the B.V.C. I've caught the odd song and dance routine from Del and Bet. These three chambers have been at the club for several months now and have a nice set of routines. Good, but, in these days of modern dance interpretation to come across youngsters who come into their own in some lively tap routines. Brings back memories of Jack Gillam revues at their best.

I'M pleased to hear from Helga Reynolds, secretary of the new South Yorks Equity, of the good progress the group is making under the chairmanship of the redoubtable Astor.

Although being a member of Equity doesn't mean that an artist has a better act it is only right that such a body of people should have an organisation to look after their interests. The transfer of the administration of the club and cabaret section from London to Manchester is obviously a move in the right direction too.

THE MANNINGS arrived on the Yorkshire scene because Tommy Jackson happened to see them on "Opportunity Knocks". Their success at the Scala has been followed by Greasbro' and the Leeds Area of Clubs and is well deserved.

This dance speciality is full of variety and colour and is also very clever into the bargain. The quick "changes" on stage by the gent is well matched by the costume changes of the two girls (off stage) and provides the basis for an excellently staged act that would add strength to any bill.

NEW to this column is Russ Clevedon Sound. Line up: two guitars, drums and lead singer who I assume is Russ himself. I liked the nicely arranged introduction and the unobtrusive backing, while vocal star Russ could make quite a big name for himself. Bonus points, too, for the stage make-up.

OH—that echo! How I curse it at times. I think it's rather like alcohol. Applied in moderation it can add a new zest and sparkle to the most ordinary of voices. Applied in excess and the distortion and loss of resonance completely kill the natural qualities of the singer.

This outburst is prompted by something I heard the other week. One of our really top clubland acts, who excel in microphone technique and stage presentation, just kept saying "best" over their good work by over indulgence on that echo.

Incidentally, these remarks should not be considered as criticism of such artists as Ricky Wright and Johnny Echo whose subtle use of this scientific aid enable them to add a new dimension to their acts. Rather, it should be taken as a plea "If you sing and use echo—use it in moderation."

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