

LIGHT
ENTERTAINMENTLINES from
LANCS.
by JAMES HARTLEY

IT'S TRUE that there are fewer pantomimes in the North this year — but that doesn't mean to say that there has been any less seasonally tailored entertainment. Blackpool's main attraction is, of course, "Doctor in the House," at the Winter Gardens Pavilion, which has brought together a bunch of television celebrities.

But there is also rich live entertainment in all the larger hotels, clubs, and bars — and even some of the humbler establishments have contrived to share a cabaret round.

Norman Teal, entertainment controller for the Top Rank Lobster Pot group, for example, has had no less than 100 artists and musicians on his circuit over the Christmas/New Year season.

Even amidst the rush and bustle of the celebrations, impresarios took no rest from their task of lining up the season's shows for the summer ahead. Many of the acts are already booked — but, like Brer Fox, those who issued the contracts are lying very low; indeed some of them are actually lying (period).

However, I have managed to uncover some of the bookings and, with commendable frankness, Bettina Merson (responsible for the ice productions at the South Shore Ice Rink for over 25 years) doesn't mind my telling that she has re-booked three of her last season's bill-toppers — ace-skaters Robbie McKay and Adrienne Erdos, and that wonderful South American songster, Raphael Lamas. "Never change a winning team!" hints Bettina.

There are lots of rumours about — there always are in showbiz — but this at least is solid fact. IT'S COLD up here! And even the kindest of Met-men are filled with forebodings of threatening storms and Arctic effects to come. So Durham-based Zareada and Johnnie St. George have packed their bags and are heading south to seek sunnier climes.

They are due in Malta to begin a six-week working-holiday at the Madalena in St. Andrews in January (January 5). It's a quick return — they last played the same swish rendezvous in March '69) for a fortnight. Their sensational success then, blazoned abroad by the island's enthusiastic press, has made them a wonderful press — is doubtless responsible for this early recall and the trebled demand for their services.

Stagewise the Malta engagement may be the last the clairvoyant and his long-time associate undertake together. During nationwide tours over several years past they have been collecting antiques, a fascinating sideline which has developed into an engrossing and remunerative business. They have cause to think so anyway and are

putting their theory to the test in a new boutique opening in Bishop Auckland which John, on return from abroad will personally manage.

Now Zareada, with bookings running well into 1971, must find a suitable successor to Johnnie — a personable young man with a gift of the gab and an unblemished driving record. There is no fakery about Z's presentation — no tricks to learn, and it strikes me as a good job with substantial rewards for the right man. It could be the chance for a singer who is not getting as much work as he needs — Zareada is often allowed programme time for an additional act.

CLUB CORNER

"I'VE DONE JUST about everything in Clubland," cept seal ice" — thus Eddie Martin, Mr. Factotum of northern night life — and I believe he has! It was a dare that precipitated his transformation from a recent staff member from sales man to songster. On a memorable spree round Clevelleys (with encouragement from con- vincts of northern night life — a certain amount of Dutch courage) Eddie volunteered a couple of songs in a wmc audition show. The resultant 14 bookings led to his appointment at the Merrie England, Fortes Place on Blackpool North Pier. There Frank Taylor spotted him and signed him up — but at Wakefield, then Brighouse. His four-year record of immaculacy and high-standard performance since earned for the lad his proudest assignment to-date — his selection as compere-vocalist in the STAGE AWARDS N-West 1969 showcase at Blackpool Winter Gardens.

Young Martin is still on the Taylor payroll, now at Blackpool Sands where, through recent staff changes it has not been unusual for him on occasion to undertake stage-management and even "lights" operation, in addition of course to his normal contributions to the bill. And the other night he was seen in yet another role — M.C. of the all-in wrestling, a new extra to cabaret and dancing bonus manager Maley has just introduced at this popular seaside rendezvous. Some of us might well jib at the job of stepping into the ring, issuing public warnings and delivering verdicts for or against one of the temperamental types engaged in the grunt and groan game. But Eddie (no Goliath) takes it all in his stride and, so far, I'm glad to tell he's still in one piece.

A few of us were surprised to discover that the celebrated heavy-weight champion, the Monster, matched the show-biz Klondyke Bill (the world's heaviest wrestler) the other night, is none other than the Sands genial receptionist, Jim Green. Alan star pupil, Alan Taylor (making his professional debut and putting up a magnificent fight that earned him a draw against Sheffield's formidable Johnny Bramall) is in fact a member of the club's bar staff. No wonder things run so smoothly at the Sands.

Blackpool keeps an especially warm welcome for the Scots — they have their own well-nigh exclusive Wakes weeks during the season and contribute with characteristic fervour to the revelry that makes the Yuletide Scene. And it's the cheerful influence of big-hearted Highlanders like Ritchie Hammond Moore that serves to consolidate cordial relations. Ritch and his good lady ran Blackpool's Casablanca (now the Albany) before they took over Guy's Dumfries. During a festive celebration with his successors, Bernie and Brenda Craggs in Blackpool the other night, the Scot disclosed he will shortly be pulling out of Scottish clubland and hopes to permanently re-settle here. There's some overseas business to settle — a two-month job — before he comes back to the resort "for a long stay."

IT'S BEEN A bumper Christmas for that happy young song-and-dance man, Norman Quinn — late Third Party he has been signed up with North-based Gina and the Mario Three as the successor to John Bramall, now leading his own outfit.

Georgie Wood Requesting...

"PLEASE DON'T
TALK ABOUT
US WHEN
WE'RE GONE"

AT The opening night of the Palladium pantomime I felt very important when such friends as TED COLLOP, BRIAN MICHIE, SAM HARBOUR, ARTHUR HELI WELLS, LILIAN AZA, HAROLD HOBSON, LESLIE MACDONNELL & LESLIE GRADE went out of their way to greet me (what a revolting name-dropper I am!).

So — this brings me to the plea and theme of my New Year message to my readers, "Please don't talk about me when I'm gone" — (ought that to read going?). This is being written from the private wing of the Middlesex Hospital — not in a state of pessimism but in the hope that those who want to write things that can be hurtful to the relatives and friends of the Lloyd's, Hancocks and Fields of the profession will have the courage to say — or write — them when they can be challenged.

I know more scandalous and disgusting facts about me than any other person alive and it is not right that when I'm dead somebody's lies about me will be accepted as facts. It's quite on the cards that some television or stage play will be written about a secret aspect of my life and "The Times Diary" will report "The portrait of a midget was not, as was generally supposed based on WEE GEORGE WOOD but on Mr JIMMY CLUTHROE when he was known as GENERAL TOM THUMB."

All right that's not as crazy as it seems — and in any case they have not yet said I am in the Middlesex Hospital as a mental case. Sumner thought — my God! Perhaps I am!

King of Cats



● Claude Zola in costume with a couple of real felines, is Tommy Steele's "cat" in "Dick Whittington" at the London Palladium this Christmas. He also accompanied Tommy in the Lord Mayor's show, and the Lord Mayor recited by attending the first night of the Palladium panto.

Claude was literally born into the circus in which his parents were appearing. He trained in acrobatics, horse riding and aerial stunts, and was a leading performer in the great Chipperfield and Lord John Sanger's circuses.

He started playing "cat" in "Dick Whittington" at the age of eight and has since played the part many times including a season of "Dick Whittington on Ice" for Tom Arnold.

Claude has specialised in animal character and in addition to the role of "cat," he has played "goose," "cow," and both ends of "horse."

In all the years that Claude has been in showbusiness, his one aim has been to play the London Palladium. This year with his selection to play Tommy Steele's "cat" in "Dick Whittington," he has achieved his ambition — And it couldn't happen to a nicer chap.

OBITUARY

We regret to record the death of the well-known northern clubs comedian, Snowy White, who passed away suddenly, at the home of Billie St. George's parents in Barrow-in-Furness, a few hours after giving his final performance at Sam Morgan's Club 99.

HOT FROM
SCOTLAND
By Gordon Irving

IT'S A bright new field for Jack Short, at 71 veteran of the Logan Family. He has joined forces in a Glasgow agency and is scouting for talent, new and established, to place in cabaret, variety, revue, pantomime, concerts and television.

If anyone knows the business, it's Jimmy Logan's dad. While he retains his interest in the family's Metropole Theatre, he'll be working around Scotland placing artists and acts in all sorts of worthwhile jobs and shows.

"People don't realise the demand for show-business types," he tells me. "They are needed even to open fetes and stores, and these jobs are lucrative. Bingo, too, needs acts."

"We're also in the market to place acts in private cabaret and at functions. I'll be looking, also, for new faces as well as the established names, and on the variety side for summer shows, both in England and Scotland."

If Jack can break the old monopoly and rutted familiarity of Scots show-business, and bring some new vitality to it, he'll do well. His partner is John Young, and the operation is known as the YOUNG Casting Agency.

IN THE uneven world of Scotland's Christmas-New Year show-business, one artist stands out. This is a Liverpool lad named Freddie Starr, 25 years young, and clever with his impressions of Cliff Richard, Lonnie Donegan, Adam Faith, etc.

I'm certain this Starr lad is worth his star potential to win a TV series 'ere long. He was only 14, when he had a part in the movie "Violent Playground." Then he formed his own beat group, but, luckily, has shown a flair for comedy. He can hardly look back now.

I HEAR that Tom and Jack Alexander, now headlining with Billy Rusk at Glasgow Metropole, will be the summer-time stars at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh. They open there in June.

The two musical lads were last in Edinburgh two summers ago.

SCOTLAND's theatrical ball, now to be known as the Show-Business Ball, is set for a new venue in Glasgow. It's at the new-inaugural Plaza Ballroom on Friday, March 13, and lots of new ideas are being worked up to make this an event taking in all aspects of show-business — theatre, television, the lot. It's a date for your new diaries.

THINGS-LIKE-DEPT: The fresh and appy of young Sarah Ballantyne, the Ayrshire girl who features in Glasgow Pavilion pantomime.

TOYS FOR BLIND
CHILDREN

● L. to r.: W. WHIDDETT (Manager of the BERKELEY, BRUCE FORSYTH, P. A. ROBERTSON (Manager of the CONTINENTALE).

ELEVEN YEARS ago, the Managers of two of Gala's cinemas — Berkeley and Continentale, Tottenham Court Road — launched a Christmas Appeal Fund for the Sunshine Homes for Blind Children. Each year since, an abundance of toys, confectionery, and money, has been handed to the Homes. Through the efforts of the Managers, P. A. Robertson, and W. Whiddett, and the generosity of both patrons and suppliers, cash and toys to the value of £10,000 — including this year's contribution — have been donated to date. This year, Bruce Forsyth was pleased to accept the Managers' invitation to formally present the many gifts and a cheque, to the Sunshine Homes.

Wakefield Kon-Tiki
closing down

Wakefield's KON-TIKI CLUB is to close on January 3. There is, however, a chance that it may reopen under new management. Managing Director GEOFFREY LENNARD told THE STAGE that his company would have been compelled to close the club in the autumn anyway as a result of the Gaming Act.

"As our company is primarily a Bingo operation, we have decided to rationalise our business now and cease the cabaret and restaurant activities," he said. The club has been run by the "Lucky Seven" Group and is one of the most popular in Yorkshire.

It has always presented a first-class cabaret, its weekly entertainment budget estimated to have ranged from £250 to £750 depending on the artists booked.

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