

SONG AND DANCE MEN.

Who and What They Are—Where They Come From—Their Specialties and Prices.

[From the Philadelphia Telegraph.]

"Song and dance" men average from \$50 to \$200 a week. Their services are varied, however, and it would be as absurd to class them all together as it would to put all servitors of the church under the classification of priest. Popularly speaking, all men and women who sing and dance on the stage are "song and dance" people. In reality such is not the case. Harrigan and Hart, who command \$300 a week each, and have been offered as high as \$500 for a brief season in Boston, would feel hurt if they were to be spoken of as song and dance men. They sing and they take steps, to be sure, but their specialty is "Irish acts," in which singing and dancing are incidental.

The first woman who introduced male impersonations on the stage in this country was Miss Annie Hindle, now playing in the West. At first her male costuming was not popular. After a little audiences became accustomed to it, and as her bearing was modest and decorous, she soon became a \$100 favorite. The best known of this class is Ella Wesner, who looks as masculine in her street costume as in her stage dress. Probably Miss Wesner would consider it *infra dig.* if she were catalogued as a song and dance woman. Nevertheless, dressed as a man, she sings serio-comic songs, and at the close of each verse takes a few steps in toe and heel time. Her costumes are neat, fashionably cut, and in no sense loud. She easily secures \$125 a week, and travels continually, either here or on the other side. The regular song and dance people are divided into three specialty sets—the negro, Dutch and Irish. Strange to say, they never attempt the Yankee. At the head of the negro men is old Dave Reed, who, so long ago as the times of Christy and the Bryants, was a favorite end man, and who, for 30 years at least, has delighted the young and made merry the old. Dave Reed is not far from 60 years of age, a quiet, decorous man of family.

The huge posters which exhibit the comely features of "Gus Williams," the "Dutch comedian," to admiring crowds, say nothing about his status as a dance and song man, and he would doubtless feel annoyed if he were to be called such. For all that, he is one of the most popular of the many who tell Dutch dialect stories, sing Dutch songs, and round off each performance with a dancing flourish. Managers cheerfully pay Williams \$150 a week and find it profitable.

George Knight, who has made the hit of Rowe's "Fifth Avenue," has more brains than a dozen average actors, and would scoff at the idea of a song and dance classification. He tells stories, sings songs, and dances every evening in the week in Booth's theatre, where he gets in the neighborhood of \$150 a week and makes a bad play go.

But the Irish singers seem to be the favorites. Two men in worsted stockings, corduroy breeches, red vest, green coat, a wide collar, a short pipe, if gifted with any vocal power and leg-shaking ability, are always certain of applause and good pay. These people are great sticklers for designation. Sam Devere, for instance, plays the banjo, sings commonplace songs, and now and then takes a step. He is good for \$100 a week the year round. He calls himself a negro delineator—not a song and dance man.

As a rule these people travel in couples. Their styles differ. Some affect the neat and fancy; others the loud and obstreperous. Delehanty and Hengler, for instance, dress in velvet coats and trousers, ruffled shirt fronts, pretty stockings, and fancy shoes, and give quiet, neat, artistic dancing, accompanied by sentimental songs. They are paid \$150 a week. On the other hand, Johnson and Bruno dress roughly, act uncouthly, and indulge in acrobatic rudeness to the huge delight of their audience. They, too, get \$150.

None of this class indulge in sketches. Their entertainment is confined to singing and acting. The moment the line of the dialogue is passed, and they have sets or scenes on the stage, they rise on the histrionic grade to the level of sketchists and actors. So long as they confine themselves to singing and dancing there must be two of them. The one compliments the other. While one dances the other can rest. Of late years there has been introduced an odd style of dance. It might, perhaps, be termed eccentric gymnastics. Hand-jumps, double somersaults and physical demonstrations, from the ordinary athletic trick to the most difficult feat of the professional arena. Some of the performers are little better than bad clowns; but some attain such popularity by their wit and humor as to warrant managers in paying them \$150 a week. They go from city to city, always sure of a cordial reception.

The ordinary mind might consider a clog-dancer, who also sings, a song and dance man; but the fraternity would be outraged at such ignorance. Now and then clog-dancers go in pairs, but rarely. There are two one-legged clog-dancers who make good salaries. A clog couple get \$80 a week. Sam Martin lost his leg in the war, and being unable to obtain employment studied the steps, bought a crutch, and now draws \$50 a week. He dances well, taking the same steps with his crutch that he does with his leg. The most popular couples are those who give male and female impersonations. A favorite sketch opens with an aged couple, man and wife, sitting in their humble cabin. They sing. The old wife goes out, returning presently as a young maiden. They sing. The father goes out, returning presently as the lover of the girl, and then they not only sing but dance, you'd better believe. It can readily be seen that in the hands of an artistic couple this sketch affords scope for pathos and humor. At all events, it is very popular, and is reproduced in German and Irish dialect all over the country.

Just now musical mokes and musical coons are all the rage. They are simply a variety of the song and dance genius, but would probably not class themselves as such. Their mode of operations is this: Two men, blackened, are discovered in a cabin, on a table of which are 20 different instruments. They propose to spend a pleasant evening together, and do so, trying in turn the several instruments, interspersing the numbers with songs, jokes and dances. Sanford and Wilson do a very neat act of this kind, and are well worth \$125. Fields and Hoey call themselves musical coons, get the same price and do a rougher act.

In all these theatres serio-comic vocalists are advertised. Of these Ella Wesner, Jennie Hughes and Miss Ida Raymond are the best. They get from \$100 to \$150 a week. Miss Richmond is considered the best dresser in the business. Miss Hughes sings well and dresses well. She however, contemplates leaving that line and entering the legitimate drama.

It is a very narrow margin that divides a sketcher from a burlesque actor. The famous Worrell sisters, Lydia Thompson, Harry Beckett and Stuart Robson are burlesque actors, differing from those in the variety theatres only in merit and the "lengths" they learn. It is but a few years since Mr. Beckett was the star of the Thompson troupe, dressed as a woman, and sang and danced like the best of them. Mr. Robson recently played in burlesque in the Athenaeum, a Boston variety theatre.

As a matter of fact the several lines in acting are more intimately connected than most people know. Dan Bryant stepped from the corks of minstrelsy to the corks of Handy Andy with ease and grace. Johnny Wild left the "gigger" business for the classic grooves in Booth's theatre. The same is true of George Knight, the Dutchman. Cool Burgess was a simple negro minstrel a few years ago; now he gives specialties, acting, dancing and singing, for which he easily gets from \$150 to \$200 a week.

A man or girl who can only sing, or only dance, isn't worth as much as one who does both. A good singer gets from \$40 to \$80, a good clogger from 30 to \$50. There are exceptions, of course. This sketch does not include simple ballad singers nor soloists of any kind outside the variety realm. There are thousands who earn their living in the humbler ranks of the dramatic profession, who are content to exist while others ride on to fame and fortune. Some of them sprung from the lowly boards on which these song and dance people work, and others, perhaps, are there yet, waiting only for the chance to rise.