



FIND THE LADY . . . who isn't what she appears to be. Yes, it's the blonde in the middle, drag artist Terry Durham, sharing a joke with two members of his audience after a show.

One of the most popular of recent television shows featured Stanley Baxter, the famous Scottish comedian and female impersonator.

When Danny La Rue appeared for 12 weeks at the Winter Gardens, Margate, this year they took a record £74,000—£20,000 more than last year.

The Mayor and Corporation were so delighted they presented him with a silver salver!

The Cabal Club in Soho's Frith Street, London, features nothing else but drag cabaret every night and has built up a membership of 400 in one year—each of them paying one guinea.

IDEAS

Even Glossop, Derbyshire, Town Band Club has put on a drag act to help to pull in the crowds and raise money to pay off the £1,800 they owe to the brewers.

"Brass band enthusiasts aren't all cloth caps, skittles and booze," said club secretary Alan White (he plays the trombone). "We've got some modern ideas on entertainment too."

And this is the strange thing about drag. Club secretaries all over the North of England report that drag artists are the best bet when it comes to drawing big audiences.

Drag is actually ousting striptease which used to be the most reliable "attraction."

Former dance band leader Clive Carnazza, who runs a theatrical agency in Leeds puts it this way:

"The clubs get tired of the same old stripper scene. When you have seen one stripper you have seen the lot.

"But with the female impersonator you get someone who really looks like a

gorgeous girl, and you would never know it was a man.

"The audience know full well it's really a man, but psychology plays a large part in the success of this type of act.

"The drag act gets away with blue jokes making them tolerable to males and females.

"A stand-up male comedian would be crude and vulgar to a married woman. Wives resent their vulgarity. Not so with drag. I don't know why—but drag acts appeal to women."

FORTHRIGHT

The theory that blue jokes were more acceptable from men dressed as women is one that is widely held.

At Hull stevedores' and dockers' club last Saturday week Johnny Dallas put on the first drag performance ever seen there.

The dockers have a fearsome reputation for being forthright about acts. If they don't like them they just walk out.

Not one of the audience of 300 left during Johnny's act, however. They liked his jokes.

"Coming from a woman they can be bluer," he said later. "Whereas if they came from a man they might be considered plain crude."

A highly pleased Mr. Len Ludders, the concert secretary, was already considering booking Johnny again.

"We pride ourselves on always being the first in Hull to bring a new form of entertainment to the city," he beamed.

Club secretary Arthur Atkinson wasn't so certain about whether he liked it personally, but added, "the club comes first and the applause was good so I think we'll have the same type of act back again."

FULL HOUSE

At the Bents Lane Social Club, Stockport, concert secretary Mr. Ernie Ralphs claimed that drag did "fantastic" business.

"It will bring in an extra 25 per cent. of members," he said.

He pointed to a full house. "Drag shows don't cost much more than the ordinary ones," he explained, "and we get the extra back at the door. Anyway, people seem to drink more on these nights."

The Lancashire audience was enjoying the show,

Every blue joke, every camp action was greeted with loud laughter.

Customers were very quick to pick up any double meaning, but the whole atmosphere was wholesome . . . an honest enjoyment of bawdy humour.

Mr. Derek Bailey, a foreman in an oil factory, thought it was marvellous "the way they carry it off."

His wife, Kathleen, who had been laughing as loudly as anyone, said: "It doesn't shock or embarrass me in any way. One of the attractions, I suppose, is that it leaves the women wondering.

"I mean . . . I suppose everybody knows that they're men, but they do it so well that you can't be quite sure, can you?"

"A friend of mine came over just now and asked: 'What are they?'

"Well you do know, but you're still left wondering, especially when you see them drive off afterwards still all dressed up.

"It's a bit like seeing yourself in a distorting mirror at a funfair, really. . . ."

One of the most popular artists in the North is 32-year-old Bernard "Bunny"

Lewis. Besides doing his own drag act—at about £200 a week, he told me—he is partner in a firm that controls more than 50 female impersonators.

Bunny, a short, well-built ex-R.A.F. man, arrived at Audenshaw (Manchester) Labour Club recently in "full drag" and blonde wig.

With him were three other similarly dressed "gentlemen."

"We had a bit of trouble at the office and, when we realised we wouldn't be able to make it in time, we changed Bunny before coming," said Bunny.

THIRD VISIT

It was the third time Bunny had played at the club—his other "regular" spots include Oldham F.C.'s Supporters' Club and Rochdale F.C.'s Supporters' Club.

Bunny's charges vary between £60 and £70.

He explained: "If a club has room for 300 customers I would offer a show for £70.

"Sometimes the club says this seems a lot, so I tell them I'll do the show free—providing I take all the money paid at the door.

"In other words the club



KEITH LANE
AT THE
CITY ARMS

COLIN LANE AT
GLESBO' TOWN
BAND CLUB

would just get the profit from the bar. Clubs usually opt for this method—the first time.

"When they see the place packed at 6s. or so a head they realise that they should have paid the £70. The second time they do.

"I work to a pre-eminently working-class audience and the dresses I wear—I pay up to £250 for them—must really outshine anything in the audience.

"They must be the sort of dresses that are completely beyond the pocket of the ladies watching."

SPECIALITY

Bunny has always done a drag act as a speciality since he went into showbusiness on leaving the Forces.

"Club owners were very wary to begin with," he said. "But I have found that since Danny La Rue became so popular work has boomed."

The changing public attitude has made a big impression on drag artists.

"A few years ago a man dressing as a woman could always fill a club, but most men just came to try to take the mickey.

"They thought I was a queer—which I'm not—and didn't keep their voices down telling me I was."

He recalled the man who shouted: "You big queer."

Bunny's reply: "I've got a dress backstage that will fit you, but I don't think my lipstick would be big enough to go round your mouth."

Female impersonators, he explained, are hurt when people regard them as some kind of freak.

"They are men," he added. "It's the worst elements of an audience who want them to be something else."

Some men—and women—were carried away by drag acts, and it was not at all unusual for men to try to date them.

Bunny recalled a hilarious time when a woman came up to him in a club and confided that she thought she

was pregnant and didn't know how to cope with the situation.

"What could I reply?" said Bunny.

"I just told her I had never been in trouble myself."

One thing Bunny insists on is remaining in drag all the time he is at a show.

SHATTERED

Some men, Johnny Dallas for example, do the opposite. They insist on making an appearance as a man at the beginning of the night's show. But not Bunny.

"I tell all my artists to stay feminine all the time," he said.

"Audiences are so convinced, or want to be convinced, that you're the real thing, it shatters them to see suddenly an ugly man in girl's make-up."

He said that recently at a

club, where he shared the billing with Winifred Atwell, he tried an experiment in showing his real side.

"At the end of my act I got a hold of my wig and made to take it off. The audience literally screamed back at me, 'Don't do it.'

"They didn't want to see what I really looked like.

"You do get some stag night audiences shouting, 'Gerrem off,' but I just reply that they would only be seeing themselves if we did."

According to Mr. George Knapman, secretary of the Entertainment Agents' Association, drag is at its peak and will eventually decline.

But in the meantime, it is attracting scores of what he calls "semi-pros."

"You hear incredible figures of 50 and 60 in one city alone," he said. "They do a job by day and earn extra cash doing drag by night."

Despite the forecast that



the craze may die within a year, all the signs are that it is spreading to the most unlikely places.

Ex meter-reader Billy Carrol who, at 53, probably qualifies for the title Queen Mother of Drag, has already put on one performance in a bingo hall at Tooting.

"I was told not to be on for more than 15 minutes, but when I had finished they were all shouting for an encore. There'll be more at the bingo halls, you'll see."

Billy's engagements vary from the Ground Rent Tavern, in the London working-class district of Canning Town to the Daylight Inn, in the "superior" Kent dormitory town of Petts Wood.

PROPS

One of the greatest problems facing all drag artists is their props.

Many of them, like Barry Anthony, make their own dresses.

He appeared at the Woodfield Social Club, Doncaster, in a full-length evening gown covered in hundreds of transparent bugle beads and crystal drops he had sewn on himself.

Eddie ('Dizzy') Trent, a drag artist who lives in Whalley Range, Manchester, had an even better idea. He used to buy the dresses of the late Alma Cogan when she had finished with them.

There are other costs, too, connected with the simulation of a woman's figure.

One London drag artist,

David Bishop gets through 24 feet of Sellotape in an evening in order to make sure he doesn't bulge in the wrong place when he does a strip act.

Then there is the bust problem. Some use tennis balls or padded bras. Others use balloons filled with oil and birdseed.

Only rarely does anyone go as far as Terry Durham and develop his own with medical help.