

Stage Story of Mary Ellis, New Singing Star of Movie

Sidelights on Her Career as Dramatic Star

She Was Original "Rose Marie" Heroine and Star with Basil Sydney.

By Charles Collins.

THE circumambient cinema, which has gorged itself upon the real life drama, the real life opera, and the real life everything else until it resembles a python that has swallowed a herd of goats, has begun to exploit a singing star named Mary Ellis in a light-minded and amusing frolic called "Paris in Spring." She is new to movie patrons; she is also new to drama and opera followers in this region; nevertheless she had her share of fame before the films adopted her. Therefore, I take pleasure in serving as master of ceremonies for this abundant and eager beauty who is, incidentally, the best actress that the movies have adopted because of her lyric talent.

If Miss Ellis' voice surprises you with its power and brilliance when she sings "Bon Jour, Mam'selle" and the several other ditties that run through "Paris in Spring," remember that her stage debut was made in the Metropolitan Opera house, New York, in "Suor Angelica" (1918), and that she also sang there in "The Blue Bird" and "Louise." Also remember that she sang the title rôle in "Rose Marie," an operetta that was a national hit in 1924 and 1925.

Former Co-Star with Basil Sydney.

If her acting surprises you with its fluidity, its conviction, its easy release of a high degree of personal appeal, remember that she has had a distinguished career in the drama. During the seven years of her co-starring association with Basil Sydney, in New York and London—never in Chicago—she proved herself an actress of the first flight. There was a time when this team of dramatic stars were almost like another Lunt and Fontanne.

The chief reason why I am writing about Miss Ellis at length, however, is that she recently became my favorite theatrical character, although I never saw her act except as the camera has recorded her in "Paris in Spring." I read a book in which some of her characteristics and exploits were recorded, and straightway began to yearn for a glimpse of Mary Ellis.

This book is "The Curtain Falls," by Joseph Verner Reed—the memoirs of a rich and stage-struck young man who, from 1923 to 1933, had an extravagant fling as a theatrical impresario. It is one of the most interesting documents regarding the American legitimate theater of this period that I have discovered. Rich with humor, it reveals the wild, romantic craziness of the institution in a way that is better than fiction. For a time it held a place on the "best seller" lists.

Mary Ellis in "Children of Darkness."

Mary Ellis is one of the heroines of Mr. Reed's fantastic confessions. Jane Cowie is the other, but her share in the tale is another story. Quotations are now in order.

The first impression, at the start of rehearsals for "Children of Darkness":

"She wasn't really beautiful, I thought; but there was about her appearance something that was arresting. . . . She seemed like a flame that was not burning, but which might transform itself into fire."

As rehearsals progressed, and Mr. Reed became more fascinated, Miss Ellis slowly developed a temperamental streak that irritated the soul of the director, Lester Lonergan. Eventually he resigned. A side-light:

"You are always trying to hide me or give me an impossible position. But I won't have it! I won't! I won't! I won't! She walked at him, fire and fury blazing from her eyes. 'Do we play it my way?'"

"Somehow I feel sick," Mr. Reed adds. "Poor Mr. Lonergan!"

Picture of a Back Stage Tantrum.

After the tryout performance of "Children of Darkness" in Pittsburgh [December, 1929], Mr. Reed felt low in his mind. The play had gone badly. Everything about it, including the acting of Miss Ellis and her husband, Basil Sydney, had been soggy. Then came a dressing room conference between the boob man-

IT SEEMS SHE'S CALLED "LADY"

Lady Yukona Cameron is the way she is addressed and also the way she is programmed on the variety bills. She is a handsome singer who has been for several years the footlight partner of Al Trahan, comedian. They are appearing in the stage show at the Palace this week. [Maurice Seymour Photo.]

agers, Macgowan and Reed, and their stars.

"Furiously she stamped her foot. 'Joseph, you tell me. How was the play?'"

"'Rotten,' I said, in deep, concentrated dejection.

"And how was my performance?"

"'Terrible.'"

"A shriek rent the air. . . . Jars and pots and tubes and paint-sticks splintered through the air. Mary Ellis, in a prostrate heap, landed on the floor. Little round jars scurried off into corners of the room."

"'You fend! You fend!' she shrieked, fighting up from the floor into a recumbent position. 'That's my thanks—let me go, Basil, don't touch me—for all my work, for all my slaving, week in and week out, to help you and this g. d. play!'"

Miss Ellis' tantrum continues for two pages in "As the Curtain Falls." The scene lasted for hours. Then came the reconciliation. But Miss Ellis, although calmed, wouldn't shake hands with Reed—"not until I know from your own eyes, not from your words, that you think I'm the best actress you ever saw."

At the New York premiere, however, Miss Ellis won her point. Her prophecy about Reed's conversion came true. She acted like an enchantress, and George Jean Nathan proclaimed "Children of Darkness" one of the season's best plays.

Change of Cast.

When "Dodsworth" begins its tour in September Leona Powers will have the part played in New York by Fay Bainter. Miss Bainter will have the leading rôle in a Max Gordon production on Broadway.



Chinese Film Star on Bill at the Palace

THE Palace theater's vaudeville bill headlines two personalities for its current program—Anna May Wong and Al Trahan. Miss Wong, well known to film audiences and to those stage patrons who saw her several summers ago in a play built from an Edgar Wallace thriller, is back in America after a long sojourn in Europe. She entertains with a series of song sketches that gained a vogue for her in London. Trahan, accompanied as usual by "Lady" Yukona Cameron, has a variant of his piano act familiar to vaudeville audiences. Also on the bill are Stan Kavanagh, a juggler; Don Lee and Louise in a dancing turn, assisted by the Sinclair Twins, and the four Hazel Mangan girls in an acrobatic act.

Rudy Vallee is appearing at the Chicago theater this week. The radio singer and orchestra leader presents his Connecticut Yankees, with entertainers who have been developed on his radio programs. Besides Vallee, the performers are the Stewart Sisters, Ann Graham, Margaret Padula, Al Bernie, Frank Yrisselle, Red Stanley, and the Kiese-wetter Four.

Miss Renée Vilion in her "White Peacock Dance" headlines in the stage show at the Oriental theater

Chicago Playbills

CONTINUED:

"Noah," play by André Obey; North Shore Drama festival, in Central school playhouse at Glencoe; second week.

"Three Men on a Horse," comedy; Harris theater; nineteenth week.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin," melodrama revival; Show Boat Dixiana, north branch at Diverser parkway; opens Thursday.

WEEKLY CHANGES: Palace theater: Vaudeville and cinema; Anna May Wong, Al Trahan, headliners.

Chicago theater: Vaudeville and cinema; Rudy Vallee, headliner. State-Lake theater: Vaudeville and cinema; Tom Patricola, Frank Wallace, headliners.

Oriental theater: Vaudeville and cinema; Renée Vilion, headliner. Rialto theater: Burlesque; Ada Leonard in "Footlight Flashes."

this week. The bill contains twelve acts and scenic numbers. Mile Vilion formerly appeared at the Ambassadors in Paris and the Kit Kat club in London.

The headliners of the vaudeville bill at the State-Lake theater are Tom Patricola, star of many Broadway revues, and Frank Wallace, hero of newspaper stories about a marriage license which linked his name with that of Mae West. Both are fine dancers. Patricola is assisted by Dorothy Daly, while Wallace has a partner called Trilix La Mae.

Simon's Band in Continental Room Aug. 16

'Apple Dance' Feature of New Vanity Fair Show; Empire Room Changes.

OTTO K. BIEHL of the Stevens hotel has engaged Seymour Simons and his twelve-piece orchestra for the Continental room, beginning Friday evening, Aug. 16. This will be the largest musical unit to appear in the Continental room. Lydia and Joresco, called "Poets of the Dance"; Jackie Green, a mimic; Alice Blue, vocalist and pianist; and Therese Rudolph, solo dancers, are featured in the cabaret show. Simons is well known through his accomplishments as a composer of popular songs.

The New Vanity Fair features Corrine in an "apple dance," an undressed ballet specialty which came out of the Parisian revue at the French Casino. Other performers are Leslie, Ayres, and Gold, comedians; Coley Worth, last seen in Earl Carroll's "Sketch Book"; Darlene Walders, and acrobatic dancer, and Ruthie Barnes, tap dancer. Al Kvale is bandmaster.

Veloz and Yolanda, the dancers, entered their tenth record breaking week in the Empire room last Thursday, Aug. 1, with the advent of two new acts in the cabaret show. The three nonchalants were replaced by Rolfe Dickert, who dances on stilts. The Veloz and Yolanda orchestra, with Shep Fields directing, continues to play for dancing and the floor show, spelled at interludes by the Embassy Four. Cardini, the juggler, remains for another week before making his debut in the cast as a dramatic actor.

Horace Heidt and his Brigadiers continue in the Silver Forest of the Drake hotel. Last week all records for attendance were surpassed.

Frankie Masters, band leader and master of ceremonies of the "Ice Carnival" at the College Inn, is offering another new song authored by his personal song writer, Walter Hirsch, entitled "Keep Cool in the College Inn." In the skating show are the Four Nelson Sisters in sports costumes; Jack Smalley, presenting an Argentine tango on skates; Oscar Johnson and Eddie Shipstad, comedians; Norval Baptie in a double number with LeVerne Busher; Roy Shipstad and Bess Ehrhart and Bobby McLean.

At the Coconut Grove, Gus Van, singing comedian, offers a program of character songs which includes the old favorites which he and Schenk used in vaudeville. Featured in the Morton Grove café show are the Clymas troupe in a European novelty act; Nellie Nelson, singer; Billy Burns, acrobatic tap dancer; and Paul Batchelor's sixteen dancing girls. Bill Hogan and his Californians continue to play for the show and dancing. Skip Morre, the Dixie Debs, and Rita O'Hayer are featured singers with the band.

Harry's New York cabaret offers Trudy Davidson, exotic dancer; the Texas debutantes in dance numbers; and Freddy Marcus as master of ceremonies.

Riverview Park recently opened the Casino Gardens with an open air theater. Several singers, in Bavarian peasant costumes, sing the tunes of their native land.

Reinhardt's Next

THE spectacle by Franz Werfel known as "The Road of Promise," which Max Reinhardt will stage for Meyer Weisgal in New York in October, deals with the history of the various large scale oppressions of the Jews. The German director will present the work on a five level stage, necessitating a large site theater. The score is the work of Kurt Weill.

The show begins in the present day, depicting a kingdom busy in the hysteria of pogroms, and thereafter employs the flashback method, on the various levels of the stage, to envisage other oppressions, including the Exodus from Egypt.



Meredith as Guest Star in Glencoe Drama

North Shore Group Gets Brilliant Young Actor as Guest Star in "Noah."

ALTHOUGH he is still in his twenties, Burgess Meredith, who appears in the title rôle of André Obey's "Noah," the third presentation of the North Shore Drama festival at the Central school theater, Glencoe, has already reached a high position in the theater. Born in Cleveland, he went to New York when he was 10 years of age on a singing scholarship and for four years was a choir boy at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

"Somehow, I landed at Amherst college," Meredith remarks, but he remained there for only one year. Following his college period he became a reporter in Cleveland for several months and after this he worked in a department store. Then he was an ordinary seaman for a half year on ships cruising between the United States and South America.

Six years ago Meredith joined Eva Le Gallienne's company and was with her for three years. In "Alice in Wonderland" he played three parts—the Duck, the Dormouse, and Tweedledee. He also appeared in Miss Le Gallienne's revivals of "Lilium," "Peter Pan," "Romeo and Juliet," and other plays of her repertoire.

In 1932 he played the leading rôle in "Little Old Boy." As the tap dancing senior in "She Loves Me Not" he scored a Broadway success.

During the last season in New York Meredith played with Katharine Cornell in "Flowers of the Forest" and in her revival of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." Broadway also saw him last season in "Hide and Seek," "Hipster's Holiday," and "Battleship Gertie."

In "Noah" Meredith plays the rôle originated in America by Pierre Fresnay, who for his performance in this play was selected by the Stage magazine as giving the best individual performance of an actor on Broadway last season. With Fresnay, Meredith received special mention for his "brilliant handling

IN FLOOR SHOW AT THE STEVENS

Alice Blue is prominent in the bill of cabaret entertainment in the Continental room of the Stevens hotel, in support of the dancing stars, Lydia and Joresco. She is a vocalist and also a pianist. [Maurice Seymour Photo.]

Dixiana Will Celebrate Its First Birthday

"UNCLE TOM'S CABIN" will be revived as the anniversary play aboard the show boat Dixiana when the floating theater celebrates its first birthday on the Chicago river next Thursday evening. During the year on the north branch of the Chicago river at the Diverser parkway bridge, the Dixiana has presented twelve old time melodramas.

"No Mother to Guide Her" was the first revival. Then came "The Convict's Daughter," "The Fatal Wedding," "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model," "A Little Outcast," "Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl," "The James Boys in Missouri," "Human Hearts," "Forgiveness at the Altar," "While the City Sleeps," and the current production, "Only a Shop Girl."

Although the plays are produced in exactly the same manner as they were in the olden days, the mood of the audience has changed. The presentations are not burlesqued by the performers, but the old-fashioned costumes, dialog, and scenery provide hilarious amusement for present day audiences. The free outdoor dancing on the upper deck of the Dixiana after the performance is in keeping with the traditions of the Mississippi river show boats.

AMUSEMENTS. Under Canvas in Soldier Field Chicago Afternoon & Night Last Time Sunday Night, Aug. 11

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