Patriotic Palaces of Pleasure? The Popular Music Industry in 1900

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Patriotic Palaces of Pleasure? The Popular Music Industry in 1900.

> Music was never simply music; songs were never simply songs. Both were produced and used by particular people in particular historical periods for particular reasons.[1]
>
> If we want to know what music hall means, we must know how it works, for meaning is constructed in action and through relationships.[2]

The centre of musical entertainment in Britain at the turn of the 20th century was music hall. It is true that musical comedy was still in its heyday, that minstrel shows (though they had declined in number) still had considerable success, and that gramophone records were gradually picking up sales among the wealthier classes; but the cheapest, most popular, genre was the music hall. Around a million tickets a week were sold in London alone. The front page of local newspapers around the country advertised the week's programme at the local hall, while music hall stars were interviewed in the inside pages for the enjoyment of their crowds of fans.

A number of authors have uncovered the history of the Victorian music hall and the gradual emergence of a true entertainment industry[3]; there has been little work done, though, on early 20th century music hall[4]. This paper will try to sketch a portrait of the popular music industry in the one year of 1900, and the most important processes which were underway.

Two main dynamics have been identified in the Victorian music industry. Firstly, the concentration of capital, which meant the increasing domination of large companies, (music publishers and chains of variety theatres in particular), and the development of a national market for entertainment based on touring acts. Its corollary was, as in every sector of the economy, a more precise division of labour and a professionalization of many aspects of work which had previously been more informally organized.

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[1] Peter Bailey (Ed.), *Music-hall, the Business of Pleasure*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1986, p. vi.

[2] Ibid., p. xix.

[3] In particular Peter Bailey op.cit.; Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian city*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998 ; J. S. Bratton (Ed.), *Music Hall : Performance & Style*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1986.

[4] But see Ronald Pearsall, *Edwardian Popular Music*, London, David & Charles, 1975.

Secondly, the continuing obsession across society with “respectability” and the fear of “vulgarity” strongly influences the content and structure of the entertainment, as well as ensuring a seemingly endless debate about the exact demands of respectability and moral uprightness. The year 1900 arrived as each of these two processes was well-advanced, but not yet exhausted.

I The consolidation of a national industry

a) Centralization and profit

A survey of the industry in 1900 shows that there was a tremendous amount of money being made. The music halls (or “variety theatres”), now several hundred in number, were growing in size and in capitalization. The logic of major investment was gradually replacing that of the self-made music hall proprietor who retained the common touch.[5] As Peter Bailey notes:

> Combinations of houses ... produced the largest operation of its kind with the formation of Moss Stoll Empires in 1900 with a capitalization approaching £2 million and forty outlets nationally, subject to centralized management and nationally integrated programming. Something like a third to a half of all remaining halls were under some form of syndicate control, many of them booking their artists through Moss Stoll. [6]

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[5] Peter Bailey, “A Community of Friends” in Peter Bailey (Ed.), *Music-hall, the Business of Pleasure,...*, p. 34.

[6] Peter Bailey, “Kipling’s Bully Pulpit : Patriotism, Performance and Publicity in the Victorian Music Hall” in *Kipling Society Journal*, 85:341, 2011, p.28.

In June, Oswald Stoll floated the Leicester Palace theatre on the stock exchange, as many other theatres had already been.[7] Regular notes in the trade newspaper, *The Era*, report the dividends being paid to shareholders. In June, the Grand Theatre of Varieties in Gravesend declared an interim dividend of 12 per cent. The Oxford paid 10 per cent.[8] The Palace theatre in the West End made an annual profit of £31 300 and paid a final dividend of 18 per cent.[9] By far the highest profits were made in these West End music halls around Leicester Square, which were profiting from the rapid development of public transport.[10] The year 1900 may have been, though, the high point from the point of view of profitability. Dividends paid out declined after this date, according to Andrew Crowhurst's detailed study.[11]

The theatre chains had many advantages: they could sign up top stars for an entire season, thus preventing competitors from using the big names in their advertising; they could by-pass theatrical agents and negotiate directly with the stars; and they could buy from foreign networks a monopoly of touring artistes from those networks. They were prepared to pay key stars high salaries. Marie Lloyd, in 1900, earned forty pounds a week, forty times the UK average wage.[12]

Smaller establishments often went to the wall. In September, The Era announced that the Marylebone was to be demolished after forty years as a music hall. The paper commented "those who understood the trend of events felt that such a small establishment as the Marylebone could not keep pace with the times."[13]

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[7] *The Era*, 23 June 1900.

[8] *The Era*, 26 May 1900.

[9] *The Era*, 13 October 1900.

[10] Felix Barker, *The House that Stoll Built*, London, Frederick Muller, 1957, p. 12; A detailed analysis of music hall profitability from 1890 to 1920 is provided in chapter 3 of A.J. Crowhurst's unpublished thesis: "The Music Hall 1885-1922", Cambridge, Cambridge University, 1992.

[11] Andrew Crowhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

[12] Midge Gillies, *Marie Lloyd, the One and Only,* London, Gollancz, 1999.

[13] *The Era,* 1 September 1900.

b) Building and refurbishment

The profitability of the sector led to the building of many grand new music halls. The London Hippodrome was opened in January, featuring hundred thousand gallon water tanks which could be filled for spectacular swimming shows. In June, the Earl of Euston laid the foundation stone of a new hall, the Euston. The establishment, blessed by the rector of Tooting at the founding ceremony, included a stage 47 feet deep and 54 feet wide.[14] The newly built Portsmouth Empire opened in the summer,[15] while in Bristol the Colston Hall, destroyed by fire in 1898, was rebuilt by 1900 to hold between four and five thousand people.

The Era noted the increase in the number of suburban music halls, when they reported the opening in June of a new establishment, the Empress, in Walthamstow.[16] The following month, the London district of Balham also saw the opening of a new hall.

The trade press of 1900 abounds with reports of ambitious refurbishment, improvement and redecoration. The names given to the variety theatres of this time – the Alhambra, the Empire, the Coliseum – emphasized the grandness and the image of luxury. Red plush seats were a must, and each new establishment tried to outdo the others. If the theatres were meant to feel "home" to the audiences, it was an imagined, luxurious home. The Gaiety in Nottingham, when management added three additional boxes and transformed the balcony into "a grand circle and lounge", installed blue velvet upholstery throughout, a "lavish scheme of decoration in the Japanese style" and improved electric lighting.[17] For its part, The Euston selected decorations "in a very light buff, pink and gold, and in the renaissance style".[18] The Tivoli opted to build a new archway which we are told was "designed in harmony with the oriental architecture of the hall", as well as constructing a new annexe to the dress circle lounge “in the style of Louis XVI”, but with electric fans.[19] The Cleethorpes Empire was also refurbished during the year, and opted to combine luxury and respectable patriotism. Its decor now boasted on one side a figure of the Queen and on the other the Prince of Wales. The Gaiety in West Hartlepool and the Hippodrome in Blackpool were just two among many others to close for improvements. All these trappings of “luxury” and of the “exotic” illustrate the reflection of Peter Bailey: “music hall was a site and occasion for liberality, profusion and plenitude”.[20]

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[14] *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper,* 17 June 1900.

[15] *The Era*, 18 August 1900.

[16] *The Era,* 2 June 1900.

[17] *The Era*, 11 August 1900. A very small number of its patrons could boast electric lighting in their own homes at this time.

[18] *The Era*, 1 December 1900.

c) Rising professionalization

The industry was ever more professional, and theatres were tightly run businesses. The market was carefully segmented:

> each section of the audience is directed to its proper place by pricing structure and the careful separation of the entrances, each mingling only with its own kind and all confined to seats of varying degrees of comfort.[21]

One important aspect of the intensification of labour and of venue use was the adoption of the “two houses a night” system. The days when the music hall evening lasted many hours and patrons drifted in and out over the course of the show were almost over.[22] Sadler’s Wells Theatre in Islington used this system.[23] In May the Bedford theatre was taken over by new management and the “two shows a night” system was announced[24] while in September the Battersea Palace reopened on the same basis.[25] The Tivoli theatre company chain opened a new theatre in Birmingham, to add to their establishments in Leeds, Hull and Jarrow. All were worked “on the up to date plan of two performances an evening".[26] The two shows a night method as a commercial tactic was not always successful, however. The Empire in Bristol tried it in 1900, but was unable to sustain it and had to go back to the previous system.[27]

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[19] *The Era,* 11 August 1900.

[20] Bailey, op. cit. 1986, p.: xviii

[21] John Earl, « Building the Halls » in Peter Bailey , *op. cit.*, 1986, p. 31.

[22] Bailey describes a show lasting five and a half hours, in 1885; *op. cit.*, p.42.

[23] *The Era*, 13 October 1900.

[24] *The Era*, 12 May 1900.

[25] *The Era*, 25 August 1900.

Inside the theatres, as the equipment became more sophisticated (revolving stages or huge water tanks) the division of labour was changing, with the invention of a series of new roles such as that of stage manager. Larger groups of workers found themselves subject to modern management methods.

Firstly the musicians: every music hall, cinema or opera house employed a house orchestra. Wages were not high, and working conditions could be hard for musicians playing up to four shows a day in addition to rehearsals for upcoming programmes, in a smoky auditorium. Damp in the halls contributed to tuberculosis, a frequent cause of death.[28]

The very first musicians' unions in Britain had appeared in the 1870s, with the foundation of the Manchester Musical Artistes' Protective Association, which soon opened a London branch.[29] These organizations only survived for a few years. Others followed, hybrids between friendly associations and trade unions, and often criticized by those musicians who refused to look at their position as artists from the point of view of the defence of working conditions. In the 1890s, a more stable trade union was established, the Amalgamated Musicians Union. The cost of joining was lowered, from seven and a half shillings a year in 1890 to two and a half in 1898, a sign of the desire to recruit all grades of musician. In 1894, the AMU affiliated to the Trades Union Congress.

Another important category were the stage hands, employed by each theatre and paid by the (57 hour) week, or by the hour; there were ever more of them as stage productions became more spectacular. Their trade union, the National

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[26] *The Era*, 10 November 1900

[27] Terry Hallett, *Bristol's Forgotten Empire- the History of the Empire Theatre*, Westbury, Badger Press, 2000, p. 33.

[28] Voir www.musiciansunion.org.uk

[29] Angèle David-Guillou, "L'organisation des musiciens dans la Grande-Bretagne du XIXe siècle : vers une nouvelle définition de la profession", *Le Mouvement Social*, 2013/2 n° 243, p. 9-18.

Association of Theatrical Employees, had been set up after a strike in 1890. These trade unions had some considerable influence: in August 1900, the London Trades Council[30] announced that they would oppose the granting of entertainment licences to employers who were not fair employers in the view of the musicians union and of the theatrical employees unions.[31]

From an economic point of view, the artistes were in a contradictory position. On the one hand, one might classify them as independent artisans, who negotiated individually with their customers (theatres or occasionally record companies), and were in direct competition with others to get bookings or top billing. Some, heads of acrobat teams or magicians, were even small employers. However, the average artiste was often most concerned with earning enough to live on, and with that tiny but real chance of making it to stardom. The artistes had not yet formed a real trade union, though there existed various forms of associations for mutual benefit. The biggest of these was the Music Hall Artistes Railway Association. Since artistes were more or less permanently on tour, the negotiation of special fares, in particular for their sometimes impressive amounts of luggage, was not without importance. Throughout the year, the organization recruited new members and by December boasted 5 196 of them.[32] This organization was to gradually extend its activities to become an embryonic trade union, not without vigorous polemics between pro- and anti-trade union members. It would be one of the contributors to the establishment of the Variety Artistes Federation in 1906, main organizer of the great London music hall strike of 1907.[33] Thus the centralization of capital and the transformation of entertainment into a national industry tended to push workers towards collective organization, even of the most individualistic sections of the workforce, the artistes.

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[30] A council of representatives of London branches of unions from all sectors of the economy.

[31] *The Era,* 11 August 1900.

[32] *The Era,* 1 December 1900.

[33] See John Mullen, "Velours rouge et piquets de grève – la grève du music-hall à Londres en 1907" *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens,* N° 67, April 2008, pp. 457-472.

The music publishing houses were the second pillar of the industry, along with the variety theatres. Half a dozen large companies such as Star, Feldman or Francis, Day and Hunter, employed popular music composers and lyricists, published scores and owned the rights to the songs, which they sold to the singers. They also bought songs from freelance authors, and organized competitions in the hope of finding the next smash hit. Music publishing was big money. In 1900, one of the main companies, Francis, Day and Hunter, released 40 to 50 songs every month;[34] print runs were rarely under 25 000, and a hit song could sell hundreds of thousands of copies at sixpence apiece. The presence of millions of pianos in Britain at this time made this business possible.

d) Continuance of pre-industrial processes and habits

At the same time as the powerful process forming a national industry based on straightforward commercial methods, there remained a good number of customs inherited from the informal, locally based traditions of earlier music hall; the music hall remained, to a large extent, “a socially intensive industry”.[35] Though some lyricists and composers were salaried workers for the large publishing companies, for example, many songs were still bought directly from the writers by singers, in pubs or at the stage door, and this was an atmosphere which included many informal links and exchanging of favours. In the catalogue of influential songs put together by Michael Kilgarriff it is clear that a very large number of composers and lyricists wrote only one or two successful songs, which were no doubt sold informally.[36]

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[34] James Nott, *Music for the People - Popular Music and Dance in interwar Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.104.

[35] Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[36] Kilgarriff, Michael, *Sing Us One of the Old Songs – a Guide to Popular Song 1860 – 1920*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Another continuance of older traditions was the "benefits" system. If less central than it had been in the 1880s, it was very much alive, acting as a nexus of a gift economy.[37] These benefits were specific shows where the profits were not taken by the owners in the usual way. They could be organized for charitable purposes, a vital necessity in a country which lacked even minimal welfare provisions for most. The music hall benevolent fund, for example, would often hold benefit shows. In April 1900, a benefit was organized to raise funds for victims of the fire at the Grand Theatre.[38] There might be dozens of charity benefits presented every year in the larger theatres.

Other benefit shows were given, occasionally or annually, as a sort of "bonus" to add to the salary of particular employees, generally theatre managers. In April, Mr Fred law took his annual benefit at the Standard, and Mr Joe Lawrence stage manager at the Empire took his first complimentary benefit, when "the house was packed at double prices".[39] Indeed, prices were often raised at these benefit shows, and they would be the occasion to return favours accumulated in the complex daily routine of show business. The same month George Sanderson, acting manager of the Belfast Empire, was accorded his first annual benefit under the patronage of the Lord Mayor of Belfast.[40] Benefits could also be held for popular stars, allowing people (in particular other stars) to show their appreciation. In February, Marie Lloyd was accorded a complimentary benefit.[41]

Annual works outings for the permanent staff of a music hall, another aspect of the old paternalistic atmosphere, flourished. *The Era* reported briefly on many of them. The staff of the Palace theatre went for a day out in Folkestone, while in September the staff of the People's Palace in Dundee were also treated to a day out at the seaside.[42] These events survived despite the hardnosed financial calculations which were now central to the industry.

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[37] Peter Bailey "A Community of friends", p. 41.
[38] *The Era*, 14 April 1900.
[39] *The Era*, 14 April 1900.
[40] *The Era*, 21 April 1900.
[41] *The Era*, 17 February 1900.
[42] *The Era*, 15 September 1900.

II Respectable leisure

a) The meaning of respectable leisure

Let us now turn away from the material dynamic, and look at one of the main ideological forces – the influence of "respectability".

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, working people gradually won increased access to free time, with the institution of Saturday half-day working, bank holidays, and the reduction of the working week to around 55 hours. This free time was accompanied by no shortage of ideas, often coming from the elites, as to how it might profitably be filled. The provision of public libraries, and public parks equipped with bandstands and boating lakes, and the organization of classical "penny concerts" in grand municipal concert halls were part of this tendency.

At first, elite campaigns for "rational leisure" for workers had often condemned music hall out of hand, but, by 1900, music hall was considered to be far more acceptable. Nevertheless, these working-class music shows were still looked upon with suspicion. When theatres needed their licence renewed, managers had to demonstrate to the committees that they were not allowing vulgar songs to be performed, that the women on stage were not too scantily dressed, and that the establishment's foyer or promenade was not being used by prostitutes to pick up clients.

Heavy investment in new theatres accelerated the tendency of the theatre chains to search for a better-off audience to occupy the more expensive seats in their halls. The frantic campaign to eliminate « vulgarity » should be seen in this context.

> it seems likely that [managers were attempting] to install middle-class values or notions of respectability... in the music Hall, so that upwardly mobile sections of the lower classes would feel they could attend music hall without compromising

their social aspirations.[43]

The move against vulgarity was also an effect of the social ambition of theatre owners and managers. By 1900, music hall managers might join the elite of local dignitaries, whereas previously the non-respectable image of their business would have prevented this.[44]

b) An obsessive campaign against "vulgarity".

Being seen to be opposed to "vulgarity" was, therefore, essential for theatre managers. Programme notes sometimes carried invitations to the audience to report any vulgarity the management had missed; artistes' contracts specified that vulgarity was grounds for immediate dismissal. "Vulgarity" itself was, of course, difficult to define. At this time it was a matter of suggestive, rather than bawdy content, and the boundaries were highly flexible. In any account, the press seemed obsessed with the question. Occasionally, precise examples were cited: in November an artiste was sacked without pay because of one sketch. The artiste appealed to a magistrates court, but lost; according to the press report, the sketch had been "hissed and booed" by the audience, in particular when the woman character said she was a "Hyde Park kerb trotter."[45]

Far more frequently, the press featured general denunciations of vulgarity. A writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* insisted that "vulgarity, at least, is as rampant as ever"[46] despite the protestations of a Member of parliament that the London music halls had “wonderfully improved”. A critic quoted in the *Edinburgh Evening News* exclaims: “I have listened to scores of songs sung, some of them by men earning huge salaries ... which as regards their character could not be sung before any respectable and decent household ... to what does it all add up? To the glorification of vice”.[47]

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[43] Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall, 1850-1914,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 86.

[44] For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of respectability in late Victorian music hall see John Mullen, "Victorian Respectability, 'anti-social behaviour' and the Music Hall, 1880-1900" in Sarah Pickard (ed.), *Anti-social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives***,** Basingstoke, Palgrave, forthcoming, 2014. See also Peter Bailey "Will the real Bill Banks please stand up? Towards a role analysis of mid-victorian working class repectability" in Peter Bailey (Ed.) *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* , Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[45] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 22 November 1900.

[46] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 May 1900.

Artistes advertising sometimes felt the need to state explicitly that their acts were not vulgar, as in the following examples :

> Alexander Petrick, comedian, is the man to make you laugh without vulgarity (*Evening Telegraph*, 26 September 1900).
> Prof Keswick, King of character interpreters. Fun without vulgarity (*Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 24 September 1900).
> Mr. Frank Coyle ... Six songs nightly... always a success, always first past the post, without war songs, blue songs or claptrap (*The Era*, 17 February 1900).
> Wanted variety artistes ... Must be very refined (*The Era*, 21 July 1900).
> New song : “It'll Have to Come Off tonight!” ... not a blue or political song (*The Era*, 13 January 1900).

The campaign against vulgarity will continue to be present for many years (during the First World War another major flare-up on the issue occurs)[48], and constitutes one of the specificities of British music hall as opposed to its French and German counterparts.

III What is specific about the year 1900?

We have examined, then, the progress of the two main dynamics of music hall – economic and ideological. In the last part of this paper, I wish to look at the content of the music hall show, and particularly the songs of 1900, and at some of the conclusions which have been drawn from it, sometimes hastily.

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[47] *Edinburgh Evening News*, 3 July 1900.

[48] Mullen John, *La Chanson populaire en Grande-Bretagne pendant la Grande Guerre 1914-1918*: *The Show Must Go On*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2012, p.30.

a) Variety: a heady mix

The increased competition between theatres and between theatre chains affected of course the content of the shows. Almost anything was permitted, to attract the customer. Extracts of “high culture” were more and more present, and this process was to accelerate in the years up to the First World War. In the summer of 1900, Bransby Williams had great success with his presentation of vignettes of characters from the novels of Charles Dickens.[49] Ballet remained extremely popular at music halls especially in the centre of London. Ballet had fallen somewhat out of favour with the elite since it was not considered respectable due to the exhibiting of women’s bodies. In February a short ballet presented as part of the evening show at the Empire was so popular it was extended.[50] The presentation in June, also at the Empire, of a new ballet “On the Beach” which was an updated version of the 1891 ballet “By the Sea” showed that the artistry of the ballet was not the only consideration. Seaside scenes were, above all, an excuse for the dancers to be more skimpily clothed.[51]

The insertion of “high culture” did not by any means eliminate the presence of acts from a circus tradition, or even a freak show tradition: the music hall evening was a heady mix. Half the acts were no doubt singing acts, but others included a donkey and baboon act at the Empire, and innumerable ventriloquists, jugglers and acrobats; a bareback riding turn shared the bill with a faith healer in Aberdeen,[52] while also on tour was “a man without arms or hands who knows how to do without them".[53] The man in question would "uncork a bottle and drink from it using only his feet", as well as play the violin. New technology was also getting in on the act and filmed "scenes from the relief of Ladysmith" were on tour. Cinema had made its debut in the music hall only four years earlier, and was rapidly to become a staple end-of-show turn.

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[49] *The Era*, 18 August 1900.
[50] *The Era*, 24 February 1900.
[51] *The Era*, 2 June 1900.
[52] *The Era*, 11 August 1900.

b) Jingoistic music hall?

The year 1900 was a significant one from another point of view. Enthusiastic reactions at the music halls to Boer War victories have been taken as evidence of the depth of imperialist sentiments among the working class in Britain. In his influential 1901 book, John Hobson[54] considered that deeply felt patriotism was the norm among the "lower classes" and claimed a particular role for music hall in imposing imperialist ideology.

> ...among large sections of the middle and the labouring classes, the music hall and the recreative public house into which it shades off by imperceptible degrees are a more potent educator than the church, the school, the political meeting, or even than the press .... In ordinary times politics plays no important part in these feasts of sensationalism, but the glorification of brute force and an ignorant contempt of foreigners are ever-present factors which at great political crises make the music-hall a very serviceable engine for generating military passion.[55]

Another commentator, Laurence Senelick even goes so far as to say that:

> Much of the energy the working man might have directed to ameliorating his own situation was rechanneled by the music hall to the advancement of [the British] empire.[56]

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[53] *Burnley Gazette*, 7 March 1900.

[54] John Atkinson Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism,* London, Richards, 1901.

[55] *Ibid*., p.3.

[56] Quoted by Andrew August, "A Culture of Consolation?" in *Historical*

Andrew Thompson, however, in his study of the popular impact of imperialism, points out how difficult it is to characterize popular attitudes with any precision:

> There are ... real problems in reading from imperial propaganda - however widespread or commercially successful - public acceptance or approval of the opinions therein expressed.[57]

And he warns that

> What the empire meant to the masses cannot simply be read from the words of a music hall song.[58]

Certainly the Boer war provoked demonstrations of enthusiasm among the working classes, but it is not easy to know how widespread or deeply felt these were.[59] This war, with the help of the rise of the popular press and increasing literacy, had been followed on a day-to-day basis by millions across the UK, but when a meeting of anti-war Members of Parliament in Scarborough was broken up by patriotic bands of vandals, public support for one or other of the parties is difficult to gauge.[60] A study of the most popular songs of 1900 shows that this year was exceptional, and that the attitudes expressed with regard to the war were not without ambiguity. Let us look first at events in the halls, then at the songs themselves.

The music halls were administered by managers keen to show their "respectability", a concept which included patriotic support for one's nation's armed forces. So it is not surprising

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Research, vol. 74, 2001, p. 22.

[57] Andrew Thompson, *"The Empire Strikes Back", the Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century,* London, Pearson, 2005, p. 39.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 84.

[59] For the much more well-known case of public enthusiasm at the beginning of the Great War in 1914, Adrian Gregory demonstrates the immense difficulties involved in analyzing it. Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War : British society and the First World War,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008 pp 9-39.

[60] *Burnley Gazette,* 14 March 1900.

to see *The Era* of the 2nd June report “The capture of Johannesburg was announced in most music halls Tuesday evening and the national anthem was sung with enthusiasm”. It is impossible to say whether this reflects mainly the enthusiasm of the managers of the hall or of the audiences.

Collections and special shows to raise money for war charities certainly showed significant public support. In January, collections for the Daily Telegraph fund for war widows were held in music halls.[61] A matinee at the Stratford Empire raised £79, while various matinees and collections at the People’s Palace music hall in Bristol raised £156, and in June £105 was raised at a special benefit organized by singing star Bransby Williams[62]. In May a special show to celebrate the relief of Mafeking attracted a full house at the Alhambra.[63] It is to be noted though that the meaning of these warm responses is not homogeneous: willingness to contribute to the welfare of war widows is not in itself jingoistic.

What do the songs say? The repertoire had by this time a well-established tradition of commenting everyday life and major events in a comic tone. The sing-along element was crucial: only consensual ideas could be included in the chorus. At the beginning of the year, recitations of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “An absent minded beggar” were highly popular, and the poem was then put to music by no less a figure than Arthur Sullivan:

> When you've shouted “Rule Britannia”: when you've sung
> “God Save the Queen”
> When you've finished killing Kruger with your mouth:
> Will you kindly drop a shilling in my little tambourine
> For a gentleman in khaki ordered South?

A number of other hit songs were patriotic in nature. The City Imperial volunteers were treated to their own hit song “Bravo CIVs!” Patriotic enthusiasm or canny marketing led the publishing house Francis and Day’s to promise they would give a copy of the sheet music to this song to every member of this corps on their return to England.[64] Major star Vesta Tilley sang a new song about the navy “A little bit of England out at sea”, combining humour with patriotism. Here are other hit titles of the year with a link to the war:

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[61] *The Era*, 6 January 1900.
[62] *The Era*, 2 June 1900.
[63] *The Era*, 26 May 1900.

Baby's Name is Kitchener
The Baden Powell scout
The Boers Have Got My Daddy
Olde England and the Boer
The Girl in the Khaki Dress
The Heroes of the Transvaal war
Mafeking night
Mafeking’s Hero
The Defender of Mafeking
Greater Britain
Oh the Kharki
Sing a Song of Victory
Victory, Victory!
Off to the War
When the Boys in khaki all come home

The New York Times commented on the plethora of victory songs:

> The British song writers seem to fairly ransack the army in their desire to leave no kind of hero unsung. Aside from the merely patriotic songs, there are songs for the Irish, songs for the sailor, songs for the wounded, songs for the dead, songs for the private, songs for the officer, songs even for the war correspondent, the women at home and the children playing soldiers on the street.[65]

The journalist linked this wave of victory songs to the terrible defeats of the British in earlier years of the war.

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[64] *The Era*, 13 October 1900.
[65] *New York Times*, 14 October 1900.

It is important not to over-interpret these songs. The war was one theme among many. Slightly risqué comic songs like “Right on My Doodah” by Harry Champion, or “What Will the Neighbours Say?” continued to be cheered in the music halls. Clowning songs like “Stiffy the Goalkeeper” by Harry Weldon, or wry comments on modern life (“The Tupenny Tube” or “Whoa ! Backpedal!” built around two rising means of transport, for example) also had a great success. Other hit songs included:

Lunatic Bakers
You Can’t Judge the Marmalade by the Label on the Jar
Knock the Two Rooms into One
Since I Came to London Town
Mulligan’s Motor Car
Sing Us One of the Old Songs
A Thing You Wouldn’t Know
Louisa
You Don’t Know, They Don’t Know and I Don’t Know

Further, the presence of a couple of dozen very popular songs about the Boer war in 1900 cannot be taken to define the nature of music hall over a longer period. In Kilgarriff’s catalogue, which aims to list the few dozen most influential song of each year, a quick perusal will make this clear. Of 22 hit songs listed for 1890, only one speaks of the army or the Empire. Of 51 hit songs listed for the year 1895, not a single one is on this theme.

There is one last, material reason that music hall’s “patriotic songs” cannot be taken as evidence of generalized jingoism. Although songs like “The Heroes of the Transvaal War” read like straightforward propaganda songs, this was far from the case for many of the hit songs. The “Absent-minded Beggar” is about the need to help families of the soldiers out “saving the Empire”. Support for the Empire is take for granted in the song, but the central point is not glorification of the

Empire. Songs, such as “When the Boys in Khaki All Come Home” talk of the war, without being imperialistic in tone, others again complain that veterans are badly treated. Songs such as “Another Little Patch of Red”, which directly celebrate imperial expansion, are very rare indeed.

Some hit songs are further still from jingoism. Marie Lloyd, one of the most popular stars of the time, put out a piece “The Girl in the Khaki Dress” of which the main point was mockery of those who are obsessed with the South African war, coupled with a suggestion that some women had been going beyond the bounds of respectability in showing their appreciation to the soldiers.

> Pa's got a house at Regents Park, he had to have it repainted khaki
> Whim of mine, and dear Papa consented well, of course
> Smiled as sweetly as he was able
> I've just been going through the stable
> Won't let him keep anything except a khaki horse
> Khaki sheets and blankets and, I declare
> In every bedroom in the house we've khaki crockery ware
> What say? Too much khaki? That's just where the fun begins
> What about my sister, eh? Just had khaki twins!

In this context, the distancing of the narrator in the second line of the first verse should not be overlooked

> I am a girl who's rather larky, always dressing myself in Khaki
> Just the same as the men who claim to fight for their home and Queen

Notice that the song mocks the obsession with khaki, that is, mocks the excesses of war enthusiasm rather than patriotism itself. Another sign that Lloyd is treading carefully is that the sing-along chorus does not include the mocking tone. The choruses of music hall songs must be highly consensual, since if only half the audience wants to join in, that would be considered a flop. Here is the chorus of Lloyd’s song :

I'm the girl - the girl - the girl in the khaki dress
Fellows following me, so larky
Busmen hollering, 'Watcher, khaki'
Oh girls - their love they can't express
What oh. That's Flo! the girl in the khaki dress.

A second example, a hit by Charles Bignall called “The Baby’s name is Kitchener” is also marked by a hesitant attitude to the war, “the blooming war,” and mockery of the obsessed, in this case the wife of the narrator.

> The War, the War, the blooming war, has turned my wife insane
> From Kruger to Majuba she's got Transvaal on the brain
> And when to christen our first child, last Sunday week we tried
> The parson said, 'What's this child's name?' and my old girl replied,
>
> ***Chorus:*** The baby's name is Kitchener, Carrington, Methuen, Kekewich, White
> Cronje, Plummer, Powell, Majuba, Gatacre, Warren, Colenso, Kruger
> Capetown, Mafeking, French, Kimberley, Ladysmith, 'bobs'
> Union Jack and Fighting Mac, Lyddite, Pretoria, Blobbs.[66]'

In both of these songs, one might see the war more as a handy theme to sell a good pop song than a sign of deeply held popular opinions. In any case each of them joins long-time genre traditions: Marie Lloyd ends with a shocking suggestion about non-respectable relationships (illegitimate children in this case), whereas Charles Bignall produces a classic tongue twister chorus guaranteed to delight audiences trying to sing along in unison, as well as mocking his wife, a long-established favourite theme.

Conclusions

The aim of this contribution has been to try to bring to life the world of the music hall in 1900, and to flesh out some of the accepted theses about music hall development: the rise of respectability and the industrialization of entertainment. The evidence culled from the trade press and the songs of the time have also allowed us to open up further questions about whose voices are being heard in the music hall songs. Once the particular pressures towards consensus in the music hall are taken into account, we see there is a need to relativize the reputation of the halls as centres of reactionary jingoism, even in this year which was particularly prone to celebratory imperial ideology.

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[66] An enthusiast of Boer war songs, John Stanley, has recently recorded a version of this song, which one can easily find on youtube.

The pressure on the singer to please the entire audience who are present will strictly limit the possibility of radical discourse in the music hall song, unlike in later forms such as blues, rock or rap. Nevertheless the use of ambiguity will allow some dissenting voices to come across. It is the rise of the vinyl record, with the possibility of selling a song to a niche audience, which will open up new possibilities for hearing different voices in commercial popular music, although the influence of powerful "gatekeepers" will always act act as a brake.

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Abstract : The music industry in Britain in 1900.

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In 1900, it was already possible in Britain to be a national pop star, with top billing and sometimes sponsorship deals from clothes brands or bicycle manufacturers; large amounts of money could be made in the industry and fierce competition forced many companies out of business; the three-minute song was already one of the most important products. Yet gramophone records were marginal, and almost all the money was made by selling music hall tickets (25 million tickets a year in the London

area alone) and sheet music (a top hit could sell a million copies).

This contribution aims at describing the structure, the dynamic and the atmosphere of the music industry in Britain in 1900 : the different actors (music publishers and gramophone companies, artistes, songwriters or theatre managers, stage staff, musicians and dancers) and the various priorities (respectability, entertainment and profit). I will also look at how the commercial, technological and other constraints affected the type of song produced, in the year which is often taken as a symbol of popular enthusiasm for the British Empire.

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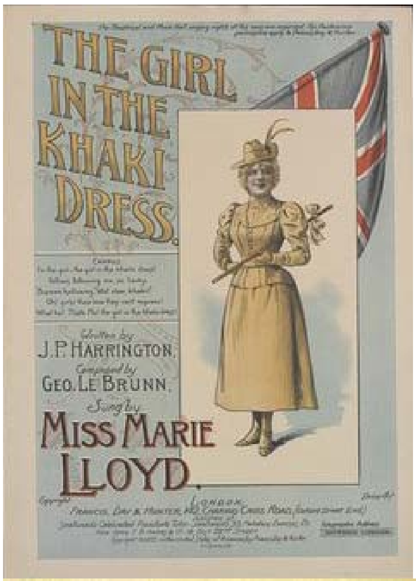
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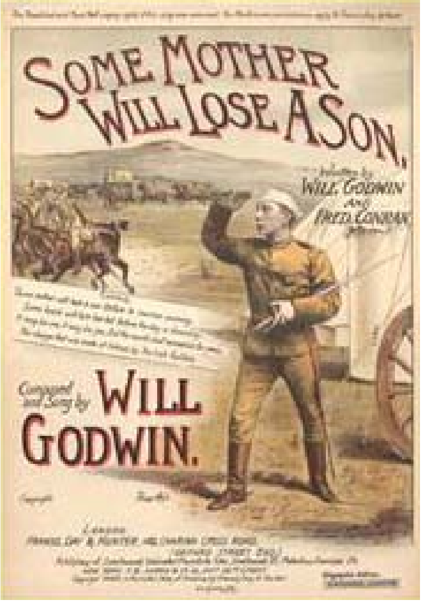
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