

RALPH READER  
THIS IS THE GANG SHOW  
PEARSON

# This is the **GANG SHOW**

*Ralph Reader*



HERE IS THE STORY, RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING  
HERE ARE PAGES OF HINTS TO PRODUCERS AND PERFORMERS  
HERE ARE SONGS AND SKETCHES ALL READY FOR USE

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
GALE PEDRICK

**THIS IS  
“THE GANG SHOW”**

by

**RALPH READER**

*Here is the Story, right from the beginning.*

*Here are pages of hints to  
Producers and Performers.*

*Here are songs and sketches all ready for use.*

*But above all, here you can meet the people who  
made it all possible, who cared for it and helped it to  
reach its quarter of a century. And here are the  
Ideals behind this world—wide brotherhood inside a  
Brotherhood who wear a Red Scarf*

**WITH A FOREWORD BY GALE PEDRICK**

*C. ARTHUR PEARSON LTD. TOWER HOUSE,  
SOUTHAMPTON STREET LONDON, W.C.2*

*Written by: Ralph Reader C.B.E. copyright; 1957*



**The Scala Theatre, London.  
Home of the Original London Gang Shows.  
Circa. 1933**



*Written by: Ralph Reader C.B.E. copyright; 1957*

## CONTENTS

### PART ONE

- 1. THE “GANG SHOW” STORY
- 2. THE SHOW THAT STARTED IT
- 3. THE SHOWS GO ON
- 4. THE SHOW IS FILMED

### PART TWO

- 5. THE WAR AND THE GANG

### PART THREE

- 6. THE SHOW IS ON AGAIN
- 7. THE SHOW MEETS “NAMES”
- 8. GANG SHOWS OUT OF LONDON

### PART FOUR

- 9. WRITING THE SHOW
- 10. REHEARSING THE SHOW
- 11. PRODUCING THE SHOW
- 12. THE CRITICS OF THE SHOW
- 13. THE GROUP SHOW
- 14. THE BACKROOM BOYS
- 15. HIGHLIGHTS
- 16. LOOKING BACK ON THE GANG SHOW

### PART FIVE

- 17. A LAYOUT FOR A GROUP SHOW

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE NUMBER
Original Dust Cover	1
Scala Theatre London. (Original Drawing)	3
Ralph Reader C.B.E.	5
Mexico (from Gang Show Film)	13
Another Scene from Gang Show Film	14
Ralph enjoys a cigar joke with Sir Winston Churchill, President Eisenhower, and Monty.	56
National Service. circa 1956	58
Ralph & the Pensioners in the R.A.F.Gang Show	67
Southland R.A.F. Gang Show circa 1946	67
First Act Finale R.A.F. Gang Show Stoll Theatre, London. circa 1946	68
H.M. the Queen with Ralph at the 1954 Gang Show	70
Homeward Bound 1956	94
Some of the Gang Show Personalities	96.97.98
Ralph shows the Belfast Gang Show a new step	122
A Tense Moment at Dress Rehearsal	122
Don,Syd,and Dink in Services Calling circa 1956	124
Dark Town Jubilee. circa 1956	134
Swing Along by the Zuider Zee circa 1956	135
The Story of Gang Show (Drawing) circa 1950	192
Ralph Reader, Montage of Pictures	193

## ***FOREWORD***

**By every rule in the book, the story of Ralph Reader should to tell than that of any other man I know.**

The highlights could not be more clearly defined. Success on Broadway at the age of twenty-one. ("Watch Ralph Reader," said the New York Times.) Success at home in England as leading man to glamorous leading ladies (Anna Neagle and Frances Day among them), and as a producer of long, even historic, runs at Drury Lane and the London Hippodrome. A distinguished war record (the full story of which cannot, because of security, be told even now)—and an M.B.E. to remind him of it. An unrivalled reputation as the creator of the Scout "Gang Show," the greatest theatrical certainty of the year. The appointment as one of the Chief Scout's Commissioners—and, apart from being the Chief Scout (Lord Rowallan) himself, or his Deputy, you can't get any higher in the movement.

On the face of it, could anything be more admirable and less complicated? But the truth is that here is only half the story and the intriguing thing about it is one's suspicion that the other half matters most.

Enigmatic is positively the last word one could think of applying to Reader. His own attitude to life is so uncompromisingly candid, enthusiastic—even ingenuous.

In case you should think I am posing a mystery where none exists, let me try to give you a picture of Ralph Reader as I know him. In the first place, then, he does not run true to type; I think it is fair to say that a stranger meeting Ralph Reader or the first time would never "place him as a man of the theatre.

Still less would they suspect him of being an actor-producer who has seen his name glittering in the brightest of lights above the foyers of theatres in London and New York. It is more than likely that they would get the picture completely out of focus from the start.

You will rarely see him lunching or dining fashionably in restaurants where the current headliners of entertainment like to see and be seen. You might, on the other hand, find him sharing mugs of coffee and a plate of hot-dogs with half a dozen youngsters who call him "Skip" and for whom the theatre before Oklahoma is a closed book. If they do address him by his first name, he knows it—will be "Ralph" as spelt he cannot bear the more pretentious "Rafe." This is one of his few fads.

And on Sundays, when most men and women in entertainment put their feet up, or add to their bank balances by giving Sunday concerts or recording their week-day radio shows, where will you be likely to find this most unorthodox member of the profession? In the pulpit—or talking to youngsters

who have somehow or other found themselves in trouble, and are now being taught a new approach to life and its problems in the L.C.C.'s reform schools.

And when the cynics ask what business a showman has (and a showman he most certainly is) with spiritual matters, the only answer is—well, take him, or leave him, that's Ralph Reader. A man with a genuine and consuming interest in young people and the way they use their lives.

You would not call him a subtle man. Those uproarious "Gang Show" sketches are based on a down-to-earth slapstick which is practically fool proof. When he writes a tune—and he has written some corkers—they are, like "Stepping Out," or "Riding Along on the Crest of the Wave," the kind you whistle not for days, but over the years.

I have no doubt that from his own point of view Reader's progress has been simplicity itself. Setbacks from time to time, and disappointments—yes: but a pretty straightforward Journey all the same, from one goal to another. But to the onlooker, a life not without its contradictions. Ralph has a racy, eager way of talking. When I knew he was writing this book I begged him to forget the tyranny of punctuation and the niceties of composition. You will find that the story bubbles along as though the words are tumbling over one another. If he hadn't written as he speaks and as he thinks—well, it wouldn't have been Ralph. I once asked Ralph why he'd never married. "I realise I've missed a good deal," he said, "but with my Scouting life and my life in the theatre, it would have been plain double—bigamy I

GALE PEDRICK

## PART ONE

### 1

#### The “*Gang Show*” Story

##### The “Gang Show” story!

So at last it's going to be told. The story of its conception; the pangs of its initial birth; the nursing and the upbringing; the sorting-out of its critics; the handling of those who would have jumped on the wagon once it became established and the shooing away of hangers-on (who cling to anything that is going places like barnacles on a ship's bottom). The story of a trickle of Holborn Rovers in a one-night stand at the London Central Y.M.C.A., turning into a flood-tide of hitherto unheard-of success, storming the citadel of the London Palladium and being honoured by a Royal Command Performance. It is the story of faith, enthusiasm, and loyalty which spread across the world, conquering radio, television gramophone recordings and a feature film. It put a new word into Scouting and that word was “Gang.” It revolutionised Scout entertainment.

Gone was the “Scout Concert.” From the smallest hamlet to the largest cities of the world, the Boy Scouts' annual performance in every village and town became known as a “GANG SHOW.”

From a small profit in the year of 1932, the sum of £130.00 came a torrent of “returns,” which is now known to have exceeded substantially the half-million mark.

1932, and that morning of October 20th, when Geoff Birch phoned me at lunch-time to say that the scenery had arrived at the theatre, but none of it could be used ! Without hat or coat I rushed to the Scala . . . When I got home early next morning I discovered I hadn't even stopped to replace the telephone receiver. The opening number in that first show with the “Policemen” and the call-boy pushing them on the stage and suddenly discovering that the one he had to push the hardest was a REAL policeman on duty. That first-of-all-shows when the principals entered in an old hansom-cab drawn by a very ancient horse. They got to the centre of the stage and then couldn't get the door of the cab opened.

They shoved and shoved, looked offstage in a panic, but the door held. I had kittens. Yes, that first-ever performance of “Of Thee We Sing,” depicting the Throne Room at Madame Tussauds', showing a group of historic kings and queens of the past, all of them standing motionless as waxworks should. All except Queen Elizabeth the First. She had the hiccups. “Snowball” coming in about twenty minutes from the end of the show and calmly asking me, “ Has it started?”

And the names that flash before me. Johnny Groves, the Digby boys, Mark Joseph, Jim Ridley, Bill Senior, Rex Hazlewood, Teddy Keener, and Fred Kennelly. Names that started it all, name belonging to the founders of all that was yet to come. I see Alec Eke and Rex Barley and Alex Mackenzie with his Hampstead Sea Scouts selling programmes out front, and I remember Jim Benson and the 13th Hackney Rover Scouts who rescued our scenery which Maurice Fowler designed. That nerve-shattering evening will never come again. It was a “oncer” that we lived through, and the only completely calm people

inside the theatre that evening were the small "urchins" of the 4th Holborn, those half a dozen cubs who just went out there and raised the roof.

And now every year the map of the "Gang Show" trail pushes further and further ahead. The "Show" goes from strength to strength, from success to even greater success. Hardly a soul today has not heard or sung the signature-tune of "Gang Shows," yes, and of Boy Scouts the world over, We're Riding along on the Crest of a Wave The coveted Red Scarf worn by "Gang Show" boys is the envy of nearly every youngster and grown-up who has been at some time within its ranks. That scarlet neckerchief with the gold lettering on the back which reads quite simply, " G. S."

During the last war I had a small parcel from a padre. In it was a " Gang Show" scarf which, he said, he thought I might like it to keep. It had been found in the pocket of a soldier killed in the Normandy invasion.

One night, in West Africa, I was sitting in my tent when a stalwart young pilot walked in. He was one of our chaps all right, and he intended me to know it. He stood There in his R.A.F. uniform, grinning from ear to ear, and around his neck hung his Red Scarf. All he said was, "What time does rehearsal start, Skip?

In Alexandria I was attached to the Royal Navy when they brought in the capitulated Italian Fleet. While I was standing on deck one night a young matełot walked over to me and handed me his "Gang Show" scarf. "Sign this for me, Ralph, it's my mascot," he said. I signed it. He still wears it today when the show is on: but the signature has been washed out by sea-water. He was twice torpedoed. The signature didn't remain, but the colour did. It is still as bright as any new scarf we present. It's nice to know these "symbols" mean so much, perhaps because they stand for so much.

I may say that amateur theatrical societies were aghast at the hold these new, exuberant shows of ours had on the public. The only excuse that could be found was that it was merely a "flash in the pan." It couldn't last Nobody—not even those in the show—could foresee that a kind of magic was abroad, a magic that would last and would not merely hold its own but turn from a trickle of popularity into something as everlasting as Tennyson's "brook."

We, who were in the middle of the whole thing, could only watch and wonder. People told us Why we were successful, why the show had clicked, and, of course, these compliments were invariably accompanied by advice on WHAT we should do and HOW we should do it.

It wouldn't have been difficult to lose our heads. The reason I didn't lose mine was simply because of the men who stood with me, who were not afraid to tell me their ideas, and above all were willing to "have a go." If I wrote here the names of these devoted pals of mine they would fill many pages of this book, because, with the years, their numbers grew and multiplied; but at this particular time roughly a dozen made up the kernel of the beginning.

You will get to know them later on. I can only tell you that without them our venture could not have been; for the "Gang Show" has never been a one-man effort. It has been team-work, with vengeance, with loyalty of a rare kind, and above all the belief that we were on a GOOD dung. it's easy to start something but not so easy to keep it up.

We kept it up solely because our team was a team of scouters who PUT SCOUTING BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE. They believed this new idea of ours could be a contribution to Scouting. I do not wish to see, or hear

about, any “Gang Show” produced coldly and formally as a theatrical production. Its members do not belong to an amateur theatrical society. They belong to a Group in the Boy Scout Association, and to that Association our first loyalty is due.

Never a day goes by without someone, somewhere, asking me, “How did it all begin? What is the secret? What’s the story behind it all?” There was a beginning; there is a secret; and these two things put together make the story. So now let that story be told. I want to write down the whole of it: the fun, the triumphs, the sadness and the set—backs.

I want to pay tribute to the boys and the men who made it all possible, who formed the pattern for its inception and who, by their devotion to an idea, emerged from a one-night stand to bring forth a show which is playing every night of every year either in a small village hall or some super theatre, somewhere in this world.

I’m going to quote here and now a few poetic (?) words written in our very first programme. Rhyming that won’t make Sir Alan Herbert envious: but we meant them sincerely, and after all, they do establish our beginning. They were addressed:

*To C. B. Cochran, Noel Coward, George Black, and Julian Wylie,  
Old England’s greatest Showmen, ye whom critics praise so highly,  
Be not afraid of us! Yet stay—what SLAVE we, though, to offer  
As might be told by Burnup, Alan Parsons, Dale or Swaffer?  
We have no chic technique to bring our numbers to a fine art,  
We cannot issue challenges to Charel or to Reinhardt.  
Our scenery won’t rival Stern with hills and castles mighty,  
Besides, each member of our Gang was born and bred in Blighty.  
We have no man with Irving’s voice, no youth to copy Tree’s ways,  
And we shall only play three nights, though that’s a run in these days.  
We know all this, yet on we go, we’re still quite fit and bright, sir,  
And undismayed, we’re ringing up at eight o’clock tonight, sir.  
Backstage, right now, the heart of every youngster’s beating faster,  
The will and urge to give their all has long turned out the master.  
And so each one sends up a prayer, in divers ways they strike it,  
But every prayer means just the same; “oh gee, we hope you like it.”  
(Signed) “The Lads.”*

Not Shakespeare, I agree, but those lines were on the front page of the 1932 programme and perhaps it is fitting that they are once again brought into the light of day so that you can all read them and see how it all began.

Such a thing can only happen once, and I’m glad I was there when it happened. Let me tell you the tale because I guess I know as much about it as anyone.

So here it is then, the “Gang Show” Story.

## 2

### *The Show that started it*

“Send your message out,  
Send the word about,  
Let the fellers shout,  
Send your message out.

EVEN I can't kid myself that these are very inspiring words. The truth is, I'd written them myself from an old tune; but the way the twenty boys of the Holborn Rovers were singing them they might have been from the pen of the Poet Laureate himself.

And by the side of the stage in this, our first concert together, Laurence Nelson, the Rover Mate of the Trojans, was busily flashing out the message to the audience. At least he should have been flashing it out. Alas, something had gone wrong—and there was no message.

He tapped away. Anxious eyes were cast from the stage to the wings, but not a sign of any message. What was intended as an ingenious “effect” was nothing but a blacked-out stage, signs of panic behind the scenes, voices raised higher and higher in angry supplication to the unlucky Laurence.

I rushed from the prompt corner and yelled at young Nelson: “It's not working.” He grinned from ear to ear and said, “Don't panic, I've just remembered I forgot the battery.”

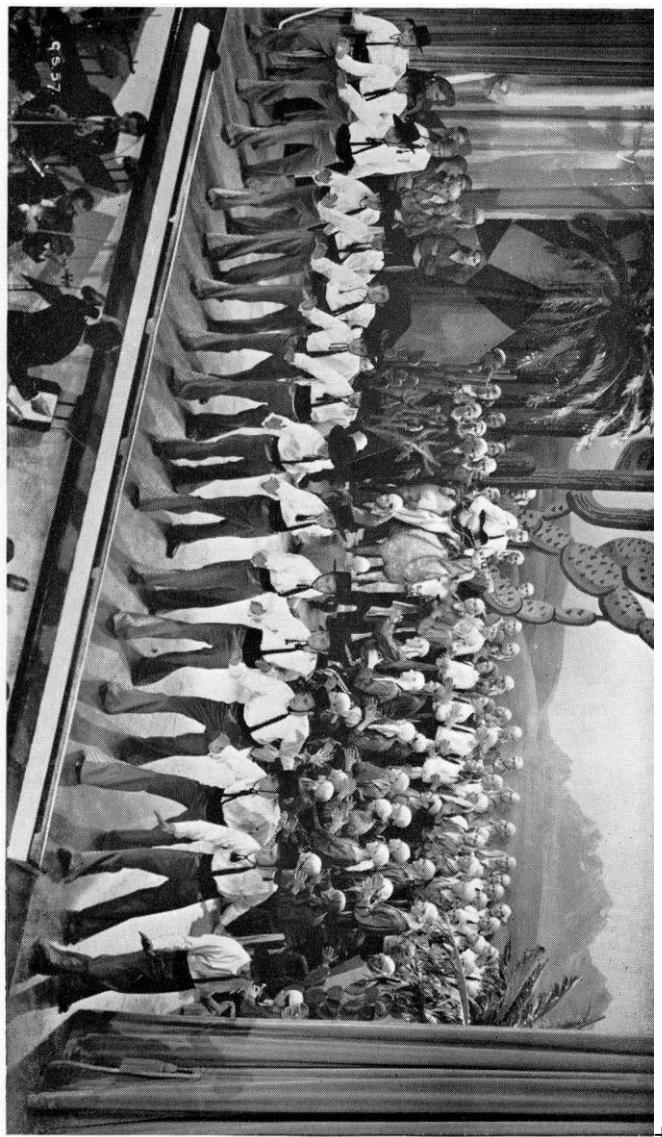
It was only a one-night show, but to all of us taking part it might as well have been an opening night at Drury Lane. Fortunately, only that one “effect” went wrong during the evening, and by curtain-fall the audience were applauding heartily. Before we left Lyons Corner House that night, we decided we would try our luck again the following year. The signpost had come into view, and we had decided, for better or worse, to see where it led us...

I had only just returned from America to stage the ballets and ensembles for several West End shows. Soon after arriving home I had a message from that great Scouter, Haydn Dimmock, who was then the editor of *The Scout*. Haydn and I had corresponded before I left home for the States and when he knew I was back he invited me out to lunch.

Through him I met the Holborn Rovers, and almost before I realised it, I became one of them. What a grand crowd they were in those days! Jimmy Cregeen and I used to run around quite a lot together. Now his son takes his place, and if I live long

enough, who knows, maybe he'll have a son to carry on where his grandfather left off! Anyway, we were like a real family, and every night of the week would find us together somewhere in the London Central Y.M.C.A., planning bikes, stunts, or a show.

Almost before we knew it, we were in the thick of preparing our second concert. This time, I had written all the sketches and songs. These were the first I had ever attempted, and during the rehearsals it began to dawn on us that we might have quite a novel type of show. We decided that this time we would go “on the road” for a few try-out performances before we played our home crowd.



"Mexico" from the "Gang Show" Film, 1937

A few odd dates were fixed for various Saturday nights in small towns round about.

We drove to our destinations in cars, motor—bikes, sometimes went by bus, carrying all our props and bits of scenery on top. We must have played quite half a dozen shows before we decided we were ready to offer our wares to the Londoners, but eventually the big night arrived. No, come to think of it, it was for THREE nights. Quite a "run."

We even coaxed some of the "brass—hats" from Imperial Scout Headquarters to come along and see us, and there was no holding us when we found that nearly all the tickets had been sold for all three nights. We didn't realise it, but we were already working up to our "Full House" tradition.

It was a good show. The boys had perfected themselves, thanks to the "try-out" nights: they were in fine form, and had almost a professional polish about them. The new songs went with a swing and the sketches, thank goodness! got all the laughs we expected. As usual, on the last night, we ended up at the old Corner House and held an "inquest" on every item.



Another Scene from the "Gang Show" Film, 1937

I remember we stayed up very late that night and had to run most of the boys home because the Underground trains had stopped running. I didn't mind a bit. I was feeling very happy and justly proud of every one of them. And we talked about what we would do the following year. None of us knew then that there would be no following year—at least not with a Holborn Rover show.

The following day brought about a change in my own life, and a complete revolution in what we had hitherto known as Scout concerts. It happened at exactly one o'clock!

I went along to the Scout Headquarters for lunch, and was waiting for a lift to take me to the restaurant. Standing by my side I noticed Admiral Phillpotts, who was then the County Commissioner for London.

"I saw the Holborn Rovers in their show the other night, Reader," he said. "I enjoyed it very much." I thanked him, and just then the gates of the lift opened.

I was just going to walk in when the Admiral took my arm and led me away to a corner of the hall. Then he said to me, "Reader", we have a wonderful camp site at Downe, and we are very anxious to get some money to put in a swimming-pool there. Could you organise a concert to raise some money.

Now, being a professional, I loathe the word "concert" when it is being substituted for the correct term, "show." However, I do remember saying to him,

"Well, sir, it COULD be done, but not as a concert. If we do anything at all, it would have to be done properly as a real production. No trek-cart displays and drilling, none of the usual items included in the average attempt at Scout entertainment."

He replied, "My dear boy, I don't care what sort of a concert it is, but do you think it could be done, and if so, would you do it?" Down came the lift again and as I badly wanted my lunch, I hastily said, almost without thinking, "O.K.", sir, sure, I'll do it." "Fine," said he, "go ahead." I did: I made a dive for the lift and left a friendly and distinguished naval officer standing in the hall.

It's about four floors up to the restaurant, but before the lift arrived there I began to wonder why I had made that promise, and what in the world I was going to do about it. When I got to my table I found my pals Fred Hurl and Tinny Fellowes waiting for me. I sat down and said, "Hey, boys, what dy'a think I've done? I've promised to put on a show for a swimming-pool." Tinny cracked back, "Do you think the swimming-pool will appreciate it?" I let that one pass.

But believe it or not, before that lunch was over, Fred, Tinny, and I had written out a complete programme of a big revue. We had also decided that the right place to put it on would be the Scala Theatre in Charlotte Street, which lies between Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road; a good first-class house which catered for ambitious amateur productions. Not a word was mentioned about how we would finance the effort nor where the money to do so would come from. All I knew was that I wanted at least a hundred and fifty boys and men in the cast, and that it HAD to be up to West End standards, to satisfy my own pride in the movement—let alone my self-respect!

That's an easy thing to "want," but it might be very difficult to get. However, the three of us were burning with enthusiasm, and that very overworked word was to become the battle-cry and the symbol for the next twenty-five years.

Now for a confession. I say this with genuine truth and after great thought. If I had known what was to happen during that next quarter of a century, I doubt very very much whether I would have taken the plunge.

Maybe this will sound strange to a good many of my readers, but later on I will try to explain to you how a hobby, especially when it becomes such a passion, can become a stranglehold.

In fact it nearly killed me professionally, and the hardest fight I shall ever have began when my hobby became larger than myself. It was a relentless fight and the odds against me became heavier with each succeeding year. It crippled my income; brought me down to very nearly my last penny; and then, right out of the blue . . . but that's to be told later on. For now, let's get back to the restaurant.

We fed and then continued our talk on the roof of I.H.Q. with its view of Buckingham Palace and its grounds. By the time I went back to the Palace Theatre where I was rehearsing a new show, our plans were laid. Now all we had to do was to submit them to the "powers that be," and see how much they would tally with their own ideas.

About four weeks later I was invited to speak to the London Scout Council. I didn't need any notes, for, during those weeks, Tinny, Fred, and I had been over our proposals so many times I had everything off by heart. So I got up and went straight to the mark.

I told them I would need their support, morally and financially. I went to work on the human side and tried to keep the kettle boiling by putting in a few wisecracks. Not all of these were appreciated, but by the time I had finished knew I had won them over. Naturally these highly responsible people wouldn't give me the "go-ahead" sign right away, but I knew in my heart they were keen on the idea.

But I'll tell you this at the risk of worrying a few of the present-day scouters and commissioners: if they had been in charge then, there wouldn't have been a chance in the world of the thing going through. Today there are far too many empire builders, who don't take kindly to the idea of anyone appearing on the scene who may take a little of the limelight from their own little corner!

Anyhow, the next stage was to recruit the cast. Obviously, I plugged for the Holborn Rovers to carry the burden of the sketches. Then I had alongside me Jack Beet, whose middle name is "Rover," and his life the 4th Harrow. So Harrow had to be brought in: and it was on the foundation of these two Districts the burden of our first show was to be placed. And how nobly they took the strain!

Our first rehearsal was held at 25 Buckingham Palace Road on May 25th, 1932. My birthday. We rehearsed in the restaurant, which isn't very large and with a hundred and fifty of us there the room soon became like a furnace.

Off came the coats, then the shirts, and I worked those boys to a frazzle. They went home after three hours of solid slogging, tired out but happy. Happy because they suddenly found themselves a part of a team. And what's more, in every heart there was the thought, "Roll on the next rehearsal." Fred Hurll, Jack Beet, Mac (our pianist), and I sat down long after the rest had gone. I was nearly whacked, but I felt like a captain of a tremendous side, and, as the skipper, already I had a great pride in my team.

Then Fred said to me, "What are we going to call this thing?" Up to that moment a title for the show had not occurred to any one of us. I think it was Tinny who put the first suggestion forward. "It's for Downe, isn't it? Why not call it 'Downe and Out'?" Not bad for a start, but then Jack Beet chirped up with "Why not 'up DOWNE'?" I felt we needed something about London, so my suggestion was "DOWNE to PICCADILLY."

We finally went home that night, having these three titles to put before our committee. The choice we thought should be theirs. One of our committee-men was Major A. Boyle, and let me say here and now, it is to him more than any other man we owe all that was to come to pass in the years ahead. Alas, he is not with us now, and when he passed on, Scouting lost a great man and I lost a very great personal friend. I was to get to know Major Boyle very closely during the remainder of his life!

The weeks slipped by. Rehearsals progressed, as did the planning. But still we hadn't decided on the title, and the time to put out our preliminary publicity was drawing near. The theatre had been booked, a contract entered into for the hiring of costumes and scenery, and the decision taken to play three nights at the Scala, opening on October 30th.

One night during rehearsals word was brought to me that the title of the show HAD to be decided that evening so that posters could be got ready for the initial announcement to the public.

We had just broken for coffee. Then, I told one of the boys to call the cast back to continue rehearsals. As they all crowded back into the room I said to the youngster, "Are they all back?" He looked at me and in a Cockney voice said, "Aye, aye, Skip, the gang's all here."

I stood rooted to the spot. "The Gang's all here!" "THE GANG'S ALL HERE!" That was it! That was the title we had been looking for. We were a Gang and the Gang was all here. Yes sir I thought, that's IT.

In this humble, unexpected way was born the title of the new venture; and a word was coined for Scouting throughout the world. The word was GANG. The credit goes to an unknown boy, and strange as it might seem, I don't suppose he even realises what he did for us. That's the joy of being a small boy; one does things that give so much pleasure, and it is done without thought and without knowledge. When we get older we know what we do and because of that perhaps lose something by it.

At last we had our title, and now the bills could go up and the tickets could be sold. The tickets could be sold! How easily that sounds today. But then? It wasn't easy at all. We couldn't sell the tickets—in fact, we couldn't even give them away. We'd ask people if they'd like to see a show, their faces would light up and they'd say, "Fine, what show is it?" Then, when we'd say, "It's a Scout show," the smiles of anticipation would vanish and they'd merely say, "Oh."

But we had one trump card up our sleeve. On the middle night of the run the Duke and Duchess of York were to be our honoured guests. Royalty would surely mean a full house. We decided we could ask for twice as much for our seats that evening. But still the tickets weren't going anything like fast enough and time was getting desperately short. We knew we wouldn't have even half a house for the opening night. It would be about a third full for the last night; and for the Royal visit about three-quarters full. This was the most we could hope for. Yet our spirits were high and the final rehearsals were even more enthusiastic than ever.

So came the big night. "Steer for the Open Sea" and There'll come a Time Some Day were our featured numbers, and as curtain-time drew nearer and nearer the tummy-flutterings began. The younger boys, of course) knew no nerves. Oh, lucky, lucky boys! Fred Hurll and I lent our dinner-jackets to two friends so that we'd have at least two of our audience "dressed" as we thought they ought to be.

The clock ticked on remorselessly and backstage we were nearly ill. Not a name was featured on the programme and the only credit was "Written and Produced by a Holborn Rover." I insisted on this because at the time I didn't want the public at large, and the profession in particular, to know I had anything to do with the show. Besides, we were all a part of the whole, each one doing

You can imagine the effect this had on everyone. Not only was there the bitter disappointment of every boy in the show—but we had charged the audience double money for this performance! It says much for everyone concerned that they pocketed their disappointment, understood the situation, and rolled up their sleeves to show those who were out front that they would have a show and a half. And they did, too. By the time the interval came, the show had bowled them over. Far, far more excitement came from the stalls and the gallery. Even the hard-working Rovers who were unseen behind the shifting scenes knew that there was something electric in the air, and as the lads were changing for the second act, Major Boyle came back to me and said, "Ralph, this

is something ! Can you write another show for next year?" I looked at him in surprise. Here we were, playing to only small audiences and yet he had such faith that he wanted to carry on another year.

Archie Boyle was an idealist, but he was likewise a realist. He had the knack of conveying to me confidence and enthusiasm as few men ever had before—or have done since. I didn't hesitate for a second. "Yes, sir," I said, "I can do it—and let's get cracking right away."

Then he shook me to the core as he said, "And, by the way, we won't bother with three days next year, Ralph, we'll take the theatre for the entire week !" As he walked away from me, I turned to Fred Hurl who was standing by me. (How strange through all my life, Fred has ever been standing by my side.) "Do you think I can do it, mate?" I asked him. "Do it? We're going to do it.

It was as simple as that. Fred and I decided we would do it, and then on we went with what was left of that second-night show. The Duchess could not be with us—maybe, we thought, they'll be able to come next year—and the going home that night was filled with the one thought: "The Gang's all here!" Tins year, it would be here again NEXT year. Our final performance was the best of all. Many folk who had already seen the show came back for more and we ended that last evening midst cheers and prolonged singing. Song after song was encored, and the loudest applause I have ever heard echoed through the high and spacious auditorium of the Scala Theatre.

Only those who have taken part in a really successful venture know what it feels like when it is all over. There is a sinking, lonely feeling that takes quite a few days to get over. A special sort of reaction; I suppose. For me it was the beginning of many such feelings. You can't work, play, and practically live with a bunch of boys whom you learn to idolise (and I make no bones about this) and then suddenly find them gone from you, withouta feeling of tired loneliness. How I missed them!

True, I had my old pals of the Holborn Rovers alongside, but those new chums I had made, the excitement of meeting them once a week and knowing they were just as keen to be meeting me made me feel that something had gone out of my life. I had plenty of work to do professionally, but so many, many times I longed for a get-together with the chaps who had left me after the Scala show to go back to their own groups.

The next fortnight brought news that we had raised sufficient money to get the swimming-pool.

Within the next month I had started on the new show. We were to call it The Gang Comes Back. At this period it did not occur to a single person connected with us that the word "Gang" was anything but a word in the title of the show. Not one of us realised then that already people were talking quite naturally about "The Gang Show. So, all throughout the following months I wrote sketches, production numbers, and new songs and almost before we knew it, back we were, all together again rehearsing the next revue. And we played a week. The first few nights we played to very good houses, but by the latter part of the week we were playing to capacity. On the Friday and Saturday nights we turned hundreds of people away, and on the final night of that second show, Major Boyle came back to me again and said, "Ralph, we're here to stay, you know. There is something about this show that has never been before. We shall go on—and on."

## 3

### *The Shows go on*

**“WE shall go on and on.”**

Could we have foreseen how much truth there was in those words of Archie Boyle, I wonder what our reaction would have been? In London, each time the show was referred to, it was never as “The Gang’s all Here” or “The Gang comes Back,” it was solely “The Gang Show.” So it happened quite naturally that future productions were called “The Gang Show, 1934—5—6” according to the year. The life-line of a good group is its continuity.

By that I mean the sons who follow their fathers along the Scouting life of that particular group. The same law applies to the life of the “Gang Show.” In one particular case I think I can explain how the parallel runs by telling you about the 4<sup>th</sup> Holborn. Consider the examples of Dinky Rew and Syd Palmer. They married sisters and are still with that famous London group (in which they started as Cubs). And they were not the only two. Add to them the names of Wilf Symonds, the Cregeens, and the Neal boys. They have, since 1932, been members of the London Gang Show,” and still are. Likewise, they are now Scouters in the 4th. I refer to this because of my conviction that it is essential to keep a “centre group,” a sort of core to the whole, which helps to hold together the newcomers and to transmit to them the ideas and ideals behind the “Gang.”

Then, of course, come the Bill Summerfields, the Jack Beets, and the backstage boys such as Jim Figg, Les Rolph, Harry Knight, Fred Samuels, Harold Levermore, Percy Cage, Stan Adams, “Monk,” and the others. They have made themselves into a team which has stood the test of time and they are the complete pilots for all those who have come, and are to come, into our outfit. So I do suggest it is a mighty good idea to hold together such a team. It will not be too difficult—if your aims are good enough. Such chaps as those I have mentioned know when a thing is good. They will not stick if it becomes slack or showy, but if it carries on always along honest Scouting lines, such Scouters as these will be with you through thick and thin.

Men such as these form a foundation for all things ahead. They think as I do, they know the methods I use and in a rather wonderful way they seem to be a move ahead, thus saving me untold worry. What’s more, they help to train the others in our well-tried ways.

It isn’t common knowledge, but we claim in the London Show never to have a new boy.” The moment a lad fresh to our ways comes into the rehearsal—room, he becomes a member of the Gang. Plans have been laid beforehand how to receive him. Although he doesn’t know it, I shall have spoken to one of the old hands who is around the same age as the latest recruit; and this old hand carries out his instructions to the letter.

He gets there early on the first rehearsal—night and stands by the table where all members are checked in. He has been told the name of a particular boy and when he pulls in he attaches himself to him immediately, shows him round, and tells him everything he needs to know. But the new boy hasn’t the remotest idea that his new-found friend has been tipped off about this. O.K., it’s another

trick. Willingly I admit it is—but it's a good one, isn't it? Nonetheless, though the latest arrival is considered a member of the Gang straight away, he does not get his "Gang Show" scarf until the final rehearsal before the dress—rehearsal. And this is not just given out or flung at him, it is presented. We make quite a family ceremony about this, and in most cases, photos are taken of the first-year boys getting their red scarf Not for publication, but to add to their own personal treasures and souvenirs.

The second edition had produced a bright finale song called "Birds of a Feather," while the sentimental song-hit was a number with the title "These are the Times we Shall Dream About." I had dedicated this last song to the 67th North London Group because they had supplied all the small boys for the first edition. Wait a minute, not all the small boys. We had a bunch of very tiny lads from the 4th Holborn, and we nicknamed them "The Urchins." Nothing could have been more applicable. They were urchins, but the most lovable tribe that have ever been together. They were adored by every member of the show. The Edwards twins, "Dimmock" Smith, and two Cubs who were to become great personalities in the years to come, Syd Palmer and Dink Rew.

I could write a book about Syd and Dink. I wish they had been my sons. Syd was a tough, down-to-earth product of Holborn. A Londoner to the core, and a born performer. A devoted pal of Dink—as I said a moment ago they both married sisters—and as staunch a friend in those very young days of his as he is now as a married man with a couple of youngsters of his own. Syd came of good stock. His dad and mum could have been photographed as the ideal London couple, and in bringing up their family they certainly knew their job and did it.

Dink Rew forgive me if I fall into the trap of overrating him, but on second thoughts this would not be possible—had everything to make him the most-loved member of the Gang. Even as a Cub it would have been perfectly safe to have entrusted him with the entire Pack on a trip to China. They would have got there and safely. There has never been an unkind word said by anyone about Dink, and how few of us could boast the same. Today he is the father of three children, he has an adorable wife, and he is still with the 4th Holborn, now their Group Scoutmaster. And he, with Syd, is still a "Gang Show" indispensable.

Then there was Jack Beet. Jack and I, though the years, have often argued, especially about principles concerned with Scouting. But with all the differences of opinion, heated though they may sometimes have been, never has it even remotely interfered with our friendship. Surely that is the supreme test. Jack's utter loyalty to me personally and to anything he undertakes puts him in the top class as a friend and as a Scouter. Jack and I are about the same age (now don't jump to conclusions, we are NOT 107, though maybe getting on that way), and the highest tribute I can pay him is to tell you here about an incident that happened between us during the war years, when we were both serving in the Royal Air Force.

We were playing shows to the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1939, and some of you may remember it was a bitterly cold winter.

One night we had been putting on our show in a shabby and very old-fashioned theatre in a small French town. During the evening we found great difficulty in getting a quick "blackout" at the end of a sketch because none of our party were very bright with their French.

To be certain of getting an immediate blackout on one skit in particular, George Cameron (another of our "Gang Show" stalwarts who later was to get to

the Royal Command Performance as a single act on his own merits) pushed the French electrician out of the way, and pulled the switch. Alas, the electric board was as old as the theatre. We got the black-out all right but the entire board came away in George's hands, and plunged the entire theatre in darkness. What's more, the lights wouldn't come on again!

We played the rest of that show lit only by the flashlights of the troops in the audience and we had great difficulty in keeping the electrician, now accompanied by some gendarmes, from lugging us off the stage. Our tempers were a trifle frayed and finally, when we did get away, one of the cars which were to take us back to our billet froze up. This meant we all had to get in one ancient French taxi. There were twelve of us crammed in that asthmatic old car, and we had to travel about forty miles. To cap it all, Laurie, another of our party, was ill, and we had to keep stopping to allow him to alight. We were frozen to the marrow, and suddenly, Jack and I had a row. What it was about I now haven't the slightest idea—but I do remember it was fierce and to the point.

We both used a few words which were not in Scouting for Boys, and when we did eventually get back to the small hotel where we were billeted, the atmosphere was zero. I went straight to my room and slammed the door and would speak to no one. Confidentially, I was fully aware that the row had started entirely through myself. It was my fault. But the next morning, very early, Jack came into my room. "I'm sorry about last night, Chief," he said, "it was my fault and I just want to apologise." It takes a Jack Beet to do that. (Curiously enough although this has nothing to do with our tale—the Madame in charge of this hotel was later shot as a spy.)

But more of these adventures later. Let's now get back to the progress of the "Gang Show" as Scouts in London. I was telling you about the songs in the second edition when I was side-tracked. Preparing for the third production, we felt we badly needed a steal hit number. For weeks I tried to write what I thought would be the right type of song. I walked about the house, upstairs and down, smoking cigarette after cigarette, but, somehow, the idea would not come.

(I often wonder whether people realise the hours and hours of sleeping time I spend brooding over lines in a sketch, or the notes in a few bars of music..)

Then, one Sunday morning, fooling about on the piano, I hit a strain that pleased me. Not only the melody itself, but words came to me immediately that fitted each note of the music. I wrote that song in less than fifteen minutes and never was a word or note changed. It was called "We're Riding Along on the Crest of a Wave." Thousands of people asked me how I came to writethat song. Well, now you know.

From the third show onwards we were established. All London began to be interested, and it is to Stoke the credit goes for the first provincial copy of our original idea.

Marshall Amor was responsible. He didn't call it by our title but preferred Streamline. They have already celebrated their coming-of-age edition: and as a memento they gave me only last year a very beautiful present of a coffee—set and some plate prints which I treasure greatly.

Streamline is an extremely good show. It has taste and original ideas. The Stoke productions are in many ways more "arty" than our London shows, but this is to their credit. I'm only sorry that I have not been able to travel north more often to enjoy an evening with them. One of the funniest items I have ever

seen was in Streamline. It was a burlesque of the Cinema Organ which rises from the floor to play an Interlude.

In Stoke, they brought the organ down from the roof (with a petrified organist) and as he played, showing off every trick the organ could perform, it got out of hand. Sparks came out of the pipes, smoke blew from the inside, and to the sound of bells, drums, loud organ rumblings, and pandemonium, the entire thing blew up. It was a rich triumph of real comedy. I wish I had thought of it, and I can't be fairer than that.

Glasgow then took the plunge. Dear old Lindy (Mr. Lindstrum to you) formed a "Gang" and took the Alhambra Theatre for their first venture. I remember going up to see it. My friends took me to a football match before the evening performance (maybe to put me in a good mood, because they all knew football is my strongest weakness !) and Harry Lauder came along, too, to sit in the box for the final show. Glasgow at first thought the "Gang" was something from Chicago and expected a bunch of ruffians with plenty of shooting! But the Scottish scouts soon showed them where they were wrong. Right from the start they clicked, and have been going strong ever since.

All the sketches I had written for the London show were used by them, and so were the songs. You can imagine how amazed I was to hear those words spoken and sung with the Glasgow accent. But the effect on the audience was just as devastating as it had been in London. Yessir, Glasgow's "Gang Show" had arrived, too!

I met there a young Scout named Jimmy Smith who made a bed lamp for me which I still use. I lost track of him for a long time, and then, four years ago when I went to Malaya with the first concert party to entertain our troops out there, one night in strolled a brawny captain in charge of the Gurkhas. It was Jimmy Smith.

Into the fray then came Newcastle. with Ted Potts at the helm they tore into their "Gang Show," which they first called Flying High. Ted is one of the great enthusiasts. I was asked to visit their show and, jokingly, I said, "Yes, I'll come on the Saturday night if you'll get me a 'plane to fly back from Glasgow where I want to see the International." Believe it or not they got me a 'plane, a private one, and they flew me both ways. George Carter, who was then the Scout Commissioner, was the man who organised the whole thing. I went by train to Newcastle for the Friday night, flew early Saturday morning to Hampden for the match, then flew back to Newcastle to see the last performance that same evening. It was a grand first effort. Since then, Ted and his merry boys have kept it up year after year, now calling it, as we do, The Gang Show. Every Londoner who goes up to see their efforts returns with praise and admiration for the wonderful productions. They maintain a remarkably high standard.

It's strange, you know, but even though all these provincial cities use exactly the same songs and sketches as we do in the London production, each city has its own hall-mark. It is not only a case of accents, it is a creation of the various producers. Ted Potts (who is lucky enough to have a sister knowing more about ballet and dancing than most of the famous choreographers) stages his production numbers in an entirely different way from the way in which we do ours: but this is an asset to the Newcastle show and the results are undoubtedly a tribute to the astuteness of their producer.

In Glasgow, Lindy and his producer get a completely different effect, especially in the sketches. They have, with the help of a brilliant performer,

Harry Dougan, a knack of suddenly bringing the house down with a slick, original gag or a wonderfully effective piece of business. Yes, they had started and they were flourishing.

We in London now became aware that something far bigger than anything we had possibly imagined was happening.

All the material I had written was turned over, lock, stock, and barrel, to the Boy Scout Association to be used without payment for Scout show anywhere. News of this was around in no time, and so even the smallest Groups began to take advantage of the opportunity. "Gang Shows" were springing up like mushrooms, letters were pouring in from every part of the country: and it became a full time job for someone at Imperial Headquarters to cope with the correspondence.

Hold on a minute! Maybe I've skipped a very important point and unjustly left out the name of a most important gentleman. It was not Imperial Headquarters which first started the "Gang Shows." It was the London Scout Council, and to them must go the credit for the initial venture.

Our great friend on this Council was a man who is still with us, and he is, at the moment of writing, the Scout Commissioner for London. His name is J. Murray Napier; a Scotsman who has all the dourness of his race and who is as watchful azid as painstaking as anyone I know. I wish more than I wish most things that I could get him excited. I've tried now and then, but not a chance. I can't even fool him. Murray Napier has a way of looking at you that makes you understand at once that you are looking at a man who can't easily be fooled. He puts his finger on a weak point like a dart flying to the bull's-eye. We owe him much. Anyway, I'm glad to think I have here stated where the actual credit for all the pre-war "Gang Shows" lay.

By 1936 it was obvious to all and sundry that "Gang Shows" were no mere flash-in-the-pan. Whereas in the first stages we had difficulty in selling the tickets, in 1936 we sent back thousands of pounds for tickets which were unavailable. Theatres in the fabulous West End of London marvelled at our success; their managements were politely jealous but staggered at the immense popularity of this new invasion to theatre land.

Each year we have to face a barrage of complaints from the general public saying that they can never obtain tickets for the Gang Show that they never know about it until it is too late. So, in recent years, we have issued posters to be put up on hoardings, in the subways, and so on, telling the public that order forms are now "available."

Our Committee believe it is a good thing to get the outside Scouting people in—and I am sure they are right—but quite a lot of our near—sighted inside friends regard this as a needless expense and, in some way, as a slight to those belonging to the movement. I am sure they are miles off the beam, and surely they would realise this if they thought a little more. It is the outside people we want to interest, and anything we can do in this connection must be the better for Scouting as a whole.

I fear there will always be criticism about the distribution of seats, but I assure you all now, nothing has been discussed more thoroughly than this particular subject. The plain fact is that there are only a limited number of seats available in any theatre and they can only be sold once. Once they are gone then that's all there is to it. After all, it's the same -with the Cup Final; but naturally our sympathies are with anyone who is disappointed year after year.

We have discussed and welcomed many suggestions from kindly people, acted on some and discarded others, but the plain fact remains namely, that twenty times the number of people want to see the show as there are seats for them to do so. The members of the cast are allowed ten seats each—no more. And from these ten no one is allowed to buy more than two for both Saturday nights. They have to pay for any seat they are allotted, but the reason for clamping down on the week-end seats is that we feel we must give our thousands of out-of-town friends the priority.

Letters pour into my letter-box weeks before the show opens. Friends (?) I haven't heard from for a year suddenly drop me a line, hoping I am getting on all right, and asking me if my cold is better and yes, right at the end of the letter could I let them have twenty seats for the Gang Show ! These are the only letters of the thousands I receive each year that I never reply to. As a point of interest, I have stood many, many times in a queue outside the box-office at Golders Green with the rest of a long line, my money in my hand, hoping to purchase a couple of returns for somebody I particularly wanted to see the show. And after many disappointments, somebody has walked up to me and said, "Listen, Ralph, it's easy for you, get me in, will ya?"

One suggestion sent to us was that all tickets should be forwarded to the various County Commissioners and that they should distribute them to their Counties, thus making it possible for every County to get a certain amount. Had this been put into action we should have lost every County Commissioner we ever had, either through his own action or somebody getting into his house with a hatchet ! What's more, we wouldn't know how many he had actually sold until it was time for the next year's show.

There is only one correct way to handle the distribution of tickets and that is through its proper channels, the theatre box-office. They know their job and, by golly, they are welcome to it. You ought to hear the postmen complaining around Golders Green around "Gang Show" time. And don't forget, we augment the box-office with three special assistants to handle the letters, return money, and to suggest different dates if seats are not available. on the night for which they are first wanted. For approximately two months they are at it night and day, and a very loud "Thank you" is due to Claude Withers, Cyril Smith, Mr. Morris, and their assistants at the Golders Green Hippodrome.

Last year, when the box-office opened to sell seats direct from the window, there were, believe it or not, only forty-eight available, and at seven in the morning the queue stretched from the theatre to the Tube station!

A "Gang Show" is not everybody's meat, but then neither is a circus, or the ballet, or even Shakespeare, but there can be no doubt that we have more than our normal share of fans and they seem to be augmenting their ranks as each year goes by—mainly because of their enthusiasm in recruiting new ones. Each year, therefore, seems to bring about a new record in the demand for tickets.

In 1956 a postman, was heard to say, as he was lugging three large sacks of mail addressed to the box-office, "This is a darn sight worse than Christmas." As an all-time record so far, within nine days of the opening of the box-office in 1956, over six thousand pounds had been returned to disappointed applicants! What the returned figure was at the end of the run is anybody's guess, but it must have reached a fantastic figure. If we could add up the whole amount of cash sent back during the entire run of these

shows it would probably run into over a hundred thousand pounds! A fortune, and we had to give it back!

At the Prince's Theatre, Manchester, Walt Dobson, of the now famous team of Dobson and Young, gave the Manchester boys a lead which inspired their first "Gang Show." They hoisted the flag, and it flew proudly until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Suddenly the Press became inquisitive. "Who is behind this? "Who is this 'Holborn Rover'?" They sent enquiring representatives to the London Scout office and to I.H.Q., but it was a pact between us that my name should not be brought into it. At that time, as it happened, I had a great musical comedy success playing at the London Hippodrome, Yes, Madame, starring Binnie Hale and Bobby Howes, and I did not want my hobby to be in any way connected with my profession.

More important still, the Gang was a team, and therefore we were all anxious that no single name should be announced for special mention. But, as I need not tell you, the lads of Fleet Street can be very persistent, and at last our Committee decided there was nothing else for it—we should have to meet them. A lunch was decided upon and along we went to find nearly every important theatre reporter and critic present. Several of them were surprised to see me there, and I was again and again asked, "What are you doing at this Boy Scout affair? At the end of the luncheon our Chairman stood up and spoke to our guests. He told them the exact story, and emphasised why I wanted my name to be kept quite apart from the Gang Show and the other Scouting productions I had already started.

They listened carefully and then Mr. S. R. Littlewood, who was then the dramatic critic of the Morning Post, later amalgamated with the Daily Telegraph, got up. I don't recall his actual words, but in effect he said that people connected with the theatre were always in the news for one reason and another. Far too often, he pointed out, for things not entirely creditable, so when something comes along which could be nothing but good for the theatrical profession, why, he asked, conceal it?

We argued; we thrashed it out. I lost. Next day the papers carried the story of who was behind the Gang Show. From that moment, the nom de plume of 'A Holborn Rover' vanished for ever from the scene I knew it was wrong, and the future proved it, but there was nothing I could do about it. The secret was out, for better or worse.

Like wildfire the news went round. Nowhere was it discussed as thoroughly and critically as among the circles of theatrical people, and by that I mean not only artists but managements around the West End.

Before I had time to realise what was happening I found myself in a tight spot. Managers who put on big shows assumed that I was beginning to think of making a drastic change, of giving up the theatre as a means of a livelihood and turning my future towards the amateur stage. Nothing was further from my thoughts because, frankly, I wasn't, financially, in a position to do this. Even if it had been, I would not have dreamed of wrenching myself away from the good companions I had made in the world of the theatre.

There's a strange fascination about show-business. It gets hold of you, and it never loses its grip. You become part of it and, though failure and success, there is a hold over you that never lets go. Once a Scout, always a Scout, we say. Well, once a pro, always a "pro." However, the rumours started, and before a

few more months had passed I began to feel a draught. Offers were not coming in as they had, and any references to myself that came in the newspapers nearly always ended by referring to me as "the producer of the Scout Gang Shows." Gone were notices of my "past performances," and the biggest news item that came my way emphasised always my exploits with the Gang. No one was more aware of my predicament than my closest pals in the movement. Jack Beet, Fred Hull, Archie Boyle, and Tinny Fellowes, though they did not mention it to me, were constantly talking among themselves of the danger that lay ahead for me, and how best they could cope and see to it that my enthusiasm for my all absorbing hobby should not spell disaster for my professional livelihood.

All this time I tackled anything that came my way from the theatre, often taking on jobs that I would not have touched a mere few months previously. I produced routine, twice-nightly road shows that were good enough in their way, and within the limits of their budgets, but which were not comparable in any way with the West End successes with which I had made what reputation I had as a man of the theatre. I worked in small variety acts and played theatres I did not dream I would ever have worked in. Yet, though it all, something inside me seemed to tell me to hold on, and that it would one day come out all right. So I stuck it and all the while, the "Gang Shows" grew in strength, spreading wider and wider across the whole country. There was no holding them.

It is no easy matter putting one's finger on the precise reason for the show's fabulous appeal to the public at large. That there is this appeal is proved by the growing numbers of ordinary theatregoers who are clamouring, more and more energetically each year, to get in.

You can't dismiss the problem in a sentence. Nobody can sum the answer up in a couple of words and leave it at that. Surely it must be a combination of man things. Here, then, are the ingredients which, to my way of thinking, form the basis of the "Gang Show's" magnetic appeal. It is clean entertainment, and it is healthy entertainment. No matter how broad the comedy may become at times there is never a moment of embarrassment for any member of the audience.

It is enlivened by singable songs so different from "crooning" and the words of most of the songs are exhilarating and have an open-air atmosphere. It provides moments when we can laugh at ourselves (never a bad thing to do !) and, who knows, see ourselves as others see us. We can take our pet grouse, twist it into a sketch and give it an airing. Every grievance, however trivial, stands a chance of being forgotten when it is brought out into the open. The show blazes with gay colours both in scenery and costume, on an ever-changing background that presents a new locale every few minutes. It is crammed with the unexpected, and brings moments of delight to an audience who can say "Oh !" and echo that exclamation as the tabs open and each new surprise comes into view. It has punch and speed and plenty of bright lighting, shooting on to the stage from the wings, acting areas, and spotlights, at every conceivable angle. It has movement. Add all this together and you have a mighty array of "effects" that contribute in no small way to the appeal of a "Gang Show." But I would not place any of the things I have so far mentioned as the outstanding attraction of the show. The real appeal is that hard-to-define quality which brings old fans back year after year, and converts new enthusiasts with each new edition. The chief factor is made up of all the boys who sing, act, prance, and grin at the customers who have paid to see them. They outshine the lighting, outdo the scenery, and bring something extra to the songs that only they can bring.

The greatest asset they have is the magical word, "Youth." They are the "appeal," they are the beginning and 'the end of all our shows stand for. And no matter how I may concentrate on the writing and the staging as year follows year, it is finding new faces, new lads, and, most important of all, new personalities, that keep our show alive. I know that because of all this, there is an intense desire on the part of so many to be one of those who will be sitting out front when "Gang Show" time comes around.

It may be thanks to a good song they were singing, but the thrill from the audience "comes across." You can see it for yourself on the face of a youngster who holds the customer in his spell just by the way he is putting the song over. He may be in a line-up of twenty, but he will be spotted. No single type appeals to everyone, so it is essential that each boy has a personality of his own and that's what I go out for. They may look rough, tough, or "public school," but ever single boy has to be blessed with a "something" about him that is different from the others.

The voices matter little if there is a "glow" about the way they are standing, moving, or singing. Personality is an elusive thing, but it is a neon sign. Oh, the times Scouters have said to me, when I have asked for one of their boys, "Sure you can have him, Ralph, but why pick him?" They will tell me of half a dozen cleverer lads in their Group, a choir-boy with a golden voice, a comic who "makes 'em scream," or a Rover who is "wonderful at taking off Johnny Ray."

I still stand by my own choice, and they realise why, when, as they sit in their seat, they discover, for the first time, a personality that comes over the footlights. If care has been taken in selecting the boys, care in each individual case, you could put on, and get away with, a "Gang Show" performed on a bare stage or in front of a black back-cloth.

Every boy has a personality of one sort or another, but the art is to eliminate the personalities who would make an impression in a room, in a conversation, or at an interview, and select only those who can obviously project—without appearing to. If a boy makes an obvious effort to "get over," he seldom impresses me. On the other hand, a sudden twinkle, a grin, or a natural gesture, may stamp a character quicker than anything. It hits me right in the eye.

Unquestionably, the major appeal of a "Gang Show" lies in the personalities of the performers. When a producer knows he is blessed with these in abundance, it is up to him to achieve the "attack," the "finish," and the zip which will come alive with the gang he has picked for his show.

More than once our boys have been referred to as "Glamour Boys." correct that's what one must have on a stage but you wouldn't notice so much glamour if you caught them as often as I do, when the curtain is down and they are able to be themselves. (It's like a Troop, the same boys, but what a difference from their appearance in "British Bulldog," and a "Church Parade.")

I'd be a fool if I hid my head in the sands and imagined that everyone in Scouting looked upon the "Gang Shows" as a Good Thing.

There is hardly a single aspect of Scouting that everyone regards as a Good Thing. You've only got to think back on the start of the Senior Section, or the change in the Rover scheme to realise that we all have our own ideas on special subjects and, when all is said and done, it is as well that we do. Nothing can point out a weakness quicker than the Opposition. But I can truthfully say

that there has never yet been a criticism levelled at us that hasn't been examined thoroughly (I'm not talking about cranks forget 'em), and that will always be the case.

But it is wise indeed for any of us, bitten by "Gangitis," to keep in mind that this is only one part of our Scouting. It would be bad for the Movement if Groups spent all their time playing football, running bazaars, swimming galas, or even getting badges! Likewise, it would be very unsatisfactory if we allowed boys or Scouters to put too much time in on" Gang Shows." (I know I've said this before—I intended to, and I shall say it again and again!) All the same, when you hit on anything that happens to be a success, well, it's like an Aunt Sally, it's up there to be shot at, and none of us must grumble if the shots come! As I daresay you know yourself, if a Group near you happens to win the local swimming gala every year, it's easy to say, "Oh, well, that's all they ever do." Those remarks are always tinged with a bit of envy, and there is seldom any real truth in the w6rds: but they are spoken.

A very eminent member of the Boy Scouts Association once made a remark about me when he heard I was addressing a District meeting on "Scouting." "How dare he do that?" said the gentleman, "how would he like it if I went round talking about 'Gang Shows'?" My answer is that I would be delighted if he would so long as he had studied "Gang Shows," as I have tried to study Scouting. One is just a member of the main family and any good son finds out all he can about the stock which bred him. But I warn every associate of mine to be on their guard not so much because of the critics but because it is a solemn truth that "Gang Shows" are like one episode in the original copy of Scouting for Boys, just a chapter written by B.P. on one activity in the Movement's life. Maybe I've been betrayed into talking in a rather serious vein on what is to so many a light hearted subject. But there are some things I just had to say. Now, back to the "Gang Show" story proper.

With the show now becoming an annual event, it was evident that a sharp lookout had to be kept for promising performers for the future. We were grooming our own "stars" for principal parts in sketches and so on, but personalities are essential in this line of country and, keen though all our members were, not all are blessed with that overworked word which means the difference between something that is "all right" and something that is special." We had to go out with a small-tooth comb and discover the specials. Every free night of the week I trekked along to any Scout show that happened to be playing. I wasn't so well known by sight then as I am now, so it was possible for me to buy a ticket and sit at the back of almost any hall without being noticed.

Some shows I saw were jolly good. Others made me think I had been sitting there for days it was an endurance test at times to keep still and watch some of the material from the Scala revue seeing mutilated and torn to shreds. Yet every now and then on would come some youngster, perhaps with little to do: but to me. anyway, there would be that glow about him which I spoke of a few pages back and which stamped him as a possible.

One very fruitful night I spent at Streatham, watching a Group there presenting a pantomime. A young comedian bowled me over. Even then he had the sure touch of a seasoned performer and never once did he overplay a scene or allow laughs or applause to get the better of him.

His name was George Cameron, and thousands of people will now remember how George eventually became one of the finest comedians we have

ever had in our shows. Throughout the war he travelled with us in the R.A.F. Then, after demobilisation, he forsook his trade and became a professional performer. He went from strength to strength and (as I believe I have mentioned elsewhere in this story) he was chosen as a single act for the greatest honour "The Profession" can bestow on an artist, and became a Royal Command artist.

The old adage of "Don't shoot, the pianist is doing his best!" might many a time have been forgotten by me if only I had had a gun while watching some of the concerts I sat through in those days. It appalled me to see the under rehearsed turns that were put before a paying public in the name of Scouting, and to say the least, it could do little less than turn any would-be Scout from ever joining up with us. I know all Scouters are not producers, but it was a scandal the way some of them threw on a show which would not pass muster even for a "Parents' Evening" in the troop room. But I sat through them all just on the off-chance of spotting likely people.

Talent is a great thing to find, but throughout my career in this "Gang Show" line I still stick to the conviction that personality is the rarest asset of all. Give me a bloke with personality and I'll do the rest. I missed hardly a District in London during these evenings, and if I had a quid for every time I heard "Crest of a Wave" sung I'd be a multi-millionaire. Only last year, when the Guards Band led the Queen's Scouts into the Quadrangle at Windsor playing "Crest," a Commissioner standing by me said, "Ralph, they're playing your National Anthem." I must admit that when I hear it I feel I ought to stand up.

When people say to me after seeing one of our shows, "You're lucky to have that set of talented chaps with you," I agree with them but I wonder how much they realise we had to go out and find them? So out I used to go, and just when I'd be getting discouraged and wondering whether it was worth it, up would pop some cheeky-faced chappie whom I knew at once to be a "find." Not all of these did I manage to snaffle. At times an S.M. would not be happy about a boy joining the "Gang Show," so he was left alone. I think only twice was I disappointed, and that's not a bad average when you consider the hundreds who have been through our hands during the fantastic run of the show. But I have told you about these nightly excursions to underline the work that was entailed and to make it clear that the work was not always as simple as it seems to lots of folk.

The very people who can explain the success of any enterprise are the same people who could just as easily explain to you why it was a failure. Yet our critics have provided me with some of the jolliest stories I have been able to recount on the many times I have been asked to speak at various functions. May I tell you one of these?

We were camping at Downe with my troop, and the boys were out on a wide game. My troop leader (Freddie Blunden) and I were staying in camp to cook the dinner. I was stripped to the waist peeling spuds and Fred was about twenty yards away from me cutting up the meat.

The competition field at Downe lies between two steep hills and down one of these from the entrance to the camp came an elderly Scoutmaster and a young Patrol Leader. They came up to Fred and as they were talking to him he suddenly called out, "Mr. Cook" somebody wants you." ("Mr. Cook" was a nickname the Holbornites gave me and some of them still refer to me as such.) Over came the S.M. and threw up a smart salute.

"It's a nice place, this Downe," he said to me. I asked him if he had ever been there before, and he told me he hadn't. So I asked him if he would like me to show him around. "I'd be delighted, Mr. Cook," said he, so "Mr. Cook" got up, left the spuds, and put on his shirt. As we started to walk up the other hill toward the training ground, the Scoutmaster noticed the word HOLBORN on my shirt-sleeve.

"Are you from Holborn?" he asked. So I told him I was. "Ah, then," he said, "you'll know this 'Holborn Rover' lad." I quietly said I did, and then he asked me rather confidentially, "Tell me, what's he like?" I find it hard to resist a practical joke and I couldn't help saying to him, "Well, between you and me, he stinks." "Ah," said the S.M., "I knew it!" I gave him a sidelong glance which he didn't notice, and then he continued, "I don't agree with all this upset he's causing, all this show-business. Could you imagine him going to camp like you are with his boys?" I said "NO!" "Could you imagine him really being in this Movement as we are?" I again said, "NO." Then finally he told me, "One blessing is, he won't last. That type never does. He'll be out before we know it and a good job too." I agreed with him and continued our tour.

Eventually we got back to my site and said our good-byes. I watched him trekking up the steep bill towards the exit. Apparently, when he was about to leave, Mr. Shaw, the Warden of Downe, saw him and they chatted. He complimented Mr. Shaw on the camp and Mr. Shaw told him that he had seen Mr. Reader showing him around.

"WHO?" said the S.M. "Oh, that was Ralph Reader who was taking you around the grounds," said Shaw. "Indeed?" said the visitor. Naturally I didn't know this at the time, but the next thing I saw was the approaching figure of the Scoutmaster and his Patrol Leader still tagging along down the bill, then upwards towards me. He came straight towards me, threw me another salute, and said, "Mr. Reader, you are just what I thought you were, so there!" I got another salute and watched him struggling up the bill for the last time toward the exit. You'll have to forgive me when I tell you I went back to my spud peeling, chuckling gleefully.

## 4

### *The Show is Filmed*

All seats were sold weeks before the 1937 production was due to open, and cash to the extent of over ten thousand pounds had to be returned to disappointed potential customers.

Then for me came another milestone, another change of direction. The man responsible was Herbert Wilcox, the famous British film producer. Yes, I went into films. The story of how all this came about is in another book, *It's Been Terrific*, and just in case you have read it, I won't bore you with it over again. But from my first film with Herbert and his very dear wife, Anna Neagle, things for me, professionally, began to get on their feet again.

This isn't my story, it's the story of the "Gang Show," so let's now forget about the Reader side of things and return to the highlight year of the London "Gang Show," 1937. It was in this year we made a feature film and in which we appeared in the Royal Command Performance. Not bad in one year, was it?

The night of the Royal Command Performance was one none of us will forget. Lined up on the bill with such great artists as Gracie Fields, George Formby, Will Fyffe, Jack Buchanan, Cicely Courtneidge, Max Miller, and others in the high and dazzling light of Theatreland, the boys were as professional as the Crazy Gang who were standing by them throughout their performance.

I'll never forget the last run through of that show. I was more than normally nervous—as a rule I have only myself to worry about: but this time I had a hundred and fifty of my boys to think of, and I was pretty well het up. George Black was sitting out front, and as the curtains opened on the Gang I had to make an entrance to the centre of the stage. I came on from the wings but somehow slipped and the next thing I knew, I was lying flat on my back in the front of the mob! They all roared their heads off, George Black included. He shouted up to me, "Keep that in, Ralph." Needless to say, I didn't.

It was a night of a lifetime. There couldn't have been a prouder man in the world that night than I was. After it was over, their Majesties back at Buckingham Palace, and the lights of the Palladium dimmed, we walked through the stage-door to the cheers of hundreds of people waiting to see the performers come out. Away they all went to the high-class restaurants and hotels for celebration suppers. But not me. I went with four of the Holborn Rovers to the flat of a pal of ours, Kipps Herring, and there we sat drinking coffee and wondering whether it was all true. Believe it or not, the next day the dailies, one and all, placed us the second big hit of the programme. Only Max Miller preceded us in favour. Yes, ahead of almost all the other stars who glittered so brightly that memorable evening, the London Scout "Gang Show" boys had reached the peak.

Within a matter of months the "Gang Show" picture was released. It opened at the Lyceum Theatre in the Strand it was the only picture ever to play that old and illustrious house. Another great night, too. Searchlights lit up the audience as they arrived for the premiere, and the entire Gang took part in a finale that must stand for all time as a brilliant idea of a producer. Herbert Wilcox finished the picture with a scene on a ship, and all the Gang boys singing "Crest of a Wave."

With his masterly sense of showmanship, on the opening night of the film, he dissolved the picture to the stage, where was set the actual ship seen in the picture with the boys in the exact places they had been in the film. You can imagine the remarkable effect as the film faded though to the exact replica of the picture to the reality on the stage. Surely never has such cheering been heard in a theatre. I sat in the dressing-room backstage for nearly an hour before I left the Lyceum that night.

It all seemed like a dream that in some way I had helped to shape. And outside the stage-door, everyone had departed except one bloke. It was one of the "Urchins" of the 4th Holborn and all he said to me was, "Do you want someone to see you home, Skip?" Take all the money in the world, the knocks and the triumphs, but let me take the memory of that youngster's words to me that wonderful evening. The Gang had "done the lot."

You won't be surprised to learn that we had a whale of a time when we were making the "Gang Show" film. Several other pictures were being made in the other studios at Pinewood, and the various stars took a delight in coming to see our boys at work. What's more, they liked to take them to lunch.

It was fun to see our kids sitting down to feed with Jack Buchanan, Robert Donat, Asma Neagle, and the glamorous Marlene Dietrich. And they took it all in their stride as though they had been born to it. Well, perhaps they had.

One Saturday night after shooting had finished I went to town. I didn't get back until about three in the morning. I was living during this period at Pinewood in the Country Club House there quite a posh affair with an illuminated swimming-pool and all the rest of it. I was walking up to the marble staircase leading to the bedrooms when I heard music from a small orchestra playing. Looking across to this indoor pool I saw several of the stars enjoying a late swimming party. I didn't bother to go in so continued my way up the stairs. Suddenly a din arose above me and I heard the rush of an oncoming throng. Down the stairs came about eight youngsters. They were in bathing slips and as lively as only kids can be. I barred their way and yelled, "What's going on? Why aren't you home?" Young Dimmock (oh, yes, he was a member of the 4th) said to me, "Out of the way, Skip, we're staying with friends for the week-end!" And down they galloped to the pool. Apparently the stars had invited them for the week-end, to give them a good time, and entertain them. Somehow I think it was the stars who were entertained. The opening night of that picture I shall never forget. The film company arranged for me to arrive at the theatre in a big chauffeur driven Daimler. As I reached the entrance there were thousands milling around the streets. The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester were to be there.

I went to get out of the car and as the door opened the limousine moved forward. A small boy had rushed to the door to get an autograph and as the car moved forward the door struck him and knocked him down. Thank God he wasn't hurt; but it shook me, and in the excited condition I was already in it had a bad effect. The very moment the title of the film came on the screen I was sick. I saw no more of it that evening.

People often said that all this fame that was coming to our boys, all the publicity and the limelight, would spoil them. But you cannot spoil thoroughbreds, and so far as the great majority are concerned, if you find the right boys, train them right and believe in them, they will not spoil. Most of them made a nice little bit of pocket-money from the days they were "shooting" the

film at Pinewood. The only person who did not receive a penny from the film either before or after was myself!

Some of you may remember the fight scene in the picture, where a bunch of toughs came and broke up a hall where the boys were rehearsing. The studio hired about twenty ex-boxers for this scene, and they really knew their stuff.

When the lads saw them, their hearts were troubled. Big bruisers they were, and of formidable appearance. "We don't have to scrap with that lot, do we?" they asked. I explained to them that they were all professional fighters and they knew how to "pull their punches" so that there would be no chance of them really hitting anyone.

At that moment our director, Alfred Goulding, came to me and said, "Ralph, you can take your make-up off. I won't need you tonight." I told him I was in the scene. "I know that," he said, "but I'm putting in a 'double.' I dare not risk putting you in."

If you could have seen the faces of the boys when they heard that you would indeed have seen a picture. One of them said to me, "Hey, where's the nearest exit?" But the shots were taken, and nobody was hurt. In fact, the harder our boys hit the pro's, the better they liked it, and it's more than likely that some of the boxers even took up Scouting afterwards

I do know that several of them took the lads into the canteen for supper. There is nobody in the world who can make friends more quickly than boys. I wonder sometimes if there isn't a lesson here for some of us grown-ups. Talk to a boy all you like but there is often magic in what you can learn if you allow the boy to talk to you. A boy is free from "angles" and politics: if only we could say the same!

In 1938 we thought we would give revue a rest. We decided instead to do a mammoth Scout play with the entire Gang playing the various parts.

This was an expanded version of a play I had written for my own Troop, the 10th Holborn, and was called Great Days. It did not go as well as a revue, but at least it was a change and therefore we decided worth the risk. Unfortunately I couldn't be with the boys during the run of the show because I was playing at the Hippodrome in The Fleet's Lit Up. But I got along each evening to see the rise of the curtain, and, of course, got back in time for the final curtain. The following year we went back or, should I say, intended to go back, to revue. mob, the same enthusiasm, and the same spirit that had now become known as the "Gang Show" "hall-mark. But around us the clouds were gathering. Unrest on the Continent, and a voice which began to blow the ill wind of despair across the world. It was the voice of Adolf Hitler!

To the rhythm of jack-boots marching on the highways of Germany we home here in Chenies Street kept the rhythm of the new "Gang Show" songs for 1939 beating hopefully. But even though our box-office opened again, and though every seat had been sold, it soon became fairly evident that there might not, after all, be a "Gang Show." August meandered its way toward the end of the month, and each day the clouds gathered darkness. Then came that sombre Sunday, the first one in September, when the voice of Mr. Chamberlain made it all too clear that there would be no more "Gang Shows" for a while. We were at war with Germany.

Came the final meeting of the boys in the Gang; the scene will never leave my memory. The tenseness of their faces, the knowledge that so many of the lads before me would soon be wearing a different kind of uniform, and the knowledge

that some of them may never again be with us to join in our songs made it a moving moment. After seven glorious years together, we knew this meant the parting of the ways. We said our good-byes, and all sang "These are the times we shall dream about."

The song took on a new and poignant meaning. The saddest breaking-up I shall ever see then took place: the boys, without a smile, just quietly shook hands, said "so-long," and wandered off to their homes. Over thirty of those boys did not come home. War, with its menace to liberty, was with us again, and until it was over—no more "Gang Shows." To those lads who had been with us, who formed the "Gang Show" trail, and who started the great institution that was to eventually become even more famous, let us pay our thanks and say to each and

The day after we had said our farewells I was in the Royal Air Force. How was I to know that throughout the coming years of a dreadful war the "Gang Shows" were destined to cheer the troops on every battle front of the world? Yes, and even in German prison camps.

So ended Part One of the "Gang Show" story. The second part was to bring forth some of the brightest stars in theatre land today and to blaze a roadway across Europe, India, Africa, Burma, and the Far East.

Here I must tell you one story about the filming of the "Gang Show" at Pinewood: how truthful it is I can't say. The fabulous Marlene Dietrich walked on to our set one morning to watch the boys at work. She then said she would like to take about four of them to lunch in the studio restaurant. Asked if she had any preference for the ages of the boys, she is alleged to have said in that dreamy, husky, romantic voice, "Vell, for lunch, about thirteen or fourteen, but for SUPPER twenty one!"

## PART TWO

### 5

#### *The War and the Gang*

Too many of us can recall only too vividly those dark days of September, 1939, I won't try and repaint a picture of the times, the good-byes, the fears and the personal emotions. Everyone was asking everyone else, "What are you going to be in?" Thousands were already "in" and the recruiting offices throughout the land were working overtime. The grim business of a new war clutched at our throats and even the most optimistic among us didn't really believe the Cheerful Charlies who, as they did in 1914, proclaimed, "It'll all be over by Christmas."

The story of how I found myself in the Royal Air Force has already been told pretty fully in my autobiography: so, for the purpose and progress of this story, let me just say that immediately war was declared I was in the light blue uniform with a thin ring on my sleeve to remind me I was a pilot officer.

The days and nights of the theatre and of the "Gang Shows" were now to vanish from my life, and in one way I was extremely glad. During those first few weeks, whilst I was stationed at Harrow giving lectures to new officers coming into the Intelligence Branch of the Services, I did a lot of planning. I was determined that when I returned to "Civvy Street," nothing would induce me to restart the Scout "Gang Shows" until I had re-established myself in the highly competitive world of the professional theatre. That was to be a first priority, and I made up my mind I would stick to my resolution.

Meanwhile the R.A.F. claimed me and that surely meant there could be no further connection, until peace-time returned, with the name "Gang Show." I know now how easy it is to plan but how differently things turn out! Here I was, billeted in Stanmore, keeping office hours (a thing I had never done since I was sixteen), saying "sir" to, and saluting, my superiors. Just dealing with papers and lectures, and sampling Service discipline, mile apart from any sort of life I had ever led before. So no wonder I believed I was a world away from greasepaint and theatricals.

My immediate C.O. was none other than Archie Boyle, now Air Commodore, so maybe it wasn't so surprising after all that one afternoon he sent for me. I duly reported and (when the door was closed and the orderly had disappeared) Boyle gave me a cigarette and told me to sit down.

For obvious reasons I cannot go into details of our chat because they were closely connected with my particular branch of the Service: but it did mean that he wanted me to go to France. Also he wanted it to seem a perfectly natural journey. One way to do this, he explained, was for me to take over a show for the troops. This didn't delight me at all.

"I don't want to send you officially," he said, "so what I suggest is this. I'll get hold of Basil Dean and suggest it would be a good thing if he sent you over with an E.N.S.A. company to play to the R.A.F. in particular and the other forces in general." I listened to various other details and I saw his point. There was

nothing for it but to carry out orders. Then he said, "There is one snag about this trip, Ralph. I must be sure of every person travelling with you."

I understood what he meant and I saw the red light. I saw that sign "Gang Show" looming up before me. "You don't mean?"

I got no further for he was on to it like a flash. What I mean is that I'd like you to take over a small unit with the boys I know from the Gang Show. I realise that they are not in the services but there are ways and means" (he winked) "and I think I could find a way round it. Give me the name of about eight or nine you'd like to take with you, and leave the rest to me. After all, it's only for four weeks." FOUR weeks! It was to last over four years. But neither of us knew it then, so I said, "You're the boss, if that's what you want, sir, O.K."

The next morning I brought Air Commodore Boyle in a list. Jack Beet, Norman ("Tinny") Fellowes, Eric Christmas, Bill Sutton, George Cameron, Laurence Patrick, George Merridew, and Bill Thorne. The rest was left to the Air Commodore and, within a week, Basil Dean sent for me. I went to Drury Lane Theatre (then the Headquarters of E.N.S.A.) and he told me that he was "borrowing" me from the R.A.F. to do a four-weeks' tour entertaining the British Expeditionary Forces in France. Dean told me the show was to be ready in two weeks time.

We rehearsed in the ballet room at Drury Lane, where every available inch of space was filled with entertainers of all kinds preparing acts and parties to "follow the boys" wherever they may be needed. One memorable afternoon while we were rehearsing, the door opened and in walked their Majesties the King and Queen. Her Majesty asked me how long ago it was since they first saw a "Gang Show." I stumbled a bit because I was nervous. I murmured something about it being two or three years. "Oh, no," she said, "it was much longer ago than that." Then she turned to King George and said, "How long ago is it, dear, since we first saw the Gang Show?" His reply was as quick as it was correct, "Five years." We did a couple of items for them, and they applauded with genuine enthusiasm. It was a memorable quarter-of-an-hour—and a reminder of the generous interest the Royal Family has shown in our efforts.

Well, the time eventually arrived when we were to embark. The instructions were to leave Victoria station on a Sunday night. Two other parties were to go over with us Leslie Henson's, with Violet Lorraine, Binnie Hale, Tom Webster, and Claire Luce, was one. The second party was headed by Sir Seymour Hicks and Dorothy Ward. We were in good company again.

The arrival of our particular outfit on the blacked-out railway station caused a bit of an uproar. The other two parties had quite a few friends to see them off, but ours? Hardly a Scout, Scouter, together with their mums, dads, brothers, and sisters could have missed being there. The platform was crowded by our well wishers, who hugged us, wishing us luck and begging us to come back safely." That, incidentally, was our fond intention. But by the time the tears from some of the more sentimental mothers began to fall upon our shoulders we began to wonder. Before the train pulled out I was perfectly positive that never again would I see London, that I was going out to meet my doom.

The guard's whistle blew and we got into the carriages and leaned out of the windows for a final wave. Then the engine puffed and the wheels skidded and the train slowly got under way. It was at that moment the true great thrill of my life happened. Without a cue, our dear friends on the platform started to sing, "We're Riding Along on the Crest of a Wave." The melody and the words swept

across that darkened station into the carriages and none of us could speak. We just leaned out of those windows staring into the blackness as the train gathered speed and the singing became fainter and fainter until it died away. But in my heart it will forever sing as it was sung that wonderful night on Victoria station when we went away to join up with our fighting forces, flying the "Gang Show" banner.

Our first performance in France was at Seclin. We were to have given two shows that night, but the boat arrived late, and by the time we had found our connection it became obvious that one show would have to suffice. At Seclin, the first house had been waiting and waiting, and then came news that we were on our way but would still be another hour. Outside in the streets, hundreds of lorries were either parked or arriving with new men for the second house. The C.O.s were determined that none of the men should be disappointed so they decided to cram all the Army boys into the single performance. I have seen halls filled to over flowing many times in my life but surely there has never been such a sight as met our eyes when we finally walked on the stage that night at Seclin. And what an audience!

Long after the show was over we were climbing in and out of the lorries waiting to take the men back to their camps, shaking hands with them, and singing the same old songs over and over again. The B.N.S.A. manager, dear old Bert Meredith, who was in charge of the party, said to me, "Sir, this show belongs to the boys and the boys know it. What a night!" What a night, indeed. It was about four in the morning when we drew up at our billet in Lens and we were tired out: but we were happy, and that made up for everything.

Within two days word came from London that we were to stay longer than the expected four weeks. The tour had been extended to eight. With the help of the Gang who made that trip, a book could be written of the experiences we went through during those two months. It would be full of laughs—and not entirely free from tears : that, however, is another story.

Our return to London meant leave for me, and a good-bye to the boys who had to return to their Civvy Street employment. Once again I was "on my own," back in the R.A.F. proper, and working under our old" Gang Show" chairman, Air Commodore Boyle. Then came the news which was to mean the title "Gang Show" would be blazoned across the entire war front. Polish refugees were being landed and posted to Eastchurch, eventually to be trained and transformed into a Polish Air Force.

Thousands were arriving, and it was obviously difficult to keep them occupied during the first week or two of their arrival. They posted me down there with instructions to "keep them amused."

Now, that's a pretty stiff proposition. Here was I, unable to speak a word of Polish, and, let's be frank, not too hot on my English either, landed on a camp with Poles who knew not a syllable of English. And I had to "keep them amused!"

Well, I arranged football matches—but they beat our English lads every time. I ran boxing bouts and I organised sports. Then one day, walking along outside the N.A.A.F.I., I heard them singing. I don't know how many of you have not heard Polish men singing, but if you haven't, you have missed a great experience. It was a lovely sound, the harmony perfect and the tunes beautiful. The idea struck me at once. We'd put on a show. We did. We used about ten Englishmen and two hundred Poles. Fortunately there was one officer among the

Polish contingent who spoke perfect English. He translated everything I said and somehow the Poles and I became very close friends. I just "clicked" with them and we had a smashing show. Several of the brass hats of the Air Ministry came down to see it, and also the Polish President. A week later the Air Ministry told me to report back to London without delay.

Royal Air Force camps were being built all over the country, some in distant, out-of-the-way places. Something had to be done to keep the men "amused" (yes, that word again) and "they" said I had to do it. I'm not going into details on how it all started, but I just couldn't manage it alone, and, besides, I had my Intelligence job to do as well. So it was decided that my two jobs should be amalgamated and that I would be given any assistance I wanted. In came the boys, and we formed a Special Unit. Because of my "inside" job, Air Commodore Boyle thought it would be wise to give a course of instruction to Jack Beet & Co. on Intelligence, and this was done. We were sent to remote stations, lived in conditions the memory of which now makes me shudder, organised Station concert parties, and gave lectures on security during the odd hours. It was work, work, and more work, but they all stuck it. Lord Nuffield had given us a large Packard car with a trailer. We rode in the car and put everything else in the trailer. By these means we could travel entirely free of Service transport and when some special call was made for my services to be on a certain station immediately, the whole operation was much easier.

Until now, we in our Unit kept pretty close about our association with the "Gang Show," but—as in those early Scala days word of mouth did the trick, and airmen and army men alike wanted "The Gang Show Boys" back on their station for another show. C.O.s were writing in by the dozen to Air Ministry begging them to allow us to return for another performance. The Royal Navy heard about it, and they, too, wanted us to visit them. Accordingly it was decided to enlarge the Unit.

We were now labelled, and there was no getting away from it: we had become the R.A.F. "Gang Show." There it was, and there was nothing I could do about it. My plans to get away from the results of our civilian reputation, to put it behind me, had failed completely, and within a matter of three months, three more "Gang Show" units were out on the Stations. Again I had to hunt for talent. This time, not among the small Scout huts in Bermondsey, Islington, and Clapham, but on R.A.F. stations of varying size up and down the country. As it happens I found a great deal of talent.

Young men, some of whom had had stage experience and others nil. I interviewed them, and told them about the hardships they would have to face. No regular leave, no chance of staying long in one place. Besides this they would be expected to work all hours of the day and night. Some didn't come in, but others leapt at the chance, and to them go my very grateful thanks. At all events they know, as I do, that the joy they brought to servicemen all over the world was thanks enough. -- They brought them laughter, songs, and stories of home at a time when laughter was not always easy to come by.

Only those who have been away from home for long periods know what that can mean. Thinking back on some of those young fellows who came into the R.A.F. "Gang Shows," it's good to see where they are now. Here are the names of just a few of the then unknowns who passed through my hands during those war-torn years: keg. Dixon, David Hughes, Tony Hancock, Peter Sellers, George Cameron, Cardew Robinson, Graham Stark, Dick Emery, and Harry

Dawson, to name but a few. Good luck, boys, you deserve every ounce of the good fortune that has come your way.

At one period of the war we had no less than twenty-five units in action. There could hardly have been a tent in the remotest field which hadn't had a visit from the R.A.F. "Gang Show." We played in barns, fields, on top of lorries, and on the sands of the African desert. We played opera houses in Cairo, Alexandria, Brussels, and Paris, in Delhi and Hong-Kong, in Burma, Malaya, and Iceland. In fact, everywhere. The boys took everything in their stride, including a batch of German prisoners during the Normandy invasion. Joe Baldwin was responsible for this and the crack he got from his fellow-members of the "Gang Show" unit was, "That's the funniest act you'll ever do." He could have played the Palladium with it.

One thing was exactly the same in these R.A.F. "Gang Shows" that ran parallel with the Scout version—the spirit. Everyone felt he belonged to something. If a unit suddenly heard that another was playing anywhere within a radius of, say, twenty or thirty miles, they would commandeer a vehicle and dash over to see them. There would then be a reunion such as only a good bunch of blokes can enjoy. When they met up on their travels they made it an event: when I paid a call on them we made a night of it. During all the years I was a member of His Majesty's Royal Air Force I took only three days off for leave. When any unit I happened to be playing with took their well-deserved leave, I buzzed off to visit another unit. In this way I kept in personal touch with them all the time and I know they appreciated it. It kept everything together as a family—which is just as I believe it should be.

It wasn't just a case of our own idea of entertainment or of appealing only to the British sense of humour either. The Americans went for our shows in a big way.

I confess I had qualms when we were told we were to be seconded to the American Forces for a series of shows. We spent days talking over our programme—whether we should alter it in any way, to include some American type of songs or whether we should cut out some of the more pointed "English" humour. After a great deal of discussion we all agreed we would try it out for the first two performances without altering a single word.

Everyone knows the average American doesn't beat about the bush, and is not slow to let you know what pleases him or bores him: so it was with trepidation we went about our business back stage on the occasion of that initial showing to the Yanks. There was plenty of noise "out front" before the start. The New World boys are a restless, breezy lot, and they don't like to be kept waiting. Besides, I am sure many of them wondered what a show would be like without a single "dames" in the cast, and I'm not referring to the kind of Dame we see in pantomime! It was only the fact that there was nowhere else to go that probably induced so many of them to turn up.

To make it even harder going for our team, a No. 1 American band was in the pit playing for half an hour before the show. Those musicians were terrific. Every song on the hit parade was trotted out and every old favourite played with a zip and a rhythm that belongs to the greatest jazz exponents in the world;

I listened to them from behind the curtain, and wondered what would happen when all that smash music stopped and we started with nothing to help us but an old N.A.A.F.I. piano! I was finding a new low in spirit and if ever I could have stopped the clock, that was the moment I would have done it!

The hour struck—and so did the Americans. They rarely miss a trick, and full marks to them for a very generous gesture—they played our National Anthem as a signing-off tribute to the entertainers who were visiting them. As you know, the tune of our National Anthem is also the tune the United States use for their hymn “My Country ‘tis of Thee.” The instant the band struck up this melody the entire audience rose to their feet and sang. It was a great moment and it gave us heart. We, backstage, singing our words and they out front singing theirs.

Then came the tinkling of the piano for our opening chorus and on we went. The opening was fair—nothing more—but the moment we started our first gags they were with us to a man. They yelled, stamped their feet, and laughed. So we slung in every joke we knew, we ad libbed yes, this was the only occasion I felt it was worth it but I allowed to boys to have their fling, and by golly, how those Americans reacted!

The band-boys stayed in their seats in front of the stage and as soon as we got to the second chorus of our numbers they picked up their instruments and “busked” the tune with us. By the end of each number they were playing with us as though they had orchestrations by Irving Berlin. They swung the numbers, built up the finishes, and really” went to town.” When the interval arrived, at least a hundred of those boys from “over there~” rushed back stage to shake us by the hand. By the end of the show they all stood up and sang “For they are Jolly Good Fellows,” and we felt the same way about them.

The C.O. made a terrific speech, and we shall always remember his ending words. “These men came to us tonight as our British cousins; from now on they are our brothers.” The party they gave us afterwards was one of those affairs that can only happen on the rarest occasions. I know I had breakfast with about thirty of them before I turned in. We were due to stay with the American boys for ten days. We stayed eleven weeks. During the day they took us out everywhere in cars, loaded us with cigarettes and cigars, taught us to play “dice,” baseball, and a new game of cards with a name I still can’t remember: and they made every performance we played for them a memorable event. No race of men can show their appreciation more than Americans, and none are more generous with their hospitality. This was proved to us every day and every night we stayed with them on that tremendous tour of their army camps. Once they even brought their own visiting stars to see one of our shows, and when I tell you these stars were Nelson Eddy, Dinah Shaw, Jack Benny, and Larry Adler, you’ll realise just what they thought of our down-to-earth British humour. After we left them it was hard going for quite a spell and we missed them sadly.

I’d like to quote you an extract from one of the American papers which wrote up the show. It comes from Bonjour, somewhere in Africa, October 30th, 1943.

## R.A.F. GANG SHOW IS TOPS

Monday night at the Dakota saw the first appearance in this area of the R.A.F. “Gang Show.” That this performance was “tops” was evidenced by the thunderous applause which continually greeted the performers and the complimentary things which are still being said about the show by the men in

town and out.

The show was a continuity of action. Belly-laughs, guffaws, and other signs of real enjoyment were emitted freely by the vast audience. Miracles were wrought that probably went unnoticed due to the undivided attention given the cast in their presentation.

Yes, men of the R.A.F. and cast of the "Gang Show," the men of the Armed Forces of the United States owe you a debt of gratitude for the most splendid entertainment yet seen in this area. It is the best ever seen by this writer. Gestures, such as yours, in presenting your show for us, bring the men of the Allied Forces into closer relationship, one with the other, and make us more determined to fight together until our every goal is reached. Many Bloomin' thanks, Blokes! !!

I expect every member in that particular unit has kept a copy of that write-up. I'm glad I still have mine, for it's good to come across it suddenly when or~e is turning the pages of almost forgotten days and to be able to relive them over again just by reading such words as those I've quoted. I met one of my old R.A.F. boys one night at a very small theatre he was playing. Business was very bad, and those who did venture in were tough and unbending. I went in to see the show, and sat alone in the third row. Behind me were about twenty people, who looked as though they were at an inquest (and they were dressed like it, too) without a movement on their faces. The only person who seemed to be alive was an elderly soul with a coat and no hat who moved her hand and arm like a piston as she put sweet after sweet into her mouth. As for applause or laughs, absolutely nothing doing.

My pal, taking the third spot, was a comedian, but not that night. He went through gag after gag in stony silence. At last, he suddenly stopped, looked straight at me, and said, "Oh, if they were only Americans!" For some never-to-be-known reason the entire audience roared. My friend stood on the stage and gasped, then the laugh died, so did the audience, and likewise my friend. He left the stage to utter silence except for one enthusiastic member of the audience who clapped for all he was worth. The rest stared at me and a voice from the back said in deep bass tones, "He don't come from here." I was glad I didn't.

When you play to a real American audience who likes you, it is indeed an experience.

Skipping the years and thinking of today, we still have very close connections with our pals from "over there," especially in Scouting. None are more devoted "Gang Show" fans than Bob Harper, at present a senior sergeant in the American Air Force, and his pal, First-Lieutenant Bill Hargrove. Bob's young brother, Dick, came to England whilst Boy Scout was playing at the Albert Hall, and after the show sixteen—year—old Dick met our own lads.

From that moment there was an "adoption." The States will never send us a finer ambassador than young Dick Harper and wherever he may go in the years ahead of him we shall always regard him as One of Us. He gave me a great kick only this year. My 'phone rang at seven-thirty one morning and there was Dick on the other end, speaking from Chambersburgh, Pennsylvania, to say, "Happy Birthday, Scruff, here's Bob." (Scruff" happens to be a nickname I tag on to the very special boys.) I hope they both come back.

There might indeed be a worthwhile lesson to be learnt from all this. We sometimes get bigoted and conceited about our Movement, and tend to think that

whatever we achieve with our Scouts, it's done because they are Scouts. This is bound to help, but let's not lose sight of the truth, others outside our Movement have the same will, desire, and sincerity to stick to a job, so long as they know it's a right one.

A Scouter came to the Albert Hall once to see a pageant I produced there with the Junior Red Cross. I met him after the show and he said to me, dead seriously, "I'm amazed that you could do this sort of thing with outside people." It proved the man was crackers even to think such a thing: but there are plenty of people in Scouting who earnestly believe that nothing can be done by anyone unless he happens to be or has been a Scout. Anyway, the R.A.F. boys who were with me during the war were by no means all in the Movement, but I'll say here and now, I have never met a finer bunch of scouts, in every sense of the word.

By the time the atom bomb dropped on Japan and peace seemed to be around the corner at last, the R.A.F. "Gang Show" was a household word. I knew only too well that the moment I took off my uniform for a pin-striped suit I should never again lose the trade-mark of The Show.

It was there with me for life, coupled with anything I might do, surrounding me for all time with the nickname of Ralph "Gang Show" Reader. But again there was no getting away from the fact, it had done a good job during those drear, hard going years, making them a little lighter for the boys who were doing the actual fighting, cheering them when they lay in hospital beds and keeping them in touch with the things they had left so far behind.

We played one evening in a hospital in Belgium. Only after I had left did I hear that this same night one of my Holborn Rover buddies, Laurence Nelson, the same Laurence who had forgotten the battery in our first Holborn Rover show, was in that very hospital. He died there that evening.

On August 31st, 1945, I was released from the Royal Air Force. There was still quite a bit of tidying up to be done, so the R.A.F. Shows carried on under Squadron-Leader Jack Gracknell. They were in good hands, for Jack, who had been our Admin. Officer during all our Service days, was a Scouter in capital letters. A Regular in the R.A.F. (he had even done boy's service) he was Scouting mad. He still is, and thousands will know him as the Warden of that super camping site, Phasels Wood. In his spare time he is my partner in the firm of Ralph Reader Ltd. The "Limited" will never refer to Jack's enthusiasm and capabilities.

So, for a few more months the Service Gang kept the flag flying: but, as the lads returned home and back to their Scouting, some of my fellow "Gang Show" producers in the Movement were itching to restart their shows. None was more eager than that bundle of energy, Ted Potts, at Newcastle. Ted, too, had just left the R.A.F. and he was determined, no matter what London decided, he was going to get cracking right away. His keenness spread over the border, and Lindy in Glasgow also heard the "call." So they got hold of me. However, that's something we can keep for the third episode of the Gang's history.

Let me end this section by paying a final tribute to every one of the men of the Royal Air Force who served with me during the war. I hope they realise how proud I was of them. To travel thousands of miles, as they did, with just a sergeant in charge (and he was usually one of the hardest workers both on and off stage), to forget such things as regular hours, to give everything they had for the enjoyment of others, sometimes four and five times a day, no joke.

A few rather stupid people thought they had a soft job. Let me repeat the words the Director of R.A.F. Welfare, Air Commodore' Stran-Graham, wrote of them:

"These men did more man-hours, consistently, than any others in our branch of the Service. They lived constantly under conditions rarely understood. They travelled for hours through the winter nights in open lorries to reach a distant site where a few airmen needed entertainment; and throughout the war, not one single major charge ~vas issued against any member of the R.A.F. 'Gang Show.' I congratulate them, and I am proud to have had them in my Establishment."

As part of my own grateful tribute to these men I would like to quote from the National and Services Press. I think they may prove enlightening.

Firstly, a cable which the Air Ministry received from Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

"My own Staff and I saw the R.A.F. concert party organised by R. Reader. We are all agreed that it was the best entertainment we have had in West Africa. Is it possible to assign them to West Africa for six months? This would be a godsend to all those serving and would incidentally help with the Americans.

The great advantage of this R.A.F. party is that, being Service male personnel, they can go anywhere and stay in any Service camp. This is invaluable for 'out' stations which are difficult to cater for."

From the Evening Standard, Tues. Feb. 15th, 1944:

"They played the 'Gang Show' on board the ships escorting the surrendering Italian Fleet. They travelled in a lorry between Tripoli and Tunis, and took eight weeks to do the journey, living entirely on corned beef and biscuits, and were once lost in the desert. On the Burma frontier they were caught in three Japanese raids in one day. They have already travelled over 300,000 miles."

From the Air Force News:

"In my opinion they can never be repaid for the hard, morale boosting work they do. A member of the Air Council started an enquiry to find out the average working-day of a 'Gang Show' airman. And it was sixteen hours. Work out for yourself what it must be over here, where amenities can often be counted on the fingers of a bloke giving the V sign. They're a great bunch—great Scouts."

From The Union Jack:

"Their next move was to Palestine, then Syria, then Lebanon, Iraq, Persia, and the Persian Gulf, Arabia, India, and now Ceylon. Good though it is to see so much of the world, it isn't much fun playing one day in a climate where everyone is mulled up in the heaviest greatcoats and then two days later putting on the

show with a temperature of about 90 degrees. One of their big worries is mail. They move so fast it takes some time to catch up with them and they've had none for six weeks."

**From the Daily Express:**

"It is the story of concerts taken further into the front line than any entertainers have ever gone. It is a story, too, of parties struggling through bitter weather to take music and humour to handfuls of men in listening posts and remote places."

**From The Star:**

"To date, more than 300,000 Service men have been entertained in all theatres of war since November 1939 by the Royal Air Force's own entertainment—the 'Gang Show.' The players, all airmen, have travelled 339,000 miles in this period, averaging 50,000 miles a year for each show."

It makes me proud to place on record the work these men did during the war and to retell some of the hard times they had. All the more so, because, when they returned (especially does this apply to those who were in the Movement), one or two people made remarks which were not exactly complimentary. Particularly was this so when these cynics noticed the "ribbons" the R.A.F. men were wearing. I need hardly mention that these "critics" were never in the Services, neither had they been out of England during the entire war! When and if they read these words, I am sure they will quickly realise who I have in mind and it may interest them to learn what the important people said of the work those grand fellows did. It might even make them a trifle self-conscious!

I can't improve on that, so there I'll leave it. The "Gang Show" had helped with a war. Now comes the peace.

Being one of the old 'uns, I hadn't long to wait before demob. day came around: but just before I made my exit I had one glorious job to do. This was a mammoth pageant, to be staged at the Royal Albert Hall with a cast of over two thousand. We rehearsed at the R.A.F. Station, Chipping Ongar, and I had a young sergeant attached to me whose job was to look after the scripts. Right well he did his job, too. You'll know him, I'm sure, because he is now the famous film star Richard Attenborough. I practically ran that Station while we were rehearsing there, and one night a "wag" changed the notice outside the Orderly Room. Originally it read "R.A.F." but next morning I heard cheering coming from a crowd of W.A.A.F. and airmen. Imagine my feelings when I read the new sign. It read, "Reader's Air Force."

I was about the last to leave Chipping Ongar after rehearsals had ended, and I drove slowly around that great camp and looked at the deserted huts. I knew then that I was on my way out, and this was by way of being my good-bye to the great people I had met during the war years. And of those great people none deserved that title more than those I have written about in this chapter and who will always be to me, MY boys. I'll say it again, "Bless 'em all."

## PART THREE

### 6

#### *The Show is On Again*

“CIVVY STREET” at last, and one overriding personal problem

I hadn’t long to wait. Tom Arnold ‘phoned me, and I lunched with him at the R.A.C. Club. Over that lunch we decided to put on a big production of the R.A.F. “Gang Show.”

We opened in Blackpool and not only did we tour the provinces for two years, but had a long run in the West End at the Stoll Theatre.

It was the most triumphant tour I have ever known. Never an empty seat in the house, two and three weeks in every town we played, and return dates rolling in all the time. We played the Opera House, Blackpool, three times, and although each date was, in fact, out of season, there were capacity houses.

We did, of course, play Newcastle. I have to mention this, because it was at Newcastle that the pick-up began for the restarting of the Scout “Gang Shows.” Ted Potts is a sticker. He knows what he wants, and what he wanted at that time was to start up his “Gang Show.” So he was with me night and day while I was playing at the Empire in his home-town.

What London was going to do meant nothing to Ted. All he cared about was what NEWCASTLE was going to do—and he meant them to do something even more than keep on winning the Cup So he got to work on me.

I think I’m right in saying that before we had finished our first trip to Newcastle with the Tom Arnold show, I had started to write Ted’s “Gang Show.” I do know that on our return visit nearly half the show was completed. Whether he used smoke signals or not, I don’t know, but his drums sounded and Lindy in Glasgow heard them, and down he came. The two of them proved to me how far more important Glasgow and Newcastle were in their view to London; and that they had to be first in the field with the revival.

They were. Mind you, I had a few doubts about the ultimate result. Six years is a long time, and a gap such as this needs a lot of filling. Maybe we would have to start all over again to persuade the public to support us. Who knows? I thought the shows might be considered out of date. Certainly such a thought never entered the head of either of my two stalwarts. They were positive.

They were right. At Newcastle the first “Gang Show” after the war again took the town by storm—the same thing happened in Glasgow. Right from the start they were back where they left off, and a flood of requests from all over the country poured in asking for the new songs, the new scripts, and the new scenes. So let’s raise our hats to Ted and Lindy for their faith and their persistence. Had they not been so enthusiastic, who knows, it may have been a long time before we should have had “Gang Shows” again.

**It looked as though London would have to sit up and blush we had been left behind!**

It was in 1950 when we took the plunge in the capital city, and with it we took a change of "management." Before the war the show had been run financed, and presented by the London

Scout Council, under the leadership of Archie Boyle and Murray Napier. Fred Huril was then one of the secretaries at I.H.Q. But by this time he was holding a very important position there.

My own standing in Scouting was vague, VERY vague. In actual fact I had no official position in the Movement at all. I suppose one could have said I was still a Holborn Rover, but beyond this I had no definite appointment. To start up again in London I needed Fred—and he was now a big-shot. I suggested my solution over a lunch. It was that we should combine and make it a joint venture, with I.H.Q. and London. This wasn't by any means an easy idea to put over, and I don't blame London for making every effort to hold out.

After all, they did start the "Gang Shows," and by rights it was theirs: but I had thought a lot about it, and stuck to the line that it would be far better to bring in I.H.Q. We had lost Archie Boyle; my old friend and chief had died only a few months earlier. Had he been alive I do not think we would have won this battle.

Murray Napier was a tough nut to crack but with Archie by his side the two of them would have been uncrackable. Anyhow, in came I.H.Q., and we began to lay our plans.

Now came a difficult task for me. I had certainly supplied a mass of new material for the out-of-town shows, but I felt that when we opened up again in Town everything had to be new.

There is a limit to the amount any man can turn out in a limited time, and I wondered whether I had embarked upon too great an undertaking. My main worry was that I couldn't write two shows a year; therefore, if I used the material the North had already used, they would have nothing for their next year's show.

I burned the night oil. I rushed home at every free moment, knocked the stuffing out of my typewriter and broke the strings on my piano. On many a night (or early morning) my mum would wake up, hear the typewriter still tapping away, and would go downstairs and bring me up a cup of tea with the dear old words,

"Don't you think, Son, you ought to get some sleep?"

The word "son" runs in our family. I use it all the time, even to people (there are a few) who are even older than I am. I was nearly arrested one night when an irate cop didn't like the looks of a bunch of my 10th Holborn boys whom I was taking on a night trip to Chinatown. I had warned them not to dress up, and they didn't. They turned up outside the Dominion Theatre in Tottenham Court Road looking like the meanest bunch of young crooks London had ever seen. The policeman came over to me and said, with a menace in his eye, "Get this bunch out of here." I intended to tell him they were only disguised, and that underneath beat loyal Scouts' hearts, so I started off by saying, "Look, son. I got no further. He growled at me, "You 'son' me again and I'll take you straight to the station." I did not "son." I said "Sir."

I tore into the new script for our first post-war "Gang Show," and soon it began to take shape. Now we had to look for a cast. Many of the old were only

too anxious to return. But we hadn't a clue about the younger ones. We did the only thing we could and that was to scout around, took chances and eventually got them together.

Dinky Rew and Syd Palmer, once the little "urchins" for the kid parts, were now married men with deeper voices, but ripe and richly experienced comedians all the same, ready for anything I could bring them. Jack Beet (who never grows older) was right there, and so were a host of our other reliables. Tips from various sources brought us new names and out we went to get them. Stan Newton from I.H.Q., Don Werts from Willesden, and, of course, Bunny Wedge, from Tottenham. Bunny had been with me throughout the war and as a stunt rhythm singer he is in a class of his own. Homer Last, an outsize figure who can never remember a line, came in. Homer is a great personality—as long as he is given nothing to say! I don't believe Homer could even remember to say "Good night" on the stage. He'd come straight on and say "It's a beautiful evening"; anything but the right line! So we never gave him a word. Dress him up as a Dame character and he has no equal. Thanks, Homer.

The King's Theatre, Hammersmith, was contracted, and there we were to make our bow on the night of December 4th, 1950. It was to be a run of two weeks. London is not quite so easy a venue for the production of our type of shows as are the provinces.

Once we used old costumes from a theatrical hiring-out firm, but these articles were rarely renewed, and we had used them time and time again.

Scenery, too, was at a premium, and if we were going to make any sort of impression it was obvious that we would have to get new stuff. Competition is tougher down here, too, and the critics do not feel they need to be as kind as the local writers who, when all is said and done, realise they are writing about their own boys. In London the Press is national, elsewhere it is local. There is a mighty difference.

The cue, then, was "Spend money." And spend money we did, in a big way. We took a chance on the outcome. Whether we would fill the theatre remained to be seen, but it was the only possible way of getting off to a big start. A lot of people, knowing now the demands for "Gang Show" seats, often dismiss the success by saying how simple it is, with so many mothers and fathers wanting to see their boys. That is only true up to a point. At 1s. 6d. a seat, and with thousands and thousands of these to dispose of, it is just impossible without the support of the general public. The three bobs, the five bobs, and the seven-and-sixes will go fairly well but not the more expensive ones. Besides, we would not have been content to play the show only to a Scouting public. After all, we were carrying a banner and we wanted the outside people to come in and the only way to get them was to put on a super production which would equal in quality the competition of the West End.

So, disregarding the Scouting talent in the show, it had to be staged and dressed as well as any production playing in town. Don't shoot me for saying this, you out-of-towners, but London simply can't get away with things as easily as you can. This is not even a slight criticism of anything done elsewhere: it is a

We were not out for too handsome a profit. After all, we looked upon the show as great and sympathetic publicity for Scouting. The material used is afterwards taken up by Groups and Districts all over the world, and it is there

the real money is made to support their own funds. All the same, we don't want to make a loss.

We were, therefore, more than a little nervous as to what the outcome would be. The King's Theatre is not a very large one, so we had to watch our step on the expenditure side, but our Committee were very fair and they groused not at all as the bills mounted. Dear old Faith seemed to be coming to the rescue all the time. And she was justified. We opened, we conquered, and we cleared our expenses with a champion amount of profit, too.

The first night of the new "Gang Show" chapter was quite an evening. I'm always very nervous on opening nights, and this was no exception. But as the evening wore on, it became obvious to everyone that we had come back in a big way. The roots took root again in London Town, and London Town was happy. Eighteen years had passed since our very first bow to the public, and here we were again, re-established in one night. I was a very proud man as I left the King's Theatre—one hundred and fifty times proud because that was the number in the cast!

We did a couple of broadcasts from that show, together with our first television programme. This clinched the show as an annual National event. We were back and we were in.

The following year the demand for seats was even greater, and it became obvious that we would have to look for a bigger theatre. However, we played the King's for the second time and then, because of the enormous business we were doing, thought very seriously about making a move. After the third show at Hammersmith we made up our minds to present the show somewhere else in our twentieth year.

We had a most generous offer to go to the London Palladium, and to turn this down was about the most difficult thing I have had to do. Nothing would have delighted me more than to take our Gang to that world-famous house, the Mecca of all artists in the variety and musical professions—but I saw a snag.

The following year would be our twenty-first! I didn't want to go to the Palladium for our twentieth year and then somewhere else for the coming-of-age celebrations. At the back of my mind I looked at it this way. If we could go to the Palladium for our twenty-first, that would be smashing, even though we only stayed there for that one year. But if we had gone there the previous year and had to go somewhere less illustrious for our big year, well, it wouldn't be so good.

Val Parnell was charming, and gave us every consideration, but he couldn't promise us that his theatre would be free the following year. So we talked it over, and finally said no. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I am sure, looking back on it, we did the wisest thing.

A good friend of ours, Len Barry, books the Golders Green Hippodrome, one of the finest theatres, and also one of the best run in London. The seating capacity is as big as the Palladium and the Underground station adjoins the theatre. Buses pass the door so it would be easy for cast and audience to reach it. We talked terms, and discussed a long term contract to go there each year.

Everything was agreed, and it soon became known that the new home for the annual "Gang Show" would be the Golders Green Hippodrome. How wise we were to do this.

Can any show in the world play the first two weeks in December to just under twelve thousand pounds in a fortnight? We do.

What's more, if only the boys could stand up to it, we could stay there for months on end. But two weeks is the limit, and I (and the Committee) would never agree to playing longer than these two weeks. It would not be fair on the boys who go to school and the men who have to work. Besides, it would take them too long away from their own Troop room.

Our twentieth year was celebrated at Golders Green, and then at last came our twenty-first. The big year!

Early on the morning of the opening day my telephone rang. One of my boys answered it and, as he came in to me, said, "Ralph, Australia wants you." I grinned and went to the 'phone. It was Australia. Yes, Melbourne was on the line to wish us luck for our twenty-first year. Not only was a Scouter there to wish us good fortune, but by his side was a twelve-year-old Australian member of their Gang to wish "Good Luck" to his young brothers in the London show. And this was not all.

I take my hat off to Australia for thinking of this next bit. One of our ex-boys had emigrated to Australia with his wife, and was living somewhere in the bush. Their Boy Scouts Association knew about this, so their "Gang Show" Committee got hold of "Peggy" Rolf, and brought him to Melbourne so that he could speak to me. How's that for good fellowship?

Looking back now, I have to say that our twenty-first birthday year did not provide one of our best shows. It ought to have been, but somehow I do not think the production turned out as well as I had hoped. The songs were not as catchy as in previous years, and somehow the sketches I had written lacked "bite."

The boys struggled bravely with the material, but I hadn't been kind to them, and no one can make bricks without straw. The show went satisfactorily but it was not up to standard. Watching it night after night (as I always do) I realised that something was wrong, and though I began to see what it was, I tried to kid myself that it wasn't so. But you can't deny sane thinking, and I had to admit some of our cast were getting on in years. We all get longer in tooth and shorter in wind, and at some time or another have to make way for younger people. The "Gang Show" is essentially a show of youth, it exults in the younger boy, and some of our "boys" were beginning to look a bit out of place running around the stage. So some changes were necessary.

After the run ended I had a long talk with Fred Hurl, and told him that there would have to be some new thinking. We would have to ask several members, chaps who had given such loyal service to the Gang, to stand down. Fred offered to write them, but I said, "No. It's my job to write to them, Fred. If I'm in charge, I'll take the tough things with the easy, so let me do it my way."

I shall never have to write harder letters than the ones I wrote early in that New Year, but for the "Show's" sake it had to be done. To the lasting glory of every man I wrote to, not one of them complained, and they are still our staunchest supporters.

They come back year after year to cheer their own replacements, and I still never meet one of them without getting a lump in my throat. But then, as you've probably gathered by now, I'm daft!

I mentioned a moment ago that I watch the show every night. Not only watch it, but take notes at every performance. The next morning those notes are typed out, and placed in the dressing rooms for those concerned to see

Sometimes I spot a gag to go in, sometimes a line to delete. Now and then an extra piece of "business" creeps in which has to be taken out again, but each detail is noticed, written down, and reported to the individual concerned. Believe it or not, I even do this on the last night. It keeps everyone on the alert and aware that only what is rehearsed goes in.

In some shows, the last night is regarded as a "fun" night, a night to play around a bit, and put in bits and pieces that mean something only to the members of the cast. This is a bad thing, and I deplore it.

The people who come in for the final performance have paid to see a good show and a good show they should see. In fact they should be able to enjoy a perfect performance and, therefore, not one joke or aside should be included that had not been in the original script previously. High spirits are natural among the lads, but they should be curbed when necessary and every member must be made to understand that only the very best is good enough for that last performance.

At the Finale, when all is over, then by all means "go to town," but not during the actual show. One thing I am dead against, and that is too much of this "Thanks" business. I know it is usual, and I know there are reasons why some expressions of gratitude should be kept in, but I do implore you. to keep them down to the minimum. I have seen so many good evenings ruined by this sort of thing. It takes the edge off the production and the people go out remembering little of the show but only a load of strange characters who have been dragged on the stage to take a bow. I wrote a complete chapter on this in my book Oh, Scouting is a Boy, and though it was written in fun, it was all only too true.

By the way, on one of the final 'Saturdays when our brother "Gang Showites" come down from the Newcastles and the Glasgow's, one of the Scottish boys went to visit some friends. He took the Underground. When he got out his kilt caught in the door and before he knew it the train started and whisked off his kilt. And he happened to be a real Scotsman! Luckily he was about thirteen years old, and when you are thirteen you can get away with anything.

So came our twenty-second year, and a complete change in the average age of the members of our show. If ever a decision had been vindicated this was. The moment the curtain went up the stage was alight with youth. It even outshone the spotlights, and it took me right back to our early days at the Scala Theatre. The vim and vitality had no need for production. It was there in the sparkling faces of the young newcomers and by half-time I knew we had taken on another lease of life.

Time and time again I was asked during the interval, "What's happened to the show? It glitters." And it did. It was alive with a life that only the young can bring and it proved once again that, as in Scouting, it is a boy's game. The songs took on a new brightness, the sketches a lighter glint, and as for the Finales, well, they blazed like the sun.

In most "Gang Show" productions up and down the country the accent is placed on the small boys, the youngsters around twelve and thirteen. Not so in London.

We certainly have a nucleus of these, but our main stay are the teenagers, especially around fifteen to seventeen. I have a reason for this and it was because of something Cicely Courtneidge said to me many years ago when she came to see her first "Gang Show." I went down to talk to her during the interval and asked what she thought of it. She said, "It's so grand I feel like crying." I then

said to her, "Don't you think the youngsters" (meaning the small boys) "were great?" Then she replied, "Yes, they were,, but the thing that struck me was the manly bunch of older boys. If you can hold these elder lads in the Scouts, then surely you've got something I for one never realised."

From then on, and more than ever today, I believe our best advertisement is to show off our boys of the Senior Scout age. It impresses the smaller boys who are always hero-worshippers-plus and it brings a manliness to the show which only a teen-ager can provide. I admit I go out for the best-looking lads I can find, and there are plenty about. I use them on every occasion for my Front Line, and I see that they are dressed so that they have every chance of being seen. If the Senior Scout Branch of our Movement is 100 per cent, then we need have no fears about anything else. If you've got a Front Line of blokes in your "Gang Show" who look as though they can run straight out on to a Rugger or Soccer field you are doing the Movement a darned good turn. What's more, you will put (forgive the word) "guts" into your show. Because nobody can hand it out better than they can.

One evening in our twenty-second year will stand out beyond all others. That evening was December 9th, 1954. Her Majesty the Queen came to see the show.

The London boys had played before Royalty on many occasions, and in the Royal Command Performance before their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, but never before had a reigning monarch come specially to see an entire performance. Hours before Her Majesty's arrival the roads outside the theatre were blocked with thousands of people. A beautiful canopy had been erected outside the theatre and a royal red carpet laid down from the roadway to the entrance. The directors of the Golders Green Hippodrome really did their stuff, and the entire theatre was decked with flowers and everything that could be polished was polished until it shone and gleamed again! Excitement in the dressing-rooms was electric, and the Guard of Honour waiting for the big moment were fidgeting nervously. It was a cold December night but a clear one, and the very air-seemed different tense and expectant.

At the precise moment arranged the Royal car drew up. The cheering crowds outside the theatre told us our Queen had arrived, and boys watching eagerly nearly fell out of the dressing-room windows facing that side of the street. One of our youngsters, Neville Hurran, had been chosen to present Her Majesty with a bouquet, and poor old Neville was more nervous than any of us. Just before she arrived he went a trifle white and someone had to get him a drink of water! But he did his job well.

After the customary presentations the Queen walked to her box and the National Anthem was played. Then cheers from the audience as she took her seat—and up went the curtain. Now it is easy to overrate a performance, but this is one case when, believe me, it could not be overrated. There has never been a finer "Gang Show" performance anywhere in the world than that which played before our Queen on that night of December 9th. Not once did any single boy glance up at the Royal Box they knew their job—and not a line was slurred, not a laugh lost.

One occasion (it was the bit where one of the kids fell through his dress) Her Majesty rocked with sudden laughter, and clapped her hands on the side of her box.

During the interval she came backstage and spoke to the boys. Then she joined us in a small room which had been specially prepared. One cannot put into words the charm and the complete sincerity of this gracious lady, and I count myself a fortunate man to have been in this small room that evening, talking and listening to her as she asked question after question about the show, and the lads. I remember so well one thing she said.

We had been discussing the talent in the cast and she smiled and said "I absolutely refuse to believe they are amateurs." We escorted her back to her box and the second half of the show went as well as the first. I made a little speech at the finale of the show and these are the words I spoke. "The 'Gang Show' has always been a family affair, but tonight will be a never-to-be-forgotten night, because we have played it before the Head of our Family." It's a wonder the house didn't collapse. The sides shook with the cheering and then came the drum roll and a second of silence. In that second over three thousand faces turned to the Royal Box and we all sang the National Anthem. It was an unforgettable moment. As Her Majesty left the theatre to the cheering throng who had waited in the streets for over three hours, she turned to me as she was getting into her car and said, "Mr. Reader, it has been wonderful." That's what we thought too.

The Directors of the theatre had six programmes printed, and they are Programmes. They are worth about £90 each. One was placed in the Royal Box, which the Queen took with her, the Directors had one each and Fred Hurl and I were presented with the other two. It is a very treasured possession of a memorable occasion. I keep mine in a special glass case at home and it has been seen by many. All hand painted, and hand printed, it is a real work of art and, to cap it all, I have on mine Her Majesty's signature.

It was a long time before we got away from the theatre that night. None of us wanted to go home and who could blame us?

Such an evening comes only once in a lifetime and we wanted to appreciate it to the full. Hours afterwards I sat in front of the fire in the flat with three of my blokes. We could still see the faces of the Gang as they looked at the Queen when she came backstage to speak to them, and it was a memory that does not grow dim.

Then the telephone rang. It was Mr. Clavering, one of the theatre's Directors. "I just wanted to ring you, Reader, to say what a triumph this was for your boy tonight. All I can tell you is that they deserved it." Yes, Mr. Clavering, I'm right with you. It was their crowning achievement.

## 7

### *The Show meets “Names”*

AFTER the success of the Command show George Black was very anxious for the boys to play a week at the Palladium.

There were all kinds of difficulties in the way—not least the fact that we could not, and would not, relinquish our amateur status. However, early in 1938 the year of the big “Baden Powell Appeal” it was agreed that the Gang should play for a single week at the famous theatre in Argyll Street. “G. B.” even allowed the boys to make collections for the Appeal” during the interval: but all the boys’ salaries and mine, too, incidentally were paid direct to the Boy Scouts Association.

To play a week at the London Palladium was a signal honour for the Gang, and they were part of a most excellent bill. Evelyn Laye, Florence Desmond, Vic Oliver, Ted Ray, and half a dozen other acts were appearing.

Everything seemed to go right for the boys, and they heard at each performance a burst of applause from the audience as soon as their “number” went up on the indicator, announcing to the packed houses that the Gang were on. The words of their opening song were never heard, so loud was the greeting the packed Palladium gave them twice a night.

An amusing thing happened on the opening night. Almost invariably at the London Palladium a troupe of dancing girls takes part. This particular week they didn’t. Now the L.C.C. are very strict about the appearances of any young people on the stage, and though we had permission to use young Dimmock of the 4th Holborn, he was a very junior performer in years and they insisted that he be given a dressing-room on his own. Every corner of every room was taken up that week—except the very large room on the top floor where the dancers dressed. This was allotted to Dimmock. You can imagine what that young boy looked like, alone in a huge dressing-room which usually accommodated twenty-four girls!

I went up to see him one evening and asked him if he was lonely. “I am in a way,” he said, “but if you want to help me out, send for the girls ! “ It was a great week for “business.” We played to Standing Room Only at every performance and here was yet another memory for the lucky ones who were with us at the time.

Writing about that evergreen evening of the Command Performance brings back memories of other Royal occasions when members of our First Family came to see us Princess Margaret has twice been to see the “Gang Show” and maybe you would like to know something about what happened. The Princess is most interested, as you know, in music. At the end of the Finale she sang “Crest of a Wave” as loudly as anyone in the theatre.

When she came backstage afterwards to chat to the boys, one of them thanked her for her help in the singing. She brightly answered him, “I bet I sang that song before you did.” (He had forgotten she had been a Brownie.)

Whenever I have met Princess Margaret she has never failed to ask me the names of the new songs for the next Gang Show; and she has an unfailing memory for dance tunes. One very amusing incident happened on her second visit to us which ties up (as an encore) with the evening our Queen attended a

performance. A twelve year old, Jay Ridley, has a very infectious grin, but he happens to be very shy and blushes very readily.

Princess Margaret was being introduced to the Fathers of the Gang, who had been in the show from its inception, and at the same time she met their sons. When Jay was presented he looked at her Royal Highness, smiled, and then, overcome, went the shade of a beetroot, and hung his head. This tickled the Princess, who laughed heartily and ran her thumb over the shoulder-strap of her evening gown. Believe it or not, the incident was repeated to the very same boy when the Queen Mother came to see us, and our Queen did precisely the same thing. To perpetuate the story we have two almost identical pictures of the two incidents.

There is one specially delightful gesture which members of the Royal Family make when they are talking to those who are being presented. They never ask hackneyed questions. The way they ask their questions has a lot to do with it; but I have purposely kept my ears open, and I can't recall a single query from one of the Family which appeared to be stereotyped—the conventional, graciously polite enquiry. One certainly never knows the question that is likely to pop up when Princess Margaret is present, and if she asks about music and the day's hit tunes, well, the man on the spot" had better be well informed because he is confronted with an expert.

The first time the late King George VI came to see us was at the Scala Theatre, when he was Duke of York. The Queen Mother, then the Duchess of York, came with him; and during the second half of the show the Duke asked if they could come back to meet the boys when it was over. During the performance he said, "This is dazzling; but how do they make the changes? I've never seen anything as slick." That, too, was his first question to the boys when he spoke to them—"How do you make such quick changes?" One of the Cockneys sized it up with typical briefness. Pointing his thumb at me, he looked at the Duke and said, "We 'ave to' he makes us

The picture of that night is as clear to me now as then. The Duke, leaning against the iron curtain (which had been lowered) with his arms folded and a bunch of the boys around him, looking for all the world like a bunch of boys from a club chatting to one of the leaders. Further up-stage stood a lovely lady in white fur, surrounded by starry-eyed younger members of the Gang.

One of the smallest was softly stroking the fur with his finger and from the look on his face, he was touching magic. It was all so natural, so completely effortless, human and informal, with these two charming people, in no hurry, just anxious to stay on and talk to a bunch of London Boy Scouts who had entertained them.

I wonder what we would have thought then if someone had said to us, "The next time you meet them they will be your King and Queen and you will have the honour of appearing before them in the Royal Command Performance at the London Palladium?" It would have seemed incredible.

After the Duke and Duchess left the Scala Theatre that night, I went back to the stage. Several of the boys were still there. I went over to the lad who had been stroking the white fur and I said to him, "Well, what did you think of the Duchess, son?"

He winked at me and replied, "She's just like my mum—only prettier."

It's good to remember that night because it was the very first time Royalty came to see us; and the year was 1933. Two nights later came Princess Alice and the Earl of Athlone.

The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester have seen the "Gang Show" several times. They were also our guests of honour at the Lyceum Theatre in the Strand when, on that memorable April night in 1937, the "Gang Show" film had its premiere. Through out the years they have shown in a practical way how much they have enjoyed our productions and have proved themselves staunch "Gang Show" fans.

A somewhat awkward moment arose when they came to see us at the King's Theatre. Royalty, as you all know, are very particular about timing. They arrive to a split second.

On this occasion, there was a certain amount of fog and on the outskirts of London it was very much in evidence. The Duke and Duchess were determined not to be late and set off much earlier than normally they would have done. All arrangements had been made at the theatre for their reception ten minutes before time, everyone was to be lined up in their appointed place to receive them.

Twenty minutes before the arranged time I was sitting on the stairs inside the theatre talking to some of the Sea Scouts who sell programmes and act as ushers.

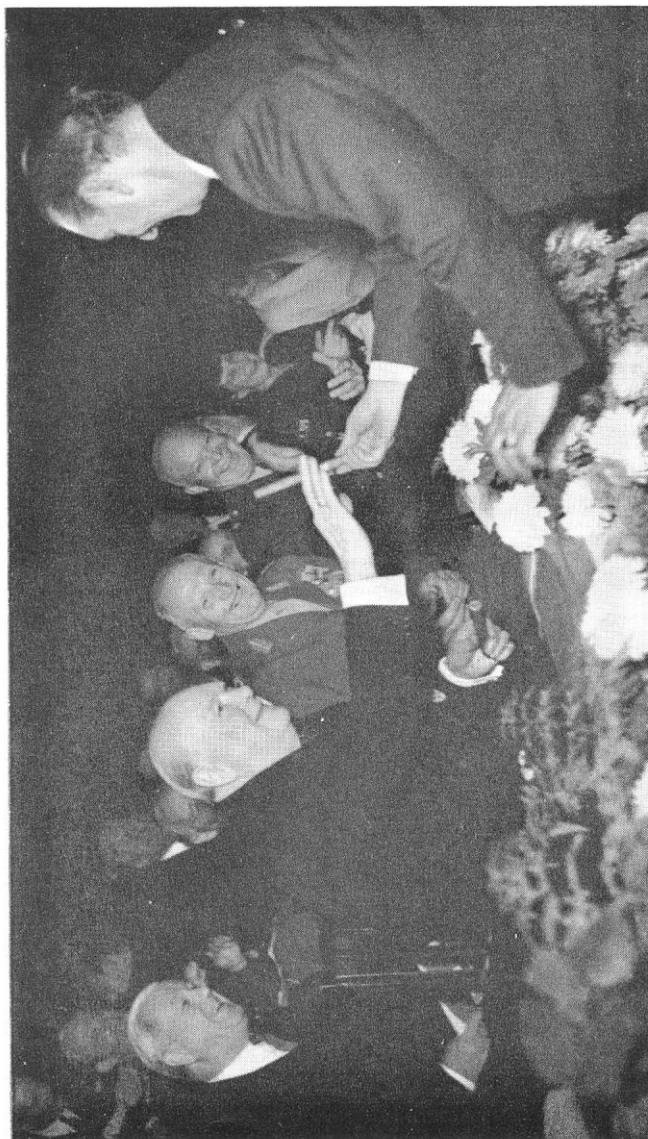
Suddenly a young Scout rushed in, came up to me and said, "Quick, they're here!" I leaped up and said, "Who?" He then chirped up with, "You know, from Buckingham Palace." I dashed out, sent someone for Fred Hurll, and ran into the vestibule of the theatre. To my dismay, their Royal Highnesses were standing among the crowd battling their way in. Nobody was taking the slightest notice of them, but to my relief they were both smiling happily. I bowed to them, and before I could say a word the Duke said, "I think we're a bit early, can we go somewhere and come back?""

The Duchess roared with laughter, and a very tricky moment had been overcome solely because of their understanding. They then explained that because of the fog, which had cleared the management they set off, the arrival had been about a quarter of an hour early. We escorted them to a room adjacent to the Royal Box and there entertained them until curtain rime. The Duke's parting remark was, "I know now what actors feel like when they are told it's time to 'go on.'" Surely the members our Royal Family are the most understanding people. They possess nothing short of genius when it comes to putting others at their ease. A lesson many of us might be the happier for learning.

In 1938 we were honoured to entertain the Duchess of Kent. I was surprised to hear from her own lips how much she knew about the show. She was gracious enough to explain that it had often been discussed at the Palace. She even asked me about an item we bad had in the previous year's show and which her Majesty had told her about.

Lord and Lady Mountbatten have been to see us two or three times, and it is always a great occasion when they grace one of our performances with their presence.

Ralph enjoys a cigar joke with Sir Winston Churchill, President Eisenhower, and "Monty,"  
*Daily Graphic*



The list of celebrities we've had to see the show would fill a book. Anna Neagle and Herbert Wilcox are always welcome guests: and they seldom miss a production by the Gang. Stage stars by the dozen, film and variety names are out front at practically every performance. Sports stars too—but we are still waiting for the Prime Minister! Hardly a night goes by without some illustrious name figuring on the list of those out front—"a list which is sent to every dressing-room. We now keep a visitors' book which the Gang present to me at our Reunion, and looking through it reminds one of a reprint of Debrett and Who's Who put together. It is personally signed by each visitor.

We've often had to "hold the curtain" before staffing the second half of the show, because some enthusiastic star has insisted on visiting the boys in their dressing-rooms. Anne Shelton had to be dragged away from an admiring crowd of "Gangsters" who were entertaining her in their "Patrol" room one night.

Arthur Askey did a complete act for a dozen of the boys before he went back to his seat, and I recall one night a kid came into our small room and said, "Hey, Ralph, give me a drink for Jack, we've only got lemonade." When I

enquired who "Jack" was, he just replied. "Jack Warner, who d'ya think?" The evening Shani Wallis met the lads, young Tony Corrie looked at her and said, "Oh, if only I was ten years older." (Many a time I've thought, if only I were ten years younger!).

Two of our "regulars" are Henry Hall and Jack Payne. They seldom miss a show, and it's an eye-opener as they discuss with the boys the newest gramophone records and the latest hits in the Top Ten.

Ted Drake, now manager of Chelsea Football Club, was talking to couple of the lads one evening. One of them told him about a goal Ted had scored to win the cup when he was playing for Arsenal against Sheffield United at Wembley. "How did you know that, son—you weren't born then," said Ted. "No," cracked the boy, "but my dad was—he told me." Seems to me, boys know "the lot."

Ambassadors from nearly every country have paid us a visit. As they talk to the cast they reach each other's level and when I tell you it is not always the boys who learn something, I am not speaking unmindfully. What's more, it's by no means the Ambassadors who do all the talking either.

Stars of other years have frequently been among our audiences. The late Gertie Gitana was with us one night, and afterwards she said to Fred Hurl, "They talk about the old days! These boys have the same punch we had. What a pity the modern professional hasn't!" Jose Collins, remembered with awe and affection by the older generation who sat enthralled as they watched her in the Maid of the Mountains, had tears in her eyes when she came through the "pass-door."

"Darling," said Jose, "this is real theatre. They give it to you and you can hear them." Dear Old George (G. H. Elliott to you) nearly shook the hand off a boy who had been singing one of his old-time songs. "You sang it, son," he beamed, "you didn't croon it!" And Lawrence Wright (call him Horatio Nicholls if you like), that great British composer who has given us more song-hits than any other single writer, comes every year, and as he will tell everyone he meets, "That's my real night out." Yes, they're all sitting out there—managers, agents, talent—spotters, beginners, and those who have "already arrived." Likewise, as I have said, those who have handed on the torch for others to carry.

No one has been more enthusiastic than General Sir William Slim, that great personality-loaded boss of the Army, who takes no halfway measures when it comes to saying what he means. He said to our Chief Executive Commissioner during the interval, "If every man who came into the Services had the background and the training of these boys here tonight I'd rejoice, for it would be a great day for the Army." Back he came to meet the boys afterwards, and as he cracked at them, so they cracked back at him, and his laughter could be heard at the stage-door. No wonder his men of the war years affectionately nicknamed him "Uncle Bill."

One evening we spotted a youngster who seemed to be exceptionally nervy. Catching my eye he said, "Oh, I've got to be good tonight." I ran my finger down the list of celebrities out front and though the list was pretty formidable I couldn't see which one of them would have such an effect on any boy. "Which one are you frightened of, son?" I said, putting the list in front of him. "None of them," said he with complete disdain. "It's my girl's mother, and she'd scare the living daylights out of anyone!"



Archie Handford

“ National Service ”

Such men as Lord Templar and Colonel Young are great enthusiasts; both boys' men and a tonic to the lads when they meet them. With all these illustrious names, one is apt to forget our very own people. It's a true saying about the Prophet in his own country, and it's too easy to overlook one or two our most intimate associates who nevertheless mean much to us. Our own Chief Scout, Lord Rowallan, and our Deputy Chief Scout, Sir Rob Lockhart. It is always an event when either comes to visit us; and they are ever generous in their support.

In each case, their personal summing-up of a new show is right on the target, and he would be a very unwise man who did not heed some of their suggestions. I will listen for hours to men who give their honest opinions when they have no axe to grind, but I grudge two seconds spent listening to people who don't know what they are talking about. Two others who visit us every year are great favourites with us all and to me there is something always special when I know they are present. I mean Lady Baden-Powell and son, Peter. They belong to Scouting's Royal Family and it is a definite link with all our beginnings when we know we have them with us. One has only to watch the youngest boy in the Gang when he meets them, to realise that he, too, is aware of this.

Some people might think the boys would become spoiled by such attention and by the compliments showered upon them, but this is not so. It has always paid to "groom" them for any eventuality, and never once have we had occasion to speak to a single member of the Gang about an indiscretion on this point.

Much of the credit for this tactful approach goes to their own Scoutmasters, and it would be a lapse on my part if this were not recorded. It all adds up to training: and I am convinced it is the duty of every "Gang Show" producer to set an example to the boys he has" borrowed," and to see that they get the same attention personally as he would expect them to get from their own Skippers.

It is not only the Scouters 'who are grateful for this. The mums and dads are grateful, too, and they will always be on your side if the necessity arises. I remember one such incident. I think it was in 1952, when London was hit by fog.

This was no ordinary fog. It not only lasted three complete days and nights, but it was so dense that even the lights of Golders Green Underground station could not be seen ten yards away. Transport on the roads was at standstill, and even the Tubes were erratic. On the first night some of the boys did not get home until four o'clock in the morning, some of them having walked for miles.

They woke to find the fog worse than ever. But not one of the cast missed the opening number, nor did they on the following night. Some of them had to sleep in the theatre. Only a few had telephones to ring their parents and tell them they would not be home. But did the parents grumble? Never a murmur. Not one of them kept their boy at home. We felt bound to write and thank them. Back came their replies, and in every case it was the same, "Well, whatever did you expect?

I have never blessed mums and dads as I did during those terrible three days. Naturally, the weather affected our audiences though, of course, every seat had been booked. We played to many empty seats. I remember on the Saturday night, halfway through the second act a large party from Bristol walked in. I spoke to several of them, telling them how sorry I was they had practically missed the entire performance, but all I got from them was "Don't worry, mate, we're here for the finish."

It isn't generally known how far some of our boys in the London show have to travel to get to and from the theatre to their homes. When I tell you that it is no exception for quite a number of them to cover twelve miles each way, it will give you an idea that a chap has to be very keen to tackle the job. It costs some of our boys over 6s. a time.

One of our lads moved from London to Chatham. He made his dad promise that even then he could be in the "Gang Show," and so young Bernard Lilley travelled up from Chatham for every rehearsal and for each night of the show and paid his own fare. Maybe dad and mum helped, but anyway it just shows the lengths to which a boy will go for something he thinks worth while, Bernard did this for three years—and he is now doing his National Service.

Our cast numbers one hundred and twenty-five, and we now never exceed this. We have a waiting-list for chaps who want to come in: and that list is now well over the thousand mark. Two years ago I spotted a young Scout and felt certain he would be good for the show. I got him in. About a week later I had a wonderful letter from his dad, who wrote, "I want to thank you for having Roger in the 'Gang.' Since I was a boy, my life's ambition was to be one of its members, but I never made it. It's all made up to me now because you've asked my son." Those are the sort of things that make an old bloke like me want to sit down and weep. (By the way, his dad is in with us now. He is in every Albert Hall pageant, and he ran the Canteen backstage at Golders Green, and is now a member of the backstage staff and, to top it all, he has a second son with us for the first time this coming year.

These are just a few of the reasons why I never worry about the boys getting swollen heads no matter who comes back to see them nor whom they are invited to meet. There is so much behind the structure that holds our crowd together and its strings, now strengthened by tradition, bind us together in a fellowship that has become part of our very lives.

We often get the "breaks" in varied ways. When the Beverley Sisters wanted to make a special record with a chorus behind them, they sent for the Gang and the Gang needed no persuading. Vera Lynn has been practically adopted by fifty of our chaps and they have appeared with her both on TV and records.

They lined up with the Great in Show Business at the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square when they were asked to appear in "Midnight with the Stars," and there have been countless times here in London when some special appearance was necessary, and the Gang were asked to oblige. I agree it COULD have been easy for them to feel they were "a little above the average," but take it from me, no boy or man in our outfit would last one night if he suddenly decided he was something special. Oh, no, not while we've got the Birches, the Cregeens, the Wingroves, and the OUTLOOK which takes pride of place in everything we do.

So don't be TOO hard on the Ronnie Meyers when they come along to help you with your show and occasionally mention that we do it THIS way in London. All it amounts to is that they are trying to tell you something that has been proven and that it is a way they believe in. It is the only way I shall EVER believe in.

## 8

### *Gang Shows out of London*

LONG before the boys in Belfast produced their first show in the Opera House they were doing "Gang Shows" on a smaller scale among their Groups. It was left to Bill Johnson to launch the flag that now brightly waves over Ulster when they are in residence. You can class the Belfast Gang among the oncers and by that I mean hitting the bull's eyes with the first attempt. Now they do it every time.

Before their first effort I was asked to go over and help with a couple of rehearsals. This I gladly did, and it was my first real meeting with Bill and his charming sister. It delighted me to think of going back to Ireland, as I had worked in a small village not far from Belfast when I was seventeen, and my love for Magheramome is well known to those who have read It's Been Terrific. So I intended killing two birds with one stone: helping with the rehearsals and buzzing over to see my old friends at the "Magh."

I knew very little about Bill as an individual, and soon after meeting him I was surprised to hear his boys referring to him as "Judge." Knowing how penetrating boys are when it comes to fixing nicknames, I soon fell in with them. During the Saturday morning Bill took me to Magheramorne to see my very great friend, the late Rev. John Doherty. We were met at the door by Mr. and Mrs. Doherty and absent-mindedly I introduced Bill to them as Judge Johnson. It suddenly shook me rigid as I heard them addressing him as "Your Honour." Eventually I got Mr. Doherty aside and told him, "Mr. Doherty, it's a mistake, he's not a real judge, it's his nickname." "So?" said the minister, "but he looks

remarkably like the Judge." I had a good laugh at that one. My laugh vanished a few minutes later when I found out that Bill was a judge!

Boys are mostly the same the world over, but if an extra bit of warmth can come from any one set, then I would award the palm to the Ulster lads. I don't know why, but even the smallest bloke made me feel I had known him for years. They had a passion for work, and I worked them good and hard. They were on the floor every second I was with them and they loved it. To date, I have never seen one of their shows but I envy the folk who have, and I long for the time when their next invitation will come my way.

Bill's sister, Mabel, plays the piano for all the rehearsals, and there is, to my way of thinking, a great deal to be said for the presence of a lady during these periods. Somehow they cast a sort of "niceness" over the hectic prancing and rushing around, and they remain cool in the most hectic moments. I have noticed this repeatedly, with our own Kitty Lydell, and I could imagine nothing more delightful than spending an evening listening (and watching) those two ladies entertaining me on two pianos.

To Belfast goes the credit for one of the most hectic week-ends I have ever spent. I got off the 'plane on the Friday evening and was rushed straight to the rehearsal. There we worked until about ten o'clock. Then, putting on my coat, I was driven to a Parents' Night at a Group headquarters. There I put on a show for about half an hour on my own. Then back to a friend's house for coffee, followed by another session at Bill and Mabel's home. Bed, and breakfast in bed on the Saturday morning. Up again early and a rush visit to Magheramorne, twenty miles away. Back again to Belfast and a rehearsal all afternoon. Then a meeting with the producers at teatime, and a special "Gang Show" party in the evening.

Again, I worked myself to a standstill, singing every song I knew until felt I could not last a second longer. I almost staggered out into Bill Johnson's car, and returned to Ballycarry to fall into bed. On the Sunday evening the judge and his sister had invited a "few" friends in for the evening, and I was to be there to meet them. The "few" turned out to be dozens!

From the most important people in the city to the tiniest Scout in the cast of their show, everyone seemed to be there. I sat down at the piano, and there I was mind you, I enjoyed every moment of it and I hope they did but when I finally went upstairs that night (sorry, morning) I felt that nothing less than a three months' holiday would put me on my feet again. But as I caught the early 'plane next morning I wished I could have stayed to do it all over again. Lots of places can show you wonderful hospitality, but I stand on this: Belfast has a brand all it's own, and I love it.

Speaking critically for the moment, the weakest part of many "Gang Shows" away from London is the sketches. For some reason there doesn't seem to be the polish or the "finish" in the performance that we usually get in the musical numbers. I don't know why this should be. Maybe it is because sketch playing is a very specialised job, and too many producers take the easy way out and allow their casts to "mug the lines instead of playing them straight."

This is a great pity, and I would urge every producer to give more time to the reading of the lines in the sketches before the actors try to play them. Positioning is often bad, and there is a sad lack of "link-up" between cues. I exempt Belfast from these remarks. I spotted their skill the moment I watched them run through their first sketch. They took their time. There was no gabbling, and they

made every word tell: Particularly were they good in keeping up the end of their lines. This is a very important point to watch. Nothing defeats a point quicker than when an actor drops the last few words of his line. Keep them up.

I once had great difficulty in making one of my own boys understand this, so I made him say "Hel-LO" a dozen times, raising his head as he spoke the second syllable. He worked himself to such a pitch that he not only raised his head but he went up on his toes. To this day, whenever I see him, even on the street, he will shout out, "Hel-LO," rising up on his toes, and adding about three inches to his height.

I have never had this trouble with the Irishmen, and I put this down to the training by the judge.

Another point which struck me about these lads was their discipline. As you know, we have a queer sort of discipline in Scouting. It is not always noticeable but, believe me, it is always there. Yet among the Belfast crowd you could notice it and it impressed me strongly. (I once brought a doctor friend of mine to a rehearsal at Chenies Street with the London mob. He stuck it for about fifteen minutes and then came up to me and said "Excuse me, but I'm going out for a drink, this is a madhouse) Bill Johnson's outfit are noisy and care-free, but they show discipline.

Ulstermen are usually masters of understatement. They have a knack of controlling their feelings which sometimes drives me up the wall.

I have only to see something that really pleases me to become very enthusiastic. Because I have no inhibitions, I am not afraid to show my delight: but somehow this is seldom evident among these chaps from Northern Ireland. The judge can be most enthusiastic (in a "velvet" sort of way) but, perhaps, I'm corrugated iron. Once I got really worked up about a youngster belonging to Belfast, and did a five-minute rave over him to a bunch of the older fellows after a rehearsal.

When I had finished, I looked at the cool faces of the bunch with me, and almost in disgust I said to them, "Don't you guys ever thaw out?" Bill Chamberlain looked at me with a grin, and quietly said, "Sure, but we don't see any sense in breaking a blood vessel."

I love butter-milk; I could drink pints of it, and it has long been an ambition of mine to take a fellow-Englishman over there who would also enjoy it—but so far it hasn't happened. I always thought it was the drink of all Irishmen (with exceptions), so imagine my surprise on ordering some as we sat down to tea with about a dozen of the lads there. Not one of them followed suit. When I asked the reason, the reply was, "We can't stand the stuff."

Another thing that intrigues me about these characters is that they don't like to be thanked. If you try it on, they go all coy and try to walk away, or else cut you off in the middle of a sentence. By golly, there is one thing you can pin on them: they are not theatrical. I adore the whole mob of them because they are "unique," I study them like a hawk because I know there is nothing dense about them and when they stare at me with that grinning glare, I feel like I'm on the end of a long line looking up at the face of the angler.

It's a sign of the times, I guess, but an incident which brought this home to me very forcibly took place on one of my recent visits there. I knew an elderly lady who had been kind to me years and years ago when I lived in Magheramorne. Each time I go back there I call to see how she is. She's very old now, and has never been to a theatre in her life. She would listen to my stories

about plays and shows I had produced, and then she would just nod her head and say, "Ah, yes, dear, but I don't hold with it."

What a change the last time I saw her ! She now has a television set. This time she told me the stories, and ended her lecture with "I like Ted Ray, but I don't like those silly plays, but of course, dear, Jack Benny, now there's a comedian. Anne Shelton is good, but did you see that programme last Wednesday night? My dear, it was real corn."

Getting back to the boys—and that's what I'm doing all my life I have never found any others as easy to rehearse.

Another point which struck me forcibly was their ability to listen. It's easy enough to put something over to a person if they will only look at you. These boys can look. You'll have gathered by now that I approve of the Belfast "Gang Show." You're right: and though I have never seen the finished article I know I would not be disappointed. Their rehearsals have made me absolutely certain about that.

If I write no special chapter about Newcastle and Glasgow, I know' they won't mind. They are mentioned so often in the pages of this story—in fact, I bet Ted and Lindy will be in complete accordance with my views about Belfast, for the two of them, with Bill Johnson and myself, make up a very formidable quartette. We all think our shows are the best, and so does little Johnny Smith who does a "Gang Show" with his Group of fourteen in a small Yorkshire village. Who can say that any one of us is wrong? For that is the way it should be.

A good Irish accent is a joy to listen to, and perhaps this in fluencies me a little when I remember the reciting of some of the "straight" items as played by these boys. Their speech is an infectious invitation to listen with a charm all its own.

I call to mind one specific rendering of "The Owls." Their brogue brought a special magic to the lines which was enchanting. I made Them do it twice through simply because I wanted to take away with me every intonation. Finally (and I want this to be a lesson to everyone) these lads knew how to stand still when they spoke. Nothing is more irritating than a fidget: nor is there anything more certain to detract from a situation. I beg you, one and all, to plant your feet flat on the stage, put your weight equally on both feet, and keep still when you are speaking a line.

Never move unless you have to and get that movement over as quickly as you can. Above all, never move when someone else is speaking. Look at them and allow them to be the star of that particular moment.

Belfast lines up with the best of us and I hope to be going over there again soon. So, boys, don't forget the butter-milk

When it's "Gang Show" time in Belfast, letters come to me from all over Ulster asking if I can manage to "get hold of a couple of seats." Naturally, the only thing I can do is to refer them back to the theatre, but up there, too, is a "feeling abroad in the air," not only in the city itself but in many smaller towns and villages.

My very close pal, the Rev. R. G. Doherty, again this year wrote me from his manse in Raphor, Co. Donegal, asking if I could get some of his parishioners in to see the show, so even in the Free State they get the urge when the boys come out to play. What's more, I bet more coffee is drunk in the cafes around Belfast during this period than at any other time of the year.

Take Tynemouth or Whitley Bay, both strong "Gang Show" centres. The miners around come home after a hard day's work and wash themselves faster than at any other time of the year so that they may get to the theatre and see their boys performing.

Amongst the audience you will always find that great England footballer, Jackie Milburn.

In Hanley, where Marshall Amor puts on his show, it's just the same old story. The effect is felt not merely inside the theatre. It is to be observed outside in the highways and the byways. It's a subject for discussion at the Rotary luncheon, and they almost stop making that wonderful china to be at the show on time. The reputation of the Stoke "Gang Show" rivals only that of their very own Stanley Matthews.

Horace Robinson, who runs Darlington's show, will vouch for the same "something" up there, as will the boys from places as far apart as Middlesbrough, Aberdeen, Dunfermline, Bristol, Brighton, and Margate, where they play the show in its famous Pavilion. It would appear that the atmosphere seeps from the footlights to the exits and races along tile pavements and streets to the very hearts of the people. It's talked about by the neighbours when they are shaking their mats next morning, and it's talked about in the buses as the same folk go out to do their shopping.

There is a large barber's shop near my home, and our annual production is invariably the main topic of conversation among the hairdressers and customers alike. The "head man" goes every year, and for the next month he entertains his customers with detailed stories about various items from the show. He gets so enthusiastic you would think he had money in it. As a result of this interest, he has two sons in a local Group. It is a feather in the cap of every "Gang Show" man that, through his efforts, thousands of people who otherwise would not have become interested in the Movement, have done so entirely because of the initiation that came through seeing one of the shows. The interest doesn't end when the curtain comes down; that's the great point to remember. The melodies linger on. All the towns I have just mentioned are in Great Britain, but it is not in Britain alone that this "spirit" is created. It follows in the wake of the Red Scarf boys all over the world.

The songs are sung on the Continent. The boys take them back from the Jamborees and Rover Moots to their own various Troops. The words and sketches are translated and on they go, to swell the funds for their own Group. They are performed in their annual concert—not exactly a "Gang Show" perhaps, but yet another branch of its roots. There, too, the infection spreads.

When Melbourne first started their "Gang Shows," Gordon Oldham wrote me and said they were to be an absolute copy. Of everything we did here.

He had been to London and had seen us at work both in rehearsals and in the actual show, so I felt very sure that they would give a good account of themselves. I didn't realise, though, how far they would go to "copy us." Several months after their first attempt we were talking to an Australian Scouter who was visiting England and he told us what a great Team their boys had turned out to be.

"And it wasn't easy," he told us, "we rehearsed in a drill hall which was a long way from the centre of the city and it meant a lot of travelling for most of the lads." When I asked him if there hadn't been another hall nearer which they could have used, he said, "Oh, yes, several, but John said that the London

"Gang" rehearsed in a drill hail, and that's what it had to be." Good old Gordon and Melbourne! Every year they send over a bunch of souvenir programmes, and we present each London boy with a copy.

We'd like to sell souvenir programmes, too, but owing to restrictions in the theatre advertising contracts, we can't. Instead, we make do with an album of the hit songs from each year's production. This is, we hope, an advantage to countless thousands who can thus buy the songs en bloc. But still I would relish being able to sell a book with photographs in it of the big production numbers.

It is a positive fact that wherever a "Gang Show" is playing, the local lads seem to enthuse the whole town with their spirit. Somehow it becomes a special "Week," and everyone wants to join in and show pride in their home-town boys.

A few months ago we went to see Roy Castle and his Gang in Torquay. We had tea at a shop on the front. When the time came to pay the bill to our surprise the lady in charge told us that on no account could she allow us to pay. "Not this week," she said, "not after seeing such a wonderful show."

In Glasgow, on one of my never-to-be-forgotten trips, I passed out literally! I saw the first half of their show and the next thing I knew I was on my way to the hospital. There was Lindy, right with me, as usual, and a couple of doctors, rushing me to the Southern General. For a couple of days Doctor Shaw did everything in his power to get me fit (and he did, too). The Matron sat by my bed, assuring me I was their "star" patient, and the nurses held a couple of parties to make sure I shouldn't be lonely. When I checked out, there was no bill only a reminder that they hoped I would be up the following year to see how great their boys were.

Nowhere is this "spirit abroad" so noticeable as in Newcastle. The very streets seem to know it is "Gang Show" time. As soon as I alight from the train there are a couple of policemen to tell me how great the show is this year" even better than last." In every shop one goes into somebody asks, "What do you think of the Show?" No matter who else is playing in the city, there is only one show that week.

Even the restaurant orchestras play hardly anything but songs from present and previous shows.

That week Ted Potts is king of all he surveys. A Boy Scout in uniform can hold up the traffic, and nobody cares. The manager of the Theatre Royal I aglow; why not, he's on a percentage. I remember on one occasion they even ran a special edition of their evening paper.

It's the same in Melbourne. Gordon Oldham sends us all the cuttings from the papers, and it would seem to take a war to chase the "Gang Show" news off the front page. Australia is one country I have never been to, but if ever a chance comes along, I shall choose the time when the "Crest of a Wave" boys are holding court, and I know it will be a journey I shall never forget. It was Australia who christened me "Mr. Gang Show"—and I like that title very much. I have a photograph of the Hong-Kong boys in one of their Finales—except for their faces it might be any of our own Finales. One amusing letter came to me from one of those Chinese lads who had seen a picture of our boys in London. He wrote me, "They look nearly like we do, but they all have such funny eyes. I wonder if that occurred to anybody before? Yet how true it is.

So far, I don't think they have produced a "Gang Show" in America. Can it be that we have beaten them to something? But Canada is right there, and so is New Zealand. I saw a "Gang Show" in Cairo during the war, produced by one of

out own men who was serving there. The Egyptian boys were amazingly keen, and the same goes for the wonderful show put on for me by the Scouts in Singapore. Mind you, they had a little difficulty in saying some of the words, but they knew what they were talking about, and so did their audience. I think one of my most moving moments was when I walked into a Malayan scout camp one evening and was greeted with "Birds of a Feather."

Even as I write, a letter has just been brought in to me from Malta. A. F. Mifsud, the Hon. Island Secretary of the Movement there, writes, "I am afraid we in Malta can neither afford nor find the necessary talent to put on anything as lavish as your shows, but I am enclosing two photographs from a recent show we put on." The small shows are as important to its parent as the small Troop is to the Movement.

Countless times people have said to me after seeing one of our performances, "It comes right over the footlights." Yes, "it" does, and as I have tried to explain, it comes even out of the theatre and into the streets and homes in the towns concerned.

Scarcely a month goes by without a new contact which leads to another new production for one of our shows. With us now is Ken Hodson, a Scouter from Cleethorpes, who has launched the Grimsby Gang Show. Using over ninety boys in their first venture, they now sell out long before they open: and alongside Ken is his Assistant Producer, Ron Rudd.

Showing some of the spirit among these Grimsby lads is the fact that one of them, David Rudd, now doing his National Service in the R.A.F., missed only one rehearsal—though he had to travel over two hundred miles each week-end to be with his gang. Stationed at Maidenhead, he hitch-hiked (when the pocket wouldn't stand the strain) and eventually fiddled his leave so that he'd be there for the week of the show. I guess that's what they call enthusiasm. To those of us who wear the red scarf we call it.

"The 'Gang Show' Spirit."



*John Vickers*

Ralph and the Pensioners in the R.A.F. Show



---

**“Southland from the RAF Gang Show 1946**

---

*Written by: Ralph Reader C.B.E. copyright; 1957*



*Written by: Ralph Reader C.B.E. copyright; 1957*

## PART FOUR

### 9

#### *Writing the Show*

I COULDN'T count the number of times I have been asked, "How long does it take to write a 'Gang Show'?"

The answer is, every day of every year. There is no stopping. Before one "Gang Show" is over, I often have at least four items ready for the following year. It is a job that never eases up, and never halts. It eats up every spare second that comes my way. It also calls for constant observation and the need to keep one's ears open all the time.

To begin with, it is not the actual material we use in the programme that takes the time. What about the weeks I have spent writing and rewriting sketches and songs that get side-tracked from the programme to the waste-paper basket?

This process is one long, bitter disappointment. At times I have gone to bed convinced I had just written a super-comedy sketch for three or four of the comics. But when, in the cold light of day, I read it through again it becomes plain that it is not right. Usually these days, when I have finished an item, I put it away for about three weeks and then take it out with a completely fresh mind and go through it again.

I've come to look on these creations as something that is part of me and many a time, as I begin to tear up a script, I have unconsciously murmured to myself. "Sorry, mate." I feel a darn sight more sorry for myself for it means beginning all over again. Yes, beginning all over again, and that is what I have to do dozens of times a year before I finally get somewhere near a balanced programme for the rehearsal time approaching.

Of all tasks, surely writing is one that must not be done in a panic. To sort out a bundle of words, select the right ones, and then place them into formation which makes a readable sentence is something that surely cannot be done in a fury. Even more so is it necessary to keep cool when you attempt to write comedy dialogue because to create funny lines and situations one has to be grim and sincere. It's not impossible to rehearse when the temper is over working; it is even possible to perform when there is an irate feeling in the air; but to sit down and bash away at a typewriter, transfer one's thoughts to paper in the tenth of a second, calls for calmer moments. When I am concentrating on a script, the sudden ringing of the doorbell or telephone has more than once nearly thrown me off my chair. Believe me, it's a serious job, and it calls for supreme concentration.

Usually I can picture exactly each scene as I write. I know where the chair will be, the table, and the doors. As the words begin to flow I place every actor in the exact position he will be in when I rehearse him. By these means I somehow manage to get a development of dialogue that seems natural. I even see in my mind's eye the clothes he will be wearing.



HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AT THE GANG SHOW

But no matter how uproarious the ultimate scene might be, the actual "doping it out," the writing, is something one can only do undisturbed, and unaffected by panics of any description. At times it is cold blooded brutality, steamed-ice thinking, and one way sight-line, making an invisible ray from the forehead to

the tripping keys on the machine. Reading and rereading every speech line with a thoroughness that comes only after rejection slips have come to you by the dozen, and with a hardness that only cool, calculated experience can bring you. In other words, brother, it's a road as hard as granite, and there is no easy way. In the words of Captain Queeg and Archie's Mr. Grimble, "I kid you not!"

Fashioning a new show is often a very discouraging job, never more so than when one has written a big success.

I wonder if anyone realises just how much ground has to be covered to create, year after year, a new revue to be played by well over one hundred boys? (Remembering all the while that these new ideas are to be copied by thousands of others through the world, to be translated into a dozen different languages, from French to Chinese!)

I'm haunted by the fear that I am always liable to "dry up." Sometimes weeks go by without an idea coming into my head, and during this time I pace up and down, drive out in the car and think, THINK! Something like three hundred songs have been written and about the same number of sketches. Is it possible to figure out ANY new angle? Yet it has to be done somehow. So, I THINK! I've lain on my bed, fully dressed, with my head stuck face downwards in the pillow, just groping for ideas.

I've walked around the streets (drenched by rain more than once) struggling for a blessed thought that would bring me a new twist to an old idea. I tear through books; I see new films; I go to shows and now and again I have even hired old films of the silent days, to watch and stare at in the hope that some gesture, some situation or some character would bring me a new thought.

I turn on the radio and glare at my television set; but there are grim weeks when not a single brainwave will emerge, and then, take it from me, it's sheer murder. The grimmest moment of all is when I remember some particular item in the previous show that turned out to be a smash hit. How, can I find another idea as good?

In desperation I bash out lines on the old typewriter and try to kid myself that I'm doing something worth while, but the next day, when I read those lines through, it is only too apparent they are absolutely useless. Grimly I tear the pages to bits and fling them into the waste-paper basket. I start again.

The same thing happens with songs. I have blistered my fingers trying to create a new phrase of music that would be suitable for a first act finale or a theme song. Suddenly a melody may come, and with a catch in my breath I write it down, feeling at that moment as though I had won a football pools. A few days later I play it over again—only to find it uninspired and quite hopeless.

The feeling I get when these things happen is hard to explain. It means beginning all over again, back to the grind, to the piano thumping, or the typewriter bashing, and with a voice beside me saying all the time, "You've had it, mate, you're drying up." I admit it—from this point of view. I know Fear!

Is it all worth it, then? A MILLION TIMES, Yes. Why? I can best explain this to you by quoting here the chorus of a song I enjoy singing more than any other, because I wrote it for myself and I won't let anyone else sing it. It may be difficult to follow at first because a lyric of a song is always in a "metre"; but I think you will be able to understand it and so know exactly the reason I WANT to go on and on, and shall go on until I drop.

*I wouldn't change for a man with a million!*

*I don't want to be a man with champagne and yachts at Cannes,  
I don't want a castle in Spain.  
I wouldn't change for the gold of a lifetime,  
And diamonds from Tiffany would not look so good on me,  
I'd feel like a king without a reign.  
But I know I'll never be poor,  
I'm with a Gang with a high top score,  
They make my life worth living for,  
AND AS LONG AS THE BOYS COME KNOCKING AT MY DOOR—  
I wouldn't change for a man with a million,  
For I've got a million Blessings more!*

There it is, all of it. Simple, isn't it? A statement? No, a testament.

How it happens I don't pretend to know, but somehow the new programme does take shape. I must confess the effort leaves me worn out and very tired at times. Weary, but nevertheless breathing again. It's time to think of that first rehearsal and how I shall use those hundred and thirty boys.

I stressed the word "USE" because this is such an important point.

When dealing with crowds (in the sense of producing spectacular scenes) I always make a point of never allowing them to think they ARE a crowd. It is my job to make them feel they are individuals: and by that I mean that every single one of them must be spoken to and given some personal direction. Somehow, I never look upon the "Gang Show" as a "big" show—why, I don't know: it could be because of the enormous crowd scenes we used in the Albert Hall shows when anything up to 2500 are in the arena.

To sit out front and see a certain sketch take the audience by storm is something that gives me a frightening sinking in the stomach. Does that sound strange? Then let me explain. It's not because of the triumph, it's because I realise that it must be "topped" next year. With the "Gang Shows" there is always next year," and it is no easy task to keep on and on. That is why, the moment something "out of the bag" brings the house down, my heart misses a beat, and I say to myself, "Reader, put your thinking cap on, you're up against it."

If, as I say, you have to turn out a new show each year, you are bound to be up against it: and I can never get this feeling out of my mind. Luckily it doesn't keep me awake, for I sleep like a log and eat like a horse, but the thought never leaves me, and every night during our two weeks' run in town, I get the "creeps" when I hear big applause and loud laughter. I almost go into a coma, wondering how that particular item is going to be replaced for the new edition.

On one point I am adamant. If a song or an idea makes a real impression, I will never try to repeat it. On the contrary, I endeavour to get as far away from that idea as possible.

So many folk ask me, "What's the mime going to be this year?" But I will not do a mime every year. I know people like them, but the same people who tell me they miss it when one is not included are the same people who would be the first to say, "They're all alike." If a number with the young boys as scholars is a hit one year then nothing would make me do a sketch about scholars for the next show.

People are funny—and you can say that again! They seldom know what they want, but they do know what they like. So I try to turn a deaf ear to most of

the suggestions I get and plug along as a lone wolf. If a would-be ideas merchant says to you, "Why don't you do something like . . ." you can bet your life if you did, they would say, "Why, that was exactly like . . . See what I mean? A writer therefore has just got to be alert and ring the changes—to get as far away from a hit turn as possible. Sometimes I think we have done everything there is to do, that there just can't be a single thing new to write about. Each succeeding year doesn't make it any easier.

Especially is this so when we happen to have a genuine" vintage" year. There were in my judgment three "vintage" years in the history of the "Gang Shows," years when the programme as a whole blended, and played as a perfect production. In 1937, 1952, and 1955. These were our peak years to my reckoning; and it is impossible always to rise to these heights. Admittedly, odd items could be selected as some of the best we have done in other programmes, but as shows, these three were, to my mind, the finest of all. They had balance, and balance is a very elusive quality. It is possible for one smash hit to put the next three items in the shade, and then it takes twenty minutes to win back your audience. I don't like it when that happens, but it does, time and time again.

Sometimes a gag or a piece of business will pull down the house, as when the boy in "Taking Their Places" fell through his dress, or "the Noo " in" Over the Seas." You can't foresee the reaction to these things—even though clever people will tell you afterwards that they knew it would be terrific. Nobody knows.

It is all guesswork, and the lucky man is he who can guess right more times than the next bloke. I can't complain about my guesswork on the whole, but it is always suspect, and no one is more aware of it than I am. That's why I worry, and get het-up when I realise that some particular number has to be "topped" in the new show-to-come.

There are never less than twenty new sketches in my "den" ready for inclusion if I can't get anything better. All the same I hope and pray that most of these will never see the light of day because I know, somehow, they are not good enough. Only the best is due to the boys and men who follow me like disciples, and for you who will be using the material during the years to come.

Songs, too, load up the shelves around me. Some might be all right, but I am not sure, and when I get that uncertain feeling I know better ones must be found. I'm always discovering in the oddest places bits of paper I have put away with a gag or an idea written on them. A few nights ago one of the lads was looking for a cigarette for me—I'd run out—and he came across a soiled scrap of paper with the words "Dink as a Hypnotist" written on it. (That eventually became the sketch "Professor Manafique.") I hadn't forgotten the idea but I certainly had forgotten I had written it down.

In years to come others living in this flat of mine will suddenly come across the most amazing things written--on bits of paper and most likely they'll report it straight to the police! Ten minutes ago, whilst writing this, a crazy idea came to me and I jotted it down on the wall in front of me—I can't lose that! But I'll have to wipe it off. So far, you see, I've even descended to writing things on walls. In everything one writes for the stage there must be novelty and twists." The unexpected is the thing to aim for and perhaps the hardest thing to get.

Do you remember "Klondike Lou?" How the first part of the sketch was played in correct costume and then the second part played with the identical wording, but with different costumes? This was a "twist," but such effective ones

as that come too in frequently for my liking. Looking for "twists" is the easiest way I know to tie yourself in knots. I'm a super tangler. Yet it is all worth it when the thought comes. It's jubilation. Then you start on the next one! That's torture.

I had an idea on my last trip to Scotland which I'm going to write some time. I had a nasty attack of something (we haven't found out yet what it was) but they took me to hospital and laid me on a bed, brought in some contrivance, put wires on my anodes and hands and told me to relax. That's a funny situation in itself. Anyway, I closed my eyes, heard a slight buzzing noise, and then listened to the conversation. I nearly leaped out of the window at some of the things they were saying. "It's slipping somewhere," "There's a bad connection," "Seems to be leaking, doesn't it?" "Worn out, that's the trouble." "No good, let's kill it." I opened my eyes in horror and found out the Doc and the two nurse were not discussing me, but the machine! I shall write it as a sketch one of these days. And don't anyone dare tell me it was far fetched.

When I do get an idea I write fast—too fast, in fact, for when I read it through I discover whole sentences missed out, and as for the spelling well, that's not my strong point in any case. If you should ever read through the first copy of a new idea I put down on paper you would think I left school when I was six! I didn't, I left school when I was eleven, and that's true. But life has supplied the education my schooling days lacked and, on the whole, maybe, I'm on the credit side. One fact is a certainty. If I had a son they could never accuse me of helping him with his home work not the stuff boys have to do today.

So you see, writing "Gang Shows" is a pretty grim job comedy always is but I have no regrets. So don't get disheartened you would be writers, but get cracking, for now you know what's ahead of you!

Writing a "Gang Show" calls for a strong typewriter. Unfortunately for me I have never been able to dictate a sketch. I have to write it down as I go along and then the dialogue seems to take on a natural flow.

The moment I stand up and see someone with a pad and pencil waiting to take down everything I say, I dry up completely. Time and time again I have tried to conquer this failing, but it is useless. I could save myself hours if I could only dictate the plays, essays, and sketches I write for one purpose or another. But it just doesn't work out that way, and I have to bash away on my old machine.

It is an old machine—it's been with me for over twenty years, and it has only let me down once. It seldom gets cleaned and rarely oiled, but it crackles away merrily.

Every now and then I beat a handkerchief over the old servant and away goes the visible dust, but I hate to think what's inside it. About five years ago one of the letters came off and I was without the machine for a few days. I felt the loneliest man in the world. I've got such an attachment for this dear old "thumper," I could never part with it. It knows all my intimate secrets, my hopes, my disappointments. It is not too much to say it is my Father Confessor. I can trust it—because it gives nothing away.

It is the only thing in my home that I will not allow anyone to touch. If, and when, it breaks, I must be the one responsible, so it is taboo to all and sundry. I never cover it up, although once in a while I am compelled to get a pin and clean the lettering. The only birthday it gets is when I have to dress it up

with a new ribbon. One of my blokes made a crack only last week-end, "That old typewriter is closer to him than his skin." I think that's true.

I try as much as possible not to rely on 'gags.' I have never used a gag book in my life, I most certainly have used gags heard or remembered at odd times, but to make a habit of storing and filing gags to fill up sketches I something I shall never do. Most of the biggest laughs we have had in our shows have come from situations, and not from the obvious gag. Once you manage to get your characters in a good situation you don't need to rely on old jokes and sayings to win laughs.

There is not one gag in "Dress Rehearsal," yet nothing we have ever done gets bigger laughs than this. "The Colonel in his Bath" is another instance. It's the fun of the constant interruptions that brings the laughter, not what the people are saying.

Most of the lines in this playlet are perfectly normal conversation. You must have noticed this point when you go to see a farce. Ninety per cent of the big yells are derived from a situation and not from a joke. Would-be authors should figure out an embarrassing situation for his players: once that is achieved, the lines will come.

Naturally one needs a creative mind and an eye for the ridiculous. Boto have to be kept razor-sharp. It helps, too, if you are a bit crazy. However, once you set yourself the task of churning out material month after month and year after year, going crazy is not such a difficult thing to do. You must have been halfway there in the first place. A clock can play havoc with your life, but once you embark on an annual show that has to be ready by a certain date, a calendar becomes your bitterest enemy. You are reminded every second of the first line of a popular hymn, "Days and moments quickly hying."

One's life becomes an eternal search for ideas. Once the idea finds its way to my mind, then I have something to go on. I draft out an opening gag or situation, a middle section, and then, hardest of all, a funny line or piece of business for the final blackout.

A writer's most difficult task is to find a certain laugh for the ending of a sketch. Without it, no matter how well the skit has previously gone, it is doomed to failure. It is rather like a footballer who does amazing things with a ball, juggles right through the opposition, then, getting right in front of an open goal, fluffs it. The final line—the pay-off—of every sketch, has got to score. There is a patch on my carpet, worn as I wander up and down, to and fro, battling for a good blackout line. (No wonder I cringe when I visit some shows and hear this very line thrown away!)

When I have drafted out the beginning, the middle, and the ending, I then get to work filling in the odd spots. Brevity is, of course, essential in revue sketches. One has to take the shortest road to a direct destination, and this means a lot of editing. Still, it is the idea, after all, that counts, and so I am always on the look out for ideas.

I have found them everywhere. I saw a woman looking at a newspaper over a man's shoulder one day in the Tube. I wrote a sketch about it which was one of the hits of a television series I did on the B.B.C. with Mrs. Shufflewick. Some of the skits we have used on Scouting have come from true stories of real happenings. Remember "Overdoing it," the sketch about the Scoutmaster who carried Scouting into his family life and made his wife and

children "Fall in" before they had their meals? That wasn't as big a exaggeration as people might believe!

Then there was the sketch about the Scoutmaster who "wheedled" the father and mother of one of his boys into allowing him to go to camp. After he had tricked them into giving their consent, the father accidentally blew a whistle. The boy came running into the room and said, "Good old Skip." The father asked what his son meant and the son innocently replied, "He said that if he blew his whistle it would be O.K." That wasn't far from the truth, either. A good sketch must in some way be true to life: it rarely fails if the audience can recognise people portrayed in the scene. The next-door neighbour, a relation, or a friend. So I keep a good eye on neighbours, relations, and friends, and I bet they have no idea how much material they have supplied me with.

But it is, I repeat, an all-time job. I never go out without a piece of paper in my pocket to write down a line I may overhear, or to jot down a sudden incident. Even posters on hoardings have brought ideas to me such as in the case of an advertisement for Senior Service cigarettes. From that I wrote "The Pride of the British Navy" for four of our youngsters who sang the song dressed as pink-cheeked Middies (I cheated on this one, I had them smoking cigars). One of the song-hits and one of the brightest scenes we did in 19S4, came as a inspiration from a holiday poster.

"The Owls," that dramatic scene, in which a Scoutmaster who revisited one of his old camping grounds and dreamt again of his boys in the Owl Patrol who had gone off to the war and did not return, came from a personal experience in the Royal Air Force.

As a matter of fact I played this scene myself in one of the Tom Arnold revues, but as an R.A.F. officer. Then there was an idea I had been toying with for about two years but it somehow wouldn't take shape. It was to be a dramatic "mime" sequence, and although I had the rough idea, it just wouldn't materialise. I was completely stumped. Every now and then it came back to me, but the formation of the theme just wouldn't make itself clear. Then one Saturday I was helping with a fete for the 4<sup>th</sup> Surbiton, when a young boy in civvies came up to ask for my autograph. I can never explain these things, but all I can tell you is that the moment that boy spoke to me I saw him right away as the lead in this vague idea.

I wrote to his Skipper and asked if I could borrow him. I had a charming letter by return saying he would be delighted but that the boy was very nervous and had never done anything in the entertaining line before. That mattered nothing to me. I knew what I could do with him because, even before I had the Scoutmaster's letter, I had written the entire scene. The boy played it and he was wonderful. He was the crippled boy in "Chinese Legend."

I have told elsewhere in this story about a lad named Bernard Lilley. I shall not forget how I found him. We were producing "Great Oaks," and I couldn't find a boy to play Alan. I knew exactly the type of boy I wanted, but I couldn't lay my hands on him.

One afternoon I went to Highbury to see Arsenal play the Villa and on this occasion I happened to go by Underground. In the crush of the carriage I spotted Bernard. He had no badge in his lapel, but the moment I saw him I knew he was the chap I was looking for. He happened to catch my eye and to my surprise he winked. I nodded back, and that was that. I didn't see him get out of

the train, but when I got to the top of the stairs leading to the road he was standing there waiting for me.

"Hello, Ralph," he said. I went over to him and asked how he knew me. He was a Scout, but the blighter wasn't showing it no badge. I got his name, did the usual routine, via his S.M., and he made the perfect Alan. It is useless to ask me how I know these things. I take no credit for it. It is a gift which I accept and am humbly grateful for, and when I am struggling for ideas to write for the "Gang Show" it is a godsend.

As you will have guessed I hardly move without a pencil somewhere within reach. As a matter of fact I never have less than three in my pockets, and my car is chock-a-block with them in every crack and corner—always handy, just in case.

Two years ago, I recall, I wasn't satisfied with a number I had written for the thirteen-year-olds in the show, so I struggled for an idea which would be an improvement. One evening I had to wait outside a garage for John Stiles, who was held up. It was pouring with rain, so I sat in my car listening to the water hitting the roof and watching it trickle down the wind—screen. There is not the remotest connection between this scene and the idea that my mind suddenly pounced on, but the rain seemed to be running down the glass in front of me in little rhythmic jerks. I grinned to myself and sung an imaginary tune as I followed the progress of one of those little drops from the top of the wind-screen to the bottom. And the little tune I hummed was wedded with words before John arrived. I had actually written down the first two verses. I called it "Miss Suzanne and Mister Brown." Remember it?

Now, don't get the idea that all one has to do is to get Out in the rain, look at a poster or read the morning paper, and WHAM! comes an idea. How I wish it were that simple! I've just told you about some snappy happenings that have brought me sudden inspiration, but these are not as plentiful as I would like them to be. I could tell you of the hours, days, and weeks when not a solitary brainwave comes. The depression I go through at those times is grim. Those blank spaces confronting me in the new lay-out haunt me. I know they have to be filled, but with what? I do, very occasionally, revive an old sketch we may have used years before, but I don't make this a habit. Troops need new material, and it would not be fair to them if I cheated too much and used up the old items. The only answer is, then, keep on slogging away until an idea does turn up. Fortunately my Lucky Star has not yet gone out. Almost every day someone will say to me, "When you write your songs, do you write the words or the music first?" There is no rule for this, and in my case it has happened both ways. I have taken sometimes as long as three weeks to "marry" words and music together. On the other hand I have written a complete song in five minutes! That song was "I'll Never Change," and I sang it myself in the Scout play The Story of Mike. Perhaps the reason for my writing it so speedily was because I was merely putting myself on paper. I am not particularly temperamental (at least so I like to think), but there have been moments when I have thrown a manuscript across the room and stalked out, slamming the door. It is impossible to force oneself to work, but time does not stand still, and I have been up against it so many times with the calendar telling me rehearsal time is too close, and not everything is ready. I remember one such incident well. I was struggling with a first act finale number. I couldn't get a catch—phrase for it. I had the tune, and the tune flowed

well: but for the life of me I couldn't find the right swinging words to marry to the music.

I tried about a dozen titles for that song but none of them were good enough. I've got a habit of trying these things out on boys when they are staying with me for the week-end, and they are pretty good judges. I can tell instantly if an idea hits them, and equally I know when I see their blank faces how wide of the mark I can be. I had played this particular number to them about twenty times. They all liked the melody, but they just didn't take to the words. They were not the words of a boy.

One Sunday afternoon I had a new idea and spent about two hours rhyming the lines. Then, as if I had struck the brainiest idea of my life, I walked into the lounge and said, "Hey, blokes, listen to this." They listened, smiled wanly, and said, "H'm, not bad." It went like a sword through my very heart. I knew I was wrong and I knew they just didn't like it. I turned on them. I yelled the room down and then took the manuscript and tore it to shreds. As I flung it on the floor one of the boys said, "Well, what a to do. It's a wonderful life." IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE! That's how that song came to be. Simple isn't it? Oh, Sir Winston, how well you described it when you said, "Blood and sweat and tears."

I'd never be able to write half the songs I do write if my boys, Kenny, Bob, and Mike, couldn't make tea. They know the moods I get in, and when they see one coming on, they glance at each other and murmur, "Tea-time!" At other moments, when they hear my typewriter getting red hot, I detect the tinkling of ice in a glass outside the door of my den, and in they come with a tray of cool drinks. Then they sit on the floor with me, knocking back their orangeade whilst I knock back my correct! But there it is, a tonic brought by the boys themselves, while I try to knock out material to be used by these self-same lads. Without them it would be an impossibility.

All my spare time is not employed in writing "Gang Shows." When I look at the shelves in my den and see copies of some of the Scout plays that have been churned out, even I wonder how they came to be written. Great Oaks, Leave it to Pete, We'll Live For Ever, The Road to Where?, The Captains and the Kings, Great Days, Boy Scout, Voyage of the Venture, The Wingate Patrol are only some of them.

In the cast of these shows we have had some illustrious Scouters taking part. Rex Hazlewood, the energetic, sparkling Editor of The Scouter, and The Scout, J. F. Colquhoun, known to all in Scouting as "Koko," and let's not forget the Camp Chief at Gilwell, John Thurman. Actors all of them! Yes, they've all been with us. Just now I mentioned Great Oaks. Many of you may have seen this play about an old Scouter who had just retired.

The story opens with the night he returns to his home after his final appearance as a Scouter. There he finds, waiting for him, a young Scout named Alan. Alan's dad had been with Mr. Oaks throughout his Scouting life, as had been Alan's grandfather, so here, late at night, the old man sits down with the young boy and tells him of his career in this Game of ours, right from the start, over forty years ago. The play takes in the beginning of Scouting from its inception and travels along to the present day. Now I had wanted to write this play for a long time, but somehow I never got round to it. Then one Monday morning I sat down at the typewriter and put the first page in the machine.

At lunch that day I told Fred Hurl I had got off to a good start and I promised him that with luck I would have the entire first act ready for him to read by the following Friday. That seemed a fairly stiff task. It is not easy to write a full length play right off the bat, as it were, but the dialogue flowed, and I knew the strength of the subject I had to write about. Well, I got working on it and somehow couldn't leave off. Food and sleep meant nothing to me: I kept slogging away, churning out page after page of manuscript. They began to pile higher and higher on my desk and when I stopped for moments to read through what I had written, the urge to continue was so strong that I couldn't leave off.

I have never felt such an obsession about anything I have written. I nearly drove my family mad with the constant clicking of the typewriter as I drove myself on and on.

By Thursday midday I felt nearly exhausted, but I did not leave the den. My fingers were sore, and my mind almost burning, but I kept at it. I worked until 3 a.m. on the Friday morning, to find that I had written the complete play from beginning to end in just over four days! My hands were shaking and I couldn't even hold a cup of tea without spilling it. I went downstairs, put on a hat, and walked out into the night. I walked around the block where I lived three times, breathing in the air and cooling myself off. I got back into the house and found my mum waiting for me. She said, "Ralph, please, please go to bed and take off those wet clothes." I hadn't realised it—it was pelting down with rain and I was soaked through.

I shall never do that again, but each time I see a poster telling me someone is presenting Great Oaks I remember that night and the four days preceding it. It is a very unwise thing to do, this taxing of one's strength to breaking point, but when an idea comes, well, it just has to be worked out of the system. My reward came when we first produced the play at the Scouters' Conference at Filey. What a night that was I almost wanted to start another right away.

Our Rover play, The Road to Where? took much longer to finish, yet, perhaps above all others, I enjoyed writing this one. The credit belongs to Roy Lammerton, who was then a young Rover from Finchley. It was because I knew Roy, and he and I were such pals, that it came into being. Most of it was planned whilst he was getting over a dose of jaundice. Roy created the part of Little 'Un, and no one has ever played it so well. It was written for him, and half the words in the play were his own. I played the part of the Skipper, opposite him, and I shall never enjoy doing anything as much. Roy did not come back from World War Two.

All these plays are second-fiddle to the "Gang Shows," but from one springs the other, and who knows, they might live even longer. We shall see.

The two places in which I do more planning than anywhere else in the writing of "Gang Shows" is (a) in the bath, and (b) driving my car. My thoughts, nine times out of ten, are dreaming of comedy lines, situations, and ideas. It must be very irritating for my pals when they are talking to me suddenly to know that I am not "with them." Recently Mike was telling me about something, when he looked at me and knew I was somewhere else. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Excuse me, my name's Mike, and I'm talking to you. Remember me?" My "inner circle" pals certainly have a lot to put up with.

When I am in the bath at least I'm alone, and even if the 'phone rings well, it can ring. I'm away from the world, and it is here I often picture the

layout for the new show. I can somehow sense the right construction of the programme, see where a gentle moment can be placed and where I can place the "socks." And at the head of the bath is a handy spot where I keep paper and pencil! No wonder people often say, "That guy Reader never relaxes." But I do. Oh, yes, and to prove it, I'll tell you where.

Friday nights are good nights to me and I usually turn in early very early. The three boys usually show up from seven onwards, and they are perfectly content to stay indoors. They have a habit of getting into pyjamas, lying on the floor, and either watching television or playing their new gramophone records.

I'm not a rabid television fan. I like to pick my programmes, and once I have heard a gramophone record I don't like constant "repeats." I get myself a book and into bed I go. The boys keep late hours, but at intervals on goes the kettle and I am kept subdued by cups of Ovaltine. Before they turn in, no matter what the hour, in they come and sit on the bed and talk about everything under the sun. I let them wander on, for nothing is as illuminating as the talk of the average normal boy, and it brings my Friday nights to a very happy conclusion.

Saturday is football day, and, as all my friends are aware, I have a mania for soccer. And Arsenal, I needn't tell you, is my club. In the evenings we go out somewhere, to see a Scout show, or for a run in the car. Very rarely do we go to the pictures or see a professional show. Sundays vary, but are usually taken up with some Scouting affair. So my week-ends are quite relaxing. Mind you, I do sneak away at times to the typewriter, but it is a temptation I try to fight.

My greatest effort at relaxing comes with my summer holiday. I fly towards the sun and there I really and truly forget about work. In a small village just by the Med., I don't even think of "Gang Shows," and for two or three weeks I live in a new world. Not alone the three boys are there. But I'm away from the 'phone, away from letters, and away from the piano and the typewriter. We see and talk of other things. Yes, I do relax at times.

But from the moment of return it's a case of "back to the grind," and hardly have I unpacked before Tommy rings from I.H.Q. to warn me, "I've got to have that new sketch for the second act by tomorrow, and don't forget. Mick Barker wants the extra verse for the music, it has to be in the printer's hands by Monday." So the reins are taken up again, it's the bath-thinking all over again, and the car-driving for more ideas.

Thank goodness they seem to come. But they wouldn't if I hadn't been blessed with an imaginative mind and a screwy brain for seeing the idiotic side of things. The typewriter gets a new ribbon, the pencils are re-sharpened, and begin again to write and destroy, to rewrite and to keep new ideas of sketches, mimes, and songs for the continuation of our show. It is our show, it belongs to no one person or one city, not even one Movement, because the Boys' Clubs and several other youth organisations are now using the same material we first put into the window of the "Gang Shows."

There is no set rule as to how this material is written, there is no suggestion I can make and no advice I can give to those who would wish to compose their own "book and music." It is just hardwork and perhaps, above all else, good editing.

Looking back, it really is astounding how many individual personalities have been responsible for items I have written, personalities who are tied up completely with the finished article. Maybe it is not so surprising that when I'm

sitting on my own I remember the boys who made these songs and the sketches, and for that matter, the plays too.

Dink Rew figures higher on this list than anyone else. "Bing," "The Regiment Entertains," "Angus McDonald," "One Man Show," and so many other items would never have seen the light of day had it not been for this great bloke. Jack Beet was responsible for "Mrs. Sunbeam," "The Amateurs Present," and to me, anyway, the best sketch we have ever had, "Dress Rehearsal."

It was Jack and Tinny who created the almost immortal "Twizzle Sisters." Yet it is to the inspiration one youngster can bring that the vast majority of these things came into being. Bob Winter, of Clapham (not Len Snelling), first gave me the idea of "Boy Scout," but it is to Len's lasting glory that he brought to life the original Boy in that pageant. To Len does go the credit for the mime, "His Majesty the King," and no one will touch him in that particular part. One of the most used and-best loved of them all came from Syd Palmer, "We're Four Little Fellers wot's Doing our Best to Fill up a Gap in the Programme." Can there be a Scout show anywhere which hasn't at some time used this number? I think not.

Pete Bessel and Georgie Jordon can take a bow for "Love, Love, Love." These two grand lads from St. Pancras gave me the idea not intentionally, but in one of their unguarded moments. And though he doesn't know it—until this moment the idea for "Over the Garden Wall" came to me just by chatting to Barry Summerfield.

It was Bill Bannister and his enthusiasm for dancing that helped me to write "Stepping Out," and, because of something he once said to me, Phil Davis gave me a hunch that eventually resulted in "Books." I could go on and on for, when I think back on it, few ideas came to me without prompting, and the prompters were inevitably among my pals. Bless 'em all.

One of the nicest things I enjoy is when a youngster comes along and introduces me to his girl friend. I'm sorry for Scoutmasters who aren't too happy about what they like to call "The girl problem." There is no such thing as a "Girl problem," and a Scouter is a fool who doesn't realise that a girl can be as good an influence to a boy as he can.

The whole secret is to see that it is brought out into the open. If a Scoutmaster makes a friend of the girl, the boy will stay in the Troop. It is only when a boy becomes shy about these things that one has to worry, and most times this is caused solely because he imagines his Skipper will resent it. If I worry at all, it's about the Scouters who haven't got girl friends.

Dinky Rew introduced me to his girl-friend when he was nine (I don't advocate this as the starting age), but the same girl is now his wife and the mother of three of the most adorable children I know. I'm a great believer in keeping in with the girl-friend, and when a boy introduces you to her it shows his confidence in you and his respect for the GIRL. "His respect for the girl" are the operative words.

Too many men in charge of our Troops today forget the boys are in a Scout Troop, and think they are in a monastery. It's our job to help a boy in his life, not to live it for him. A Scouter is in a glass house surrounded by boys with gimlet eyes. Those boys can see right through you, and don't ever make a mistake about that. You can fool yourself quicker than you can fool a boy, so don't try it—because you'll come out on the wrong side of the argument! It is no good "sitting on a fence" with a boy, because if you do you'll spend the rest of

your life mending it. Few boys let you down; it is just that you didn't manage to rise to the occasion. Hey, I'd better stop. I'm beginning to preach

But it has done no harm, I hope, to lay before you some of the ideas I believe in and which have proved not entirely unsuccessful in my Scouting life. It is these self-same ideas that I have used to effect in all "Gang Show" dealings. Again I repeat, it's the same technique I employed when I was running a Troop; as I still use in the Troop which is called the "Gang Show." If a "Gang Show" is not a Scout Troop it is nothing.

It simply boils down to this the "Gang Show" spirit is nothing more or less than the Scout spirit. We just direct it along another channel, and it becomes an important channel because through it we reach a host of people who would not otherwise realise it. That's why it is so vital for all producers to keep before them all the time that this entertainment side of our activity is just that another Scouting activity. If I keep on about this I'm not apologising, because I regard it as the paramount thing to remember. Our job is to bring Scouting to every member of the public. We can do this with our shows, so let them be Scout shows.

Yes, human nature supplies a tremendous amount of ideas for me, so maybe after all, if I can leave you would-be writers with a thought, let it be this, keep your eyes and ears open.

A final story to end this chapter. A certain critic of mine never missed an opportunity of telling a story against me so I wrote a skit about him. He saw the sketch and afterwards he came to me and said, "That was a terrific sketch, you know, and it's true too. There are people like that." I looked him in the face and replied, "Really? How did you find out?"

Since writing this last chapter I have been up to Scotland, and there saw the Glasgow Scout and Guide Exhibition. It was the greatest of its kind that there had ever been, and I brought back with me a load of ideas that will one day form the backbone of future sketches for our show.

I have written elsewhere of the difficulty in getting a snappy line for the blackout of a sketch, but I was handed one right on a plate by a young Scottish Scout while wandering around the exhibition. I happened to be looking at the Scout bookstall, and there on the counter were also some song-albums of mine. On the cover of one of these was a photograph of myself taken many MANY years ago. In fact it made me look quite youthful.

The fourteen-year-old behind the counter looked for a moment or two at the photograph and then he looked sadly into my face. He shook his head and in the broadest of broad Scots accents he said, "Mon, ye must have lived a terrible life." I'm going to use that one day for the "tag" line in a sketch. Thanks, son.

# 10

## *Rehearsing the Show*

AFTER producing the same show for twenty-five years I guess I am as well qualified as anyone to give a straight talk to present and future "Gang Show" producers.

Let me tell you straight away I am not going to beat about the bush. What I have to say has been proven and there can be no contradiction to the statement that though flowering branches prosper and grow on the "Gang Show" tree, the roots that feed and nourish the branches are strongly earthed in the London production. From these roots flow the material and ideas that decorate so well the off-springs. How then do I treat these "Gang Show" rehearsals?

The "Gang Show" is another name for a Troop. And, what's more, a Scouting Troop. Its members have been loaned by Skippers over a large area, and because of the co-operation of these Skippers, their boys come into another Troop headed by myself. Therefore, first and foremost, I have a duty to the Scoutmasters who loan me their boys. Because of this, each rehearsal-night must be run exactly as one would run a Troop night. There must be a Beginning, a Middle Part, and an Ending.

We start at seven p.m. We start at seven p.m. Not a minute past, but at seven. As each boy turns up for rehearsal he comes straight over to me, and shakes hands.

He never leaves a rehearsal without coming to me, shaking hands, and saying "Good night." My reason for this is that I will not have any member of the Gang (or my Troop) sneaking in or out of a rehearsal. To commence a rehearsal (or a Troop meeting) on time is essential, and any good Scouter will admit it. It teaches the boys the necessity of promptness. Usually I have an early call for a few boys, perhaps in a sketch or a special number, so that even when the remainder arrive a few minutes before the time to start the evening, they see we are already at it.

This shows those who come in that we have action and that we mean business. If a boy comes in late, which sometimes is not avoidable, he still comes over in front of all the others and shakes hands with me. Even if I am talking to a visitor the same thing happens. I tell my chaps that if it be an important visitor I am talking to then that makes it more important that he comes straight to me, and says "Hello." It makes him important and it impresses the stranger.

On the dot of seven I cease whatever I am doing and start the rehearsal "proper" with everyone on the floor. (This is as one would start every Troop meeting with a "Fall in.") So we begin as in the Troop room with a mass formation.

Now comes the task that every Scouter would have prepared prior to his Troop meeting or in this case, his rehearsal. No good Scoutmaster (or producer) will go to a meeting without having laid out on paper every minute of the evening's programme. This takes a lot of time beforehand, but it is the job of the

man in charge. Too many Troops suffer from lack of this—too many shows lack enthusiasm for the same reason.

When I make up my programme for the night's work, I see to it that everyone is used. You cannot allow three or four Patrols to be unattended whilst you concentrate for a long period on a special section, so I arrange to spend so much time on each particular item and then have a concerted one. Thus I bring every member of the outfit into constant play, and this prevents any single fellow getting bored. Boredom is frustration for many a good Scout, but we ensure that none is lost through lack of planning for the evening's programme.

Take this tip from me. If you can send your boys away from the Troop meeting or from a rehearsal, whacked out, he'll crawl away fagged—but happy. I learned this very early in my career when one evening, as a boy came to me to say good night, I asked him, "Enjoyed yourself, son?" He said, "Yessir, I'm aching in every limb, but roll on next Thursday." Each evening has to be a joy-night, and when you accomplish that, you will never lose a boy. So, let's recap on the beginning of a rehearsal!

Start on time; prepare every moment of the evening's work; make your boys greet you and meet you before they 'go, and, no matter how many setbacks you may have to your prepared plans, never lose your temper..

No man loses his temper except when he doesn't know what to do. Nobody realises when you are stumped quicker than a boy. So never be slap happy about your preparations. Sure, you'll have a busy life, sure it'll be often difficult to find time to get every thing laid out, but, remember B.P. and his words of wisdom when he said, "Never say you haven't enough time you have all the time there is." It's just a case, gentlemen, of having to fit it all in. If you are a Good Scouter or a Good Producer, you'll make the time. If you can't apply the word "Good" to yourself, don't take on the job. Now for the Middle Part of the evening.

There must obviously be a "high-spot," again as there should be at every Troop meeting. The middle part of the rehearsals is the right time for a "highspot." I always plan to start a new ensemble somewhere in the middle of the evening. This adds an effervescence not only to those who are selected for the item, but also to those who are watching. It creates a new, sudden interest. I would never attempt to stage the entire number at one go, because this way you would be unable to use the "Watchers." I endeavour to take it to the first major spot, and then leave it for the next rehearsal. Then back to the boys who have been, as it were, on the touchline.

You'll often have absentees through various reasons, but I never shall believe in having "reserves." Even if a boy is absent through illness in the actual show, I would not put anyone in his place unless of course it was in a sketch or a leading part of the number. If he is just one of the chorus, I like to be able to go along and tell him that there is a vacant place in the show which can't be filled until he gets back. It makes a youngster feel good, and, let's face it, that's what Scouting and "Gang Shows" are for. (One couldn't do this in a professional show, but don't, please don't ever allow professional or amateur acting technique to enter into a "Gang Show." After all, if a boy is ill, and not with his Patrol, would you put another chap in his place? Would you? I can't emphasise enough the vital necessity of Scouting technique' in the "Gang Show." It is not the Turnup Laundry's Amateur Society, it is a Scouting Activity! Don't be afraid of" tricks"

if they are for the good of the boy. Let me tell you of one" trick "I used when we did the first edition of Boy Scout at the Albert Hall.

I was rather worried about having over a thousand boys running around in the rabbit-warrens underneath that spacious building, and I was equally determined that I would rely on the boys themselves to get from dressing-rooms to the various entrances without having "Marshals" and "Guides" with armlets on their arms to superintend.

I was likewise determined that no boy would miss an entrance. So I hand-picked a young boy from each dressing-room and took them out to tea. This is what I said to them. "Now, boys, I am going to put you in complete charge of your room. You will be the boss. There will be grown men as well as chaps your age in that room, but you will be the last to leave when you are called for an appearance; you will be the last to leave the hall at night and see that everything is tidy; and you will be responsible that no one in your room will miss an entrance. But if any single person in your room finds out that you are the boss, I shall ask you to leave the show."

Not one failed me they never will if you give them a reason and a responsibility, for a boy can rise to the occasion far more frequently than some of us older men.

I have told you about this incident because I want to impress on you the "thinking" that is necessary for all producers, and Scouters. After all, you've taken on a job, to be true to yourself, and you must be true also to the boy and give him credit for being able to rise to an occasion. Fear not, he will

So, in "Gang Show" rehearsals, and in the show, don't be afraid of good "tricks" but see that they are scouting ones.

Every dressing-room in the London Gang Show is a named Patrol. I don't mind what crazy names they call themselves, but they are a Patrol and each dressing-room elects its own P.L. (In many cases this has been the youngest boy in the room, and often he has a couple of Commissioners under him. This is good for the Commissioners.) Two years ago on the door of one room I saw a notice which read, "The Four R's." When I asked what it meant I was told " Ralph Reader's Ruddy Rabble." Not a posh title, but it caused plenty of healthy amusement, and that all helps toward" Spirit."

Only this last year the smaller boys of one dressing-room created a cult called "The Oomphs."

They made spiders from pipe-cleaners, and as each one was admitted to the clan they were presented with a spider. This ran right through the theatre, back and front, and it was a proud moment for everyone of us when we had been admitted to "The Oomph's." Our musical director even found one on his baton one evening when he raised it for the Overture. He had been accepted. The idea spread also to Glasgow, but, being Glasgow, they called it the "MacOomphs." I remember well the night Lord and Lady Mountbatten came to the show. They spoke to the boys and then came into our room, and, being impressed by the youngsters in a certain number, asked if they could meet them. (These were the boys who had started the "Oomphs.'~) They must have been very impressed by Lady Mountbatten, for when she went to pick up her handbag to go back to see the second half of the show she spied a spider on her bag. She had been elected.

Ideas like this are good for morale, and they should be encouraged. Trust the boys to think them up. On the other hand never allow "rags to take place in

the hall or theatre where the show is being held. Remember at all times we are guests there. As long as the fun has an honest dignity, all's well, but ragging NO!

So, getting back to the rehearsal room, let's remember that the Middle Part should be something new, something that brings in most of the boys, and that it should not be too lengthy an affair.

Now for the last half-hour. More Scouts have been lost to the Movement because of an unattractive last half-hour at a Troop Meeting than we would care to admit. More shows have been ruined because of the closing half-hour and more rehearsals have foundered because of this than for any other reason. You must send your boys out longing for the next rehearsal. How then is it done? I'll try to tell you how I do it.

I make it exciting. Not only do I use this period for either the first-act finale (where one uses all the boys) or we rehearse the finale where likewise everyone is on the floor. What's more, I keep back one special tit-bit of news for my second-in-command to tell the boys, something they can take away with them.

Maybe it's about a special guest who will be attending the show; perhaps about the sale of tickets: or we show them a brand new costume which will enthuse them. I never let them go without pulling something "out of the bag" as a tonic for the evening's work. Don't say that is a difficult thing to do . . . it isn't. True it needs thinking about and a little planning beforehand, but, when all is said and done, that is the job of the Skipper in charge.

It is always a good plan to make the boys know it is not a one man affair. They like to know that even the producer (or Scouter) cannot work single handed, and it is only fair to give your second or third-in-command an opportunity of giving the boys some special bit of news because it makes the henchmen important. I never fail to bring every assistant into the limelight at all times because it is just as vital to make the backstage boys into a unit as the performers. But more of the behind-the-scene-workers later.

Usually I hold back one or two of the older members for a special item, but I do make sure that the younger lads are sent home at a reasonable hour. And what is more (and read this, you producers, over and over again) I do not see my "Gang Show" boys on any other night of the week.

I believe in rehearsing them only one night a week. They only belong to you for that time: the rest of the week their loyalty is to their Group and to their parents.

Home-work and their own Scouting must come before any extra calls on their services. No Scoutmaster likes to think his boys are being taken out here and there by some adoring producer who happens to take a fancy to them. It is unfair to the Scouter who has loaned you the boy and it is unfair to the boy to be carted here and there and then, after the show has ended, to find himself "lost," with nothing but the humdrum existence of hi~ own Troop night and a routine kind of life. Be fair to his Scoutmaster.

I am very proud of the fact that throughout the years we have never had one complaint from a Scoutmaster that his boy had been taken from him through being in a "Gang Show." I endeavour to get the Scouter along to a rehearsal so that he can see, firstly, exactly how his boy is handled, and secondly, the company he is keeping while he is a member of the Gang. Moreover, if a boy, returning to his Troop after a show, does not improve in his Scouting, he never comes back into the show.

Another thing; we have as you know the special" Gang Show's scarf. If a boy dares to wear this scarf in his own Troop room in favour of his own scarf I tell his Skipper to take it from him and send it back to me. Then I can see the boy, and explain to him the prior importance of his own Group neckerchief.

These things create an acuteness of "spirit" which can never be rivalled, and it proves to all and sundry how we realise the application of the Second Scout Law to the Scouter whose boy has been loaned to us. It likewise creates Tradition.

In the London show we now have nine boys and their fathers, their fathers having been in the show when they were boys and now bring their sons to join us.

That could not happen if ours were not a Scouting activity. Let me give you an instance of how a Skipper, knowing these traditions of our London show, can react when a boy of his is selected. I never ask a boy to be in the "Gang Show." If I see a chap who looks a likely bloke, I get from him the name of his Skipper. Then I write personally to him, and ask his opinion and permission. I explain to him exactly what would be entailed and also ask him to see the boy's parents. Up to that time the boy has no idea that he is being sought after.

When those two permissions have been granted it is the Skipper who then asks the boy. If he says "Yes," and they usually do, the Skipper writes me and then I write to the boy—but never before. Well, when we were doing Boy Scout I spotted a boy I liked the look of. I got hold of the Skipper: he did the "rounds," and we got him. About two nights later I spotted another boy and to my amazement I found he came from the same Troop. (I didn't realise this before, as this second boy was in the choir of the Albert Hall show and they all wore the same scarf—you're right, I didn't spot his Troop tag on his shirt!)

Anyway, I spoke to his Skipper again and to my dismay he said, "Well, Ralph, that's going to be expensive." I thought he meant about the fares, and so on, for the other lad -and I agreed with him. But then he said, "Oh, it's not that, mate. You see, we've never had a boy in the" Gang Show" before, and when you asked Alex, the others were so darned pleased that they gave him a party. Now we shall have to do it for Andy." That, gentlemen, is "Spirit," and a super acknowledgment of what a place in the "Gang Show" means to a Skipper who knows and appreciates the ideals we try to hold in our London show.

I hope I have explained in these few paragraphs how to run a rehearsal by planning everything beforehand and how to "programme" the events of the evening so that no member can have the remotest chance of becoming bored. These notes, too, should give you an inkling of how we have created through this method, the pride, spirit, and enthusiasm that becomes a "Gang Show" bloke. It is the old Game in practice, the old Game of Scouting. It's all up to the Scouter or, in this case, the producer. It is his planning, his preparedness, and his example that provides the dynamo for running the outfit, and he must know his job. All right then let's find out what his job is.

## 11

### *Producing the Show*

I AM often asked just what is the producer's job? I Now, this is a tough one: and you must forgive me if, by the very nature of things, my reply likes the personal note. But here goes.

When I stand out front at Golders Green Hippodrome and watch the boys on the stage, listen to the roars of laughter and applause rolling up from the audience, and see the gusto and the polish coming over the footlights, I know you'll understand if I admit to glowing a little with pride and satisfaction. The audiences seem to share my reaction and many times people have come over to me and told me how lucky I was to have such a bunch with me. As if I needed telling

Without reservation, I agree one hundred per cent, for, believe me, nobody is quite as aware of this as I am. Those boys are my life, my very LIFE, and in my screwy way I kid myself that they belong to me. Because of that, I am beset with worries.

I HAVE to turn out material worthy of them; I HAVE to write new songs for them to sing; I HAVE to think out new ideas all the time, every day of my life; to be ready in plenty of time for the first rehearsal of the new show. The more successful one item is in THIS year's show, that much harder it becomes to try to top it for the following year. So I have to think—think—THINK!

All the same, to most people our annual show is looked upon as a big production, and so it is—as a theatre production anyway. For that reason I take great care in the "mob" scenes to see that each man taking part is not merely one insignificant "extra" on a packed stage but a definite personality. As indeed he is.

I never allow anyone to participate in only two items as the opening and the finale, say, because this cannot be good for morale. Nothing, indeed, is worse for morale than for a boy to have "nothing to do."

All tight, then—it's up to me to see that he is used as often as possible. It's up to me to MAKE a place for him in various (is items so that he doesn't sit in the dressing-room for an hour on end and watch the other more fortunate (or talented) chaps getting all the breaks.

That is why I always write at least two "crowd" scenes in each act excluding, that is, the opening and finale.

I am often asked how I manage to control and handle such big crowds. I DON'T KNOW. I do know I can take no credit for being able to do this. It is simply a gift God gave, to me and I thank Him for also providing me with the opportunities to use it. The truth is that once I see a crowd in front of me, I see a picture in my mind so clearly that at once I can tell each person where to go, how to stand, and what to do. He understands me perfectly and just does it. It's as easy as that.

On the other hand I DO take a bit of credit for knowing instinctively when I am wrong. I feel I can take credit for this because this is the result of years of experience—some of it bitter.

Once, after a matinee in Newark, New Jersey, I was sacked because I couldn't do a dance step properly. I went back to my room and I fought that step for hours until my ankles were swollen and painful. I didn't get the job back, but

I got that step, even though I had to leave my "digs" because of the noise I made practising.

Jack Mason (one of the best dance directors in America) once hit me across the face because I funkied doing a leg-leap. Then he stayed behind and worked with me for an hour on my own, explaining to me the rights and the wrongs of tackling a new step. I stayed alone on that darkened stage for another two hours working it out for myself. I was so exhausted I couldn't even walk to the stage door: I slept on the stage with a "prop" rock for a bed.

But I was getting expetience. It quickened my brain until I knew almost in an instant what was good and what was bad. So, when I am staging a big ensemble item in "The Gang Show," something inside me "clicks" when I begin to watch it take shape and that "click" tells me whether I am on or off the beam.

Some evenings I get home from rehearsals on top of the world. At other times when a sketch hasn't turned out as I hoped well, it just means either rewriting it, or scrapping it and starting again. So often, there begins another quest for an idea—and now there simply is no time, for the show may well be only~ a couple of weeks away.

Luckily, I'm not one to go to the bottle for inspiration. But the old routine starts up, and I walk; I lie down; I drive, and I THINK! Indeed, this very thing happened when I was preparing the 1956 "Gang Show." I had written a sketch for Dink Rew, Syd Palmer, and Don Werts. It was to be the first comedy sketch in the show, and oh! how important those first laughs are ! We read through the lines and they just weren't right.

I hand it to those three fellows. I have never met, professionally or otherwise, three quicker brains who can sum up a sketch as speedily as they can. We sat down and suggested every conceivable type of situation that might be better.

Finally we got around to a suggestion of three old girls waiting in a laundrette for their washing to be done. The three boys thought this might be what was wanted. I said I thought so, too, but apparently I said it without much conviction, because Syd chirped up: "Mate, you ain't kidding me when we get the new script, whatever else it's about, it won't be about laundrettes

When they'd gone I put my coat on and walked. It was a cold night and I turned from Swiss Cottage into Finchley Road. I didn't know or care where I was, I just had to get an idea. Well, it was after three o'clock in the morning when I got back into the house—without a single hope of an idea. Wearily I got undressed and made myself a cup of Ovaltine and took it in to the bedroom. As I was getting into bed my eyes wandered to the table where I had put the cup of cheer. There was a picture postcard which had come only that morning from one of the boys who had been to Southend. It was one of those comedy pictures of an old girl enjoying herself on the beach. THAT WAS IT ! I rushed into the" den " and tore into a script of three old characters enjoying themselves paddling in the sea. "That's how "BY THE BRINY" came to be written. When I got back to the bedroom my hot drink had frozen, but I didn't even see it until the morning. All I knew was that I had written the right sketch for those three lads. I glanced at the clock as I went to put the light out: six minutes past five!

Another permanent headache is the constant search for new faces and new talent. In each programme we always feature a couple of numbers played either in song or skit by half a dozen smallish boys. Naturally I spend a great deal of time training them and polishing their performance. Invariably these

youngsters make a smash hit with the audience. But within two years they have a habit of growing up, and another bunch of new recruits must take over. This means that I have always to be on the alert for a new boy with that "something" about him which hints at the kind of talent I want.

This "looking" has now become second-nature to me, and I never go anywhere without keeping an eye open for a likely lad. They are not easily found and even when I do spot a candidate I am often disappointed. He may look right and he may speak right, but he cannot sing a single note! Sometimes when he is just right I find that because of schooling, exams, living too far away, or, perhaps, for some domestic reason, he is not available.

This search goes on every day of the year because the "stables" of the cast must be kept filled and there is no safety unless there are at least three or four new boys lined up and ready to step in when the others go up "to the big boys." I get many "tips" from the veterans of our outfit. They have rescued me time and time again, but even so, there is no rest from the quest and, having set ourselves a pretty high standard, it's up to me to go on looking, finding—and hoping.

The most fatal thing of all for a producer—need I say it—is to lose his temper. Most certainly at times I raise my voice in no mean way, but I never go "off my head." There's an answer to this one—I happen to be very devoted to the boys. I both want and need their respect, and I just cannot take the chance of losing it by making a fool of myself.

Strangely enough this doesn't call for a great amount of effort on my part, because I make a point of spending a lot of time on my own before attending a rehearsal, and thus know exactly what I want to do. The cast realises that I am sure of myself and when a man is sure of himself he doesn't lose his temper. My problem is finding time for this planning.

With professional commitments during the day, and professional rehearsals going on until half an hour before the Gang rehearsal, there is only one possible period to get down to the planning of the rehearsal and that is during the very late hours of the night. Odd moments are useless: "it's a sit down job and a concentrated one. Invariably this is done in the kitchen with the kettle on and plenty of tea in the pot.

I find it my best time to concentrate, because the telephone rarely rings and all respectable people are in bed

All the same this is when the clock moves fastest. I sit down around midnight, get cracking on my rehearsal schedule—and often minutes I discover it's four o'clock. I've sometimes tried to work some of these plans out in bed, but without success. You see I am apt to drop off to sleep and wake in the morning with the light still on and the sheets covered in ink!

Nonetheless this preparation is an essential, because when I meet the boys I know exactly what I am going to do, and so there is no need to "blow up." I never blame the boys for not doing something right: it must be my own fault for not explaining it to them properly. I am sure you understand what I mean.

I have to admit it, I am a sentimentalist. When for some reason or the other I have to take a boy out of a number and replace him by one of his pals, I have to screw up my courage before I can get the words out. This is one of the problems all producers have to face, and being ruthless doesn't come as easy to

me as it does to some. But it's a decision I have to take, and it is good training for the boy and for me.

The show must come first with the rarest of rare exceptions. I add this because there have been one or two instances when I refused point blank to withdraw a boy from a number, because I thought it would hurt the boy too much.

With the older members of the cast this situation doesn't exist. Only this year Phil Davis, one of our original members, was taken out of one of the chief sketches because I believed another man would give a better performance. Not only did Phil come straight up to me and tell me I was right, but Don Werts, who went into his part immediately, went up to Phil to apologise. Phil broke into a roar of laughter and said to Don, "Don't worry about that, Don, the 'old man' feels worse than either of us." He did, too!

This is why I am so proud of the Gang; this is why I can take the worry and accept the problems; and because of this spirit I can somehow keep awake at night and still find time during the day to turn out the material for the next programme. There is no finer example in the world of Scouting than the example of the boys and the spirit that flows through every member of our red scarf Gang. That is why I can sing so happily, "I wouldn't change for a man with a million, for I've got a million blessings more."

And every blessing stands for a boy who is in or has been in "The Gang Show."

It has been said that a producer is a man who stands at the back of the theatre on opening nights and wishes he were dead. I heartily agree.

There is nothing more harrowing than the frustration of being able to do nothing, having to leave everything to those on- and back-stage, and just watch and hope. I have walked miles during these terrible sessions, and never am I more worried than on "Gang Show" openings.

There is, of course, a reason for this. It will be the first time the sketches have been tried out on the public and there is always the possibility that one or two of them will not get over. Realising that if two or three had to be changed at once, and that there was no hope of getting the cast next day for rehearsals, it creates a feeling of anxiety and suspense.

I've stood at the side of the theatre watching some of our opening nights, with sweat pouring off my brow—just in case! On the credit side, only once have we had to take a sketch out after the initial performance, and this was way back in 1933. We were fortunate, because Eric Christmas happened to be in the cast and he had a very amusing monologue up his sleeve which he ha'd used in one of the Holborn shows. We put that in, and saved the day.

But one day perhaps we may not be so fortunate and I shall stand, sweat, and see three or four of the items going "down the sink." What will happen then is your guess as well as mine! But save a kind thought for a poor helpless director who faces the Ordeal by Opening Night, powerless, and feeling very much alone. I do assure you, he needs your sympathy. Things are all right when they are all right, but you never know that until it is all over. Only the ones who cannot know, tell you they do, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred these people are the very ones who have been content to look on.

Reward comes, though, when a sketch you hope will succeed does so, even beyond your expectations. This, praise be, has happened quite a few times. In 1955," Cinema, 1955 " turned out to be much, much stronger than I had dreamed possible; but this I believe was chiefly due to the brilliant way it was

played by those three fine artists, Dink Rew, Syd Palmer, and Don Werts. I have never seen them do anything better. Another occasion so long ago now was when the "urchins" did "The Road to Rome." I remember when young Smith walked on, all four feet of him, dressed as Nero, the house rocked for about two minutes. His opening line, "Where's my fiddle?" almost demanded an encore. Yet the eternal sinking feeling which they say causes ulcers never leaves the producer, and who can blame him if he often asks himself, "Is it worth it?" After a long, long time, my answer is "Yes."

A producer is a person who knows a pathway and takes his cast along it without once treading on the grass. He can only do this by knowing every inch of the trail along which they will travel. And that trail is no simple one.

It is full of pitfalls which are seldom evident unless they have been discovered either by bitter experience or from the words of someone who is a specialist in that job. So here and now (speaking from my experience) let me tell you what you are up against.

Criticism, no matter what you do! This will come from people in all walks of life—SELDOM FROM A FELLOW-PRODUCER WHO knows his job. It usually springs from those who have done but little of the big things they revile. From unconsciously disappointed people who would give their ears to be doing just one small part of the job you have in hand. If you have overheard as many conversations as I have about the way it should have been done, well, unless you are blessed with either a thick skin or a great sense of humour you would give up right away. Luckily, I think, I have both these qualities. Up to a point!

I cannot truthfully say they never have an effect on me, because that just wouldn't be correct. But I have learned to treat them with a certain amount of disrespect which is their due. At lunch, three and four times a week, especially when the "Gang Show" is on, I have listened to some of the most inane remarks by these so-called experts which would make one feel the easiest way out was to jump off the roof. This I never intend to do.

There is usually such an obvious answer to their criticism, and it is only hidden from them because of their complete inexperience. Nobody in the world talks show-business and uses "pro" quotations as much as those who are not in the profession. It is rather like the untrained watcher in the stands bawling at the players on the field, telling them what they should do. So I would suggest right away that you steel yourself to ignore the back-chat and the tittle-tattle which comes back to you from well-meaning friends and get on with your job.

By no means do I suggest that you do not want criticism, we all do, but do, I beg you, get it from someone who has the authority to give it. I've had over thirty years now of producing nearly everything except a circus. Revue, musical comedy, straight plays such as Pilgrim's Progress at Covent Garden, and pantomime for good measure, and I still have plenty to learn. Plenty. But I refuse to allow anyone minus this experience to influence me one bit.

When I want advice, when I want to learn something, I go to somebody whom I believe in. So Mr. (or Miss) Producer, whatever advice you may need, get it from someone who has had plenty of first-hand practice at putting on shows, and turn a deaf ear to the "twitterers" who talk too much and are not one-quarter' as qualified as you are for the job in band. So, first on the list, toughen yourself!

Secondly, read well the directions and even memorise the words written about production on every sketch you intend to stage. Nine times out of ten the

author knows best, simply because he knows exactly what he is writing about. Therefore pay him the compliment he has given you in allowing you to perform his material, and do not change a word or a line of "business" in his play.

How many of you realise that by law you are not allowed to alter one single sentence in a script? Speaking particularly of "Gang Show" material, every page of the script has been passed by the Lord Chamberlain. And every page has been stamped by his office. Yes, every page.

It is, therefore, just as important not to delete a line as it is to add one. You can be summoned if you do this and the author has a cast-iron case against you which he cannot lose. Some of you may wonder why a deletion is against the Law. Let me tell you. Several years ago some astute, small-time producers made a practice of sending out to the Lord Chamberlain's office certain scripts for very small-time revues. They worded them so that when certain lines were deleted, the continuation would take on an entirely different meaning, and usually this meant that the joke then would be a very "blue" one.

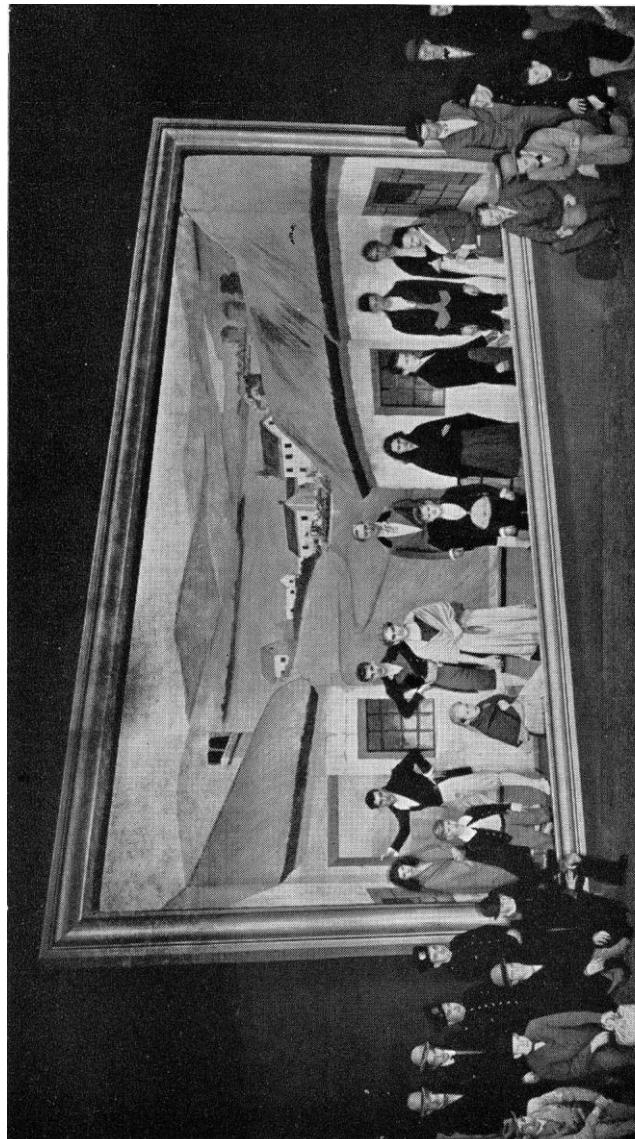
They had not added one single word on the page, and the page was stamped (as they all are), but by deleting certain passages there came a double meaning to the script, an implication which would be appreciated by the less high-minded members of the audience.

This was soon found out, and the Law was altered to allow for such a practice. So be warned, everyone, never tamper with a "Gang Show" script, innocent though it might appear to you.

If you only knew how, by adding one big laugh in a script, you may well lose the next three. If only you could see me at times, walking the bedroom as I go over line after line in a sketch, just to Cut out one word to get the right rhythm to tone down a speech to get the right effect at a needed spot if you could see this, and get to know the hours and hours of hard grind I put in before I am satisfied with it, I am sure you never again would foul around with "Gang Show" sketches.

A while ago I went to see a certain Scout play I had written. It was produced by a man who had considerable experience with the local amateur dramatic society. When I saw the play I was amazed to find out that he had taken out one scene and completely altered the text of another. I got him in a corner after the show and asked why he had done this. His explanation was that for the benefit of his Group he thought it would be wiser to change the locale completely. Then I said to him, 'What was the last play you produced for your society? He told me, "Emlyn Williams' Night Must Fall." Said I, "But that locale was in Wales. Did you change that?" He then answered me with the complete answer I had been searching for for years. "Oh, no, we didn't alter THAT script, you see, we had to pay for it." Dear, dear me So please stick to the script and rehearse the exits and entrances exactly as they are given you. They have all been worked out and proved before you get hold of them. And please don't forget that bit about going against the Law. One day I might get cross and start something. A producer's position is Head Man. He is the one person to whom everyone with a problem will come: he will be expected to know the answer to every question from the size of a "prop" to the colour of a gelatine. So it means that taking on 'such a job calls for a great deal of swotting. Nothing brings more confidence to a team than the team being confident that their boss knows his job. Once a producer gets complete faith from his cast and backstage colleagues he is halfway home. But only halfway. The ultimate result naturally is the success of the show itself. Therefore, let's check up on the pitfalls that a good producer

should be aware of and know how to dodge. One of the most supreme tests of any show is its construction. A lot of people imagine a revue to be nothing more than a string of sketches, songs, and mimes lined up together in any haphazard order. Nothing is further from the truth. I change the running order of the "Gang Show" time and time again before I get near rehearsal—time, so that each item is in its allotted place, and calculated to build up to a big overall effect. At times I wilfully put in a skit which may not be a strong one because the next item is to be a smash. But time and time again, though people have seen the London show, they take all the items and then juggle them around so that the eventual lay out is nothing like the original. When I tell them about this their usual reply is, "Well, we are doing everything you did." True enough, but they were not done in the correct order. Let me explain it this way. A man builds a house. He is an experienced builder and the house looks fine. Along comes somebody else who wants to build the same house, and is given the plans exactly as the house stands. But when the new man gets down to building his house he decides that he won't follow the original blue print. What happens? The windows are placed where the chimney should be, the front door is on the roof and the bedrooms somewhere in the backyard. Everyone can admire each of these departments, but standing back from the whole thing, it is nothing like the original house. See what I mean? If you accept the plans of a construction (and all good revues are just this), for goodness' sake erect it as it was intended to be erected. After all, nine times out of ten you have seen the original finished article, so why muck it up? Of course the always-ready answer to any of my criticisms is that "So-and-so" couldn't make the change. That, if you will forgive me for saying so, is rot. It is far more professional to keep to the original construction and place your actors within that frame, than to fit the actors into a jig-saw puzzle which will always have several bits left out of place. Forgive me again if I side-track a moment to tell you a story which at least is amusing to me on this construction business, because it is rarely accepted even among the keenest enthusiasts of shows. During the later rehearsals one year, I felt that a change in the running order was needed because the show was not "rising" as I wanted it to.

*Archie Handford*

“Homeward Bound,” 1956

I knew there was something amiss with my lay-out. I sat down after the boys had gone and must have looked a trifle bothered. One of the senior boys Laurence Nelson, came to me and said, “I don’t know why you worry your inside out you know darn well it’s going to be all right.” I smiled at him and left it at that. But I knew it would not be as I wanted it unless I had a brainwave. Home I went and sat up until four in the morning, testing item after item, juggling them around in an endeavour to get the flow and the punch in the needed places. Nothing would come, so at last I tried to get some sleep. The entire week that followed, whether at work, driving the car, or eating my dinner, only one thought was in my mind. (I’ll make a confession now that I have never told anyone. I left the Palace Theatre after a session with a new London musical I was producing, to go home to Norbury. I got in the car obsessed only about the running-order of the “Gang Show.” I suddenly became aware that I was in unfamiliar surroundings, and to my horror I found myself in the East End of London. I had driven there quite unconscious of where I was driving, simply because I was thinking only of the next approaching rehearsal and that I hadn’t got what I wanted.) However, that very night I had a brainwave. I reorganised the programme, had new lists made out, and at the beginning of the next

rehearsal-night I told the boys to watch out as the running order had been changed. I was nearly sweating with anticipation, keeping my fingers crossed and almost praying that I had done the trick. Before half the evening was over I knew I had. The anxiety and the work of that week had been worth it, for I knew I had at long last the right construction for the new programme. At the end of the rehearsals, everyone felt they were taking part in an almost new show, so well had the rehearsal gone. Over came Laurence Nelson to me and said, "There you are, you twirp, I told you not to worry." But if I hadn't, You cannot constantly keep rising in a programme—you would exhaust your audience so there must be moments when you stay on the same level to allow breathing space and to give an added weight to the punch that follows. Remember, it's nice to climb higher and higher up a stairway to the top, but it's also nice to pause for a moment in the middle to get your breath. Then, with renewed energy you can go on to the heights. So it is with a revue lay-out. I wonder how many of you have ever thought of it in this way?



A. W. Hurll, C.B.E.

SOME OF THE  
“GANG SHOW”  
PERSONALITIES



Mrs. Kitty Lydell



Levi Molineaux



John Stiles



Marshall Amor



Tommy Thompson

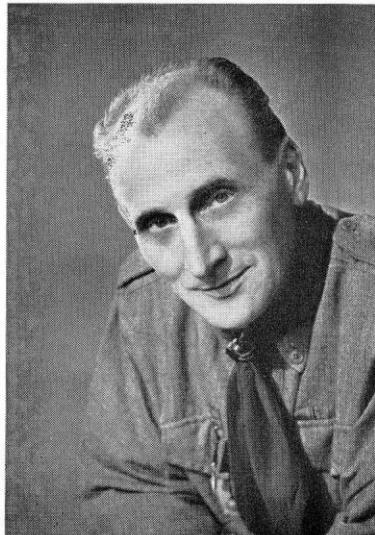


Ken Hodson

At the first rehearsal of every "Gang Show" I produce, the running order is listed up in the hall for everyone to see: and I can only remember about two occasions when an item has been changed from its position. I know when I am writing an item for the door or for a window, and in a house there is only one correct place for the door and window to be. As I say, therefore, when you build that house, surely the positions of the various items should remain as per the original. Keeping this running-order in front of the cast means they know exactly where they are, how long they will have to change, and they will get used (without being called) to "stand by I."

*Right:*

Charles L. C. Linstrum  
("Lindy")



*Below left:*

J. E. Potts

*Below right:*

Roy Castle



One other hint about "standing by." If you came to Chenies Street where we rehearse you would always notice, no matter what item we may be rehearsing, that the cast for the following item are standing by, whether I intend to go into the next item or not. This is training. It also begets discipline. No producer can neglect discipline. I have never not even with over a thousand boys in Boy Scout used a whistle to call for silence or attention at rehearsals. So let me tell you producers that if you train the boys to the standard you expect of them, they will not fail you. It will also make your task a hundred times easier.

You have the Scout training behind you, so use it to the full. But let them know that it is because of that Scout training we can do things so much better. Never lose a chance of plugging the Scouting side of things, because it makes every boy keep on his toes. You are not only challenging him but the good name of the Group he comes from.

Now a word or two about positioning actors in sketches and songs. In the old days I used to put a sixpence on a spot, or on a table. If a piece of business meant that a boy had to put his hand on the table or stand on a certain place, he would have to cover that piece of money. If he didn't, then he was in the wrong position. By insisting on this positioning, you bring not only confidence but the realisation that the actors are being taught how to behave in a professional manner. Once set, a piece of business or a position should never be altered. Any member of the cast who departs from his instructions should be pulled up at once, and if the rebuke is given in front of the whole company, so much the better. It will impress upon them all the necessity for such correction. Never allow anyone to ad lib. Nothing is so untidy as the comic who introduces gags that are not in the script.

Only the lines that have been rehearsed over and over again can be used" on the night," and anyone who trespasses against this rule should be dealt with severely. Keep a stern hand on the individual who dares to go impromptu either in lines or pieces of" business." It is an offence to his fellow performers and might easily "throw" them. It can never do less than put out of gear the polish that is the ultimate goal of every good producer. And polish can only be obtained by constant repetition during rehearsals and by ensuring that each performance is exactly the same every night of the show.

I have said time and time again it defeats me how a Skipper can swot with his boys on a badge so that when they go before the examiner they will know their subject inside out, yet when he puts them on exhibition to the public at large, he will send them on to a stage, unprepared and with just the silly hope that it will be "all right on the night." Surely by now we have got beyond the laughs from the mums and dads and the generous reports in the local paper. After all, a local paper has to sell, and it would never do to say that their local boys were not terrific ! What's more, ninety-nine times out of a hundred they like to print a picture of the whole cast.

Why not isn't everyone of that cast bound to buy several copies of the paper? So don't allow yourself to be fooled into the old time, slovenly way of putting on your show. Your team is on exhibition. Send them to that exhibition in a trained way and even at the expense of losing several laughs, go out for only the RIGHT KIND OF LAUGHS. Then you will at least be bringing to the audience a polish that otherwise could not be possible. Not a step,

not a movement, not a gesture should be in your production unless it has been madly rehearsed for weeks before the event. This gets back to what I have said at the beginning of this paragraph never allow anyone to ad lib.

Now for TIMING. From the moment a sketch or a scene is staged, Tommy Thompson (that great, never-ending worker for "Gang Shows" in every part of the world) is standing by me with a stop watch. As I cut lines (this incidentally is before you get the scripts) he takes off seconds until we get the absolute minimum for the run of the item.

Once that is set, it is set. You see, I run to a time limit for all my shows. The first half (in my estimation) should run from one hour and a quarter to one hour and thirty minutes. Never longer. The second act runs roughly one hour and ten minutes. For a Group show I would consider this far too long, but for a big District or County "Gang Show" this would be my timing. If

I find I am running over this estimate, then I cut and cut until I get it down to time.

"Send them out wanting more" is a good slogan. Don't tire them out. But in addition to the timing of the show, there is the timing of the "lines." There is only one way of putting a line over with polish and that is to say it exactly the same way every time. By doing this, whoever has to reply, or to take that line for his cue, will know exactly the right moment to speak it. But only of each line is said the same way and at the same tempo every time. This, of course, should be planted at rehearsal.

Study the lines and talk them over with your performers. It is surprising how sweetly a laugh can come with a slight pause just before the gag is spoken. And it is rarely necessary for a man to pull a face to accentuate a good line. Oh, the number of times I have heard cast iron laughs thrown to the dogs because the comic" reads them with some grimace that beat the line to the mugging. No producer who knows his job would ever allow that to happen. Timing is the one thing a professional goes on learning all his life. It is one of his most intimate studies. Once his skill in this field has been acquired, he is well on the way to being a performer. And the name "performer" is a very proud title. Get timing into your lines, and likewise on the length of your show. You will then never face the chance of it becoming an Endurance Test.

**Auditions.** Strangely enough, I have never in my life held an audition for anyone who comes into the "Gang Show." However, I do not set this up as an example for others, because (and I brag not about this) I have a freak way of spotting a boy who could be of use to me. But as most likely you will be holding auditions, handle the newcomers with care and look upon them as you would look upon a new boy who wants to join your Troop. (See, here it comes again that Scouting outlook.) If I were running a Troop once more, I would never interview a, boy in front of any others: so, therefore, if ever there did come a time when I wished to hold auditions for "Gang Shows," I would do it in confidence. The aspirant will be nervous enough as it is, but in front of several onlookers it is, well to me anyway, an unkind and unnecessary experience.

I would presume that the Skipper of the new arrival would be there with his candidate? He should be! If not, then his A.S.M. or Troop Leader. You think this unnecessary? No, I don't. It allows his Group to realise just how thorough you are being, and how fair you are to the Scouters who are helping you out. Besides, if the bloke is no use to you it is far easier to chat with him along side someone he knows. For that means, in his disappointment, he has someone to walk home with. It doesn't hurt to think of these things, you know.

If a new boy has been selected, let him have as many details as possible, right away. Not merely by word of mouth, but most essentially on paper. These should have been prepared before you held the audition, so that the lad can take away with him all the news about when the show is to be, the amount of rehearsals entailed and what he would be expected to provide. I consider this is only fair to the parents. Whatever happens as the result of his efforts at the audition, don't delay in telling the boy one way or the other what his chances are of being in the Gang.

With these tips about rehearsals, etc., what about the dawning of the opening night? No producer should bother with anything that has to do with the front of the house.

Get somebody else to handle that. Your job is connected with everything backstage. It is difficult to tell you much about lighting, but if you are playing in a theatre, you'll have the assistance of the house electrician. However, there are one or two suggestions I can pass on to you. Don't "muck about" with the lighting during a scene. Sure, get effects—but only get them when it is necessary. Nothing becomes the amateur as obviously as lights turning from red to green, blue to amber, and so on, during an ensemble number, for no other reason than itching hands on a switchboard. Lights should only be changed at important moments of the scene. At the end of a refrain, or perhaps the beginning, or at some previously worked out moment when an effect is progressive.

Your own stage-manager should know exactly when these changes are to take place. During rehearsals, he should shout out at that exact moment "Change to green," "Dim down," or whatever directions you have given him, thus letting you know he is awake to his job and letting the Cast know that not only they are being trained correctly. Lighting should at all times be used with discretion rarely for stunts. Always for effect.

Now to makeup. The art of make-up is not in how much you use but in how little you use. Cut out for all time the black smudges on the eyes and the overripe effect of too much carmine on the cheeks. Especially does this apply to small boys and Scouters over forty! Dracula was a thing of beauty compared with some of the hideous sights I have seen when grown men put on make-up which might have been more in keeping with the faces of chorus girls in a fifth rate show. Such overdone make-up does not make you look younger, gentlemen, it emphasises your vanished youth. Mr. Producer, be sure and keep make-up at a minimum. This means you have to keep a close watch on Mrs. Tiddy (who was once on the stage), who has volunteered to come along and "help with the make-up." She'll adore it, I know, but your cast will in the end have more lines on their faces than Clapham Junction! On the other hand, great attention to detail is necessary when making-up for character parts.

I usually say to my blokes: look in magazines or daily papers for pictures of people you think look like the person you have to portray. Then I endeavour to see that they make up as near to resemble that person as possible. It is a great training for observation, and after all, that is part of our Scouting. Read over the words of B.-P. in Scouting for Boys and see what he says about amateur acting bringing out the quality of observation in a Scout. Remember, B.-P. was a great enthusiast for this hobby and was a very fine performer himself. No mean gentleman to follow. Now it cannot be left to the final dress-rehearsal, this character make-up, It must be tried out and corrected long before.

Leave nothing to chance, because there will be so many snags cropping up at the last moment, that anything which can be settled before the dress-rehearsal should be tackled and finished with. The all-important rule to keep before you always is never overdo the greasepaint, allow the natural looks of the artist to come through, thus avoiding the possibility of killing whatever personality he possesses. It is a producer's job to attend to this, to know what he wants—and to see that he gets it.

As for scenery, my advice is to cut this down to the minimum. Anything likely to cause a hold-up in the speed of the performance should be eliminated.

When you light a set, spotlight only the highlights of the painting, and concentrate most of the stage lighting on the centre of the stage. Clean lighting is vital, so don't mix colours that don't mix, for all you'll get is a dirty result that masks set and performers alike. Remember, white lighting is often cruel to an artist, so tone it down with pinks or ambers. The brightest lighting is always the warmest lighting, so try to surround your cast with warmth: it helps them tremendously. If you happen to have one of those know alls on the comedy side of things, someone who won't take direction and enjoys "doing what he likes," don't try to light him, use a blackout!

Scenery must fit the item—never work the other way and let the item fit the scenery : so be careful to see that the set never swamps the people who have to play in front of it. If the set looks too prominent, dim down and concentrate your lighting on the people. After all they are the important ones. And put your scene shifters in plimsolls to cut down the noise backstage. See that all these things are well and truly in your mind long before you get to the dress rehearsal stage. And remember that an efficient producer will know practically every part and every line of a song before he gets to the theatre for the big test.

You see then how essential it is for you to spend a great deal of study on the actual lines yourself. Be sure the item fits the person playing it. And here I must tell you an amusing, but to me one of the most embarrassing, moments I have ever had, and it was simply because the producer had not really studied the item and the performer who was to recite this particular item. This is what happened.

In our second "Gang Show" at the Scala Theatre, we did a dramatic monologue which I'm sure many of you will either have performed or will remember. It was called "Money."

The scene was a pedestal whereon stood a man dressed in a gold cape. Around him were hands reaching up to him, trying to get to the gold. These arms came through a black velvet cloth over the stage and it was a very excellent effect. Well, one evening (only about three years ago) I had been invited to a joint show of Guides and Scouts. To my delight I noticed on the programme that they were performing "Money." It was good to see that item again and I was quite looking forward to it. I happened to be seated between the D.C. and the Vicar, who was accompanied by his wife. The moment arrived, and I was all expectant.

To my amazement, in a front cloth came a Guide Lieutenant, who spoke most beautifully, but with a rather "posh" accent. She had on a low-cut evening-dress. She did the monologue.

When I tell you the first line reads, "In me you see the thing all men desire" you will gather it was, to say the least, inappropriate! The boys at the back of the hall immediately shouted their approval (and I don't blame them), but my breath almost stopped. I knew what lines were yet to come!

I dare not repeat them here almost for censorship reasons ! But if you get hold of a copy and read them as spoken by a charming young lady in a rather daring evening-dress, and read them as slowly and as deliberately as she did, you will understand why I sank lower and lower in my seat and also why the Vicar began to puff and his wife to look toward the nearest exit.

It was a terrible ten minutes and one I don't want to sit through again. Afterwards when I went backstage to talk to the producer and ask him why he

had allowed it to happen, all he said was, "Well, I hadn't given it much thought and until tonight it seemed all right to me.

He hadn't given it much thought. Dear me, dear me; how can a man say such a thing, and believe himself to be a producer. You must give thought, and oh, so much of it, to every moment of your show, every line, every song, and every effect for the onus is on you and you alone.

I could fill a book with sketches that have been used by people who claim they are putting on a "Gang Show" but have in fact used material unworthy of a tenth-rate touring show.

Jokes which should never be allowed have crept in; pieces of business copied from cheap comedians have been included and, this is true, in one instance one of our numbers, "I Wonder how my Willie's getting on," was played, not by reading from letters the boys were supposed to have written home, but from toilet paper

You shudder. So did I, for I happened to be there and saw it. When I remonstrated with the producer, all I got was, "But the people laughed, didn't they?" This is no isolated case, and it can do no harm if I remind you of one or two others. One "Gang Show," publicised as "Written by Ralph Reader," opened with a sketch of a man and a "woman" in a double bed. I won't tell you the nature of the sketch, but well—it is hardly the way to open a Scout show, Is It? Another case was the rewriting of a complete number, using lyrics likely to be heard only in a barrack-room. So don't complain when you are asked to submit every line of your material) other than our own, when you are anxious to augment your performance with outside material. Maybe I deserve blame for some things, but not all this can be laid at my door. If our material is not good enough for you,, neither shall our title be.

I once saw eight "Gang Shows" in one week. Three of these were District affairs, but the remainder just small Group efforts

They were as far apart as Reading and Bermondsey, Islington and Nottingham. Watching the Nottingham show I sat with Ted Potts. It is apt to be a somewhat delicate business, sitting with another producer, and watching a third producer's efforts ! I was darned glad Lindy, Roy Castle, and Bill Johnso weren't sitting there with us as well. Our reactions would have stopped the show. It was a darn fine production but, quite naturally, incidents adopted by the Nottingham producer were not necessarily ideal from the point of view of our own conception. It is no reflection on Bob, or upon any other director, when I tell you that we would have been an extreme reactionary force sitting out there consciously aware of differences of opinion.

This happens everywhere, and every time a bevy of producers gets together. It proves they are human! But one thing calls for emphasis: we are all pulling for each other. And we each can learn from the other. The local touches Nottingham put into their show are terrific in fact one of those used in their last show was quite the best thing. Yet—and read these words carefully! If you call your show a "Gang Show," then you must use the original material and any exceptions must be vetted by the London Gang Show Committee. You will not find them difficult in this respect, but the title must be respected. If you get your public by using a "drawing" name, then you must use the material which made that name a draw.

Finally, do remember this. If the show is a success, the cast get the praise. If it's a flop, the producer stands holding the baby. He has no come-back, and he

mustn't expect any. Don't leave yourself open, try to protect yourself in every possible way, and I only hope some of the things I have advised you about here will assist you.

## 12

### *The Critics of the Show*

WHEN one is writing a history, it's foolish to dodge the irritations and the pin pricks that spatter themselves at intervals along the path-making.

We all know (and should be big enough to admit) that one of the most exasperating things is criticism. It has been referred to quite often in these pages, but let's for a moment take the subject out and give it an airing. It might be an enlightening thing to do.

Undoubtedly we shall find some of it is justified we won't kid ourselves about that. But by looking at it in broad daylight we shall be able, perhaps, to correct the failings in future years. The first thing to do then is to separate the Truth from the Rot, and in any ever-growing "empire," such as the one' this story is about, there is bound to be a lot of Rot talked.

There is an old saying that "people only throw stones at the well laden tree." We've been particularly fruitful, so I suppose we cannot expect to be free from a few hurling stones. Let's see if there is a way to dodge them.

One of the remarks I have so often heard is, "What good is this thing to Scouting?" I'm not going to explain all that here, but instead, I shall ask the reader to look through the pages of this book until he comes across some letters which have been written about the show by our Founder, B.-P., and I shall ask you to ponder on his words. They have been quoted verbatim, and I think they are the complete reply to this often-asked query.

Nothing Is more foolish than keeping out of the limelight all the the time, but one has to be certain that one is able to stand up to glare! To shut Scouting up in a Troop room or a camping ground, away from the general public, is just the surest way of making them forget we are alive. We must bring it out into the public eye in every good possible way. To have something in our hands which not merely gives us a chance to go to them, but to have them clamouring to come to us surely that must be a tremendous asset.

Another choice remark one hears from time to time is that the. "Gang Show "spoils a boy. There may be much more" spoiling" done in his own Troop and if, after the active high-pressure evenings he has spent at rehearsals, he finds his own Troop night inactive and unprepared, don't blame the boy or the "Gang Show" read again the chapter about the night's programme of a rehearsal evening and see whether you have put in as much time before you went to the meeting, to see that all of your Scouts were going to be fully occupied every moment they were present.

You can't spoil a boy by working him hard or by interesting his mind in good things; but you can ruin a possible future Scouter by boring him stiff on Troop nights through lack of preparation and worrying about what he was doing the night he Went to "that blinking rehearsal." Just see that you know what he is going to do from the moment he comes in the door on Troop night.

One incident is worth noting which happened only last year. We were anxious to get two boys from the same Group into the Gang Show but both these boys were studying for their G.C.B. After a lengthy discussion with the Skipper (who also had seen the parents), one boy came in but the dad of the other boy felt it would be too much, with the exam so close. The ending of this little story is that the boy who came into the show passed his exams with flying colours; the other, unfortunately, didn't. What a blessing for me it didn't turn out the other way round!

Critics are mostly very inconsistent people (especially those who specialise), but if one fears them, then every venture is doomed before its birth.

It is better to fail a dozen times than to leave a dozen things unattempted because of what people might say. Maybe I'm becoming hardened, but I do try to look on the humorous side of some of the remarks that are flung at us. There is a table in the restaurant at I.H.Q. which many of us favour John Stiles, Tommy Thompson, Shady Lane, and half a dozen others—and I admit we make it a noisy one at times. Lots of people would give anything to be able to put a tape—recorder under that table just to find out some of the things we have said.

They would be very disappointed, but as they don't know, they imagine, and it is fun hearing afterwards from various quarters how fertile imagination can be. We were talking about an investiture we were planning for three boys of the 4th Surbiton to be held at Gilwell, when a certain gentleman who had been out of earshot became brave enough to walk over. We stopped talking to greet him, and his first words were, "How's the' Gang Show' going?" I just said, "Fine, thanks," and went on eating my lunch. He turned and went back to his pals at his own table, and the first thing he told them was, "You can't get a word in there, all they talk about is 'Gang Shows.'"

A while ago I had a very heavily booked week talking to A.G.M.s at Greenford, Willesden, Leicester, and South London. The subject in each case was on "Senior Scouting," "The Patrol System," and "Where the Parents come in." In addition to this I was due to present two Queen Scout Badges in Hendon, and to give the address at a Scouts' Own in Watford and another at the campsite in Phasells Wood. My final commitment was to present a Medal of Merit to a Scouter in East London. On my way home from this last date I met three Scouters I knew, and with them was a certain District Commissioner whom I did not know. The D.C. obviously possessed a distorted sense of humour; he said to me, You wouldn't care to come along with us and listen to someone talking about Scouting, would you? It would be a change for you." If I hadn't my own brand of a sense of humour I think I would have sloshed him. But it is a positive fact, these things now have ceased to bother me. Don't let them bother you.

The cynic is another type one has to endure. To me a cynic is like a dead flower rotting on a grave. He is a person to be sorry for because he is a disappointed man, and the simplest way to get even with him is to let him know you realise this. Nothing will hurt him more, because it is the one thing he is trying to hide. A man only becomes cynical when he realises what he has missed!

However, we must not blind ourselves to the fact that there are many sincere people about who will give a critical opinion that is well worth taking notice of. In fact, it would not only be foolish but to one's detriment if such opinions were not heeded.

When it comes to "Gang Show" scripts I have been helped, beyond measure by the opinions of Fred Hurll. I have eliminated and changed line after

line because Fred has explained his criticism in the enlightening way that becomes a man who knows what he is talking about and is able to give a reason. Koko too can present an opinion which usually has to be considered because it is an unbiased opinion. That is the vital value in all criticism, that it be unbiased. Don't ever run away with the idea that the only constructive criticism is the kind you wish to hear—it's not so. Many a time I have discarded an idea very dear to me, simply because I have been clearly shown that it was not to the good of the production and I am sure this policy could be adopted by all of us, in our Scouting as well as in our entertainments.

But it is the biased chap who comes along and throws out criticism that one must be warned against. Most times he won't be saying it to your face and that fact alone should provide you with enough proof that no notice should be taken of it. Yet these blokes have their uses because they are the steeling processers who will (or should) supply you with a thick skin and if you're not thick skinned you are going to get plenty of bruises. Not a living soul can place himself beyond the reach of criticism; if you do nothing, they will brand you a slacker, if you achieve something, envy will sharpen the arrows to be fired your way, so be not merely prepared for this but gird on your armour to steel yourself against it. The finest armour I can suggest is to surround yourself with friends who are not "yes-men." Nothing blunts a man's initiative more surely than having no opposition, whilst nothing sharpens a person's wits as quickly as having an argument on a certain point with one of your friends. The proof of friendship is in the test of disagreement. We like someone because . . . We love someone although . . .

Nobody knows "the lot," however brainy he may be. The genuinely clever chap is he who can take the advice of a critical observer in the same good spirit as it is given. But, as I said before, you must first of all convince yourself you are at the receiving end of an honest point of view: and this can come only from someone who has no axe to grind, other than that of helping you. Once you are sold on this point of view, then study everything your critic has to say, argue with him and dissect his suggestions one by one. Together, you will arrive at the right course to take.

I suppose one of the hardest things we older men have to face in life is to accept advice from a younger man.

But if you look at it closely, there's no reason why the average young man of today shouldn't be far more wise than we were at his age. The standards of education are higher, information on every subject in the world is easier to get, and what with the television service tipping us off on events from every quarter of the globe, surely they ought to be more enlightened.

The only advantage we do have is experience. Young people can be very severe critics. They often hit the nail on the head which can be very annoying to know-ails, but at the same time they can supply a source of information which can be tapped with advantage. It is no good these days putting on a show that does not appeal to the younger generation, and it is useless for the older generation to be constantly saying that they don't understand the latest craze of the children. Grown ups never have, never.

When Adam begat Cain it started right there, and it's been going on ever since. Our fathers and mothers were aghast when we started to Charleston and do the Black Bottom; they were appalled at the "noise" of Jazz, and refused to understand it. Today we refuse to admit there is anything in the new progressive

music (for the life of me, I can't understand it !), but it is here to stay. You see, these things, like the new boys and girls of today, are the new signs of the future, and when it comes to discussing the future, the space—ships and the other planets, leave it to the new generation, and Granddad, keep out of it, it's beyond us. But it's not beyond these kids, and that is why I say there are times when their opinions and their criticisms are worth listening to.

At the first rehearsal of each new show I watch the reaction among the boys when they hear items for the first time, and I can tell you, first hand, they telegraph to me what is right and what is wrong. When I'm working on a sketch with the actors, I often slide over to a watching youngster and say, "What do you think of it?" His reply will tell me, for it is rarely evasive. So let's sink our pride now and then and be not afraid to take a few hints from those who are many years our junior: there are times when they are much more in touch than we are. The criticism by youth is not often cruel, it is to the point. We should be as willing to learn as we are to teach, yes, to learn even from the young.

However, it is the sting from the matured element which causes the most concern—that is, if it be allowed to take root. One should come to grips with oneself and refuse to be bothered with anything people may say, that is, once you have weighed up the sincerity of the person in question. Critics? Let 'em all come. All you have to do is to sift the chaff from the wheat, and once you've done that, have a darned good feed of wheat.

- To end this chapter, Mr. Reader is going to mount a platform and quite a few people won't like what he is going to say. Too bad

Now, it's all very well for the average G.S. Producer to talk about the other fellow's show when he goes to see it (and I've heard 'em), but there is a difference when some of these producers ask me for an opinion. Especially does this apply to some of the full scale reproductions, so you producers concerned, remember I love you even though I'm now going to hit you hard.

Before I begin to voice the opinion you have asked for regarding your show, I know darned well (all of us being human) you really wish to hear only what you WANT me to say, and quite often you take exception to some of my remarks. Get this straight: my only aim is to hand you some advice which will improve your show. After all, it is my material, and naturally I want you to get the best out of it. At the risk of being called "big-head," not one of you knows as much about it as I do. Therefore, remember this, all of you (and I'm not even blushing when I write these words), when I tell you what is wrong or right with your show I am not only telling you as one "Gang Show" producer to another, I speak as a PROFESSIONAL to the AMATEUR.

I shall never fail to say what I know to be true, because if you are big enough to listen you will appreciate I speak from thirty years' experience and with only one thought in my mind to help.

# 13

## *The Group Show*

UP to now I've concentrated on the larger type of "Gang Show." The advice I have tried to hand on has been about the theatre type of shows in which large numbers of boys are used. But if these bigger productions can now be counted by the dozens, the smaller ones, Group shows particularly, surely run into thousands. It might therefore be a good idea to concentrate for a while on some of the points that might be of assistance to the G.S.M. or the local producer who has to put on a two and a half hour show with quite a small bunch of lads. What's more, he'll most likely be presenting his epic on a stage not much bigger than a large drawing-room, and his expenses may have to be desperately small.

I'm no stranger to the small hall. My own early Scout concerts were all put on in an old disused chapel at South Heighton, near Newhaven, in Sussex.

It held about a hundred people, and even while we used it as our Troop headquarters, the old rostrum and pulpit were still there. Our stage had to be set in front, and that meant still less room for those who wanted to see the show.

Our stage itself was made from a dozen large sugar boxes roped together and covered with table tops. These, I may say, were never even, and no matter how strong our roping, great gaps appeared long before we were halfway, through our concert! To get through without anyone tripping, or falling through, would have been too much to expect; it always happened. On one memorable occasion the "stage" collapsed completely, and threw me and three others in the laps of the people in the front row.

Another night the weight of two boys standing on the end of one of the trestle tables was too substantial, with the result that the other end flew up in the air, shooting a table and a vase straight as an arrow toward the pianist. The table crashed on to the piano, but the vase hit the back of Miss Cooper's head good and proper She fainted.

Our footlights were candles, and the only other lighting we had were old fashioned hanging oil-lamps, with brown paper around one side so that only the unshaded side shone on to the platform. If we had had fifty of these it might have made a glimmer. We had three

But even with this limited amount of lighting and material we tried effects. I'm sure not one of them ever came off, but we didn't know that at the time, and no sleep was lost. Our scenery was made up from old sheets and blankets sewn together, with paper flowers pinned on to brighten it up a bit. Our wings', were fashioned from wall-paper on frames, which lasted at least toward the end of the first item, but after that, backstage was visible from all parts of the audience. To get on and off the stage we used a chair which was taken away every two minutes by anyone who happened to want ! it

The only light we had in the "dressing room" (which, incidentally, used to be the vestry) was provided by two candles, and it held about four people comfortably. There were never less than twenty in our shows, so we dressed somewhat uncomfortably. To get from one side to the other we had to go behind the hanging blankets and crawl over the pulpit. Since this was never lit at all, strange happenings were always taking place as we tried to get from one side of the stage to the other.

These were not all—male shows either. We hadn't sufficient talent to put on an entire show by ourselves, so we relied on any lady who would come in to perform a monologue, help with a duet, or perhaps sing a solo. Luckily, we were all small boys, and the ladies mostly married women, so we were not talked about.

I don't ever remember a single show during which Mrs. Hibberd didn't sing "The Sunshine of your Smile," nor Mrs. Holland render "The Old Rustic Bridge" while the very generous Mrs. Ashton, who played piano solos, proved how generous she was, for once she got started she never stopped. She gave them the lot. The moment she started the male members of the audience went to the Hampden Arms. After a few drinks, a game of darts, and a stroll back, they came to the hall, and she would still be at it.

I used to produce these shows and why I shall never know these older ladies did all I told them. Once when I lost my temper I made one of them cry, and was accosted by her worthy husband, who told me that if I did it again he wouldn't let her out. Then he bought me a bag of crisps

I went every week to the Brighton Hippodrome and brought back idea after idea for the next concert. I don't suppose they looked the same the way we did them, but we tried.

Still, I had yet to reach my fourteenth birthday Tho I suppose I can be forgiven.

I discovered an old Patrol book a few months back, a very old Patrol book of the "Wolves" "today my favourite patrol is still the Wolves and in it discovered an entry, "From concert, 1/6." I puzzled over this for a long while and then it came back to me—both the reason for this entry and what that 1/6 stood for. Harry Avis, my very first Scoutmaster, spurred me on with these old time concerts by telling me that for every pound I made on the show, he would give me a shilling for my Patrol funds. That one-and a tanner told me that the concert that year had made the fantastic profit of thirty bob

We can all laugh at it now, but I bet that the night I was told we had made thirty shillings I felt like the biggest impresario in the world. Our most expensive tickets were a shilling (in the first two rows) then sixpence, and those at the back threepence. When you realise that "those at the back" were a bare twenty yards from the stage, I think they got in cheap

We had nearly enough chairs to fill the first two rows. What was missing were made up from Mrs. Lower, of the Hampden, and as these were the softest, there was always a rush for "early doors." All other seating was on forms, and the knowing ones brought their cushions. This once caused a sad episode.

Three cushions were lost one night, and though we all searched the place from top to bottom they couldn't be found. The irate owners accused us of stealing them, and tempers became frayed. The poor dears were sensitive and I guess they were thinking that their front rooms would never look the same. However, they were not found, and dire threats were made as to what would happen to us when the police were told, and how "Scouts are supposed to be honest," etc., etc. But they eventually went home (without cushions) and the whole thing was brought up at a Court of Honour.

They didn't turn up until three months later and then it caused an even greater commotion. The scene was a Jumble Sale at the same old Troop room and suddenly one elderly lady let out a scream. "That's it I That's it!" Everybody stopped dead in their tracks and looked to see what "that" was that

was so definitely "it." Then before we could grasp the situation she took up the story, "And look ! There's Mrs. Mitchell's."

We all looked over and saw her grasping one cushion in one hand and pointing at another. Then she yelled at the top of her voice, "Mrs. Mitchell, MRS. MITCHELL, I'VE GOT IT, IT'S HERE, LOOK ! " Over came Mrs Mitchell and she (with the sternest face I have ever seen) grabbed "her" cushion and went to turn away when her eyes alighted on yet another. "THERE! Mrs. Jenner. Look, there's our Mabel's." She then turned around and stared our S.M. in the face and shouted "ROBBERS !" We gave them back the cushions and two boys were taken away from the Troop for two nights.

They were the sons of the ladies in question; but their fathers were on our side, and eventually got round their wives to allow their sons to return. On our way home one evening one of these gentlemen met Mr. Avis and myself, and naturally the conversation turned on the cushions. "I can't think how it happened," said our S.M. The other man looked at him with a twinkle in his eye. "Harry, I'll tell you," he said, "Bert and I took them cushions and hid 'em and then sent 'em on to the Jumble Sale. We wanted to get them out of the house, WE HATE 'EM."

Our programmes which sold at one penny were all hand-written, and don't think they ever tallied with the routine which finally ran its course "on the night." When it came to costuming—well, we never really did come to it. We just dressed in what we thought might look something like we hoped for. If somebody came along with an old fancy-dress they had used in the "Send Parcels to the Crimea" Benefit Ball well, we just had to get a number to fit that particular dress.

I recall once Flo Moore found a Chinese dressing gown that had, to say the least, seen better days. (If it hadn't, it must have had a poor sort of life.) Anyway, a Chinese dressing-gown didn't come our way very often, so it had to be used. I used it. I was down to sing, "I'm Burlington Bertie from Bow.' I put on the dressing gown and changed the words to "I'm old Shanghai Bert from Hong Kong."

We even "toured " in the small villages round about. Rodmell and Bishopstone were both on our circuit, but the halls we played in both these places were even smaller than our own, and when we came back to "play at home" it was like the Palladium. But we did it, and I like to look back on those times and kid myself that maybe we brought a certain amount of pleasure to our dear friends who bought tickets and never failed us.

I've told you all this so that you won't run away with the idea that I know nothing about the difficulties of putting on a show with very little to help you; that perhaps all my experiences have been in the big cinemas, halls, or theatres. Oh, no. I could go on and on telling you about some of the fit-ups in which we did our early shows. Once in the Priory by the side of Denton Rectory, which holds not one person more than thirty. Another time in the Old Barn, with no roof, and what's more, it didn't rain. We even erected a stage in the meadows at Denton, and played under the walnut trees, but this time it poured; and so the only ones who stayed for the show were those who could find room under the trees, or the kids who sheltered under the stage. The rest went home, and so, before the interval, did half the cast. I stuck it out, intending to go on to the bitter end until my uncle came into the field and yelled, "Ralph—come on in." I did.

So you see, I've had my share of the tougher times, and I know some of the heart-breaks that beset the ambitious bloke who wants to do a full-scale epic on a stage about the size of a postage stamp. The last thing I want to do is to discourage him. In fact, I'll go all out to help him have a shot: but we can all learn from another's first-hand experience if it be passed on in the proper spirit and that's just what I am going to try to do now.

Don't think I do it with my tongue in my cheek the only time I do that is when I'm listening to someone telling me how to do something he had never done himself (and such an incident is not infrequent, as you may have learnt for yourselves). I honestly believe that the smaller shows are far more essential, and often more important than the bigger ones. That's one reason why I go along to see so many of them, and the following pages are dedicated with great sincerity to the down-to-earth fellows who have to tackle this type of show at least once a year to raise fund's for their Group.

So I plan now to chat to you about the smaller (but so important) type of Scout entertainment.

My first tip is a vital one. Cut down on your scenery. Many first class West End revues have been played with less scenery than some shows I have seen put on in the village hall.

If your show is right, then scenery is nothing like as important as what goes on in front of it. One particular Group comes to my mind when I discuss this, the Chesham Bois Group, who do an annual show, and run in their local hall for about three weeks. George and Len King are the "King-pins" behind this effort, and they most certainly do not stint the customers when it comes to scenery. Good it is, too, but I do not agree with overloading their stage with quite so much scenery as they use simply because it so often distracts from the work of the actors.

Let me be fair, they put weeks of work in their back-cloths and their effects and they nearly always "come off." Many a great night have I shared with them and their packed houses, but what I am trying to point out is that in several cases I have found myself looking at the "tricks" around the stage instead of being able to concentrate on the performances on the stage. However, George and Len are an exception, because of the facilities they have in turning out their wings, cloths, etc.; but even here I would warn them that it can be overdone.

To the thousands of other Groups, however, I say right away cut your scenery down to the minimum. A couple of curtains, clean and bright, and two or three back-cloths for the finales are about all you need. For sketches I would suggest "cut-outs." These are small bits of scenery which can be erected in front of the bigger cloths and they just give the "idea" of the setting instead of staging a complete "set." It makes things easier for changing, and above all else, it gives you that speed which is so essential. One good tip: if you can't get hold of two or three "drawtabs," set your front-tabs about three feet back from the footlights. Then you will be able to play scenes in front of this tab, thus giving yourself a "house-curtain" and also what we call a Number One Tab-cloth. I've done this many times and it saves hiring an extra cloth.

Keep your best effort for the first act finale, and for the finish of the show. If you can get two good sets for these main items, the others can easily be staged at a low cost. Of course it's good to see your stage nicely dressed with scenery, but there are many other far more important things to spend your money on. Keep your scenery in proportion to your production and never overdo it. It is

far better (and wiser) to spend your money on advertising and on the costuming. If you can get good posters, and a special ad. in the local paper, this will help considerably in telling the outside public what you are doing. A neat poster always gives the impression that the show is going to be a cut above the average, so don't be too keen on blueing most of the money in hand on pieces of scenery that are not absolutely necessary.

If you CAN spend a bit on "sets," try to see that they are conservative and not too glaring. Blazing colours seldom help the performers: and I would urge you to tone down anything that hits you in the eyes. There is far more "class" in pastel shades, and though I appreciate that one does want a certain amount of "punch" when the curtains open, great patches of reds and yellows screaming at you from the back-cloth only distract attention from the front stage.

I would advise those who are doing shows annually to get hold of a good "sky-cloth." That is a plain light-blue cloth, devoid of any design, and it hangs as far back-stage as is possible.

It is the finest piece of scenery you can have, and can be used time and time again. Just another small "set piece" in front of it will form an entire scene: and nothing takes lighting as well as what is known as a "sky-cloth." It is perfect for all outside scenes, whether for night or day, and what is so important, it always looks clean. I don't think there is a theatre in the country that hasn't got one of these sky—cloths in their stores, and it is the first thing I obtain, no matter what show I may be producing.

You will find it a most paying investment, and it can be kept for all time and used in a thousand different ways. Before getting anything else, then, buy yourself a sky-cloth and you won't go wrong. At Golders Green we use two of them, and they have served us better than any ten other cloths we have ever bought. To make up a complete scene, get a couple of borders in the same shade, and a set of wings. This will give you all you want for any type of revue, and no matter what sketch or production number you have to put on, all of them can be done within this set. But don't allow any bright enthusiast to paint anything on either borders, wings, or cloth. Set whatever you like in front of them but not on them.

No "main" scene ever devised has been so effective as the one I have suggested. Watch the opening of next year's Golders Green show, and the following production numbers, and count how many times we use (and disguise) our "blue set piece." "Red, White, and Blue," "The Owls," "Don't be afraid of the Rain," "Bluebird," and a hundred others have been worked exclusively inside this very set. So if you can afford to spend a bit of money on scenery, this is the thing to buy. You will never regret it. Another point to emphasise this still further: you won't have much "headroom" on your stage, and so won't be able to "fly" bits of scenery. With one complete set that remains all through, this handicap is eliminated. It stands in place for all ensemble items, without the bother of quick changes, and finding places in the wings to store large pieces of scenery. When we did "Ride," the big number with the illuminated jockeys, all we used was this exact set, with starting-posts erected in front of the blue wings and a batten with hanging ribbons decorating the rear. From the front it looked like a very expensive set. Well, take it from me, it wasn't.

Without bragging, I think I may say that among the most appreciated shows during the last war were the R.A.F. "Gang Shows." In these we never used anything but a small back—cloth with the words " Gang Show "painted on it.

We never used tabs (they were never available) and for the whole performance nothing else was used to decorate the stage. What counted (and always will) was what took place in front of the back-cloth. Every unit of these Entertainment Sections carried their own back-cloth. It was tied up on tire back of lorries, in barns and even in large theatres. That is all we ever used, so I assure you it can be done because I've done it. All you need is a piece of canvas, and leave the rest to your enterprising painter.

Now about your material. If you run only a small Group, then you will have only a bare handful of good performers. The remainder will have to be camouflaged. But they must be used.

Every single member of the Group should be put into the show in some way, no matter how small the part. It would never do to leave anyone out. But, because of the talent among the few, it means you will have to overwork them. Watch out, therefore, and select sketches which only have two or three characters. This will then allow your "stars plenty of time to change, and will mean they will not always be "hogging" the stage.

Nothing is more annoying to an audience than to see the same couple of chaps in every item even if one of them happens to be the too enthusiastic producer ! A good producer will never try to claim too much of the limelight—if he is a good producer he will train his actors to do this. Front-cloth sketches and songs are always good spots, so try to collect as many of these as possible. This will allow you plenty of time for your full-stage numbers and then you will be able to use every performer at your disposal. There are plenty of sketches available with only about three or four parts, and you will find these very useful when you are dealing with a limited number of ace-performers.

If you've been to our London "Gang Shows" lately you will have noticed that I have written far more skits with small casts than I used to do. This is entirely due to the fact that I have wanted to help such shows as we are now discussing, so please take advantage of this. Don't go in for sketches like" Television," "The Pageant," and the "Mrs. Sunbeam" series. You'll find the smaller-cast sketches far more rewarding. Only a year or so ago some of our biggest hits were with " Neighbours," "Types," and " Hold—Up," and none of these carried a large number of performers. The most important thing to concentrate on is that every part must be played, dressed, and read exactly as per the character in the play. Nothing gives a sketch "class" as strongly as a part in character. In addition, it brings satisfaction to the producer, the actor and, most important of all, the audience. Never "clown" a part unless the part is that of a clown.

There are few clown parts in a genuine sketch because in nearly every case the character is taken from life. Exaggerate it, yes, but never clown it. (And not too much exaggeration either!) Details such as these can be copied and adopted by even the smallest Group, so don't ever degenerate to the" silly" type of performance that was seen so often in the distant days. By now we should have learned better.

Now for the Production Numbers, in which you can use all the mob. The biggest, the smallest, the talented, and the untalented. At times you will need precision, at others you can make it a romp. But whatever you do, see that it is always the same that no boy ever puts in one single gesture that hasn't been rehearsed. You'll find unlimited numbers available for the big production scenes. These can be obtained from I.H.Q. just for the asking. Select your super

number for the first act finale: and then every trick you can think of should be put in, so that you can end your first half on a terrific note. Remember it is during this interval that your friends (and foes) get together to talk about your show!

The Group from down the road will not hesitate to compare your show with theirs, and the interval gives them the ideal moment to air their views. If you have ended the first part of your show on a smash production number, it will give them plenty to think about, and even take the edge off the criticism of some of the other items they have already seen. I always choose one of the biggest song-hits to end the first half.

It was here we used "Birds of a Feather," "Great, Great Game," "Crest of a Wave," and, oh, so many of the "Gang Show" tunes that have become part of every camp fire round which Scouts congregate. It must be a "swingy" tune, something to make the people out front tap their feet, and it should be sung with actions that have been rehearsed and rehearsed over and over again. During our own rehearsals I often get the boys to close their eyes when they are rehearsing these movements so that they are not glancing from side to side to "see what comes next." Nothing looks worse than seeing small boys in the front looking up and down the line to see what action comes next. This cannot happen if they have been properly rehearsed, and if your show is not properly rehearsed, don't put it on! All this bilge about a bad dress rehearsal making a good show is rot, and only the most amateurish amateur will use this old-fashioned and totally untrue excuse. At your dress—rehearsal, you should be able to see exactly what you are going to present to your paying audience. If this is not done, you are taking money under false pretences. You are cheating, and this is not a Scout like thing to do.

The greatest test of a well-rehearsed bunch of boys never pays off so well as in one of these big first-half finales. So concentrate on this particular spot in your programme, and make it shine like a new pin. Many of your defects will be overlooked if you can bring down your curtain on a smashing first-half finale. Before you settle anything else in your programme, get this well and truly set out on paper, and polish it until it glistens.

I suggest you need approximately three of these major numbers in your first half and two in the second, but see that none of these is allowed to overshadow the last item of your first act.

I believe in ending all our shows with the boys in Scout uniform. It is a good way of getting over the propaganda side of things, and having shown your boys in various disguises throughout the evening, it is wise to send your audience home with the realisation that the performers are first and foremost Scouts. In this last item it is good to reprise the various tunes you have sung in the show and even to get the audience to join in with you. A "party" finish is always a good thing, and it is one of the highlights of all our London finales.

All our first-act finales in the London "Gang Show" hit the audience right in the eyes when the curtains open, and they see the tier upon tier of boys rising from stage level to three-quarters of the way up the wings. This, of course, is one of the biggest effects. I have seen it done in smaller editions in many of the Group' shows I have attended, but, strangely enough, they have often used this same idea to open their show. This is bad, simply because it gives away one of your finest moments right at the beginning of the evening, and anything that is a duplication cannot have the desired effect. Whatever you do, therefore, make

your opening chorus as big and vigorous as you like, but don't throw away one of the big tricks right at the start—or you'll have nothing left to surprise them with afterwards.

Tier the boys up for the ending of your opening, but see that the boys in boys sitting cross-legged. Don't put the back-row boys on rostrums, or you will obviously lose on your first act finale. One of the oldest sayings in the theatre is "Never telegraph an effect." Don't let the audience be aware of what's to come surprise them. I repeat be sure and watch your opening number, and don't give anything away. If you give them too much at the start they will expect wonders, so plan your programme in such a way that it builds, and the effects you are going to bring out grow as the evening proceeds.

It is always a sure-fire get-away if your second item is done by the small boys and that it is a musical in front of the tabs.

The old idea of following the opening with a sketch is going out of fashion now. It never matters if a musical item follows a musical number, providing that they are staged differently and that the tempo is contrasted. Don't ever put two sketches to gather ! This is fatal and must be avoided at all costs. Even a monologue should never be placed to follow talk. But never worry about two or even three musical items following on because this will not hurt your programme at all, and songs, whether "point" numbers or choruses, will seldom bore an audience. Talk will.

Comperes, too, have gone out of fashion, so don't use them except when they are necessary to explain the next item, and even then, make your comp&e stick to a script and not trespass on the time by slinging out old gags he has heard at some other show. Years ago it was quite "the thing" to have a comedian compare who did about five minutes in front of the tabs after each" turn"; but not today. Tommy Trinder can get away with it, but there are not many Trinders about It is too dated. See, too, that whoever is selected to explain the next item is dressed neatly and that he looks his best. It is a tribute to his audience as well as to himself And make him keep still when he is speaking. Train every member of your cast to be able to stand with their weight on each foot—it will not only give them confidence but it will likewise put the people out front at ease.

One of the most effective warnings I can give you here is in regard to the burlesque type of item—such things as "The Ballet," "Angus MacDonald," and the Comedy Pantomime.

It seems to me that in a great many minds an item is bound to be funny if the ballet dancer puts on football boots, or falls flat on his bottom. These things can only be funny (effectively) when they are done at a definite spot in the proceedings. It is criminal to leave it to the performer to choose his moment, or to allow him to ad lib one single movement in this type of presentation. Take this tip set every comedy piece of business in the same orderly way you lay out your programme. Place the comedy antics so that they are well distributed among the actors. Let none of the "business" overlap, and when one comedian has got his laugh, make him keep in the background until the next person has given his particular contribution.

Don't allow irregularities to creep in, and even on an occasion when a sudden unexpected laugh is created, get all the players together at the end of the show, and explain that this extra bit will be retained but in the exact same spot and that it must be executed in the same way the following night. This imprints

on the minds of the cast that they are being watched, and it will, above all else, make them understand the necessity for keeping each antic and each laugh in a special order. By doing this you will never descend to a rough and tumble type of show. Maybe you will remember the roars of laughter when the "Scotsmen" "appear in the humorous march of the men in "Angus McDonald." Take it from me, each funny walk of each individual man is rehearsed and rehearsed; they are never allowed to vary a single step. This means that no two men will be duplicating an idea, and consequently each man becomes a definite personality.

Each time he appears, the audience will be waiting for the particular funny walk that happens to appeal to them. So keep each entrance exactly the same. The one exception is perhaps the comedian on the end who should be allowed to exploit his own brand of comedy to the full, but even here, only what he has rehearsed before the actual show. In any burlesque number, the power lies in the absolute sincerity and seriousness of those playing it.

If anyone on the stage laughs, the burlesque is killed, and the stage becomes full of simpletons. The more seriously you play these items, the funnier they become, because nothing amuses an audience so much as seeing somebody in a fix. Embarrassment is always a good situation, especially if the player is obviously not appearing to enjoy it.

The greatest clown of this generation is Charles Chaplin, and the biggest laughs he has ever got have been when he is getting the worst of the deal. The woebegone look in his eyes as misadventure befalls him has broken more seats in cinemas than any single incident. Comedy must be taken more seriously than any other form of entertainment. Ask the Crazy Gang

I've seen those men struggling over scripts, sitting around a table for hours, just to get one single laugh and there is little one can teach those great institutions of laughter. But they take it seriously. Think back, you old timers, on the custard-pie days of the silent films. Nearly all comedy originated from there. It is not the custard pie that gets the laughs, but the dead pan, surprise look of the one who gets it right in the face. It is shock treatment, and the one who is due for the shock must react to it as though it is a shock. See to it then that your men understand the essential need for "straight" playing when you embark on the staging of one of these burlesque numbers. You'll get one hundred per cent more laughs out of the finished article and you won't be kidding yourselves into horseplay.

Use discretion when you first plan your show and don't attempt items far beyond your scope. It is all very well to be carried away by something you have seen put over with the aid of large numbers, lighting effects, and changing scenery. If you try this with only limited facilities, you will be presenting a show—but only you will know what it is supposed to be

I've fallen into this trap more than once myself, and before I decide on any big "trick," I analyse it from every angle.

On the other hand, don't elaborate something you have seen and liked by taking a small item and endeavouring to turn it into a big one. "Over the Garden Wall" was one of the cutest numbers we have staged, but on one occasion I saw it ruined completely by a thoughtless producer "adding" to the original production. You may remember the scene is played by the actors as they look over a garden wall at an imaginary girl in the garden of the house opposite. The whole essence of this item is that they are the only ones who see the girl but this didn't do for my friend. He had to show the audience the girl. Obviously, the

moment she appeared the audience laughed. On went the singing, and the vital lyrics were lost completely. The number was thus changed from a charming unsophisticated contribution to a silly burlesque.

Especially does this apply to the mime or serious sketches. Believe me they have been carefully edited, planned, and staged with very great care, and it is unnecessary to put in anything extra. To illustrate still further what I mean I'll tell you about the restaging of "The Owls."

There is a very tense moment when the "Owl" Patrol returns and talks to the Skipper: and in the words of the dialogue one slowly realises that these young boys were all in fact killed in various ways during the war. The drama is purely in the picture of these lads telling their Skipper what happened to them. Imagine then how I felt on seeing before me some enterprising producer bringing on ghosts of Servicemen to stand behind the boys as they were speaking to their Scoutmaster ! It broke the spell completely, and just showed how unimaginative he thought his audience were. Please don't add to these serious items; if such a thing were needed, it would have been included in the first place. Give the bloke who created the scene some credit for knowing what was in his mind. The times I have heard, "That was a smashing thing you did last year in the show, Ralph, but when we did it . . . !" My answer is "Why why, oh, why?"

Now, don't run away with the idea that I am out to crush initiative not at all; but if you do think you have a better idea, drop me a line and tell me about it. If it is a good one, I'll let you have your own way, but if it isn't, then I can write back and explain why I don't approve. In most cases I think I could make myself quite clear. I certainly would appreciate the compliment, anyway.

Do you remember a Scout play, We'll Live For Ever? One of the chief characters is a small Scout who always gets his words mixed up. But he is a sweet little chap nicknamed "Muzzy." A lot of the propaganda of the story hangs on him, as it is through Muzzy that an ex-Service chap returns to Scouting. So, though he gets the main laughs of the show, we rely on him to hold the story together and get the main theme of the drama. One day at I.H.Q. a P.L. came to me and said that his Group had performed the play. I asked him how their "Muzzy" had got on. "Oh," said the youth, "he was a scream, old Skip was smashing." I looked at him and said, "Skip?" The boy said, "Yes, we didn't have a small boy. But you see, our Skip is a big fat man, and he played it and got yells." I groped for a jug of water and nearly swallowed the lot. Such things nearly make me say, "What's the use ! "

So don't get too cross with me when I make constant reference to "sticking to the scripts" and beg you to do your utmost to stage, to the letter, any material you get from the original production, without additions and without further elaboration. I care not two hoots what you do with anybody else's material, but I do care a great deal how you interfere with something that has already been tried and proved effective. I assure you it will be to your own advantage to play these things as written. So on to the next tip. It should be understood that no member of your cast is holding a script in his hands at least three weeks before your show comes off.

You know, as well as I do, it is common to see, even at a dress rehearsal, members still looking at their words. Now this must be wrong. Either you haven't allowed yourselves sufficient time for rehearsing (and this is an offence!) or you haven't been firm enough with your actors. Another offence ! No matter

how "jumpy" a man may be when he first lays his -script down, get it out of his hands. as early as possible. Nothing brings more confidence to a player than when he realises he does not have to look at his lines any more; and nothing can help him perfect his movements and his actions as easily as when his hands are free from holding papers.

Warn your cast of this when you have first got them together, and they will then know what is expected of them. Let them recap, as much as they like, before they go on the floor to rehearse, but set a dead line date for the exclusion of scripts and stick to it. And be sure you make them return the scripts after they have finished with them, for you never know when they may be needed again and it is all part of the business that these things be returned and filed for future use. It is all part of The Training.

In the same way allow your actors plenty of time to get used to the "props" they will be using. Don't leave this until you get on the stage. Even if you don't find it possible to use the actual objects, supply substitutes. But give them something to hold in their hands, and then they will get used to picking them up, laying them down, and getting the feel of them. You can't be too careful about this. It will prevent awkwardness and bring a smoothness that pays good dividends.

Personal "coaching" is a valuable asset and especially in the case of star part men. I advise getting them away from the main bulk of the cast, for preference at your home, or on a night when the rest are not working on the show. Individual attention is a wonderful system to bring the very best out of a performer whether it is in a lyric or a scene. Besides, it doesn't hold up the main rehearsal and bore the waiting personnel. It is an easy way to get rid of the self consciousness of many a boy and it brings him a confidence he can get in no other way. You can work a miracle with the "dull" boy and make him feel important, if you take him aside one evening and give him a little special attention. It is a Scouty thing to do, too.

Now on to one of the craftiest words ever used by mankind. It's an overworked, unneeded word which should be banished for ever, especially from the vocabulary of any Scouter who takes his life in his hands and ventures on the task of" putting on a show." That word is "Excuses."

Never make excuses. There can be no reason for a bad show, no reply to something that has been overlooked, because neither should be allowed to happen. We all know about young Tommy who suddenly goes down with the mumps, and about eighteen year-old Jim who gets hiked off to do his National Service: but even when these things happen at the last minute, you'll find no difficulty in replacements if you have been rehearsing properly. Few boys don't know the lines through watching the skits in rehearsal, and apologies to an audience because of a last minute alteration should be forbidden.

You wouldn't appreciate it at all if some one sold you a pair of shorts, and then apologised for the cut because a new cutter had to be put in. You'd want your money back—or at least, a rebate, wouldn't you? Well, if you sell a ticket for your show to members of the public, they want the best, and are entitled to the best without feeble alibis for something which is your responsibility. Value for money is an old adage that is still true, so make up your mind before you start off on a show that whatever happens, your public is going to have value for money. Don't make excuses

I'd try, too, to cut down on the now overworked "miming to gramophone records." It's all right for the parents' social, but it's been done too many times to bring it up again in the show. If you must have someone doing impersonations, skip the worn-out "usuals," Charles Boyer, Durante, Garbo, and Co. I often wish I could be allowed to see a Patrol Leader doing an impersonation of his Scoutmaster, the visiting Commissioner, or the Vicar. If he made them true to life, he'd bring the house down.

I think it is a pity that more performers don't try serious monologues or poems. If they have been well studied and spoken correctly, they can provide a fine moment of repose in any show. By no means do I mean "The Charge of the Light Brigade" or "The Old Stage-Door Keeper," but there are many short three minute poems hidden away in some of the classics. Don't think they won't be appreciated. They will be: and it will be a great contrast to all the broad comedy that runs through the programme. Some of these "straight" poems can be illustrated by performers as the reciter reads the verses—much the same as the way we did the Napoleon scene in the 1956 show. It will take a lot of practice to time the movements with the lines of the speaker, but if they are dove tailed nicely you will have a very excellent item.

If there is anything worse than the use of a "mike" in a small hall I have yet to experience it. But night after night I have been blasted into insensibility by the blaring of an untrained voice assaulting me with violence through the greatest enemy of our time.

Leave 'em alone! If your singer has such a small voice that he can't be heard in the front row, shut him up in a bathroom, don't ask people to pay money to be insulted. If you think I am letting off steam, well, I am. There are many great stars today whom I admire and would go anywhere to see and hear; they do use mikes because they happen to be microphone artists. But they know how to use them (and it is an art), and their particular technique needs a mike: but when this magnifying instrument is in front of an amateur with no idea whatever of its sensitivity the sentence should be slow death by the same torture he brings to his unfortunate audience. Lay off mikes

Now, a word to Akelas. The Cubs obviously must be included in a Group show, so, not fearing death in any shape or form, I am going to give some advice on the Cub item. Please, dear, sweet Akelas, let your Cub item be a contribution, not a hold-up; let it be a slick presentation and not an endurance test.

Only recently I was present at a District "Gang Show in no, I won't say where but, anyway, it was a grand show, fast and breezy until the Cubs came on. For the first ten minutes they did a super turn, but it went on—and on. It took twenty-five minutes before they ended their turn, and by that time, even their own mothers were looking at their programmes to see what was coming on if ever next. Twenty five minutes! It takes a star performer to stand up to anything over twelve to fifteen minutes, especially in a revue. Anything beyond this is a stand-still.

If you have got a great idea, and if it does mean you are going to swamp the show with the Cub item, break it up into two or three portions: but please, Akela, don't give it to your audience all in one lump. It would take a team of super-men to pull the show back into shape again after nearly half an hour had been taken up by one single item.

I know they are adorable, I know they look sweet, and I know the audience love them : but don't give them a chance to hate them. "Leave the

audience wanting," is the greatest axiom in Show-business, but the thing you make them want should not be a rest ! Be kind to the Scouts and the Rovers, too, and don't allow them too much time to cool off. Be thoughtful of your audience and don't give them too much of a good thing. Above all, be fair to your Cubs. This should be one case where the Old Wolf gives in to the Cubs. Short and sweet. The Cubs are sweet but, oh, blessed Akela, you are so rarely in favour of keeping these delightful items short. (I stand by now and await the letters!)

Forgive me for making such an obvious remark, but all songs are made up of two things, music and words. The pianist will help with the music, but it is up to the singer to allow the audience to hear the words.

Throughout the years of watching and hopefully listening to Scout shows, I have been appalled at the lack of diction when it comes to putting over the words of a song. Especially does this apply to a comic song.

The very moment the "catch line," or the "funny line" is due, the singer immediately decides to give it all he has got. Sure enough, he knows the words, and he knows they are funny, so he gives it the comic treatment. The usual result is that the only laugh comes from those in the wings who know the line, and perhaps a sheepish grin from certain members of the audience who merely smile at the grimace the entertainer makes with his face.

Let the line get the laugh. It'll work nine times out often. Make a daft action or a funny face, and the line won't have a chance. The audience will always be interested if they can hear what it is all about: so, even in the smallest show, get the words of the song over. Practise diction and you'll find it pays good dividends. In this age of television and radio you have plenty of opportunity to hear the greatest singers of songs in the world today, so learn from them. Today, words count even more than the tunes.

There need be no handicap in putting on a show with only a few good performers. Pardon me if I go back again to tell you about the R.A.F. "Gang Shows," but each unit was made up of only eight or ten men. Only eight or ten.

Time and time again, at the end of one of these shows, the Entertainment Officer, or the C.O., or the Padre, would thank the Airmen and say something to this effect, "It is surprising to realise that only nine or ten men have been taking part in this show tonight. From the number of characters we have seen, one would have expected at least twenty." The sole reason for this was the lay out of the programme, the way each man's talent was distributed.

That is what you must do if you are going to put on a Group show with only a limited number of specialists. It can be done if care is taken when you begin to lay out your programme, but it must be done weeks before you call your company to the first rehearsal. Oh, the times I have heard Scouters say, "We've got our first rehearsal next week for the Group show, but what we're going to do, I don't know." Shame on everyone who says this. Do you take your Group to camp without preparation? Of course not.

Preparation is the seed from which a good show will grow, but it can't flower unless the soil has been prepared beforehand. I promise you this, if you work out every detail before you call the first rehearsal, your worries will be halved, the interest of every member of the cast will be kept up, and you will never be at a loss to know what to do as the show date gets closer. You will avert panic. Nothing blurs even the dimmest talent so quickly as uncertainty; nothing helps the amateur so much as being certain what he is going to do, and how can

you help him better than by planning each movement and each item way ahead of time? Frankly, you can't.

Get the copy of all your lyrics and sketches typed out before hand, and see that every member of your outfit is given one. Not in pencil, but in type. On the first day of rehearsal, never allow a boy to rehearse unless he has a pencil in his pocket. This is so that he can write down pieces of business you give him the very moment you are producing him. If he writes it down then and there, it will be stamped on his mind and he will not forget it. Every professional in the business does this and even reads out his new directions as he does them. If it is good enough for the pro's, then surely it is good enough for us.

Lighting is always a problem in the local hail.

Some have a certain amount of modern equipment, but most of the rural places are barren of anything of the kind required for a revue. Hiring prices are steep (unless some local tradesman can be roped in to help). You must keep expenses down yet still have enough electrics to bring a few effects to the big scenes.

If you can afford to hire a few lamps, go in for "floods," because they will cover the maximum of space and the colours can be changed to suit requirements. A "spot" at the rear of the hall is always an asset, but be sure and tell its operator exactly who you want spotted and don't allow him to wander around the stage, picking out anybody at random!

It is the centre of the stage that really counts, so bring your lighting to bear chiefly on this area. Warmth is the great thing all the time, so get rid of as much white lighting as possible: use bright colours. Try to avoid shadows on the back-cloth. I have produced some excellent little shows using only three floods, one on each side of the stage, a little in front of the footlights, built up on boxes and decorated, and the odd one either just above the front of the stage (and behind the proscenium) or suspended from the roof, flooding directly down to the centre.

The "spot" from the back of: the hail I used only for single items or for extra flooding on ensemble numbers. The usual old fashioned type of footlights badly blur faces of the cast when they come too far downstage and something is needed to counteract this. That is why I like the extra "floods" to be way out in front of the footlights. But it all adds up to what you can afford, and if you want to learn something about this stage lighting you can't do better than write to Stand Electric. They are the finest experts on this, and they will sell you a book giving you valuable advice on all aspects of stage-lighting and how to get good effects at a nominal charge.

Costuming, again, comes under the "charge account," but mum, as we know so well, is a great saver. But one has to "cut the cloth," as it were according to the "pocket." All costumes we use in the town show can be hired from West End Costumes, whose address can be found in the Directory. It can be an expensive business, so if money is scarce it would be wise to hire only the set that is necessary for the biggest items.

One thing I'd like to make clear now. A lot of people imagine I have an interest in West End Costumes. Allow me to put on record here and now, I have no interest in this firm whatsoever except for the good work they do for us in our own show.

It is to our advantage that other Scout shows hire costumes from them simply because the more they hire out, the better can they make our costumes

for the next London "Gang Show." They have given us yeoman service, and no one is more helpful or keen than Peter Dunlop, presiding genius of this firm. Therefore, I strongly advise anyone who can afford to hire costumes to get in touch with Mr. Dunlop. You will certainly get every attention and, likewise, be sure you are getting the actual costumes for which each item of our shows are written. However, make sure whatever creations are home-made, that they are representative of the number (or song) concerned. By that I mean be sure they "fit the scene."

Some of you may think this a daft thing to say. It isn't, because I saw a concert last year where the chorus were dressed in Spanish costumes, and they sang "London Town"! I asked afterwards what the idea was, and the G.S.M. told me that a sister of one of the boys once went to a fancy-dress dance as a Spanish maiden and they decided to make the other costumes to fit the one they had. They reason they sang "London Town" was because they thought it would be different. It was.

I've written elsewhere about make-up. I won't dwell on it again, but please read, mark, learn, and never forget, it is not what you put on your face that counts, it is what you leave off. Incidentally, there is one point I'd like to mention before I finish this chapter, and it does concern make-up.

Nothing looks worse than clothes disfigured by greasepaint, and yet this is far too common an occurrence to be allowed to pass. It is vital for every chap to look smart and clean. No one can look his best wearing a shirt smeared with carmine or eye pencil there is no need for this.

Never, therefore, make-up in your stage suit. Never change your make-up or add to it without first of all covering up the suit you are going to wear, even when it is necessary to make alterations during the performance. I know this is sometimes essential, but no matter how quick the change, cover up before you dabble with a stick of greasepaint so that when you do get back on the stage your suit will look spick and span.

Mothers will appreciate the fact that you want their son to look his best. I have never yet found anyone in this grand body of helpful people who has complained when a boy has been given his shirt or shorts to be taken home and washed so that it can be cleaned for the next night. Finally please don't allow any boy to go out of the hall during or after a show with his make-up on. It is unfair to his folk at home and even worse than this, it is a terrible sight for him to be seen on the street like this. It is done. Don't you allow it.

Summing up then, don't use too much scenery, don't handicap yourselves by using anything you can do without, and watch that First act finale.



*Belfast Telegraph*  
Ralph shows the Belfast Gang a new step



A tense moment at a Dress Rehearsal

Take Akela out for the evening and guardedly talk her (or him) into cutting down on that Cub item so that it doesn't become like Tennyson's "brook": and, as in all things connected ,with any show, it is the time spent beforehand in preparation that makes for the real good show. Numbers matter not at all, slickness and care does. I've seen some of the smartest Scout shows ever, done by a mere dozen boys simply because they have given thought to the undertaking and have worked out their programmes to a split second. Two hours is plenty long enough for the average programme, so don't drag it on for three hours few West End shows are this length, so keep it nice and snappy.

The big Gang revues are fine shop-windows, but the backbone of all Scout entertainments are the Group shows—so I hope these few hints will have helped you. Good luck for your next one.

If I were asked to underline anything I have said throughout these pages, I would remind you time and time again that the first essential in starting off your show is PREPARATION.

**Line up your show BEFORE YOU BEGIN REHEARSALS, and keep that running order. Nothing shows up a producer's defects as much as the constant changing of the running order at each new rehearsal—and it causes him, too, a tremendous amount of unnecessary trouble. Have it all down on paper and stick to it.**

**Don't rely on your memory, because with so much to think about nobody can keep it all in one head and trot it out at the exact moment it is needed. Have it in writing, and you'll save yourself a lot of headaches.**

**Remember your Group show is open to the public who pay to see it. Give them their money's worth, and chalk up a medal of merit for your Group at the same time.**



*Archie Handford*

Don Werts, Syd Palmer, and Dinky Rew in "Services Calling," 1956

# 14

## *The Backroom Boys*

No history of any big-scale undertaking would be complete without reference to the legions of men who, unseen by the public out front, perform duties backstage and “behind the scenes of organisation” without which nothing could be brought to life.

The equivalent to names I can mention here are found in every place, big and little, where pages of the “Gang Show” story are written. They have their “opposite numbers” in each hamlet, town, or city today, but in the beginning, let’s take a look and see who was around at the formation time of the very first “Gang Show.” Happily, most of them are still with us; but some have gone further afield and are now helping with the production of shows as far apart as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The training they had when they were with us is now being put to practical use in the newer Gangs that seem to crop up with each new week of the year. They write home regularly to us asking for the latest “hints,” and the newest suggestions for planning and rehearsing and they are kept up-to-the-minute with any new development that comes into being. I suppose the Number One of all “backroomers” must be the Committee. Little can be done effectively without such a body and, I remember well, the very first thing we did at the outset of it all was to appoint a Committee. Here are the names of the people who sat on our very first Committee: J. H. Knight (Chairman), Hon. Mrs. M. Beaumont, R. A. Boulton, Major A. R. Boyle, A. W. Hurll, C. W. C. May, R. H. McCarthy, B. S. Munroe, and “A Holborn Rover.” Roy McCarthy was our very first publicity manager.

Few of these are with us now, but other stalwarts have taken their places, notably Murray Napier the present County Commissioner for London. But Fred Hurll still “sits,” and has been our Chairman on several occasions. Right from its inception to the present day this “body” has been the most UN-interfering Committee it has been my lot to know. They get through a meeting with the maximum of speed. By no means do I always get my own way, and they are not slow to remind me that I am but a humble member. (Fortunately they remind me with a grin!) Our meetings have always been few and far between. Never more than four a year, and this includes the kick-off and the final summing-up meeting, so you see, they have never believed in wasting time. The answer is that they all know their job, understand what is required, and get down to it in the shortest possible time.

Some Committees, especially for a Charity show, go out for names because they look pretty good on the paper heading. They are also useful in selling tickets, but this is one trap into which we have never fallen and for that we can all be profoundly thankful.

It is difficult to get on with the business when one sits facing Lady Dooda or Lord Thingamee. They so often have things to talk about which have nothing to do with the job on hand, and only too frequently both Lord and Lady have not the slightest idea of what they are there for in the first place. There was just one exception, when we were landed with a “glitter list” Committee, but as this was a very exceptional occasion we all felt it was justified. In fact, this was one time when every member not only pulled his or her weight but came on the

Committee wanting to do everything in their power to make the evening a very special one. They succeeded. It was to plan the opening night of the "Gang Show" film at the Lyceum Theatre, and a very illustrious evening this turned out to be. Here are the names of some of our members and I am sure you'll agree with me it is an impressive line up. Herbert Wilcox, Dorothy Dickson, Binnie Hale, Anna Neagle, Jack Buchanan, Gordon Harker, Sydney Howard, Bobby Howes, Colonel G. Walton, Vera Pearce, and Ivor Novello. Every one of them was a worker. They did not spare themselves on our behalf and we remain abidingly grateful.

But, as I say, this was an exceptional occasion and all against the usual run of our ruling Committee. Today, looking through the minutes of the last meeting one sees the names of the present regime. J. Murray Napier, A. W. Hurl, Ted Wood, Geoff Birch, Tommy Thompson, Mick Barker, and myself. We have two additions to the above and these two are co-opted annually to represent the Cast. For years they consisted of Jack Beet and Dink Rew, but now, at their own request, we change the co-opted members, thus allowing more senior members to be present at our Committee meetings. Whether Mr. Hurl or Mr. Napier is in the Chair makes no difference to the speed of getting on with the job, for each one is concerned with only one thing that the ultimate result be in every way good.

The corner-stone having been laid, as it were, by the black coated workers of the organisation, let's get on to the honest to goodness labourers, the boys who take off their jackets, roll up their sleeves, and sweat and toil the whole time through backstage, pushing scenery, buttons, and arc-lamps. The lads who never feel the glare of the footlights on them, who are never allotted dressing rooms, who wear no fancy costumes and know not the feel of greasepaint. Christened by one of the "wits as "The Chain Gang," but known affectionately to all of us as the Backstage Boys.

They are a gang on their own, with their special brand of humour, and they rival everybody with their choice of likes and dislikes. Perhaps because they are often the "lookers-on" during stretches of rehearsals, they spot weaknesses in playing and in character more quickly than most, and night after night they can be seen grouped together watching a sketch in preparation with a critical eye. A sardonic grin tells you their minds have already been made up as to the worth of the item and the performers playing it. They are ahead of anybody, with a wisecrack ever on their lips.

I remember one evening a newcomer came up to them and asked for Geoff Birch. "What do you want him for?" asked one of the backstagers. "It's about a script. I'm one of the actors." He was withered with a disdainful scowl as its owner replied, "Actor? Actor? Down on your knees, scum, you're talking to one of the staff." Oh, yes, these boys are proud of their position, and they never lose an opportunity of reminding the performers that theirs is an exclusive calling. Since 1932 we can brag about this merry band of "sloggers" who pull the strings of the "Gang Show," way out of sight of the paying patrons, and who glory in the name of the Backroom Boys.

Let's meet them.

Geoff Birch, who worked under our original stage director, Fred Hurl, is now running the backstage scene completely as head man.

He served his apprenticeship well and there are few professional stage directors who can surpass him in—this particular line of country. I like to brag of the fact that Geoff was my right-hand man who started with me in the 10th Holborn Group even before our first visit to the Scala Theatre. So we know each other pretty well. He now holds an important appointment in the Equipment Department at I.H.Q., but I like to believe he is never happier than when working twice as hard “in the corner” on the Golders Green stage.

Beside him, in charge of the lighting, is Michael Hurl, the son of Fred. I remember when Mike was born. It was on the day of a dress-rehearsal at the Scala. We were rehearsing the finale of the first act, “Blow.” The boys were dressed in white shirts and red scarves, and I had a very fine effect of a storm, with water pouring on to the stage through long pipes. We had just started to light this particular scene when Fred was called to the hospital. He saw the opening effect, the boys swamped with the downpour and the sudden awakening to something we hadn’t foreseen. The scarves shed their scarlet colouring on to the white shirts ! Undismayed, I went on trying to light the “rain.” Nothing is more difficult to light than water, and it took me hours, and all this time the boys had to remain in their places. As one of the boys said to me afterwards, “I ain’t a Scout any more, I’m a fish.” When Fred arrived back from his visit to tell us Michael had arrived, the boys were still sitting there, not so happy, but still in the shower. Mike is now our lighting expert number one.

Alf Wingrove (of Gilwell) is another stalwart of the backroom boys, and alongside him are Harry Killingray, Ernie Biddlecombe, Fred Samuels, Les Rolph, Lou Churchman, and Harry Knight, etc.

And here we come to Jim Figg. Jim has always been with every Scout show I have produced, whether revue, play, or pageant. Pie handles the props, and when I say “handles” them, he handles! I’ve asked for some strange things in the years, but he’s got them. The look on his face when some weird request is before him needs seeing to understand. There is a blankness which leaves nothing to the imagination. Then you see him walk away, to be joined by his own mates, who on hearing what is wanted will murmur, “Cor, stone the crows, what next?” You can be assured that with any prop Jim Figg and his boys handle, it will be set exactly in the right place. Not a table, a chair, or a vase will be half an inch out of place. Jim is a strange mixture. Let me tell you a story about him.

Once, when I was playing the part of the Skipper in “The Road to Where?” I forgot a personal “prop” which was vital to the scene. I’m not usually temperamental, but for a moment I was flummoxed completely. (You see, I had to produce this particular article at the end of the scene and I had left it in the dressing room.) Fortunately for me Jim Figg was watching and I managed to convey to him what was wrong.

He simply put his hand in his pocket and handed me a duplicate prop which I took from his hand by walking to the side of the stage as though it were part of the “business” and all was well. But during the following dialogue, one of the older members of the cast (who should have known better) decided to play his lines in an entirely different way from that in which they were rehearsed. I worked myself up into a frenzy, but could do nothing about it until the curtain fell.

I raced into the dressing-room and I’m afraid I went to town in no uncertain way with the gentleman concerned. The others in the room hadn’t heard me let off steam like this before and they stood still, hardly breathing.

Then at the height of my raving I looked over at the door and there stood Jim Figg grinning all over his face. "And what are you laughing at?" I shouted. Jim, in that quiet, never-bothering way of his, merely looked at me and said, "You." He walked over (and the silence in that room you could have cut) calmly took the "prop the had handed me and put it in his pocket. "I knew you'd forget it one night, Skip it's great to know we're all human, but don't do it again or I shall be cross, and I might even shout and rave and that would be silly, wouldn't it? The tension broke. I grinned and Jim just walked on out of the room. He has never mentioned that incident to me since, but I have never forgotten it. I like, too, to believe that it was one of the reasons, ever since that night, I have done everything in my power never to "go off the deep end" again. Jim Figg is one of the most "thinking" men I have ever met. Nothing escapes him and he plays for perfection and exactness in everything he undertakes.

It was a grand day for us all when the Chief awarded him the Silver Acorn for his great work in Scouting and equally it will be a sorry day for all of us here when his work takes him away from that prop-room. His thoroughness is always to the fore; he has a well-trained crew who have been with him for many years. They know the ropes, and they will carry on. They have all his ideas, his way of going about things. The one thing Jim can't hand on to them is his personality. He's had to get everything you can think of for various scenes—among them horses, hounds, donkeys, and rabbits. He never failed. (Alas, since writing this, Jim has left us. His job has taken him northward.)

For years "Nunc" Greenfield, a Lewisham Scouter and a schoolmaster, was in charge of our orchestra. He was also to the fore at the Royal Albert Hall, directing all our choirs there: but in the very first edition of "Boy Scout," George Chance wielded the baton. "Nunc" was a tireless worker with the "Gang Shows" and it amazed me how he could still manage to run his Group, be so prominent in his own District, and spend hours with us both on preparation and rehearsing. Because of ill-health "Nunc" stood down some time ago, and is now taking things easier, but on occasions he comes back to us. He still belongs.

Now, as O.C. music, we have John Stiles. He could rate as a genius if for no other reason than that he can read at a glance my own peculiar type of manuscript. That's more than I can do, but John picks up a new tune I have just written and plays it without a hitch. Nearly every night of the week (except on his Troop night) he'll be out playing for some Scout effort, often miles outside London. Very often he comes to play for me when I have to make some personal appearance, but he is always round about where there is work to be done, and heaven only knows what we would do without him.

Although the vast majority of Troop "Gang Shows" are all male affairs, one should never overlook the help given by the ladies—and not only in the costume department either. Mrs. Daisy Hyde, for example, one of Manchester's most famous Scouters, happens to be an Elocution Specialist. What an opportunity here for a few tips to the sketch players. Admittedly, ladies like Mrs. Hyde, who have homes to look after as well as a heavy Scouting programme are very busy people, yet it is a positive fact that the busy people are always the ones who make the most time to take on other jobs.

Then there is Mrs. Kitty Lydell "Kitty" to everyone who has ever met her. She is the only feminine member of the Gang: one of the most accomplished pianists I know and surely one of the most generous. She gives of her talents abundantly and what the 4th Holborn would do without her I don't know, nor

Islington and Bermondsey, come to that, for she leaves her husband in charge of the shop and trots off anywhere and everywhere to lend a helping hand wherever it may be needed. She is a darling, and we are devoted to her.

When we have three pianos in the orchestra (as we often do) the third one is played by George Packham. It is George whom you see, perched high on the rostrums at the Albert Hall when "Boy Scout" is there, playing alongside John Stiles. George is a handicapped Scouter, but we would be the ones who were handicapped if we didn't have him along to give us a hand. It must be a super-human effort for him to travel the miles he does in his chair to take his place in the orchestra, and then back again after the performance, but he's there with us whenever we call upon him. What better way can he be described than as a Good Scout? In the programme of our first show are names, pioneer names, of those who were the first to play the songs which afterwards were to be sung all over the world. As I said, "Nunc" Greenfield was in charge of most of the early editions, but the very first conductor of all was A. Mackintosh, that great runner of Camp Fires at Gilwell.

The leader in the orchestra was A. Stockins. After the first couple of years we made great changes in the arrangement of the band and eventually augmented the instrumentalists with six grand pianos. This caused quite an effect upon the incoming audience; I guess their reaction was the same so that on one of our small boys who, on seeing the half-dozen pianos for the first time, said to his pal, "Look, the pianos are holding a Rally!"

An interesting note on the 1932 orchestra is provided by the credit line, "Orchestrations by P. R. Greenfield and R. C. D. Hanmer." Ronnie Hanmer not only helped with the orchestrations, but he also played the piano in the pit and he was, at that time, about fifteen years old. Today, an orchestration by Ron Hanmer would cost hundreds of pounds, for he has become one of the foremost arrangers in the musical world. He is sought by all the top-line singers, and hardly a star in the country has not called him in for a special arrangement of a new number. You will find his name on gramophone records, in the "Radio Times almost every week, and on the covers of some of the biggest song hits of the day. He is still proud to remember that his early efforts were for the "Gang Show," and we in turn are very proud of Ronnie's success.

Nowadays, we use a professional orchestra, with that popular musical director, Harry Hudson, in charge. Whatever his professional engagements may be, Harry arranges things so that he is free to come down to London to conduct the annual "Spree's as he calls it. Usually you will find him conducting for Jewel and Warris, Norman Evans, or one of Tom Arnold's major Christmas pantomimes.

I believe he is never happier than when he is with us. Certainly he is a great favourite with all the boys. However, among the professional musicians in the pit, our two stalwarts, Kitty Lydell and John Stiles remain. We'd be lost without them. Our only other professional is a man who has the admiration of all of us in the Gang Bill West.

Bill is a stage director and has handled some of the biggest shows in the country. I have never seen a man get a production into a theatre and fixed up on a Monday morning quicker than he does. He not only gives the orders, but he gets to grips with the heavier bits of the scenery himself. Bill has saved his employers hundreds of pounds by the efficiency and knowledge which, after a long journey from one town to another, makes it possible

to open on the Monday night in the new town. We like to have him with us just to keep an eye on things, and to me, he is never more valuable than at the dress rehearsal. When I tell you that he never intrudes on the jobs of our own boys, and that they regard him as one of themselves, I think I am paying him the greatest possible compliment.

Hundreds of boys come to the London show from all over the country, and we try our best to provide hospitality for them. In charge of this department is Frank Holme, District Commissioner for Pinner.

He works closely with his "oppo's" from the other big scale shows, and is untiring in his efforts to welcome the expected visitors. (Nowhere is the hospitality greater than in Newcastle. The Saturday afternoon tea party when that mighty gathering of Gangsters from everywhere get together is a sight that can only be seen in Geordie land! I just don't know how they do it but they do!) It is more difficult in London, because of the size of the place, and I do hope our brothers from out of town realise it. It is absolutely impossible to get a large enough hall or room to hold a big gathering near Golders Green on a Saturday. Every large building is booked, either for dances or regular customers, and we dare not risk taking our cast far from the theatre between the matinee and the night show. London has fog! We might never get back. So we do the best we can, and Frank and the rest of us just hope you'll understand.

Our Press Representative is now Ted Wood from I.H.Q. It is necessary at times to get the assistance of a Fleet Street man simply because London is very different from the provinces, and here we battle not with the local newspaper but the nationals. Getting space in the national newspapers can be a very difficult thing, particularly when there is so little new material which can be written about a show. Even for the Royal Tournament it is hard to get the coverage which such a show warrants. Advertisements, yes; but getting pictures and news items in a national newspaper is another kettle of fish. Remember, it is not as personal as in a smaller city or town. Ted Wood & Co. deserve a bouquet for every paragraph they get.

We must put on record here the willing help we have had through the years from the well known writer, critic, and author, Gale Pedrick. He has been more than generous with advice, and with the dozens of articles he has written for us. His interest began long before the last war. When I look through my scrap-book and read again some of the writeups he gave us in the days before I met him, it makes me realise that here indeed is a man who has been a wonderful friend to us all. He was behind the scenes in the arrangements made for a number of our successful shows on radio and television, and we are indeed fortunate to be able to call on him whenever we need some new angle for publicity.

Now comes a "mention" which will give me greater pleasure than anything I have written for many a long day. It's about a fellow who helps me more than even I know. He takes more work off my shoulders than an entire staff, but above all else he stands by my side as a man filled with a burning sincerity. His name, now known to thousands, is Tommy.

Let me pay tribute to I.H.Q. for "presenting" Tommy Thompson to the "Gang Show" Department at 25 Buckingham Palace Road. It isn't fully appreciated just how much work Tommy puts in each year, answering letters of enquiry, sending off scripts and music, and keeping check on the thousands of shows that go on every week of the year—nay, every night. It is through the

generosity of I.H.Q. that this is being done, and I consider it only right that this should be made clear.

For Tommy himself there can be nothing but praise: few know (as I do) the hours and hours he spends giving unstinted help to anyone who needs it. No one has ever had a thoughtless or curt reply from Tommy and no one has to wait long for an answer to their requests. He has a temperament I envy and a loyalty seldom equalled. At rehearsals he wanders around with a stop watch in his hand, and if a sketch or song runs a few seconds over time he is at me in a flash. He is a "know all" in the highest sense. Every member of the show is an open book to Tommy, though they seldom realise it. He is aware of every likely happening long before I am. He can sum up a chap quicker than anyone I know, and no warning he ever gives me is unheeded. If a full salute be due to any particular personality in our "Gang -Show" family, that man is Tommy Thompson.

He is an ever—present, but he has a genius for self effacement.

While these tributes are in my mind, and are directed to the many who have contributed one way and another to the rise and continuance of the Gang Shows, the name of W. A. Sutton, known to us all as "Bill," must be in the front rank of the queue.

As a boy, he was in the cast of the very first show, and he remained with me for many years. Throughout the war in the Royal Air Force (where he rose to the rank of Warrant Officer) he was in charge of the Units, and also played his part as Producer. When the war ended and I started up my firm, Bill was the managing-director until he eventually left us to tackle a much bigger job with the Royal Artillery at Woolwich. It is there he stages one of the biggest Military Tattoos each year, and besides handling that enormous stadium, we hear him on the radio. He is still in close touch as the Hon. Secretary of one of the Holborn Associations of our old Boy Scout days, and, believe me, none of us older members will ever forget the name of Bill Sutton.

Bill Bannister, once the "leader" of our production numbers, is now a backstage director not with us but with the Torquay chaps. Bill gives us an even closer connection with the Devon boys. Each name I have mentioned has a counterpart in other big shows, doing the same unseen job, with the same enthusiasm and the same delight in doing it. Only the name and the accents differ. And no one shares more in the glory of a success than these backroom boys to whom we owe so much. Maybe this is as good a time as any to tell you something about this team of workers and how they operate during rehearsals.

They start off exactly the same time as the performers; their own rehearsals begin at the same moment. As each sketch is given its first staging, the prop boys note exactly what props will be needed, and add any extra odds and ends the producer may suddenly include whilst laying the scene. From a previous reading of the scripts (which are sent to the boys prior to the first rehearsal) they will already know quite a few of the items needed: and I make it a rule that no one other than the Props Department handles any prop or places any piece of furniture in position. This method ensures right from the beginning that the property men know exactly where everything goes and the exact number of properties required. It is up to these men to train the actors to return to them every article they personally take off—stage during the action. It is a common sight at all our rehearsals to find the property men standing by each entrance and exit every time we rehearse each sketch. They know their positions just as do the actors on-stage.

You will never get the same efficiency if the off-stage team doesn't go into action until a few days before production. They should be rehearsed as diligently as the cast right from the start. Then there can be no last-minute panics for a forgotten prop, no nerve shattering moment searching for a misplaced telephone, all because they "grew up" with the duties expected of them from the moment each individual item was put "on the floor."

Apply this same training to your electricians and stage director. Allow the stage director to shout out "Curtain" or "Lights" just before the commencement of an item. At the end of the sketch, he should be the one who calls, "Blackout!" Only at that moment will the actors move from their places. Any changes of trick lighting that are planned should be on the lighting director's lips the moment it is supposed to happen. Thus you can be certain that the producer is confident that his men know their job. It means perfect timing and co-ordination of the entire production team.

Michael Hurll stands by me during the rehearsals of the big song scenes, and he will quietly say to me as a certain cue is coming up, "Stand by for down-stage floods to come in—(a pause and then) "Up!" And the "Up" will come on the actual beat of the music as planned. I guarantee that these pre rehearsed plans of co-ordination between the staff and the producer will save hours of worry at the dress rehearsal. What's more, it will do away with the wishful thinking of those foolish people who delight in saying, "It'll be all right on the night." It won't be, it can't be unless care such as I have indicated is high priority on your rehearsal agenda.

One final word of commendation to the call-boys. The lads who run up and down flights of stairs from the beginning of the show to the end. Nobody has a more exhausting job, and they don't always get the credit they deserve. Their job can be made easier if, right from the commencement of rehearsals, they carry a small note-book and write in it the names of everybody in each item. This note book will be invaluable to them during the actual show. I advise them to be very firm with any defaulter who does not "stand-by" when he is called.

All he has to do is to report the delinquent to his stage-director and let him speak to the person concerned. A call-boy is an important part of the whole, and it is the duty of everybody in the show to respect him. The sooner this is planted in the minds of each performer the better it is for the running of the show. Get your cast to understand that the call-boy is one of the bosses. He is there to be obeyed.

In recent years it has become a habit to allow call boys to join the cast of the following year's show if he wants to. They accept this as a fitting reward for the galloping up and down countless miles of stairways throughout the run of the previous show. So I do believe in hand-picking the call boys they may be the coming stars of future productions if selected with care in the first place.

So you see, these people who do all the donkey-work behind the scenes must be moulded into one unit, the Production Team. Once they have been trained to work smoothly, to know their individual jobs, the producer can remain out front watching points, completely assured that back-stage everything is in good hands.

See that your show is in the safe keeping of good hands.

# 15

## *Highlights*

We all have our own particular favourites when it comes to discussing sketches and songs from the “Gang Show.” If twenty people were asked to write down the items they enjoyed most, I doubt whether any list would be duplicated.

I too have my own “list,” and if you—are interested, here is a line-up (not in programme order) of the turns I would like to do again, Of the sketches, my first choice embraces “Dress Rehearsal,” “Overdoing it,” “Underworld,” “The Amateurs Present,” “Henry the Eighth,” “Seeing the Sights,” “Drama as You like It,” “Over the Sea,” “Never the Twain” (a very early one this), and “Services Calling.”

Of the big production numbers I enjoyed “Birds of a Feather,” “BlueBird,” “You’re the Fellow for Me,” “Picnic,” “Re-union,” “His Majesty the King,” “Dickens,” “Red, White, and Blue” “Light and Shade,” “The Lady Jives,” and, of course, “Crest.” One day I would like to restage “Crest of a Wave,” and produce it with all the new equipment we now have. I think it would be a wow.

Of the smaller front-cloth song numbers, several stand out as genuine high-spots. Number one is “Four Little Fellers,” closely followed by “Love, Love, Love,” and “Garden Wall.” “Types” and “Pride of the British Navy” would also feature high on my list, and I’m not forgetting such little gems as “Over Here from Over There,” “On the 8.15,” “Babies only Babies,” and the ever popular “Cupids.” I wonder how many of you remember seeing the original “Babies” doing this particular number in one of the big Warner Brothers films? I took them to see it when it opened years and years ago at the Empire in Leicester Square and I remember Syd Palmer saying to me as he saw the first shot of himself, “Blimey, Skip, do I look like that?”

Looking back on the 1956 production there stand out in my memory three performances that will, I believe, never be “topped” in anything we ever do. In fact, there were (to me) two other spots as well that could be singled out as memorable.

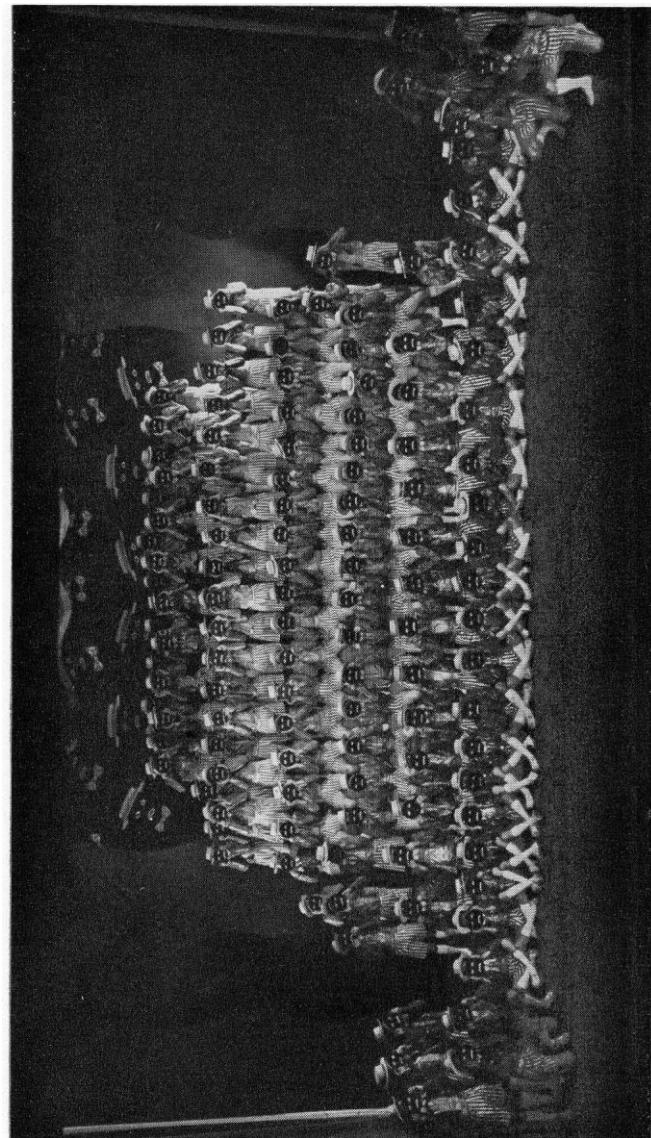
Let’s first pin-point the three performances. They were in a sketch entitled “Services Calling.” Only three characters in this skit: a soldier, a sailor, and an airman. These three men were sitting on a seat, each typically taking a rise out of each other. The parts were played by Don Werts, Syd Palmer, and Dinky Rew, and I can tell them here and now, they will never surpass the performances they gave in this particular item.

They never appeared to be actors ; they never “worked” a line, and they never even remotely got out of character. They were three Servicemen accidentally meeting and each one anxious to prove the worth of his branch of the Service. Yet, underlying all, there was a warmth of comradeship that will always be found among men wearing Her Majesty’s uniform.

Every year of experience behind them went into that sketch, and came forth with brilliant (and I mean brilliant) timing. Each night I wanted to tell the audience to watch out and enjoy every detail of these three performances, and I felt sorry, genuinely sorry, for the unfortunates in the audience who were not

able to appreciate exactly how well those three lads got under the skin of those parts. Only those inside the profession can fully appreciate exactly what artistry was displayed by Don, Dink, and Syd. Jack Hylton came back to me and his first comment was, "Those three fellows were high-class professionals in every line and gesture. What a trio." Herbert Wilcox told a dressing-room full of people, "I have never seen any sketch played as well as those three men in 'Services Calling.'" And Vera Lynn herself told Dink, "What a credit you three boys are to the theatre."

The other two spots I mentioned were, again, performances. The first was seen by millions on television when we gave an excerpt from the show. I'm referring to Norman Allen and Brian Kirby who performed "Keen, Keen, Keen." These two boys played that item like veterans. Not one false move, not a flicker of an eyelid when the other was putting over a point: and, what's more, not one night did their performance vary.



*Archie Handford*

"Dark Town Jubilee," 1956

The other outstanding performance in this particular show was given by a "performer" who was not seen by the audience. Only the result of his performance was visible. I am now talking about Michael Hurll, who was in charge of all the lighting cues and the particular item in which he gave a most outstanding performance was the dramatic episode of Guy Gibson in "Tribute to a Scout." This episode lasted eleven minutes and in this time there were thirty-three lighting cues. Each one had to fade in a split-second timing on a line or a gesture and come up equally effectively. At one moment we used five "effects" lamps, six acting areas, three spots, two pageants, and several floods. This would tax the ability of the greatest stage director in the business. Mike, during this scene, was as good as any stage director in the business. And he has yet to celebrate his nineteenth birthday!

All this reminds me that, through the years, there have been quite a few, really exceptional, performances by various members of the Gang in some particular sketch or song scene. Here are those which come to my mind as positively the best of the best.

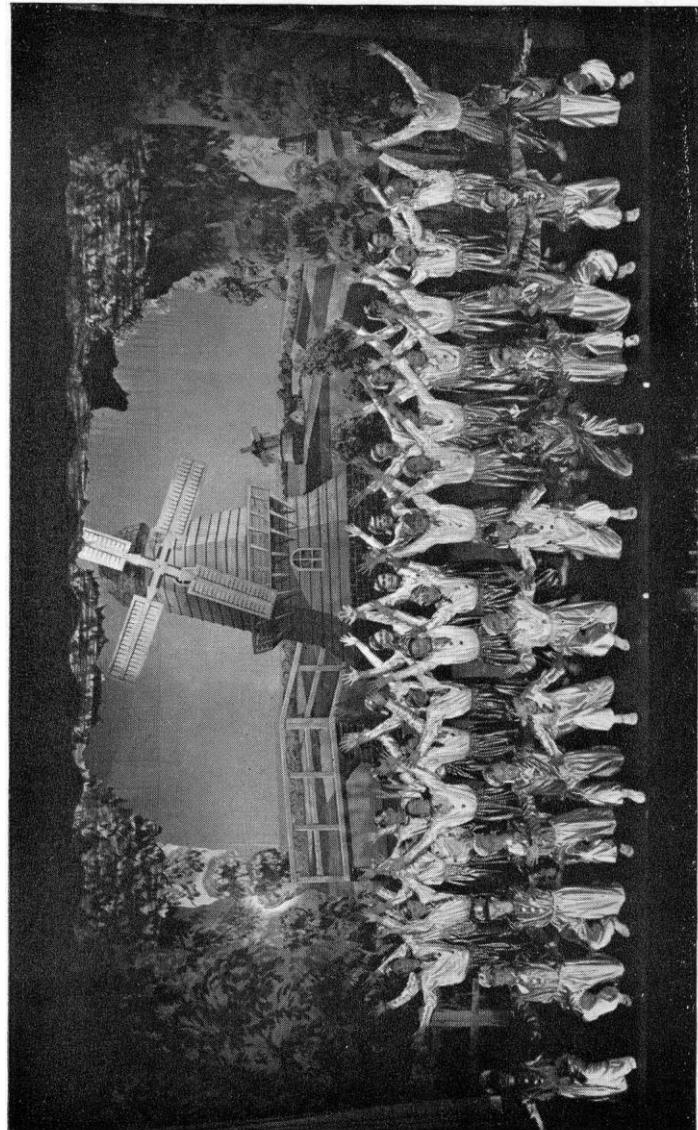
Though Bunny Wedge will be remembered for a long time for the tremendous way he worked and put over "The Lady Jives" in the 1956 show, his greatest contribution was as the Yankee Colonel in "American Musical." Before he opened his mouth, his very entrance brought down the house and throughout the scene he gave a performance that from any angle was near perfection.

Way back in the 1934's, Jimmy Childs recited "Indian Silhouette," and though he brought many fine characterisations in other shows, this was his finest performance.

Jack Beet has created perhaps as many parts as any living man, but one stands out above all the others for complete "character." He was not alone in this because by his side was Norman Fellowes ("Tinny" to us all), and some of my readers will now be getting ahead of me for you will realise I am talking about dozens of people, but none of them have even understood how far away from this "Miss Twizzle" they were.

Jack knew. He was that fierce some, deadly, mother's darling child who had to show off her party piece whenever a visitor was unfortunate enough to call at the house. It wasn't a cruel interpretation, it was a true one, and both he and "Tinny" made many a doting mother hide her head in shame when they saw how guilty they had been. "The Twizzle Sisters" became a household name throughout the country, and hardly a home in Great Britain didn't listen Sunday evenings to these two terrible "sisters" calling out, "Oh, Mr. Reader!" through the medium of those Sunday evening Luxembourg broadcasts. Incidentally, it was Gale Pedrick who first saw the possibilities of these two young dreadnoughts" and his faith in them was surely vindicated by the success they made.

Watching others portray these two "girls" after having seen Jack and Tinny is like watching an amateur reciting one of Hermione Gingold's famous monologues. It's all right so long as you haven't seen the original, but if you have well, it's not even a faint carbon copy. Jack Beet and Tinny as "The Twizzles" hit a new high for real-blooded characterisation.



*Archie Handford*

“Swing along by the Zyder Zee,” 1956

“His Majesty the King” has been a favourite for years and has been given hundreds of times, but to me there was only one boy who ever gave a one hundred per-cent performance of this part. That boy was Len Snelling, for whom it was originally written. (The nearest approach to this was done by Ted Potts in Newcastle when he had a really great youngster named Peter playing the young King: I have never seen this scene produced with greater care and understanding than in the productions rehearsed by Ted.) But Len Snelling, not only on the stage, but in the film of “The Gang Show” somehow captured the longing for the outside world that filled the heart of this youthful monarch, and I place his performance among the great ones of our shows.

Now I remember George Cameron as the Colonel tying to take his morning bath in a boarding-house filled with various people all clamouring to follow suit. Because there was no lock on the bathroom door, he had to endure the comings and goings of every member of the household, including four children who insisted upon using the bath (whilst he was in it) as a sailing pond for their boats. His only escape was eventually through the plughole!

George gave the performance of his life in this sketch, and even later, when he appeared as a solo act in the Royal Command Performance at the London Palladium, never did he rise to greater heights than that of the terrified Colonel who only wanted to be left alone.

High up on the "best performance" list comes young Ted Smith of the 4th Holborn (known as "Dimmock" to us all) when he played the "extra boy" on the end of the line of "We're Four Little Fellers Wot's Doing our Best to Fill up a Gap in the Programme." Not only the mothers' hearts in the audience went out to the small boy on the end of the line who "couldn't get a look-in." (I'd like to use this item again some time, but my fear is that, though it may still get over with today's audiences, I know there will never be another Dimmock, and I shall never be content with second-best.)

The portrayal of Guy Gibson by Bob Corp is another "must in my collection; and let me also pay tribute to yet another perfect piece of acting in the 1956 show. One of the most hilarious sketches we have ever done is "National Service," and there was an incident in this sketch which has been talked about the length and breadth of the country, simply because it was in the television sequence.

Stanley Newton played the Army Colonel and in one spot of the sketch his moustache fell off. This brought the house down. For fully three minutes the audience rocked in their seats as he, with great embarrassment, replaced the moustache, only to find it wouldn't stay in its appointed place, and off it came again. To see Stan's face as the house nearly collapsed was something never to be forgotten and literally hundreds of people have asked me whether this was intended.

It was. It had been well rehearsed beforehand and so well was it played by Stan that it fooled everybody everywhere. Those three minutes will go down in my memory as one of the finest pieces of real acting there has ever been in any show.

Stan won't mind my mentioning the great assistance he got from everyone on the stage, especially Dink, Syd, and Phil Davis (who, incidentally, has never done anything better than his Army Sergeant in this same sketch), but the actual "peak" of the situation was Stan's. A great piece of work.

Flying through my mind are others who brought far more than could be expected of them in various top-line renderings of characters Basil Green as Garbo in "Grand Hotel," way back in 1933; Jimmy Cregeen (in the same year) reading the final line as one of the old "Flora Dora" sextet in "We're Pretty Maids No More"; Eric Christmas as "Henry the Eighth" in 1934; Bill Summerfield as Mae West (1935); and let's not forget a more recent "tit-bit" supplied by young Ronnie Rampton as the loud voiced "female juvenile" in the 1954 presentation of "Christmas Pantomime."

I'll close with a final thank-you to Homer Last who is now, alas, not with us. Homer is in Canada and we shall miss him in all our future shows. I do hope he will give his talents to his new Scouters when he meets up with them in that far-away country and I hope he will remember with glee his last appearance with us all here in London. It was in his final show with us that he impersonated Liberace, and he will never do anything better. Thanks, Homer, for all the years you were with us, and bless you always.

It has been good to look back again on these outstanding performances, and though I may have missed one or two that ought to have been included,

those I have mentioned are, to me anyway, the perfect example of training, experience, and above all, intelligence. A producer can only supply so much—the rest must come from the individual and the ones I have told you about just now brought far more than I could have even dreamed of.

How's this for a story of Scout enthusiasm: Andy Spence is fifteen and belongs to the 17th Acton. On the middle Saturday of our run last year, he got up as usual at six in the morning, then he came to the theatre and worked the matinee and night show.

At ten-thirty that evening his Skipper was waiting at the stage door for him and by eleven-thirty he was in a canoe on the Thames off on his Venturers Course. Good Scouting, Andy.

I must tell you one true story which happened during the rehearsals of the 1956 edition. In the programme we did a dramatic sketch about Napoleon on the eve of Waterloo. We called it "June 15th, 1816." One night when I was busily rehearsing this item, two of our smaller boys were sitting down together watching. A Scouter overheard this conversation as the two youngsters watched me producing this 1816 episode.

"Old Ralph knows a lot about it, doesn't he? "Well," said the other, "he ought to, he was there! " But of all the remarks made about me, there is one I shall remember for all time. It was the warmest, most glowing, tribute I shall ever have, and it came from the lips of a fifteen-year-old member of our London Gang. We were ending the rehearsal one evening and the boys were coming along as usual to say good night. Standing by me was a visitor from New Zealand. By his side stood this young Londoner I mentioned a moment ago. As I was saying 'Good night, Jim! Good night, Andy! Good night, Douggie!' etc., the New Zealander said to me, "Ralph, it simply amazes me. How can you remember the names of all these boys?" Without a moments hesitation the "Gang Show" boy said to him, "Don't you remember the names of people you love?" Nothing can be added to that.

I hope too I shall always enjoy telling stories against myself. I sure have been given plenty of opportunities!

One evening I was coming out of the stage-door of the Stoll Theatre in London. I realise that make-up (thank goodness) makes quite a difference to me when I am on—stage, but I hadn't realised it made quite such a difference until this particular evening. Two girls were waiting outside, and as I came out they asked me for an autograph. Just as I was about to sign, one of the girls said to me,

"Has Ralph Reader come out yet?" I looked her straight in the face and said bluntly, "My name is Reader." She didn't blink an eyelash as she replied, "Really? Are you his father?" I crept away.

During the run of this same show I had some trouble with my throat (always one of my weakest spots) and I became very worried. I smoke a tremendous amount, and having got a bit worked up, I consulted that eminent throat specialist, Dr. Pierce. He examined me, and looked very grave. He told me nothing except that he wanted to see me again the following day. All that night I hardly slept, I felt that there was something seriously wrong and I was determined that when I went back to him I would insist that he told me the truth. After the examination next day, again he looked grave so I took the bull by the horns and asked him straight out to tell me the worst. He said, "Oh, I'll tell you the truth all right. The trouble is, YOU TALK TOO MUCH!"

One night after a Scouting Conference, three of the blokes were chatting away in a corner having a friendly sort of argument. I went over to join them and as I arrived one of them turned to me and, without the slightest idea of what he was saying, said, "Ralph, give us your opinion, as an outsider, what do you think of the human race?" I suppose I should have gone back to my tree.

It's very difficult to assess the value of any one show as compared with the others, and few people agree with what one could class as our best show: but strangely enough, more people have told me that the 1956 show was the best ever. Obviously certain items from other shows remain in one's memory as a highlight, but as a whole, public opinion declares our last show was the peak. Even John Barber, that eminent critic of the Daily Express, wrote in his review of the 1956 show, "This is the brightest and breeziest yet." However, the past is not my worry—the Future is!

# 16

## *Looking Back on the Gang Show*

HERE are few occupations more fascinating than glancing I through old snap-shot albums or theatre programmes I'm always picking up the latter, and the names I read so often bring back a flow of memories of incidents and people.

"Wigs by 'Bert'"? You'll find that line in each London programme of the Gang. "Bert" is brilliant at his job and he employs a grand team of make-up experts. Most of the major British films have "Bert" working for them, and many West End shows use his wigs. He can appreciate exactly what is required in colour, shape, and period. I remember the amazing hair-do he invented for Jack Beet when he played "Mrs. Twilley," the beard and wig for Charles Dickens, and those nauseating curls adorning the heads of the "Twizzle Sisters." They were so true to life, they were cruel

Here's another name—Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe! How well we all remember the night he came to see us. He talked for half an hour afterwards to the Gang, and it was like the Battle of Jutland being fought all over again. You can keep your Davy Crocketts and your Robin Hoods, this man Jellicoe could cast a spell of romance over a bunch of boys that would put the rest to shame.

Our beloved and irreplaceable Chief, B.-P. I read again some of the words he wrote in our 1938 programme. "The history of crime tells us of many forms of robbery through the ages. Dick Turpin was a polite blackguard; modern gangsters are not; they put you on the spot if you don't fork out. But now there's this new 'Gang' upon us, with quite a new method: they tickle us till our sides ache and we don't notice all the while that they are picking our pockets. But what do we care? Nix. It's all in a good cause, so more power to their new show." I remember, too, other words he "coined" in other messages to us. In 1933 he wrote, "The Gang comes back on its mission of 'Happification.' Don't you know what that means? Well, you will when you find yourself enjoying idiotically their jolly nonsense. That's what Happification means." Has, I wonder, any other man brought such Happification to so many millions?

The late Earl of Atblone and Countess Alice. I find their signatures in a programme of 1933, and I remember that very charming lady saying to me, during the interval, in her quiet, dignified way, "It is an amazing evening. Why can't I be a Boy Scout?"

At the top of the next page I come across two autographs so very plainly written, "Elizabeth" and "Albert."

I spot the name of Ribbentrop, then the German Ambassador, and I remember his invitation to me to go to Germany to take a look at the Hitler Youth Movement. I went not!

Now I see the signature and a little note written by one of the greatest of all men of the theatre. A composer whose songs will never die; a man who has indeed given to the great British public some of their most wonderful nights in the theatre. Ivor Novello. He never missed a "Gang Show" dress-rehearsal, and he always brought the entire company of his show along with him. They sat in the dress-circle and what an audience they were! Many times Ivor has given me pointers about a line in a sketch or the phrasing of one of the songs, and I never failed to act upon his suggestions. He was one of the kindest men who ever

lived. He is another of the irreplaceables. The wording on his note reads, "There is only one answer to these boys, they have magic." So had he. One lasting memory I have of Ivor. I met him early in the last war in Normandy when he was entertaining the troops. "Ralph, you've just got to hear a new song I've written, it's for Olive and I think you'll love it." I did. The song was "We'll Gather Lilacs."

Now I am glancing through the pages of "Great Days." The last time the Gang were to be together before the advancing clouds of a new war—and here I find the name of General Sir John Shea. Sir John was at the time County Commissioner for London. Here indeed is a character! I picture him now, walking along the streets of the City in a Scout hat, a cloak, breeches, and stockings, and of course the monocle. You couldn't sway Sir John. He'd listen to your arguments and he'd nod his wise old head: but you couldn't shift him an inch from what he thought was the right thing to do. He is one of the remaining few who brings the distinction of the Empire Builder to this unromantic age.

And among the Gang themselves in the long list of the cast that year, some are underlined. Percy Cooper, Don Dickie, Roy Frost, Roy Lammerton, Johnny Heydon, Thurshy, Pat Byworth, Laurence Nelson, and several more. I underlined those names because they did not return from the war-to-end-wars. We can but pray they did not die in vain.

At random I pick up the various other "Gang Show" programmes sent me from so many places. Here's one from Victoria, Australia, produced by Levi Molineux, whom I have yet to meet. But he has spoken to me, as I have to him, on tape. I see the name of Gordon Oldham, the power behind the throne both here and in Melbourne. Here's one from Newcastle, with a picture of Godfrey Hutchinson wielding the baton. (To earn his living he wields a pair of forceps, pulling out teeth)! Here's a programme, smothered with signatures, from the new Manchester "Gang Show," their first since the war, and what a grand show Roy Parry and his henchmen have started off with! Another, a very modest affair this, from a small village in Penang. It is covered with signatures. Not one can I make out, but it is a very treasured possession, for each one of these little coloured boys belong to the "Gang Show" story.

Later B.-P. wrote: "Now that I have had a night to sleep on it I see your Revue in better perspective than during its performance but I do not find that my appreciation of it has gone down in any way—rather the opposite. You have made a big success may we have many more." In a second letter our Chief wrote, "I cannot get over my joy at seeing 'The Gang.' I am not merely thinking of the acting, good though that was, but of the splendid team-work of the whole lot. Having myself, in my time, had the job of organising theatrical performances I know pretty fully all that this means, so I can claim that it is no empty phrase on my pal when I say, 'Well done!' I would like to add my own very grateful thanks for this added reputation you have gained for the Scout Movement. It must go on and on." It is nice to know we haven't failed our Chief, we are going on and on.

Two or three times I've referred to our big scale Pageants at the Albert Hall and other places. You may wonder whether these have anything to do with the actual "Gang Show" story. The answer is a very definite "yes."

"Boy Scout," "Voyage of the Venturer," "Royal Sovereign," and the English Ranger Rally, together with the B.-P. Guild Reunions, all big Pageants furthering the publicity of Scouting and Guiding, could not have been so

successful were it not for the help of Gang Show men, and a chap like Reg Kemish who sits high in the organ loft as music master-in-chief. Usually the main acting parts are played by, and certainly all the Production Departments are controlled by, the experienced "hands" who run the "Gang Shows." How these chaps manage to find the time to fit all this extra work in and give the leisure time to the work entailed, I don't pretend to know, but I do know and want you to know that the staging of some of these mammoth productions are due entirely to the untiring help of our own Gang chaps.

Somewhere in the "rabbit-warrens" of the Albert Hall, Ginger Emerick, Harry Eltham, Dave Purfltt, Don Donaldson, and "Put" from Edmonton are holding the reins that drive the cast along and keep the Pageants securely on their course. Without them, on the first nights of these undertakings, I wouldn't be able to keep so calm; frankly, I'd be scared. But with them, well, I can take it all in my stride, knowing everything is in good hands.

I listened to a speech not long ago from one of the Scouters who had been alongside for many years. He was addressing an A.G.M. in a District here in London, and this is what he said. "People don't understand how we work in a 'Gang Show'; it is a course on running Scout shows. Ralph is in charge, and we are trained exactly as we would be were we on a course at Gilwell."

"Therefore, we all feel that the things we learn should be handed on as often as possible and in as wide a radius as we can reach. The technique of a Pageant is as vastly different from that of a stage show as a Troop Camp is to a Jamboree, so we try to learn it all, and then carry it back into our District and Group efforts.

It's no good keeping what we are taught to ourselves." Those words are identical with my own feelings. "It's no good keeping what we learn to ourselves."

There is nothing wrong in going to somebody who knows, and asking them for help. We do it in a thousand other ways, so why not in this? Besides, it's all part of the Service.

Looking back is never so adventuresome a business as Looking Ahead because one is as positive as the other is uncertain.

For my money, let me look ahead all the time. That's the way to live. Now and again I may just take the odd moments of leisure to pick up a few old press-cuttings or faded photographs, but nostalgia, intoxicating as it can be, never has been a close pal of mine.

I guess the reason is that all through my life there has been a tomorrow coming up when something new is going to start. Even when "pack up" time is at hand, I'll try to remember Barrie's famous line in "Peter Pan," when Peter, who thinks he is going to be killed by the Pirates, doesn't worry, he simply says, "To die will be an awfully big Adventure."

Get this straight, I feel fine ! All the same, it's not a bad future if one's mind can always conjure up expectations of things to come. That's where I am mighty lucky. Even as I write these lines I've a new Gang Show to write; a new musical to produce; I'm off for the coming week-end with four of my boys on a trip to Ireland; while, between times, I must get down to writing this book.

And, of course, there is tomorrow's mail. How I look forward to the letters that pour into a letter-box each day of the week from boys I have known. Now they are all over the globe but they remember. There will be letters from chaps coming home on leave wanting to put up for the night—they can! Postcards from youngsters on their holidays letting me know they haven't

forgotten.

A bloke is rich when he can look forward to such things. Of course there are bills too, to say nothing of that Government gink who wants to know how much you've earned during the past year. He never forgets me, but it's all part of a routine that goes to make up a life, and according to the way I look at it, it's living!

How can a man spend his hours dreaming of the days behind when he can wake up and live for the days ahead? Anyway, that's how it seems to me and it works. Maybe a fellow is fortunate who was born to take things easy, to live a normal sixty seconds a minute.

I guess I was born to live sixty minutes a second. Loads of my pals have tried to cure me but they haven't had much luck, and now they have given it up. I laugh when I think of the times when some well-meaning friend has begged me to ease up and take things more quietly! He spends an hour explaining to me that I can't go on at this pace, that I ought to cut out half the things I do and then, in the next breath, he'll be asking me to write a complete show for his Troop, to go along to open a Bazaar, talk to his Rovers, and stop off to visit a hospital on the way. Then he'll finish his chat by saying, "You see what I mean, mate? You must take it easy

How do I keep on? What's the "current" that charges the batteries? That calls for a simple answer. My name should surely have been Mr. Chips, because the answer is" Boys."

Yes, Boys! Small ones, big ones, good ones, and bad ones, though not many of the latter. The biggest joy of my life has come from them, the biggest debt I owe belongs to them. And it has gone on for more than one generation. My flat is fairly large, but it's nothing like big enough for some of those week-ends when the mob arrive. There are camp-beds stored up all over the place and in each of the bedrooms, even my own.

Their gratitude is not shown through their pockets, but by what they feel in their hearts. Not in the words they say but in the words left unsaid.

Take it from me, there is nothing in life more real than a Boy. So what can a life be without such real things around? I wouldn't know, because they have always been there, yes, always. The photos around my place are of whites, blacks, and yellows, and when I go home, though alone I may be, I am surrounded by pictures which fill my rooms and my heart with everlasting companionship. Can you wonder if I look on myself as the richest man in the world? I've been told I am "nuts" so many times that the fellows who've told me so have gone round the bend themselves. The springs on my car have often been loaded down to zero, carrying ten times the accepted number of passengers (but then, what Scouter's car hasn't?)

It's my way of life, and the sign-posts pointing the way all along the course have been set up by Boys who have shown me the way to a glorious Highway.

Naturally I've learned a lot of lessons. For one thing, I've discovered it doesn't do to worry about one's critics. The very moment you become even slightly prominent (and this applies even more to any who happen to be prominent in a small circle) you'll have to steel yourself against the "slings and arrows" of envious people. They never stop telling you where you are wrong, why you shouldn't have done this and that, and you'll find them going out of

their way, delighting in your set-backs and under rating your successes. But don't worry.

Try to remember these words. Nobody thinks they know as much as those who realise they have done nothing. It is always very easy to criticise something you have never been able to achieve. Smug people are the most dangerous of all and you are not very bright if you can't pick out these unfortunates a mile off. So beware of them. Smugness is a veneer used for covering up envy.

The most thrilling name I have ever been called is "Skipper," especially when it came from my own boys in my own Group the 10th Holborn. The 10th brought me my happiest years in Scouting—but being boys, they were a handful! How was I to know that they were to be nothing compared to the handful I took on when we started the "Gang Show"? Would I do it again? You bet I would!

I have a mighty ambition—one that maybe will never come to pass, but I still dream of it. I would like to put on a really gigantic Then he said, "It's fabulous ; to go on year after year with ever changing scenes and new presentations; I only remember one other show that ever did that. It was way back home on Broadway and it was called "The Ziegfeld Follies."

I told him I knew all about Broadway and also of my close connection with the "Follies," and that great showman and creator, Florenz Ziegfeld. Suddenly, as we were talking about those stars who shone so brightly among those wonderful revues, names like Eddie Cantor, Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, W. C. Fields, and dear Will Rogers, I remember the caption Ziegfeld always used beneath every title of "The Ziegfeld iEollies." It was "Glorifying the American Girl." I reminded my friend about this and he looked at me and said, "That's what I mean, Ralph, the 'Follies' glorified the American Girl; the 'Gang Shows' glorify the British Boy."

He may be right, and if he is, I think it is a good thing, for the average British Boy of today is worth all we can give him and as far as I am concerned, nothing will ever shake my faith in him.

So get on with your "Gang Shows," and add more chapters to this unfinished story. Keep it in its place as just one of your Scouting activities. Though we regard all the "inner-circle" members of our shows as brothers, we must always keep before us the fact that we belong to that Greater Brotherhood, the Boy Scouts Association.

The Movement came first, and first it shall always remain. Our shows are a contribution to it, and just a small branch of the main oak. Let's pay a tribute to all those who have belonged to our Red Scarf brigade, the pioneers and the newcomers, and let's include the hundreds of thousands of people who clamour for tickets and make up that wonderful "family" we call Our Audience: and say again to all those who are still actively with us, onward, ever onward, and "Here's to next year !"

For the Show that started way back in 1932 as a three-night effort is now being played EVERY NIGHT OF EVERY YEAR, somewhere in some corner of the world. Perhaps it is fitting that in this year of 1957 when we celebrate the centenary of our Founder's birth and a half century of Scouting we can also celebrate the quarter of a century of Gang Shows.

Thanks, boys; thanks Ted, Lindy, Bill Johnson, Roy, Levi, Bob, and every one of you whose names are too legion to mention. We are still together and, like Scouting, we are still

“Riding along on the crest of a wave and the sun is in the sky.”

## PART FIVE

### 17

#### *A Layout for a Group Show*

PEOPLE often write to me asking for details of a complete show which would be suitable for a normal-sized Group.

They go on to tell me of their difficulties small stages, limited lighting, no scenery, and very little money to buy costumes. They are not telling me anything I don't know. All my early experiences were with shows of this type.

With us it wasn't a case of having only a “little” money we had none! Cardboard boxes were torn up, straightened out, stuck together, and painted. Costumes were created (lovely word!) from odds and ends left over at the Jumble Sale, and the rest was begged for, borrowed, and at times—well, not exactly stolen, but let's say, taken prior to asking.

Ingenuity is a wonderful thing, and when it comes to “sets for Group shows, well, make the most of it, because it may well be the only asset you'll have to kick off with. But don't ever say it can't be done—because it can. And remember this: once you have got hold of odd bits and pieces of material, wood, curtains, and so on, they can also be used for the next year's show. It's only a case of redesigning, repainting, and rehashing. Never destroy anything, because you can bet your life you'll wish you hadn't when you suddenly want just that extra item to fit in somewhere or other.

The point to remember is this—I am going to choose for my Group programme sketches which do not call for a big cast. When it comes to concerted items, then you can “go to town” and use everyone in the Group. But remember, you may not be over blessed with talented comedians or performers, and those you do have will have to be held in reserve—for the essential items. So I restrict my choice of sketches to those which call for only a limited number of players.

Also, I am including in this book some scripts that have not been published before. In a few cases they have been used for the first time in the very recent London shows, so you are practically getting them first hand. But remember, please, they are copyright and for the Boy Scouts' Association only. If they are used as an item in your Group or District show, then that's fine, but they must not be used professionally, or for radio or television, or in any performance outside the Group or District show. All the songs I mention can be obtained from the Scout Shop, 25 Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1. I'm sure needn't explain the reason for this.

Notice that each item can follow on without one moment's delay, while there is plenty of time available for changing scenery and costumes. The bigger concerted items can always start in what is called the “front cloth” and open out to the full stage when you are ready for this to happen.

To run this programme easily you will need a set of "tabs" (hung about four feet from the footlights) and curtains to drape your stage. If there shouldn't happen to be one available, you can even get by without a front curtain, which would normally be in line with the footlights and in front of the "front" tabs. Many of our old Holborn Rover shows were worked this way and though it is much better to have a "house" curtain, you can do without it if you have to.

In front of the curtains at the rear of the stage small pieces of scenery can be painted to depict the nature and locale of the item in progress. (This is where we used to use our cardboard boxes.)

Here, then, is a line-up which I consider would be excellent for a Group Show.

1. **The Opening: "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE"** (Song).

(Use here entire Group, excluding those who are in the following item.)

2. **"TYPES."**

(This calls for three young boys. It is a musical item.)

3. **"NEIGHBOURS."**

This was used in the 1955 "Gang Show": for this you need three of your best comedians who can play "dame" parts.

4. **"BAMBAZOOLIAN WAY."**

A musical number involving as many players as you wish. It should be sung by two or four "specials" in the front-cloth, before going to full stage. This allows time for the change of scene.

5. **THE POSTMAN**

A monologue. It is in a book you can obtain at the Scout Shop *More Sketches from the Gang Shows*.

6. **"IMAGINATION."**

The cast for this sketch is three men. They are sitting on a bench late at night on the Embankment, and dressed in tattered clothes.

7. **"YOU'RE THE FELLOW FOR ME."**

This is a song sung first by a soloist, who is later joined by two others, and finally by as many as you like.

8. **THE CUB ITEM.**

This one we must leave to Akela—because Akela generally has something up her sleeve : and in my experience it is always one of the high spots of a Group show.

9. **"LOVE, LOVE, LOVE."**

This is a song sung by four young boys and four little "girls." It is done in front of the "tabs."

10. **"ORDER OF THE BATH."**

For cast consult the beginning of the sketch (which is printed at the end of this chapter). If possible a "cloth" painted to resemble the corridor of an hotel-floor should be used as a background.

11. **"IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME."**

Here is a big song finale to end the first half of the show. Start it in front of the "tabs" with a line-up of about six to eight boys, and eventually open up on a crowded stage with everyone "on." Use every trick you can think out to make this a really big hit, because the curtain is coming down. Out goes your audience to talk during the interval so let their talk be on how good the show has been so far ! Nothing is more conducive to this than to impress them by your first-act finale.

Now, don't have too long an interval. I know you may want to sell refreshments but, believe me, a lengthy interval can ruin a show. No matter how well the performance has gone so far, it will be very hard to "get your audience again if you have kept them waiting too long.

At the limit, no interval should be longer than fifteen minutes. I think twelve minutes is quite enough, but of course I realise this is not always possible. However, no longer than fifteen minutes! (And, incidentally, don't allow any of your cast to mingle with the audience during this period. It's just "not done," and it cheapens your show.) On, then, to Act Two.

## PART TWO

I. **"SEA SCOUTING IS THE LIFE FOR ME."**

Here we have a musical item with lots of scope for the producer. It is an entirely different type of presentation, with as many of the cast as possible dressed as Sea Scouts. A good effect can be achieved here with the use of "cut out" dinghies.

2. **"UNDERWORLD."**

Another sketch which seems to fit in very well at this point. It was one of the big successes of the 1955 London show. I discuss the size of the cast at the top of the script.

3. **"MR. BROWN AND MISS SUZANNE"**

This is a very handy musical item because it is done in front of the "tabs," and the smaller boys can be used. Originally it was played by three sets of six, but you can reduce this to three or four in each set, according to the cast available.

4. **"THE OWLS."**

Now, this is a "straight" item. It is a very dramatic scene, and was undoubtedly one of the best items we have ever had in a London show. It is the story of an ex-Scout master who one evening finds himself on the site where he camped with his Troop before the last war. He then dreams of those days and of the boys who were in the

Owl Patrol and who did not return from the war. The script for this sketch can be obtained from I.H.Q.

s. **“FOUR LITTLE FELLERS.”**

This was one of the items which made such a hit when the “gang” played the London Palladium. It is sung by four small boys dressed as urchins.

6. **“ONE BORN EVERY MINUTE.”**

Here again you will find the script for this sketch telling you everything about it a few pages from here.

7. **“THERE IS A HAPPY ENDING.”**

This is a song scene about the settlers crossing the Plains of America in the old days. It can be a very picturesque item, and needs little movement. After the song has been sung in the front-cloth, open the “tabs” on a “picture of a group of settlers and sing the remainder of the number in full stage. Not more than a dozen to eighteen are needed in the cast for this item.

8. **“THE CHEER-UPS.”**

This is a knock-about item to be played in the front cloth by about six of your comics. They are supposed to be an old-fashioned concert-party coming along to help out the show. All the songs and bits of “business” can be obtained from I.H.Q.

9. **“THE GARDEN WALL.”**

This musical item is in one of the “Gang Show” Albums. You need only a prop wall over which appear the heads of the singers. They are singing to an imaginary girl ‘in a garden opposite them. The lyrics clearly explain the situation.

10. **“JOHN.”**

A monologue for a small boy. But, as you will understand when you have read the script, you will need four other boys in the background.

11. **THE FINALE.**

This is the “Good-night” item to close your show. I suggest here that you use all the choruses of the songs you have already sung in the show, bringing on in small groups sets of boys to sing each chorus, and thus gradually filling your stage with the entire Group. Then for a final chorus, finish with “IT’S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.”

I believe the layout of this programme to be within the means of any average Group. The cost of production is not great, and you can “cut your cloth” to the material on hand. It can be lavish if you can afford it or very economical if funds (as they are likely to be) are low.

Remember this: you can always get any advice you want by writing to Mr. Tommy Thompson, do Gang Show Department, 25 Buckingham Palace Road, S.W.1. For the privilege of being able to do this, don't forget to give a salute to the powers that be at I.H.Q. for they alone have made this possible. It is for YOU they have created this post, and I am sure everyone of us should be grateful to them.

### It's a Wonderful Life

OUT in the rain boys, or out in the snow,  
Out in the sunshine, wherever you go,  
There's one thing all we fellows know,  
**GEE IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE.**  
Whether in Highlands or down in the dale,  
Over the river, and on to the vale,  
We hike along the Rainbow Trail,  
**GEE IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE.**  
When you're out about in Scouting—  
You're as happy as a King.  
If you're tracking in the meadow or a bird upon the wing,  
In the autumn or the winter, or the summer or the spring,  
It's a most remarkable thing  
Out with the Gang boys, and journeying in  
Lands of adventure, awaiting for you,  
You find your day-dreams coming true,  
**GEE, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE,**  
**YOU BET IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE.**

### Types

A musical front cloth number for three small boys dressed as pukka Service" Brass Hats"; one is an Admiral, the second a General, and the third an Air Marshal (complete with handle—bar moustache).

### **ALL:**

We're a sight to fill your hearts with great elation,  
(In the midst of all the worry and the fuss)  
We're the apex and the backbone of the nation,  
We're Whitehall's "Waving Standard," yes, that's us.  
We're the Geezers who descended from the gentry,  
(Descended may not be the proper word),  
But explanations are quite elementary,  
And trying to explain it is absurd.  
We're a type, we're a type,  
We are fruity and we're juicy—we're a type,  
In our uniforms so dashing  
All the women think we're smashing,  
And we are ! In tradition we are ripe!  
We're the warriors from Whitehall and we fight with one accord,'

You can always find us lined-up for the latest new award,  
We prove beyond a doubt the pen is mightier than the sword,  
We're a type.

**ADMIRAL:**

I'm a type, I'm a type,  
Every week-end I'm a hunting sort of type,  
I really am a glutton,  
For a saddle—if it's mutton,  
For green peas I'm a most insistent type.  
My base is on a land-ship and I keep it trim and slick,  
I've never sailed the seven seas, I've always been too quick,  
But once I crossed a Ferry—and it made me awfully sick I I'm a type.

**GENERAL:**

I'm a type, I'm a type,  
I'm the Foreign Service, crazy sort of type.  
If any man would sooner  
Live in England than in Poona,  
Then I'm sorry for that weak-kneed slacking type.  
In garrisons across the seas my breeches have been slung,  
Now I'm the bloke who is unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.  
From the outposts of our far-flung Empire, I'm the one they flung,  
I'm a type.

**AIR MARSHAL:**

I'm a type, I'm a type,  
Bomber Harris, Tedder, Trenchard are my type,  
I remember when we fellas  
Flew kites that had propellers,  
But keeping up to date befits my type.  
You must admit my moustache is a sight for picture page,  
I nursed it and I groomed it and it soon became the rage,  
But Jimmy Edwards pinched it and he put it on the stage,  
I'm a type.

**ALL:**

We're a type (laugh), we're a type (laugh),  
And we don't require a ref-er-ence to tripe!  
The years have proved us very  
Absolutely necessary,  
Just remember that and stick it in your pipe!  
But just in case, among you all, we may be raising doubts,  
It's time I think for us to make confession hereabouts,  
We are NOT in the Service!—we are really three Boy Scouts  
SMASHING types (salute), smashing types I

## BLACKOUT

### NEIGHBOURS

#### Cast

JULIET

TESSIE

MONA

The scene is the front of a suburban house. We see two largish windows, the ground floor one and the one above. JULIET is looking out of the ground-floor one across the house opposite where a wedding is in progress. She is waiting for something to happen. She watches, and then her face lights up. Something is happening.

JULIET:

They're coming, they're coming, dear, the wedding is going to start. Tessie ! TESSIE I  
I come quick or you'll miss it.

TESSIE:

(rushes to the window) I was just ironing my smalls. I LOVE weddings, don't you,  
Juliet? LOOK !—they've opened the front door. It's the first time that door's been  
opened since they buried the old man.

JULIET:

Call Mona, she'll miss it if she doesn't hurry. (They both lean out and call up to the  
window above) MONA !

TESSIE:

MONA ! It's begun, they're coming out, Mona, are you there?

MONA:

(appearing at the top window, is a dazzling blonde, not too young, wearing a kimono) :  
Thanks for calling me, dear, I'm here.

TESSIE:

Can you see?

MONA:

They've opened the door, I can see right inside. They've even washed the passage.

JULIET:

Who's that one? Who's he? Is he the bridegroom?

TESSIE:  
NO! he looks too happy. That's her brother.

JULIET:  
I haven't seen HIM before.

TESSIE :  
He's been away—three years ! (they glance knowingly).

MONA:  
Julie, look, there's Ethel Prince a bridesmaid, she's had her hair done. She's had it touched up, I can't stand people with UN-natural hair, can you?  
(TESS and JULIE look at each other.)

She looks rasher pretty must be wearing a mask. That's her mother standing behind.

TESSIE:  
Is it? Is she crying?

JULIET:  
No, she ain't crying.

TESSIE:  
Pity, I always think somebody should cry at a wedding. Makes it more respectable.

MONA:  
Getting rid of that one ought to make her laugh.

JULIET:  
Remember when YOU was married, Mona?

MONA:  
Don't remind me. I took him for better or worse,  
but he turned out worse than I thought.

TESSIE:  
Julie, how long ago was you married?

JULIET:  
Thirty-one years. That was a day. that was.  
I WAS nervous. I got into the bath with me nightdress on.

MONA:  
Was it a posh wedding?

JULIET:  
I'll say it was, we ain't even finished paying for it YET! I had six bridesmaids and four cars. I had everything except a bridegroom.

TESSIE:  
What happened?

JULIET:

He went to a Cup-tie at Chelsea. I had such a job finding him in all that crowd.

TESSIE:

Who won?

JULIET:

I DID. I got him there in the end.

MONA:

Tess, Julie here she comes, here's the bride.

TESSIE:

That's her all in white—except for her neck.

MONA:

What's that all down the front of her dress?

JULIET:

Tea-leaves. Hey, Tess, is that something boiling over?

TESSIE:

It's all right, I'm boiling an egg.

JULIET:

Don't smell like that to me.

TESSIE:

I slipped in a couple of the old man's shirts.

MONA:

They're going to have a picture taken, who's that on the end? Is that her father?

JULIET:

That's him, the henpecked one. He's going to give her away.

MONA:

So could a lot of people. Coo! look at that kid on the end, he's dressed like a page.  
Ain't he got a funny face.

TESSIE:

Yes, when he was born they must have taken the baby and left the stork.  
Who's that looking out of the window? Is that the grandmother?

JULIET:

No, you fool, that's the dog.

MONA:

They're taking the picture now. Look at them all making out they're happy.  
There's something burning.

TESSIE:

It's me iron ! I forgot it, oh, me smalls ! (she rushes in).

JULIET:

I knew I could smell something. Weddings take your mind off everything, don't they?

MONA:

Any damage done?

JULIET:

I don't know. (TESSIE rushes back.) All right, dear?

TESSIE:

Burnt a hole right through 'em. Don't worry,  
I'll make a couple of handkerchiefs of 'em.

MONA:

Here comes the car—look, it's a Rools Royce.

JULIET:

Don't be silly, that's not a car it's a hearse.

TESSIE:

That's the worst of that family—they always take things lying down.

MONA:

Here they come look, there's a man on each side of the bridegroom.

TESSIE:

That's so's he won't get away.

(She shouts) Don't do it mate, run while you've got the chance.

JULIET:

They've shoved him in. He's had it. He's done for. I hope he ate a hearty breakfast.

MONA:

Look at HER—who's That one—dressed like a cowboy?

JULIET :

It's the bride's sister she married a G.I.

TESSIE:

Here's the bridesmaids—there they are getting on the tandem.

MONA:

Here's the Bride—see her, Mona? It's the Bride. See her, Juliet, the bride.  
Bless the bride and heaven help the groom.

TESSIE:

Luv-a-duck LOOK! her father's getting in the sidecar,

and she's getting on the motor-bike. (Sound of hooter.)

**MONA :**

There she goes—let's wave. (They all start to wave.)

**JULIET:**

Don't 'arf take you back, don't it, gel? (Starts to cry.) Makes you think.

**TESSIE:**

Nearly twenty years ago mine was. (She is sobbing.) Oh dear, I'll never forget it.

**MONA: (crying):**

Weddings are wonderful, aren't they? Aa (waving madly and sobbing loudly)  
Goodbye, Good luck,  
**AND GOOD RIDDANCE!**

**BLACKOUT**

### **THE BAMBАЗОOLIAN WAY**

Come on to Bambazoola with me,  
And by the Bambazolian sea  
There's a place to play all the night and day,  
On the Bambazolian Way.  
In Bambazoola everything's new,  
We've got a Bambazoola for you,  
There's a moon aglow when the lights are low  
On the Bambazolian Way.  
What a tropical island,  
What a beautiful shore,  
There's a magic in the music of the South Sea Symphony,  
Who'd be asking for more?  
Come on and play, you orchestra, play,  
Your beating tom-tom we shall obey,  
And it's all romance when the natives dance,  
With a boogywoogily sway,  
The Bambazolian Way.

### **THE POSTMAN**

*A postman is standing by a letter—box. His bag is across his shoulder and a bunch of letters in his hand.*

*He speaks.*

Behold in me, the Postman, I'm your servant good and true,

You see in me your messenger from friends both old and new.  
I bring you news from every far-off land beneath the sky,  
Through me you are remembered as the years go passing by.

In wind and hail, in snow or rain, you'll hear my rat-tat-tat,  
And rush to find your morning post awaiting on the mat.  
Maybe at times the news I bring will not be always gay,  
Perhaps I'll tell the news of dear ones who are called away.

But on the whole I am the bloke most people like to see,  
And lovers in particular make such a fuss of me,  
But fathers get the wind up, as they'll readily confess,  
When I bring awkward envelopes which read O.H.M.S.

But frowns are turned to smiles again and life becomes a joke,  
When Willie writes from school to say, "I'm quite all right—but broke."  
I never read your postcards, that is NOT a postman's trick,  
But when I bring you bills, you bet your life I buzz off quick.

I wish you Happy Birthdays as through the years you climb,  
I bring you Easter Greetings, and a mystic Valentine,  
The parcels in December, the thrill when postman knocks.  
So do you wonder if I hope I'll get a Christmas Box?

I trudge along, mile after mile, from one door to the next,  
With heavy loads, I leave with you the things you least expect,  
Sometimes I'm freezing with the cold, at times I'm dripping wet,  
And in the summer weather I still trek along and sweat.

But I am well rewarded, yes in city, town, or dale,  
My heart rejoices in this thought:  
**I'M ENGLAND'S FAVOURITE MALE!**

## **BLACKOUT**

### **IMAGINATION**

Cast  
TWO POLICEMEN WALK ACROSS STAGE  
THREE TRAMPS A, B, C,

The scene is on the Embankment at midnight. There is a seat and on it are seated three tramps, "Burlington Bertie" types. They talk extremely "posh." They are drinking from old tins.

A :  
Not the best coffee, I fear, Vivian.

B:

Not the best china, either.

(They hold the tins by the lid when drinking,  
except A he has his hands cupped round his.)

A:

Some careless creature has broken the handle off mine.

C:

My dear old mater made the best coffee I have ever experienced. She had a knack.

A:

A knack? Strange, mine used an urn. (They all laugh "cleverly.")  
Wasn't your mater a Tanyard-Copleton? Tanyard Copleton with a hyphen?

C:

That's right, we've dropped the hyphen now, we never use it.

A:

Neither do I except for soda ! (They laugh again.)

B: (to A)

Tell me, Brutus (A glances at him),  
didn't your family come from the Maidstones of Kent?

A:

No, from the Cockles of Southend.

We descended from the early Tudors we've been descending ever since.

C:

My great-grandfather was one of the Barrows.

B:

The Barrows? From where?

C:

Caledonian Market! My, he was shoved around. Brutus, what was your family crest?

A:

Frightfully original. A dark background with a gold star, supplemented with two bottles  
of Guinness.

B:

My family dates back to Hastings. St. Leonards, of course. We lived there for  
centuries—at the Castle, we did the WEEDING.

A:

That mark on your eye permanent?

B:

A birthmark, all my family have this peculiar birthmark. Interesting, isn't it?  
We descended from Harold 1066.

C:

Vivian, what time did you order the Rolls?

B:

I didn't, I thought we'd wait for the "rolls" until we found a piece of cheese.  
(They all laugh again.)

A:

Tell me, Clarence, didn't you marry into the Peerage?

C:

Indeed, rather tragic it was, one stormy night the pier got washed away.  
I had a suite at Claridge's once, but she turned sour on me.

A:

I remember her father, the Duke. What a man I remember once I saw him lay a corner  
stone. I never thought he had it in him. (All laugh.)

B :

Brutus do have a cigarette. (He opens a tin of butts.)

A:

Thank you. Where did they come from?

B:

Those on the right from the curb, Those on the left from the gutter.

A:

Both are my favourites. (Takes a butt.) Clarence, have you a pin?

C:

Several. (He takes one from trousers which is apparently holding them up.)  
Anyone got a match?

B:

I never use them, I find the cigarettes last longer without lighting.

A:

Good show.

C:

I say, shall we toddle?

A:

Let's toddle. Vivian, will you toddle too? Oh, do you toddle?

B:  
To the Ritz?

C:  
The Savoy?

A:  
The Y.M.?

B :  
Immaterial, let's just toddle, life's fun, isn't it?

A:  
All one needs is imagination!

### IMAGINATION (Song)

Just imagine that every day  
Is free from gloomy care,  
Just imagine along your way  
The sun is around somewhere,  
Stoney broke though you may be,  
It is plain to see,  
If you can just imagine, then I declare  
You'll feel like a millionaire.

(Scouts enter behind them to sing “counter melody” after number has been “planted.”)

### IMAGINATION (counter—melody)

If you would wander in the moonlight,  
When there's a dark cloud following you,  
It's a long, long day, and you find the way is  
Loaded up with every kind of care,  
If, when you wander in the moonlight,  
You can remember up in the sky,  
Tho' the way be far, there's a guiding star,  
Watching with a twinkle in his eye,  
Stoney broke though you may be,  
It is plain to see,  
So if you wander in the moonlight \_\_  
Put on a bright smile and then  
You'll feel like a millionaire.

## **You're the Fellow for Me**

I've been looking all over  
For somebody who  
Tries to understand what I'm feeling, and  
Thinks the same as I do.  
If I tell you my story,  
You'll know what it's about,  
Here is the way I have figured it out.

If you believe in a life worth living,  
Where the people are good and free,  
If you can share in the joys of giving, well,  
You're the fellow for me.  
If you can look for a silver lining,  
So that others around may see,  
And if you show them the sun is shining, well,  
You're the fellow for me.  
Oh, I know that it's true,  
And along there with you,  
We'll climb the highest mountain, then  
Down the other side to a land of better men  
We shall arise from the times of sorrow  
To a world as it ought to be,  
Lend me a hand for the New Tomorrow, and  
You're the fellow for me.

There's a sunny side waiting  
For somebody who  
Seeks a holiday in a better way  
Than the rest of them do.  
Mine's the only solution  
That can fathom it out,  
Here is the theme song to bring it about.

Join together ye nations,  
Join together and sing.  
Rich man, poor man, or what you're aiming for,  
Let it be a good thing.  
There's no better creation for you sinners below.  
Sing out this anthem wherever you go.

## **LOVE, LOVE, LOVE.**

IF we look dejected, well, we'll tell you what it is:  
Love, love, love.  
Perhaps it's best to tell you in case you start a quiz,  
We are in love.

If you thought at first we looked a trifle smug.  
Something's pulling at our hearts with such a tug,  
The answer's very simple, we've been bitten by the bug.  
Love, love, love.

Everybody gets it and it's such a funny thing:  
Love, love, love.  
Something deep inside you makes you want to sing,  
When you're in love,  
First you feel so happy then you feel so glum,  
One day you are smart and then the next day glum.  
You think of all the stories that your father told your mum,  
Love, love, love.

One day it's terrific but the next day is a blight:  
Love, love, love.  
Sometimes you're hungry but you just can't eat a bite,  
When you're in love,  
Mother grumbles at us with a nagging tongue,  
Father says, "Now stop it, you're much too young,"  
They both forget that they were just as young when they were stung:  
Love, love, love.

When you're really smitten every moment it appears:  
Love, love, love.  
Makes you do such silly things as wash behind your ears,  
When you're in love.  
Sisters make such fun of you, they are the end.  
A sister's blooming sickening and they drive you round the bend—  
Of course I'm not referring to the sister of my friend—  
Love, love, love.

Once it really gets you, well, it gets you and you're pinned:  
Love, love, love.  
Worse than indigestion when you're suffering from the wind,  
When you're in love,  
Life becomes a misery that you can't doff,  
It's agonising torture and it won't wear off,  
I'd rather have the measles, chicken-pox, and whooping cough,  
Than love, love, love.

**GIRLS:**  
We're the ones who cause it all, we take a heavy toll,  
Love, love, love.  
Just one little smile from us and they go up the pole,  
They THINK its love.  
But they're silly Billies and they're all bereft,  
With a glance we hold them in a steel-like cleft,  
We dangle them on a string and when there's nothing left,  
Good-bye, love.

**BOYS**

Listen to us fellers, if you don't know what it's like,  
Don't touch love,  
Take a word of warning, chaps, and for the love of Mike,  
Keep dear of love.  
It's a bad disease that makes you ill and tense,  
Every hour of every day it spells expense.  
So take a tip from men like us and our experience:  
Love, love, PHOOEY!

**ORDER OF THE BATH**

**Cast:**

<b>COLONEL</b>	<b>BOOTS</b>
<b>MAN</b>	<b>BAG MAN</b>
<b>WAITER</b>	<b>1st DETECTIVE</b>
<b>BOY</b>	<b>2nd DETECTIVE</b>

The scene is a corridor in an English hotel. An elderly man, obviously ex Army enters, carrying a sponge bag, towel, etc. He is dressed in a bathrobe and is looking for the bathroom. A man in lounge suit and hat enters.

**COLONEL:**  
I beg your pardon, sir.

**MAN:**  
What's the matter, been robbed?

**COLONEL:**  
Not at all, sir. I'm looking for the bathroom. I wish to take a bath.  
Can you direct me to the bathroom, please?

**MAN:**  
I'm afraid not. I don't know where it is. I've only been here six weeks. (He goes to exit.)

**COLONEL:**  
Good heavens, six weeks without a bath? Disgusting

**MAN:**  
Disgusting? WHO'S disgusting? Why am I disgusting?  
Because I haven't had a bath in six weeks? Our cat has never had a bath in its life and  
he looks a darn sight cleaner than you do.  
One only baths when one is dirty and I hope your remarks are not intended as an  
insinuation.

**COLONEL:**  
My remarks were NOT intended as an insinuation, sir, and I object to being addressed  
as though I were an envelope.

**MAN:**

**You spoke to me first, didn't you? You wanted something, didn't you?**

**COLONEL:**

**I still want something, a bath.**

**MAN:**

**Well, do I look like a man who goes around with a spare bath under his arm? If you want the bathroom I hope you find it, and take a tip from me, keep your big toe out of the plug hole.**

**(He exits.)**

**COLONEL:**

**Well, really, bless my soul !**

**(A very posh waiter enters to cross the stage with tray and breakfast on it.)**

**COLONEL:**

**Excuse me, Waiter, I want a bath. Could you kindly direct me to the bathroom?**

**WAITER:**

**Information on the first floor**

**COLONEL: I realise that, sir, but all I want to know is—**

**WAITER:**

**I do not deal in bathrooms, sir, all I can offer you is a couple of kippers.**

**COLONEL:**

**I can hardly clean myself with a couple of kippers, can I?**

**Surely you know where the nearest bathroom is?**

**WAITER:**

**My union does not allow me to trespass on the preserves of the Information Department. Good morning, sir. (He exits.)**

**(At that moment a man in Sherlock Holmes coat, carrying a bag, slides on, looks around, puts a paper in the COLONEL'S hand, and exits.)**

**COLONEL:**

**Well, really, REALLY !**

**(Two men who have obviously been following the BAG MAN glide across the stage as If in full pursuit. The Colonel stops the last man crossing.)**

**COLONEL:**

**Forgive me, sir, but I am most anxious to find the bathroom it's not a LOT I am asking, I merely wish to take a bath, but I cannot locate the correct room. I wonder, could you help me?**

**MAN:**

**SH, SH, SH ! ! ! ! (With fingers still to lips he follows in direction taken by BAG MAN.)**

**COLONEL:**

**It's all so typically British. (A young pageboy enters.)**  
**Boy, oh, my boy, I know you'll be able to help me.**

**BOY:**

**What's it worth?**

**COLONEL:**

**I want a bath.**

**BOY:**

**What for?**

**COLONEL:**

**Good gracious, what do you think I want a bath for?**

**BOY:**

**I suppose 'cos you're a dirty old man. Ha, hah!**

**COLONEL:**

**Young man, I am endeavouring to keep as cool as possible Is it too much to beg you to lead me to the nearest bathroom?**

**BOY:**

**The nearest one is just down there but it ain't no use. It's locked.**

**COLONEL:**

**Why?**

**BOY:**

**It's busted;**

**some Americans was here last night and they got into the bath with their boots on.**

**COLONEL:**

**I expect they were in a hurry. Is there no other?**

**BOY:**

**Yes, there's one down this end, but that's locked, too. A man drownded himself yesterday. If you give me a bob I'll let you have a look at him. Come on!**

**COLONEL:**

**No! You gruesome creature. All I wish for is a normal morning bath.  
Am I expecting too much?**

**BOY:**

**Don't yell at me. Why don't you go back and bath in the sink?**

**COLONEL:**

**There is no stopper in my sink, there is no soap, and the hot water tap is running cold.**

**BOY;**

**Well, what do you expect? This is a British hotel, ain't it? Tell you what,  
I've got an old bucket left over from the Coronation!**

**COLONEL:**

**Run along, young man, hurry or there'll be a bereavement in your family.  
(He takes open razor from his bag.)**

**BOY:**

**Coo! I got a better one than that. Look, mister.**

**(He pulls half a dozen from his pocket.)**

**Compared to me, mate, Sweeney Todd was an amateur.**

**COLONEL:**

**GET OUT!!!**

**BOY;**

**I don't know what the country is coming to, so blinkin old fashioned only got one razor,  
wanting a bath Coo! blinkin' lunatic.  
(He exits.)**

**(The BAG MAN returns, same business, slipping paper into Colonels hand. He  
exits and is again followed by the two men.)**

**COLONEL:**

**I can't stand it ! I can't stand it ! (He goes to exit, when the Boot  
(Boy enters. He is a "Goof" He looks at the shaking COLONEL.)**

**BOOTS:**

**Hello, you going daft too?**

**COLONEL:**

**I wonder if you are daft enough to be able to direct me to the bathroom? I want a bath.**

**BOOTS:**

**I know you was crazy. Good, ain't it?**

**COLONEL:**

**Who are you? The Boots?**

**BOOTS:**

**(reciting loudly Kipling's poem)**

**Boots, Boots, marching up and down again.**

**(He is marching up and down. Suddenly he calls to the Colonel)  
Come on, join in.**

**COLONEL:**

**Boots, Boots, marching up and down again**

(He realises what he is doing.)  
Stop it. Where's the Manager? Where's THE MANAGER?

**BOOTS:**

He's in the bath.

**COLONEL:** Good, show me where he is. I'll stand outside the door and  
when he comes out, then I'll go in.

**BOOTS:**

He ain't coming out. He's drownded himself.  
Oh, Boots, Boots, marching up and down again.  
(He repeats this in rhythm as he exits.)

**COLONEL:**

I must get out of here. I must get back to my room I  
(The BAG MAN returns,

and this time places a whole wad of papers in the Colonels hand.  
Exits as the other two men enter. They are detectives.)

**1ST DETECTIVE:** What have you got there?

**COLONEL:**

I don't know who you are, sir, and I don't know what I have got here. I only know what  
I want, and so far I haven't got it.

**2ND DETECTIVE:**

What are you doing with these papers?

**COLONEL:**

I'm giving them to you. (He does so.)

**1ST DETECTIVE:**

Ah ha! Caught in the act. Look at this, "Rise, Comrades, this is the time to strike.  
Strike, Comrades, strike."

**COLONEL:**

I, What do you think I am, a box of matches?

**2nd DETECTIVE:**

Silence, you are under arrest for distributing subversive propaganda.

**1<sup>st</sup> DETECTIVE:**

You will accompany us to the station.

**COLONEL:**

How dare you? I am a retired British officer. You can't do this to me?

**2<sup>nd</sup> DETECTIVE:**

Come along.

**COLONEL:**

But what are you going to do with me?

**1<sup>ST</sup> DETECTIVE:**

**You will be taken to the Station and then charged, then you will be stripped and given a bath.**

**COLONEL:**

**Really! Now, how peculiar, that's all I wanted in the first place. Come along.**

**BLACKOUT**

**"IT'S A GREAT GREAT GAME"**

**VERSE**

**Why are we over the skyline,  
Under a tent of blue?  
Why are the pathways we trek along as bright as a New day?  
We've got a very good reason  
We would like to tell,  
So that you can come and share it as well.**

**CHORUS**

**Get out and come in, boys, we're waiting for you,  
And you'll be delighted you came,  
To enjoy the joys of the Scouting Boys,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.  
The thrill of a lifetime is waiting for you,  
It's time you were staking a claim.  
Let the rafters ring and your heart will sing,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.  
You play on a wonderful journey,  
Beyond the realms of Mars,  
Every night on your way's alight  
With a million lucky stars.  
You gotta get in, boys, and take it from me,  
In putting your worry to shame,  
You will learn the break of the left-hand shake,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.**

**VERSE**

**Ours is a wonderful journey,  
No matter where we go,  
Welcoming sign-posts are pointing out  
Each high-way and low-way.  
You can be sure of a greeting,  
Over hill and dale,  
While each "Hello" echo's over the trail.**

**CHORUS**

Get out and come in, boys, we're waiting for you,  
And you'll be delighted you came,  
To enjoy the joys of the Scouting Boys,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.  
The thrill of a lifetime is waiting for you,  
It's time you were staking a claim.  
Let the rafters ring and your heart will sing,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.  
You play on a wonderful journey,  
Beyond the realms of Mars,  
Every night on your way's alight  
With a million lucky stars.  
You gotta get in, boys, and take it from me,  
In putting your worry to shame,  
You will learn the break of the left-hand shake,  
IT'S A GREAT, GREAT GAME.

## ACT 2

### "SEA SCOUTING IS THE LIFE FOR ME"

BLOW, blow the weather, put out to sea,  
Sea Scouting is the life for me.  
Breezes a—blowing, so fancy free,  
Sea Scouting is the life for me.  
I go down to the sea in ships whilst the wind blows through my hair,  
And the spray leaps along my way  
Just to let me know it's there.  
Out on the billows I long to be,  
Free, sailing on the open sea,  
No doubt about it, it's plain to see  
Sea Scouting is the life for me,  
'Cos I'm fancy free, on the briny sea,  
That's the life for me.

### VERSE

We are the boys for early rising,  
Up with the Morning Star.  
Out on the tide we'll soon be prising,  
Crossing the harbour bar.  
We are the boys who plan the courses  
Out where the dawn is red,  
Leaving the old land-lubbers safe in bed.  
Hard to the wind our heart rejoices,  
Bright as we go along,  
Hark to the sound of merry voices  
Singing a sailor song.  
Heave and a Ho, away my hearties, making the wind your slave,  
Sailing along upon the ocean wave.

## 2ND VERSE

Silvery sails in the moonlight trailing,  
On with the wake behind,  
Then comes the sound of someoneailing,  
Over the tack they wind.  
Then from the port to starboard churning,  
Over the trackless foam,  
Comes the command to be returning home.  
See how the boats appear to fly, sir,  
See how they hear the call,  
This is the life for you and I, sir,  
This is the best of all.  
Pull for the shore, my hale and hearties,  
Hack with the shoulders steep,  
Ours is the wide horizon of the deep.

## UNDERWORLD

In the Gang Show we have always endeavoured to bring you ever aspect of LIFE even the seamier side. In this next sketch we are going To take you to a rather sordid, dreary, smoke-filled cellar, resembling a Paris nightclub. It is, I fear, among the dregs of the underworld of that amazing city. But you should know ALL not just the brighter side of living, but perhaps the OBLIQUE side of things. Into this den of the sadder side of life come two visitors who are anxious to explore and find out for themselves what goes on in these hovels. So it is the plot of our next sketch and we trust you will accept it in the spirit intended. Naturally we call this episode—"Underworld."

Note: Compere to be dressed as an undertaker.

### Cast

TOUT	2ND GIGOLO
MANAGER	AKELA
1ST GIGOLO	BALOO

Scene is late at night. A sordid cellar café in Paris. A French song is being played. Rather dirty-looking apaches are hanging around. They look evil. A French TOUT suddenly appears and calls the owner.

### TOUT

Messieurs, tourists, Anglais ! (The owner rushes to the door. A waiter dusts a table. The rest of the louts merely look around, with no enthusiasm. One slowly pulls out a knife and sharpens it.)

MANAGER (in broken English)

Ah, welcome, welcome, entree Madames, entree to the night life of Paree. Welcome Eenglish ladies, come in.

(Two ladies enter, dressed as in lady Cubmaster uniforms.)

**AKELA:**  
**Howdoyoudo?**

**MANAGER (bowing low)**  
**Madam. (He kisses her hand.)**

**BALOO:**  
**Be careful, Akela—you never know.**

**MANAGER(to Baloo)**  
**Madam. (He kisses her hand also.)**

**BALOO:**  
**No, thank you, we only want a cup of tea. Come, Akela.**  
**(She takes Akela's hand and they go and sit down at a table.)**

**AKELA:**  
**Do you think we should have come?**

**BALOO:**  
**It was your suggestion, you said we ought to know everything.**

**AKELA:**  
**I was only thinking of the Pack.**

**BALOO:**  
**Well, I don't like the look of the pack around here. Do you think we are safe?**

**AKELA:**  
**I'm afraid so. What would you like?**

**BALOO:**  
**Do you think they'd have a deliciously toasted crumpet?**

**AKELA:**  
**I don't know what that is in French we can't speak the language, how can we order it?**

(A GIGOLLO has sneaked across the ladies' table. He suddenly speaks.)

**1<sup>ST</sup> GIGOLLO**  
**AH! (The two women throw their arms around each other in fear.)**  
**You like a friend yes?**

**BALOO:**  
**We like a friend NO We just wish for a cup of tea and a bun, or whatever you have.**

**1<sup>ST</sup> GIGOLLO:**

You buy drink for me? I show you Paris from the IN side?  
You like to see Paris from the inside Yes?

AKELA: Just a cup of tea and we'll get on the OUTside yes. (She smiles.)

1ST GIGOLO:  
Cup of tea and aperitifs quickly.

BALOO :  
Aperitifs? What's that, Akela?

1ST GIGOLO : Aperitifs, very nice, very sweet.

BALOO :  
Instead of sugar I expect. (MANAGER brings tea and aperitif .)

MANAGER:  
For Madames voila (He places tea and drinks on table.  
(The ladies are not certain what to do so they pour aperitifs in tea.)

1ST GIGOLO :  
Good luck. (The ladies raise cups and drink, dyb, dyb, dyb.)

BALOO :  
It is sweet. (Hiccoughs.) Pardon me

1ST GIGOLO :  
Encore, Madames, encore, Pierre. (The MANAGER rushes off for more tea and drinks.  
(The GIGOLO draws up a chair and sits at table.)

AKELA:  
This is quite an experience, Baloo. It is only right we should find out how the other half  
lives. It will make a most profitable yarn for the Pack when we get back.  
(Another GIGOLO has sneaked up to their table.)

2ND GIGOLO:  
Ali! (They both jump in terror.) Beautiful Eengleesh ladies. Mmm !  
(He kisses BALOO'S hand.)

AKELA:  
Take no notice, Baloo. Don't encourage him. (She hiccoughs.) Excuse me.  
(MANAGER returns with tea and aperitif.  
The GIGOLOS pour aperitif into the tea for the ladies.)

BALOO:

1ST GIGOLO:  
One cup? No, two cups, then three cups, then four cups then

AKELA:

**Have you such a thing as a Bath bun?**

**2ND GIGOLO:**  
**A bath ? Ah, ha-ha! you want to make the whoopee, yes?**

**BALOO:**  
**Akela, think now, think, what were we told on the course at Gilwell?**  
**I think it was in Part One.**

**AKELA:**  
**No, dear, Part Two. That bit about handling boys when they get to a certain stage.**  
**(She signifies she means the two men.)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> GIGOLO:**  
**Good luck. (He raises his glass. The ladies do the same, and start on second cup of tea.)**

**AKELA:**  
**Best wishes. (Hiccoughs.) Excuse me.**

**BALOO:**  
**Really, Akela. (She drinks and hiccoughs.) Pardon me.**

**1<sup>ST</sup> GIGOLO:**  
**Madames, you like to dance yes? The wild dance ? the Jungle.**

**AKELA:**  
**The Jungle, Baloo. I believe he's been a Cub. (She giggles.)**

**BALOO:**  
**Do you think he looks like an old Wolf?**

**2<sup>nd</sup> GIGOLO:**  
**Jet-a-door, Jet-a-door.**

**AKELA:**  
**If you feel the draught shut the door yourself. (Giggling) Oh, what have I said.**  
**This tea is delicious. (She drinks more.)**

**BALOO:**  
**Akela, we must get out. They might have doped us. We shall wake up in the morning  
and find ourselves floating in the Seine. Come on.**

**AKELA:**  
**I think this is Life.**

**BALOO:**  
**Yes, and I want to live.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> GIGOLO:**

**One dance one dance, Madames. Vive la France, Vive la Eenglish.**

**BALOO:**

**Vive Ia Exit. Come on Akela.**

(The other men have by now blocked the exit and look menacing.)

**AKELA:**

**Don't look now, but we can't get out, we're trapped.**

(The two ladies rise and make their way, arm in arm, to the door. Two men bar the way. They turn and begin to sing "Back to Gilwell," return to table and drink again and sing more merrily and walk across to counter and ask for "Two returns to Gilwell." Then make their exit and)

**BLACKOUT.**

**Note. This ending must Not get out of hand.**

**Mr BROWN and Miss SUZANNE**

**BOYS**

**How Dya do its nice to meet you, Miss Suzanne  
It's a treat to greet and meet you, Miss Suzanne  
It is not my line to dither, shall we stroll down by the river,  
Would you like to go a walking, Miss Suzanne**

**GIRLS**

**Thank you for the invitation, Mister Brown,  
And it fills me with elation, Mister Brown,  
If you'd like to take me walking, what's the use of useless talking,  
Let's get going and I thank you, Mr. Brown.**

**BOYS:**

**What a most delightful evening, Miss Suzanne,  
You're a glamorous companion, Miss Suzanne,  
And before I start to waver, may I ask of you a favour?  
May I whisper something to you, Miss Suzanne?**

**GIRLS:**

**I'm a very modest maiden, Mister Brown.  
So be very, very careful, Mister Brown.  
For the light of truth is dawning, and I hear the Gipsy's warning,  
But go right ahead and whisper, Mister Brown.**

**BOYS:**

**Will you marry me tomorrow, Miss Suzanne?  
Can a wedding be tomorrow, Miss Suzanne?  
Say the word and I will fasten on a phone call to the parson,**

**Will you marry me tomorrow, Miss Suzanne?**

**GIRLS:**

Oh, don't rush me off my feet please, Mister Brown,  
Oh, you ARE in such a hurry, Mister Brown,  
But I am not filled with sorrow, so why wait until tomorrow?  
Let's get married now, this evening, Mister Brown.

**BOYS:**

Oh, you wonderful creation, Miss Suzanne,  
All my worldly wealth I give you, Miss Suzanne,  
If a cheque book does escape me, here is one and tuppence ha'penny,  
And I hand it to you gladly, Miss Suzanne.

**GIRLS:**

Here's the Minister to wed us, Mister Brown,  
In a moment I shall be Suzanna Brown.  
I shall know what joy and bliss is, just as soon as I'm your Missus,  
Oh, I really want to thank you, Mister Brown.

**MINISTERS:**

Put your hands together Sue and Mister Brown,  
Put the ring upon her finger, Mister Brown,  
There's the knot so none can doubt it, and you can't do nowt about it,  
You have been and gone and done it, Mister Brown.

**BOYS:**

You are mine, you're really mine now, Missus Brown,  
Are you feeling very happy, Missus Brown?

**GIRLS:**

From now on WE'LL be the warders and it's I who'll give the orders,  
And you'll do just what I tell you, Mister Brown.

**BOYS**

That's the way it is with every Mister Brown,  
All through life the boss is always Missus Brown,  
Let this warning rage and tingle, for the love ~of Mike—stay single,  
Don't be another sap like Mister Brown.

## THE OWLS

Cast

THE MAN

FIVE MEMBERS OF THE OWLS  
A POLICEMAN  
VARIOUS OTHERS FOR THE TROOP  
A.S.M.

The scene is night time and a rather deserted field way out in the country. It is a very good night, and as the curtains open we discover the figure of a middle-aged man standing in the field alone. He is wearing a mac, and a trilby hat is pushed rather on the back of his head. He is looking around him. The music is quietly playing "These are the Times We Shall Dream About." A local policeman enters and stands for a brief moment watching the man. Then walks towards him and speaks.

**POLICEMAN:**  
**Are you lost, sir?**

**MAN:**  
**Good evening, Constable. No, I'm not lost. I was just looking around.**

**POLICEMAN:**  
**'Fraid there's not much to see around here, sir, especially at this time of night.**  
**Been here before?**

**MAN:**  
**Yes. Many years ago, though. I happened to be going back to town in the car and suddenly saw the name of this village on a signpost. I couldn't resist the temptation to come along and see what it was looking like.**

**POLICEMAN:**  
**Pretty desolate, isn't it? The only thing we get around here is owls, and there's plenty of them. The noise they make at night is something fierce.**

**MAN:**  
**The Owls could always make a noise, Constable it's funny, but I was thinking of the Owls as you spoke.**

**POLICEMAN:**  
**Don't go much on them myself, sir, but every man to his taste.**  
**(The MAN takes out a cigarette and then a lighter)**  
**That's a nice lighter you've got there, sir.**

**MAN:**  
**It was a present a present from the Owls.**

**POU**

**POLICEMAN:**  
**(he scratches his head for a moment)**  
**Might see you later on, sir if there's anything I can do for you, let me know.**

**MAN:**

**Thank you, Constable. Cigarette?**

(The CONSTABLE takes one and lights it for the CONSTABLE.)

**POLICEMAN:**

**Expensive things, these days. Might see you later, sir. (He exits.)**

(The MAN almost absentmindedly throws the lighter in the air and catches it. He then walks slowly back to a tree trunk in the middle of the field at the back and sits down on it. Then the lights appear to be changing. First they come down to a blackout with only a tiny spot on the MAN. Then as they come to more of a daylight glow we see small tents surrounding the field. A flagstaff with a "Jack" on it, and then a Small Boy enters. He speaks in a whisper, not seeing the MAN as he crosses the stage.)

**BILL:**

**Hey, Skip, I've cut my finger. Got some iodine? I only want a little drop.  
I cut my finger on a tin. Got some iodine (and he walks off)**

(A P.L. enters and speaks as two other Boys enter from the other side.)

**P.L.: Anybody seen Johnson? He's supposed to be Duty Patrol,  
and they've all gone out somewhere.**

**DICK:**

**They're ALWAYS going out. Old Skip won't half be mad. What time's dinner.**

**P.L.:**

**How do I know? I'm not Duty Patrol, it's the Owls.**

**TOM:**

**I'm starving I'm always starving, maybe I've got a tapeworm.**

**P.L.:**

**A tapeworm wouldn't be seen with you.**

(A small group of Boys, one playing a guitar, enter and sit around one of the tents. They sing a chorus of "These are the Times." As they slowly sing quietly the second refrain the following dialogue is heard over the singing.)

**BUDDY:**

**Hey, I've just come back from the Post Office, there's a smashing girl down there.  
(TOM gets up and goes to exit.)**

**DICK:**

**You know something, Timber? You suffer from a one-track mind.**

**P.L.:**

**Bradley, where are you going?**

**TOM:**

**I'm going to take a walk down to the Post Office.**

**P.L.:**

**Then get into uniform, you're not leaving camp unless you are properly dressed.**

**TOM:**

**Aw, nuts. (He goes off to get dressed. The P.L. goes to his tent and gets his hat.)**

**DICK:**

**And where might you be wandering to, Mister Patrol Leader?**

**P.L.**

**I got a letter to write.**

**BUDDY:**

**When did you learn to write? Hey, Jimmy, there's a letter for you.**

**(A YOUNG Boy comes over and is handed the letter.)**

**JIMMY:**

**Coo, lumme, it's from my mother. Hooray.'**

**(He tears the letter open. Then he reads, and grief registers on his face.**

**He seems to be almost breaking down. BUDDY notices this.)**

**BUDDY:**

**What's the matter, Jimmy, something wrong?**

**JIMMY:**

**Yes, it's awful, she hasn't sent me anything. (He shakes the envelope to be sure.)**

**(An A.S.M. enters.)**

**A.S.M.:**

**Some of you blokes had better start getting dinner ready or there's going to be a hefty row. The Owls have gone out and aren't back yet.**

**DICK:**

**Well, blow the blinkin' Owls. I vote we give them a rough house when they do get back. Come on, you two, get out the spuds. (The two Boys get up.)**

**BUDDY:**

**Bloomin' slaves, that's all we are, and this is supposed to be a holiday. (They exit.)**

**(Two BOYS cross the stage with water buckets.)**

**SMITHY:**

**This is about the tenth time today that they have sent me for water. I don't know what the heck they do with it. They certainly don't wash. (They exit.)**

**(Then the Owls enter. There are five of them, all in uniform, and they go straight to the MAN sitting on the tree trunk. SPENCER, the P.L., speaks to the MAN.)**

**SPENCER:**

**I know what you're going to say, Skip, we're the Duty Patrol and we shouldn't have gone out. Dinner is going to be late and we're always the cause of all the trouble, and we're a pain in the neck. Happy birthday. (The MAN looks at them.)**

**Collins:**  
**You thought we didn't know, didn't you, well, we did.**

**STAGG:**  
**Don't start grousing, you can't grouse on your birthday, and we don't know how old you are, but I think it's a hundred and seven.**

**SPENCER:**  
**Don't be disrespectful, he don't look a day over ninety.**

**RANDLE:**  
**Go and give him the bloornin' thing and let's get back to the spuds.**

**SPENCER:**  
**From your devoted brats, the Owls, please accept this as a token of our regard, and we hope to be annoying you for the rest of our lives.**  
**(And with that he throws the MAN a cigarette lighter.**  
**The MAN catches it and smiles at them.)**

**STAGG:**  
**Gee, Skip, I bet you didn't think I was going to be a sailor, did you? I had a smashing time in the Navy, and I was on the best ship in the whole Fleet. I wish you could have seen her, Skip. Gosh, she was great, there'll never be another Prince of Wales.**

**RANDLE:**  
**What about me, Skipper? Remember the first time I came home on leave after getting my "Wings?" Remember that time I flew right over your house? And the night we went on the binge together? That was my last party before I went down over Hamburg.**

**SPENCER:**  
**I didn't let you down, Skipper, either. That old P.L. badge is still with me at Arnheim.**

**COLLINS:**  
**You loaned me that lighter once when I was on leave cos mine was busted. But I gave it back to you and I bet you've still got it. What a rum lot the Owls turned out to be.**

**SPENCER:**  
**Come on, you mugs, get cracking with the dinner or he'll forget it's his birthday and start bawling us out again. Come on, my merry men.**  
**(They rush off. The first YOUNG BOY comes on.**  
**He is walking backwards and still whispering.)**

**BOY:**  
**Hey, Skip,**  
**I've cut my finger. Got any iodine? I only want a drop,**  
**I cut my finger on a tin, got some iodine?**

(The lights were dimming down on this last speech, and only the tiny spot on the MAN's face is showing as the BOY exits.

Then we find ourselves in the night again with no sign of the tents and with the blue lights coming up we see the figure of the CONSTABLE watching the MAN.)

**POLICEMAN:**  
Still here, sir?

**MAN:**  
Still here, Constable, but I think I'll be moving on now.

**POLICEMAN:**  
Didn't see anything of the owls, did you?

**MAN:**  
Yes, I saw them.

**POLICEMAN:**  
Peculiar things owls, sir, you never know what they are going to do.

**MAN:**  
You're right, absolutely right. I never dreamed what they were going to do.

**POLICEMAN:**  
How long did you live in these parts, sir?

**MAN:**  
A fortnight; long time ago now, though.

**POLICEMAN:**  
A fortnight? What you really mean is you stayed here.

**MAN:**  
No, Constable, I was here for two weeks and I lived.

(Off—stage we hear some Boys singing "These are the Times.")

{The MAN throws the lighter in the air and catches it again. He looks back at the POLICEMAN and nods as he slowly walks away.)

**MAN:**  
Good night.

**POLICEMAN:**  
Good night, sir.

(Only the last two lines of the song are needed.)  
'These are the times we shall dream about, and we'll call them the Good Old Days.'

**SLOW FADE TO BLACKOUT.**

**FOUR LITTLE FELLERS**

**WE'RE four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
We're sent out here to fill the gap,  
And the man who made us do it is a great big sap.  
He simply picks on us young blokes,  
And all we want to say is that we hope he chokes.  
We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.**

**We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
We've got to stick till he shouts "Right,"  
If they don't get a move on we'll be here all night.  
And if they're too long I can't wait,  
Or I'll cop it from me mother if I get home late,  
We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.**

**We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
We'll do our best without much fuss,  
But, blimey, why the dickens did they pick on us?  
The reason tho' I s'pose you see,  
Is because they all can hear us in the gallery.  
We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.**

**We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
We really don't know what to do,  
And we're feeling very silly as we struggle through  
We're so self conscious, dear, oh my,  
And it's very, very evident we're all so shy,  
We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.**

**We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
It seems a shame to spoil the show  
By sticking us in front of you, but still it's so**

We've got to keep on singing more,  
And in case we didn't tell you who we are before,  
We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.

We're four little fellers wot's doing our best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.  
If something doesn't happen soon,  
I'm certain we had better change the darn old tune.  
Our voices aren't of high degree,  
Its plain you couldn't stick it long—and more, can't we,  
We're four little fellers wot's done their best  
To fill up a wait in the programme.

## There's One Born every Minute

Cast

THE OLD MAN	1ST MAN
ARCHIE	2ND MAN
ALEXANDER	

*The scene takes place at Midnight. It is a small railway station which looks derelict. It could be somewhere on the Yorkshire Moors (If there is such a station, It has obviously been "lost." It is not deserted. Outside what was once the booking office is seated a very old man. He is dressed as a porter cum station master. He is completely unconcerned as to the lateness of the hour. He is seated in an old arm chair. Beside him, seated on the floor, is perhaps his grandson anyway, a small boy. It is nearly dark, and very dreary. Suddenly two men enter. They are wearing overcoats and are stranded motorists.*

1<sup>st</sup> MAN:

Good evening, we nearly despaired of seeing life in this incredible place.

OLD MAN:

Good evening, having a walk?

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:

We've just picked up a couple of nasty punctures on the main road, about two miles away, and we have no spares, any ideas? We're stranded.

OLD MAN:

Yeah, you're going to be tired.

1ST MAN:

**Do trains still run to this station?**

**OLD MAN:**

**Run here? Of COURSE they do. That's why I'm here, I'm the Station Master.**

**2nd MAN:**

**Good, that sounds healthy, when is the next train?**

**OLD MAN:**

**Friday !**

**1st MAN:**

**FRIDAY!**

**OLD MAN:**

**They only come in on a Friday.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:**

**You mean that's all they do?**

**OLD MAN:**

**Oh, no, they goes out again!**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**

**On a Friday? (OLD MAN nods his head and smiles.)**

**2nd MAN:**

**But today's only TUESDAY!**

**OLD MAN:**

**Is IT! (He is amazed.)**

**1st MAN:**

**Do you mean to tell me you don't know what day it is?**

**OLD MAN:**

**I don't need to. All I have to worry about is Fridays, as the train ain't been,  
it ain't Friday, so I ain't worrying.**

**2nd MAN:**

**Good heavens! I can't believe this, and in the middle of the twentieth century, too.**

**OLD MAN:**

**We're going to celebrate in a minute, 'cos we've won.**

**1st MAN:**

**Does he mean the Pools? He's won the Pools.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:**

I don't know, ask him.

1<sup>st</sup> MAN:  
Won what, sir? What have you won?

OLD MAN:  
The war! It's here in the paper. I always said we would beat them Germans.  
I'm going to have a beer in a minute.

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:  
You mean you mean you've only just heard?

OLD MAN:  
That's right. I read it tonight in my paper. I only found it this morning. I knew we'd whack them Germans. I wonder what they will do with the Kaiser?

1<sup>st</sup> MAN:  
Has anyone got a car near here?

OLD MAN:  
A car? (He gets very excited now.) Oh, yes, our Alexander has a car. It goes, too.  
But Alexander is in bed.

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN: But couldn't we get him up?

OLD MAN:  
He's dead.

BOTH MEN:  
DEAD!

OLD MAN:  
Dead sound asleep. He don't like to be woken up in the middle of the night.

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:  
Now listen to me, my man. This situation is becoming ridiculous. Here we are, two Englishmen stranded in the wilds of the moors, with urgent business in London. You have a car and refuse to take us.

OLD MAN:  
'Tain't me, it's Alexander.

1<sup>st</sup> MAN (shouting):  
WELL, GET ALEXANDER!

OLD MAN:  
He won't like it—and he's very expensive. Archie, call Alexander.  
(ARCHIE rises and calls off to ALEXANDER.)

**2ND MAN:**  
**If I hadn't seen this I wouldn't have believed it.**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**  
**It's like a story out of a book. An isolated station with trains only running on a Friday, looked after by a crazy old man. You don't know anything, do you?**

**OLD MAN:**  
**Well, I ain't lost.**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**  
**LOOK! (ALEXANDER enters. He is carrying a candle and has bare feet and is wearing a long, dirty nightshirt (white). He looks completely looney.)**

**2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:**  
**What's that?**

**OLD MAN:**  
**That is Alexander.**

**ALEXANDER:**  
**'Ain't Friday, is it?**

**OLD MAN:**  
**No. Alexander, will you get the car out and drive these two men to where they want to go. (ALEXANDER shakes his head.)**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**  
**Good heavens, man, you can't leave us here all night!  
Take us to the nearest town and we'll put up there.**

**OLD MAN:**  
**It's fifteen miles, it will cost you ten pounds.**

**2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:**  
**TEN POUNDS! It's daylight robbery.**

**OLD MAN:**  
**What, in the middle of the night? He won't do it for less than ten pounds.**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**  
**Let's pay him the ten pounds and get out of here. This place is giving me the creeps.**

**OLD MAN (to ALEXANDER):**  
**How long will it take you to get ready?**

**ALEXANDER:**  
**I've only got to put my hat on.**

**1<sup>st</sup> MAN:**

Your hat! You mean that's all you're going to wear?

ALEXANDER:  
Yes, I never bother with gloves.

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:  
Quick, give him the ten quid and let's get out of this place. I'm getting the shivers.

OLD MAN:  
So will Alexander if you don't hurry up.

1<sup>st</sup> MAN :  
Take this (handing over money). Where's the car?

ALEXANDER:  
Out here, I'll take you by the back road, it's quicker. Come on.  
(He walks off, followed by the men.)

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN:  
Thanks very much Just heard about the war.  
Trains on Fridays The Kaiser Come on quick. (Exits.)

(The OLD MAN takes from his pocket an enormous roll of bank notes  
and slowly places the ten pounds with the others.)

OLD MAN:  
Archie, get your broom. (Archie nods.) We've had a very good evening and I am tired  
and going to bed. About the busiest time for a long while, so I'll have a drink and then  
go to bed. I don't want to be disturbed any more tonight, son, so go down to the main  
road and sweep up the nails, we'll put them back tomorrow. (ARCHIE exits.)  
(The OLD MAN sits down and pours himself a drink, He raises it in a toast.)  
There's one born every minute!  
(He drinks, and the curtains close.)

## HAPPY ENDING

BROTHERS though we know the day is long and weary,  
Hope ever on.  
Though we ride the vale of shadows, hope is not gone.  
Steel your hearts to face the morrow,  
Though the night be dark and long,  
I believe the trail of sorrow fades away in song.

There is a happy ending to the clouds of darkest blue,  
If you just keep an eye for the rainbow in the sky,  
You will find it somewhere shining through.  
There is a happy ending to the worries on your way,  
If you only will do what the Good Book tells you to,  
There's a mighty bright horizon of sky-way blue,

To bring a Happy Ending for you.

**HARRY E.:**

Lost upon a trail, and every will is broken,

**BILL S.:**

Hope ever on..

**JOHN H.:**

Ne'er a sign or helpful token,

**BILL S.**

Hope, brother, on.

Raise again your eyes to skyward,  
There alone your friend will be,  
Join me, brothers, all believing,  
Sing your hymn with me.

**The Cheer- Ups**

**Opening Chorus**

We are the famous" Cheer ups,"  
We crave the spotlight's flare,  
We love to sing, we don't miss a thing,  
We get in everywhere.  
We even got with E.N.S.A.,  
We put the troops to rout,  
Whatever there is going,  
We've got to have a showing,  
And you'll never keep us out.

**2. AIN'T SHE SWEET.**

**3. THE KEYS OF HEAVEN.**

**4. ACTION SONG.**

**ALL:**

A show must start off with a bang as you will all agree,  
And notbing's better than a laugh, it's very plain to see,  
So without more delay,  
We'll all get underway.

Stand by, stand by, now the show's begun,  
Stand by, stand by, all aboard for fun.

**ONE:**

If I could do just as I like, I'd paralyse the boys,  
There's nothing in the world that I prefer to making noise,  
I'd enter every race,  
And be a motor ace.  
**HONK-konk, honk-konk, see me clear the track,**  
**Honk-konk, honk-konk, see me racing in my old tin-tack.**

**TWO:**

I've got a great ambition, that is very clear to me,  
Above all else I'd like to be a football referee,  
I'd be up with the play,  
On every Saturday.  
**Off—side, off—side, I'm the guy who knows (blows whistle),**  
**Off-side, off-side, stop when the whistle blows (blows whistle).**

**THREE:**

I know this all sounds crazy, and you'll think I'm up the pole,  
I'd love a nice electric drill, and then I'd dig a hole,  
If I could have a go,  
It would be great, I know.

Drill, drill, drill, drill, what a lovely time,  
Drill, drill, drill, drill, shivers up and down my spine.

**FOUR:**

I'd like to join the Navy, and to sail across the foam,  
I'd get a bo'sun's whistle for my dad when I come home,  
I know I'd be the type,  
To do the Old Horn Pipe.

Da-da-da, dancing merrily,  
Da-da-da-da, out on the briny sea.

**FIVE:**

I went to see the Derby with my mother and my dad,  
And somehow I got bitten with a yearning very bad,  
And now it's plain to see,  
What I would like to be.

Gid-up, gid-up, ride 'em on the rails and win,  
Gid-up, gid-up, gotta be the first one in.

**SIX:**

There's nothing in the world to me that seems to be so grand,  
As playing on the big drum with the leader of the band,  
I'm positive that I'm,  
The bloke to keep in time.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, I know what to do,  
Bang, bang, bang, bang, sock 'em with the old one-two.

## **OVER THE GARDEN WALL**

**FOUR VERY SMALL BOYS  
FOUR FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLDS  
FOUR SENIOR PREFECTS  
FOUR TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLDS  
FOUR MARRIED MEN  
FOUR BABIES**

*This is a musical number with each verse sung by four people, each of a set, dressed practically the same. We only see the tops of them as they are looking over a garden wall and the garden they are looking at is where the audience are. They rise just before their verses from behind the wall, and face the audience as they sing. It is a sequence from boyhood to manhood, each "set" being the same as the previous "set" seven years later.*

### **VERY SMALL BOYS:**

Without the slightest doubt, I think this is about  
The nicest place I know to stall,  
And while away the hours in day-dreams,  
Over the garden wall.  
I've seen it all before, and in the house next door,  
The neighbours often shout a call  
To say "Hello" to me as I lean  
Over the garden wall. Who is that a-coming, sunshade in a twirl?  
Gee! this is surprising  
What-da-ya-know, by gum, it is a lovely little girl!  
Oh, what a pretty face I didn't know the place  
Could boast of things like this at all,  
Whilst I grow I'll keep my eyes on  
The pretty little lady from the garden wall.

*(With a grimace they fade down behind the wall, and through the music FATHER TIME crosses the set. Then up comes the next "set. They are the boys now about fourteen years old.)*

### **FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLDS:**

The years are rolling by, but you can see that I  
Have not forgotten to pay a call  
Upon the girl who took my fancy,  
Over the garden wall.  
I've been away to school, but I forgot each rule,  
And couldn't concentrate at all,  
I dreamed all day, and all I dreamed was  
Over the garden wall. (Each look and see the girl.)  
Hi, there, Miss Benita, I'm home to say "Hello."

Gosh, I've got an idea,  
Wouldn't it be terrific if we saw a movie show?  
But if you'll say you'll come, we mustn't tell our mum,  
She wouldn't understand at all—  
You will? Oh, gosh, that's super-duper!  
Meet you at the end of the garden wall.

(Repeat business as they fade down behind the wall. FATHER TIME again crosses over and next "set appear older youths.)

**PREFECTS:**

A fellow's full of beans when he is in his teens,  
And life is far too full to pall,  
Especially when his thoughts go wandering  
Over the garden wall.  
And all through last term I used to sit and squirm,  
For this vacation time to fall,  
Because of someone who'll be waiting,  
Over the garden wall. (Each sees girl.)  
"Say, how are you?" at last I'm home again,  
Gee! you look colossal,  
Get out your bike and let's go riding down the country lane,  
And as we ride away, there's something I must say,  
And you must listen to it all  
Because I've got to get it over-  
See you at the end of the garden wall.

(Down they go. FATHER TIME and the next "set" come up. These are the TWENTY FOUR-YEAR-OLDS. Lighting changes to night effect.)

Oh what a day it's been, oh what a night it's been,  
I can't believe it's true at all,  
Oh, let me stare up at her window,  
Over the garden wall.  
Tonight I took her hand, I popped the question and  
She didn't blush, or faint, nor fall,  
She said "yes, please," and, boy, that shook me!  
All through a garden wall.  
Oh it's such a feeling, makes you want to sing,  
I could hit the ceiling,  
Now I must save and slave away to buy the wedding ring,  
And every star above knows I'm in love with love,  
So when our happy day shall fall,  
My darling won't have far to travel,  
I'll just lift her over the garden wall.

(As they dip down and FATHER Time crosses over, the strains of the wedding bells are heard, and the same "set" reappear, dressed for the wedding, with button holes, gloves, top hats, and the lighting changes to a sunny day effect.)

**BRIDEGROOMS:**

Ah, well, the big day's here my tummy's feeling queer,  
And now, whatever may befall,  
I need not come to gaze with longing  
Over the garden wall.

I'm sticking out my neck I feel a nervous wreck,  
But to the church I've got to crawl,  
I pray the choirboys won't start singing.  
Over the garden wall.

What a dreadful moment—what an awful strain,  
First I'm hot—then I'm freezing.  
One thing I swear, I'll never ever go through this again,  
But still I'm pretty sure, Man has been caught before.  
He has to say "I will," that's all,  
But I shall need supporting badly,  
Wish that I could lean on the garden wall.

(*Away this "set" goes and FATHER TIME crosses. The last "set" appear, obviously well and truly married men, and the years have left their mark.*)

**MARRIED MEN:**

I've taken out the pup, I've done the washing-up;  
And very soon I bet she'll bawl,  
"I wish you wouldn't stand there gazing  
Over the garden wall."  
For years I've plainly seen what disillusionments mean,  
It doesn't quite add up at all,  
I wish I'd kept a thousand miles from  
Over the garden wall.

(*Four BABIES poke their heads up beside their dads.*)

**BABIES:**

Who is that a-coming—sunshade a-twirl?  
Daddy, take a look there,  
What d'ya know, by gum, look there, it is a lovely little girl.

**MARRIED MEN:**

Oh luv-a-duck it's plain, it's going to start again,  
Now, heavens above—I've seen it all.

**BABIES:**

My poor dear dad, it's very simple,  
History is repeating itself  
Over the garden wall.

(*The MARRIED MEN clasp their hands to their foreheads and collapse as the BABIES wave to the little girl.*)

**BLACKOUT**

**JOHN**

**HELLO, I'm John.** I'm much about the same as other chaps,  
A few good points, and several bad—you'll notice them perhaps.  
I'm bashful—in a forward way, I'm scared of girls, oh; very,  
In fact I'm sure you'll all agree, I'm very ordinary.  
I've got a family just like you, and here's a funny thing,  
They all regard me differently and to their views they cling.  
I see it in their very eye when me they look upon,  
1 hear it in their voices when they greet me, "Hello, John."

**My dad has got his own ideas of what I'm going to be,**  
Oh, yes, he's for a million plans, all building up for me.  
He often talks about them when he gets me on his own,  
I think I like him best of all, just he and I—alone.  
For in his mind are pictures and I know he's got a host,  
But here's the kind of" me" I think he wants to see the most.  
(Picture Rugger cap.)

**No, Mother.** She adores me, I'm her ace of joyous pride,  
To her I am perfection, all good things personified.  
I guess she thinks I'm wonderful, my faults she'll never see,  
Why this is what she thinks I am, quite confidentially.  
(Picture of cherub.)

**It's funny, very funny, yet it's absolutely true,**  
And after all I s'pose it's just about the same with you.

**Well, now, let's take my auntie.** She's a spinster, forty-four,  
She thinks I dote on Sunday Schools and Band of Hopes galore.  
She's honestly peculiar, why, she'd never understand  
A chap who'd walk about without a prayer-book in his hand.  
When she's around I'm on my best behaviour, gee, it's funny,  
You see, I have to humour her—she's got a lot of money.  
And though she's very healthy, not too old, and really clever,  
My common sense just tells me that she cannot last for ever.  
It's good to be her favourite and I love a bit of sham,  
And so to my dear auntie, this is what she thinks I am.  
(Picture of choirboy.)

**And now comes my young brother.** Honestly, on the level,  
It's no exaggeration, he's a blinking little devil.  
I have to keep him in his place, he tells such dreadful lies,  
I've no illusions how I look in my young brother's eyes.  
•      (Picture of bully.)

**Of course, we can't miss Granny out,** all grannies are the same,~  
They seem to carve themselves a niche inside the Hall of Fame.  
When we grow up and battle forth, our lives we rearrange,  
Yet in our granny's eyes I'm sure we never seem to change.  
They have their own convictions and from them they never stir,

All through the years mine sees me and here's how I look to her.  
(Picture baby.)

And so you see I'm all those things, and all those things are me,  
According to the views of my devoted family.  
Of course I'd hate to be the chap they seem to think I am,  
To always be just so so, never smoke, or utter "damn."  
I'd hate to think of all good things you'd find in me a sample,  
I'd die if fellows looked on me to set a good example.

So as I turn around to these and cast my gaze upon,  
I'm glad I am, just as I am, a normal, formal, John.

#### BLACKOUT

#### CREST OF A WAVE

WE'RE riding along on the crest of a wave  
And the sun is in the sky.  
All our eyes on the distant horizon,  
Look out for passers-by.  
We'll do the hailing when other ships around are sailing,  
We're riding along on the crest of a wave,  
**AND THE WORLD IS OURS.**

"Send your message out,  
Send the word about,  
Let the fellers shout,  
Send your message out.



## RALPH READER

*and The Story of the Gang Shows*



*How then -  
Let's sing it again*

*Ralph Reader*

PHOTO BY JOHN VICKERS

