

# The life and times of **George Mozart**



Presented by Anne Goulden

At the British Music Hall Society, *In the Limelight*

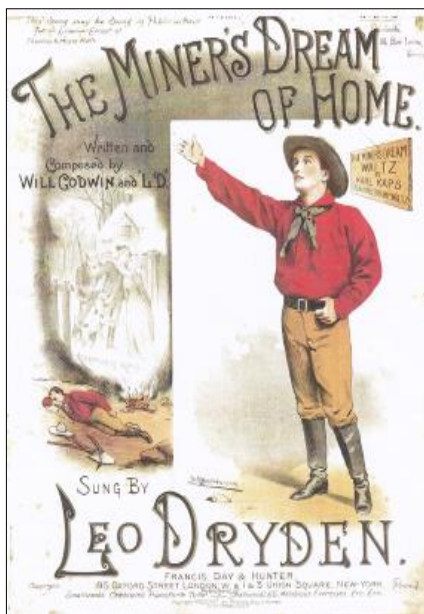
8 February 2018

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George Mozart was a musician and burlesque comedian. He wasn't one of the top music hall stars, and you won't find much about him in books on music hall. But he had a long, interesting, successful career as an entertainer. My plan is to talk about his career and some of the people he met on the way. But before I do that, I need to tell you about his names - they're confusing.

First his real name. When he was born - in 1864 - his parents registered him as David John Gillings. By the time he got married in 1887 he was using the name David George Gillings.

Now for his stage name. At the beginning of his career he performed as Dave Gillings. Around 1893 he took George Mozart as his stage name. I'll call him George Mozart (or just George).



George was about the same age as Leo Dryden, who was the subject of Peter Charlton's *In the Limelight* talk in January 2018. Leo Dryden was best known for the song *A Miner's Dream of Home*. It's interesting to compare him with George Mozart.

- They were both musicians, but George Mozart was primarily an instrumentalist. Leo Dryden was a singer.
- George Mozart made a big success in pantomime; Leo Dryden didn't do pantomime at all.
- As to their private lives, George Mozart had a very stable marriage, and in 1937 he and his wife celebrated their golden wedding anniversary with a big family party. Leo Dryden's private life is best described as complex.

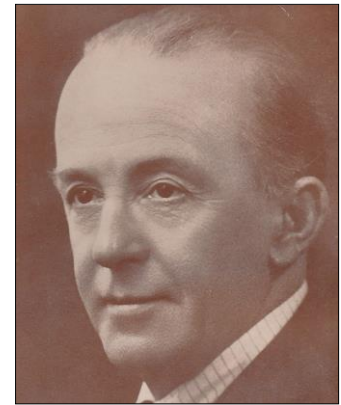
So we have two comedians, born at about the same time. Different careers, very different lives.

George Mozart was born in Yarmouth. His first paid engagement was as a boy musician in the 1870s, playing the side drum in a theatre orchestra at a shilling a night. This was at the Theatre Royal, Yarmouth. He was still performing in 1947 at the age of 83, shortly before he died.

He saw many changes during his long career, including the rise of cinema and the introduction of sound recording. Over the years he worked in:

- Music hall
- Pantomime
- Circus
- Revue
- Drama – farce and musical comedy
- Cinema films
- And in two Victorian touring shows:
  - The Livermore Brothers Court Minstrels, and
  - Poole's Myriorama.

He wrote an autobiography entitled *Limelight* and this photograph is the frontispiece. He was a small man (only 5ft 4in) and in this portrait he looks an amiable, unassuming sort of character – which he might have been away from the theatre. He was naive in business matters, and his business ventures outside the theatre all failed. On stage he was in his element.



I first came across the name George Mozart when John Salisse and I were working on our book about Maskelyne's theatre, St George's Hall. George Mozart had three seasons there, in 1927 and 1928.

This programme is from February 1928:

<p>1 Overture by the Orchestra (Conductor - JACK GOLDY)</p> <p>2 CHINATOWN LING FOO will magish a l'Orient</p> <p>3 <b>GEORGE MOZART</b> will say a few words</p> <p>4 IN THE QUEUE P.C. 99 ... .. W. M. MAYNE The Perfect Lady ... .. MARY MASKELYNE Itinerant Performers by Members of the Company</p> <p>5 OSWALD WILLIAMS Will show you a Simple Trick</p> <p>6 THE CHAIR OF DEATH</p> <p>7 <b>GEORGE MOZART</b> Will discourse sweet music</p> <p>8 JASPER MASKELYNE Will indulge in some DAINTY MAGIC</p> <p>9 BEN SAID In ALGERIAN FUNJORING</p> <p>10 <b>THE MAN FROM PENNSYLTUCKI</b> In which OSWALD WILLIAMS and GEORGE MOZART will play at "Shop"</p>	<p>11 JASPER MASKELYNE With CECIL HOME-DOUGLAS will present THE LEVITATION</p> <p>12 BEN SAID Will Keep Things Going</p> <p>13 EVERYDAY MAGIC OSWALD WILLIAMS will conjure with all sorts and conditions of things</p> <p>14 <b>GEORGE MOZART</b> Will show how you all look</p> <p>15 ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT And the Dangers thereof</p> <p>16 JASPER MASKELYNE and OSWALD WILLIAMS Will amuse each other</p> <p>17 <b>GRAND FINALE</b> In which the entire Company will disappear</p>	
<p><b>INTERVAL of 10 minutes</b></p>		

The show was a revue in seventeen scenes, and George Mozart appeared in at least five scenes. Three of them were solo spots.

- In scene 3 George Mozart “will say a few words.” Like many comedians, he was a raconteur. On the evidence of his autobiography, he had a fund of entertaining stories.
- In scene 7 he “will discourse sweet music.” He played the violin and clarinet, among other instruments. But he did a novelty musical act, and I imagine that some of the “sweet music” wasn’t sweet at all.
- In scene 14 he “will show how you all look.” He did impressions – not of celebrities, but of types of people. For example, at the Leicester Palace in 1913 he did impressions of characters from the racecourse. The following year in 1914 he did theatregoers, “from the dandy in the stalls to the navy in the gallery”.

- Scene 10 was a sketch: *The Man from Pennsylvtucki*, “in which Oswald Williams and George Mozart will play at ‘Shop’.” Oswald Williams was a major force at St George’s Hall. He invented and built magic tricks and illusions, wrote sketches, produced revues, and performed on stage. He was a man of many talents.

*The Man from Pennsylvtucki* was set in a shop, with George Mozart as the shopkeeper and Oswald Williams as a travelling salesman. Initially the shop was bare – nothing on the shelves - and the salesman filled it with items of stock produced by magic from a small sample case. So we have magic by Oswald Williams and comedy by George Mozart – a winning combination.

- Scene 17 was the “Grand Finale, in which the entire company will disappear”. George Mozart **must** have been involved in this scene.

He may also have appeared in scene 4, which was entitled *In the Queue*. The queue was outside a theatre. The cast list doesn’t mention George Mozart, but it does say “Itinerant performers by members of the company”. I imagine him as one of the itinerant performers, busking on his violin or clarinet perhaps.



Left: Colonel Nutty of the Fighting Nuts  
Right: Conductor of the Vealanpeas Band

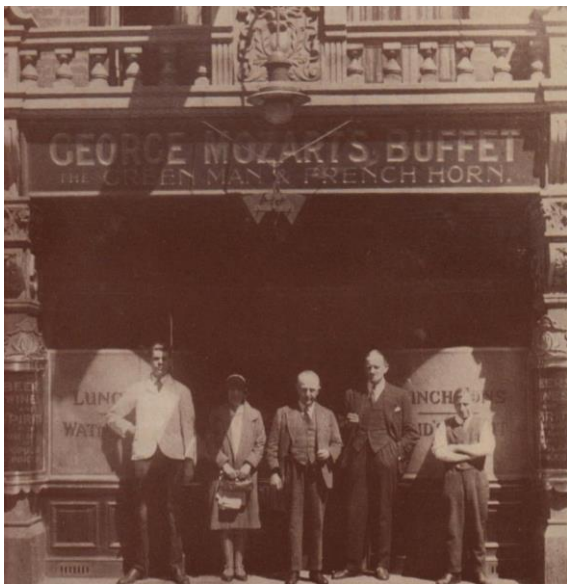
I hope I’ve given you an idea of what George Mozart could do on stage. These two photographs, from his autobiography *Limelight*, show him in stage costume.

His career peaked in the mid-to-late 1890s, when he appeared in pantomime at the Prince of Wales, Liverpool for three successive years. During that time he began to appear at the top London music halls.

His peak years continued until the outbreak of the first world war. That was in 1914, when he was just turned fifty - too old for military service. I don't know what he did in the war, but he'd have wanted to help in any way he could. He had a spot of bother when people objected to his German-sounding stage name - Mozart - but he was able to say quite truthfully that he was "as Yarmouth as a bloater".

The war turned everything upside down, including the entertainment scene, and I imagine that George Mozart's act began to look dated. So, after the war his career stalled. He didn't help matters by taking on a pub on St Martin's Lane, London, presumably in the hope of providing for his retirement. The newspapers made a big fuss when he opened there, but they gave the impression that he'd already retired from the stage - which he hadn't. From then on, he said, he found bookings hard to get.

At St George's Hall in 1927-1928 the Maskelynes couldn't afford to pay him the sort of salary that he earned at his peak, but they kept him busy in the work he loved. And he was a better class of performer than they were used to, so everyone was happy.



This photograph is in his autobiography. He's the small man in the middle of the group. The lady on his right is his daughter.

His wife will have been indoors, running the pub. Her father was a publican in Yarmouth and presumably she knew the trade from girlhood. George was a hopeless businessman, and she wouldn't even let him go behind the bar and serve customers. The pub venture lasted four years.

If you look at the photograph carefully, you'll see the pub name above the entrance: "George Mozart's Buffet", and in smaller letters "The Green Man and French Horn". I was delighted

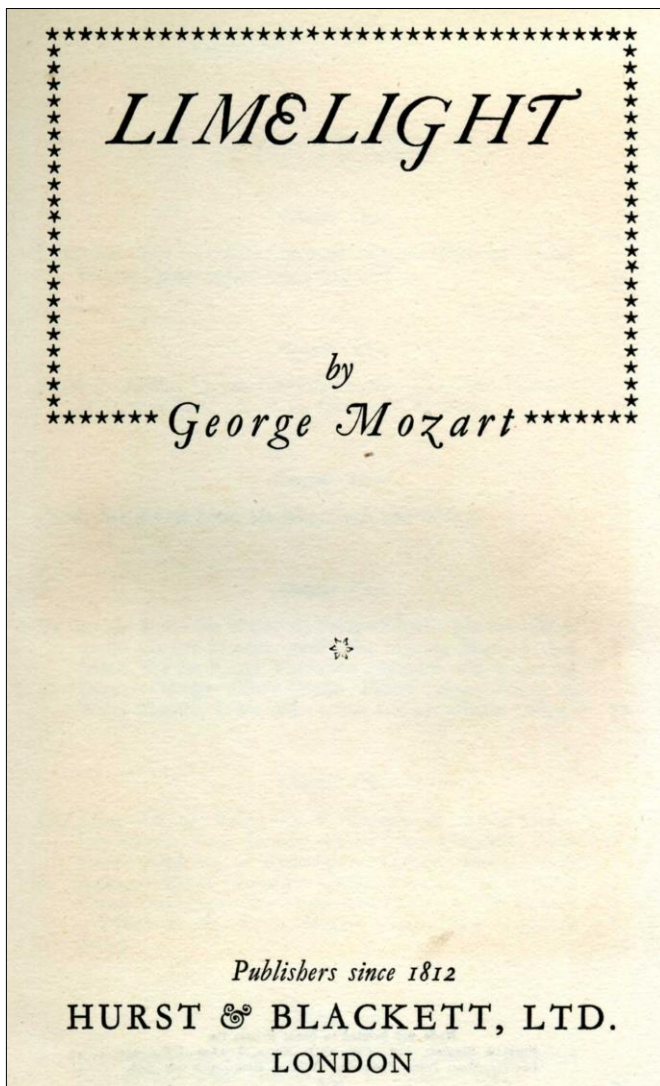
to find that the building is still there. It's a fine old building on the east side of St Martin's Lane, opposite Cecil Court.



Nowadays (February 2018) George Mozart's pub is a restaurant named "The Real Greek", but until recently it was known as "The Green Man and French Horn". The inn sign is still there – with the jaunty green man shown in the photograph on the next page.



The photograph on the left shows the ground floor of the building as it is now. On the right is the photograph from George Mozart's autobiography. The entrance has changed; in George Mozart's day the door was in the middle of the frontage, but nowadays there's a door on each side. The pillars at the extreme ends of the frontage seem to be the same, except that George Mozart had advertising signs wrapped round them. The first floor balcony is definitely the same.



This is the title page of George's autobiography, written when he was in his seventies. The publication date was 1938. I'm not a great fan of showbiz autobiographies, but I do enjoy reading this one. For one thing, George didn't feel that he had to be the star of his own autobiography, so there are interesting anecdotes about the many people he knew and worked with. For another, he wrote about his failures as well as his successes. He liked nothing better than to tell a story against himself – and he did it very entertainingly.

George's book is badly organised and it often raises more questions than it answers. And, as always, there aren't enough dates in it. But it tells an interesting story.

The rest of my talk is about his early life and career, up to the point in 1896 when he launched himself as a solo performer named George Mozart. There are difficulties in researching that period:

- He wasn't well known – obscure performers tended not to be reported in the newspapers of the time.
- The stage names that he used don't lend themselves to searching in digital newspapers.

As a result, I've had to rely on his autobiography more than I'd like. But I've been lucky finding information, and Peter Charlton has been very helpful. Peter is one of the Historians of the British Music Hall Society, and is immensely knowledgeable about music hall.

To begin at the beginning, in Yarmouth in the 1860s and 1870s, George's father was a boot and shoe maker. Both parents sang and his father played the concertina. George will have shown promise as a musician very early on, and his parents must have gone to a great deal of trouble and expense to encourage him.





In his teens he was a member of a regimental band: the Prince of Wales' Own Norfolk Artillery Band. This photograph is in his autobiography, facing page 17. It was taken at Sandringham, the country home of the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII). George is the clarinet player with the moustache, arrowed in the photograph. He had happy memories of playing at Sandringham when the Prince of Wales was in residence.

The band was primarily a military band, in which George played clarinet or drums. But it also had a string band, in which he played second violin. At Sandringham the string band played during dinner and to accompany visiting entertainers; the military band was called on to play when the Prince of Wales and his guests were out of doors.

Apart from these gala occasions at Sandringham, I don't think George really enjoyed life as a military bandsman. It gave him a good musical training, but he certainly didn't like military drill and I suspect that he didn't like military discipline.



This photograph is in his autobiography with the caption "George Mozart at fifteen years of age". By this time he was a proficient, experienced musician.

Probably two years later, in the summer of 1881, he left home and became a professional entertainer. He went to Ramsgate and joined Jimmy Hawthorne's Band. This was a high-class busking band with seventeen performers. George played drums. He said he used to get crowds of children following him – he was an expert double drummer and, I suspect, already a showman.

That autumn he went to Glasgow to work at the Shakespeare Theatre, Arthur Lloyd's new music hall. He played drums in the orchestra at a salary of 20s a week.

The poster on the right is for Arthur Lloyd's opening night, on 10 October 1881. It's one of a collection of posters which Arthur Lloyd and his family accumulated over the decades. The collection ended up in an antique shop, but it's now in the hands of the Lloyd family again. You can see some of the posters on the Arthur Lloyd website [www.arthurlloyd.co.uk](http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk). I'm grateful to Matthew Lloyd for permission to use this image.

Top of the bill was a "drawing room entertainment" by Arthur Lloyd and his wife Katty King. She's described here as a "charming comedienne, vocalist and dancer". Under Arthur Lloyd's name it says: "introducing songs, duets and dances", and "Mr Arthur Lloyd will also submit for approval some of his newest songs and impersonations".

There were eight supporting acts:

- Kennette, a gymnast.
- Edwin Barry, an American vocal comedian – "first appearance in Glasgow".
- Edith Phillis, a serio-comic.
- John Le Clair, a juggler and balancer.
- Emily Fraser, a Glasgow ballad singer.
- Walter Thornbury, a musical mimic, with sketches of "Men We Know".
- Frank Clark: "six distinct characters in thirty minutes"

It sounds a long show, but this was before the days of twice-nightly variety and there'd be only one performance each evening.

Details of the orchestra can be found near the bottom of the poster. Nine performers are listed in three columns. I was thrilled to find that George is in the third column: "Drums, Mr D Gillings. You'll recall that in those days he worked as Dave Gillings.

Euphonium.....	Mr W. PICKLES
Second Violin.....	Mr JACKSON
Drums.....	Mr D. GILLINGS

**ARTHUR LLOYD'S**  
MUSIC HALL  
**SHAKESPEARE**  
Watson Street, Gallowgate, by the Cross.

**GRAND OPENING NIGHT**  
OF THE ABOVE NEW AND MAGNIFICENT MUSIC HALL.  
**MONDAY, 10TH OCT., 1881.**

Mr ARTHUR LLOYD begs to intimate to his old Friends and Patrons that this Elegant Hall will Open on the above date with a

**SPLENDID COMPANY & ORCHESTRA**

MISS  
**KATTY KING**  
(Miss Arthur Lloyd), the Charming Comedienne, Vocalist and Dancer, will appear in a  
**DRAWING-ROOM ENTERTAINMENT**  
WITH MR  
**ARTHUR LLOYD**  
INTRODUCING SONGS, DUETS, AND DANCES.  
Mr ARTHUR LLOYD will also submit for approval some of his NEWEST SONGS and IMPERSONATIONS.

Engagement, at Great Expense, of the Marvellous  
**KENNETTE**  
Acknowledged to be the GREATEST GYMNAST in the WORLD, in his New and Wonderful Novelty Performance.  
SPECIALTY: AERIALS, PATENTED.  
Being equal to the greatest acrobat ever known amongst the Circus and Lion Tamers, with ONE GOLD and SILVER MEDALS.

MR EDWIN BARRY  
The Popular American Vocal Comedian. His First Appearance in Glasgow.

MISS  
**EDITH PHILLIS**  
The Popular Serio-Comic Artist.

**JOHN LE CLAIR**  
The most Elegant, Extraordinary, and without doubt, the Cleverest JUGGLER and BALANCER in the WORLD.

**EMILY FRASER**  
The Glasgow Favourite Ballad Vocalist.

MR WALTER  
**THORNBURY**  
MUSICAL MIMIC, and Marvellous Sketcher of "MEN WE KNOW."

MR  
**FRANK CLARK**  
English and Irish's Own Comedian. A most Wonderful Artist. Six Distinct Characters in Thirty Minutes.

**ORCHESTRA**

Musical Director, . . . . .	MR D. BUTLER.
Conductor, . . . . .	Mr BIRNIE
Organ, . . . . .	Mr BIRNIE
Chorus, . . . . .	Mr F. FAYE
Double Bass, . . . . .	Mr HERRON
Mr. Horns, . . . . .	Mr. A. THOMAS
Drums, . . . . .	Mr. D. GILLINGS
Superintendent of Auditorium, . . . . .	MR H. F. LLOYD.

PRICES OF ADMISSION ON THE OPENING NIGHT AND ON SATURDAY EVENINGS.

Orchestra Stalls, . . . . .	1s 6d.	Gallery, . . . . .	6d.
Pit Stalls & Back Circle, . . . . .	6d.	Pit, . . . . .	4d.

Prices of Admission Every Evening, except Saturday.

Balcony Stalls, . . . . .	1s.	Gallery, . . . . .	4d.
Orchestra Stalls, . . . . .	6d.	Pit, . . . . .	3d.
Pit Stalls & Back Circle, . . . . .	6d.	CHILDREN FULL PRICE TO ALL PARTS.	

SEATS NOT GUARANTEED. NO MONEY RETURNED. DISORDERLY PERSONS WILL BE EXPULSED.

6<sup>th</sup> Doors Open at 6-30, Overture at 7 o'clock. SATURDAYS—Doors Open at 6-30, Overture at 6 o'clock. 6<sup>th</sup> Entrance to Balcony Stalls, Orchestra Stalls, Pit Stalls, and Back Circle, in Watson Street. To Pit and Gallery by the Side of Hall. TRAM CARS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE CITY STOP AT THE HALL.

The Stage Carpets, Furniture, and New Curtain by Thomas McMurtry & Co., 247 Sauchiehall Street.

**THE BEAUTIFUL NEW ACT-DROP**  
Representing the "Auld Brig o' Doon and Burns Monument," and the scenery by Mr. W. W. SMALL and Assistants.

NAMES OF CONTRACTORS ENGAGED IN BUILDING THE SHAKESPEARE MUSIC HALL.

Mason Work, . . . . .	Messrs. MONTGOMERY & HARRIS.	Painting, . . . . .	FRITH, 11, 122 Wellington Street, Glasgow.
Joiner Work, . . . . .	Mr. THOMAS BURNHULL.	Household Glass, . . . . .	Messrs. A. & J. SCOTT.
Slater Work, . . . . .	Messrs. ALEX. M'OLRY & SON.	Glaziers, . . . . .	Messrs. GILCHRIST & BROWN.
Plaster Work, . . . . .	Messrs. LEITCH & DUNNAN.	Millwrights, . . . . .	Messrs. C. & J. MALCOLM.
Plasterer Work, . . . . .	Messrs. BERTIE & WALLACE.	Machine Tool Work, . . . . .	Messrs. Wm. James & Co.
Gas Fittings, . . . . .	Mr. HENRY TONN.	Cut Iron Work, . . . . .	Messrs. ALISON BROTHERS.
		Glaziers and Lamps, . . . . .	The Old Footscry Cottage.

W. R. LITTLE, Steam Fitting Works, 21 Leslie Street, Glasgow.

The opening night of Arthur Lloyd's new music hall had an enthusiastic report in the *Era*. After that things went pear shaped and the venture lasted only fourteen weeks. George Mozart said that "poor Arthur Lloyd lost all his savings". In fact it was worse than that – he was bankrupted.

Young George didn't behave very well at the Shakespeare. For the first and only time in his life, he did a bunk. He must have been writing round for alternative engagements, and one Friday night he had a telegram offering him an engagement in Edinburgh the following Monday at a higher salary. There wasn't time to give notice, so he upped and went – leaving Arthur Lloyd's orchestra without a drummer.

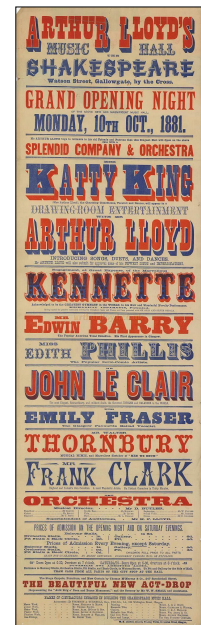


Max Tyler, Historian of the British Music Hall Society.

A month before I gave this talk, on the morning of Peter Charlton's talk about Leo Dryden, I was putting the Arthur Lloyd poster into my PowerPoint presentation. I thought of Max Tyler then, because he liked music hall posters, and this one would have gladdened his heart. Then I came to London for Peter's talk in the evening, and Dean Caston told us that Max had just died.

Years ago I was working on a talk about variety artists at St George's Hall. I wanted to include George Mozart but I didn't have an image of him. So I did what people often did, and asked Max. He sent me a colour photocopy of the Colonel Nutty photograph from George Mozart's autobiography. Later on Max gave me details of the book and I bought a copy.

I shall remember Max with gratitude. He was incredibly knowledgeable, always helpful, and an inspiration to us all.



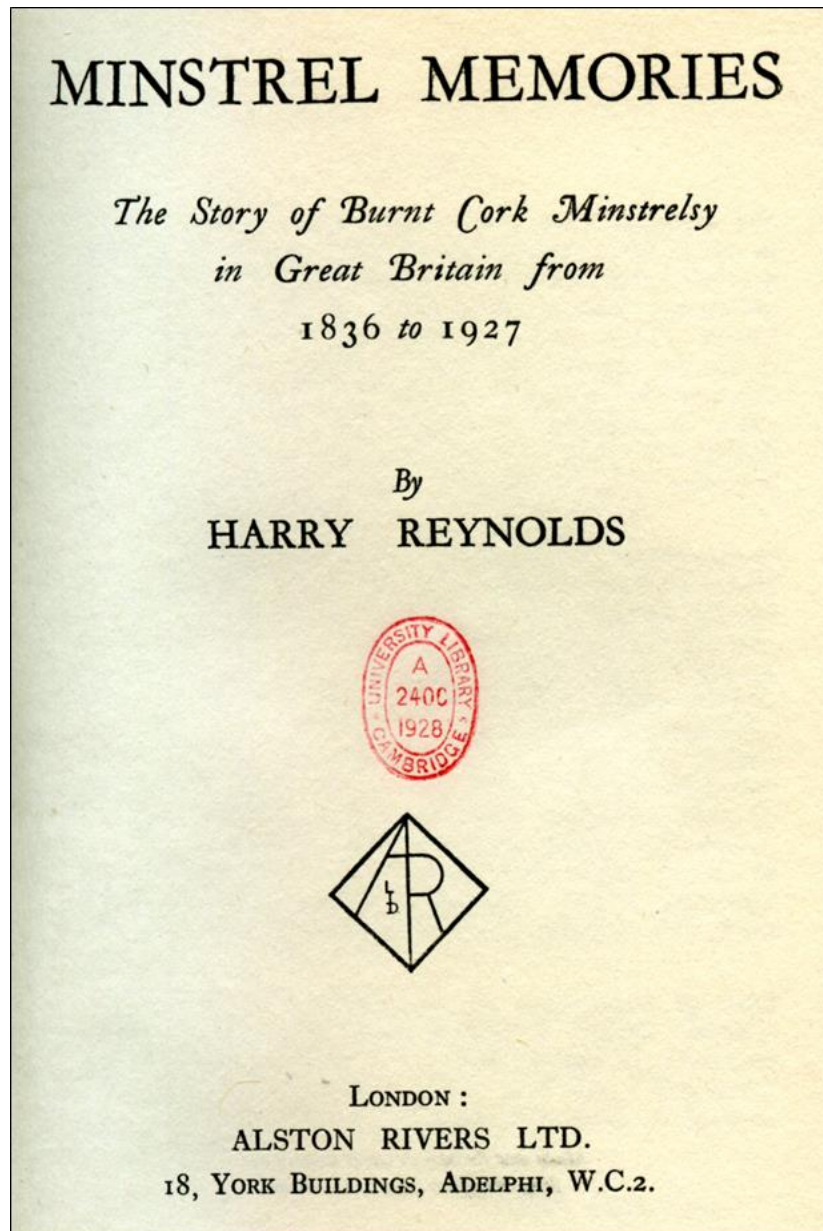
This poster would have gladdened Max Tyler's heart.

Back to George Mozart. We left him at the end of 1881, age seventeen, travelling from Glasgow to take up an engagement in Edinburgh. This was as a clown in John Henry Cooke's Circus. He said in his book that it was his first professional engagement, but he'd already been working as a professional musician in Ramsgate and Glasgow. I think he meant it was his first professional engagement as a comedian.

In those days, as nowadays, circuses often toured in tents but they could also be found on fixed sites. Cooke's Edinburgh Circus was an example. When George was there, it was a tented arena on a site below Edinburgh castle. A year or two later Cooke had to vacate that site for development, and he built a permanent circus arena which he called Cooke's New Circus (see Colin Dale's book, *The Last Edwardian Jester*, page 3).

After George had finished in Edinburgh, he went home and got a job at Yarmouth Aquarium. He played drums in the orchestra, painted scenery, and did some acting, all for 25s a week. In his spare time he was bandmaster of a Royal Naval Reserve band.

George still had the wanderlust badly, so he got a job with the Livermore Brothers Court Minstrels. He recalled that he had to travel from Yarmouth to Jersey in order to join them. The Livermores were a black-face minstrel troupe and they played an important part in George Mozart's career.



I'm indebted to Peter Charlton for telling me about this book. It's a history of black-face minstrels in Britain and it has a section on the Livermore Brothers Court Minstrels. The author, Harry Reynolds, ran a minstrel troupe of his own for many years.

Minstrel troupes were very popular in mid-to-late Victorian Britain. Probably the most famous was the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, who were based at St James's Hall on Piccadilly. Minstrel shows were patronised by the kind of people who wouldn't go to a music hall. For young performers, though, they were a way into the music halls. George Mozart followed that route; so did G H Elliott, R G Knowles, and Eugene Stratton.



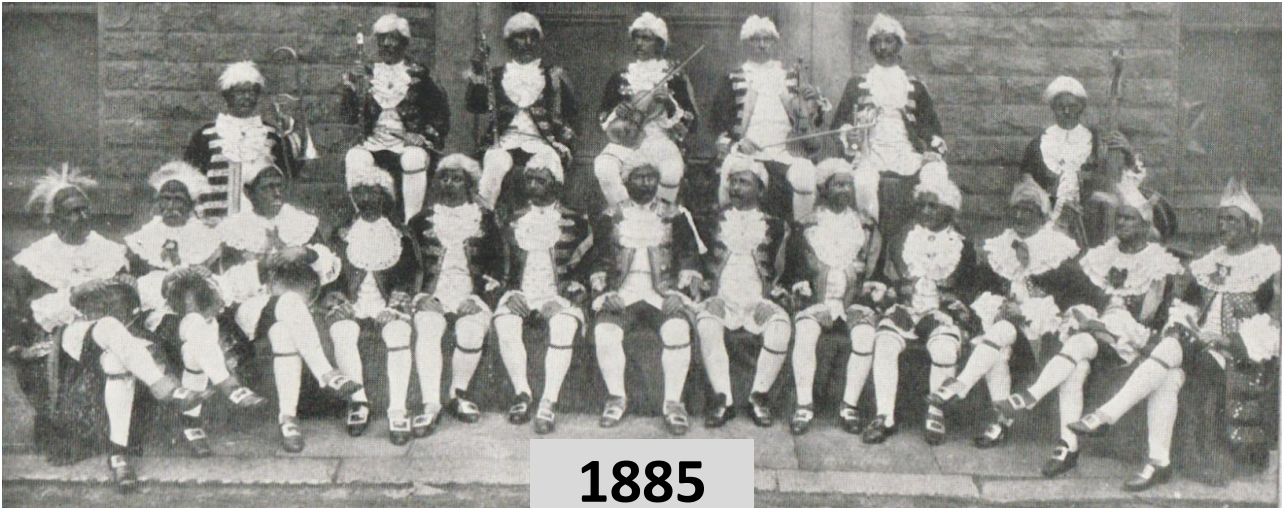
This photograph of the Livermores is in Harry Reynolds' book. The date is 1869, when George Mozart was a little boy of five. At this stage the Livermores were working in music hall as a variety act and there were only six people in the troupe: four Livermore brothers, one Livermore sister (named Ada) and a cousin.

Minstrel troupes had an interlocutor, who sat in the middle and acted as master of ceremonies. The Livermores' interlocutor was Ada; she was also a singer and she played the harmonium. At each end of the semicircle were the corner men: Tambo and Bones. The corner men were comedians and their comic exchanges with the interlocutor were part of the entertainment.

The Livermores did things differently from other minstrel troupes.

- Minstrels usually wore black evening dress for the sit round. The Livermores wore what they said was the court dress of George II's time and their coats were of blue velvet.
- Most troupes were all-male. The Livermores had – shock horror - a female interlocutor.

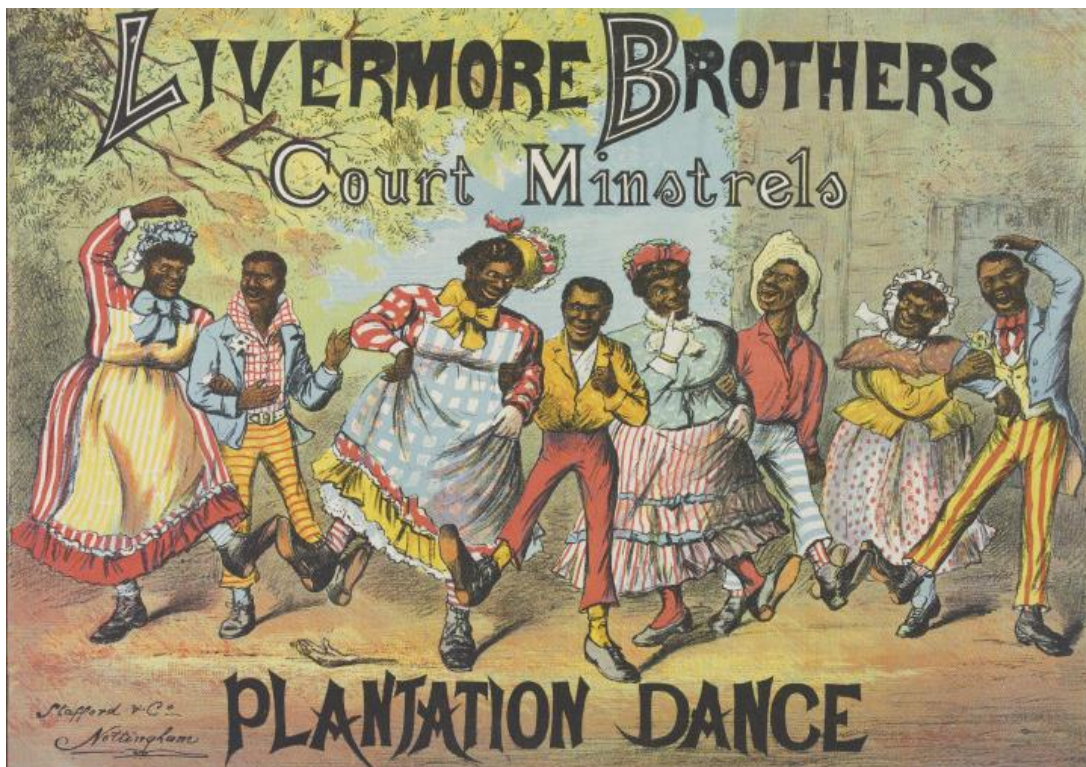
The emphasis in minstrel shows was on music, but there were dances, burlesques and sketches, and very often a stump speech. A feature of the Livermores' show for many years was a boot dance by three of the brothers.



This photograph from Harry Reynolds' book is dated 1885, round about the time George Mozart joined the Livermores. There were now twenty performers in the troupe: thirteen in the front row and seven in the orchestra at the back. There were six corner men: three tambourines on the left, three bones on the right. The interlocutor was now a man - Ada had left to get married.

Minstrel troupes demanded a high standard of their musicians. Members of the orchestra had to be soloists and they usually played more than one instrument. The singers had to be equally proficient.

These photographs look very staid and formal – in a word, dull. But the backcloth in the 1869 photograph is elaborately painted and it will have been brightly coloured. As an antidote to these black and white photographs, let me show you a poster from the V&A Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection. It's a lithograph printed by Stafford & Co, showing the Livermores in their plantation dance (V&A reference E.135-1935).



George had a high opinion of the Livermore brothers. He said they were “grand fellows and tremendous workers”. They had to be tremendous workers. A troupe of twenty sounds quite big, but it was actually very lean. The interlocutor, orchestra and corner men accounted for fourteen people, and in principle that left only six people to do the singing - solos and chorus. So a great deal of doubling had to go on.

When George Mozart first joined the Livermores he was employed as musical director and violinist, at a salary of 30/- a week. But they took him out of the orchestra and he became a corner man. I like to think they'd recognised his talent as a comedian - but they must have been perturbed when he arrived in Jersey and they saw that their new musical director was a very inexperienced young man.

As corner man, George was a sort of comic odd-job man. In the formal sit round he played bones or tambourine, and I imagine he had a good enough singing voice to double as chorus singer. He'd have been expected to take part in the dances, burlesques and sketches, and he gave his usual musical act in black face. All in all, it was a splendid training ground for a young performer.

During the Livermores' vacation George made his first London appearance in music hall, at the Marylebone. His career was moving on.

One of his fellow performers in the Livermore troupe was Posh West, a double bass player. George and Posh West began to think about going into music hall as musical clowns. At this point, enter the Thompson Trio.



The Thompson Trio were Harry and Mary Thompson plus their son, the future Percy Honri. This photograph is in Peter Honri's book, *Working the Halls*, and it puzzled me for a long time. I couldn't work out what those things are that the three of them are holding. Then I looked up Peter Honri's book again. He said they had a clockwork train which ran on the stage and could be played as a trumpet. So Harry and Mary are holding a carriage each. Percy's got the locomotive and tender.

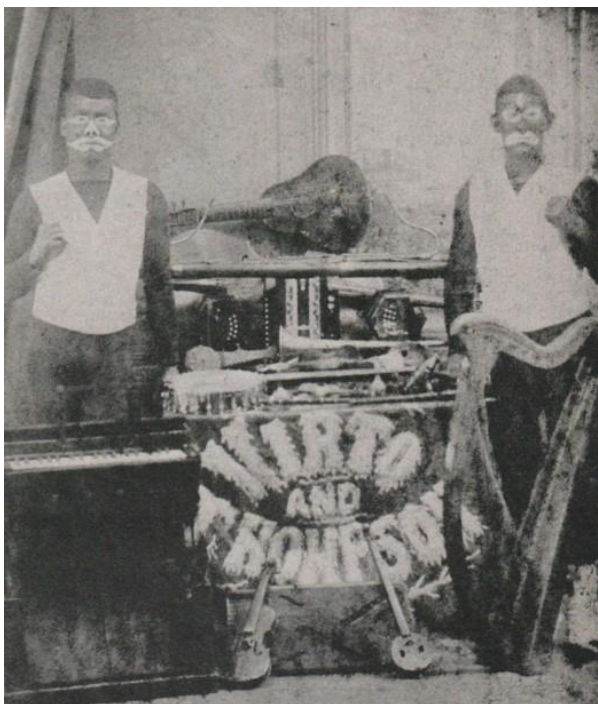
The Thompson Trio had a season with the Livermores and became friendly with George. Harry Thompson suggested a name and bill matter for George's new act with Posh West:

Engist and Orsa, the most legitimate Funny Musical Act extant.

Why "legitimate"? I don't know.

Harry Thompson also got them their first booking, at the Alexandra, Wigan. Peter Honri's book says that this happened at Christmas 1892, but I think that date is wrong. The mid-to-late 1880s is more likely.

At one time Harry Thompson was half of a double act named Virto and Thompson, billed as The Musical Savages. This act folded in 1884 when Albert Virto left. Consequently Harry Thompson was able to offer George some of the Virto and Thompson routines for his new Engist and Orsa act.



This photograph of Virto and Thompson is from Peter Honri's book. It's murky, but I hope you can see two black-face comedians with a stand between them. The photograph gives some idea of what the Engist and Orsa act might have looked like. The costumes are very different from those worn by modern clowns.

The Thompson family were lifelong friends of George Mozart. One of the illustrations in Peter Honri's book is a poster for the Birmingham Empire in 1920, with George Mozart topping the bill and Percy Honri and his concertina in second place. They must have enjoyed catching up on the gossip that week.





Back in the 1880s, Engist and Orsa worked in music hall and circus. On one occasion they were booked at a Glasgow music hall with Jenny Hill topping the bill. The story in George's book was written fifty years after the event, and some of the details don't make sense.

The nub of it is that there was a disturbance in the audience and it became so noisy that the act before Engist and Orsa had to give up. When they went on, their first job was to quieten the audience and get it in a good mood. George said in his book: "I had a pair of toy bagpipes, so I started to play and they began to laugh. I followed on with a comic bassoon solo, and all was well."

The bagpipes are a noisy instrument – loud enough to be heard over a rowdy audience. And toy bagpipes played by a clown must have looked really stupid – no wonder the audience laughed.

George's book says that Engist and Orsa were in Paris when the act came to an end. True to form, it doesn't say what they were doing in Paris or why the act broke up. George went back to Yarmouth where he got married on 4 January 1887, at the age of 22. His father bought him a pub, presumably in the hope that he'd settle down to a proper job. George didn't know the trade but his new father-in-law was a publican.

Disaster struck less than two years later. George's father died, George was seriously ill with typhoid, and – I presume - his pub business failed. So he went back on the stage. He and his young family left Yarmouth and went on tour.

George will have been glad to be back in show business, but I don't suppose his wife thought much of the change. On tour they had to live in digs with not much money, and she'll have missed the support of her family back in Yarmouth. No doubt she coped, but it can't have been easy.

One of George's engagements was with C W Poole's Myriorama. He said that the Myriorama tour took him up to the north of Scotland, which was new territory for him. It certainly took him to London.

In 2017 the British Library put on an exhibition about Victorian entertainment, entitled *There will be Fun*. It was a showcase for the Evanion Collection, which is owned by the British Library. The poster on the next page is one of many posters in the exhibition. I'm grateful to Helen Peden, the curator of the Evanion collection, for permission to share it with you. It's for C W Poole's Myriorama at Sanger's Amphitheatre on Westminster Bridge Road, London and Dave Gillings, the young George Mozart, is one of the supporting acts. I was puzzled by the date, which was said to be 1886, but I did some prodding around and it turns out to be 1889 – which makes a lot more sense.



Jenny Hill, the Vital Spark, topped the bill at a Glasgow music hall when Engist and Orsa were there.

**MORE ATTRACTIONS! MORE ADDITIONS! MORE NOVELTIES!**  
**AND NO ADVANCE IN THE PRICES.**  
 Pronounced by the entire Press and Public the best Blend of instruction and amusement to be found open anywhere. A Night spent in merriment and something gained.

**SANGER'S AMPHITHEATRE**  
 WESTMINSTER BRIDGE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.  
 NIGHTLY AT 8 O'CLOCK.  
 DAY PERFORMANCES ON SATURDAYS AT 3 O'CLOCK.  
 DOORS OPEN AT 2.30 AND 7.30.  
 ADMISSION:—3s., 2s., 1s.6d., 1s., and 6d.

**CHAS. W. POOLE'S**  
 Latest, Greatest, Grandest, and most Successful Enterprise, a Magnificent, Colossal, Entirely  
**NEW ECLIPSE**

**MYRIORAMA**  
 POPULAR EXCURSIONS  
 AND  
 CHEAP TRIPS ABROAD TO ALL CLIMES.  
 MONDAY, SEPT. 9th, and at each Performance,  
 The most expensive Engagement Mr. POOLE has ever made, the **MATCHLESS**

**MINTING**  
 THE AUSTRALIAN WONDER  
 THE GREAT SPIRAL ASCENSIONIST!  
 This Artiste accomplishes the Marvellous feat of Ascending and Descending the  
**SPIRAL COLUMN**  
 ON ONE WHEEL!  
 This Extraordinary feat has never been attempted by any other Artiste, and Stamps MINTING the  
**CHAMPION CYCLIST OF THE WORLD**



Words would fail to convey any idea of this Wonderful achievement. It must be seen to be believed! MINTING will appear at every Performance in addition to all the other Great Artistes.

**MDME. POOLE GARLAND**  
 Soprano, Characteristic Vocalist, and Duetist.

**MR. DAVE GILLINGS**  
 In his Fancy and Legitimate Business Art, introducing Yodels, Trances, Clairvoyance, Japs, Ossification, Snaps, Fairy Balls, Sligh Sligh, Quavers, Duggies, Maults, Plus Woods, Glasses, Dances, &c.

**MR. ORVILLE PITCHER**  
 (Of "Lights and Shades" notoriety) the Greatest of all Negro Comedians.

**PROFESSOR R. DUNNING**  
 The most Powerful Triclistical artist, with his **MERRY FAMILY**, introducing many new and able: also Triclistical Juggling, Musical Hiccups, Snaps, Dances, and Triclistical of every Genre.

**M. LE MONTE**  
 The Unique Lightning Change Artiste. Eight Changes of Costume in full view of the audience, without leaving the Stage, with songs appropriate to each character.

**PROFESSOR DEVEREUX**  
 With his Renowned "Troupe of Performing Dogs and Monkeys."

**LITTLE MISS ZENO**  
 Tight Rope Performer and Skipping Rope Dancer.

**FALCONBRIDGE & BEERE**  
 Black and White Variety and Skitish Artiste.

**MR. CHAS. W. POOLE**  
 The Premier Guide, Humourist, and Duetist.

**CELEBRATED QUARTETTE PARTY!**  
**ORCHESTRAL AND MILITARY BANDS!**  
 Of Solo Performers (Conductor, Mr. A. T. WILEY, will perform Music of all Nations.  
 THE WHOLE PRODUCED UNDER THE PERSONAL SUPERVISION OF THE PROPRIETOR.

Proprietor: **MR. CHAS. W. POOLE.**  
 JAMES EYTON, Theatrical and General Printer, Cambridge Street, Birmingham.

For me, the fun thing about this poster is the section for the star act, Minting. He was a circus act – before his date at Sanger’s Amphitheatre he was at Croueste’s Grand Circus in Scarborough. He advertised that he went

Fifty feet up and down a spiral column on one wheel.

I think that’s showman-speak for “25 feet up and 25 feet down”, but a 25-foot spiral is pretty impressive.

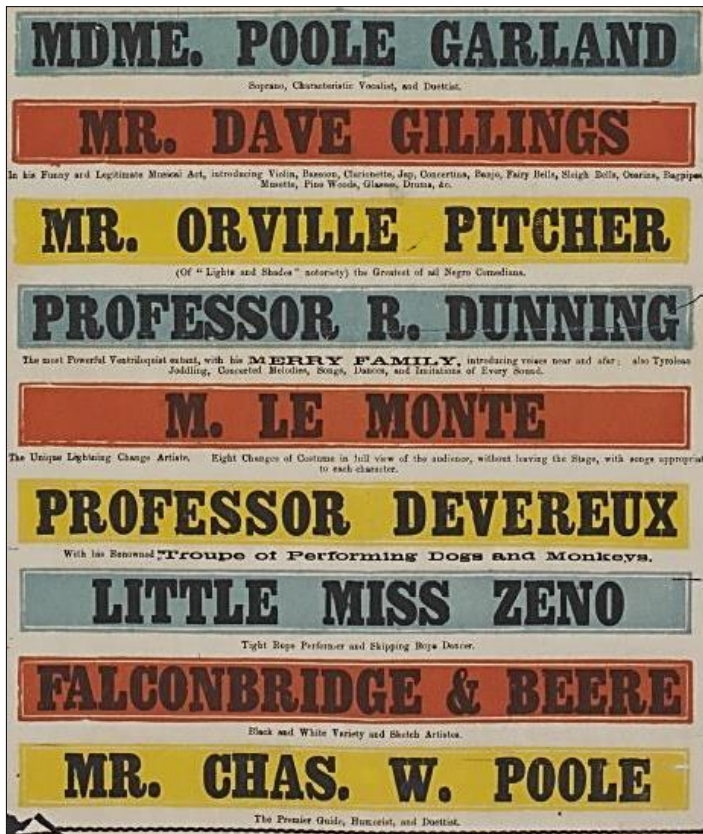
There’s a drawing of Minting’s spiral column on the left of the poster. At the bottom of the spiral there are three little pictures of Minting on his unicycle, and one of them shows him starting to go up the spiral. Then if you look at the top of the spiral, there’s a little picture of Minting on his way down. I imagine that going down the spiral was even more difficult than going up.

It’s clear from the poster that Minting was brought in to beef up the usual Myriorama show for Sanger’s Amphitheatre.

Poole’s Myriorama was a diorama show. To understand it, you have to imagine a long backcloth with a succession of scenes painted on it. The backcloth is stretched across the stage on big vertical rollers; as the rollers turn, the scene changes. So, as the poster says, a diorama could take you on “Popular excursions and cheap trips abroad to all climes”.

Dioramas used special lighting effects. For example, the backcloth could be lit from the front or the back to give dissolving views.

In addition to the diorama, Poole’s Myriorama had a lecturer to talk about the scenes in an entertaining way, singers and an orchestra, and variety acts. This formula was immensely successful and in 1889 there were at least two Poole’s Myrioramas on tour.



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The poster lists the people in C W Poole's usual show.

- Chas W Poole, the proprietor, acted as lecturer. He's at the bottom of the list, described as "Premier Guide, Humorist and Duettist" - so he did some singing as well.
- Madame Poole Garland was his wife. She's at the top of the list, described as "Soprano, Characteristic Vocalist and Duettist".
- The seven variety acts include the young George Mozart – Mr. Dave Gillings.

George's billing shows the range of instruments he could play:

- violin, bassoon, clarionette (clarinet)
- jap (I don't know what this was)
- concertina
- banjo
- fairy bells, sleigh bells
- ocarina
- bagpipes, musette
- pine woods, glasses, drums.

The ocarina is an ancient wind instrument, traditionally made of clay or ceramic. The photograph on the right shows a modern one made of wood. George's skill with the clarinet will have helped him to play the ocarina.



During this period George took music hall bookings whenever he could get them. One of them was at the Parthenon, Liverpool, where the young Oswald Stoll was working backstage as his mother's assistant. Top of the bill at the Parthenon that week was Vesta Tilley.

Mrs Stoll paid her performers in cash, with the coins wrapped up in newspaper. George's salary for the week was £4, so on Saturday night she gave him four packets, each containing twenty one-shilling coins. When he got back to his digs and opened the packets, he found twenty gold sovereigns in one of them - £20 instead of £1. He rushed back to the theatre to get the mistake corrected and found that Mrs Stoll had given him Vesta Tilley's salary in one of his four packets. Vesta Tilley was earning £20 a week, five times as much as the young George Mozart.

Twenty years later, George had come up in the world, but he still earned less than Vesta Tilley. In 1914 George Mozart topped the bill for a week at the Leicester Palace and was paid £75. At the same theatre in 1914, Vesta Tilley's weekly salary was £225 – three times as much.

Around 1890, George's book mentions four engagements outside music hall.

- He had two seasons as manager and artist in an end-of-pier show on the Wellington Pier, Yarmouth. He said he was the first person to put on a variety show there.
- Then there was Poole's Myriorama, as we've seen.
- He had an engagement at the Rosherville Gardens, Gravesend, where he was paid £5 a week to perform on an open-air stage to a lot of empty chairs.
- While he was at Gravesend he was spotted for his first pantomime engagement, in *Bo-Peep* at the Theatre Royal, Oldham.

After the pantomime finished he went home to Yarmouth, where he and his wife set up an unsuccessful business as a tobacconist and hairdresser on Yarmouth Quay. He was rescued when his old friends, the Livermore Brothers Court Minstrels, came to Yarmouth Town Hall. They engaged him as principal comedian, and he and his family went on tour again.

He said this was the turning point of his life. One of the performers in the Livermore troupe was a singer and pianist named Charles Warrington. He and George devised a musical act, and went off on their own. George said their first engagement was at Elphinstone's Circus in Hanley.

At this point I'd like to pause and think about the Livermores' contribution to George's career. He worked for them twice, and each time he went off with one of their performers to work on the music halls as a double act. My guess is that they encouraged their performers to experiment with new acts and new combinations. They might lose people as a result, but it kept their show alive and constantly changing. Given that they returned to the same towns every year, this was important.

**LIVERMORE BROTHERS' TOUR.**  
**THE PALACE CIRCUIT.**  
 Booked in conjunction with the Moss-Thornton Tour.  
 Always Vacancies for anything First-class.  
 Artists will please Note,  
 if they desire to Book for the following Towns :—  
**THE PALACE. SUNDERLAND, THE PALACE.**  
**THE PALACE. BRISTOL, THE PALACE.**  
**THE PALACE. PLYMOUTH THE PALACE.**  
 (send Bill-Matter to Plymouth direct),  
 they must communicate with  
**L. C. I. LIVERMORE, People's Palace, Sunderland.**

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When making up your  
**SCOTCH TOUR**  
 communicate direct with  
**ERNEST SHELDON, People's Palace, Aberdeen, for**  
**THE PALACE. ABERDEEN THE PALACE.**  
**and**  
**THE PALACE. DUNDEE. THE PALACE.**  
 We beg to draw the attention of all Artists holding Contracts  
 to Rule 12. Don't forget it!  
**THE PALACE CIRCUIT.**  
**LIVERMORE BROTHERS' TOUR.**

In addition to the minstrel troupe, the Livermore brothers had a small circuit of music halls.

This advert appeared in *Era* in January 1896, when the Livermores had five music halls: the Palaces in Sunderland, Bristol, Plymouth, Aberdeen and Dundee.

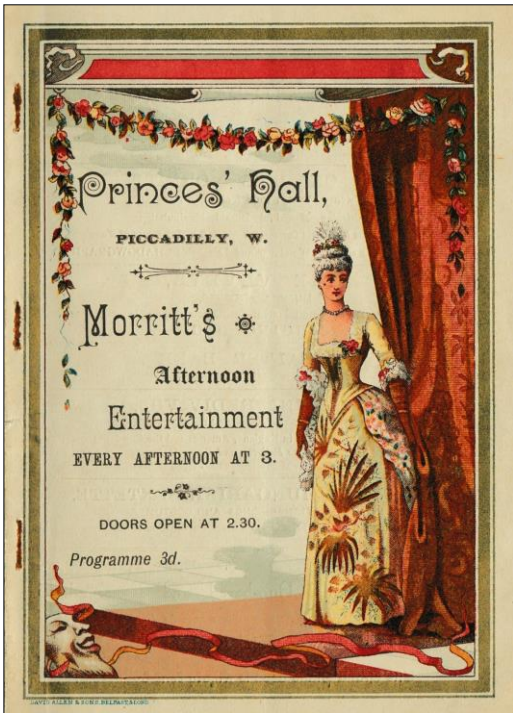
George's book says that the Livermore Brothers' Tour was the first music hall circuit. I don't know whether that's true. The Livermores were certainly early in the field but, for example, Oswald Stoll and his mother began to build up their music hall empire in the late 1880s.

Back to young George and his new act, which at first was named Warrington and Gillings. His new stage partner was an interesting character. George remembered his name as Charles Warrington, but he usually performed as Ernest Warrington. His real name was Charles Ernest Catchside. His family came from Newcastle.

As Ernest Warrington he had a long career as a recording artist, starting in London in the days of wax cylinders. He's said to have made his first recording in 1893 – round about the time he began to work with the young George Mozart. Eventually he moved back to Newcastle, where he became known as a collector and singer of Geordie songs. You can hear some of his recordings of Geordie songs on YouTube.

I think you can see that Warrington and Gillings wasn't a good stage name. It's rather long and certainly wouldn't display well on a poster. Oswald Stoll was their agent then, and he told them that they needed something snappier. Ernest said, "How about Mozart?", and they became "The Mozarts (Ernest and George)". Which is much better.

They worked in music halls up and down the country, and also in London. George said in his book that they had a twelve-month engagement at the Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue under the great Charles Morton. He said that they always appeared at the end of the show, when the gallery was still full but the rest of the theatre had emptied out. Nevertheless, appearing at the Palace will have done them no harm and they had the option of working elsewhere earlier in the evening.



For a time the Mozarts worked as a supporting act for Charles Morritt, the magician. He had a full-length show at the Princes' Hall on Piccadilly. Magicians will be interested to know that this was the show in which Morritt vanished the Tichborne Claimant. The programme is a wonderful period piece.

For the 1895-1896 pantomime season, the Mozarts were engaged for *Aladdin* at the Grand Theatre, Islington. Ernest played the Emperor Ah-Dup and George was his Vizier. The principal boy was a burlesque artist named Fanny Leslie.

Press reports of the London pantomimes appeared after Christmas. The drawing of Fanny Leslie on the right was published in *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* on 29 December (page 5). I was surprised to see how modest her costume was – it showed her legs, but only from the knee downwards.



On the same page of *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* there was a drawing of Maud Nelson, who played *Aladdin* at the Surrey Theatre (left). Maud Nelson's costume was the kind of thing I expected Fanny Leslie to be wearing.

There was a report of the Islington production of *Aladdin* in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* of 4 January 1896. George will have been gratified to read that "Mr George Mozart caused more laughter than any other in the pantomime." During the run of the pantomime he decided to go solo, and this advert appeared in the *Era* on 11 January 1896:

**NOTICE to Proprietors and Managers.—**George Mozart (The Mozarts) begs to Announce that he has Arranged to Sever his Connection with Ernest Mozart, and will after Easter next work single handed.  
**GEORGE MOZART.**  
All communications to Nathan and Somers.

*Era*, 11 January 1896, page 24.

At Easter he followed up with another advert, telling the world that he'd appointed G H Macdermott as his agent:

**SPECIAL NOTICE.—**  
I, GEORGE MOZART, late of the Mozarts, have Appointed Mr G. H. Macdermott, of 50, Tenison street, S.E., my Sole Agent, and all Contracts must be made through him alone.  
**Signed, GEORGE MOZART.**

*Era*, 11 April 1896, page 28

And now we're at the point where I said I'd stop. It's Easter 1896, and he's launched himself as a solo act under the name of George Mozart.

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