

# On the Road With a Comic Opera Company

A Day on a Train, 3 Performances and 4 Rehearsals in 54 Hours



The chorus girl is never without a novel, which she reads during every idle moment.

The chorus girl wraps her belongings in a linen bag and carries them to the trunk packers.

Letters follow the comic opera company everywhere carrying messages of undying love for those left behind.



Miss Alice Yorke just arrived, bag and baggage.



Miss Bessie McCoy waiting for a drayman to haul her hat to the theater.

**E**VERYBODY in the station stopped work and strolled out into the trainshed to see the "troupe" come in. The sandwich butler in the lunchroom came out with his knife in his hand, and said he liked the looks of the one in red and allowed he'd go to the show; the gateman straightened up and tilted his hat and gazed out over the turnstile with the look of a connoisseur; everybody stood up a little straighter; even the dogs got up and stretched.

It doesn't make any difference whether it is Painted Post or Peoria—everything in the station except the clock stops when the troupe comes in. The troupe usually wish the clock would stop long enough to let them get a square meal, but it doesn't. The train rattles into the shed; there is a procession of trucks and trunks, of pretty girls peeping over the tops of hat boxes, of nodding ostrich plumes, of living fashion plates. Then the turnstiles begin to whirl like windmills in a gale. The troupe is passing from the trainshed out into the hotel for luncheon, or perhaps to the theater if there isn't time for luncheon before the matinee. From the moment the troupe reaches the town there isn't time for anything but work.

The Whitney opera company went down to Peoria to

"try out" the new comic opera, "The Three Twins," before the Chicago opening. The company did not seem to feel that they were going away on a pleasure jaunt. They knew what it meant to be on the road—they knew that it meant work, work, work. It did.

The "call" had been posted late Monday night. It said simply that the company would leave for Peoria at 9 o'clock the next morning.

The company had been rehearsing all day long. Supper, consisting of ham sandwiches and coffee, had been served in the wings and in the dressing rooms. The broilers, the mediums, and the show girls were sitting around on trunks and the paraphernalia that always clutter the stage during rehearsals when the call was posted. A minute later they were pressing around the little sign—tall girls and short girls, and stout girls and lean girls, and girls of medium breadth and height, clamoring to read that sign. They knew it meant more work.

But they were game, for the chorus girl loves to work, because, perhaps more than any other employe, she is interested in her work and wants to contribute everything she can to the success of the production. Money in the pockets of the managers means that she is succeeding, for had she failed the manager would not be making good. She wants to move along up the ladder of fame; to move along herself, the manager must move with her. The stage girl is loyal—loyal to those that employ her, loyal to those who work with her, loyal to her ambitions.

**End of the Long Day's Work.**

It was 2 o'clock in the morning. The interior of the Whitney was slowly sinking into shadow. Gradually the lights went out, and quickly a hundred hands were working to make ready for the departure. The hands of the clock on the wall were moving around the dial. But the people of the stage do not watch the hands of the clock. They do not know what it means to put down their work when the clock strikes. They work on and on until they are almost ready to fall with fatigue, simply because they know that the stage manager knows what is best for the show and for the manager. They know that what is best for the show and the manager is best for them.

Girls in bloomers rushed hither and thither, gathering up their belongings—their costumes, their shoes, their stockings, their wigs. They worked like beavers. There was not a hand that was not moving as rapidly as nerves and muscles would let it. The clothing was done into bundles—neat, flat bundles—and on each bundle the girl of the stage wrote her name. Then she hurried with the bundles to the long line of trunks and packed her bundle into one of them. Her makeup was laid carefully in a tin box—the paint, the rouge, the powder, and the cosmetic—and the tin box was packed into her suitcase.

Perhaps it was 3 o'clock that morning before the company was asleep; it was 6 when it began to wake up. Some of them had gone to their homes, away out on the south and north sides. The chorus girl cannot afford to stay at a downtown hotel when she is tired. She takes the long trip home. The principals sauntered into the Victoria and registered for rooms. To stay

town would give them a chance to steal another hour of sleep.

**All at the Station on Time.**

At 8:30 o'clock Tuesday morning Sam Gerson, manager of the Whitney, and Stage Manager Stevens were at the station. The members of the company began to come. As they passed through the turnstile their names were crossed off of the list that Manager Stevens held in his hand. They came singly and in twos and threes. They came in omnibuses, cabs, and hacks, but most of them came in street cars. Joe Allen, who plays the role of Gen. Stanhope, swung along Adams street at an easy gait. He always is on time.

"I'm not worrying about you," said Gerson, laughing. "It's the others I'm worrying about. They didn't have much time for sleep, and I'm afraid some of them will forget to get up."

But they didn't. Frances Kennedy, in a black picture hat and a snugly fitting tailored suit, came down the long steps, with a suitcase in one hand and a hat box in the other. Then came Madge Voe, as light hearted and happy as if she had had a long beauty sleep, and just as beautiful, too, dressed from head to foot in brown to match her auburn hair, which was done up as carefully as if she had spent the three preceding hours in a hairdresser's shop.

Then came Victor Morley and Bessie McCoy. Miss McCoy struggled along under a hat box as big around as a hoghead. Then came Miss Alice Yorke, and Jack Henderson, and James Young, and William Bechtel, and William Stowell, and all the rest, one by one. And Stowell, who is a gallant chap, stood at the foot of the stairway and helped the broilers and the mediums and the show girls carry their baggage to the train.

On the train the company curled up and went to sleep. When the special pulled into Peoria they were all as fresh as if just arisen from a night of deep sleep and just as happy and uncomplaining.

**Begin Rehearsal at Once on Arrival.**

"Be at the Grand opera house at 2 o'clock," instructed Manager Stevens, hurrying through the train and stopping to tell every one.

It was then 1:30 o'clock. No luncheon, everybody hungry, rooms to be procured, and rehearsal at 2 o'clock! Buses and hacks rushed in all directions to hotels and cafes. At 2 o'clock the company was at the Grand.

The stage manager had been there already and done his work. The scenery had been placed. The trunks had been opened and the wardrobes had been hung. On the wall behind the wings had been posted a list of the dressing rooms, showing to which room every member of the company had been assigned. The principals and the broilers and the mediums and the show girls hurried to their dressing rooms, opened their bundles and boxes, and spread out their belongings just where they always do—carefully keeping the one arrangement with which they are as familiar as the stenographer is with the keys on her typewriter. There was a place for everything, and everything was put in its place.

Ten minutes later the stage was full of people and song was going out over the empty seats. The rehearsal lasted until 6:30 o'clock, and then dinner!

"Be back at the theater promptly at 7:30," commanded the "call."

**Fall Asleep Like Tired Children.**

It was not worth while for many of the girls to try to dress and leave the theater for an hour's rest, and besides they were too tired to move. They curled up

on the trunks in the dressing rooms, or crept into dark corners behind the scenes-like tired children and went to sleep.

Rest was more precious to them just then than food, so they snatched whatever sort of hasty bite they could, or went without eating entirely. Just to rest for an hour was a boon, and they could not waste one moment of the precious time.

One of the girls fainted as soon as the rehearsal was over, and was lovingly cared for by her plucky comrades until she was restored, and when the time came for work again she was ready to go on with her part. To have failed then would have been heart-breaking.

But not one word of complaint was heard through it all. Every girl in the show was just as anxious for success as the manager or the principals, and seemed to realize that the loss of sleep and the hard work was only a necessary part of the day's business—something to be endured cheerfully.

**"The Three Twins" First Presented.**

And at 8 o'clock the curtain rose, and just as if they hadn't done a bit of work for weeks, the broilers and the mediums and the show girls swung into the steps of the opening dance.

It was the first presentation of "The Three Twins," and just as the curtain rose a hundred pairs of hands behind those wings were clasped together and the people to whom those hands belonged were wishing one another all the success in the world, unselfishly wishing that no one would fail and that the effort that had cost days of work and nights of work and sleeplessness would be appreciated by the murmuring audience that filled every seat in the house.

It was a nerve straining occasion. Nobody out in front knew it, but there was a moment of agonizing tension as the curtain slowly climbed to the great arch, and then everybody went onto the stage in turn with hearts beating within them so fast that they could feel their beat, but with exteriors that laughed at the suggestion of nervousness.

Peoria liked the show. Until the curtain fell at 10:30 there was constant applause. As the performance moved along, nervousness wore away. It was the applause that gave the company confidence. Persons who do not applaud on opening night would be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail if those who have within them sympathetic hearts knew the heartache, the tears, the sobs, the anguish that accompany failure.

After the curtain was rung down for the last time another little piece of paper was posted on the wall, and the tired girls dragged themselves over to the wall and read it. It was another "call." It said: "Do not leave the theater; short rehearsal." It was midnight before any of them left, but they were still happy, still light hearted, still uncomplaining, still laughing and singing.

**Back Home After Successful First Night.**

The next day there was a rehearsal at 10 a. m., a performance at 2 p. m., another rehearsal after the matinee, and evening performance, and then—supper. It was not supper of the hot bird and cold bottle variety, either. It was a steak or chops, with coffee. Sometimes it was only a glass of soda water or a sundae with wafers. The members of the Whitney company may not belong to the W. C. T. U., but nobody would know they do not.

Of course everything had to be packed again before the company went to supper, for the "call" announced

that the company would leave town the next morning on the 8:30 o'clock train. There was the hurrying and scurrying and the procession of bundle carriers to the row of trunks, and again, while this procession was moving over the worn line of march, the walls of Dr. Hartman's sanitarium tottered, fell forward, then were swung into the air and drifted like great aeroplanes into their places.

A dozen hands carried them to the drays, and the scenery, five minutes after the curtain fell, was on its way to the train in order that it might be ready when the company reached its next destination, which this time happened to be Chicago and the Whitney, but which might have been Springfield or Rock Island or any other smaller city in the state.

It is work, work, work on the stage. That is the life of the stage, so take down your prism of glass and do not let it deceive you. The stage is a place where ambitions are nurtured. It is not merely a home for mirth—it is a place where real work is done by people who have so much spirit and optimism that hard work, heartache—nothing—can crush out either of these two virtues.