

London; 21 March 2017

Dominic Combe has presented a number of programmes on musicals staged in the early years of the 20th century but this was, I think, his first devoted to a centenary year. **London Revues and Musicals of 1917** provided a snapshot of thirteen of the shows that could be seen in London's West End in that year. All the recordings we heard featured the original cast performers. Dominic had assembled an impressive amount of material about the shows (writers, producers, plots, principle performers) packaged in an attractively illustrated booklet with a CD of 23 records 15 of which we would hear in the course of the evening.

It's more than usually difficult to identify the highlights from this consistently enjoyable programme but I would single out Violet Loraine and Joseph Coyne in duet with *Do You Like Me?* from *The Bing Girls Are There*; William H Berry in an exceptionally clear recording of *I just want to go bye bye* from *The Boy*; Julia James singing *Widows are Wonderful* ("single girls are much too tame but a merry little widow knows the game") from *Yes Uncle!* (one wonders how contemporary audiences, all too familiar with widowhood, greeted this song); and Shirley Kellogg and George Robey's tiff in *I can live without you* from *Zig-Zag* – a show also featuring the eccentric dancer, Daphne Pollard who would later appear on film as Mrs Oliver Hardy. Her electric carpet dance (bare wires of opposing polarity were woven through the carpet and sparked when touched by her metal toe caps) must have been quite something.

At this remove, it is difficult to square the light-hearted gaiety of these shows with the carnage going on just a few miles away across the Channel. A necessary relief, I suppose, and reassurance that away from the battlefields, life was going on.

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