Vaudeville in the Early 20th Century

By: Teresa Viggiano

Vaudeville was mostly based out of New York City but I did find a few places in Florida where they offered vaudeville shows in the area. I found a great deal of interesting information dealing with circus and Broadway shows coming to town. Many of the ads in the Tampa Times and Miami Herald linked many types of vaudeville performances together. I found the name Ethel Clayton underneath an ad with the words, “A Sporting Chance.” This caught my eye — seeing a name like this and it being next to other theater performances in the same paper was interesting. I found Ethel Clayton in a book called The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville by Anthony Slide. In this book it stated that Ethel Clayton and Ian Keith were in a dramatic sketch that was called “Clipped” which took place at the Riverside Theater in New York.

I also came across a variety of information dealing with ragtime or “ragging” as it was called. The ragtime music sounded like a broken or ragged rhythm that was played on a specific instrument. Many of these ragtime and vaudeville acts took part in the music scene in New York, the center of the era’s music industry.

In Florida newspapers from the 1910s (Tampa Times and Miami Herald), I found additional advertisements for vaudeville attractions. Although some acts were only done in New York City, I found a variety of ads that were for theaters hosting of theater, movies and musical groups in Tampa and Miami.

Vaudeville began in the 1880s until the 1930s. Vaudeville was popular in the United States and Canada. The acts were known as being a series of separate unrelated acts that were grouped together. These vaudeville acts included many musicians, singers, dancers, comedians, animals, magicians, impersonators and many more. The music was furnished by a large orchestra of musicians who read the music. The music for the vaudeville shows used a pianist and a drummer and once in a while a violinist.

Florida is a large state with a variety of many different musicians with many accomplishments. Florida has grown over the years. I have lived in Florida my whole life and have witnessed many changes to the area I live in as the years clicked by. Florida has many opportunities for people who are just starting out whether it is music related or not. There are many areas in Florida that have musical venues and groups that many people take part in. A Spanish-English-Spanglish is a term that Mormino used in a book relating to Florida and jazz. Spanglish is a cultural and media revolution that has taken root in the South Florida area. The talent in Florida that made a difference was largely in Miami.

Vaudeville eventually became one of the most popular forms of entertainment arts. Many dramatic actors appeared in vaudeville acts and they attracted many people. Vaudeville actors and vaudeville in general was considered a lower class rather than upper class entertainment. The amount of energy and hard work the vaudevillians put into their act was the most important part of what they did. They poured into their acts their hard work, time, skills and money and this was apparent when they performed.

I found a website after I searched through books and magazines that had something about the Sarasota Opera House showing a revival vaudeville show in April of 2014. The website has different links to the performers and a way to contact them and even gave information on a blog located on the page. I was surprised to have come across all of this information relating to a present-day vaudeville revival in Florida.

Endnotes


Vaudeville, a light, comical theatrical entertainment, flourished at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. Its success, like that of organized baseball, was caused by the greater amounts of leisure time and money that industrialization afforded people. The word vaudeville is derived from an old French term for a satirical song, vaudevire, which is a reference to the Vire valley of France, where the songs originated. Two early entrepreneurs in the entertainment form were American theater managers Benjamin Keith (1846 – 1914) and Edward Albee (1857 – 1930), who opened the Bijou Theatre in Boston in 1885. Eventually they operated almost four hundred theaters, including New York City’s Palace Theater, the gem in the Keith-Albee crown. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, drag performances remained mostly underground. In theater, men who performed as women were doing so simply to fill the role. In drag performances, men dressed in “drag” to emulate and caricature famous women, usually for comedic effect. Traveling vaudeville acts featured many female impersonators whose comedic performances earned them some fame within the burgeoning scene. Some of the most fascinating, and largely forgotten, famous drag queens of these early years include… The Rocky Twins. Image Source: Pinterest. @Example Essays. Film in the early 20th Century. 1 Pages. 341 Words. The Marx Brothers were three American brothers who became famous for their zany antics in motion pictures. Trained as musicians, they began their careers in vaudeville with their mother and aunt as the Six Musical Mascots. Leonard Marx (Chico) Born: 3/22/1887-10/11/1961- Specialized in distorted logic and Italian dialect routines. Animation Throughout the 20th Century Animation has proven to have an irresistible magic that has been a major part of the film industry since its very primitive times in the early twentieth century. The ability to make still pictures seem to move and have a character of their own has fasc... Wordcount: 1092. Pages: 4. The late 19th and early 20th century.

Bibliography


