

The City's Entertainment

As in all cities, the rich and poor alike could enjoy the pleasure of seeing some splendid public monuments and other picturesque views. Limerick city fared better than most in this regard. The view from Honan's Quay towards the Clare Hills took in the Thomond Bridge, King John's Castle, and St. Mary's Cathedral, with the Curragour Falls in the foreground. There were many other famous views of the surrounding country from different parts of the city. During the summer one could meet at least six artists seated at various points sketching these many scenes. All of these things gave pleasure and unconscious pride to the citizens, but the greatest binding force was the community of interest in music. The circus coming on its annual visit had its own band of musicians who, seated on long cars, led the parade through the city.

The Recruiting Sergeant, preceded by a military band, lured many a witless youth to a life of ease and a pensioned old age in the British Army, though all did not fare so well.

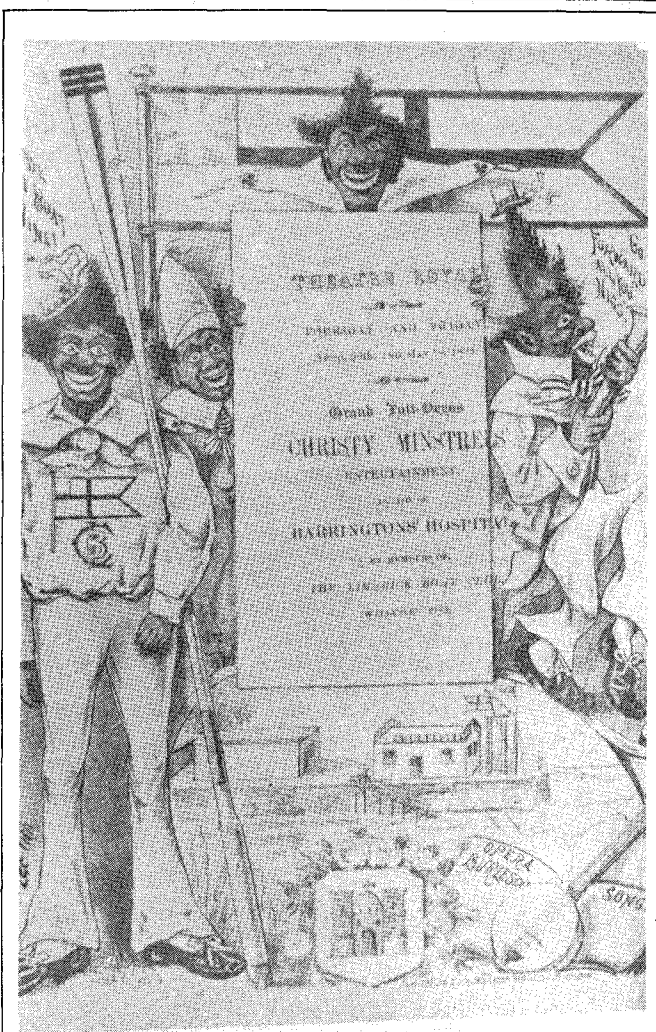
The six cinemas and the Theatre Royal had each its own orchestra of violins and piano. As the cinemas were denounced from the pulpit by the clergy as occasions of sin, they must be recorded. The Abbey Cinema near Barrington's Hospital, and the Tivoli, directly across the river near Baal's Bridge, charged 2d and 4d admission for the evening performances and half-price during the daily matinees. There was no cinema tax to pay. The Athenaeum in Cecil Street, the Grand Central in Bedford Row, with the Coliseum and the Gaiety in O'Connell Street, charged 6d and 9d, and 1s. admission. The tariff in the Theatre Royal ranged from two pence in the 'Gods' to a half-crown elsewhere and ten shillings in the boxes. The Theatre Royal was a death trap in the event of a fire.

The city had three brass and reed bands and as many fife and drum bands. They gave occasional concerts in the park and in St. John's Square. They gave life and colour to the many annual processions and sporting events in the city. Mungret College had a brass band and many a priest going on foreign mission work lugged his brass trumpet to Timbucktoo or other places and by his musical ability may have saved himself from the cannibals' cooking pot.

There were in all about two hundred professional musicians in the city whose sole means of livelihood was their musical ability. The city was graced with occasional visits of operatic companies. The Elster-Grime and Moody Manners groups were regular visitors. The visiting companies always received a warm welcome at Strand House, the residence of the O'Mara family. This family founded the O'Mara Opera Company. All the family had musical ability and were splendid singers. The leading tenor, Joe O'Mara, had an international reputation as an outstanding performer.

Street musicians played the accordeon, flute or fiddle. The playing of bagpipes was the exclusive right of the blind. These wierd sounding instruments could be bought from pawnbrokers who had accepted them in pledge from members of Scottish regiments stationed at various times in the city. The British regiments in the city had their own bands and gave weekly concerts in the 'New' Barracks and in the People's Park. They also travelled on route marches around the city. During performances in the barrack the public were free to enter the place where seats were provided. The public were free to enter any of the four military barracks on any trivial excuse. Other than an occasional drunken brawl, perfect harmony existed between the civilian population and the occupying military. This easy-going state of affairs existed until 1918 when a notice was nailed to all gates of the barracks. "Owing to the treachery of certain of his Majesty's subjects all persons and vehicles entering or leav-

by P.J. Ryan



The Limerick Boat Club's Christy Minstrels, in aid of Barrington's Hospital, at the Theatre Royal, April 30 and May 1, 1885.

ing this barrack must be searched".

The milkman, the baker, the butcher, and the pigman removing swill all were doubly searched. Despite these precautions, petty trafficking in arms and ammunition continued. The military no longer gave concerts and admission to any barrack was restricted. Brass bands and public concerts, though greatly appreciated, could not be turned on at will, nor could they be brought into people's houses. Gramophones met this need. The wealthy had cabinet models and horned models were available for others. The maestros and great singers of the day were now on tap: McCormack, Caruso, and others could be heard bellowing from the lanes and streets, the instruments having no volume control.

The pop songs or people's choices of the day came in the following order: **Mother Macree, Danny Boy, Terry My Blue Eyed Irish Boy, Peggy O'Neill, and God Save The King.** The latter was to be heard in some homes of the wealthy and in the homes of some clever patriots.