Limerick's theatrical revival recalls some great artistes who performed here in the last century

They trod the boards of the Old Royal

Percy Rendell, Coach and Stage Manager to the Limerick Operatic Society for "The Geisha", 1914.

J. F. Bellens was one of the best-known musical personalities in Limerick in the early part of the century.

P. F. Quinlan was first hon. secretary of the Limerick Operatic Society in 1914.

Limerick is well on the way to becoming a recognised centre for theatrical presentations of the first quality, and it is confidently predicted that the opening year of the 1970's will mark the beginning of a rich era in this cultural field.

Prior to 1922, the Limerick Theatre Royal had its doors open almost continuously to the cream of Europe's musical and dramatic talent and it was generally accepted that if a company won favourable notice from a Limerick audience that it could face the world's most discriminating critics with confidence.

But, alas, on Monday, Jan. 23, 1922, the old Theatre Royal was destroyed by fire. The great reputation that Limerick had built up over the best part of a century was now to become only a memory.

The sparks were kept alive by the occasional visits of such companies as the Anew MacMaster Company, Arthur Sinclair's Irish Players and, for the time of their tenancy of the Lyric Theatre, the efforts of Lawrence and Parsons to provide the best theatrical companies then on tour.

Honourable mention must be made, of course, of the various local amateur groups — musical and dramatic — who, despite many difficulties, bravely carried on.

But what was the fare like in the Theatre Royal of the old days? What companies performed there and what had they to offer local audiences? One of the best authorities in this sphere was our fellow-citizen, the late J. D. O'Connor. He was a frequent contributor to the **Limerick Chronicle**, and perhaps no time is more appropriate than the present to recall his memories of the old Royal which originally appeared in these columns many years ago.

Leading Stars

Mr. O'Connor, in the course of his reminiscences, says—

It was in 1841 the Theatre Royal first opened its doors to the public, having been built by Joseph Fogarty, father of Robert Fogarty, C.E., who managed it up to the time of his death.

During its heyday, the playgoing public were treated to a feast of opera and drama performed by companies which included many of the leading stars of the theatrical world. Amongst their members were such as — Miss Helen Faucit, a famous actress of Greek tragedy; Barry Sullivan, the greatest "Hamlet" of his time; our famous townswoman, Catherine Hayes, a singer of world-wide repute, styled by hosts of admirers as "the Swan of Erin"; the eminent tenor, Mr. Sims Reeves; the sublime operatic soprano, Madame Teresa Titiens; the Irish-born bass vocalist, Signor Foli, etc., and others of equal fame. Such were some of the outstanding artistes who delighted our great-grandfathers in a critical age of music and song.

Charles O'Connor, another well-known musical personality, was joint hon. secretary for the Limerick Operatic Society's production of "The Geisha", at the Theatre Royal, in February, 1914.

In the '80s came Madame Adeline Patti, "the Queen of Song"; Madame Melba, afterwards so famous; Madame Georgina Burns and her husband, Mr. Leslie Crotty, who ran their own opera company; Madame Marie Rose, the great soprano; the Carl Rosa Opera Company, then just beginning its famous career with many well-known artistes, including Madame Adelaide Mullen and Mr. Henry Beaumont, who became great favourites with Limerick audiences.

The Gay Nineties

In the "gay '90s" numerous leading vocalists of the concert stage visited the old Theatre, amongst whom were Madame Belle Cole, Madame Albani, Madame Chita Corri, Madame Clara Butt; the famous pianist, De Greef; Paganini, the great violin virtuosi; Mr. William Ludwig, who created the part of "Vanderdecken" in the first London production of Wagner's "Flying Dutchman"; Miss Anna Russell, a charming singer and a native of Limerick, who retired from the concert stage on the occasion of her marriage.

Great musical enthusiasm always prevailed by the visits of such companies and the D'Oyle Carte Opera Company in the various Gilbert & Sullivan operas, the Rousby Grand Opera Company, the Moody—Manners Opera Company, Mr. Harry Battersby's Juvenile Light Opera Company in such old favourites as "Cloches de Corneville," "Olivette" and "La Fille de Madam Angot," etc.

But the bright spot of all was the visit of Sir Augustus Harris's Royal Italian Opera Company from Drury Lane Theatre, with artistes who included our popular townsman Joseph O'Mara, who appeared in "Faust," with Madame Hill as "Marguerite."

Joseph O'Mara

In later years Mr. O'Mara revisited his native city, appearing in Stanford's Irish opera, "Seamus O'Brien." He scored a most tremendous success in the part of "Mike Murphy," especially in the song "Ochone, When I Used to be Young," and, incidentally, launching forth on the first steps of her musical career the Limerick vocalist, Miss May Hourigan, daughter of the city's most gifted artiste, the late Mr. David Hourigan.

Other companies who especially endeared themselves to the Limerick public were — Horace Lingard's Light Opera Company in "Falka," "Pepita," "The Old Guard" and other operas, which always won the plaudits of the gallery gods.

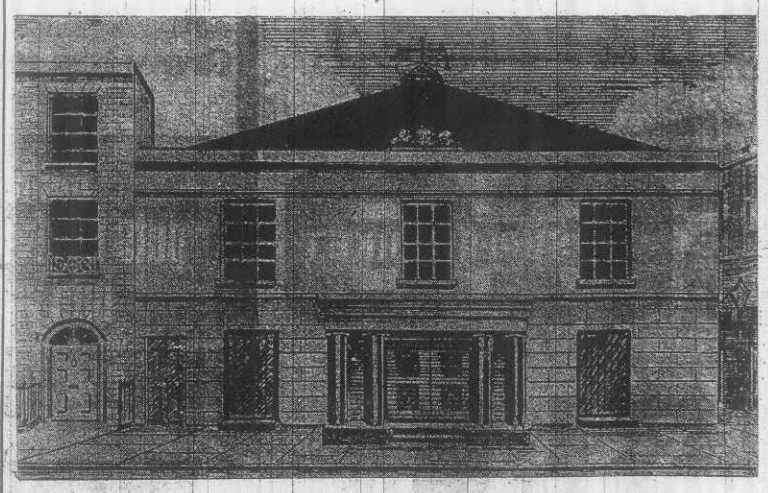
Neither can one forget such splendid companies as The Milton-Rays in "Don Quixote," with the late Miss Bessie Wentworth; Edward Compton in old English comedies; Mrs. Bandman Palmer in "Mary Stuart," "Sapho" and "Hamlet," etc.; Mr. Norman V. Norman's Company in "Nell Gwynn"; the Osmund Tearle Company, including Alexander Marsh, in their repertoire of old and modern plays, including Gerald Griffin's masterpiece, "Gisippus" —the only time as can be ascertained his great tragedy was performed in his native city. Sir F. R. Benson was another great favourite of Shakespearean parts, and his visits for a fortnight's season were eagerly looked forward to by lovers of the drama.

Musical Comedy

There was also the palmy days of musical comedy, when George Edwards' Companies visited the city with first-rate productions of "The Geisha," "The Greek Slave," "San Toy," etc.; also the Bannister-Howard and Ed. Laurillard Companies with "Floradora," "The Belle of New York," "The Orchid," "The Toreador," "The Messenger Boy" and many others of that class.

These names are just a few at random from the host of musical and dramatic friends who trod the boards of the old Royal. Many incidents, grave and gay, sometimes accompanied those merry nights, which are inseparately interwoven in the history of this old place.

The cast of "The Pirates of Penzance" which was produced at the Theatre Royal in 1913 by the Limerick Operatic Society. Included are Charles O'Connor (Major General Stanley), John Cahill (The Pirate King), M. O'Doherty (Lieutenant), R. Clune (Frederic), John Shannon (Sergeant of Police), Miss N. Glynn (Mabel), Miss L. Clandillon (Edith), Miss E. Quinlan (Kate), Miss G. McCormac (Isobel), Miss L. O'Carroll (Ruth).



The Old Theatre Royal in Henry Street was destroyed by fire in 1922.

Three Limerick girls who have qualified as R.G.N.'s in Ardkeen Hospital, Waterford. From right: Breda O'Flynn, Ardagh; Annette Ahern, Abbeyfeale; Margaret Fitzgerald, Rathkeale.

LIMERICK CITY BUS TIMETABLE AMENDMENTS

As from Monday next, 26th January, the following Timetable Alterations will be made.

ROUTE 5.

City Centre to Ballynanty Beg. 07.40 altered to 07.35.

Ballynanty Beg to City Centre. 07.50 altered to 07.45.

City Centre to Fairgreen. 08.00 altered to 07.55.

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PANEL OF SCHOOL WARDENS

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Age: Not less than 35 years of age on the 1st February, 1970.

Wages: £1-2-6 per school day

Full particulars and application forms may be had from City Manager, Town Hall, with whom completed application forms must be lodged not later than 4.00 p.m. on the 11th February, 1970.

21st January, 1970.

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