



A Season of Happiness

nothing too serious

Popcorn



P02-4



MUSOS MUSES - ACT III



It's Showtime

Summer Season

Touring, one-night stands, recording sessions, flitting between jobs, all are part of a musician's life. On occasions, however, some set down roots, albeit temporary ones, for the duration of a particular show. The Summer Season was like that. Many British seaside towns catered for their visitors by putting on entertainment of a quality usually unavailable except in the big cities. The main draw-cards would be the well-known artists topping the bill, and I expect their salaries would have been commensurate with their standing in the business. But even if the rest of the cast and the orchestra weren't paid anywhere near a fortune, there were other advantages that made these gigs attractive. When simply getting any work was difficult enough, and keeping it was even harder, taking a holiday could mean professional suicide, considering that their current job might have been sharked by the time they got back. A Summer show was a way to secure a regular spot for however long the show ran, and provide a vacation into the bargain. They might have to play matinees and evenings, sometimes three performances a day, but there was still enough spare time to experience whatever the resort had to offer - exhilarating sea air, a bit of fishing, the joyful ambience radiating from people with nothing better to do than relax and, if the sun stayed out for more than five minutes, the lucky ones were in the market for a tan of sorts.

Playing in the pit, of course, was a bus-man's holiday for musos, and the band room was pretty much the same as would be provided at any venue, often cramped and Spartan; but there were compensations. For some reason the boys seemed better appreciated by the stars of the show here than they were in "town". Maybe the big names were also inclined to enter into the spirit of seaside living. One well-known personality in particular was a definite favourite behind stage, stopping by each day or so to visit the boys in their glorified "cupboard" for a friendly chat and, most importantly, once a week to share a drink, then leave a full bottle of scotch for them to savour at their leisure. What muso wouldn't regard such a man as

a good guy and a friend for life, or at least for as long as the show lasted and the tipples kept coming? But not every personality was so amiable: some were positively distant and annoying. One comedian was very popular with his audiences, particularly those who tuned in to his regular radio programme, and you'd expect this exuberance would make him pleasant company off-stage. Instead, he would bore the pants off anyone in range as he told the same jokes he used in his act, gags the band boys had heard a hundred times; and as a bonus utilised his repertoire of voices, almost as if he was never sure who he really was. As for shouting the band a round of drinks once in a while, presumably he didn't do that sort of impersonation.

It wasn't unusual for families of the musicians to join them for a week or two. Mums and kids could do their own holiday thing when Dad was working, then they could all spend time together after. And, of course, there would be free tickets to the show. George acquired a couple on the occasion of his 25th wedding anniversary. He couldn't sit with them, but while he played, his wife and young son were able to enjoy the show from the best seats in the house, also looking forward to a family get-together later in the evening. Under the circumstances, there was little more George could do that would make the night memorable. Unknown to him, however, someone had let the cat out of the bag and the star of the show had got to hear about it. Towards the end of the performance, he stepped up to the microphone and announced that one of their band boys was celebrating his anniversary, adding that George's wife and son were in the audience. A spotlight came on, swinging round until it focussed on the front rows of centre circle to illuminate one excited little boy and Ivy, cheeks aglow with more than just rouge. The audience applauded, Ivy continued to blush and the star chatted; but in the tradition of the theatre, it wasn't over yet: he was about to present an encore. He asked everyone to light a match or cigarette lighter and hold them in the air. At his signal, every other light in the auditorium was turned off to reveal his gift to George and Ivy - a two-tiered anniversary cake complete with candles. As I recall, the show was the pantomime, Aladdin, and here was some ad-lib magic that wasn't in the script - it was a simple act of kindness and respect that would be remembered long after the final curtain fell on a very special Summer Season.



The Show Must Go On, or Off!

Shows weren't just restricted to the Summer months. Broadway, of course, was renowned for successful stage performances that would eventually go "on the road" to major cities in America, complete with cast and crew. When they went overseas, however, although the main stars might travel with the shows, the rest of the cast and the band were generally recruited from local talent. Such was the case with "Paint Your Wagon" which had an extended run in London. Then there were the others that weren't as well-known and it was a risky business putting one on in the hope that it would bring in the crowds. "Black Gold" was a prime example trying to hitch a ride on the back of "Wagon"; but audiences stayed away in their droves and it failed miserably.

Though many others followed suit, for musos it could still be a good gig in the end. The trouble was that no-one could predict whether a particular show had the right stuff, so the supposedly-better ones were trialled in Windsor before chancing them in a London theatre. George and his mates played for the odd box-office hit, but these were the exception. He was of the opinion that his band was something of a jinx because they seemed to close more shows than they opened. One might think that at least they had a

paying job, even if it only lasted a week; but when management decided to pull a failure, they did so without notice. If the stars had a default clause in their contracts they would come away with something, unlike the cast, crew and band who were simply shown the door and told: "It's over and there's no money, sorry." There was nothing else for it. A group of musos would gather near the scene of their latest disaster, busking on the footpath: not for themselves, but for the benefit of the show-girls who had rent to pay and no food in the cupboard. Charity does begin at home, and as far as musos are concerned, whoever's in the business, whether they play an instrument or not, they are one of your own and you look after them. So, when you see them playing in the street, be generous - you might save a hooper or two from starvation.

Act IV starts after the break...

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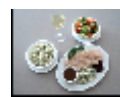
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