

Flash Parade

Flash Parade:
A Photo Montage of a Theatrical Touring Company

By

Vikki Jackson

Editor Micheal O' hAodha

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Flash Parade: A Photo Montage of a Theatrical Touring Company,
by Vikki Jackson
Editor Micheal O' hAodha

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by Vikki Jackson

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1380-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1380-8

**I want to dedicate this book to Ken- Emma- Eoin and- Cillian.
This is your history too...**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue.....	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Opening chorus.....	xiii
Photos from the 1920's to the 1960's of the Vic Loving Show, Flash Parade	1
Other side of the footlights; more audience memories	81

PROLOGUE

VICTORIA JACKSON AND HER PHOTOGRAPHIC OEUVRE

Modernity reached its limits with the recognition that its most cherished discourses were founded on an act of violence against the Other...If the Holocaust marked the culmination of the modern quest for mastery and the determination of the Other by the Self, postmodernity as a post-colonial and post-Holocaust discourse forces us to see the Self through the eyes of the Other (Delanty 2000: 3)

This book is an important addition to the diverse and exciting range of artistic developments currently ongoing in Irish visual culture, particularly as relating to the questions of cultural diaspora and identity representation. We live in the era of the Other, the era of “difference”, the era of the “namless” migrant – the (“stranséir” (stranger) who waits patiently at the border crossing at the checkpoint, suitcase in hand. For centuries, the Showpeople have been the archetypal migrants. “Outsiders” who are either ostracised or “exoticised” Showpeople and Fairground people have survived vast social, economic and cultural changes in recent centuries, changes that would have destroyed most other cultural groups and communities. They have survived and endured, regardless. This figure... the *Showperson*, the *Gypsy*...the *Travelling Player*, the *Revue artiste*...is the archetypal *Other*, that person whose very existence generates ambivalence. These people and the images of their working lives are the presences who are central to the beauty of Vikki Jackson’s photographs. These haunting images and presences are a revelation in themselves and they pose important questions for a modern Ireland currently re-interrogating notions of history, authenticity and the very question of Irish identity itself.

Vikki’s images of beauty will remain long after the people who are their subjects are dead and gone. Her photographs will outlive the privileged readers who have the good fortune to marvel at them also. They are like traces in the earth, the wagon-wheels turning in the damp Irish soil, the smoke from the campfire, forgotten words and laughter. Vikki

Jackson's photos are part of a new impulse in Irish artistic culture, a new consciousness...a new language which Irish culture and Irish society seeks to speak. They help us to appreciate once more what it means to be truly human. No greater praise than this can be given to any artist.

—Dr. Mícheál Ó hAodha
Department of History,
University of Limerick
October, 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I put together an exhibition of my Theatrical Collection in the Excel in Tipperary Town, one of the most talked about aspects of the display were of the photographs. They brought back memories to so many people who remembered not only my Gran's Flash Parade show but other companies who toured Ireland in what now seems the distant past. I want to thank those people for their interest and the stories they related; like 'Kitten' who auditioned for Vic as a child dancer in a 'scena'. The other girls came with dresses full of Irish dancing medals so Kitten promptly borrowed some.....from the local boxing club!

I want to say thanks to Louisa Haywood-Samuel who with her family travelled all the way from Wales with photos of my Gran, a couple of which are featured in the book. Thanks to other visitors to the cottage and were fascinated with the whole 'back story'. To Patricia Feehily for her continued interest and support.

I also want to say 'Thank you very' to my circle of friends including the 'Techie Ladies Club' who helped this non technical one with getting this all down; Anne Marie-Marysia and Carol....and Ken for computer lessons by phone..... Life was *so* much easier in the 'good old days'! To Mandy for bringing the 'glass plates to life' and to Jon Kenny for his enthusiasm and graciousness.....

To Micheal for getting *another* of my books up and running and this time you didn't have to do the typing....nice one Doc.....

OPENING CHORUS

Kildorrery, Co. Cork. September 1993

Dear Ms Jackson,

I read in the papers about your forthcoming book on the history 'Fit-ups' and I look forward to its production.

Considering it is over 50 years since I had the pleasure of attending one of those shows- the memories of Vic Loving evoke nostalgic thoughts. Who, after having seen 'Flash Parade' could ever forget the elegance, the glitter and the glamour of the lovely chorus girls as they 'kicked up' to the strains of 'Happy Days Are Here Again'; Vic introduced vaudeville and Music Hall magic to our village.

Her show regularly visited Kildorrery in the 1940's and used to perform in O'Dwyer's Hall. Each night a different show was presented with a complete change of costume and scenery. I can still see Vic herself in top hat and tails swinging her way and delighting the audience with 'Burlington Bertie from Bow' and all the Florrie Ford and Marie Lloyd numbers of the era. At one time Vic's show ran here for *three whole weeks*, playing to a packed hall every night. We had never seen anything like it before and never will again. I was very young at the time, but I remember the excitement when the 'PRO' man appeared in the village with the bill posters. How we would scrutinize the contents and carefully note each item.

Some of the performers usually stayed in local houses but Vic had her own touring caravans.

The show would commence with the entire company doing variety- a raffle- the drama and a closing number like 'Goodnight Friends until tomorrow night'. Chic Kay's hilarious balancing act on the 'roller log' brought the house down. He would invite the local lads to try their luck on it, but as often as not they ended up on the floor.... Frank Macari would hold us spellbound with his versatility on the accordian. Then a baritone who sang holding a scroll of paper with his wife playing the role of a maid in mop cap and apron (sadly I cannot remember their names) The evergreen monologues 'Dangerous Dan McGrew' and 'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God'; you could almost hear a pin drop- with the piano accompaniment sotto voce in the background. Looking back on those halcyon nights I often wonder how the troupe coped with all the changes and managed to present such a spectacular shows with limited cloakroom facilities available. All those baskets *full* of magnificent clothes.

The era of the travelling show is no more alas, but the memories linger on forever. It is indeed a disaster that they have become just part of a past history.

The plays; 'Night must fall' 'Murder in the Red Barn' 'East Lynn' 'Peg o my heart' and Vic Loving's unforgettable 'Smilin' through'. I can still see Chic Kay behind the gauze curtain that was used in the show...

In the 1930's other shows used paraffin lamps as spotlights and were advertised by the 'bell ringer' announcing the show whilst walking up and down the street!!

Those were the days; the happy days never to be forgotten by those who had the privilege of experiencing live show at its very best.

Wishing you every success and good luck with you 'Fit-ups' book.

Yours sincerely,

D.B.

It is with these words I introduce you to a book of photos following on from 'Gags and Greasepaint'; they feature artistes which the letter refers to....obviously an ardent fan...of Vic Loving's show 'Flash Parade'.

There is a story behind each image of people and places....that was the life of the 'Strolling Player'

Vic loving loved to take photos, a lot of them of her son Chic and she also developed them too. I'm lucky to have such a collection of timeless images in this book...and there are more...

—Vikki Jackson



Photo 1

Vic Loving in what appears to be a 'Scottish' style dance costume. Most likely to be a publicity shot for her work in Music Hall.... c1907



Photo 2

Vic in another publicity photo in a rather coquettish pose... c1907



Photo 3
Studio portrait of Vic in her 'Gypsy Rose Lee' ensemble....
c1908



Photo 4
Lena Martin who was Vic's
business partner in 'Bazarring'.
This was a form of raffle with big
prizes. Lena ran the 'show'
whilst Vic did the 'spiel'.... c1920



Photo 5

Vic in one of her 'Male Impersonation' roles. This photo was recently reproduced from a glass plate... c1920



Photo 6

Vic in top hat and tails as ‘Ireland’s Vesta Tilley’ who was the originator of the male impersonator or ‘masher’ roles for women. Vesta gave Vic the silk top hat she used in her act.... c1920

**Photo7**

This was Vic's first chorus line of girls which she toured with all over England going as far as the Shetland Isles. This is the first time the photo has been printed from a glass plate.... c1920



Photo 8

Vic (centre) with her dancing troupe. This photo is courtesy of Louisa Haywood-Samuel who lives in Wales. Her grandmother and her gran's sister were in the chorus line.... c 1920's



Photo 9

Vic and 'adopted' daughter Dot who was later killed in the Blitz in London... c1925



Photo 10

Vic and second husband 'Peter Piper'. She had nursed her first husband through TB, but he succumbed to the disease.... c 1925



Photo 11

Vic and Peter's son Brian who was called after Vic's first husband. He was called the 'Chicago Kid' as his parents had been fans of touring the States, when in Music Hall and all things American were considered 'exotic'.... The age on the original photo was wrong to comply with 'Child actor protection laws'. He was born in March 1926.



Photo 12

Music Hall entertainer and Vic's husband Peter Piper with young son Brian. The odd thing about the photos in my collection is that there are none of them 'au famille'; considering many are studio portraits.... c1927.



Photo 13

Vic and Brian in another studio shot. Judging by the calm expression on his face he was obviously being groomed for life in the public eye.... c1928



Photo 14

Brian in a studio portrait on a rocking horse which would lead to his passion in later life for real horses.... c1929



Photo 15

Vic and young Brian at the seaside; location unknown but possibly England.... c1929



Photo 16

**Brian aged 4 in costume for his role in 'Black-up Review'
written by Peter Piper and choreographed by Vic
Loving.... 1930**



Photo 17

Vic's dancing girls in 'civvies'. Later the girls would dye their hair blond as a trademark.... c1930's