

Summer Entertainment on the Isle of Man

The Joe Loss Years

Part 1: 1946-50

'Let the good times roll again'

by

Maurice Powell

*'It was a golden period. The mix of reliable old, brilliant new, up and comers, down and outers, has beens, never was-ers and some of the most eccentric acts ever seen . . .'**

The world of entertainment slowly began to regain some of its pre-war vitality during the immediate austere post-war years. In 1947 the Crazy Gang returned to the London stage with *Together Again*, and in 1949 Billy Cotton and Tessie O'Shea appeared together in their touring show *Tess and Bill*. Radio reached the height of its popularity and influence* and two years later Billy Cotton launched the *Billy Cotton Band Show*, which cemented his enormous reputation, and with his signature tune *Somebody Stole My Gal* and raucous call of 'Wakey, Wakey!' the show became the backdrop to Sunday lunchtimes throughout Britain. In 1948 Frank Muir and Dennis Norden's *Take It From Here* was soon attracting enormous radio audiences, mainly due to the weekly saga of the Glum family, starring 'Professor' Jimmy Edwards, Dick Bentley and June Whitfield. *Ray's a Laugh* with Ted Ray replaced *ITMA* after the death of Tommy Handley in 1949, and *Educating Archie*, Peter Brough's bizarre radio ventriloquist show, began a decade-long run the following year and helped launch the careers of some notable stars who appeared as Archie Andrew's tutors, including Tony Hancock, Max Bygraves, Beryl Reid and Hattie Jacques. *Worker's Playtime*, the popular lunchtime entertainment for factory workers begun in 1941 and broadcast directly from factories 'somewhere in England', introduced a myriad of stars including Jack Warner, Elsie and Doris Waters, and later Cyril Fletcher and Val Doonican. Another wartime favourite, *Variety Bandbox*, ran from 1944 until 1953, and helped launch the career of resident comedian Frankie Howerd, whose hesitant, seemingly disorderly delivery became his hugely successful trademark. In 1950 *Crazy People* morphed into that warped, anarchic trailblazer *The Goon Show*.

* Roy Hudd's *Cavalcade of Variety Acts*. London, Robson Books, 1998.

* BBC Radio's Third Programme, the first new programme inaugurated after the war, began in September 1946. It became Radio 3 in 1967.

1946 in a nutshell

Clement Attlee was Prime Minister; the American dance craze, the Jitterbug, sweeps Britain; William Joyce, 'Lord Haw-Haw', the Nazi broadcaster was hanged in Wandsworth Prison on 3rd January; in March Sir Winston Churchill delivered his 'Iron Curtain' speech in America; Alastair Cooke's first 'Letter from America' was broadcast on the BBC Home Service on 24th March; the first post-war FA Cup is won by Derby City in April; in May first class cricket returns after its wartime suspension; Fred Pontin opens his first holiday Camp at Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset; television broadcasting resumes after the war, and on 1st June the Television License was introduced; bread rationing was introduced on 27th June; the Family Allowance was introduced on 6th August; the BBC Third Programme begins broadcasting in September; *Woman's Hour*, and the detective series *Dick Barton - Special Agent* were first broadcast in October; Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* received its premier with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Malcolm Sargent, on 15th October; Stevenage becomes Britain's first designated 'new town'; on 19th November Peter Scott opened the Slimbridge Wetland Reserve in Gloucestershire; W. V. Awdry's *Thomas the Tank Engine* was published; the actresses Brenda 'Vera' Blethyn and Joanna 'ubiquitous' Lumley, and the actors Timothy 'not quite James Bond' Dalton and Alan 'Snarling Snape' Rickman were born; David Lean's film of Dickens' *Great Expectations* was released on 26th December.

The re-birth of the tourist industry on the Isle of Man during the first full post-war summer season was marred by severe shortages, and, despite the remarkable transformation that took place on the Island when barbed wire fences and internment camps began to disappear, something like a traditional seaside holiday atmosphere could not always be felt, even in Douglas. Hoteliers, struggling to provide accommodation for guests, were angry at the slow pace of the decommissioning of their properties by the military, and some hotels and boarding houses were not habitable until after the end of the holiday season. Many premises were handed back in poor condition and some had had floors asphalted and turned into showers and washrooms. The military offered only 50% of any claims for damage to properties, the procedure was protracted, and claims were frequently disputed. Windows had been boarded up for the duration of the war, but now glass was in short supply, as was plaster for damaged walls and general building materials. Plumbing and electrics had to be reinstated; furniture was often found to be defaced or damaged beyond repair, and items such as cookers were often found to have been 'vandalised'. Thousands of mattresses were damp, moth-eaten or infested with vermin. Those who were invited to retrieve what they believed was their furniture, fixtures and fittings from the Furniture Restoration Division at the Derby Castle Ballroom, found, like the previous year, that many of their items had been appropriated by neighbours who got there first. Whatever was left was eventually auctioned. The chaotic situation was best illustrated by the huge mound of fat-encrusted frying pans left for the Derby Castle staff to disinfect and clean! Nor would the Isle of Man be a 'food paradise' that summer, for many hotels and boarding houses could offer only tea and bed and breakfast. Furthermore, bread rationing was introduced due to problems with the supply of flour. Visitors were reduced to queuing for their main meals at local cafes, and there were naturally complaints about the quantity and quality

of meals. Surprisingly there was a mini-boom in property sales, and for a period 'fantastic prices' were paid for holiday properties - much of it of poor quality and in need of repair - in the belief that a post-war boom would see thousands of tourists returning to the Island.*

* A good deal of useful information can be found in the Douglas Weekly Diary of Current Events, first published in June 1928 by The Norris Modern Press Ltd., Douglas. The 1000th edition appeared in August 1947. The founder and editor was Samuel Norris, the Lancashire-born author of *Manx Memories and Movements*.

'It's getting more like old times every day . . .' *

Despite these difficulties there was the familiar frantic pre-season race to get everything ready for the first visitors in June, and there was a general 'polishing up for business' as the Island moved from a war footing to a holiday footing. In February Sydney Albert Perry, formerly deputy and assistant manager for Eastbourne Corporation, was appointed to the vital position of Entertainments Manager for Douglas Corporation. Everywhere there were signs of activity as towns throughout the Island attempted to brighten up their promenades, kiosks, children's playgrounds and beaches, and on Sunday morning 14th April at 2.00 am, the first post-war British Summer Time began. The previous month *Mona's Queen* – passenger capacity two thousand - was launched at Birkenhead and joined the Steam Packet fleet which now consisted of the *Lady of Man*, *Ben my Cree*, *Viking*, *Mona's Isle*, *Manx Maid* and *Rushen Castle*. The normal steamer service between Douglas and Fleetwood resumed, and in April the regular daily steamer services from Liverpool re-commenced.

* *Isle of Man Examiner* 22.02.1946.

Horses were sought in Ireland for the horse tram service, which was officially re-started by the Lieutenant Governor Bromet in May after the coaches had received a new coat of paint for their 1946 debut. Tenders were invited for the ice-cream and mineral water stand at the foot of Broadway, the weighing machine site on the promenade was re-let and the Loch Promenade fountain was refurbished. Concerns were expressed about the amount of rubble on Douglas beach as early visitors declared their preference for Port St. Mary and Port Erin: 'the sands are nicer'. A tenancy for the Punch & Judy Show on the beach was sought, an open bowling tournament at the Villa Marina was scheduled for 17th June, and there was a report on the state of the deck chairs by the Chair Hire Superintendent. Nobles Park refreshment facilities and golf course were due to open for Easter and the Summer Hill Glen refreshment kiosk at Whit-week. It was agreed that the lamps on the promenades should be increased to thirty-one during July, August and September; the Palace Ballroom, a naval dining room and later a training facility for D-Day visible signalling during the war, and Coliseum were de-requisitioned, made 'spick and span' after weeks of all-out work under the experienced eye of General Manager D. F. Barwell, and would soon once again throb to the sound of dance music. The Villa Marina was 'attacked by an army of workers and made most attractive', re-decorated in cream with crimson curtaining, with new carpets and with part of the lower balcony re-designed as a café area. The staff looked splendid in their new maroon and gold uniforms as did the waitresses in attractive frocks, caps and

aprons, and not forgetting the imposing figure of the 6' 2" Commissionaire. The Queen's Hall, Ramsey was all set to re-open for the summer; the Derby Castle, however, remained out of action for the time being, but longer-term plans were laid to re-open Howstrake Holiday Camp in time for the 1947 summer season.*

* The camp was occupied by the Royal Naval School of Music during the war and provided training for four hundred young bandsman, aged 14-18, many of whom would later secure careers in Britain's dance orchestras. These young musicians helped to keep the Manx Music Festival alive during the war by entering for the various instrumental and orchestral classes.

A much-needed winter work scheme resulted in the North Promenade being widened by forty-five feet for 460 yards from the foot of Summer Hill to the Derby Castle. A new Douglas Town Guide was under consideration providing the Town Council awarded a grant towards printing costs. All this hectic activity paid off as 90,000 war-weary visitors arrived during June.

The bands played on and Variety returns to Douglas

Before the war, and for some decades after, the main reason thousands of holiday makers chose Douglas and the Isle of Man for their annual holidays was the quality and quantity of the summer entertainments. The variety shows, and the well-known stars who appeared in them, were a huge draw, and equally so were the dance bands with their charismatic leaders, their vocalists, their star instrumentalists and the varied dance programmes they presented.

Realistically though, the halcyon days of British dance bands were during the 1920s and '30s, when radio or broadcasting bands topped the bills and gave Variety a tremendous boost when it was under pressure from the popularity of the cinema. The war gave the bands a new lease of life and extended their era into the 1950s, and for a few years they continued to be the main prop in keeping doors open at Variety Theatres and seats filled. Post-war, the dance bands were actually in decline and began to suffer from competition from 'cheap, tatty shows . . . full of listless girls and foul-mouthed comics'. Johnny had indeed come marching home after the war, and some service bands such as the RAF's Squadronaires and the Skyrockets stayed together, and survived by taking to the road in dreary circuits of 'dreaded one-nighters', which often involved travelling three hundred miles by coach to play a gig, then getting back on the coach the next morning and driving another two hundred miles to a new town. Some British bands attempted to go with the flow and emulate the famous American swing bands, but audiences made their feelings known especially when they took waltzes and other 'old fashioned' dances out of their programmes, and played in styles that were perceived as either too fast or too slow for dancing, or when their pumped up brass and reed sections drowned out conversation.

However, Douglas's once vibrant summer seasons bounced back during the late 1940s and continued to flourish undimmed until at least the mid-1960s, and helped to keep some dance bands in business - the 'strict tempo' bands such as Joe Loss, Ronnie Aldrich, Cyril Stapleton and Ivy Benson, who left room in their programmes for the older style dances as well as more modern ones - and popular enough to almost buck the trend, even if the careers of their vocalists – including such well known stars as Rose Brennan, Howard Jones and Dickie Valentine - would barely survive the onslaught of the Rock 'n' Roll era. Furthermore, the survival of the flourishing dance bands in Douglas ensured that there would also be full houses in the variety theatres to attract the popular variety acts of the day, pre-war stars like Sandy Powell, George Formby and the Two Leslies, together with new talents such as Jack Warner, Frankie Howerd, Ted Ray and Peter Sellars. The ghost of that most popular of all wartime radio shows, *ITMA*, appeared at the Villa Marina on January 2nd, 3rd and 4th when Harold Fielding presented an All-Star Variety Show based on Jack Payne's *Can I Do You Now, Sir?* with a full cast of favourite characters including Mrs. Mop, Sam Scram, Ali-Oop and Signor So-so, supported by Flotsam* of Flotsam Follies, the genial harmonica virtuoso Ronald Chesney and vocalist Billy Scott-Coomber. Holiday makers in Douglas in 1946 found that most of the entertainment venues were open for the season: the Palace Ballroom and Coliseum, the Gaiety Theatre, the Villa Marina and the Palais de Danse, the Onchan Head and Crescent Pavilions, the cinemas and Douglas Holiday Camp, formerly Cunningham's Camp. Only the Derby Castle remained closed for the time being.

* One half of Flotsam and Jetsam. Jetsam, the Australian *basso profundo* Malcolm McEarchern, died in January 1945.

The Palais de Danse was opened for dancing throughout the year, and in March the pre-war resident band leader Harold Moorhouse* entered into a contract with the Palace & Derby Castle Company for his Havana Band, known briefly as the Demobbed Musician's Band, to provide dance music at the Palais de Danse until Whit-week. The daily programme began at 11.00 am with Morning Coffee Dances until 1.00 pm; refreshments were served between 2.30 pm and 6.00 pm and the evening dancing commenced at 7.30 pm and lasted until 10.30pm. Other bands were featured from time to time such as the Swing Sextette. Later in the season Harold Tootill and Jean Wall gave ballroom dance exhibitions, and in June the Manx Open Amateur Dance Championship took place. There were always special events programmed at the Palais de Danse. In February there was an All Ladies Novice Waltz competition, a Grand Dance in aid of the Royal Naval School of Music Memorial Fund, which promised non-stop dancing to two bands from 8.00 pm until midnight, a Cavalcade of Dance entitled Dancing Through the Ages devised by Eunice Joyce, and an Easter 'Whoopee Night'. In April the Palace & Derby Castle Company organised a Grand Dance and Cabaret at the Palais de Danse in aid of the Bolton Wanderers Football Disaster Fund.* 'Out of respect for the thousands of Bolton holiday makers who had been loyal to the Island over many decades', Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band and a Marine Band from the Royal Naval School of Music provided a non-stop programme of dances from 7.30 pm until midnight. At the close of the evening twenty-five pounds was handed to the football club's manager, and subsequently a total of £168 8s 6d was sent to the Mayor of Bolton from various Palace & Derby Castle Company events.

* See Maurice Powell: *Harold Moorhouse*, in Manx Musical Worthies, manxmusic.com. Harold Moorhouse served five years with the RAF, including two years stationed at RAF Jurby. He was in France two days after the D-Day landings and helped organise troop entertainments and dances in Belgium and Hamburg and elsewhere for the British Liberation Army, as the British Army was officially called from D-Day until the end of the war.

* The 'forgotten' football disaster with the greatest loss of life at a British football ground up to that time, with thirty-three lives lost due to fatal crushing injuries, the result of overcrowding on the terraces during an FA Cup tie between Bolton Wanderers and Stoke City at Burnden Park on 9th March, 1946.

Ralph Fidler's ten-piece Strict Tempo Dance Band and Billy Page's Wonderful London Dance Band took over from Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band once the season proper started, and the popular Sunday concerts commenced with guest vocalist Bert Gray, billed as 'Manxland's favourite tenor,' and other local singers including Mona Clucas, soprano, and Norman Kaighen, bass. In Peel the Palace & Derby Castle Company successfully applied for a licence to provide music, singing and dancing in the Ballroom of the Pavilion Cinema when the cinema was closed, and for charity events only. The Wanderer's Male Voice Choir, and the Laureston Ladies Choir conducted by Harry Pickard appeared at the Palais de Danse in July 21st July, and in September Harold Moorhouse's Havana Band made a welcome return for the winter season.

The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum

The Palace Ballroom re-opened for the season on 3rd June with Joseph Muscant,* and the fifteen-piece Palace Grand Orchestra played for dancing in the ballroom together with resident vocalist for the season Miss Terry Leigh. Thursdays were designated Carnival Nights. Two thousand were present on the opening night.

* Originally a concert violinist from Kiev, he turned to light music when he was appointed Musical Director at the Commodore Theatre, Hammersmith, in 1929. He went on to become a well-known radio musician. He worked for ENSA during the war and directed the Troxy Broadcasting Orchestra for some years. Post-WWII he formed his own orchestra and played for summer seasons in Paignton, Broadstairs and Douglas. His orchestra became familiar to radio listeners of 'Morning Music', 'Music While You Work' and 'Workers' Playtime'.

The Palace Coliseum (henceforth referred to as the Coliseum) re-opened on 10th June with the promise that stars of stage and screen had been booked, and a guarantee of 'quick-fire variety'. However, for those more concerned with physical fitness than entertainment, Mr. J. Hollywell, 'physical culture and training expert, began his seasonal classes, which, during the years before the war, attracted as many as two hundred brave souls undertaking fitness training on the foreshore. There were Bathing Beauty prizes each week and the opportunity to compete for the title of Manxland's Bathing Beauty at the end of the season.

One of the first celebrities to top the bill in the 'Star Varieties' on his Douglas debut was Hutch,* singer and pianist, with his dark, velvety voice and a 'lazy sophistication' not unlike Nat 'King' Cole, a mildly Jazzy piano style and a huge reputation as a West End cabaret star. Once known as 'High Society's Favourite Gigolo', the 'toast of London' was no longer the sleek 'beautiful black god' of the pre-war years, for his good looks were ravaged by excessive drinking. The local newspapers are short on details of his programme, but 'the sentimental songster *de luxe*' sang favourite songs 'old and new', graciously acquiesced to many requests for encores and surely performed his greatest hit '*These Foolish Things*'. Unsurprisingly, Hutch was retained for a second week. The supporting acts included Billy 'Mirthquake' Matchett, 'who set the house a-giggling in seconds', and Madrigal, assisted by Joyce, who played various musical instruments whilst perched precariously on a unicycle ('pass me the saxophone, love, before I fall off!'). The Hamilton Sisters tap-danced with zest and Frank Marx and Iris drew great applause with their novelty juggling act.

*Leslie Arthur Julien Hutchinson, born 1900 in Grenada of mixed parentage. Although he enjoyed the high life, he nevertheless suffered a certain amount of racial prejudice, and is now viewed as a trail blazer for black entertainers. A relentless social climber, his rise was spectacular – he was one of the highest paid stars of the 1930s and was said to have earned some £17,500 per week - but so was his fall and descent into obscurity as a holiday camp entertainer. At his death his estate was worth a mere £20,000 out of the millions he had earned. He was reputedly bi-sexual and his rumoured affairs with Edwina Mountbatten, Cole Porter and Ivor Novello, Tallulah Bankhead and Merle Oberon gave him an unwelcome notoriety. He was a favourite of the Prince of Wales, and one of the first stars to volunteer to entertain troops during the war, for which he received no recognition.

'Good evening, cads, your better selves are with you once again!' announced the Western Brothers,* a top-line act and all 'mockery and monocles'. Attired in full evening dress with languid upper-class drawls, they were the epitome of 'the old school tie brigade' and snob-ridden caddishness, well-known from the pre-war radio shows Cad's College and Cad's Club - motto: 'ad sum ard labour'. Their songs probably included *Play the Game*, *You Cads*, *You Can't Take the Breed from the British* and the wartime hit *Lord Haw Haw*, *the Humbug from Hamburg*. Perhaps they also sang their pre-war hit songs *We're Frightfully BBC* and *Keeping Up the Old Traditions*, and some of their duologues with piano accompaniment - Flanders and Swann with 'a studied air of bored cynicism', but without the political satire - including *We never pour vinegar over our chips*. They invariably departed the stage with their familiar sign-off: 'Look after yourselves, cads, there are very few of us left!' The supporting acts included Mackenzie Reid and Dorothy, accordion wizardry, the ventriloquist Raymond Smith and his 'boozem pal' Mr. Dummy Swallow, Walcott's Marionettes, Ray and B'nay, 'charming girl *danseurs*' and Billy Rolls, acrobatic dancer.

* London-born Alfred and George were actually second cousins. Originally known as The Perfectly Polite Pair, they developed into the Western Brothers with their 'all a bit Park Lane and Poonah' style. Music hall and radio stars popular from the 30s to the 50s. Britain after WWII had little need of old school ties, and though they continued to appear on the bills with the likes of Rawicz and Landauer, Larry Adler, Elsie and Doris Walters (radio's Gert and Daisy), the young Julie Andrews and comedienne Joyce

'George, don't do that' Grenfell at the major seaside resorts, and in radio's *Workers' Playtime* and *Blackpool Night* from Blackpool, they gradually became unfashionable. The sly lampooning of upper-class twits was no longer 'cool'.

'The master of patter and parodies', Max Bacon* was a chubby, larger-than-life musician, comedian and character-actor - he looked a bit like Stubby Kaye - known as 'Cohen the Crooner' or 'The Crosby of Mile End'. He was one of a distinguished line of Jewish East End music hall stars, who included Bud Flanagan and Issy Bonn, and developed a pseudo middle-European Yiddish accent with which to tell Jewish versions of familiar nursely rhymes and fairy stories. His straight-faced portrayal of cockney stereotypes, with words mispronounced in a manner worthy of Stanley Unwin, was a highlight of his act, as were songs such as *Mr Holz, Please Sing with More Schmaltz*.

* Max Bacon (1904-70) was born in London, although his father was from Katowice. He enjoyed an early career as a drummer in the 1920s, and a long association as a drummer with Bert Ambrose's orchestra, during which time he became a comedian by accident after he was given a spot with a band singing a song in a parody of the Jewish popular style. His film, radio, television and stage career lasted from the mid-1930s until the late 1960s. He appeared regularly on *Workers' Playtime* and appeared in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* in 1968.

Not all the acts were top of the bill big names. Amongst the supporting turns to appear at the Coliseum were the Badminton champions Billy Cooke and George Mansfield, with a comedy demonstration of 'how we would all like to play Badminton' entitled 'Thrilling Badminton'. Banda and Vicky introduced 'a breath of the Orient' into Douglas with their juggling act, and Elva and Mark Sheridan* - Elva Ledson, comedienne, and Mark Sheridan, the son of the music hall artist Mark Sheridan of *I do like to be beside the seaside* fame - brought a whiff of traditional seaside concert parties to the stage. Tubby Turner, catch-phrase 'Hif hit's ho kay with you hit's ho kay with me', a good, solid variety turn, if not a number one, once boasted that 'I played everywhere from Hutton-le Hole to the London Palladium'. His famous, much-imitated deckchair routine during which he attempted to put it up several times, ended when he flung it across the stage in frustration whereupon the deckchair landed perfectly and ready to sit in. A touch of glamour was brought to the Coliseum with four shapely young ladies called The Society Four.

* Mark Sheridan Jr. died in 1946, but Elva's career flourished into the 1950s with other partners; she later replaced Enoch of *Happidrome* fame and became She-noch!)

Liverpool-born, 'and proud of it', Beryl Orde, was a brilliant mimic or 'impressioniste' with a long career in every branch of the entertainment business. In 1943 she had starred with Jack Warner in the film *The Dummy Talks* about the murder of a ventriloquist. 'The radio comedy girl with a voice', Bertha Willmott, actress, singer and comedienne, was familiar from her appearance as the singer in the morale-boosting 1943 film *Millions Like Us* during which she sang *Just Like the Ivy* and *Waiting at the Church* in a canteen scene that evoked the popular radio show *Workers' Playtime*. She would continue to sing the songs she made famous during the war well into the 1950s and might even have been dubbed the East End of London's Gracie Fields. Albert Whelan, the versatile, debonair Australian singer, novelty dancer, mimic, raconteur, pianist and violinist

had been popular in Britain long before WWI. His was a man-about-town 'toff' *persona*, and, immaculately dressed in bow tie, top hat and tails, his act largely consisted of elegantly removing his gloves, hat, scarf, gloves and top-coat and equally painstakingly donning them again. He was one of the first entertainers to adopt a 'signature tune': he whistled Vollstedt's waltz from *The Jolly Brothers* as he appeared on stage; his best-remembered song was *Show Me the Way to go Home*. His act was almost impossible to describe; he had few, if any, imitators.

Billy Russell, billed as 'The Son of Toil', was a Black Country comedian, whose stage *persona* was a grumbling old navvy, complete with pipe and drooping moustache, hobnail boots, collarless shirt and moleskin trousers secured below the knee with string, a character apparently based on the World War I cartoon character 'Old Bill'. His opening song was invariably *On Behalf of the Working Classes*, and in fact he maintained that he got most of his best material from pub tap rooms. He was an unashamed scene-stealer and the scourge of hecklers. Concerning Manchester he quipped: 'You awake every morning to the sound of birds coughing'; and concerning his house: 'Every time they pull the chain next door, they empty our bath'. In a seventy-year career he told countless stories about 'the mother-in-law' and 'the wife' that were never offensive or 'blue' and regarded Music Hall as the best and oldest entertainment in the world.

Carroll Levis, the Canadian talent scout, compere, impresario, radio and television personality, and the man who brought the talent show to Britain brought his Services Show* to Douglas in June. Levis was a great entertainer in his own right and a brilliant impressionist of such stars as Bing Crosby, Nat 'King' Cole and Dean Martin. He was also a fine comedian with impeccable timing so that when he mimed to a gramophone, he allowed just enough time to stroll to the theatre bar during the instrumental sections and stroll back in time to pick up the song! His Services Show opened on 10th June, once nightly, and twice nightly from 15th July. Among the ever-changing supporting acts were Steffanis' Silver Songsters boys choir dressed in their familiar Tyrolean *Tracht*.

* The BBC had broadcast a programme showcasing new amateur talent before the war, which became *The Carroll Levis Discovery Show* in the 1950s and the forerunner of *Opportunity Knocks*. Helen Shapiro was one of his discoveries and on Sunday 15th February 1959 three lads from Liverpool appeared in a show at the Hippodrome Theatre, Arwick, Manchester, as The Quarrymen!

Among the quick-fire variety shows in July were Harry Lester and his Hayseeds, a comedy band act and a 'spoof' of Big Bill Campbell and his Rocky Mountaineers, up for the day from an American farm. Lester had earned his craft in circuses and at rodeos and brought this to bear in his show *Your Country Cousins*, which was full of 'good music and antics' according to the reviews, with characters such as Goofus and a dwarf. Among their most popular songs were *Bear Cat Mountain Girl*, *Our Hometown Mountain Home* and *The Music Goes Round and Round*. The Finale brought the house down with the entire company singing *Lili Marlene*. Douglas favourite Walter Niblo appeared as the supporting comedian. Zuider Zee Macari* and his Dutch Accordion Serenaders were a popular broadcasting 'costume' show band from the early 1930s. The Dutch

persona is something of a mystery, although the band always dressed in an all-purpose pantomime style *Klederdracht* - Dutch national costume - including Volendam hats and clogs and performed in front of a picturesque backcloth of windmills and dykes. The local newspapers made much of the fact that Macari would be playing his £2,000 wonder organ.

* Liverpool-born Anthony Macari came from a circus background and was a phenomenal accordionist who developed an accordion double act with his brother which lasted for fifteen years. 'Costume' bands were enormously popular in the 1930s - 50s and some of the most famous appeared in Douglas: Bora Minevitcvh and his Harmonica Rascals and Felix Mendelssohn and his Hawaiian Serenaders to name just two.

Koringa, 'The only Female Fakir in the World', a *magicienne* with wild, Afro-styled hair and flamboyant stage presence, who during her years with the Mills Brothers Circus often appeared with four alluring female assistants and five crocodiles, was one of the most exotic artistes ever to appear in Douglas.* On the same 'Colossal Variety Bill' were the famous comedy pair the O'Gorman Brothers, 'Irish and proud of it' the masters of pantomime and exponents of fast-moving anarchic crazy shows.* In July Cingalee and his Mystery Makers mystified audiences as they had before the war. Also appearing was Delya, BBC Radio's Personality Girl from *Music Hall*, a peak listening show broadcast every week from 1932, and featuring real music hall veterans such as Gus Elen and George Robey together with popular radio stars such as Sandy Powell, Percy Edwards and Ted Ray. Her vocal range, from soprano to bass, was extraordinary; she wrote Ronnie Ronald's hit song *If I Were a Blackbird*.

* See Vanessa Toulmin, *Koringa: From Biknar to Blackpool* in *Cabinet*, issue 26 (*Magic*) 2007.

* Dave and Joe O'Gorman, ENSA, toured with *The Boys of the BBC* and *Hello Playmates* with Arthur Askey.

And now for something more elevating

The revival of the Sunday Celebrity Concerts (formerly Sunday Sacred Concerts) began on Sunday 16th June under the baton of Joseph Muscant and an augmented orchestra of thirty-five players from the Palace Ballroom, the Coliseum and the Gaiety Theatre bands, known as the Palace Coliseum Symphony Orchestra, or the Palace Grand Orchestra. Amongst the first guest artists were Billy Reid, originally the leader of the London Piano-Accordion Band and his resident singer the Welsh songstress Dorothy Squires – 'Billy could write the songs and Dot could sing'em'.* Later in the series the celebrated violinist Alfredo Campoli, piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer and the Albert Sandler Trio, well-known from radio's *Grand Hotel*, broadcast from the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne. Their elegant palm court style evening of waltzes, foxtrots, the Military Two-steps and the Progressive Barn Dance woven together with light classical pieces selected from shows such as *The Desert Song*, Strauss waltzes, gypsy melodies and violin solos was the perfect Sunday musical cocktail.

* Their partnership ended when she married the young, and as yet little-known actor, named Roger Moore in 1953.

The baritone George Baker enjoyed a fifty-three-year career and appeared on thousands of Gilbert & Sullivan recordings between 1917 and 1962. He made some of the earliest children's records, and from 1944 until 1947 was the BBC's Overseas Music Director. Perhaps he sang that old favourite *The Departure of the Troopship*. The pianist Mark Hambourg, who had appeared in Douglas regularly before the war, received a warm welcome at his first post-war recital.

On Sunday 7th July 'Stars of the Opera' from Sadler's Wells appeared at the Coliseum including James Johnson, tenor, the Australian soprano Vera Terry and John Dethik, bass, who sang excerpts from Puccini's *La Boheme*, *Butterfly* and *Tosca*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, *Casta diva* from Bellini's *Norma* and *Caro nome* from Verdi's *Rigoletto*. The most popular duet of the recital was encored twice: Offenbach's *The Bold Gendarmes*. Joseph Muscant conducting the Palace Grand Orchestra completed the programme with a selection from Rossini's *William Tell* and Lehár's *The Merry Widow*.

Richard Tauber is coming

On Sunday July 14th Richard Tauber made his one and only appearance in Douglas prior to his New York debut in Lehár's *Land of Smiles*.* Tauber's enormous prestige and fame preceded him, and by a happy coincidence the Romantic spy drama *Lisbon Story*, set in Paris and Lisbon during the war, in which he appeared in a cameo role was shown at the Plaza Cinema that month. A huge audience of 3,000 was packed in, and 'something of the former glamour and glory of the Palace was recaptured' as a great hush fell on the hall at the start of each song. His performance was enthralling. 'What an artiste! And what singing!' declared the reviewer; 'the flawless tones . . . cast a spell' as he 'loll'd, seemingly nonchalantly, against the piano. His programme included Handel's *Largo*, *Ave Maria* (either Schubert or Gounod), arias and songs from Lehár's *Gypsy Love*, Romberg's tale of Schubert's life, *Blossom Time* and songs by Strauss and Schubert. He generously acceded to a number of encores which surely included *You Are My Heart's Delight*, which he estimated he had sung over one thousand times in his career. Joseph Muscant and the Palace Orchestra contributed a selection of short orchestral pieces.

* *Land of Smiles* was renamed *Yours is my Heart* for the American production, and due to the execrable adaption of the book and music was a rare 'flop' which closed after three disastrous weeks. Broadway inflicted a similar fate on Verdi's *Aida* some years later when it was adapted as *My Darlin' Aida*.

Two weeks later, on Sunday 28th July, it was a young usherette who charmed the Coliseum audience, for in addition to the great violinist Alfredo Campoli and the unique Irish singer Delya, the concert marked the debut of 'Manxland's Star in the Making', eighteen-year-old singer Miss Elsie Jackson, who confidently stepped onto the stage to perform before an audience of three thousand. A slim figure dressed in pale blue, and exhibiting a natural stage presence and self-composure, she completely won over the audience who gave her a terrific reception. In the best

tradition of the Sunday concerts the evening had something for everybody. Campoli played the *Andante and Finale* from Mendelssohn's violin concerto followed by three shorter pieces by Bach, Hubay and Paganini-Kreisler. The orchestra began with Suppé's overture *Pique Dame* and later contributed a movement from the *Petit Suite de Concert* of Coleridge-Taylor, Henry Hall's medley of popular romantic songs, *Sweethearts of Yesterday*, Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* no. 1 and selections from *The Great Waltz* and Friml's *The Vagabond King*. Elsie Jackson,* the girl with 'Golden Hair and a Golden Voice,' sang *The Pipes of Pan* from Lionel Monckton's *The Arcadians*, *One Fine Day* from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and, as a well-deserved encore, Eric Coates' *Birdsong at Eventide*. In a fairy-tale lucky break, she had an amazing stroke of good fortune when she was discovered by the Polish tenor Herman Simberg whilst working as a member of the Coliseum staff. She had asked for his autograph, was subsequently auditioned by him, and impressed him with her 'magnificent, sweet bird-like voice and captivating charm'. He hoped that 'the Island would do everything possible to help this girl develop her splendid voice'. Although her voice was limited in power, he recognised her mature dramatic sense, and felt that her voice could be trained. He recommended that, if the funds could be raised, she should study in London with the possibility of further study in Italy and promised to introduce her to 'the right people'. A great future was predicted for her. In November that year she appeared at a British Legion Concert at the Villa Marina with the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society conducted by Kathleen Rydings.

* Elsie Jackson, not to be confused with the Belfast-born soprano of the same name who broadcast during the 1920s and 30s, was the daughter of Mr and Mrs Stanley Jackson of 12, Ballabrookie Way, Douglas, and was trained by Mrs R. H. Bridson - formerly May Clague, 'Our May', one of the Island's best-loved singers - who had herself been discovered as a young singer. Elsie was a prize-winner at the Manx Musical Festivals of 1940 and 1941 and took part in a Salvation Army Music Festival in February 1945, giving a performance described in a review as '... a real musical treat'. In December 1945 she was a vocal competitor in the Christian Street Methodist Eisteddfod for girls under twenty years of age. On January 23rd 1948 she appeared at the Pavilion, Torquay, in the pantomime *Dick Wittington*. She took dancing lessons at the Madame Vera Garbutt School of Dancing in Brighton and appeared in many productions in the South of England. She disappears from the local newspapers after 1948. Perhaps she enjoyed a successful career in musical theatre and concert appearances in Britain. See *Isle of Man Times* 27.7.46 for a photograph and review.

The August Sunday Celebrity Concerts continued to attract large audiences to hear some of the finest concert artistes. Early in the month Cyril Smith, piano,* with a fine reputation in Romantic and twentieth century repertoire, played pieces by Liszt, Chopin and Albeniz. The reviewer remarked on the 'sheer brilliance of his performance'. James Johnson, tenor, from Sadler's Wells, sang arias from *Carmen*, *Rigoletto*, *La Boheme* and Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding*, and the orchestra played a Schubert selection and medley of English songs entitled *This England*. Later in the month J. H. Squire, 'cello, the founder of the Celeste Octet,* the dramatic soprano Eva Turner, and the imposing figure of the charismatic New Zealand operatic bass Oscar Natzke,* whose 'glorious, deep bass voice' was heard regularly at Covent Garden before the war, all drew enthusiastic audiences. He had been a star of the musical revue *Meet the Navy*, which toured British cities in 1944 and 45, and the 1946 film adaptation, in which he portrayed a fisherman. Gwen Catley, the renowned *coloratura* soprano with a pure, bell-like voice, was a household

name through hundreds of radio broadcasts. She was equally at home in opera, operetta and musical theatre, and was famed for her singing of *Caro nome* from Verdi's *Rigoletto* in Jack Hylton's revue *Hi-de-Hi* during the war.

* Cyril Smith began to perform piano duets with his wife Phyllis Sellick after they combined to take part in ENSA concerts during the war having both previously pursued solo careers. In 1956 he suffered a stroke which affected his left arm, and thence forward they performed their own skilful arrangements for three hands of many popular pieces. Malcolm Arnold composed his concerto for two pianos (three hands) op. 104 for them.

* John Henry Squire ran away to sea at the age of twelve and became a young military bandsman, as both a cornettist and 'cellist. He later joined the Royal Marines and saw action during the Boxer Rebellion and the Boer War. He purchased his discharge for £12 in 1906, and in 1913 formed his famous Celeste Octet. He is credited as 'the man who brought Jazz to England', and his octet the first such ensemble to broadcast on all the BBC main stations and to make a gramophone record.

* He later changed the spelling of his name to Naztka believing it would be easier to pronounce. A remarkable singer whose voice would have matured into one of the world's great operatic basses had he not died tragically on stage at the age of thirty-nine.)

George Formby, recently voted most popular man in Russia after Stalin, made a personal appearance - literally a flying visit by a specially chartered plane - for one night only on Sunday 11th August when he was also appearing in Blackpool. The audience, almost frantic with delight, whistled along with all his songs. The following day two old-time music hall acts, Tommy Jover & Co., circus-inspired clowning burlesque acrobats who were popular for over five decades, and The Sherry Brothers - truly all from one remarkable music hall family - who danced, sang and played musical instruments, often at the same time. Both acts appeared for the week, although it is possible that only 'Captain and Mate', Peter and Sam Sherry from the Sherry Brothers, appeared in Douglas that season.

Star maker Carroll Levis and his Discovery Show - 'We take the unknown of today and turn them into the stars of tomorrow' - returned to Douglas on the 26th for a week, with new contestants including three singers, a *siffleur*, a comic, a fleet-footed young dancer from Darlington and a male Carmen Miranda. The compere was Bob Andrews 'who kept the show moving along nicely', and the supporting acts included 'old-timers' the Musical Elliotts, with a concertina, musical glasses and drumming act of 'pep and personality', 'Woman-hater' Jack Stocks, 'laugh-raiser' and 'the ancient' Bert Wright and his 'highly entertaining comedy juggling whatnot'. Several local hopefuls also took part during the week and entertained the audiences with monologues, songs and accordions.

Mr. A. A. Shenburn, the new owner of the newly renovated Majestic Hotel, presented a 'new type of dinner, dance and floor show' from July 1st. 'A bold enterprise which merits success' featured dance band leaders Sid Roy and his Famous 16 Lyricals together with Harry Roy's Tiger Ragamuffins who provided the dance music. The floor show in The Chrystal Bowl featured The Five Majestic Lovelies, 'easy on the eye' graceful

dancers', comedians Bijou and Freda, 'two cheerful Scottish lassies', breezy compere Eddie Hooper and Eva May Wong, * plate spinner, acrobat and contortionist whose 'brilliant balancing act' kept audiences on the edge of their seats.

* Eva May Wong was Variety's petite, alluring, doe-eyed, perpetual Peter Pan (her real age was one of the best-kept secrets in showbusiness.) She appeared at the London Palladium in 1947 in front of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret in a huge cast that included Laurel and Hardy, Tommy Trinder, the Crazy Gang, Gracie Fields, Wilson, Kepple and Betty, Billy Russell, Norman Evans and the ventriloquist Bobby Kimber.)

The Villa Marina

The New Year at the Villa Marina began with an 'Old-Tyme Evening' in January featuring the Lancers, Maxina, Barn Dance and the Two-step, with Steve Lahmers augmented band, followed by a Grand Gymnastic and Variety Show with guest celebrity Miss Paula Barker of Grimsby, 'Britain's Most Perfect Woman of 1945', together with the Wanderer's Male Voice Choir and displays by the Doris Lowthian School of Dancing. On Easter Saturday there was a Grand Concert with guest artistes Clive Richardson and Tony Lowry, pianos, 'four hands in harmony', and Elena Danieli, soprano. Richardson was the composer of charming light orchestra pieces such as *Beachcomber*, *Holiday Spirit* and *Melody on the Move*, who teamed up with Tony Lowry, an arranger for Henry Hall, during the war to form a successful touring duo which endured into the 1950s.

In April a new manager was appointed, Sydney A. Perry, who soon revealed the names of some of the concert and variety artistes that would be appearing during the forthcoming season. These included Tommy Trinder, Charlie Kunz, Stanley Holloway, Dame Myra Hess at a Sunday Celebrity Recital, and the biggest draw of all, Joe Loss and his orchestra in July. The Villa Marina Gardens were initially open during the mornings but were closed between May 3rd and June 8th for a pre-season tidy up. The summer season opened officially on Whit-Saturday 8th June with a Grand Victory Ball. Hector Davis and his BBC Ballroom Orchestra played for dancing in the Royal Hall and Douglas Brass Band at 3.00 pm each afternoon in the Gardens. Mid-season the 'costume band, Nat Younkman and his Famous Czardas Band of seventeen players attired in Hungarian costumes gave bright and colourful programmes in the Gardens with singers Ludmilla, soprano, and Norman Melville, tenor. Three thousand people often attended these concerts, the programmes of which changed each day.

On Sunday 9th June the popular Sunday Celebrity Concerts began with the appearance of the great English dramatic soprano Eva Turner. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra gave two concerts on the 11th and 12th July, conducted by Enrique Jorda - conductor of the Madrid Symphony Orchestra from 1940 until 1945 - with Julius Isserlis, piano, a musician whose career was blighted by anti-Semitism in both Russia and Vienna. At the time of his Douglas concert he was re-building his career in London by teaching, broadcasting and giving recitals. The first programme included Berlioz' overture *Carnival Romain*, Turina's *Danzas Fantasticus*, Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto and Beethoven's 7th

symphony. The second programme opened with Wagner's *Mastersingers* overture and included da Falla's Suite *The Three-Cornered Hat*, Mendelssohn's violin concerto played by David Wise, the leader of the orchestra, and Tchaikovsky's 5th symphony.

The Sunday Celebrity Concert on June 16th was given by the Polish piano virtuoso Jan Smeterlin making his Douglas debut and highly regarded for his interpretations of Chopin, Mozart, Brahms and Debussy. His programme included Mozart's sonata K. 332, Brahms' *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, five Chopin pieces including the *Ballade* in G minor and the *Fantasia-Impromptu* in C sharp minor, colourful pieces by Albeniz and Debussy, and, as an encore, Guarnieri's *Brazilian Dance*. Other celebrity artistes that season included the Polish *basso profundo* Marian Nowakowski, hailed as 'the new Chaliapin', who had made his first London appearance only two years earlier. His rich, dark-hued, cavernous voice had a powerful low register which contrasted with the walnut tones of his high baritone register. The local newspapers gave few details of his programme, but he probably included *The People Who Walk in Darkness* from *Messiah* and either the *Eriskay Love Lilt* or *Annie Laurie*, both of which he recorded. Five encores were demanded of him including 'a rousing Polish marching song' which was the highlight of the evening. Among the instrumentalists was the concert violinist Marie Wilson, the English harpist Gwendolen Mason, who had played before Queen Victoria and had been a professor of Harp at the Royal Academy of Music, the 'cellist Mannucci and the pianist Shulamith Shafir, recognised as a superb interpreter of Beethoven and Chopin, and associated with the concertos of Schumann, Grieg, Tchaikovsky and Bliss's 1938 concerto. She was a gentle, self-effacing artiste who captivated audiences from the 1940s-1960s through her radio, television and Promenade Concert appearances.

The baritone Robert Easton, a larger-than-life character, was well known in the concert hall and on the operatic stage particularly in demanding Wagnerian roles, Leila Finneberg, soprano, and Kyra Vane, the Russian-born English soprano with a voice of uncommon beauty, whose chequered career encompassed revue, variety, operetta and opera, were all well-received. The popular broadcasting soprano Margaret Eaves, sang *When Big Ben Chimes* and Moura Lympany, one of Britain's most popular concert pianists, whose career lasted from her debut in 1929 into the 1980s, appeared at a Sunday afternoon recital on 7th July before an audience of three hundred, and performed pieces by Schumann, Chopin, Debussy and Liszt.

The Variety Stars

On the evening of July 16th Jack 'Blue pencil!' Warner* stepped onto the stage in the Royal Hall as the star of a show devised by Charles Shadwell, a household name in the 1930s, a raconteur with an infectious laugh and Musical Director of the BBC Variety Orchestra. The full supporting company included Leslie Jeffries, John Turner, tenor, Patricia Davies, soprano, Roy Stevens, 'the BBC Whispering Pianist' and local pianist Emily Christian LRAM as the official accompanist. No doubt his catch phrases 'not Blue Pencil likely', referring to censorship during the war, and 'Mind my bike!' were much imitated in the days following his appearance as they were very familiar from the BBC Radio's wartime show the *Garrison*

Theatre. He made his name during the late 1920s and 1930s in music hall in a double act called Warner and Darnell, but when that act broke up he developed a solo act specialising in dialect comedy monologues such as *Frank and his Tank*, *A Fumper and a Flattener of Fevers* and *A Bunker-Up o' Rat- 'oles'*, which contains the memorable lines: 'I'm a bloke wot bungs up rat-'oles, I am reely; I'm a rat-'ole bunker upper too an' all'. From *The Chap Who Chops the Chillis* comes the tongue-twister: 'He's the chap who chops the chillis for the chutney; he's the chutney chilli chopper's choice for champ'. A popular part of his turn were the letters, supposedly from his 'bruvver' Sid, which he read out loud, which became famous for their P.S. jokes. He also enjoyed great success impersonating Max Miller impersonating Maurice Chevalier.*

* Jack Warner (1895-1981), real name Horace Waters and brother of Elsie and Doris Waters, became a household name when he starred as Joe Huggett in the 1947 comedy film *Holiday Camp*, which introduced audiences to the endearing Huggett family. It was followed by three further 'Huggett' sequels and a radio comedy show, *Meet the Huggetts*, with Kathleen Harrison and a young Petula Clark as his wife and daughter. His career received a considerable boost post war after he played PC George Dixon in *The Blue Lamp*, during which he was famously shot dead by a thug played by the young Dirk Bogarde, and the long-running TV series *Dixon* ('Good evening all') of *Dock Green* written by Ted Willis, whose 432 episodes ran from 1955 until 1976, with its iconic introductory tune, *An Ordinary Copper*, composed by Jeff Darnell and played by Tommy Reilly, harmonica.

* A fair idea of his stage act can be seen in the 1943 film *The Dummy Talks* which also starred Beryl Orde and Ivy Benson.

In July Clay Keyes of 'Penny on the Drum' fame headed a bright and breezy Sunday evening light music concert, during which he interpolated his twenty-minute turn based on his asking the audience questions which, if they failed to answer correctly, resulted in a forfeit of one penny piece left on various drums placed at the exits. The collections were donated to the British Legion. Keyes was 'one of the world's worst comedians',* an ex-juggler with the Crazy Gang and one half of the quickfire early cross-talk act Haver and Lee. Later he became the host, deviser and writer of the popular Forces Programme variety show *The Old Town Hall* - 1941-45 - from which the quiz Penny on the Drum evolved. The supporting acts included Kyra Vane, Billy Thorburn, radio's ace pianist, and a xylophone duo. Later that month Forsythe, Seamon and Farrell, a guy and two girls, billed as 'BBC's Famous American Trio', entertained with their popular singing, dancing and comedy touring, and broadcasting and stage act.

* See Dennis Gifford, *The Golden Age of Radio*, Batsford, 1985, and Stanley Holloway's song *Please Put a Penny on the Drum*: 'Will you please put a penny on the drum, Will you please put a penny on the drum; We only want a tanner to buy a new pianna, So will you please put a penny on the drum'.

The King of Rhythm comes to town . . . the 'coLOSSal' arrival of Joe Loss and his orchestra

Joe Loss arrived in Douglas for the first time on Thursday 24th June and was welcomed by a reception in the Villa Marina Reading Room consisting of the Manager S. A. Perry and members of Douglas Town Council. The following day, Friday 25th June, Tynwald Day, Joe Loss and his orchestra

made their first appearance on stage in the Royal Hall in front of a crowd numbering two and a half thousand. The level of excitement and anticipation was such that nearly three hundred couples swarmed onto the floor ready to dance a few minutes before his appearance, immaculately dressed as always in his trademark white tie and tails, at 8.30 pm. The date should be recognised as one of the most significant in the story of the entertainment industry on the Island, for it marked the start of ten magnificent seasons when much of the pre-war atmosphere was re-captured, and Douglas was once again able to hold its head high among the most successful post-war summer resorts.

It was the most auspicious beginning of an eleven-week engagement, taking over from Hector Davies and his band in the ballroom. Supported by his current singers Elizabeth 'Betty' Batey, a petite Geordie lass from South Shields who sang the lighter, infectiously gay songs, and was the only lady member of the orchestra; Welsh baritone Howard Jones, who would remain with Joe Loss until embarking on a solo career in 1955, and 'silver-voiced' tenor Pat MacCormack. Joe Loss and his music appealed to all ages and every seat in the ballroom and balconies was taken. The local newspapers were fulsome in their praise: every member of the orchestra was 'an artiste in their own right'; this was 'the best dance music it is possible to secure'; he is the 'consummate showman and his command of the band is much admired'; 'a twist of his hands, a flick of the baton, and he has the orchestra just where he wants it' and 'those just listening watched 'as if hypnotised'. The atmosphere of those first appearances was perfectly caught by Frieda Standen in her reminiscences *Those Were the Days*, when she recalled standing next to the Villa Marina stage and the orchestra began to play: '. . . it was something I will never forget - the wonderful sound of all the wind instruments: loud and overwhelming and marvellous'.

On the following Sunday evening Joe Loss presented a two-hour concert programme which attracted such a large crowd that hundreds were turned away at the doors. Pat MacCormack sang popular Irish ballads and opera extracts, and pianist Bill McGuffie, who had developed a very individual style of playing due to the loss of a finger in a childhood accident, played Chopin's *Fantasia Impromptu*. The orchestra - Dance Band or Swing Band, 'call it what you like' - played *Woodchopper's Ball*, *Skyliner*, *Fishmarket* and *American Patrol*; as the *Isle of Man Times* critic put it: 'a lot of "hot" numbers which may have appealed mainly to "the younger element"'. The evening ended with the National Anthem* 'played with a fine dignity'. The same commentator concluded: 'This writer is one who loathes this popular class of music but takes joy in seeing the way it is presented'.

* Interestingly, Joe Loss wrote an open letter to the *Mona's Herald* dated 23th July asking for guidance as to which of two tunes was the official Manx National Anthem: *Land of Our Birth* or *Ellan Vannin*, 'as I dare not offend any section of the local community by playing either tune at the moment . . .' The response, delivered with all the unanswerable authority of an Old Testament prophet, came from William Cubbon, MA, journalist, historian, librarian and Director of the Manx Museum, and 'the highest living authority on Manx subjects': 'There is only one Manx National Anthem, and there cannot possibly be any controversy or dispute about it at all . . . W. H. Gill's stirring

work, first published in 1907 and adapted from a traditional old Manx air *Mylecharaine* . . . has become firmly established through custom by Manx people everywhere as their own national anthem'. See Maurice Powell, *Mr. Joe Loss asks a question*, manxmusic.com.

Joe Loss quickly became an established figure in Island life during the summer months. According to the recollections of the prominent Manx singer Allan Wilcocks,* he rented a house in Stoney Road, Douglas, and was frequently spotted driving a gold coloured Humber 'Super Snipe' - the choice of Prime Minister and Kings - around the Island. On a visit to Ramsey with his wife in July, the couple's verdict on the town: 'very attractive'.

* Conveyed to me during an interview about his musical life on the Island in 2019.

With Joe Loss and his orchestra firmly established in the Royal Hall for dancing, the Sunday Celebrity Concerts also continued to flourish with some of the finest concert artistes of the time performing for large, enthusiastic audiences. Joe Loss and his orchestra, too, sometimes featured in these concerts and occasionally provided the entire programme as did guest bands such as Charles Shadwell and his orchestra in August. The contralto Gladys Ripley, well known for her appearances at all the major English music festivals, for her seasons at Covent Garden and most recently for her voice-over role of Mrs Cibber in the film *The Great Mr. Handel*, and the Welsh concert and operatic tenor Parry Jones appeared with the Serbian virtuoso violinist Yovanovitch Bratza on 21st June. The following Sunday Albert Sammons,* the English violinist closely associated with the music of English composers, especially Elgar, gave a celebrity recital in the afternoon.

* Albert Sammons first performed the Elgar violin concerto in 1914 and subsequently played it over one hundred times, and the Delius concerto the following year. In 1916 he gave the first UK performance of Debussy's violin sonata. During the war he undertook a busy schedule of touring throughout England by train and appearing at the famous national Gallery concerts in London. Sadly, the onset of Parkinson's disease in 1948 curtailed his public appearances. Sir Adrian Boult said of him: 'he was a great musician in every sense of the word'.

Throughout August large crowds continued to flock to the Villa Marina and his guest artistes such as the pianist Bill McGuffie who played the *Warsaw Concerto* on one occasion and Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* on another, and the violinist Philip Silverstone who won an ovation for his rendering of *Ave Maria*. On Sunday the 18th the Ukrainian-born pianist and composer Leff Pouishnoff, highly regarded in Romantic piano repertoire, gave a fine afternoon recital including Haydn's rarely-heard *Variations in F minor*, an even rarer arrangement of an organ concerto by Wilhelm Friedeman Bach, Schumann's *Carnival*, three popular Chopin pieces and Liszt's dazzling *tour-de-force* the *Mephisto Waltz*. He was also the accompanist for the lyric tenor Frank Titterton, well known throughout England on the 'Messiah' circuit, who sang arias by Puccini and *Onaway, Awake, Beloved* from *Hiawatha*. There were 'Full House' boards outside the Villa Marina 'for the umpteenth time' that season when the soprano Grace Nevern, 'the loveliest voice heard in Douglas for many a day', appeared at a Sunday concert later that month and sang a

selection of Negro Spirituals including *Oh What a Beautiful City*, Schubert lieder, a taxing aria by Meyerbeer and popular old-time ballads and songs including *Cherry Ripe*. Appearing with her was the bass-baritone Frank Phillips, a familiar voice as a newsreader on BBC radio, and the first presenter to announce his name before reading the news. The Jan Berenska Trio* played selections in a relaxing 'palm court' style, and Carroll Gibbons, the popular pianist and dance band leader, whose 'elegant artistry' gave the impression that he was merely 'toying with the piano', improvised a piece based on just four notes given to him by the audience.

* Born Frederick Charles Bye at Seaham Harbour, County Durham, Jan Berenska was an enormously talented violinist, 'cellist and pianist; he and brother Charles once performed the Brahms Double Concerto for violin and 'cello with the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra under Adrian Boult. A bandleader from the heyday of British dance bands, he was famous for his weekly broadcasts from the Royal Pump Room Tea Room in Leamington Spa and the composer and arranger of several pieces of light music including *Riviera* and *Taps in Tempo*.

On Sunday 25th Joe Loss and his orchestra presented an evening's entire programme entitled 'Light Music in the Modern Style' with music both 'Blue' and 'Hot' in a kind of concert version of a 'Jam Session'. The duet *Good, Good, Good* sung by Betty Batey and Howard Jones was voted the hit of the evening, with *Do You Love Me* from the film of the same name, sung by Pat MacCormac, coming a close second. Eight Hands in Accord (three pianos and four players) became a showcase for the talents of Bill McGuffie, Bob Layzell, Fred Evans and Danny Miller.

Joe Loss and his wife were present when Miss Ramsey of 1946 (Miss Moira Sayle) was crowned Ramsey's Carnival Queen at the meadow at Brookfield following a parade of children in fancy dress to start the event. Joe Loss later addressed the crowds, and the Lhergy Songsters expressed thanks to all concerned for helping to raise funds for new bed for the Liverpool Cancer Bed Appeal. For the August Bank Holiday Grand Floral Ball, 'Say it with Flowers', the Villa Marina was decorated with blooms specially flown from England, and every lady attending was presented with a carnation. The couples who won the various 'spot dances' received bouquets and an autographed Joe Loss gramophone record.

Tune in and hear Manxland!

The Island featured in no less than ten BBC Radio broadcasts during the first week of September including the Morning Service from St. George's Church and the Sunday Half-Hour at Kirk Braddan for the Forces Overseas Service, introduced by the Lord Bishop and conducted by Noah Moore. Joe Loss was heard from the Villa Marina for listeners to the Northern and Northern Ireland services listeners, and from the Palais de Danse in the series 'Saturday Night at the Palais'. Victor Smythe introduced 'Seaside Nights' from the Gaiety Theatre for the North of England Home Service and 'Northern Music Hall' from the Coliseum. Local singer Norah Moore featured in a broadcast from Blackpool with Toni and the North Pier Orchestra, and the North of England Home Service presented Children's Hour with Lawrence du Garde Peach's play *Castles of England*.

Bartlett and Robertson,* the husband and wife classical piano duettists, were the headline artistes at the Villa Marina on 1st September having just returned from an American tour. Like Rawicz and Landauer their example helped popularise the piano duet genre in Europe and USA in the 1930s and 40s, and like them their performances were noted for the almost uncanny synchronisation between their hands, as if two people were playing as one. The audience 'was enraptured' by their performances of a Bach fugue, Milhaud's *Brazilian Dance* and Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody*. Violoncello soloist Beatrice Clare won enthusiastic applause after she played Goddard's *Angel's Guard Thee*. Leila Finneberg, soprano and Redvers Llewellyn, a major British operatic baritone of his generation, sang arias and songs and the duet *Love is Meant to Make us Glad* from Edward German's *Merry England*. A concert version of the complete *Merrie England* was performed at the Douglas Holiday Camp on 4th September with Harry Pickard conducting the Laureston Choir.

* Such was their prowess that Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson had pieces written for them by Bax, Britten, Berkeley and Martinu and they themselves commissioned a double piano concerto from Bartok who sadly died before work started. They toured extensively to USA, South America, Australia, South Africa and Canada; in 1935-6 they gave over one hundred concerts in Europe and America, gave a recital for Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt and once played before an audience of 35,000 at the Hollywood Bowl in 1940. The couple settled permanently in America in the 1950s.

On 8th September 'Pagan sounds filled the Villa Marina, giving Douglas a South Sea Islands twist' as Felix Mendelssohn and his Hawaiian Serenaders* topped the bill at one of the most popular concerts of the season and helped to brighten up the drab post-war years. His exotic 'costume' band popularised Hawaiian music in Europe in the 1930s and '40s and, as one local newspaper put it, 'there is a strange appeal about primitive music . . .' Felix Mendelssohn was a showman through and through - he always wore a Polynesian garland of flowers to set off his characteristic white suit – and his exuberant charisma made up for the fact that he was one of the few bandleaders who was not an instrumentalist in his own right. The band's signature tune, *Song of the Islands*, set the tone for his shows and songs such as *Hawaiian Love*, *Hawaiian War Chant*, *Moonlight in Waikiki* and *South Sea Sadie* undoubtedly helped audiences float away to their own dream worlds of swaying palms and bronzed South Sea islanders. Kealoha-Life, the only real Polynesian in the band, sang, yodelled and played the guitar, and in support was The Pulu Moe Trio with guitars and other South Sea Island instruments with Louisa Reyes singing a selection of native songs.

* Although London-born, his name really was Felix Mendelssohn, although his claim of ancestry with the German composer Mendelssohn was much-disputed. He filled a niche in the dance band market for a time and appeared in the Radio shows *Variety Band Box* and *Worker's Playtime*, made over one thousand broadcasts and appeared in forty-three films. His star began to dim as the 1940s eased into the 1950s and the band ran into severe financial difficulties. Neither Mendelssohn lived long enough to fulfil their full potential and like his name-sake he died young at the age of forty-one. One wonders if somewhere, forgotten in dusty piles of old programmes, there are traces of such bands as Wolf Mozart and his Salzburg Syncopators or Frank Schubert's Viennese Schnitzel Band!

Smeterlin's second recital that season consisted of Bach organ preludes arranged by Busoni, a Haydn sonata, Schumann's *Carnival* and a Nocturne, two Etudes and the Bb minor Scherzo of Chopin. The concert reviewer B. E. Sargeant, a prominent government official since before World War I, an amateur composer and frequent music critic for the local newspapers, enjoyed the 'brilliancy' of the Bach-Busoni pieces and the Chopin Scherzo, but considered the Haydn sonata to be 'hardly one of the best . . . lacking cohesion . . . and with overpowering sequential *menvetti*'(sic). * Sadly, both recitals attracted meagre audiences.

'The Island's "Loss" '

Joe Loss' farewell week began on Saturday 14th September when members of his orchestra and the Jurby Dance Band took part in an Open Day at Andreas RAF Station in celebration of Battle of Britain Day, and to mark the imminent closure of both RAF Andreas and RAF Jurby. The following day there was a Grand Farewell Ball with modern and old-time dances, which, along with the consistently full houses throughout the season, triumphantly vindicated the policy of Douglas Town Council in bringing such a high-profile British band to Douglas. The choice of music, the high quality of the musicians and the lively personality of Joe Loss had proved to be a winning combination; over 100,000 dancers had flocked to the Royal Hall during the season. Following the dance there took place an informal farewell party in the Villa Marina Café for two hundred invited dignitaries and friends organised by the Park's Committee of Douglas Town Council, during which Joe Loss and members of the orchestra mingled with the guests. A cigarette case was presented to him, a bouquet of carnations to his wife, small gifts to the band's resident vocalists and cufflinks for each musician.

The manager of the Villa Marina, S. A. Perry, thanked the band leader 'for all you have done for Douglas' and announced that Joe Loss and his orchestra would be returning to Douglas in 1947. In his reply Joe Loss confirmed that he had accepted the Council's engagement in Douglas next season as the resident orchestra for an extended period, although he had received many other attractive offers from other resorts: 'I have never met such kindness in any other place, and look forward to next season . . . I shall stop at nothing to make the name of the Island soar to the top and bring this heavenly spot, with its natural beauties, to the notice of everyone'. He paid tribute to his musicians who had been 100% behind his determination to make the season a huge success, and he believed that he was taking home 'a better band than I have ever had before'. Those who heard those words surely felt that the stage was set for a tremendous resurgence of the Island's popularity as a holiday resort of note.

The summer season at the Villa Marina officially ended with a final Sunday Celebrity Concert on the 22nd with Walter Widdup, tenor, Noel Eadie, soprano, Hervey Alan, baritone and an up-and-coming young pianist, Ivey Dickson, who had made her concert debut at the Wigmore Hall, London, as recently as 1940.* There were however two winter celebrity concerts. The first on 14th November featured 'the world's greatest

living dramatic soprano', Australian-born Marjorie Lawrence,* a noted interpreter of Wagner who possessed a powerful voice, rich in vocal splendour with a superb range. Accompanied by Hubert Greenside, she undertook an exhausting programme including a *scena* from Gluck's *Alceste*, the final scene from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, three Schubert lieder including the dramatic *Erl King*, Ravel's delicate *La Flute enchantée* and songs by Grieg and Rachmaninov. She shared the afternoon with Sidney Crooke, pianist, and composer of attractive light pieces such as *Turning Wheels*, *Solo Flight* and *Evensong*, who played pieces by Ravel, Liszt, Scriabin and Chopin's Ballade in G minor. This was a sophisticated recital with an unusual programme, in some ways a throw-back to the great singers' recitals of the pre-war decades and the like of which would seldom be heard in Douglas in the decades to come.

* Ivey Dickson 'peaked' early in her career; her last Promenade Concert appearance was in 1948. She ran the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain from 1966 until 1984.

* In 1941 Marjorie Lawrence was stricken with polio but courageously fought back to her career and performed at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in 1943. A film of her career, *Interrupted Melody*, based on her autobiography appeared in 1955, and starred Eleanor Parker in the role of Lawrence who fortunately could read music, and sung the arias with a full voice, in tune, during filming instead of merely lip-synching, although Lawrence's voice was ultimately 'ghosted' by Eileen Farrell. Glen Ford played her doctor/husband Thomas King, and a young Roger Moore in the key support role of Lawrence's brother Cyril. The music included arias by Wagner, Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, Bizet and Saint-Saens, and *Over the Rainbow* and *Waltzing Matilda*

The year ended at the Villa Marina when it re-opened after the summer season for 'Old Tyme and Modern' dancing on 2nd November with Steve Lahmers' Swing Stars, and on 7th December there was a 'Welcome Home to HMS *Manxman*' reception and dance.

The Gaiety Theatre

The big show at the Gaiety that season was a stage adaption by Tom Arnold of the popular wartime radio show *The Happidrome*,* presented twice nightly at 6.30 and 8.45, and starring Harry 'Mr Lovejoy' Korris - loud check suit and bowler hat - the hapless proprietor of the imaginary Happidrome Variety Theatre, Robbie 'Enoch' Vincent, the gormless call boy, or boy in buttons, complete with cap and baggy trousers, and Cecil 'Mr Ramsbottom' Frederick, the stage manager and 'straight man'. Enoch's high, squeaky catchphrase 'Let me tell you!' even became the title of a song and Mr. Lovejoy's weary 'Eeee . . . if ever a man suffered' was frequently heard as he never managed to get the better of Enoch. 'The Gaiety lives up to its name' heralded the local newspapers and praised the show for its 'brilliant colour, bright music and broad, homely - and more to the point - family entertainment . . . 'the perfect holiday show . . . the cheeriest entertainment'. Korris,* Manxland's most successful comedian, known variously as 'Blackpool's other tower' or 'the Manxman with many tails', was an irrepressible larger-than-life character, the 'pillar of the show', and writer of many of the sketches. The supporting acts included Betty Hobb's Superb Eight 'Happidrome' Girls; the burlesque of The Four Charladies; Mackenzie Reid and Dorothy, Scotland's Ace Accordionists and impressionist Dinah Miller.

The show opened with the familiar signature song:

Come to the Happidrome,
Come to the show,
Just take a tip from us,
That is where to go . . .

And at the close:

*We three in HAPPIDROME –
Working for the BBC –
Ramsbottom – and Enoch – and me.**

The Happidrome was without doubt one of the most successful summer shows to come to Douglas, and reflected the Credo of its star Harry Korris, revealed in an *Isle of Man Examiner* interview ten years earlier: 'I have found interest and joy in my career, and had I my life over again, I would choose the same job. It is a life of vivid expression, movement, comradeship - and luck. It had its joys and its heartbreaks, but it has a lure that never fails'.

* Broadcast live from the Grand Theatre, Llandudno on Sunday evenings, the wartime BBC radio series which ran from 1941-7. *The Happidrome* catapulted HK from a run-of-the-mill Northern concert party entertainer to a nationally known and loved radio comedian. Dozens of guest artists appeared in the show including Rob Wilton, Issy Bonn, Wee Georgie Wood, Cyril Fletcher, Tessie O'Shea, Jack Warner, Wilfred Pickles, Beryl Reid and Norman Evans. It is thought that *The Happidrome* attracted some 12,000,000 listeners over two hundred episodes during three long series.

* See Maurice Powell, *Harry Korris*, manxmusic.com.

* Their take on the popular Ink Spots hit song of 1941: *We Three (My Echo, My Shadow and Me)*.

The smaller venues all enjoyed successful runs of their various shows and revues. At the Crescent Pavilion the Crescent Revels with Hugh Rene and Company also starred Lancashire comedian Jack Fields, Della Facer and Lionel Baker, vocal duettists the 'twinkling melodies' of Mischel and his Xylophone; Ivor Worrying, pianist; Jack Crisp and Jill, 'sophisticated dancers' in a fast-moving family show of sketches, impersonations, songs

and dances. The revue 'Onchan Cocktails' at the Onchan Pavilion, written and produced by A. A. Shenburn, owner of the Majestic Hotel, was described as 'A Rollicking Family Revue', and starred a lively company led by 'that old Douglas favourite' Jack Edge, with Babs Dudley, 'at the piano, with something to sing about'; the Three Elstree Stooges; 'superb little performer' O He Wong and the Eight Lovely Regis Young Ladies. Sunday concerts were planned at the 'Crystal Bowl' at the Majestic Hotel at 3.00 pm and 8.30 pm daily, with Harry Roy* presenting his brother Sid Roy and his Lyricals, and the Tiger Ragamuffins.

The White City Amusement Park on Onchan head opened on Whit Monday with a new Rolo Coaster, the Wall of Death, the Dodge'em Ride, the Great Bucking Bronco, the Ghost Train and Karthay, 'the unique master of mystery'. At the Douglas Holiday Camp there was dancing to Ralph Fidler's Holiday Camp Ballroom Band directed by Fred Gill.

A heartfelt 'Farewell' was bade to the four hundred young musicians of the Royal Naval School of Music, stationed at Howstrake Holiday Camp since 1941, who had contributed so much to the Island's ability to entertain itself during the war by providing dance bands for every occasion, their willing involvement with the Manx Music Festival and many notable charity and ceremonial events and most visibly for their three seasons of afternoon concerts in the Villa Marina Gardens.

* *Isle of Man Times* 27. 07.1946, for a detailed review and assessment of their time on the Island.

' . . . there's no place in the British Isles where sweets are so scarce . . . '

Unsurprisingly the island's traditional winter sport of endless inquests as to the success or otherwise of the summer season began as soon as the last visitor had departed, not least an enquiry by the Douglas Boarding House and Apartment Association into complaints made by holiday makers against hotels, cafés and the owners of charabanc companies and amusement venues. There were several issues raised over last-minute cancelled bookings at the August Bank Holiday, and the price, quality and quantity of food, although it was agreed that only a small minority of hotel and boarding house owners failed to cater to their guests to the best of their ability. Perhaps Douglas should take a leaf out of Blackpool's book by 'naming and shaming' those boarding house keepers found to be guilty of profiteering?

There were inevitable shortages of linen, curtains, crockery, cutlery, linoleum and sweets. As many hotels struggled to engage sufficient staff, it was suggested that the tourist industry should establish its own staffing registry. Furthermore, staff might be retained if a fair system for 'tips' or bonuses was instigated. The Steam Packet Company were commended for doing its best with the vessels available and for coping with the cancellation of some Scottish and Irish sailings. Through-bookings by rail and steamer would be re-established for next season.

The consensus was that most hotels and boarding houses had enjoyed a successful season despite the immediate post-war difficulties experienced particularly in the early weeks. In fact, the forecast of 400,000 visitors envisaged during the spring for the first full post-war summer season was 'smashed', and the arrivals for the first week in September – 22,000 – meant that it was the second-best weekend of the entire year. The visitor numbers rose steadily throughout May, June and July and reached just under 300,000 by early August. By September the figure was approaching 500,000, including one thousand motorcycles and two hundred cars, a higher number than in 1938. Most visitors it seemed left the Island with happy recollections of their stay, and it was hoped that the few who nursed grievances concerning poor service and high prices would do little to harm the island's reputation of a 'summer playground'. The Isle of Man 'must not fail to capitalise on the better than imagined season'; accommodation should be up-dated and the matter of lack-lustre, under-funded advertising addressed. So, did the good times roll again? Yes, but creakily. The Island would have to get its act together for the forthcoming season because, as one acute observer put it:

'Only complacency flourishes in the garden of mediocrity!'

'Hail the summer of 1947'

The Big Freeze.

The second full post-war summer season began with high hopes of something like a return to the glorious summers of 1938 and 1939 in the midst of the coldest winter for seventy years and the coldest February on record. In Britain by the end of January the series of cold snaps in December had developed into a fierce anti-cyclone with strong Easterly winds bringing heavy snow and deep depression in March, followed by drenching rain, gales and ultimately floods. The Isle of Man, too, endured its bleakest winter for decades with temperatures remaining stubbornly below freezing for days. This summer season would see the tourist industry properly relaunched with all the principal entertainment venues up and running. Douglas Head and many of its attractions would be brought back to life, likewise the Marine Drive opened, albeit without the reinstatement of the Electric Railway. Douglas Holiday Camp opened amidst persistent complaints about the quality and quantity of the catering and against a background of falling bookings, but happily there was the expectation that Howstrake Holiday Camp would be ready to receive visitors.

Hotels and boarding houses continued to battle with everyday shortages, although there was financial relief voted by Tynwald for some whose businesses were unable to open last season because of the military occupation of their premises and the aftermath which included damaged or demolished walls, broken doors and missing door knobs, sagging ceilings, cracked washbasins, asphalt on some floors used as showers or toilets

and brown and grey paint covering the walls. The annual dearth of winter work was relieved to some extent with the opening of three factories on Douglas Head, in Kirk Michael and Laxey employing around ninety men and women engaged in the manufacture of 'short-life' utility furniture - tables, chairs, wardrobes and beds - to help replace wartime losses. Some boarding houses had to segregate men and women in order to maximise the accommodation space, and there were constant worries about feeding the visitors although the Governor confirmed that 'the Island is guaranteed the same treatment regarding food and rationing as any other holiday resort'. In his opinion ' . . . no one expects that the Island will be back on anything like a pre-war basis regarding catering - visitors will not expect it . . .' Demand for eggs resulted in prices rising locally to 6s a dozen. Fresh meat was in short supply for most people and to help make up the shortfall hard pressed local butchers appealed for fresh rabbit. By August even 'spuds' were in short supply. At least the holiday makers would be spared the grim prospect of whale meat appearing on the menu. Although supplies were meagre, lemons from Sicily, grapefruits from Texas, oranges from South Africa and bananas from who knew where gradually appeared in the shops. Domestic fuel stocks were low, and everyone was asked to consume less fuel in order to avoid gas, coal and electricity cuts. By September, in line with measures in force in Britain, there was a restriction on sales of petrol for 'pleasure'. Nevertheless, it was a record year for cars and motorcycles landing on the Island.

As the Island once again geared up for the coming summer many wondered 'will there be no end to the misery?' Ten years earlier the prospect of gas bombs caused most disquiet; now it was obliteration by the atom bomb in what some feared was an inevitable Third World War. Meanwhile news that Tessie O'Shea would be appearing at the Palace Coliseum and Joe Loss once again at the Villa Marina again helped to quell the more exaggerated fears of a world devastated by radioactive fallout and regain a sense of proportion.

1947 in a nutshell

The author of this modest piece was born 24th January; Earl Mountbatten of Burma appointed the last Viceroy of India on 20th February; the school leaving age is raised to fifteen on 1st April; also that month, the private healthcare firm BUPA is founded, and BBC Radios' gardening programme *How Does Your Garden Grow* was first broadcast, the for runner of *Gardener's Question Time*, which still runs today; the first Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod was held in June; on 10th July Princess Elizabeth announced her engagement to Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, who was created the Duke of Edinburgh the day before their marriage on 20th November; the first of the popular 'Huggett's trio of films, *Holiday Camp*, released on 5th August; also that month India and Pakistan gain their independence; the first Edinburgh festival of the Arts opens on 24th August; the partition plan for Palestine approved by the United Nations; in December the first permanent Oxfam charity shop opens; soft toilet paper first on sale from Harrods; the Avocet resumes breeding in England; Compton Mackenzie's *Whiskey Galore* published;

chef and restaurateur Rick Stein, David Bowie and playwright Willy Russell born; Scottish music hall veteran Will Fyffe dies after falling from a hotel window; John Boulting's *Brighton Rock* starring Richard Attenborough released.

A promising return to pre-war seasons

The summer season of 1947 was in fact generally very successful with over 600,000 arrivals.* In contrast to the appalling winter months, day-after-day the Island was bathed in warm sunshine, Douglas beach was consistently crowded and daily excursions to explore the Island's secret beauty spots flourished. The weekend of July 25th - 27th saw the greatest number of visitors arriving since 1939, some 31,000, 11,000 of whom were unable to gain access to their accommodation immediately. The Publicity Board's Information Bureau soon exhausted their list of accommodation booked not taken up; the police, with their local knowledge were able to help 'fix some people up', but visitors arriving 'on spec' were directed to Laxey or as far afield as Kirk Michael in search of somewhere to stay. August enjoyed over three hundred hours of sunshine which meant that attendance at some indoor entertainments was poor. The Bank Holiday arrivals were half those of 1939, but over 4,000 up on the same period in 1946. It was thought that many visitors might be 'staggering' their holidays or were reluctant to brave the chaos of rail travel during a Bank Holiday weekend.

There were other reminders of pre-war summers in Douglas when at August Bank Holiday some 5.00am arrivals slept in charabancs on Douglas Promenade or on deck chairs under the Villa Marina Colonnade* before making their bleary-eyed way to the besieged café which opened early for cups of tea served to the visitors in the ballroom. 'Observer' in the *Mona's Herald* reported that although the Villa Marina and the Douglas Holiday Camp were aglow with welcoming lights at 7.00am, many hotel and boarding houses were still in darkness. Everywhere there were queues of people 'cursing the day they decided to come to the Island by the night boats'. Queues at cafés, queues at cinemas, queues at the bus station for the out-of-town services, in fact queues for most things. Douglas Corporation buses, the railways and taxis were all 'kept hard at it' and the morning sailings carrying those leaving the Island were barely out of sight before queues began forming for the afternoon sailings.

If the Island's tourist industry was to prosper post-war the chaos of early Saturday morning arrivals at peak weekends could not be ignored. Before embarking, thousands of visitors had to endure the totally inadequate facilities at open-air departure sheds at Fleetwood and Liverpool, where not even a cup of tea was available, and upon arrival there were insufficient shelters on Douglas promenades. Competition between the UK resorts was going to be fiercer; the Island could not afford to have a repetition of the situation this season or it would be left behind.

* Average visitor arrivals between 1947-49 were 613,000.

* It was suggested that the attached Villa Marina Arcade could be cleared of shops and turned into a public shelter, and church schoolrooms in Douglas could provide shelter, tea and coffee for the increased numbers of early morning arrivals.

Gradually the Island began to regain much of its pre-war ambience as things slowly returned to something approaching normal. Ronaldsway Airport experienced its third busiest day of the year on Saturday 2nd August with thirty-one scheduled flights and forty-two chartered flights in and out, and a new service from B.E.A between Liverpool, Belfast and the Isle of Man began promisingly. Another good omen was the following urgent request in the local newspapers during July:

WANTED, at once, DECK CHAIR ATTENDANTS

Apply, Chair Hire Superintendent, Villa Marina

In August the Parks Committee authorised the entertainments manager and the chair hire superintendent to negotiate the purchase of five hundred additional deck chairs, and the Borough Surveyor was instructed to install a number of seats in the upper and lower Villa Marina Arcade. In the north RAF Jurby and its Gunnery School, recently transferred from RAF Andreas, was disbanded, its future role uncertain. Andreas airfield was purchased by Tynwald and subsequently sold at auction with plans to return the farms at Ballaghau and Braust to agricultural use. Niarbyl, with its radar station remained sealed off for the time being. Douglas was to have played host to Field Marshall Montgomery on 4th September when 'Britain's greatest soldier' was to receive the Freedom of Douglas at a ceremony in the Royal Hall of the Villa Marina, after which he was scheduled to inspect an honour guard of the British Legion in the Gardens. In the event his visit was cancelled at the last minute for reasons which are not at all clear* and weeks of preparations, including a special luncheon and the issuing of a thousand special guest invitations, came to nothing. In November the Island celebrated the wedding of H. R. H. Princess Elizabeth II to H. R. H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

* The official reason was due to 'the crisis'. Field Marshall Montgomery did come to the Island in 1948.

As the season progressed, less welcome aspects of pre-war seasons raised their unwelcome heads, namely the nuisance caused by 'touts' and complaints about overcharging. Drivers of charabancs and taxis were the worst offenders, and some were fined or had their licenses suspended.

'A luxury fare-de-luxe' guaranteed'

With the Derby Castle finally released from war service and undergoing urgent renovations Douglas now boasted four ballrooms, four theatres and five cinemas. The Villa Marina, whose resourceful entertainments manager S. A. Perry was appointed as a founder member of a new Institute of the Municipal Entertainment Managers during the season, was scheduled to open in early May and the Palace & Derby Castle Company was

now back to its pre-war strength with 'the most ambitious entertainment programme ever planned for a holiday season in Douglas' in prospect. 'The cream of Britain's variety and concert artistes' had been engaged and 'good, clean, wholesome comedy, with variety, revue, and concert party programmes' designed to meet the needs of families was promised.* There would be 'nothing austere' about the entertainments in Douglas that season, on the contrary, 'a luxury fare-de-luxe' would be on offer according to the local newspapers. Five Steam Packet vessels were ready to bring the first visitors across for Whit-week, and D. F. Barwell, the General Manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, was anticipating that the season would run until the end of September. As travel to Europe remained difficult, holiday resorts which were ready and organised, should be looking forward to a post-war boom for the entertainment industry. The good folk of Bolton - collectively 'Trotters', after their football club - certainly thought so. Long popular during 'wakes' weeks, the 'Isle of contrasts' was given a tremendous boost in the *Bolton Standard* which highlighted the 'daytime enchantments of the high mountain tops and fairy glens and evenings with *Happidrome* at the Gaiety Theatre or listening to the 'lilting dance music of Joe Loss at the Villa Marina'.

* *IoME*, 25.04.1947.

One of the first celebrities to arrive in Douglas that season was George Formby, who was taking a holiday with his wife Beryl ('If you want George you have to have me as well') and made a guest appearance during the TT festival. 'Ee - it's considerate of the lads to wait till I arrived!!!' he quipped to the crowds waiting at the Grandstand for the appearance of the first rider. His verdict on the scene from the official's box: 'It's champion up here!' Inevitably *No Limit* was showing at the Strand Cinema during the period. During an interview with the *Mona's Herald* he said that he had long wished to spend a carefree week on holiday on the Island 'like any other Yorkshire or Lancashire lad and his lass', and perhaps one day he would make his home here. He never did.

In July a sour note was struck when ill-considered thoughts from the Lord Bishop drew the Bishopric of Man into a storm of controversy which found its way into the public domain. The Lord Bishop had publicly objected to the singing of *Ave Maria** by young Sheila Corlett at the Seamen's Bethel, Ramsey. The Lord Bishop's objection became the subject of an address at St. Maughold's Roman Catholic Church the following Sunday evening during which the Rev. Father J. Atkin suggested that the Lord Bishop's words might have been in 'bad taste' as they were directed at the young singer in public. In an interview with a reporter, the Lord Bishop lamely suggested that his words had of course been misunderstood, and that it was the juxtaposition of Schubert's song with the text of the preceding address on the words 'Look Away Up to Jesus' that 'many thought unfitting', and therefore 'I would make a request to her that she would not sing that particular song at a public service or meeting'. The Lord Bishop tried once again to justify his comments in the pages of the *Isle of Man Examiner* in September by maintaining that he was 'speaking the

truth in love to one who had probably little idea of the significance of the words she was singing'. The patronising and pompous ass further maintained that he 'had every right – nay, duty – to do so' as president of the Seamen's Bethel.

* *Ellens Gesang III*, op.52/6, with texts from Sir Walter Scott's epic poem *The Lady of the Lake*. Better known as the Latin prayer *Ave Maria, gratia plena*.

The Douglas Carnival pageant in July wound its way from the Derby Castle to the Jubilee Clock followed by a 'quick-fire' charity variety matinee in the Palace grounds, featuring volunteer stars from all the Douglas shows. No-one refused, and the proceeds of between £500 and £600 were donated to the Merchant Navy Comfort Fund. The parade itself was led by Joe Loss and his band heading a huge number of stars, many in fancy dress, with Tessie O'Shea riding in a jeep, dressed as Carmen Miranda inviting the crowds to 'throw your pennies in'.

'Ow do Peel'

On Saturday 13th September the new BBC Radio programme 'Have a Go' hosted by Wilfred Pickles piloted from Corrins Hall, Peel, prior to a broadcast from the Villa Marina the following day, a year after its inaugural run.* Admission was free, the demand for tickets was huge and many were disappointed. Wilfred Pickles himself requested Peel as he recalled the kind reception he received from the people of the town when he last visited with ENSA during the war. *Have a Go* - 'bringing the people to the people' - was one of the most popular shows ever broadcast and attracted a radio audience of twenty million in the mid-1950s. His wife Mable appeared with him as local people were invited to talk about their lives, and to 'have a go' at answering quiz questions for cash prizes and *Have a Go* was the first quiz show to give away money prizes. 'Give him (her) the money, Mabel' was the frequently heard catchphrase during the show, as was Pickles' cheeky enquiry of many girl contestants: 'Are you courtin'?' Jack Jordan's theme song *Have a go, Joe* was often sung by the entire audience:

'Have a go, Joe, come on and have a go;

you can't lose owt, it costs you nowt,

to make yourself some dough'.

A popular feature of the show was that Pickles would refer to local places and place names such as 'Are you courtin' down Love Lane, love?' to a young lady 'live' on the show in Peel. Among the eight contestants from Peel was Mr Jerry Rice, fish worker, Mrs E. Clarke and Miss Ivy Jolly, kipper curers and Miss Noel Cubbon, shop assistant. Songs at the piano featured 'cheery Violet Carson' - more than a decade before her years as the judgemental, sour-faced *Coronation Street* battle-axe Ena Sharples, caretaker of the Glad Tidings Mission Hall and self-appointed guardian

of the Street's morals - who led the singing of *Have a go, Joe* at the start of the show followed by a selection of Florrie Forde favourites including *Kelly* and *Flannagan*. The pilot recording was very successful and was scheduled for broadcast in October.

* See Maurice Powell 'Ow do Peel' in Manxnotebook.com. and *IoME* 12.09.1947.

* Wilfred Pickles (1904-78) was born in Halifax, West Yorkshire, and was selected by the BBC as a radio announcer for its North Regional Radio Service, and later as a newsreader for the BBC Home Service during WWII. He was a proud Yorkshireman and was the first BBC Radio announcer to speak in a regional accent. His nightly signing off catchphrase: '... and to all northerners, wherever you may be, good neet', was designed to make it difficult for the Germans to impersonate BBC announcers with their customary 'received' English. The first series of *Have a Go* - 'bringing the people to the people' - was broadcast on BBC Home Service North between March and August 1946. Local people were invited on stage to talk about their lives and memories. The show ran until 1967. Pickles' most notable film role was that of the father in the 1963 'new wave' drama *Billy Liar*, starring Tom Courtney and Julie Christie. He also appeared in the television series *Dr Finlay's Casebook* and *For the Love of Ada* with Irene Handl, and was the guest in *Desert Island Discs* in 1953 and *This Is Your Life* in 1971.

Pickles and his wife had arrived the day before to assist in the judging of a bathing beauty contest at the Villa Marina, organised annually by the June Effort and Season Extension Committee. The Mayoress of Douglas presented the 60 guinea rose bowl together with a cheque for £50 to the popular winner Miss Marion Joyce Lewis, aged 17, from Douglas. Among the judges was Mrs Catherine Beasley from Cleethorpes, the representative of the National Fitness Committee, and the North of England representative for physical training. 'What do I know of bathing beauties', Pickles quipped to the crowd, 'I've haven't bathed one in my life!' The Villa Marina was completely sold out days before the Sunday show; Pickles was greeted by 'a storm of applause', and as the *Mona's Herald* reported, he soon had everyone 'rocking with laughter'. The crowd erupted into thunderous applause when he invited blind local singer Eve Callow to 'have a do' and sing *The World Has a Thousand Beautiful Things*. In support, Jan Ralfini and his orchestra 'enhanced their ever-growing reputation with a splendid concert programme'.

The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum.

The Palace Ballroom opened on Whit-Saturday 24th May under the new manager Mr. G. E. Faragher, with dancing from 7.30 -10.45 to Roy Fox* and his orchestra of between fourteen and twenty players. Fox, a suave, elegant, good-looking American-born British dance bandleader, and at six foot said to be the tallest in the business, and in his characteristic tails the best dressed, was something of a showman. *Whispering* was his signature tune and his smooth, mellow style of cornet and trumpet playing led him to be known as 'The Whispering Cornettist'. A generous dose of band comedy was a feature of his dance programmes. It was an auspicious start to a glittering summer season of seventeen weeks.

* Roy Fox first came to London in the 1930s and accepted an engagement at the Monseigneur Restaurant, Piccadilly. He was in Australia and the USA during WWII and was accused by other bandleaders of dodging the war. At the time of his engagement in Douglas he was also resident at the Potomac Club, London, but virtually bankrupt. The

1947 summer season on the Island probably saved him. He went into semi-retirement in 1952 and set up as an artistes' booking agent. He was Roy Plomley's guest on Desert Island Discs in February 1974. His most enduring hits included *Painting the Clouds with Sunshine*, *A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody*, *Tip-toe Through the Tulips*, *Thanks for the Memory* and *Will You Remember*.

At the Coliseum quick-fire varieties opened the following week with Australian acrobatic dancer and comedian Maurice Colleano who came from a half-Irish, half-Spanish circus family background; his sailor routine during which he managed to hang himself on a clothes rack as he appeared on stage, was his signature turn. The supporting acts included Elsie Bower and Company, the twelve talented Jackson Girls, and the ventriloquist's ventriloquist Arthur Worsley, who remained silent whilst his over-bearing dummy Charlie Brown would bully him with ever more persistent tirades. The following day, Sunday 25th May the Laureston Choral and Orchestral Society totalling nearly one hundred and eighty performers under conductor Harry Pickard gave Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* and Stanford's *Last Post* on the occasion of the British Legion delegates to Douglas' parade and service. The town was 'festooned' with bunting and flags and looked like 'a real holiday town'.

Later in the season the Sunday Concerts would feature Joan Butler, soprano, and James Johnston, the principal tenor from Sadler's Wells, in a programme of favourite operatic arias and duets during which frequent encores were demanded, and the bass Norman Allin, well-known as a concert recitalist and in oratorio, and for his appearances at Covent Garden, The British Opera Company and the Glyndebourne Festival. Also appearing were the contralto Astra Desmond, whose vast repertoire included Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Handel's *Messiah*, Stravinsky and Mahler and the songs of Grieg; piano duettists Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick; the contralto Muriel Brunskill, a Douglas favourite nearing the end of her career, but with 'her formidable presence' and rich voice still in evidence; the great Russian soprano Oda Slobodskaya, whose pure and agile voice was heard at its best advantage in Russian song; everybody's favourite Irish tenor Joseph Locke; the baritone Roy Henderson, a fine interpreter of English music and Mozart, who became the teacher of Kathleen Ferrier; the pianist Mark Hambourg, a veteran of many Douglas appearances; Michael Miles in 'Radio Forfeits'; The Two Leslies, Leslie Sarony and Leslie Holmes; the soprano Eleanor Danieli; the mezzo-soprano Mary Jarred, as successful in Strauss and Wagner as she was as a concert recitalist; and the Australian baritone Harold Williams.

'Hear my song'

The popular Sunday Concert on 1st June starred the legendary Irish tenor Josef Locke, originally 'The Singing Bobby', who then trained for grand opera in Italy but was advised by John McCormack to specialise in lighter repertoire, and ultimately became the 'People's Tenor'. * Locke was engaged in the summer show *Starry Way* at Blackpool's Opera House at the time of his Douglas debut and had just recorded the song that would forever be associated with him, *Hear My Song*, *Violetta*. He was a great showman and his irrepressible, ebullient personality is heard to fine effect in *The Drinking Song* from *The Student Prince* and *Goodbye* from *The White Horse Inn* which was the final number in many of his

performances and during which he invariably encouraged audiences to wave their handkerchiefs. He was supported by the Welsh soprano Ceinwen Rowlands.

* Nevertheless, he could manage a 'top C' long after he retired.

In every sense of the word the 'biggest' star to grace the stage at the Coliseum that season was Cardiff-born, self-styled 'Two-ton' Tessie O'Shea, the lead in Tom Arnold's new summer revue *Tons of Fun* which began its spectacular run on 16th June. It was the first time in Douglas for the Welsh entertainer and actress. 'Tons of girth, but tons of talent'. All the E's applied to her: ebullient, exuberant, effervescent and even 'elephantine' (she once appeared on stage on the back of an elephant at the London Palladium) expressed in the words of Tessie herself in her famous song *I'm Two-Ton Tessie from Tennessee*. Her radio broadcasts had made her a household name; her 'breezy personality', and a voice that needed no microphone, led many to liken her Florrie Forde and Lily Morris in her power to 'work' an audience. Like the great Florrie Forde she often wore luxurious, resplendent and glittering costumes. She was a master of disguises and might appear as a TT rider, a precocious schoolgirl or a South American dancer. Her 'uke' songs were both cheekily comic in the George Formby mode, and sentimental. At seventeen stone her axiom was 'Laugh and Grow Fat', and many of her songs reflected her total ease with her size and bouncy stage persona: *It All Belongs To Me, I'm Worth My Weight in Gold* and *A Little Bit of Something the Others Haven't Got*. The supporting cast included wise-cracking comedians Syd and Max Harrison, 'Just Nuts', and 'the hilarious couple' of acrobats Manley and Austin, 'what rough-and-tumble antics they get up to!' including their finale when one carries the other, who is playing the violin, high above his head. There were rousing songs from tenor Donald Reid, 'man of a thousand voices' Victor Seaforth, whose impressions included Sir Winston Churchill and The Hunchback of Notre Dame, acrobatic dancers, and 'dainty *soubrette*' Sheila Daly completed a full programme.

* A Blackpool summer season regular in the 1930's, she toured with ENSA during the war and in 1944 topped the bill at the Palladium with 'cheeky-chappie' Max Miller. In 1949 she teamed up with Billy Cotton for their touring revue *Tess and Bill*. She appeared in two 'Northern' comedy films: *Somewhere in Politics* with Frank Randle and *Holidays with Pay* starring Sandy Powell and played herself in the 1950 'shocker' *The Blue Lamp*. She moved to America in the early 1960s and made a number of Broadway and television appearances.

Naïve jollity personified

On Sunday 27th July George Formby made a personal appearance prior to his twelve-week Australian tour. Needless to say, the Coliseum was packed so that show had to be relayed to the Palace Ballroom thus proving that 'Big Names mean Big Business', and after Gracie Fields, George was the biggest draw in the business and still attracted huge audiences in the North. He may have been 'greying and thickening out', but one fan was overheard to remark at the end of his forty-five-minute act: 'Ah could listen to George all neet'. He sang all the old favourites: *They Call*

it *The Isle of Man, Riding in the TT Races, With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock, When I'm Cleaning Windows* and *Mr Wu* and the crowd sang along with him and demanded more. Nevertheless, post-war he was not everyone's cup of tea. His morale-boosting brand of simple, homely comedy, and saucy lyrics was already wearing thin, and many found his gormless persona, piercing voice and extreme Lancashire 'twang' irritating.* As the *Isle of Man Times* reporter put it: 'His songs were simple, they were not well sung, his accent is abominable, yet he gets there'. He was supported by the soprano Anna Pollack with Roy Fox and his band.

* His last film, *George in Civvy Street* (1946) was probably his least successful at the box office. Post-war, people demanded suspense, romance and drama; the new stars such as James Mason, David Niven, Stewart Granger were in the ascendant; the film careers of the previous generation, Gracie Fields, Tommy Trinder, Will Hay and George himself, faded. Some of his earlier films 'make me want to cringe' he once said, and he realised that 'the days of being a clown are gone'; from now on 'I'm only going to do variety'. Ahead lay a decade and a half of declining health and prestige as a performer. Yet his passing in 1961 was genuinely and widely mourned.

The Coliseum was the venue for *On Wings of Song* broadcast on the BBC North of England Service with local soprano Norah Moore and the Lon Doo Male Voice Choir. Plans for a Circus in the Palace Grounds came to nothing due to 'insurmountable transport difficulties'.

The Villa Marina

The Villa Marina promised the longest season on record and published details of season tickets, valid from 4th May until 20th September and costing 10s 6d, available to all bona-fide residents entitling them to free deckchairs in the mornings and for the afternoon concerts. The weekly BBC broadcast from the Villa Marina helped keep the Island's name alive in Britain. During March and April Charles Shadwell and His Famous Orchestra played for dancing and for the Easter attractions, whilst in the Villa Gardens the Douglas Brass Band School of Music played for the afternoon concerts when fine. Shadwell was well known as the conductor of the Coventry Hippodrome Orchestra during the 1930s, the BBC Variety Orchestra and the BBC Radio show *Garrison Theatre*. Suave, tall and slim, and a raconteur with an infectious chuckle and a good line in back-chat, he more than held his own as the 'stooge', butt' or 'feed' for the comedians appearing in *Music Hall* with its signature tune *The Spice of Life*. ITMAs Tommy Handley dubbed him 'The Human Hairpin', a nickname of which he apparently approved.

The opening of the season proper coincided with the arrival in Douglas of Jan Ralfini and his fourteen-piece orchestra* in early May on only his second visit to the Island. Ralfini was not only the director of the orchestra but also the resident solo violinist, and at one time he had been the musical director for the music publisher Lawrence Wright. A special late-night dance until midnight took place on Saturday 3rd May, and the following day the orchestra played a selection of light, entertaining pieces in the gardens. For the Sunday Concerts Ralfini fielded his 'straight' orchestra and presented programmes of popular classical overtures, selections and vocal solos. A Hammond Wonder Portable Organ was installed in the Gardens with organists Phil Farrell, Sandy MacPherson (the BBC Theatre Organist, well-known for his Sunday night request

programme *The Twilight Hour*) and Robinson Cleaver making guest appearances. The instrument was transferred to the Royal Hall for the Sunday concerts. Resident guest artistes included the baritone Barry Arnold, Master Michael Austin, a fifteen-year-old pianist who played a *Concerto Pastiche* derived from the music of Tchaikovsky, Chopin's *Minute Waltz* and Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* which won him a standing ovation, and the ace drummer and vocal impressionist Leslie Shannon, a veteran of the Radio series *Cabaret Cruise*. There was a brief hiatus at the start of the season when the Incorporated National Federation of Boot Trades Association Ltd., held their conference there, but Ralfini returned on the 15th with a special late-night dance.

Thus, the pattern of musical entertainment for the season was quickly established: dancing in the Royal Hall nightly; Sunday Celebrity Recitals in the afternoons; popular Sunday evening concerts and concerts in the Gardens daily during the afternoons. From 27th June Ralfini's orchestra would alternate with Joe Loss and his orchestra in providing 'the best music for ballroom dancing'; as the *Mona's Herald* had predicted back in April: 'Joe Loss will provide the *modern music* and Jan Ralfini will play the old-time favourites'.

* Jan Ralfini first came to the Island twenty years earlier and appeared on Onchan Head. A photograph exists showing an orchestra of thirteen musicians: 2 trombones, 2 trumpets, a banjo, a violin, 3 saxophones, 1 double bass, 1 sousaphone, a pianist and a percussionist.

The concert artistes during the early part of the season included some returning for the second time since the war: the soprano Leila Finneberg, the dark-toned Polish bass Marian Nowakowski and the baritone Robert Easton. The *tenore di grazia* Heddle Nash, whose programme of ten songs and four encores was one of the best-attended of the season, was accompanied by Miss Michal Hambourg, daughter of the famous pianist Mark Hambourg, who delighted the audience with a selection of well-loved classical pieces. The singers included Welsh tenor Parry Jones, the operatic tenor Walter Widdup, the lyric tenor *par excellence* Frank Titterton, the contralto Gladys Ripley and Essie Ackland, the Australian contralto, who by the late 1930s was hailed as the most recorded contralto in the world. Two famous violinists from different musical worlds, Alfredo Campoli, the popular concert violinist, and Stéphane Grappelli, 'the world's greatest swing violinist', played before large audiences accompanied by the blind jazz pianist George Shearing with Canadian singer and actor Jean Cavall, who sang in both French and English. The vast audience was captivated, and the artistes had great difficulty in escaping from the stage. In mid-June Ralfini and his orchestra broadcast from the Villa Marina in the BBC series *Seaside Nights*, a forty-five-minute programme which also visited Roy Fox at the Palace Ballroom and Harry Korris' *Happidrome* at the Gaiety Theatre. The New Zealand operatic *basso profundo* Oscar Natzka made a return visit at the end of June, and in August the Oldham-born dramatic soprano Eva Turner, whose huge voice was renowned for its 'clarion power' in Verdi, Puccini and Wagner, was the guest concert artiste.

My Yiddische Momma

The celebrity entertainer on Sunday 15th June was the ebullient Issy Bonn*, the larger-than-life actor, singer and comedian and on his first visit to Douglas. A Jewish comedian in the Bud Flanagan and Max Bacon mould, he was a household name through his appearances in BBC shows such as *BBC Music Hall*, *Variety Bandbox*, *The Melody Lingers On* and *Workers' Playtime*. In many ways he was a throwback to the 'coster' comedians of the music hall era, famed for his 'loud' double-breasted suits, tilted back trilby hat, broad grin and 'belted out' schmaltzy songs such as *My Yiddische Momma*, *The Little Boy that Santa Claus Forgot* and *When You're Home with the One's You love*. He also became a comic strip character in the comic's comic paper *Radio Fun: Issy Bonn introduces his famous Finkelfeffer Family*. The following line from the Jewish tailor Finkelfeffer gives a flavour of Bonn's characteristic stage 'patter':

'Oi, Yoi! Vot a t'ing to happen! I'll have to go to the club, den! In der meantime poys, you keep an eye on der man in der shop!'

To his contemporaries he was 'a born star if ever there was one', and according to one critic 'he could have been another Tauber . . . but he prefers to be a male Gracie Fields'. He introduced topical local references into his act including a joke about Douglas Corporation's concert piano, called for song requests and sang *Let Bygones Be Bygones* as an encore. He was supported by the concert violinist Marie Wilson, who, before embarking on a solo career, played in the Queen's Hall Orchestra, since when she had appeared at the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts, the Eastbourne Municipal Concerts and the British Association Concerts.*

* Real name Benjamin Levin (1893-1977), 'the great Hebrew singer and comedian'. Post-war, his career faltered as Jewish humour became unfashionable but revived when he invited the young charismatic trumpeter Eddie Calvert, of *Oh! Mein Papa* fame, to be a guest on his shows. He worked in television in the 1950s and ultimately developed a career as a theatrical manager.

* She also featured among the W. D. and H. O Wills 'Fifty Radio Celebrities' cigarette cards, second series.

'Joe Loss is here again!'

Joe Loss' first concert that season – which was sold out many hours before the doors opened - took place on 27th June, and that evening he introduced both his signature tune, 'In the Mood', and the band members individually to the audience. Joe himself, the dapper, agile and meticulous baton-wielding maestro displayed his customary artistry and showmanship. His two regular dance band vocalists from the previous season, the captivating Elizabeth Batey (*Dear Old Donegal* and *Little Old Mill*) appearing for her second season and charming audiences with her sparkling personality, along with Howard Jones (*April Showers* and *The Old Lamplighter*), were joined by newcomer Don Rivers (Handel's *Largo*, *Come Back to Sorrento* and *I'll buy a rose from Marguerita*), a tenor with film star looks, who sang 'the popular and dramatic ballads', with Bill McGuffie, solo piano and accompanist,* and Phil Silverstone, a regular violinist with the Joe Loss orchestra, who played the *Intermezzo Souvenir*

de Vienne from the film *Escape to Happiness*. The duet *Good, Good, Good* from Batey and Jones was one of the highlights of the evening. The *Mona's Herald* caught the mood perfectly: 'It is not easy to analyse the reasons why Joe Loss and his orchestra cast a spell upon audiences, but the unmistakeable fact is that they do'. Amongst the audience may have been ratings, trainees and offices from HMS Anson, the Home Fleet battleship anchored in Douglas Bay for a week, whose complement of some eleven hundred crew were granted the 'freedom of the town', free transport by Douglas Corporation and access to the Villa Marina the Derby Castle and selected cinemas. Joe Loss' final Sunday concert of the season took place on Sunday 24th August, and was a special request night, with the audience invited to send their requests to Joe Loss at the Villa Marina by mid-day on Saturday the 23rd.

The Sunday Celebrity Concerts commenced on 28th June, and one of the first variety stars to appear that season was Evelyn Laye, the English actress pre-eminent in musical comedy, operetta, theatre, film and pantomime. Her signature songs were Ivor Novello's *I'll See You Again* and Noel Gay's *Only a Glass of Champagne (but it's led a young girl into sin)*, popularised by Gracie Fields. Later in the season she received a great reception when she joined Jan Ralfini and his orchestra together with the comedy musical duo Gerry Hoey and Partner at a Sunday Popular Concert. In August the guest was Ethel Revnell, of Revnell and West, the original Cockney Kids.* Ethel appeared in her one woman revue after her partner retired through ill health in 1946. Her best-remembered impersonation was that of a baby! The afternoon concerts in the gardens at 3.00pm proved to be so popular that Douglas Corporation considered opening the Villa Gardens at 2.00pm in order that long queues in the Broadway and on the Promenade could be avoided. 'Every effort would be made to open earlier', but without extra staff this proved unworkable.

* A well-known double-act styled 'The Long and the Short of It'. Ethel was just over six-foot tall and Gracie just under five foot tall, and they often appeared as two gawky teenagers; their signature tune was *We do see life! Yes, we do see life*.

* Pianist William (Bill) McGuffie was once fined £3 10s for driving without due care and attention after driving into a wall near Braddan Bridge. He was voted Britain's top pianist three times during the 1950s, and went on to write film scores and make several TV appearances including the police drama *Softly, Softly*.

The Sunday Concert on 31st August starred the song writer, band leader, pianist and accordionist Billy Reid, and the Welsh-born singer Dorothy Squires:* 'Billy could write songs, and Dot could sing'em'. At that time she was a star of BBC Radio's *Variety Bandbox* and reputedly the highest-paid female singer in the United Kingdom.

* She worked the East End of London clubs before teaming up with Billy Reid and his accordion band, with whom she had a twenty-year partnership, consistently topping the bills selling thousands of records. In 1953 she married the young actor Roger Moore. They parted in 1961 but she battled on against changing musical fashions and in 1970 organised her own 'come-back' concert at the London Palladium, which was a sensation.

'Miss Snaefell' is 'Mona's Queen of Beauty'.

More ambitious in scale than 1946, the 'June Effort Committee' - bridging the slack period between Whit-week and the start of the summer season proper in July - and the 'Season Extension Committee' - extending the season to the end of September - each championed a number of local events to attract and entertain the visitors, including concerts with Douglas Town Band, dog shows, physical training programmes, ladies' open bowling competitions and a cricket festival. By far the most popular of these events were the weekly summer Thursday afternoon bathing beauty contests in the Villa Marina Gardens which started on 10th June when George Formby and his wife Beryl had been among the judges, and George, as usual, chatted and quipped with the delighted crowd. The contests reached their peak of popularity on Thursday 14th August, when 6,000 people watched twenty-nine dance contestants, each hoping to be crowned 'Miss Snaefell', parade in brilliant sunshine before the judges, who included Elizabeth Batey, Howard Jones and Don Rivers, the vocalists from Joe Loss' orchestra. The contests took the form of a two-hour afternoon show which also included music from Jan Ralfini and his orchestra and guest artistes. The Grand Finale featuring the twelve winners of the individual contests took place on 10th September for the title 'Mona's Queen of Beauty'. Douglas girl 'Miss Snaefell', and three holiday finalists, 'Miss Tynwald' from Bristol, 'Miss Ellan Vannin' from Glasgow and 'Miss Greeba' from Essex were chosen from more than 250 girls who had participated throughout the season. The winner was Miss Marion Joyce Lewis of Douglas who received a cheque for £50 and a silver trophy. What had begun as an impromptu beach contest, weather permitting, had become a major highlight of the summer season. On a smaller scale, the Douglas Merchant Navy Queen was due to be crowned in the Villa Marina Gardens on 8th September, and girls between the ages of sixteen and twenty were invited to apply together with applicants for the role of Maids of Honour. The stipulation was that the applicant must be a daughter or relative of Merchant Navy men and reside in Douglas and District. A similar event also took place in Ramsey.

The Sunday Celebrity Concerts continued to be well attended throughout September. The tenor Henry Wendon, barely remembered today, but highly regarded through his regular appearances with the Sadler's Wells Opera Company and Covent Garden during the 1930s and '40s, appeared early in the month together with the soprano Edna Hobson. On Saturday 13th a local version of the BBC Radio programme 'In Town Tonight' was staged at the Villa Marina with five local guests interviewed by S. A. Perry, including the newly crowned 'Mona's Queen of Beauty', Mr. J. Dunlop, a fitness expert and a well-known figure at the Douglas Holiday for many seasons and Douglas lifeboatman William Killey. This was followed by an Ellan Vannin Ball with both the Joe Loss and Jan Ralfini orchestras and the Wanderers Male Voice Choir. The following evening the traditional Sunday concert was replaced with a special stage adaption of Wilfred Pickles' BBC Radio show 'Have a Go'. Billed as '*The Social Event of the Season*', a Grand Charity Ball in aid of Noble's Hospital, the Jane Crookall Maternity Home and the House of Industry took place at the Villa Marina on the 22nd. Joe Loss, who delayed his return to England in order to take part in the event, and Jan Ralfini shared the dance programme and gave their services free. The raffle prize on that occasion was a chicken, but the winning ticket was not presented. The fate of the unclaimed fowl can only be guessed at.

'Farewell Joe and Jan'

The final two Joe Loss nights of the season took place on Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st September for the last celebrity concert which featured Albert Sandler,* violin, accompanied by pianist Jack Byfield. Sandler was one of the most popular and recognised bandleaders between the wars, and a significant figure in the field of light classical music. His many recordings testify to the extent of his appeal, and range from *Gypsy Songs*, *Music from the Palm Court* and *Sandler Serenades*, to light classics such as Elgar's *Chanson de Matin*, and old time dances including polkas and foxtrots, Strauss waltzes, notably *Roses from the South*, which became the signature tune for Grand Hotel. Also on the bill was American-born English actress and singer Dorothy Dickson, best-known for her recording of Jerome Kern's *Look for the Silver Lining*, who appeared in many shows at various London Theatres during the 1920s and '30s: the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Wyndam's, the Lyric, and the Palace. The other guest artiste was the Welsh baritone Redvers Llewellyn.

* Albert Sandler was for many years the director of the resident orchestra at the Grand Hotel, Eastbourne, the Park Lane Hotel, London and he directed the BBC Palm Court Orchestra from 1943. The popular programme *Grand Hotel* was broadcast every Sunday evening from the concert hall at Broadcasting House until 1973, although Sandler himself died in 1948 at the age of only forty-two.

The Derby Castle Ballroom and Opera House

The summer season of 1947 in the Derby Castle Ballroom opened on Monday 16th June with dancing from 7.30-10.45 led by Bert Noble and his band of fourteen musicians. In the Opera House - the variety theatre - the new manager, Mr. Will Sykes, promised 'a lightening programme of star turns', which proved to be every bit as spectacular as that presented at the Villa Marina.

The most prominent variety artistes included Douglas favourite Sandy 'Can you hear me mother?' Powell, whose catch-phrase had propelled him into radio fame before the war. His hopelessly inept ventriloquist and conjuring turns are still remembered today. 'I can see your lips moving' a member of the audience once heckled; his quick-fire reply: 'Ah yes, but only when the dummy's talking'. Another 'vent', a real one, was Bobbie Kimber with dummy Augustus Peabody. Audiences were shocked when it was revealed that 'she' was actually 'he'. Going into drag early in his career was the gimmick that established him and fooled everyone. Although no one knew it, 'he' was the first female impersonator to appear in a Royal Variety Show.

Another variety artiste well-known in Douglas was the 'brilliant impressionist' Afrique,* one of the most extraordinary characters in the history of variety, whose stage presence was never less than imposing, especially when he appeared as a terrifying Zulu warrior! His impressions of famous celebrities were legendary: The Prince of Wales (Edward VIII), an impression he dropped from his act when 'the powers that be' declared

it to be 'in bad taste', Churchill, and bizarrely, George Bernard Shaw in conversation with Hitler! He was possessed of a voice of extraordinary range, from deep bass to tenor, and could imitate Caruso singing *The Lost Chord*, Maurice Chevalier, Richard Tauber and Paul Robeson.

* Born Alexander Witkin in South Africa in 1907. His early training was that of an opera singer and he was a member of the Old Vic Opera Company in the 1930s. He appeared at the Windmill Theatre in 1934, at the London Palladium in 1936 and in Carroll Levis' 1939 film *Discoveries*. A fine character actor, he was much in demand as Abanazer in *Aladdin*. He died virtually penniless in 1961. For more information see www.jacquialexander.co.uk.

Very much in the Harry Lauder mould was the original 'Cock o' the North', Scottish comedian Peter Sinclair, an old-style music hall and variety entertainer, complete with highland costume. Roy Hudd* believed he should have been a bigger star than he was, but with Harry Lauder and Will Fyffe having dominated the field for so long, there just wasn't room for another traditional Scottish comedian. Sinclair later found fame as Jimmy Clitheroe's grandfather in the BBC Radio comedy *The Clitheroe Kid*. The ten act show also featured lugubrious Jack Stocks, 'the Woman Hater',* 'even funnier with the passing years'; impressionist Elva Sheridan's precocious schoolgirl; eccentric Henry D. Adams, 'skilful juggling and funny stuff'; a troupe of continental contortionists; a 'clever trickologist'; Molly Ostram, hat juggler, who had the hall in uproar with her weird and wonderful hats, and the Betty Hobbs Girls.

Roy Hudd, *Cavalcade of Variety Acts*, Robson Books. 1998.

* *The Woman Hater* is an anonymous cockney-style monologue.

Steffani and his Silver Songsters, with George Elrick, 'the smiling voice of radio', appeared on 30th June, their second appearance in Douglas since the war. Arturo Steffani and his Songsters* were essentially a well-trained sixteen-strong boys choir dressed in traditional Tyrolean *Tracht* whose act included plenty of action and dancing. Many boys were also instrumentalists, and their programme of old and new favourites was very well received. One unnamed boy soloist sang *Ave Maria* in a glorious voice, 'trained to perfection'. The Songsters toured extensively throughout the war and often shared the stage with Gracie Fields, George Formby and Wilfred Pickles. They were part of the *Victory Cavalcade* of March 1946 along with such stars as Tommy Handley and a young Petula Clarke. Their appearance in Douglas was sadly one of their last as they soon disbanded, unable to continue in the face of new regulations relating to the employment of children becoming law. Elrick, a former dance band vocalist and drummer with the Henry Hall Orchestra, radio personality and later impresario, who wrote the 1936 song *I Like Bananas Because They Have No Bones*, charmed the audiences with his endearing stage presence and cheerful songs. From the late 1940s until 1967 he was the genial presenter of BBC Radio's record request show *Housewives' Choice*. His regular sign-off was a phrase from Jack Strachey's *In Party Mood* sung to the words: 'I'll be with you all again tomorrow morning'. Thousands of 'Boltonians' were holidaying on the Island that week during their 'wakes' weeks and no doubt appreciated the Lancashire comedian Nor Kiddie, who 'had the house roaring with laughter', and Bobby Kimber

who ‘certainly earned the description “unusual ventriloquist”’. In support were the comedy acrobats Marco and Max, impressionist Marion Navarre, aerial artistes The Grafton Sisters and Jacques, and Betty Hobbs’ Girls.

* Suffolk-born Frederick William Wisker (1904-74), composer, arranger and composer, trainer of boys’ voices and producer of pantomimes and revues. The Silver Songsters first appeared in 1935 as a troupe of twenty boys mostly from 12-16 from working class backgrounds, who were given excellent vocal training supervised by Steffani himself. Their last performance was in Crewe in 1948. Steffani’s greatest discovery was the singer, bird impressionist, yodeller and siffleur Ronnie Ronalde, one of the biggest draws of the 1950s, whose personal manager he became.

Tweet, tweet on behalf of the working classes

In July ‘Brummy’- born veteran character comedian Billy Russell appeared in his characteristic role ‘on behalf of the working classes’, his act peppered with topical ‘rants’ against the Government, the Establishment and, of course, the Mother-in-Law. He shared the stage with ‘Yorkshire’s gift to variety’ and an old Douglas favourite Walter Niblo, a legendary front cloth (curtain) comedian, who, like the Manx comedian Harry Korris, was an early guest on Wilfred Pickles’ radio show *King Pins of Comedy*. The supporting acts included Tommy Burke & Co., a novel hand balancing act; Silvestri, ‘the unusual ball juggler’; an impressionist and Madrigal, a unicyclist. On the 14th Hutch returned sporting an out-sized handkerchief and a selection of ‘soulful melodies’ including *Begin the Beguin* and *Heartaches* and was retained for a second week. The famous ‘Scotch’ comedian, pantomime and film star, Jack Radcliffe, who often appeared with Jimmy Logan and was a mentor to the young Andy Stewart, appeared in three hilarious sketches including the hit of the show, ‘an inebriated gent’s antics in a telephone box’. Cheery comedy conjuror Claude Williams and ‘the boneless wonder’, Ladd West, described as ‘a novel performer’, glamorous xylophonist Shirley Dane and the American Western capers of Rex Roper and Maisie completed the programme.

Topping the bill at the end of the month were the Two Leslies* with a selection of their huge hit songs: *When the Guards Are On Parade*, *Jollity Farm*, *I Lift Up My Finger and I Say Tweet Tweet* and the darkly humorous *Ain’t it Grand to be Bloomin’ Well Dead?* with topical new lines and a new comic song mildly poking fun at Hutch’s large, colourful handkerchief. Leslie Sarony, whose career began before World War I, was known for his mildly *risqué* word play or *double entendre* exemplified in such songs as *In the Land of Inky Pinky Dinky Doo*, *Umpa, Umpa (Stick it up your Jumpa)*, *I’m a Little Prairie Flower* and *Mucking About in the Garden* - a favourite song of Sir Edward Elgar - which contains the line attributed incorrectly to both Marie Lloyd and Bessie Bellwood, *She sits among the Cabbages and Peas*. La Petite Poupee, ‘the dainty doll of the air’, comedy duo Velda and Vann and boy-meets-girl routine ‘with a vengeance’ from Richmond and Jackson completed a first-class bill of fare.

* Leslie ‘tweet tweet’ Sarony, singer, song writer - he could produce a song almost at the drop of a hat - writer of parodies, dancer and comedian with his new partner Leslie Michael Cole, having split from his original partner Leslie Holmes.

Vauderville came to the Derby Castle the first week of August with the appearance of Herschel 'Jizz' Henlere, an old-time comedian, composer, actor and comedy pianist with his stock-in-trade 'mad musicians' hair. He was like a deranged version of 'the great Dane' Victor Borge, the pianist *extraordinaire* and comedian, who appeared regularly on British television throughout the 1950s and '60s. Harry Mooney * had the house 'roaring with laughter' at his comical 'hop, skip and jump' routine. The fun continued with the impressionist Leslie Strange and his portrayals of a Tyneside lad and Herbert Morrison, the organiser of the Labour Party's 1945 election victory, and the 'new vicar of mirth' Hal Miller. Breathtaking 'thrills in the air' from Marie Louise, the 'vent' Archie Elray and his 'family', Reggie Redcliffe, the tap-dancing xylophonist and the remarkable 'feats of strength' by The Newman Twins 'gripped the audience' and kept them amused at the height of the season.

In the July 29th edition, the *Mona's Herald* noted that D. F. Barwell, the general manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, had left the Island for a week or so 'scouting' for new acts for the 1948 summer season. 'Stick to your Horses!' demanded the *Mona's Herald* in its 'Our Opinion' column when the future of the horse trams seemed in doubt. The Tramways Committee came in for the harshest criticism and was accused of lacking vision and imagination in attempting to integrate the historic transport system – an attraction beloved of thousands of visitors - with the modern public transport system. The position of Douglas in the crucial race for recognition among the UK holiday resorts was not so secure that such an asset could be discarded so easily. Those advocating the scrapping of the horse trams were influenced by the poor returns of 1946, but a fair trial under the far better summer conditions of 1947 was only fair, as any doubts would surely be quashed any evening of the week when observing the cheerful long queues at the Jubilee Clock or Derby Castle while the motor buses on the promenade route were nearly empty.

* Once part of the double act Murray and Mooney, Harry Mooney went on to star as himself in the TV film *This is Music Hall* in 1955 with Max Bygraves, Charlie Chester, Billy Danvers, G. H. Elliott, Oliver Hardy and Fred Emney amongst others.

Musical clowns, a nautical 'vent' and a Bengali magician

Later in the month Carroll Levis presented his 'Stars of Tomorrow' show with compere Jimmy Ryan and supporting turns The Two Cromwells - 'thrills in the air' - Terri Carol's novelty paper-tearing act and the 'master of magic' Jimmy Rogers. The newcomer hopefuls included a 'wee' young Welsh accordionist, a 'vent', a violinist, and singer Annette Reid from Glasgow. Betty Hobbs' Globe Girls were, as ever, on hand to add a touch of glitter and glamour to the show with their 'zesty' dancing. Known as 'The Gentleman Juggler' because of his impeccably turned-out stage persona, Gaston Palmer,* the self-styled Anglo-French comedy juggler developed his act from his failures on stage after he realised that the audience laughed when things went wrong. From that time onwards he apparently ceased to practice! His most famous routine featured a tray with eight glasses and eight spoons, which became a running joke throughout his act. The spoons never ended up in the cups, except at the

very last when he was leaving the stage, when he would pretend to trip, and all the spoons would miraculously fall into the glasses. Also sharing the bill was Billy Danvers,* 'as cheeky, cheery and chubby as ever'; Ivor E. Keys in 'keyboard comedy'; a 'novelty perch balancing act' with Bob and Rita Rema, and Sam Linfield and his company of 'sailors' from HMS Lively who 'certainly lived up to the name of their ship'.

* His was a commanding stage personality; he spoke six languages and was popular throughout Europe, America and Australia. He made six films including *The Madwoman of Chaillot* with Katherine Hepburn, Yul Brynner and Danny Kaye.

* Robust old-style 'front-of-tabs' gaggery. Born William Mikado Danvers in 1889, he was named after his father James who played the *Mikado* with D'Oyly Carte during the 1880s. An endearing character, he enjoyed a long career which lasted from the great days of music hall to the variety shows of the 1960s. He was a much sought-after Buttons in pantomime.

On Wednesday 20th August many of the stars currently appearing in Douglas joined a large parade from the Derby Castle to the Jubilee Clock in aid of the Island's Merchant Navy Effort. Accompanied by the bands from the ballrooms, it was, according to *Mona's Herald*, 'a gay and colourful spectacle reminiscent of the old Douglas Carnival days', and was followed by an all-star gala matinee in the Palace Coliseum, with all manner of 'high jinks and side shows in the Palace grounds'.

During the last week of August the father and daughter musical clown act Noni and Nita, 'the lovable clown and the loveliest lady', together with Dody, the flame-haired violinist, appeared with their 'original musical absurdity' during which Nita would attempt to play the harp, the accordion or some other musical instrument and dance whilst Noni fooled around. The 'dusky' Ben Abdrahaman Wazzan troupe of 'sensational' acrobats, and comedy magicians Lester Sharpe and Iris completed the line-up. Music was provided by the Tom Katz Saxophone Six, and ensemble of two alto saxes, two tenor saxes, one baritone and one bass saxophone. Originally a black-faced saxophone band formed in 1927, they became the Saxophone Six in 1936, often dressed as bell hops. Modestly billed as music hall's greatest vent, Arthur Prince, dressed as a sea captain, and accompanied by his cheeky Cockney chum able seaman Jim, had taken part in the first Royal Command Performance in 1912 (later Royal Variety Performance) along with Little Tich, Vesta Tilley, Harry Lauder and Wilkie Bard and continued to top the bill for fifty years. His signature tune was *A Life on the Ocean Wave* and his trademark trick was to drink a glass of beer whilst his dummy kept on talking. The supporting acts included 'slack wire' juggler Jose Moreno, Hal Swain and The Swing Sisters, aerial thrills from Dorothy Gray and Brother, and vaudeville's latest novelty Rex Ramer who sang duets with himself.

On 10th September the bands of Jan Ralfini and Roy Fox met in friendly rivalry at a special area cordoned off between the Villa Marina and the Derby Castle to see which band members could 'cajole, serenade or woo' the crowds into giving them the 50,000 pennies needed to construct a mile of pennies in aid of Island charities. At 10.30am a rocket signalled a breathless chase to the finishing tape as passers-by, shopkeepers and

even visitors on the horse trams were encouraged to donate their pennies. It was hoped this unusual musical duel would raise over £200, but after two and a half hours, with Ralfini's boys in the lead, only half a mile of pennies had been collected.

A big draw for the final week of the season in September was the Canadian actor-comedian Jackie Hunter,* known as 'Your Favourite Broadcasting Comedian', whose wartime film credits included *Don Chicago* and *Give Me the Stars*, who presented his one-man show, with new 'patter' and a drumming routine. The vocalist and pianist broadcasting couple Ted and Barbara Andrews were given a tremendous reception on their first visit to Douglas. Sheik ben Ali, genuine Bengali 'cod' magician with the catch phrase 'Nothing inside - nothing outside', performed many tricks with coins, including a well-known one with a paper bag, famously 'borrowed' by Eric Morecambe. 'Drawing the laughs' from comic cartoonist Paddy Drew, an unusual 'bird in a gilded cage' routine from Gale and Barker, comedy capers from Maxwell and Horrox, and the popular Manley and Austin transferred from the Palace Coliseum completed the bill. The season officially ended on Saturday 13th September with a traditional Manx Mhelliah.

* Jackie Hunter was one of the stars featured in *Variety Party* with Mantovani and his orchestra, just after 3.00pm on Saturday 7th June, 1946, when the BBC's Television Service resumed transmissions for the first time after the war. The show also featured popular pianist Kay Cavendish, Gwen Cately, soprano and impressionist Beryl Orde.

The Gaiety Theatre

A jolly, happy family holiday show

Under the new manager J. R. C. Hamilton, the Gaiety Theatre presented Manx comedian Harris Korris who returned to Douglas on 7th June with a new twice-nightly Isle of Man edition of the favourite wartime radio show *Happidrome*. Needless to add, the 'House Full' signs were frequently seen. The supporting acts included the twelve Tiller Girls, the three Manley Brothers with their highly unusual act utilising three musical knife grinding machines, and a new Manx star, Ramsey girl seventeen-ear-old Eileen Jeans* who sang three songs including Haydn Wood's *A Thousand Beautiful Things*. Vocalist Nancy Brown, who placed her large repertoire at the mercy of the audience who were invited to request their favourite songs, Stylish dancing duo Sanina and Valdemar, and vivacious *soubrette* Anna Mac completed the company. The picturesque settings and colourful costumes contributed to 'a really happy "Happidrome"' with Harry Korris and his colleagues 'dispensing the right brand of humour for the holiday crowds . . . sprinkled with plenty of old chestnuts and double-meaning humour'.*

* Real name Eileen Jean Crellin, a former pupil at Ramsey Grammar School, a typist with the Ramsey Steamship Company and a singing pupil of Mrs Mary Black ARAM, she won the contralto class at the Manx Music Festival that year. Her big break came when she deputised for Nancy Brown who was indisposed, having been recommended to Harry Korris by J. F. Hughes of Ramsey Amusements. After a hurried period of extra vocal coaching and instruction in stage craft she was introduced as 'a charming young

Manx vocalist by 'Ramsbottom', received a warm reception, and sang *I'll walk beside you* and *I'll remember the stars* and, in the second house, appeared in a Victorian song scene. See *Ramsey Courier*, 11.07.1947.

* See *Isle of Man Examiner* 18.07.1947 for photographs of the shows.

A typical show ran as follows:

Overture and opening scene: 'The New Happidrome Re-opens'.

Sketch: 'The Happidrome Sports Club' during which Ramsbottom attempted to coach the Happidrome Rovers.

Sketch: 'Lovejoy's Showboat' featuring a Coal-Black Mammy, a minstrel scene, 'Koloured Comedy' with Rastus, Massa Enoch and Mr Interlocutor Ramsbottom.

Sketch: 'Outposts of Empire', described by one reviewer as 'a screaming burlesque'.

The Happidrome Swingette with drums, piano and xylophone supported by the Manley Brothers.

Sketch: 'Mr Lovejoy at Home'. The John Tiller Girls.

Grand Finale' My Lovejoy's Revue' with Mr. Lovejoy, Enoch and Ramsbottom singing their popular exit song *We Three*.

Harry Korris and company were also busy off-stage that season. At the end of the month Harry Korris and 'Enoch' joined in the fun at Glen Wyllin fair ground and helped the Douglas and Ramsey Rotary Clubs entertain sixty 'crippled' children on a day long charabanc tour of the Island sponsored by the I.O.M. Cripples Guild. The children were treated to lots of ice-cream and had fun on swings, roundabouts and speed boats. Harry Korris presented each child with an autographed photograph of the Happidrome company. During the first week of July Harry Korris, a Rotarian himself, gave a talk about his beginnings on the Island with Fred Buxton's Pierrots and his subsequent career in Blackpool and on BBC Radio at the Ramsey Rotary Club entitled 'From Lawyer's Clerk to Star Comedian'. He concluded an entertaining evening with: 'I can say quite sincerely that I spent the happiest days of my life in Ramsey'. In August 'We Three' appeared at Peel Castle at a novelty sports event in aid of the Merchant Navy Comforts Service and caused great hilarity when attempting to start the married ladies' race. The sum of £5 5s was raised from the sale of autographed photographs of the trio.

Harry Korris was again amongst the stars who took part in a colourful large-scale parade of prominent stage and radio stars organised by Mrs Ellen Kane, 'Kanie', of the Howstrake Hotel, Onchan, also in aid of the above Merchant Navy Fund. Harry was persuaded to join the procession

pushed along in a pram, Tessie O'Shea, dressed as Carmen Miranda, travelled in style in a sheep trailer, Joe Loss and his orchestra played *In the Mood* and Syd and Max Harrison led a goat supplied by Groudle Glen Farm. The parade was followed by a variety matinee show at the Palace Coliseum which featured the bands of Roy Fox and Bert Noble, comedians Billy Danvers and Jack Edge and the Betty Hobbs' Girls. The joint events raised some £500-600.

The smaller venues

The resident dance orchestra at the Douglas Holiday Camp was Ralph Fidler and the Holiday Camp Ballroom Orchestra who also gave a Sunday orchestral concert. The 'neat revue' presented by Pat Aza at the Crescent Pavilion, *Douglas Calling*, opened the same night as the Derby Castle revue and starred Terry Wilson* - more changes of costume and character in two hours than you can count - 'Lancashire's Funny Man' comedian Wally Wood and a full supporting company including The Four Balmoral Girls, 'delightful *soubrette*' Trudi Walker, and Val Cave's skilful fiddling. By all accounts it was 'a brilliant summertime show with never a dull moment'. The Sunday concerts commenced at 8.00pm and were well attended.

* Terry Wilson was the guest speaker at a Douglas Rotary Club luncheon in August and recalled entertaining the troops with ENSA and George Formby during the war. He had sold his first car to George Formby who eventually sold it to a taxi driver. He reckoned that on many occasions they had both hired their own car!

The revue at Onchan Head Pavilion, 'Cocktails of 1947', was led by the droll 'King of Jesters', Jack Edge, together with Terry O'Neill and Billy West and his Eight Harmony Boys. Versatile local star Eva Kane - 'one of the Island's most versatile entertainers' - joined the cast in August. Her 'whistling items' were always well received, but she could change to a show stopping coloratura soprano in the blink of an eye. The verdict on this bright, breezy non-stop entertainment? 'A very palatable cocktail'. The 'brilliant new show' at the Ramsey Pavilion, *It's Fun*, was replaced at the end of July with a two-week run of 'a new style concert party' *Pleasure Pie* starring 'the great little comedian' T. E. D Lewis with 'wizzard accordionist', banjoist, mandolinist and electric guitarist Brendina, and Jack Rich, the entertaining BBC pianist. In support were 'bright spark' Ella Ruffey and 'utility girl' Jeanette Wayne. The programme changed again in August to *The North Regional Follies*: 'A bright show that should attract crowds to the popular resort . . . a tip-top entertainment in the music hall vein', with comedian Jimmy Calvert. This was superseded by 'a super musical revusical' entitled *Pleasure Parade*, straight from Aberystwyth. Norman Newman and his Mayfair Club Quartette played for dancing in the Ramsey Pool Ballroom and featured request and old-time nights.

The Castletown Pavilion at Janet's Corner featured The Theatre Workshop Players, a band of strolling players who presented the Isle of Man premier of Ewan MacColl's satirical comedy *Operation Olive Branch*, produced by Joan Littlewood.

The Palais de Danse

Harold Moorhouse* and his Havana Band were in residence from the New Year and presented the popular Old Time Nights, Carnival Nights, Saturday 'Whoopee' Nights and Sunday 'quick fire' variety concerts.

* Frank and Harold Moorhouse were family butchers. Frank played the drums, Bob Whittle played sax/clarinet – and also worked in the business - Harold Moorhouse was the musical director. Information from the recollections of Allan Wilcocks.

In March both Harold Moorhouse's band and Al Boyd's Jive Five played for the Manx Dance Championships and on April 26th the Princess Elizabeth 21st Birthday Celebration Dance was held and featured the New *Royal Minuet* demonstration dance. On June 9th Harry Roy* and his Tiger Ragamuffins took over from Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band until late September. Roy was a high-profile bandleader, a limelight-stealing one-man cabaret, famed for his energetic, unpredictably impish antics, effervescent personality, lively foot-tapping tunes and stylish arrangements. He was an ad-libber *par excellence*, although he must have toned down his characteristically 'edgy' and subversive material to some extent as some of it would have been considered far too risqué and sexually explicit for a Sunday Concert in Douglas. 'Scat' songs were his trademark and his signature tune, *Bugle Call Rag*, heralded the appearance of the hyper-active, diminutive showman, small in stature but larger-than-life on stage, the self-styled 'Little Hotcha-Ma-Cha-Cha'. The Star Special Nights commenced in July and included a crooning contest and a guest appearance of Tessie O'Shea.

* Real name Harry Lipman, 1900-71. British dance band leader and clarinetist. He toured the Middle East during WWII entertaining the troops with the *Ragamuffins*. One of his hit songs, *My Girl's Pussy* (1931), contained the lines 'There's one pet I'd like to pet, and every evening we get set, I stroke it every chance I get, it's my girl's pussy', which, in its crude, blatant suggestiveness, goes some way beyond George Formby's 1937 'Little Stick of Blackpool Rock'.

The cinemas generally did well that season. At the Strand Cinema George Formby in the ubiquitous *No Limit* vied with *The Jolson Story* at the Royalty with Larry Parkes in the title role, and *Welcome Stranger*, starring Bing Crosby as a young doctor at odds with his older stuffy colleague and falling for somebody else's fiancé, at the Crescent. Deborah Kerr, Jean Simmons and 'Sabu' were the stars in Powell and Pressburger's exotic and visually stunning *Black Narcissus* at the Plaza. Once again radio listeners could tune in to Manxland and hear a series of BBC broadcasts from the Villa Marina with Jan Ralfini, the Palace Ballroom with Roy Fox, and extracts from the *Happidrome* at the Gaiety Theatre and *Tons of Fun* with Tessie O'Shea from the Palace Coliseum.

Turned out well, didn't it?

The summer season of 1947 was generally considered to have been very satisfactory. The glorious weather in July and August led many elderly residents to recall the pre-war years when the promenades were thronged, and the beaches were crowded with children. Visitor numbers for May, June and July were only just short of those for 1937 - 322,891 - which meant that it was one of only two years when visitor numbers exceeded 300,000. By the end of August, the total numbers of visitors recorded reached 498,560 – a sizable increase over 1946 – and the September figures were eagerly anticipated. The Island had retained a leading place among the British seaside resorts, and it looked as if the effort to extend the season until the end of September was bearing fruit. It seemed probable that the early season in June and especially the late season in September would rank equally in the overall summer season and go some way to avoid the hitherto sudden collapse of the tourist trade at the end of August.

Three reasons were offered for the success of the season. The most significant was the exceptionally kind weather, but the new modernised Steam Packet vessels, which came into service as a result of the post-war rebuilding programme, the resumed sailings to Ramsey, which added a further 2,500 visitors to the overall numbers, and an increase in those travelling by air, contributed to an increase in those choosing to holiday on the Island. The steamer service between Douglas and Fleetwood benefitted from an increase in popularity of day trips, as did the Belfast service. When asked, visitors commended the Island for providing quality over quantity in matters of food and entertainment, and pin-pointed such treats as Manx ice-cream and the teas served at Rushen Abbey. When asked if Douglas should scrap the horse trams, the answer was an emphatic 'not on your life!' The bathing beauty contests in Douglas and elsewhere were hugely popular with the visitors. There was a boom in the revenue derived from hiring deckchairs and from sales of tickets for the horse trams and buses. Hoteliers in Ramsey began to advertise special winter rates.

There was the ongoing problem of the lack of facilities available to visitors arriving in Douglas on the early steamers to be resolved. One contributor to the *Mona's Herald* suggested that a two-story café could be built on spare land between the Edward VIII viaduct and the Imperial Building with plenty of seating and a 'Buffet', where holiday makers could wait in comfort with a cup of tea or coffee for their accommodation to become available. On 14th September, as the season entered its last week, it became necessary for food rationing documents to be shown by visitors staying more than two nights.

One consequence of the long, hot day of brilliant sunshine was that fewer people attended concert party performances nor wished to spend much time in hot, stuffy cinemas. There was even a dearth of energetic rowers willing to take to the boats on Ramsey's Mooragh Park lake, and the lack of wind provided little sport for yachting enthusiasts. The bowling greens, however, seemed more popular than ever. 'Friend of Ramsey' wrote warmly to the Ramsey Courier in September of his welcome in the town on his second visit since the war, but felt that the town had a

tired and care worn look and the derelict plots of land near Mooragh Park might have been filled with flower beds and shrubs. In his opinion Ramsey 'is the choicest part of the island, but the most neglected'. Another visitor wrote of the disapproving looks he attracted when walking around Ramsey minus his shirt trying to 'get some colour', something that would not have raised an eyebrow in Douglas. The editor of the *Ramsey Courier* suggested that he might be just a little sensitive, as there was plenty of flesh to be seen on Ramsey's beaches during the summer.

The Ramsey Regatta on Mooragh Lake attracted around 1,500 participants and on-lookers and was adjudged one of the most successful events of the season with many holiday makers taking part in the novelty races. The Wanderers Choir, conductor Jack Jolley, visited Laxey Glen Gardens in September and gave a concert in aid of the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund together with local singers and Steve Lahmers and his band. The event failed to attract the number of visitors it deserved. One of the last events of the season in the North was an Air Pageant at RAF Jurby on Saturday 13th September. Many different types of aircraft were on show and there were displays of formation flying, aerobatics and a realistic bombing attack on a tank.

By the end of September steamers were being laid up leaving only *Mona's Queen*, *Tynwald* and *Victoria* in service on the Liverpool run; the double daily sailings to Liverpool ceased for the winter except at weekends. Those involved in the tourist industry began to wonder if they had made enough to see them through the winter, and the search for out-of-season employment began in earnest.

1948

'The Island gets back into its holiday stride'

During 1947 and 1948 Douglas Corporation invested £4,250 'improving and prolonging the visiting season' and increasing Douglas' advantages as a pleasure and health resort. This injection of much-needed money certainly paid off and with visitor numbers rising to 624,000, 1948 was a near record season. There was even a substantial increase in those travelling to the Island by air - over 43,000 – an increase of more than 16,000 over the previous year. Photographs taken at different resorts around the Island that season show Douglas beach crowded with sunbathers enjoying the warm sunshine with many taking a dip into the sea, and likewise at Peel and Port Erin beaches, whilst hundreds relaxed in deckchairs in the Villa Marina Gardens listening to the afternoon concerts or watching the bathing beauty contests. Brilliant sunshine at the August Bank Holiday, and a new record of 82 degrees, and the Douglas promenades floodlit at night, brought back memories of the summers of 1913 and 1914 for some, and a real sense of carefree wellbeing and optimism for the future of the Island for others. Thursday 10th June was declared a Bank Holiday in celebration of the birthday of King George VI. In July the Island welcomed the new Steam Packet vessel *Snaefell V* and bade a

fond farewell to an old friend, *Mona's Isle*, after nearly thirty years in service. The Steam Packet was generally praised for the efficiency with which it brought visitors to the Island, but the lack of regular weekly sailings to Ramsey was felt in the North which in most other respects enjoyed another good summer.

1948 in a nutshell

British Railways created; BBC Radio's *Mrs Dale's Diary* first broadcast; London's first supermarket opened by the Co-Operative Society in Manor Park; 83,260 people attended the Manchester United/Arsenal football match at Maine Road on 17th January, the all-time highest attendance for an English Football league game thus far; BBC Radio's comedy *Take from Here* was first broadcast on 23rd March; the National Youth orchestra of Great Britain gives its first concert; the state of Israel comes into being; HMT Empire Windrush arrives in Britain on 22nd June with 492 Jamaican immigrants; the first Aldeburgh festival takes place between 5th and 13th June; the National Health Service begins to function; the BBC begin live coverage of the Olympic Games in London on 29th July; *Any Questions* first broadcast on the BBC Home Service on 12th August; jockey Lester Piggott, aged 12, wins his first race on 18th August; the first Comprehensive School opens in Potters Bar in September; the Hoover Company begins to manufacture washing machines in Wales; during October and November the first post-war Motor Show was held at Earl's Court; Princess Elizabeth gives birth to a son on 14th November; Ronnie Barker, aged 19, made his stage debut at the County Theatre, Aylesbury on 15th November; T. S. Elliott wins the Nobel Prize in Literature; Agatha Christie's *Taken at the Flood* published; Andrew Lloyd Webber, considered by many to be a composer, born 22nd March; Terry Pratchett, author, born 28th April; Michele 'Betty' Dotrice born 27th September; Scottish singer and entertainer Lulu born 3rd November; the music hall veteran Nellie Wallace died on 24th November; *Scott of the Antarctic* released, with the film score by Vaughan Williams.

The Gaiety Theatre

Tom Arnold presented his revue *Let's Get On With It* starring 'Radio's Rare Pair' Nat Mills and Bobbie,* whose sketch *Cabaret Capers* was said to be the funniest ten minutes of the show. The full supporting company including Vic Korris - the son of Harry Korris - Pepino and his Toy Circus; the Twelve Orchids; the 'Waltz Symphony' of speciality dancers Lalo and Musette; knockabout musicians Hackford and Doyle; 'Big Noise . . . off the beaten track impressionist' George Heaton, with impressions of TT broadcasts, London underground trains, thunder storms and 'other strange noises'; the amazing feats of balancing from Jackie 'the wonder equilibrist'; laughter-makers Bertie Hare, Norman McGlenn and Vera, and singer and dancer Heather Furnell. There were two packed houses at 6.30 and 8.45pm.

* A husband and wife team; straight man and lugubrious, dumb-looking stooge with her nonsensical interruptions. Nat Mills was a notable Dame in *Mother Goose*.

The Palais de Danse

The Palais de Danse was open throughout the year with Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band from January, and Eddie Edwards and his music, his popularity undiminished, and local guest vocalists, from 4th July. The Palais always attracted big crowds to the old-time dances on Tuesdays and Fridays, the Thursday 'Carnival Night' and the Sunday evening concerts. During August Harry Roy presented his show, and twice each day at 11.00am and 3.00pm the Rhythm on Records feature attracted both dancers and those who just enjoyed refreshments and some background music. Eddie Edwards bade farewell in early September, after which Harold Moorhouse returned for the winter. An Armistice Ball took place on 11th November.

The Villa Marina

Joe Loss 'Pulls-em in'.

The Villa Marina opened on Saturday 15th May with Jan Ralfini and his orchestral with a concert in the Gardens. There were Sunday Celebrity concerts throughout that month, with the Australian bass-baritone Peter Dawson singing a selection of operatic arias and rousing ballads, and local soprano Norah Moore on the 16th, piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer on the 23rd and John McHugh, tenor, Gerald Delmondi, star accordionist, and Gordon Bonner and his 'mighty electric organ' on the 30th. The Jewish comedian Issy 'My Yiddische Momma' Bonn appeared mid-June, and Wilfred Pickles returned to Douglas with a stage version of his hit radio show *Have-a-Go*, supported by comedy entertainer Nick Nissen, Gerald Delmondi and Norman Melville, tenor. People queued for hours before the start of the show at 8.00pm; Pickles himself appeared at 9.20pm and entertained for an hour whilst introducing eight contestants from among both residents and visitors. It was an evening 'marked by roars of laughter' after which he thanked the audience, including the Lieutenant Governor and Mayor of Douglas, and declared that he had just enjoyed the best three weeks holiday of his life on the Island and promised to return in September.

With the arrival of Joe Loss at the end of June the Villa Marina became *the* magnet for dancers. He brought with him his 'accomplished orchestra' and current dance band vocalists, all Douglas favourites: Elizabeth Batey, 'sprightly', vivacious and 'as charming as ever', in *Anything You Can Do*, Howard Jones, 'singing better than ever' in *Galway Bay*, and tenor Don Rivers whose singing of Handel's *ombra mai fu* - the so-called *Largo*

- *Come Back to Sorrento* and very movingly *Bless This House*, were among the highlights of the early programmes. Pianist Bill McGuffie also returned for a third season and delighted audiences with pieces by Beethoven, Schumann and Rachmaninov and later in the season, attractive medleys based on Tchaikovsky's piano concerto no. 1 and Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*. There was a 'gaiety of atmosphere' that kept everybody 'In the Mood' and augured well for another successful season. 'The secret magic power of Joe Loss . . . his stage personality and showmanship' . . . had clearly lost none of its potency, and 'attracts even those who never put foot on a dance floor . . . huge crowds revelled in the host of items in the two-hour programmes'. Jan Ralfini - with his own loyal following - shared the dance programmes playing the old-time numbers.

The hugely popular Bathing Beauty contests began in the Villa Marina Gardens with the musical entertainment provided by Jan Ralfini and his orchestra. Joe Loss presented the prize for the winner of the 'The People' National Ballroom Queen preliminary contest to Miss Margaret Holmes of Douglas. The second week Elizabeth Batey presented Miss Barrule with a silken sash and 5 guineas, and together with Howard Jones and Don Rivers helped make up the team of judges. Later that month Mr and Mrs Joe Loss chose Miss Peveril from among twenty-nine contestants, and at the end of August they were joined by guest judge Monsewer Eddie Gray, currently appearing at the Derby Castle, and five thousand holiday makers for the finale. 'Proof positive of the popularity of this event' declared the delighted June Effort Committee and the management of the Villa Marina.

The infinite variety of the Sunday concerts

The Sunday Celebrity Concerts that season featured some of the best-loved variety acts and concert artistes in the business, some paying return visits and others making their Douglas debuts. Borrah Minevitch's Harmonica Rascals made a special 4th July flying visit and performed many of their most popular and classical hits. It must have been among the 'gang's' last seasons as Borrah Minevitch had officially retired the previous year.* The Rascals were an immensely successful vaudeville act and the stars of several Hollywood films during the 1930s and '40s. The ten players featured the entire range of the harmonica family, with the midget Johnny Puleo naturally playing the largest instrument.

* Born Boruch Minowitz in Kiev in 1902, he retired to France in 1947, became a film producer, opened a jazz club in Paris and helped to distribute some of his friend Jacques Tati's films in America including the classic *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. He died in 1955.

Heddle Nash,* the English lyric tenor par excellence, and Joan Hammond,* the Australian soprano with an enormous popular following, were the celebrity artistes on Sunday 11th July.

* William Heddle Nash was one of the sixteen British singers chosen by Vaughan Williams to take part in the first performance of his *Serenade to Music* in 1938.

* Joan Hilda Hood Hammond (1912-96), the 'sporting diva'. She excelled at both sport and music, was a great lover of sailing, and in the late 1920s and '30s was better known as a championship golfer. She studied singing in Vienna and London, and became known for Puccini roles, eventually appearing in the world's great opera houses including The Royal Opera House, La Scala and the Vienna State Opera. Her famous recordings of Puccini's *O mio babbino caro*, which sold a million copies, earning her a Gold Record, Dvorak's Rusalka's *Song to the Moon*, and *One Fine Day* from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* made her a household name in the 1950s and '60s

The Popular Concert on 18th July featured Sam Costa, 'the crooner with a smiling moustache'. He had worked with all the best-known bands and had a charismatic personality that turned him into a national celebrity during WWII after he became a member of the team in Tommy Handley's ITMA. He subsequently teamed up with Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Horne in *Much Binding in the Marsh*, and his catchphrase 'Good morning sir, was there something?' became well-known in every household. After the war he developed a career as a radio disc jockey and is credited with introducing Mel Blanc's 1951 comic hit song *I Taut I Taw a Puddy-Tat* to British audiences in his *Record Rendezvous*. He was later a presenter of radios' *Housewives' Choice*, hosted his own radio programme *Midday Spin* and presented some early programmes in the popular BBC TV series *Juke Box Jury*. Sylvia Robin, a popular broadcasting vocalist known as 'the voice', was among the support acts.

Stewart MacPherson presented a stage version of BBC Radio's *Twenty Questions* on Sunday 25th July.* He had been the Chairman of *Ignorance is Bliss*, a spoof or burlesque of *The Brains Trust*, and was reputedly 'The Fastest Voice on Radio' after he began his quick-fire radio ice hockey and boxing match reports. As a war reporter he was known as '... the man behind the headlines', his calming mid-Atlantic accent and steady delivery making his voice one of the most distinctive, trusted and best-loved radio personalities of the war years. In 1946 he presented record request programme *Down Your Way* and, in 1949, was voted National Radio's Voice of the Year. In 1950 he would star as himself in the film *The 20 Questions Murder Mystery*. The show was presented again in August and the volunteer team of seven members of the audience proved too good for the quiz master, answering twelve out of thirteen questions correctly. The packed hall enjoyed a thoroughly entertaining evening with MacPherson's 'ready wit' and charm 'keeping the fun going'. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra played popular selections and the 'clowns' among the musicians delighted everyone with a burlesque entitled *My Favourite Band*. Accordionist Gerald Delmondi, comedian and violinist Nick Nissen and his unique rendering of Vittorio Monti's *Czardas*, pianist Harry Green and vocalists Barry Arnold and Norman Melville all contributed to a splendid night out in Douglas.

* BBC Radio's popular parlour game was first aired in March 1947. Canadian-born Stewart Myles MacPherson was the Chairman and the original panel which included broadcaster Richard Dimpleby, singer, actress and 'personality' Anona Winn, ITMA's Jack Train and 'an unknown', Olga Collett. Pianist Norman 'and the next object is' Hackforth became The Mystery Voice. The 500th edition of the show was broadcast in August 1962; the final edition, in 1976.

Ted Heath and his band, currently engaged at the Empress Ballroom, Blackpool, arrived by Dakota at Ronaldsway airport on the morning of Sunday 8th August on his first visit to Douglas, to give two two-hour concerts featuring a succession of 'roaring hot numbers' enough to 'waken

up the Isle of Man'.* The Royal Hall was filled to capacity twice that day, although not everyone warmed to Heath's hard driving, jazz orientated swing incorporating much that was new and unfamiliar to Douglas audiences more accustomed to the 'strict tempo' bands such as Joe Loss.

* *Isle of Man Examiner* 13.08.1948. The band numbered many top-flight musicians including Kenny Baker, trumpet, who had played with Ambrose and Lew Stone during the war, and with Ted Heath between 1945-50, and star drummer Jack Parnell who was with Ted Heath between 1944-51. His uncle Val Parnell allowed Heath to hire the London Palladium for the famous Sunday Night Swing Sessions which lasted until 1955. Ted Heath put his current band together in late 1945 from musicians returning from the war; it was generally considered to be the most successful and long-lasting British band of the 50s.

Heath was a shy, reluctant showman and therefore resident band singer and compere Paul Carpenter set the mood with his lively 'patter' in cahoots with 'diminutive trombone comedian' Jackie Armstrong, who was more than happy to 'play the fool'. An observer noticed that Ted Heath did not use a baton when directing his band.

'Swing Music fans were really "*In the Mood*"' when Joe Loss and his 'terrific show band' appeared before a sea of faces in a packed Royal Hall at his own Sunday concert later that month. The band played *Ode to Spring*, *2 o'clock Jump*, *Woodchoppers Ball* and *Trumpet Blues*, and Bill McGuffie played Lionel Hampton's *Hamp's Boogie Woogie* and other numbers. Don Rivers sang *The Donkey Serenade*; Howard Jones sang *Temptation* and *Dance Ballerina, Dance*, and Elizabeth Batey sang *Civilisation*, *Nature Boy* and *The Woodpecker Song*. Other vocal items included *Bless This House*, *Anything You Can Do*, *Galway Bay* and *There's a Man at the Door*.

The 'nimble-fingered' Rawicz and Landauer returned for the Sunday concert on 29th August. The Royal Hall was packed for 'one of the most elegant acts in the entertainment world today'. The *Mona's Herald* reported that 'so great was the continuous clamour for encores that eventually the curtain had to be dropped'. Their pieces included their arrangements of Tchaikowsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, a Dvorak *Slavonic Dance*, Chopin's 'Military' Polonaise, and de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra were in support with light classical pieces including Thomas' *Raymond* overture and a selection from *White Horse Inn*. Norman Melville, the orchestra's resident tenor, contributed *I'll Walk Beside You*.

In the early hours of Thursday 2nd September The Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir under their renowned conductor Douglas (Duggie) Buxton, together with Joe Loss and his orchestra, recorded *Ellan Vannin* and *Galway Bay*, with baritone Howard Jones for the HMV record company.* The sessions took place on the stage of the Royal Hall following the Wednesday evening dance programme and lasted into the early hours of Thursday morning, after which the 'tired but proud' choristers left in a charabanc for their homes in Douglas and Onchan, whilst Joe Loss and his orchestra stayed for a further two hours to record two more numbers.

* See Maurice Powell: *The Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir Record Ellan Vannin*, manxmusic.com.

A jovial evening was had by all on Sunday 5th September when Richard 'Dickie' Murdoch,* forever saddled with the nickname 'Stinker', and avuncular Kenneth Horne,* the master of the double meaning delivered with bland innocence in a rich, fruity voice, entertained a crowded Royal Hall for the second time that season. Both were well known from the wartime radio shows *Merry-Go-Round* and *Much Binding in the Marsh*. Murdoch was the consummate radio entertainer both as a performer and writer, and with his roguish looks, he often played the straight man to such over the top characters as Arthur Askey. For Douglas, his genial upper-middle-class patter was peppered with 'local' topical allusions. One of their sketches developed into a comedy musical act using a bathing beauty contest programme as a musical score!

* Richard Murdoch, actor and entertainer, whose big break came in 1938 when he teamed up with Arthur Askey in BBC Radio's *Band Waggon*. It was here that he acquired his nickname 'stinker', a reference to his posh education at Charterhouse and Cambridge and his urbane, English Home Counties *persona*. He served with Bomber Command during WWII, finishing with the rank of Squadron Leader.

* It was during his war service in the RAF that Kenneth Horne formed a concert party and made his broadcasting debut in 1942 as quizmaster in BBC Radio's *Ack-Ack, Beer-Beer*. At this stage in his career he was starring in *Much Binding in the Marsh*, set in a fictional RAF station, with Richard Murdoch as his harassed second-in-command, and Sam Costa as an amiable but disaster-prone chump. Horne and Murdoch were very much a double act at this time. In December 1949 he took the role of Chairman of BBC Radio's *Any Questions* for the first time. The years of *Beyond Our Ken* and *Round the Horne* lay ahead in the 1950s and '60s.

The following Wednesday saw the final Bathing Beauty Contest for title of Queen of Man 1948 watched by 8,000 people packed into the Villa Marina Gardens. George Formby and his wife and Mr and Mrs Joe Loss were on the judging panel. The winner, Miss Joyce Lewis received a £60 silver rose bowl and £50 in cash and retained the title she first won the previous year. The musical part of the afternoon was provided by Jan Ralfini and his orchestra.

On Sunday 12th September the Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir were the guests of Joe Loss and his orchestra for an evening of the old and the new. The choir, under their conductor Douglas Buxton, sang *The Jolly Roger, Abide With Me, Galway Bay* and *Ellan Vannin*, which was 'sung with perfect expression and feeling . . . made a great hit . . . and received a splendid ovation from the audience'. The orchestra played the ever-popular *Woodchoppers' Ball, Trumpet Blues, Ode to Spring* and *Sabre Dance*. Elizabeth Batey sang a new number, *The Pussy Cat Song*.

'Give then a grand send-off'.

On Saturday 18th September there was a Grand Farewell Ball for Joe Loss at the end of his third season and for Jan Ralfini. 'Joe Loss is coming back . . . and Jan Ralfini too', announced Alderman J. H. Skillicorn (Chairman of the Entertainments Committee of Douglas Town Council) to loud applause from the stage of the Royal Hall. There was no doubt of the popularity of Joe Loss 'and his merry men' with the holiday makers, and 'the wisdom of these decisions (to engage both Joe Loss and Jan Ralfini and their orchestras) is apparent, for all pre-1948 records in receipts and

attendances have gone overboard this season'. Over 100,000 had attended the Sunday concerts and the Bathing Beauty Contests. Each member of both orchestras was presented with a fountain pen. As a tribute Joe Loss played the Manx National Anthem at the end of the evening, and Jan Ralfini repeated the compliment at the end of the final Sunday concert.

The final celebrity concert took place on Sunday 19th September with Joan Hammond (operatic arias including *O my beloved father*), and John McHugh, tenor, (*Take a pair of sparkling eyes* and *Bless This House*) with Jan Ralfini and his orchestra.* 'Musical Memories' compiled and compered by Jan Torr reviewed events and personalities associated with the Villa Marina during the season. A bouquet was presented to the Entertainments Manager of Douglas Corporation, S. A. Perry, and Jan Ralfini made a speech of thanks for his warm welcome and the many kindnesses shown to him by the Manx people. The orchestra performed Rossini's *William Tell* overture and a concert waltz based on Noël Coward's *I'll see you again*, together with solos from organist Gordon Banner and accordionist Gerald Delmondi.

* Local musician Molly Radcliffe had been the orchestra's violinist for the last two seasons.

Away from the large entertainment venues, the main attraction at the Plaza Cinema at the close of the season was *Gone with the Wind*.

The Palace Ballroom and Coliseum

The Palace ballroom opened for the season on 5th June with Joe Kirkham and his band in the ballroom entertaining large crowds of dancers nightly, and his String Serenaders in the Gardens every afternoon at 2.30 where a 6d ticket would entitle everyone to a deckchair. Kirkham's band enjoyed a fine reputation as 'a strict tempo band', essential for dancing, and there were dances old and new on a fifty-fifty basis each Tuesday, and so-called 'King Carnival' nights on Thursdays until midnight.*

* Season tickets for Isle of Man residents were available as follows that season: the Palace and Coliseum, £1 10s; the Derby Castle and Opera House, £1 5s; a combined Palace & Derby Castle ticket. £2 5s and the Palais de Danse, £1 5s.

The season at the Coliseum opened with *It's Fun*, a 'Star-studded Summer Show' featuring Charlie Bruce and adagio dancers Petro and Petrova 'with his band of dancers'. The Coliseum orchestra was under the direction of Harold G. Payne, 'a capable musical director'. The resident summer show *Good 'Evans* starring Lancashire's 'ambassador of mirth' Norman Evans opened on 26th June, whereupon *It's Fun* transferred to the Crescent Pavilion. Described as 'The 1948 Family Laughter Show', *Good 'Evans* was 'clean and clever . . . bright and breezy . . . with never a wrong word or gesture throughout the two hours entertainment'. There was, indeed, 'a lot to laugh at' in Norman Evan's famous sketches 'Over the

garden wall', a visit to the dentist, and the 'absolute scream' of his antics with Teddy the Baby Panda. The supporting acts included the legendary all-blond precision dance troupe Twelve Zio Angels in their fantasy *The Phantom Guard*, Freddy the Sophisticated Clown assisted by Paul King, 'uproariously funny and an amazing multi-musical talent', and Radcliffe and Ray with songs and duets at the piano. There were full houses well into July and further record-breaking crowds reported in August. The local newspapers were unanimous in their estimation that *Good 'Evans* was 'without resort to the risqué or the vulgar . . . the most entertaining show brought to the Island for many years'.

A typical show began with an overture, after the troupe Twelve Zio Angels dazzled the audience with two show-stopping routines. Norman Evans then made his first appearance to say 'Hello' and introduced Indian club jugglers Gray, Austin and Worth, after which he presented his first sketch, 'A Painful Episode'. Welsh singing brothers Radcliffe and Ray, 'Two Boys in Harmony', and regular members of the Norman Evans road show, then appeared in their smooth, polished vocal act in the style of Layton and Johnstone, followed by Marguerite and Charles doing 'Something Out of the Ordinary' on the isometric bars, and to end the first half, Norman and Ray's musical turn 'Fun at Two Pianos'. After the interval Twelve Zio Angels performed their best-known routines 'The Military Tattoo' and 'The Phantom Guard', after which Norman Evans together with Baby Panda Teddy reduced the audiences to tears. Slapstick antics and back-chat from Freddy the Clown, the three 'charming young ladies' that formed Zio Trio, and circus thrills from Swan and Leigh bridged the gap before Evan's final appearance as his most famous character, the gossipy Fanny Fairbottom, in the iconic sketch, 'Over the Garden Wall', followed by the Grand Finale, 'All Pals Together'. The ambience in the Coliseum and the spectacular effects required in some of the acts was considerably enhanced by the newly installed lighting system known as 'Delicolour'. Amongst the audience that first night of the show were several boys and girls from the Isle of Man Homes for Orphan and Destitute Children, and groups of elderly folk from the House of Industry, all guests of the Palace & Derby Castle Company. At the end of the evening Norman Evans presented two cheques of £100 each to the managers of the Palace Ballroom and Coliseum donated by 'a Douglas lady' who wished to remain anonymous.

Good 'Evans continued to draw large houses throughout August, and that month fifty people attended the 25th wedding anniversary celebration of Mr and Mrs Norman Evans at the Howstrake Hotel. During his after dinner speech Norman recalled his early life as a secretary in a cotton mill and a salesman selling paper tubes, and recalled that Gracie Fields gave him his first chance in Rochdale.*

* This is a nice story but not quite true as Oswald Stoll gave him his first chance at the Alhambra in London in 1934. See *The Era*, 14.11.1934 cited in Richard Anthony Baker, *Old Time Variety, Remember When*, 2011.

'Good, clean comedy at its best' . . . mostly.

The first Sunday Concert in July featured the baritone Harold Williams, 'celebrated vocal duettists' Janet Hamilton Smith and John Hargreaves, and Jack Train, radio's supreme man of many voices, appeared the following Sunday. Train, actor and impressionist and a household name as the voices of Fusspot, Funf the German spy and Colonel Chinstrap from *ITMA*, 'made a crowded house rock with laughter'. He shared the bill with smooth crooner and pianist Hutch, 'the toast of London', and one of the first black entertainers to be accepted by Society. Joe Kirkham's band played a selection of light orchestra favourites. On Sunday 18th Tommy 'It's that man again' Handley, the star of *ITMA* himself was the guest variety star, and he too had the Coliseum rocking with laughter at his quick-fire jokes and patter when he appeared together with the Lon Dhoo Choir.

Elsie and Doris Waters,* radio's cockney duo 'Gert and Daisy', attracted one of the largest crowds of the season when they appeared on Sunday 25th July together with Radcliffe and Ray. Considered by many as the most successful female double act in the history of entertainment, they were homely and utterly believable as they swapped gossip about Gert's fiancé, Wally, Daisy's lazy husband, Bert, and their nosey neighbour old mother Butler. Their comedy crosstalk routine was described as 'rich, raw, ripe and risqué' and sprinkled with political and other topical references about the Labour Prime Minister Clement Atlee. They had in fact just embarked on their first touring show, *Gert and Daisy's Working Party*, which visited a different part of the country each week, and introduced guest stars including their brother Jack Warner, Richard Murdoch and Cardew Robinson. There was also an enthusiastic reception for twenty-year-old Roy Wilson making his concert debut as a virtuoso violinist in Monte's *Czardas* and two encores. Virtuoso violinists were always popular in Douglas, and some members of the audience may have been old enough to recall the years before World War I when the young Haydn Wood had displayed his enormous talent at the Sunday Sacred Concerts under the baton of his older brother Harry Wood. The house was full to capacity and many were happy to stand.

* Born in Bromley-by-Bow, East London, they made their debut in Will Pepper's *The White Coons* concert party and on the radio in the early 1930s. The whole family were musical and at one time performed as E. W. Waters' Bijou Orchestra. Their brother Horace changed his name to Jack Warner. During WWII they broadcast daily cookery hints and starred in three films. From 1949 they had their own radio sitcom *Petticoat Lane*. Their songs were quietly amusing; their signature tune was *Daisy Bell* and they reputedly never sang the same song or broadcast the same act twice.

One future icon of television and film comedy made his Douglas debut at the Sunday Concert on 1st August. Frankie Howerd* was by no means the huge celebrity he would become, but a familiar enough radio personality since he established himself as a resident comedian on *Variety Bandbox*, the programme that 'discovered' many stars of the future including Max Bygraves, Petula Clarke, Cyril Fletcher, Peter Brough (of *Educating Archie* fame) Harry Secombe, Bill Kerr, Bob Monkhouse and Tony Hancock. At this stage in his career he eschewed the persona of a 'star', and instead ambled onto the stage in an ill-fitting brown suit, as if he had merely wandered in from the street. In fact he was fresh from a gruelling pantomime tour as Simple Simon in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, and the next day, Sunday 2nd August, was due to appear in Leeds! His

opening line: 'Now, er, ladies and gentlemen' became his catchphrase. He was supported by the Australian bass-baritone Howard Williams. The following Sunday the comedy pair Kenway and Young, well known for memorable radio characters and catch-phrases, appeared with Irish family-butcher-turned-lyric tenor James Johnston, currently engaged at Sadler's Wells, but just one year away from his Covent Garden debut in Verdi's *La Traviata* with Elizabeth Schwarzkopf no less. Other concert artistes that appeared at the Sunday Concerts that month included the English soprano Isobel Bailey and baritone Dennis Noble, who delighted an audience of 3,000 with popular songs, ballads and operatic arias by Handel, Rossini, Verdi, Wagner and Mozart.

* Another 'unknown in uniform' who learned the basic skills of performing before an audience in the school of hard knocks in the halls but was rejected by *ENSA* and *Stars in Battledress* during the war. In Sunderland he once had a shipyard rivet thrown at him!

Radio personalities Eric Barker and Pearl Hackney ('sheer nonsense turned into clever entertainment') were the well-known voices from the services show *Waterlogged Spa*, which featured the goings-on at HMS Waterlogged. 'Steady' Barker was the station Commander of the imaginary naval shore base at Sinking-in-the-Ooze, and Pearl Hackney his wife. Together with a cast of improbably eccentric personnel and a host of catchphrases such as Dr Oliver Dither's 'I'd be very much surprised if you feel a thing . . .' the show occupied comedy territory somewhere between *ITMA* and the *Goon Show*. Afrique held the stage for thirty mesmerising minutes with impersonations of Paul Robeson, Vic Oliver, Richard Tauber, the Duke of Windsor and Winston Churchill, and popular songs such as *Now is the Hour, I'll Make Up for Everything* and operatic favourites included Rossini's *Largo al factotum*.

A stage version of radio's *Ignorance is Bliss*, the anarchic antidote to the high-brow radio quiz *The Brains Trust*, came to the Coliseum on Sunday 29th August with compere and question master Matt Nixon, and a panel of familiar halfwits: cockney character Harold 'Wot a geezer!' Berens, refined Gladys Hay, 'a women so large, her mother must have been frightened by the Albert Hall before she was born', and 'silly ass' Michael Moore, 'a man whose hobby is setting fire to police stations'. Questions were either avoided, digressed from or ignored altogether whilst the comic momentum often descended into an hilarious unruly slanging match littered with appalling jokes. The *Mona's Herald* acknowledged that the audience was 'convulsed' by the quick-fire patter and inane questions such as 'on what part of the body do you wear a wrist-watch?', although the reviewer noted that the panel, egged on by the crowd to 'crack the nasty ones', abandoned certain 'standards of decency' in front of a holiday crowd, and doubted that the evening would have gone down well in Rhyl or Blackpool. In support, The Wanderer's Male Voice Choir conducted by Jack Jolley were 'in good form' and earned the respect of the audience. Bert Noble took over as conductor of the orchestra for the evening from an indisposed Joe Kirkham.

Joe Kirkham was back in charge of his Augmented Concert Orchestra for the Sunday concert on 5th September and included selections from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *The Student Prince* in the purely musical part of the evening. The huge draw was of course George Formby, billed as 'Britain's Greatest Stage and Screen Comedian', with pianist Jennie Simpson, who received an equal amount of applause for her impressive artistry in pieces by Chopin, Liszt and de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*. Formby himself received a tremendous reception and his thirty-five-minute turn included all the familiar the songs he made famous all over the world. 'If you can stand it, I'll sing 'em' he quipped. *No Limit* was showing at the Royalty Cinema that week so it was inevitable that amongst his dozen or so songs he included the two really topical Manx numbers, *They Call it the Isle of Man* and *Riding in the TT races* along with *Mr Wu* and *Leaning on a Lamp Post*. ' as infectious as ever, he is unchallengeable in his special brand of entertainment' affirmed the local newspapers. On Monday 6th George Formby and wife were in a box for *Good 'Evans* 'and appeared to enjoy themselves immensely'.

The exciting news that Norman Evans would be returning to Douglas for the 1949 summer season, announced from the stage of the Coliseum by manager Fred Barwell at the end of the evening of 12th September, was received with 'thunderous applause'. Evans thanked George Faragher, the manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, Harold G. Payne, the musical director and Jennie Simpson, the resourceful piano soloist and accompanist. The curtain fell for the last time that season after the entire company and the audience sang *Auld Lang Syne*. All were agreed: it was 'the best show seen in Douglas for years'. The official end of the season came a week later with a traditional Manx Mhelliah.

The Derby Castle Ballroom and Opera House

New Style Quick-fire Variety!

The Derby Castle Ballroom opened for dancing between 14th and 17th May to Al Boyd and his augmented band, and for the summer on Monday 14th June with Bert Noble and his band who had proved to be so popular the previous season. Wednesday nights were designated 'Carnival Nights'. The Variety orchestra in the Opera House was conducted by Atkin (Atty) Baker.

Donald Peers, Radio's 'Cavalier of Song', was the star of 'a well-balanced vaudeville show' in the Opera House. Small, avuncular and cuddly, at the age of thirty-nine he was Britain's unlikely first 'pop' idol. He sang sentimental 'evergreens' such as *In a Shady Nook* - his most requested song and his signature tune - yet still had teenage girls and women of all ages swooning at his concerts. Brought up in a Welsh mining town, he first started singing at Sunday School, but enjoyed little professional recognition until 1945, after twenty years' drudgery touring the provincial

halls. Suddenly Britain's 'bobby-soxers' were claiming him as their own and screaming his name at concerts. Even though he lacked the sex appeal of Sinatra or the raw emotion of Johnnie Ray, a sunny personality, sincerity and a silky, mellow voice left every girl believing he was singing just for her.* His songs that season included *I Wonder Who's Kissing her Now* and *Why am I yearning for Teresa*. That season he generously highlighted fourteen-year-old Maureen Kershaw* of Beams Breezy Babes and joined her in the duet *Sweet Sixteen*, the first step in establishing her as a singer as well as dancer the following year. Also in support was the Flying Comets' aerial 'dare devil' act, Beams Breezy Babes troupe of young dancers (the 'sprightly sprites'), feats of strength and 'good, clean' cross-talk from The Three Aberdonians, ethereal musical sounds coaxed from ordinary drinking glasses by nimble-fingered Sylvia, the 'near-wits' Bijou and Freda and The Marchants, 'ace diabolists', who amazed the audiences with their spinning manipulations of double coned bobbins (yo-yos), suspended on strings between two sticks.

* In 1949 Peers partnered Billy Russell and Norman Wisdom in a new show, *Buttons and Bows*. The following year he presented a one-man show at the Albert Hall and appeared at the Royal Variety Show. In the 1960s he presented his own television show 'Donald Peers Presents' in which he introduced a young fellow-Welsh singer Tom Jones to British audiences. His career faded gradually from the 1950s with the closure of many variety theatres, although his recordings still featured in the best-sellers lists in the 1970s. Richard Anthony Baker, *Old Time Variety: an illustrated history*, Remember When, 2011.

* Maureen Kershaw joined Beams Breezy Babes, run by Eleanor and Peggy Beams, in 1946 at the age of twelve, when she was already an accomplished singer and tap dancer. She embarked on her solo singing career in 1949. For further details, and photographs, of her career on radio, television, in variety and in pantomime see the Simkin/Hughes/Kershaw Family page and follow the link to Maureen Kershaw.

'Professional idiot' Claude Dampier, a good actor with a wonderfully mobile comical face, partnered by the beautiful Billy Carlyle, was the next guest entertainer that season. During his act he often talked about a friend, Mrs Gibson, who never actually appeared, but whose name always raised a laugh when spoken through his protruding teeth in his 'silly arse' voice. The supporting acts included Yorkshire comedian Sandy Lane; the two competing cross-talking dummies of entertaining 'vent' *extraordinaire*, Bobby Kimber from the previous season; cartoonist Paddy Drew; The Two Cromwells 'acrobatic thrills in the air'; dizzying roller skating from The Skating Typhoons, and resident singing and dancing chorus Beams Breezy Babes completed the line-up. Orchestral support came from Bert Noble and his band. George Doonan, 'The Life and Soul of the Party' appeared on 28th June. He was well known as a 'patter' comedian in halls all over the provinces and was one of the first comedians to adopt a smart lounge suit instead of the usual rag-bag music hall outfit. If he did not feel that his act was going well he would kick *himself* in the pants crying 'Take that! Old man'. His signature tune was *Make it a Party, Gay and Hearty*'. He was joined on the bill by the comedy juggler Gaston Palmer, The Two Eddies, Hal Swain and his Swing Sisters - saxophone and two female accordions - and Red Fred and Rosa.

Hutch, 'The Millionaire of Melody', made a triumphant return to Douglas on 4th July and was retained for a second week. He sang as many popular sentimental numbers as could be crammed into half an hour, and judging by their persistent calls for encores, the audience made it clear they would happily have listened to him for half a day! The supporting acts during the fortnight included Johnny Lockwood, 'a sparkling personality with a good style in patter'; the 'perky porter and the sailor' Wheeler & Wilson with new quips and stories; comedy magician Donald Stuart, known as 'Varieties longest laugh'; trapeze artistes Dorothy Gray and Brother; two burley knock-about dancers Desmond and Marks, in an old fashioned music hall act complete with acrobatics and 'prat-falls'; magicians and Jack and Mary Kinson; comedian Norman Kiddie; and 'The Juggling Fool', Henry D. Adams.

Jimmy James* was afforded a very warm welcome on 19th July on his first visit to Douglas for many years. He was the consummate comedian's comedian; a comic actor in the Robb Wilton vein whose timing was the envy of his peers. His famous sketch *Animals in the Box* with his two stooges Bretton Woods and Hutton Conyers* is the stuff of comedy legend, and although a teetotaller himself, he could play a magnificent drunk, as in his sketch *The Spare Room*, about a bridegroom who gets locked out on his wedding night. He excelled in improvised gibberish and a thousand ad-libs and introduced such bizarre characters as Lancashire's 'Champion Chipster and aspiring Batterer' and new sketches such as 'Sober as a Judge'. He was retained for a second week. The supporting acts included Val Lotto and Constance who 'accomplished strange things on bicycles'; Hamilton Conrad whose pigeons flew alarmingly around the theatre under his expert control. Daring and dainty little aerial star Dolaire and violin playing Irish comedian Harry Bailey, who let out a stream of one-liners such as 'Twenty-eight children has Mrs O'Brien, she feels fine but the stork is dyin' ' whilst still playing the violin, together with 'laugh-raising' female impersonators Ford and Sheen* and the 'twinkling toes' and energetic tumbling of Beams Babes completed the programme. For the second week James acquired an additional partner, Gloria Bannister, together with 'The Great Claud', comedy conjuror Claud (Medals) Williams, comedy acrobats Dunn and Grant and amusing songs from 'the woman hater' Jack Stocks. Ventriloquist Terry Hall with his Irish dummy Mickey Flynn and comedy jugglers Retter and Bale completed the programme.

* His 1953 Royal Variety Performance stopped the show. He retired in 1964 after a sixty-year career. See Roy Hudd's *Cavalcade of Variety Acts*, Robson Books, 1998.

* The young Roy Castle played Hutton Conyers for a time, and nephew Jack Casey, known as 'Eli' or 'Our Eli' played Bretton Woods.

* Danny la Rue made his first brief appearance in their show *Misleading Ladies*.

In August Herschel 'Jizz' Henlere appeared with his eccentric quick-fire variety act, and no stranger character had appeared in Douglas since G.H. Chirgwin, 'the white-eyed Kaffir', before World War I. Sometimes billed as 'The Mirthful Music Master' and sometimes 'The Mad-cap Musician', he was, like Ken Dodd, notorious for overrunning his allotted time. A wildly innovative self-promoting total work of art, he had a deranged shock

of hair, thin-faced features, painted on moustachios *a la* Salvador Dali, and often wore a tail coat, neck tie and waistcoat. A demon piano player, the name 'Jizz' signifies 'Jazz', and apparently, it was hinted, something less tasteful. Sharing the bill were magician Chris Charlton, who apparently passed a metal rod through the body of a girl, continental juggler Roberto Chiesa, Don Philippe and Marta who designed glamorous gowns from odd pieces of material on stage and Beams Breezy Babes.

* Born Herschel Steinberg, this Canadian-born novelty pianist, composer, parodist and eccentric comedian was active on the music hall scene from the 1920s until the '40s.

The following week Billy 'the Son of Toil' Russell headed a quick-fire variety programme together with the 'vent's vent' Arthur Worsley and a full supporting cast. Monsewer' Eddie **Gray*** was a 'one-off' who almost defies description. An uproarious juggler and dancer, whose trademark was his appallingly mangled Cockney-French, 'Franglais' or 'Allo Allo' French, as we might call it today delivered with dead-pan expression eg 'Je got 'ere un packet de cards'. In an age of eccentric entertainers, he stood out with his unruly moustache, red nose, round spectacles and battered top hat and tails. He delivered all manner of visual jokes whilst humming tunelessly or battering the audience with his raucous Cockney voice. One of his best-loved sketches involved him trying to get a bored looking dog to jump through a hoop. The supporting turns included Woodward's 'mysterious magical tricks', Millicent Cooper, 'who changes her gowns on an average of one per minute', The Cycling Astons, the French musical acrobats Les Frères Six and one of Douglas' favourite comedians, Yorkshireman Walter Niblo, who gently poked fun of the Manx Government.

* Eddie Gray was an honorary member of the Crazy Gang whose 'calling card', given out to his fans, was a small book entitled *What I Know About Women!!!* The pages were blank! He left the Crazy Gang after World War II and pursued a solo career. His last guest appearance was with Elsie and Doris Waters in Eastbourne in 1969. He died three days later.

Towards the end of the month Afrique returned to top the bill with his brilliant and sometimes controversial impressions of the famous. His supporting acts included slack wire walker Babu Rao, Freddie Bamberger, who bombarded the audience with wise-cracks and stories from the piano at the same time as playing a piece in a myriad of different styles, and the dizzying spectacle known as The Skating Barodas. On 30th August Turner Layton, the genteel, sophisticated and cultivated honey-toned 'black' American crooner, appeared impeccably dressed in an elegant dinner suit and sang songs that were a genial mixture of sentiment and sophistication such as the 1918 hit *After You've Gone*. Originally the pianist of the cabaret duo Layton and Johnstone, he had successfully pursued a solo career since the duo split up in 1935, often appearing at London's Café de Paris, but by 1948 he was virtually retired.

The last celebrity to appear that season was Douglas Byng on 6th September. 'Bawdy but British', and an old school *raconteur*, he was highly regarded as the darling of West End variety, cabaret, pantomime and revue for nearly seventy years, and was the self-styled ambassador of 'camp' long before the age of Kenneth Williams *et al*. He had opened his own cabaret club in London in the 1920s which was patronised by such

stars as Noel Coward, Gracie Fields and Gertie Lawrence, and in the 1930s he appeared for several seasons at the Café de Paris in Leicester Square. His songs and monologues were often *risqué* but never 'dirty' and included such titles as *Sex Appeal Sarah*, *Hot Handed Hetty - the Vamp of the Jetty* and *I'm Milly, the Messy Old Mermaid*. Although his act never offended anybody, a censorious BBC remained wary of him. His success was due almost entirely to *double entendre* in the manner of Max Miller or Frankie Howerd. At the end of the evening the resident dance troupe, Beam's Babes, were presented with gifts by the management at the farewell party, and Miss Peggy Beams, 'Auntie Peggy', thanked the assembled company and all the helpers.*

* In an interview for *Woman's Sphere* in the *Isle of Man Times* (04.09.1948), Peggy Beams reminisced that she had some five hundred young dancers currently on her books, that she had a waiting list of young girls wishing to join the 'babes', and that her current Derby Castle troupe were the youngest, averaging around fourteen years of age. The girls attended Ballakermeen High School during their stay in Douglas and could often be seen 'romping and bathing' on the beach. The youngest member, Francis, revealed that her favourite number involved the living statue-like poses in the acrobatic dance sequence.

The Derby Castle closed for the season on Saturday 18th September with the time-honoured Manx Mhelliah. The ballroom was decorated with flowers, fruit, vegetables and evergreens, and some three thousand mainly local residents thoroughly enjoyed 'this final carnival and jollification which recaptured much of the pre-war spirit'.

The Onchan Head Pavilion

The Revue *Capers and Sauce* featured Kitao, billed as 'the world's greatest living Yogi', faith healer, fire eater and 'The Man They Couldn't Kill'. At one time ten men tried to strangle him, and a later report said that 'twelve men are now trying to strangle him!' Perhaps they should have exerted themselves a little more for he was a slightly sinister character* and a 'quack', albeit an entertaining one who drew large crowds and whose show is still remembered on the Island today. In July a court action sought to prevent him from selling 'talismans or charms' to his audiences in the form of small packets of 'powders' derived from the King Cobra and certain 'seeds', which he claimed could cure 'many ailments', if the person in possession of them had enough faith. His 'slick show' included lying on a bed of nails, washing his chest and face in broken glass and other elements of 'fakiry'. He was supported by vocalist Rhoda Holt with songs old and new, Paul Wood, billed as a 'phenomenal vocalist', Hal Blue's antics and patter, accordion man Frank Bernard and The Four Glamourettes.

* Real name Frederick Charles Collinson, 43, who was subsequently arrested and charged with three counts of 'carnally knowing' his assistant, a girl under the age of 16 years. He was sentenced to twelve months hard labour at the Court of General Gaol at the conclusion of a two-and-a-half-day hearing during the summer of 1947 when evidence was produced that they slept together in the theatre in his dressing room. The girl gave birth to a baby boy in March, who was actually brought into Court as evidence. See *IoMT* 16.06.1949

The Crescent Pavilion

Barry Wood's Concert Party *It's Fun* was the resident revue for the season, described as a 'Bright and Breezy' family show with a company of fourteen transferred from the Palace Coliseum. The acts included 'fun-maker-in-chief' Charlie Bruce, adagio dancers Petro and Petrova, a musical act popular on radio called the Three Imps, and 'personality girl' Eileen Lilley with her ukelele'.

Douglas Head

After seven years of occupation by the Royal Navy as a radar school, Douglas Head 'is now beginning to look something like its old self' observed one local newspaper. Twice each day at 11.00am and 3.00pm Jan Ralfini and his versatile band presented The Douglas Head Entertainers, billed as 'The Jolliest Show in Douglas', with principal fun makers Harry Orchid and Sid Ridge heading the bill with *soubrette* and dancer Mildred Carroll, William 'Sticks and Tricks' Thorpe, solo pianist Roy Woodley, and vocalist Jack Gibson.

Ramsey, too, enjoyed an excellent season after the Pool and Pavilion reopened in July for the first time since 1939. There was dancing in the Pool Ballroom on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and an initial two week run of the Variety Highlights Company which starred the irrepressible Gladys Morgan, the diminutive Welsh comedienne with her fearsome shriek of laughter, billed as 'Variety's Longest Mirthquake', and her husband Frank Laurie, in 'a jolly mixture of mirth and melody'. The show returned for a further week in September. The summer revue at the Pavilion, Barry Wood's *All in Fun* at the Pavilion, was billed as 'the brightest and most versatile entertainment imaginable'. The cast included vocalists Evelyn Dolman, soprano, and Jack Parker, baritone; June Ross, 'a charming exponent of the xylophone' who also sang and danced; genial pianist Hal Bright, and Eric Twigg, a mirth-maker with 'an endless store of jokes and stories'. The *Ramsey Courier* was enthusiastic: 'there is not a dull moment from start to finish'. The show stealers were Britain's multi-talented Dead End Kids whose fast moving, up-to-date music hall style act was 'bursting with vitality and energy 'that is nothing short of amazing'.

During August Ramsey Methodist Church was packed for a recital given by Reginald Foort FRCO which included great organ masterpieces and lighter fare together with fascinating and entertaining dialogue. Many in the audience queued for autographs and several requests for popular pieces were made. In support, local singer Dan Minay was 'on good form'.

The Ramsey Hydro also enjoyed 'a remarkably good season'. Many still regretted that there was no town orchestra, 'which we had some years ago and foolishly lost', and that there was no proper provision for choirs and concert parties in poor weather. The Ramsey Regatta and aquatic sports struggled to regain the popularity of forty years ago and the demise of the flower show was still mourned by many. The promise of new town lighting and cleaner promenades and thoroughfares had so far not materialised, although the new town bus service was welcomed.

'An unprecedented measure of progress in our principal industry'.

There was good reason to feel 'pride in our achievements . . . an abundance of grit and confidence had helped to overcome great difficulties', and the success of the 1948 summer season seemed to confirm that the new-found optimism about the Island's post-war future as a holiday resort of choice - as it always had been - was not misplaced. One newspaper looked back on 'a brilliant season with the "Dismal Jimmies" knocked for six!'. The Island's position was 'at least as strong as our competitors'; record crowds invaded every week with no less than 31,000 arriving one weekend in July! At the height of the season those who failed to book accommodation in advance found that spare rooms in Douglas were impossible to find, and some were forced to return to the mainland the day of their arrival. There was an almost complete 'lack of grumbling', and visitors felt that all things considered they were receiving good value for money.* Indeed, the overwhelming number of letters of gratitude from visitors to Douglas Corporation and the Publicity Board were in praise of 'the beauties of Manxland and the cordiality of its people'. The Isle of Man, it seemed, still had much to offer the weary workers of Britain and 'it is our job to help people to forget the troubles and trials of the age' with a 'healthy and wholesome form of escapism'. One indication of this new optimism was that the 1949 Holiday Guide was to go into print in October with an edition of 15,000 copies instead of the previous 5,000.

* There were thirty-one serious complaints against the tourist industry that season of which four were upheld. Of the thirty-two claims against visitors who failed to take up their bookings, nine were upheld and five abandoned.

There were still some issues that required attention if this euphoria was to be perpetuated into the 1950s. Members of the Douglas Boarding and Apartment Keeper's Association meeting in the Villa Marina in early October* were of the opinion that the season ended too soon, and urged the Palace & Derby Castle Company and Douglas Corporation to open their resorts two weeks earlier and extend their facilities until the end of September. The House of Keys seemed to agree*: 'The visiting industry is the most important to the Island. Our prosperity depends upon it and it must be supported.' More targeted publicity was needed, however, so perhaps the Government would help by making funds available to more effectively publicise the Island? One on-going cause of consternation was the seemingly unavoidable congestion for passengers waiting at Liverpool and Fleetwood to board the ferries to Douglas. Many reported that they were 'herded like cattle'.

* *Ramsey Courier* 01.10.1948:

* *Isle of Man Times* 02.10.1948.

One way to attract visitors in late September was to enable the popular shows to carry on longer as happened in Blackpool, for the holidaymakers disappeared when the entertainment ceased. The Palace & Derby Castle Company argued that the shows were too expensive to be extended.

There was a general shut down after the Grand Prix, the horse tram service was discontinued, and bunting removed from the promenades. Perhaps the Villa Marina could continue to stay open with a smaller staff and a local band after mid-September? It was important that late season visitors to Douglas 'should not feel that they are not wanted'. The last recorded visitor to the island that season was certainly welcome, observed asleep near Greeba on 1st October: a nightjar, presumably having stopped for a nap on its migration south.

A cherished link with the golden era of entertainment on the Island was severed with the announcement on 17th September of the death in West Yorkshire of Adeline Wood, formerly of 1, Osborne Terrace, Douglas, the sister of Harry Wood, the pre-war Palace & Derby Castle Company musical director, Douglas, and the composer Haydn Wood.

1949

A boom time for our resorts and entertainments

The Island received a further boost to its reputation that year with the publication of *This is the North of England*, a BBC publication highlighting the North Region of the Home Service, spotlighting the North's talent, humour, culture and resources and featuring the Isle of Man, whose Viking names, customs, byways, historic monuments, traditional music and 1,500 years of Christianity were highlighted. Costing just 1s, it was considered to be 'fine value'.

1949 in a nutshell

Peacetime conscription begins in the United Kingdom; *Book at Bedtime* first broadcast on the BBC Light programme on 31st January; astronomer Fred Hoyle coins the term 'Big Bang'; NATO created on 4th April; George Orwell's *1984* published in June; also that month *Whiskey Galore* released as a film by Ealing Studios; the maiden flight of the de Havilland Comet took place on 27th July; the iconic film *The Third Man* released on 2nd September; the Berlin airlift ends; British television's first comedy series, *How Do You View*, starring Terry Thomas, first aired on 26th October; Sir Winston Churchill's speech at London's Kingsway Hall makes the first reference to a European Union; Noddy first appears in Enid Blyton's *Little Noddy Goes to Toyland*; garden pest Alan Titchmarsh born 2nd May; actress Zoë Wanamaker born 13th May; politician Jeremy Corbyn born 26th May; Twiggy born 19th September; actor Bill Nighy born 12th December; radio comedian Tommy Handley died 9th January, and comic actor Will Hay on 18th April; film *The History of Mr Polly* starring John Mills released

The announcement that a new high-powered television transmitter under construction at Sutton Coldfield in the Midlands was due to start broadcasting television transmissions from Alexandra Palace in 1951, brought the enticing possibility that people on the Island could be watching television for the first time a step nearer. Although the range of the transmitter was said to be only one hundred miles – fifty miles short of the Island – local radio dealers were soon planning to test possible local levels of reception, and because of developments in transmitting technology, it seems as if the Island could receive ‘reasonably good’ television pictures.

The illuminations on Douglas promenade, last seen during the glorious summer of 1939, returned in 1949, as did the cross-harbour steam ferry service and the Douglas Head incline railway. A great improvement to the Island’s sporting facilities was announced in July, namely plans to develop the King George V Park (the former Bell Vue Pleasure Grounds) to include a new stadium, football pitch, running and cycle tracks.

The Publicity Board inaugurated a campaign to encourage private householders to take in visitors, which proved to be a success. The Information Bureau at the Pier began handling enquiries for rooms from the early hours of Saturday mornings, and no-one was forced to return because of the lack of accommodation. By the end of July 37,00 visitors had arrived and 23,000 departed: a post-war record.

In August film royalty arrived on the island in the shape of Britain’s queen of the silver screen, Anna Neagle, who was accorded a tremendous welcome as the guest of the Palace & Derby Castle Company on her first visit to the Isle of Man as part of her tour of the North of England, during which she also dropped in on Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport. Although she was on the Island for just five hours, she nevertheless managed to make five appearances, sing twenty-two songs and accomplished an astonishing number of changes of dress. She was naturally mobbed by admiring crowds at the airport with the result that many autograph books were sent on to the Castle Mona Hotel for her to sign. At a reception at Ramsey she sang *Haste to the Wedding* and *Roses of Picardy*. Before flying back to London (in a Dakota, no less) she made time to meet Norman Evans in Douglas and make many fond farewells.

Season tickets for the Palace & Derby Castle Ltd. resorts were advertised in early June: The Palace & Derby Castle combined ticket: £2 5s; The Palace: £1 10s; The Derby Castle: £1 5s; the Palais de Danse: £1 5s.

The Villa Marina

The Ballroom (Royal Hall) opened 26th May with Jan Ralfini and his orchestra, with guest celebrity Derek Roy,* for the Car Race Ball. According to Roy Hudd, Roy was ‘a good old-fashioned, value for money, pro’, and a star of *Variety Fanfare*, a new radio show first broadcast in April 1949,

'heralding variety in the North'. His signature song was *I'm Doctor Roy the Melody Boy* and his trademark, a large shaggy dog of the St. Bernard variety which often appeared on stage with him. Ralfini - signature tune *Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly* - introduced guest vocalists Anita Joy, who 'captured the audience with some modern numbers', Donald Peers sound-alike Bobby Saxen, and fourteen-year-old soprano Margaret Gibberd, who sang Haydn Wood's *A Brown Bird Singing* to thunderous applause. Kenneth Stroud entertained at the new electronic organ and pianist Harry Green played his own arrangement of Charles Williams' *The Dream of Olwen*.

* Originally a comedy singer with Geraldo and his band, Derek Roy became a radio comedian by the 1950s. In 1945 he became a resident host of BBC Radio's fast-moving talent show *Variety Bandbox* - presenting 'the people of variety to a variety of people' - alternating in combative rivalry with Frankie Howerd, the show which also helped launch the careers of Beryl Reid, Jimmy Edwards, Arthur English and Tony Hancock among others. Roy subsequently fronted his own radio show *Hip Hop Hoo Roy*, which was partly written by Spike Milligan, and *Happy-go-lucky* in 1951.

The First Sunday Concert of the season was on 21st May. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra played Suppé's overture *Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna*, the 12th *Street Rag*, light selections and novelty numbers, and Kenneth Stroud performed organ solos. There were many familiar faces in the orchestra including that of Harry Green, 'at his accustomed place at the piano', for a third season. The afternoon concerts with Jan Ralfini in the Villa Marina Gardens commenced on 29th May.

Sincerely Yours

It has been suggested that 'there were three voices which epitomised the struggle against Hitler' during World War II: Churchill's, Tommy Handley's and the homely voice of forces sweetheart Vera Lynn* who appeared in the Villa Marina's Royal Hall on Sunday 29th May. In anticipation of her appearance, the local newspapers described her as 'the well-known "heart-throb" radio singer', but it was her girl-next-door image that persisted in the years immediately after the war, and her down-to-earth, ordinary, unglamorous stage *persona* that endeared her to millions, so that decades later when Gulf War I was about to erupt, Ken Dodd could quip 'it must be serious, Vera Lynn's started gargling!' Her flight to Ronaldsway was delayed and she only just made it to the Villa Marian in time. She sang nine numbers during her half hour appearance, and 'charmed her audience' with a varied selection of songs including *Lavender Blue*, *This Perfect Day*, *The Nearest Thing to Heaven*, *Christopher Robin is Saying His Prayers* and *Jealousy*. The reviews do not mention her wartime 'hits' *We'll Meet Again* and *The White Cliffs of Dover*, but I cannot imagine that the audience would have allowed her to leave the stage before she had sung them. She was joined in the programme by young newcomer Margaret Gibberd who sang Horn's *Cherry Ripe* and *The Dancing Lesson*. Jan Ralfini's orchestra contributed the overture to Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, a violin solo from Ralfini himself and a novelty number* *The Maharajah of Mogador*, about a 'Great Ruler'

who, despite owning 10,000 camels, couldn't dance the Rumba: 'He had rubies and pearls and the loveliest girls, but he didn't know how to do the Rumba', in which the band joined in the chorus: 'Ah-ah, ah-i-ah-ah, ah-ah, ah-ah'.

* Vera Lynn (1917 - 2020) was discovered during the 1930s and became a recording artist with Howard Baker, Joe Loss, and later Billy Cotton, Charlie Kunz and Bert Ambrose. She was already a star by the eve of war, and soon branched into variety. Ballads were her trademark, and her records outselling even the Mills Brothers and Bing Crosby. In November 1941 she was heard in her own BBC request programme *Sincerely Yours*, which proved to so popular that she soon began to receive 2,000 letters each week. She made films and toured with ENSA. Even though the BBC considered her out-of-date and refused to renew her contract in 1949, that proved to be her best year, with shows in London and New York and a best-selling record *Auf Wiederseh'n*. See *This England's Second Book of British Dance Bands*, This England Books, 2001.

* Novelty numbers, when the band and sometimes the audience joined in the chorus, were always popular on the Island from the days of the *Hi! Kelly Polka* in the 1880s.

'Crowds of dancers flock nightly to this popular resort'

The Ballroom reopened on Saturday 4th June with a welcome dance for Joe Loss and his orchestra, an event which attracted huge crowds with the result that hundreds were turned away at the doors. The Sunday concerts commenced the following evening, and the two-and-a-quarter-hour show featured Loss' regular dance band vocalists: Elizabeth Batey, who charmed the audience with her vivacious personality and infectious sense of fun, and amazed them with her change of six dazzling gowns'; baritone Howard Jones and newcomer Irene Miller, who added a dash of spice to the evening when she sang *La Vie en Rose* and *J'attendrai* in French. Another regular member of the Joe Loss 'family' was entertaining pianist Bill McGuffie, who included pieces by Chopin, a selection of 'jazzy' numbers, and the ever popular *The Dream of Olwen*, into his repertoire that summer.

The Bathing Beauty competitions commenced on Thursday 9th June in the Villa Marina Gardens. Joe Loss and Jerry Dawson, joint editor of *Melody Maker* magazine, were both chosen as adjudicators, and the title of 'Miss Ellan Vannin 1949' went to a young dance teacher from Halifax in West Yorkshire. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra provided the musical selections and the event was compered by S. A. Perry, Douglas Corporation's genial Entertainments Manager.

Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Horne returned to Douglas on 12th June, and on the 19th Stéphane Grappelli,* the French-born jazz violinist, appeared with a beguiling blend of lyricism and vivacious 'swing'. One observer wrote 'When he played it was as if he was in a world of his own, with eyes half-closed and an expression on his face of utter bliss'.

* An unlikely jazz 'great', he established the concept of the violin in jazz through his legendary collaborations with Django Reinhardt in the 1930s and the blind pianist George Shearing in the 1940s and '50s.

Another great musician who appeared in Douglas that season, Ronald Chesney,* arguably Britain's foremost harmonic virtuoso, had made his radio debut in 1937 and went on to star in *Variety Bandbox* and *Worker's Playtime* in the late 1940s and '50s. Although exempted from war service, he collected hundreds of harmonicas for POWs in Germany and broadcast harmonica lessons to thousands of serving soldiers. He made several recordings of popular classical pieces, but the most famous was of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Flight of the Bumblebee*, which he played at a show-stopping break-neck speed.

* Born René Cadier in London, he was inspired by hearing the great Larry Adler play, and began his career playing at ABC Cinemas in London during the intervals between films. After the war he was granted a musical spot on radio's *Educating Archie*, and teamed up with another Ronald, Ronald Wolfe, and together they wrote the scripts for television's *The Rag Trade*, starring Miriam Karlin, and *On the Buses*, starring Reg Varney, which attracted an audience of 20 million viewers over seventy-three episodes between 1969 and 1973. Both shows had their well-known catchphrases: Karlin's 'Everyone out!' and Blakey's 'I've got you this time, Butler!' he died in 2018 aged 97.

The bright, silvery voice of Joan Hammond resounded around the Royal Hall again at the end of the month, and in order to please her audience, she announced that she would be singing her arias from the operas of Verdi, Puccini and Giordano in both Italian and English. There was a huge eruption of applause as the opening bars of *O My Beloved Father* sounded and her encore, Quilter's delightful song *What's in the Air Today*, was also well-received. She was supported by leading local baritone Dan Minay who distinguished himself in songs and arias and songs by Tchaikovsky and Dunn, and a surpassing performance of *Largo al factotum* from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. The excellent work of accompanist Harry Green was duly acknowledged by both the artistes and the audience.

On Sunday 3rd July the sixteen-strong George Mitchell Choir* joined Jan Ralfini in a programme of 'red hot rhythm, harmony and negro spirituals'. The choir incorporated the High Gangsters from the show *Hi! Gang*, The Singing Silhouettes from *Stand Easy*, The Glee Party from *Waterlogged Spa* and the Kerbside Choristers from *ITMA* which featured many ex-servicemen and women. Their programme included *When You're in Love*, *Louisiana Hayride* and an Irving Berlin medley; the solo vocal pieces were all well received. There was a great Manx welcome for another band vocalist newcomer in early July, Tony Ventro,* a tenor with 'a glorious voice and a gracious personality' and a local family connection, who had auditioned for Joe Loss just a few days earlier. He received a tremendous ovation when he sang well-loved arias from the worlds of opera and oratorio, including Handel's *Ombra mai fu*, and proved to be 'a terrific success' with audiences for the rest of the season. On one occasion as he moved amongst the audience in the hall, he serenaded them with *O Sole Mio*, several ballads and an aria from *Pagliacci*, and received yet another tremendous ovation. His vocal power was arresting so that one commentator wondered whether microphones could be dispensed with at the Sunday concerts.

* George Mitchell had organised choirs during the war, which led to many BBC Radio appearances with the Hi Gangsters from *Hi Gang*, the hugely popular, fast moving and slick wartime show which starred 'Hollywood's happiest couple' Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels, and violinist comedian Vic Oliver; the Kerbside Choristers from *ITMA*; The Singing

Silhouettes from the show *Stand Easy*, another popular wartime show replete with high speed gags, sketches, songs, a piano quiz and regular serials such as *Whippet Kwick*, *the Cat Burglar*; the Glee Party from radio's *Waterlogged Spa* which starred Eric Barker and Pearl Hackney. The later famous George Mitchell Minstrels grew out of his choir and the *Black and White Minstrel Show* first appeared in 1957, dominated prime time Saturday night television for twenty years until finally axed in 1978.

* Tony Ventro, the brother of well-known local musician John (Johnny) Ventro, had not previously sung with dance bands but had taken part in celebrity concerts with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. See Maurice Powell, *John and Tony Ventro*, manxmusic.com.

'Fresh from their recent world tour,' Rawicz and Landauer, the great stylists of the piano duo genre, appeared at the Sunday concert on 7th July, together with young singer Margaret Gibberd who sang *The Pipes of Pan* 'very sweetly'. Their programme included their own entrancing arrangements of popular pieces by Chopin, Borodin, Johann Strauss and de Falla. They appeared again in August. On Saturday 16th Joe Loss broadcast from the Royal Hall from 1.30 until 2.10pm in the BBC programme *Dancing by the Sea*. Admission to this event was free.

On Sunday 31st July the Villa Marina resounded to the sounds of Ted Heath and His Music during two special appearances at 3.00 pm and 8.00 pm. He was at the height of his fame and had recently inaugurated the now legendary 110 Sunday Night Swing Sessions at the London Palladium. Now the acclaimed leader of the most successful British big band of the post-war era, Heath's was not a stage personality, nor was he a natural showman, so he brought with him Paul Carpenter to act as the lively entertaining compere and front man. At first Carpenter's dressed down appearance and string of 'old chestnuts from the music hall era' did not go down too well, although the audience warmed to him as the shows progressed. Heath's huge reputation was built on the superb musicianship of his star players and the judicious blend of jazz, 'new-style progressive numbers' such as *Metronome Riff* and *Ladybird*, and popular ballroom numbers. There were no glamour girls, dancers or vocal ensembles. Instead he brought some of his finest musicians to Douglas including the eminent drummer Jack Parnell, described as 'a droll little fellow', the trombonist Jackie Armstrong and ace trumpeter Bobby Pratt. The arrangements of Tchaikovsky's *None but the Lonely Heart* and Debussy's *Claire de lune* featuring the brass section of four trumpets and four trombones, blending with the saxes were particularly admired. The band's new singer Dicky Valentine, 'a young man with a pleasant voice', was enjoying his first season with the band, and soon won over the audience with an endearing personality, good looks and the song *Lavender Blue*.

Bank Holiday Monday was dull and cloudy even if the rain held off until the afternoon, with the result that some outdoor attractions were poorly attended. Nevertheless, thousands may their way to Douglas Head - a time-honoured custom for Douglas inhabitants - and the Promenades were 'black with people', many of whom were making their way to Onchan Head. Although heavy rain ensured that most tram, electric railway and road traffic fell away to nothing, Joe Kirkham in the Coliseum and Jan Ralfini in the ballroom helped to keep the visitors happy.

Making his second appearance in Douglas that season on Sunday 7th August, Derek Roy, impersonator and entertainer, supported by Jan Ralfini's orchestra and Kenneth Stroud on the Console Organ, soon warmed up the crowd with his wisecracks and 'breezy burlesques of American film stars. 'Derek Roy did it again' enthused the local newspapers; 'the young rascal . . . simply convulsed the audience' with his impressions of Harry Lauder, Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra and Al Jolson. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra joined in the fun with their impressions of Billy Ternet and his band, and Edmundo Ross and his Rumba Band. The fun did not stop even after Derek Roy and American film star John Boles had left the Island, as they became embroiled in an impromptu comedy sketch at Speke airport when the handbag of film star Kitty Masters fell to the ground and burst open as they were all boarding the London-bound flight, leaving them scrambling around the runway attempting to retrieve several £1 notes being blown around by the wind.

High jinks and remarkable musical gifts on display

There was disappointment when it was learned that, due to contractual and scheduling issues, the Ink Spots would not be appearing in Douglas that season. The Deep River Boys were engaged instead. The next group to appear was Borrah Minevitch's Harmonica Rascals, the renowned ten-strong comedy harmonica group, often dressed in outrageous colourful Alpine costumes. Borrah, an old-time music hall entertainer, comedy film actor and later impresario, normally wore a loud check jacket and bowler hat tipped at a rakish angle. The smallest member of the troupe, four-foot-tall Johnny Puleo, stole the show every time with his 'mock melancholy miming' and hilarious attempts to muscle in on the act. There was more than a whiff of genius from this group of colourful merrymakers, and 'the most marvellous musicianship' displayed on their wide range of harmonicas' was astonishing. They always attracted a large crowd in Douglas, and not for the first time many failed to gain entrance. As usual the headline act was complemented and supported by Jan Ralfini and his orchestra with selections from everything from Dixie to Be-bop.

Tony Vento was once again the star performer of the evening on 21st September when Joe Loss and his orchestra presented the Sunday concert. 'His popularity soars with every appearance . . . and is assured a future in the entertainment world'. Once again, his singing of Handel's *Largo* with full orchestral accompaniment was hailed a triumph and 'raised his status among resident entertainers . . . everything he sang roused the house to tremendous enthusiasm'. The other regular Joe Loss singers Elizabeth Batey, Howard Jones, Irene Miller and pianist Bill McGuffie all contributed to a fine concert. The following Sunday concert saw the return of Rawicz and Landauer whose forty-five-minute act included music by Gershwin – *Rhapsody in Blue* – and subtle arrangements of pieces by Chopin, Dvorak and Johann Strauss.

On 27th August the *Green Final* announced that broadcasts from Douglas could be heard three times in early September: from the Gaiety Theatre in the BBC's *Beside the Seaside* series, *Too Funny for Words*, and *Showtime* from the Crescent Pavilion. From the Derby Castle, in the series *Northern Music Hall* broadcast on the North Home Service, continental vocalist Las Estrella, musician *extraordinaire* Herschel Henlere, 'funsters'

Foster and Clarke, Tubby Turner and the Theatre Orchestra conducted by Atty Baker. Joe Loss and his orchestra were heard in *Dancing by the Sea* on the Light Programme.

Described in the *Mona's Herald* as 'a truly great racial singing group', The Deep River Boys appeared in place of The Ink Spots on Sunday 4th September, an unplanned stop-off on their current British tour. The five-strong black American vocal group had made a big impact at the London Palladium earlier that year with their superb accompanied and *a cappella* close harmony singing. Originally a student glee club they had become fully professional in 1936 and claimed to have a repertoire of more than two thousand songs. They sang their signature spiritual *Deep River* and drew long and loud applause with *On the Bonny, Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond*. Jan Ralfini and his vocalists proved themselves to be equally at home in stylish comedy impressions of Danny Kaye and Carmen Miranda, as in the colourful, light-hearted music of Offenbach and Johann Strauss.

The final Sunday Concert of the season took place on 11th September. Joe Loss and his popular vocalists Elizabeth Batey, more vivacious than ever, and with an inexhaustible wardrobe, the 'idol of the ladies' Howard Jones, Irene Miller and local 'golden voiced tenor' Tony Ventro, were supported by the Wanderer's Male Voice Choir, conducted by Jack Jolley, who had recently been performing in Ramsey in Mooragh Park and in Port Erin. Pianist Bill McGuffie played his new composition entitled *Manx Rhapsody*. The Grand Finale of the Bathing Beauty Competition to find the 1949 Queen of Man took place on Wednesday 14th when blonde, blue-eyed, 5' 4" tall Miss Judy Roberts of Bangor, N. Ireland, was crowned in front of a crowd of 5,000.

On Saturday 17th there was a Grand Farewell and Broadcast Dance at the Villa Marina with Joe Loss, and the following evening Douglas bade farewell to Jan Ralfini, who would soon depart for Worthing to begin preparations for his October tour with the show *Stars of Manxland* which featured artistes who had appeared in Douglas that season. Finally that season, and just a month after the English film star Anna Neagle paid her flying visit to the Island, on Sunday 19th September Hollywood super-star Peter Lorre made a special appearance at the Villa Marina. Best known for his roles in *The Maltese Falcon*, *Casablanca* and the Mr Moto films, he was 'one of the world's leading bad men', and, according to the *Isle of Man Examiner*, enthralled the audience with a series of character portrayals both dramatic and comic.

As the dust began to settle on another fine season at the Villa Marina and the doors were finally closed in preparation for a substantial renovation and redecoration, the welcome news came that 'Joe and Jan' would be returning to Douglas in 1950.

The Palace and Coliseum

The Palace Ballroom opened on 4th June with Joe Kirkham directing 50-50 nights on Tuesdays, and Carnival Nights until midnight on Thursdays. His String Serenaders played in the gardens every afternoon from 3rd July. The Sunday Concerts began on 3rd June with local artistes Norah Moore, soprano, and The Lon Dhoo and Wanderers' Male Voice Choirs appearing in the first concert.

'Magnetic' Norman Evans returned to the Coliseum in June with the hit summer show 'Good Evans' which included the sketches and characters that made him a household name: the Dentist's Chair, Teddy the Baby Panda, Over the Garden Wall and Norman Evans' Village Band with Fanny Higginbottom Evans, brass band drummer, which invariably reduced the audience to 'a state approaching helplessness'. The supporting acts for 1949 included the knock-about comedy of 'Whirls on Wheels' with unicyclists the three Kemble Brothers; 'clever acrobats' Bil and Bil; Senor Carlos, a balloon sculpting animal impersonator; three 'very attractive' girl tap dancers, The Three Shades and the legendary Twelve Zio Angels 'adding their quota of dash and sparkle' in their 'Staircase Dance', plus two show-stopping routines, *The Military Tattoo* and *The Phantom Guard*. The comedy vocal brother and sister act Vic and Joe Crastonian, and Symphony, 'a full-throated vocal act' featuring George Sandford and Janet Frazer with Rita Shearer at the Hammond Organ, the sound of which proved to be uncomfortably over-powering for some in the audience due to the use of microphones and loud-speakers.

On 3rd July the celebrity artistes were barber-shop-style close harmony vocalists The Five Smith Brothers* from Newcastle, well known as Mr and Mrs Smith's Little Boys' from the BBC family radio comedy show *Up the Pole*, set in an Arctic trading post. The Smith Brothers 'sang the kind of songs that people like these days' with the audience joining in: *Sunshine of Your Smile*, *Goodnight Irene* and *Hop-Scotch Polka* and Tyneside favourites such *Blaydon Races* and *Cushy Butterfield*. Solo pianist Jennie Simpson played a number of classical pieces and Joe Kirkham's orchestra played a selection from *Oklahoma* and another from the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan.

* The brothers were all ex-professional footballers. Harold, ex-pro Glasgow Rangers, also guitarist; Alf, ex-pro Liverpool footballer, Roy, ex-pro footballer Birmingham; Stan, and Martin, who was killed in a car accident, and was replaced by clarinettist Ronnie Culbertson.

George Formby was the star of the Sunday Concert on 17th July, and during his forty-minutes spot sang all his most popular songs including the two TT numbers. One commentator wrote: 'If he had answered all the calls for encores he'd have been on stage for a week!' At the end of his act he announced that he and his wife Beryl would be celebrating their Silver Wedding anniversary on the island on 13th September. Joe Kirkham and his orchestra with the Wanderer's Male Voice Choir and Rita Shearer at the electronic organ were in support. Later that month James Johnston, the Irish tenor from the Sadler's Wells Opera Company, local soprano Nora Moore and the radio entertainer Leslie Strange with his entertaining impressions of famous personalities took part in one of the most popular Sunday concerts of the season. There were arias from

Verdi and Puccini and *Macushla* from Johnstone and the *Jewel Song* from *Faust* from Norah Moore. Joe Kirkham and his orchestra played selections from *Iolanthe*, *Annie Get Your Gun* and some of Florrie Forde's best-loved songs. On Sunday 24th Freddie 'the Sophisticated Clown' made a well-received return visit to the Coliseum with his 'quaint comedy and clever musicianship' on the piano and saxophone, assisted by Paul King. A young Australian tenor, William Herbert, sang Clay's *Songs of Araby* and Handel's *Silent Worship*, and solo pianist and accompanist Jennie Simpson played a selection of popular classical pieces. The final Sunday concert of the month featured Laelia Finneberg who sang *I Hear You Calling Me* and *Shining Through My Dreams* in 'a voice of bird-like quality', whilst the popular English bass Owen Brannigan* did what he did best in songs and arias from the world of oratorio and the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, and two encores *Simon the Cellarer*, and Leslie Stuart's *The Bandelero*, a song made popular by Peter Dawson. It was however that extraordinary entertainer Afrique who stole the show with his thirty-five-minute act of songs and impressions during which he held the huge audience in the palm of his hand.

* He sang at Sadler's Wells between 1944 and 1958, at Glyndebourne, Covent Garden, on the concert stage, and frequently appeared at the Promenade Concerts. He created three roles in the operas of Benjamin Britten.

Singers galore, and a controversial comedian

The Coliseum was packed for the first Sunday concert in August when the American singer John Boles delighted the audience 'with his easy style and gay personality' in excerpts from *The Desert Song*. He was warmly applauded but somewhat put into the shade that evening by the presence of the Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir, in superb form under their conductor Douglas Buxton, in a selection from *The Student Prince* which featured a fine solo quartet of choir stalwarts John Miles, Bert Gray, Tom Gelling and Stephen Quirk, all at the peak of their careers. '... every man in the choir gave of his best ... the holidaymakers must surely have been left in little doubt that there is something in the legend of the Isle of Man as a musical nation'. Later in the month Coliseum audiences had the opportunity to appreciate another American singer, billed as 'Hollywood's singing star', when the 'glorious tenor voice' of Allan Jones was heard to great effect in a thirty-minute recital of popular operatic arias, songs and popular ballads. He was greeted with a spontaneous outburst of applause and it was several minutes before he was able to sing a note! His was a voice of such rare power and beauty that required no microphone, and coupled with 'a pleasing personality', he was 'very popular with the fair sex who swooned in ecstasy' when he sang *Falling in Love with Love*; those who didn't faint 'screamed with delight'. 'My ears are beginning to look like those of a donkey', he told the audience when introducing *Donkey Serenade*, a song he had sung hundreds of times. His programme also included *Begin the Beguine*, *Do I Love You* and *No, no, no*, and one young member of the audience shouted 'don't let him go' when he attempted to leave the stage after agreeing to several encores. For many, his true artistry was displayed when he sang *On With the Motley* from *Il Pagliacci*. He was supported by Coliseum pianist Jennie Simpson, who gave fine performances of a selection of pieces 'of a classical

nature' including a Chopin Scherzo and a popular piece by Rubenstein, and by Joe Kirkham and his Orchestra who played a selection from *Iolanthe* among other pieces.

The star of the Sunday Concert on the 14th was Frankie Howerd, billed as the 'famous radio comedian'. The audience soon warmed to his off-beat humour, although his act certainly did not please one reviewer: 'If we must have comedians on these programmes, let's have them clean and wholesome. It is true that for nearly forty minutes the majority of the audience roared its approval of the vulgarities of Frankie Howard, but there was a considerable minority, who are neither prudes or puritans - just decent minded people who have retained a sense of good taste – and they deeply deprecated this brand of crude and coarse comedy, and that one needless lapse into profanity'. These comments may have reflected the commentator's personal views on Sunday entertainment, and were the exception, as another reviewer reported that the crowded house 'loved every minute of his inconsequential patter', and particularly noted how his 'facial expressions and vocal inflections' brought every anecdote to life. '...an overwhelming majority avidly lapped up all'. The other artistes were the renowned piano duettists Reub Silver and Marion Day who amazed the audience by the precision of their playing in popular classical pieces including an extract from Grieg's piano concerto and a famous Chopin Polonaise.

Popular soprano Helen Hill, from BBC Radio's show *Much Binding-in-the-Marsh*, also appeared that month together with the tenor James Johnston from Sadler's Wells. He delighted the audience with *Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes*, Gounod's *Ave Maria* and Lehar's *O Maiden, my Maiden*. Helen Hill sang Mendelssohn's *On Wings of Song*, Puccini's *O My Beloved Father* and Rossini's *La Danza* accompanied by husband Frank Wilcock, and together they sang the duet of Mimi and Rodolfo *O soave fanciulla* from Puccini's *La Boheme*. The audience were understandably reluctant to let them leave the stage.

On Sunday 4th September Kay Cavendish* appeared for the first time in Douglas. Pianist, 'croonette', actress and entertainer with one of the warmest personalities in the world of entertainment, she was a household name because of her popular weekly radio show *Kay on the Keys*. She captivated the audience from the moment she stepped upon the stage to her signature tune, Zez Confrey's *Kitten on the Keys*. A 'tall, stately brunette with an appealingly husky voice and nimble fingers, her programme was full of surprises and contrasts, ranging from da Falla's *The Ritual Fire Dance*, Sammy Cahn's 'bright little song' *Put 'em in a Box (Tie 'em with a Ribbon, and throw 'em in the Deep, Blue Sea)*, *Jealous Lover*, *Dream of Olwen* and Litloff's famous *Scherzo*. In between the musical items she amusingly related many of her adventures travelling thousands of miles to entertain troops during the war, and concluded her programme with 'two quickies', *Twelfth Street Rag* and *Buttons and Bows*. She was joined by the tenor Robert Naylor whose perfect diction meant that every word he sang could be heard throughout the hall. His songs included *The Road to the Isles*, *Bless This House* and *Christopher Robin* and an aria from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and in his second set, *Goodbye* from

White Horse Inn, Edward Purcell's *Passing By* and that warning to bachelors everywhere, *Beware of the Maidens*, for 'it's better to be on the shelf than on the rack'!

* Born Kathleen Dorothy Cavendish Murray in 1908, she studied at the Royal Academy of Music and gave recitals at the Queen's Hall and Wigmore Hall, and many early radio broadcasts of classical music. During World War II she appeared in ITMA and played for the troops in ENSA concerts. She was a well-known golfer and the guest on Desert Island Discs in February 1962.

The final Sunday Concert of the season took place on 11th September and featured the soprano Isobel Baillie, the baritone Dennis Noble and the irrepressible Norman Evans, supported by Joe Kirkham's augmented orchestra. Dennis Noble was equally at home in opera, oratorio, musical comedy and as a concert artiste and was a prolific radio broadcaster. He sang arias from *Pagliacci* and *Figaro*, Verdi and Puccini and Stanford's fine nautical song *The Old Superb*. Isobel Baillie was one of the Island's favourite singers and she included arias by Puccini and Mozart, Noel Coward's *I'll See You Again* and the *Swing Song* from *Veronique* in her programme, accompanied by Jennie Simpson. Norman Evans presented some of his famous sketches including 'The Village Concert' and had the audience rocking in their seats. Joe Kirkham rounded off the evening with a medley of Florrie Forde's favourite songs.

Saturday 17th September was farewell night in Douglas as the season came to an end and audiences bade farewell to Norman Evans at the Coliseum, Nat Mills and Bobbie at the Gaiety, *Show Time* at the Derby Castle and Joe Loss at the Villa Marina. In Ramsey, *Variety Highlights* at the Pavilion ended its successful run with a series of 'requests nights' on Friday 16th, Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th.

The Derby Castle Ballroom and Opera House

Summer Fun Underway

It was an auspicious opening for the season at the Derby Castle on Whit Monday, 6th June with Bert Noble and his band in the ballroom, and the early season 'Quick Fire Variety' show, advertised as an 'honest to goodness vaudeville bill', in the Opera House. At the top of the bill and leading the 'good, clean fun' were two droll characters, Collinson and Breen, a traditional straight man with Churchillian cigar and the absurd ambition to be the champion boxer of the world, and 'the little 'un', his disruptive, diminutive partner complete with a squeaky Northern voice. The other acts in the full programme included Cingalee & Co., the 'silent' Chinese Mandarin Illusionist, an adagio comedy turn, The Three Renowns, Alf and Vic Churchill's trained fox terriers and the balancing act, The Valmar Trio. 'Bright Lancashire comic' Joe Crosbie, The Lonsdale Sisters* in 'stepping out' and Priscilla Wise, the lady tenor, who kept the audiences guessing by singing from a darkened stage, were among the variety turns now

barely remembered today. The young acrobatic song, dance and acrobatic troupe Beam's Babes, 'the dynamic dozen', made a welcome return; the theatre orchestra was conducted by Atty Baker.

*The Lonsdale sisters, Pauline Cingalee (daughter of stage magician Cingalee) and Florence Samuels, were popular during the 1940s and '50s with their stylishly choreographed routines. In 1952 they were a support act in Laurel and Hardy's famous British tour performing up to fourteen shows each week. Samuels permanently retired in 1954, but Pauline became Paula Lee and developed an act which endured into the 1980s.

In mid-June Rob Wilson, 'the Voice of Scotland', led a Quick Fire Variety show with a selection of ever-popular Scottish favourites, together with Sid Plummer, a 'novel xylophonist', and his son who was making his first stage appearance, in a turn marked by humour crossed with extra-musical elements and 'weird sounds' from his instrument. The supporting acts included 'startling firebrand juggling' from Felovis; crazy cycling from the Brockways; comical antics from tight-rope walkers the Two Linares; Stuthard, 'the Canadian Fun-atic', with racy patter and sleight of hand tricks, and George McTear, a versatile whistler and bird-song mimic.

The dearth of post-war entertainers is over!

After a gap of ten years Will Dalton returned as booking agent for the Derby Castle varieties promising 'no stupendous names on the programme' and no crooners to delight the hearts of some hysterical teenagers' Every act, without exception, would be 'really good', and amongst some old favourites would be new acts, never before seen at the Castle. 'Never heard of 'em? . . . we shall surely be remembering them'. Top of the bill during the week beginning 20th June was the superb, widely respected ventriloquist Arthur Worsley, known as 'the vent's vent', together with his hectoring dummy Charlie Brown. He constantly amazed his audiences as he masterfully 'descended into the lion's den of Bs, Fs, Ms, Ps, Vs and Ws' without so much as a 'tremble at the lips'. In support were the 'terrific Australian quick-fire acrobats' the Seven 'Astounding' Ashtons, the Three Aberdonians, Ribton and Richards, and Sylvia 'who produces sweet music from ordinary drinking glasses'. Comedy came in the shape of Joe Church, and Dagmar and Rell with their 'Wit' and 'It' routine. The programme change during the last week of June introduced further new acts including the violinist Jules Adrian, the Van de Vere four, dancers, acrobats, jugglers and musicians, the comedy tumbling act The Three Leroy's, and Leon Pierre, 'the king-pin of puppetry'. Among the other supporting turns were the playing card manipulator Leslie Lester, billed as the 'debonair deceiver', Scottish accordionists Mackenzie Reid and Dorothy, and Joe Black, comedian, 'who will go places if he will lay a little less emphasis on the mental patient theme'. Musical entertainment was provided by popular Lancashire pianists Robbie and Platt. Beams Babes added their customary touch of youthful energy and sparkle to the proceedings.

In July one of the most famous names in music hall and variety, Georgie Wood* (minus the 'Wee'), was top of the bill together with Dolly Harmer in the role of his stage mother. At 4' 9" he was a midget who, like Jimmy Clitheroe, specialised in precocious, all-knowing little boy characters.

He had been on the stage since before World War I with impressions of Marie Lloyd, Vesta Tilley and other music hall legends. Off-stage he could be witty and articulate, but also outspoken, prickly, gossipy, argumentative and to a certain extent bitter about his size and the soubriquet 'Wee'.

* His stage partnership with Dolly Harmer, from 1916 until 1953, was one of the longest in entertainment history. George Wood was well read and highly self-educated, and seldom lost the opportunity to proselytise about the merits of Catholicism. The American singer, film and stage actress, Fanny Brice, once referred to him as 'a little shit!'

South African-born Robert Harbin, conjuror, is best remembered today as the avuncular magician on children's television making animals and birds out of folded paper. His stage act, 'not to be missed', according to the *Isle of Man Examiner*, included tricks with jugs of milk, cigarettes, playing cards and goldfish bowls. Also appearing were the nimble tap-dancers the Shen-Tun Duo, Josie del Rio who 'spun yarns and ropes', and Ivor Keys in fun at the piano. There were 'thrills in the air from The Grafton Sisters and Jacques, novel impressions from Leslie Strange and the 'furious dance routines' devised by Bob Koynot and Olive.

George Elrick, 'The Smiling Voice of Radio', is best remembered for presenting *Housewives' Choice* (the popular radio show designed for housewives at home) on the BBC Light Programme for twenty years during the 1950s and 60s. He would sign off each show by singing 'I'll be with you all again tomorrow morning' to a snatch of the show's signature tune, Jack Strachey's *In Party Mood*. From 1948 he took his touring revue around the UK. He shared the top of the bill with Baro and Rogers with their burlesque of ballroom dancing 'Dancing for Fun' and the Cycling Astons with their football match on cycles routine. Further down the bill were Hamilton Conrad's amazingly trained pigeons, the masterful juggling of Pierre Bel, Les Alyxons, a trapeze act, and Donovan and Byl, the tumbling 'assassins of sorrow', who brought forth roars of laughter before they had been ten seconds on stage. The truculent manner of comedian Joe King struck a chord with the visitors as did the resourceful musical *melange* devised by Vera and Michael Norman.

For the week beginning 18th July Noni the Clown presented a new modern, stream-lined version of his familiar pre-war show assisted by 'glamour girls' Nita and Dody, and supported by cheery songs at the piano from Three Radio Rascals, Boy Andro, tightrope walker, and the comedian and bagpiper from Glasgow, A. J. Powers. The dainty dancing of Bebe and Bell contrasted with the whirlwind roller-skating of the Dexters and ventriloquist Raymond Smith and his inebriated dummy. Jean Melville from BBC Radio's *Worker's Playtime* led the audience in a selection of popular songs at the piano;

Afrique's brilliant impressions of famous people, and an invitation to the audience to join him in popular songs of the day, made for an entertaining last week of July. Also on the bill were Walcott's Marionettes and the uproarious slapstick antics of the huge Charlie Jones and the diminutive Victor Thomas, and knockabout comedy from Georges and Dorina. Magician Chris Charlton amiably thrust steel rods through the body of his attractive assistant and produced any drink requested by the audience from a kettle! Yorkshire veteran Dick Henderson, a top-line

variety trooper and father of Sinatra-style crooner and comedian Dickie Henderson, was a short, fat, old-fashioned music hall comedian who attacked wives, sweethearts and mothers-in-law in an abrasive style from the moment he stepped onto the stage. His opening line was 'I was standing outside a maternity hospital, minding my own business . . .' and he often finished his act with *Tiptoe Through the Tulips*. The Theatrical Charity Garden Party featuring Norman Evans and Nat Mills and Bobbie planned for 26th July was unfortunately abandoned part way through due to heavy rain.

The drunk, the 'mad musician' and the mental telepathist

In August 'Yorkshire's comic little fellow' and a Douglas favourite Walter Niblo appeared and peppered his familiar act with 'plenty of lively back-chat' with the orchestra's conductor Atty Baker. 'Clever clowning' from Tommy Jover & His 'Jovial' Company plus The Flying Cromwells, whose thrilling feats in the air 'had the audience gasping with fear for their safety', and a new Dixieland routine from Beam's Babes kept the show 'pepped up'. The supporting turns included Connie Graham and Hal Scott in a 'comic feline love scene'; tomfoolery with clarinets, saxophones and violins from 'nearly musicians' Spence and Davies; The Muldoon Four in 'a smart dance act', and magic with electric lamps from Voltaire.

Jimmy James was the consummate stage drunk although he didn't drink himself. Together with his two stooges, Hutton Conyers (named after a village mentioned in the Doomsday Book near Ripon, North Yorkshire) and Bretton (later Eli) Woods (near Mount Washington, New Hampshire), he appeared in two 'screamingly funny' sketches, 'His First Night' and 'BBC Discovery'. Madrigal and Joyce played various musical instruments whilst perched on unicycles, whilst Melville and Rekar juggled with the Indian Clubs, and Reub Silver and Marion Day, stylish piano duettists, played a selection of light classical pieces. Jim Della's Twelve Dogs solved mathematical problems posed by the audience and Les Silvas proved to be agile equilibrists. New acts appeared from the 15th, most notably ventriloquist *extraordinaire* Bobbie Kimber, who managed to manipulate two dummies; whirlwind roller skaters Ravic and Renee; Sid Plummer, xylophone virtuoso; Krandon and Karna 'a dexterous balancing act', and the Henderson Twins from radio's *Variety Bandbox* with a selection of 'hot' numbers'.

Later during the month La Celeste transferred from the Palace Coliseum to top of the bill at the Derby Castle. 'She appears to possess bewildering and baffling powers' wrote one observer, as blindfolded throughout her act, and with uncanny, deadly accuracy, she revealed personal details of members of the audience with 'no collusion guaranteed', and on one occasion revealing the full details of a National Registration Identity Card produced by a member of the audience. In support was the exponent of the slack wire, juggling Jose Moreno, and Donald B. Stuart, the burlesque magician and conjuror, known as 'Variety's Longest Laugh' due to his 6'7" height. In some ways he was a forerunner of Tommy Cooper. Music was provided by 'Radio's sweetheart of Song', Doreen Harris, and Hal Swain and his Swing Sisters (saxophone and three girl accordionists), and Dudley Dale, comedian, dancer and popular pantomime dame, and his 'Gang' of six boy singers and dancers dressed as bell-hops. 'The

Dynamic Dozen', otherwise Beam's Babes, were on hand with Atty Baker directing the resident Castle orchestra to ensure that the show moved swiftly along.

Herschel 'Jizz' Henlere played everything from the *Warsaw Concerto* to 'Jizz' with ease, and shared the bill with La Esterella, the amazing Belgian girl vocalist with a distinctive range from soprano to bass, who sang both *Ol' Man River a la* Paul Robeson, and an angelic Gounod's *Ave Maria* in a voice of surprising power and purity. The support turns included Dave Park, contortionist, and variety old timer Tubby 'Hif hit's ho kay with you, hit's ho kay with me' Turner, assisted by his wife Florence Revill. Characteristically attired in short trousers, undersized blazer and tiny boater, he had played everywhere from Hutton-le-Hole to the London Palladium with his much-imitated collapsing deckchair routine. There was more comedy in Jack and Billy Moxham's cycling act, and The Seven Volants drew great applause and amazement with their lightning acrobatic and tumbling routines. The appearance of Joan Hinde, girl trumpeter,* in a skimpy costume, brought more than a touch of glamour to the stage. She displayed a nice round tone and amazing triple tonguing as she blew her way 'like a veteran bandsman' through a selection of pieces ranging in style from 'modern jazz' to arrangements of popular showpieces such as *The Post Horn Galop*. She was in every way a class act and was frequently chosen by the likes of Elsie and Doris Waters, Ken Dodd and Max Bygraves to appear in their shows. The most eminent variety performers always used the very best support artistes.

* The *Examiner* 02.09.1949 referred to her complete command of the cornet.

As the season neared its end in September Leslie Sarony appeared with breezy songs and new stories 'on his own' without the other Leslie, Leslie Holmes, from whom he had parted company in 1946. Said to be the first radio magician, Sirdani,* whose catch-phrase 'don't be fright' was aimed at encouraging timid members of the audience to join him on stage, he sometimes did 'horrible things to his body' during his act including treading on glass, eating a gramophone record and piercing his neck with a large needle, although he was generally thought of as a conjuror. In support was American tap-dancer Hal Mencken and shadow and silhouette artiste - a 'shadowgraphist' - Edward Victor, whose profiles of famous people conjured up behind an illuminated screen included Queen Victoria and Churchill always earned admiring applause. He was a highly regarded Abanazer in pantomime where his shadows were presented on a sheet hanging from Widow Twankey's washing line. A 'vent' and a pair of comedy hand balancers completed the cast, and, as usual, Beam's Babes 'pranced their way light-heartedly through two spots'.

* East End of London-born Solomon Sydney Daniels was sometimes billed as Sirdani the Indestructible. He appeared in film advertisements for Vim in the 1940s, but was involved in court case on the Island having been accused of assaulting a member of the cast on the stage of the Derby Castle. See *Mona's Herald* 13.9.49.

'The Private Lives of Beams Babes',* the resident young dance troupe at the Derby Castle, was revealed in the *Examiner** when a reporter surprised them and their guardian, trainer, producer and surrogate 'Aunty', Peggy Beams, as they were preparing for an end of season farewell

party in the large apartment above the Derby Castle Hotel. Peggy Beams told the reporter that, like ordinary children, the thirteen girls aged between fourteen and sixteen could be 'quite a handful'. During term time they attended Ballakermeen High School but at other times could be found at the cinema or 'playing on the beach'. Most of the girls were from London including the eldest, Sylvia Draper, and the youngest, Joyce Whitehall, known as the 'up and down girl' because she gave the others their timing signals during their act. Many of the 'Babes' were ultimately aiming for a stage career, so 'their early training knocks them into shape and instils discipline', said Peggy, who incidentally also designed, made, washed and repaired their costumes, cooked their meals, supervised their rehearsals, sometimes assisted by her sister and co-founder of the 'Babes', Eleanor. The girls rehearsed for an hour before each show, but by 10 o'clock', after supper, they were safely tucked up in bed. Some of their mothers travelled to the Island to visit them during the summer.

* Sometimes billed as Beams' Breezy Babes. See *Isle of Man Examiner* 09.09.1949, p.10, for photographs, and *Isle of Man Examiner* 29.07.1949 for general summer photographs including Beams' Babes.

From Monday 12th *Show Time* at the Crescent Pavilion transferred to the Derby Castle, including Stella Hartley's popular 'Party'. The cast included comedian Jack Strand, multi-instrumentalist Nena Musker, xylophonist Shirley Dane, vocalists Doris Yorke and Harry Tolfree and the Dorchester Lovelies, and was judged to be a distinct 'hit' that summer.

George Formby and his wife Beryl returned to the Island in September and were the special guests at a party at the Castle Mona Hotel on the 13th to celebrate their Silver Wedding.

A traditional Manx Mhelliagh took place on Saturday 17th September, the last night of the season.

The Palais de Danse

Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band were in residence pre-season as usual with Joe Kirkham occasionally acting as musical director. Between July and September Vincent Ladbrooke and his orchestra became the resident musical director together with comedy piano entertainers Robbie and Platt, the Three Radio Rascals, and resident vocalist Bobby Hill. Each week there were attractive dance programmes to suit all tastes: carnival, old time, late night, balloon ball, old time carnival, welcome nights, morning coffee and afternoon tea dances. The Sunday concerts continued to be popular and featured a series of guest celebrities including Harry Shields, 'The Minister of Enjoyment', and at the end of July entertainer and comedian Dickie Henderson was the guest celebrity. The son of music hall artist and film star Dick Henderson, he was a smooth Sinatra-like crooner with a laid-back, easy-going stage persona and an abundance of one-liners. He was currently appearing in revues, pantomimes and

would later enjoy a successful television career which included compering *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* and fronting his own *The Dickie Henderson Show*.

One event was destined to become an annual feature at the Palais de Danse: The Stockport Ball, held during the Stockport wakes weeks in August. A highlight of the evening was the introduction of a new modern dance sequence called the 'Hoopla', which quickly gained popularity. Harold Moorhouse returned to the Palais as the season came to an end, and one of his first engagements was to provide music for the Cadet Forces Welfare Fund Dance at the end of September.

The Gaiety Theatre

'Fun is the keynote'

The Gaiety Theatre opened for the season on 11th June with Tom Arnold's uproarious revue *Too Funny for Words* starring 'Radio's Rare Pair' Nat Mills and Bobbie,* a superb 'comic and stooge' double act, for their second season in Douglas. With music, laughter and dancing guaranteed, two shows each evening and a change of programme every Thursday and Sunday, it was billed as 'a show for young and old, with never a dull moment'. Their act was based on connubial disharmony and was sprinkled with well-known catch phrases from their radio appearances in the 1940s such as Nat Mills' exasperated 'Let's get on with it!' in response to Bobbie's constant inane and irrelevant questions. Their sketches included 'Let's Elope', or 'how *not* to go about dodging father', 'The Ballet School', the biggest riot of the show, set in an imaginary Viennese dancing school, in which they were assisted by the 'side-splitting diminutives' Norman McGlen and Vera, and the ever popular 'Talent in the Kitchen'. The supporting acts included Canadian close harmony group The Maple Leaf Four, whirlwind roller-skating duo Downey and Daye and Crotchet the Mad Musician, a legendary Scottish musical clown who played several instruments at the same time including the accordion, trumpet and clarinet. There was old time knockabout comedy acrobatics from Desmond and Marks when daring deeds were frequently upset by humiliating 'pratfalls' *a la* Charlie Chaplin. 'Tail-wagging canine sagacity' was the hallmark of Christian's Dog Parade, charming *soubrette* Audrey Hewitt both 'sang very prettily' and led that 'snappy bevy of beauties' Annette's Manx Belles. By mid-August, with just four weeks to the end of the season, the 'house full' signs were often in evidence. The theatre orchestra was conducted for the season by Bob Marshall.

* Theirs was one of the longest partnerships in the history of entertainment (1920-55) and was as successful off-stage as on. Vesta Tilley thought that Nat Mills was the greatest pantomime Dame since Dan Leno. The following notice appeared in the *Mona's Herald* on Tuesday 14th June, 1949: 'THANKS for the cheerful and helpful spirit of the Captain and crew of the good ship of the Steam Packet Co which brought us, and our company, safely over the water to this lovely island once again. WELCOME to old friends and new, to our revue, "Too Funny for Words," on any night this summer'. The opening scene of their revue recreated the arrival of the *Mona's Queen* and the disembarkation of the Company.

The Ramsey Pavilion

The famous Roosters Concert Party of male entertainers presented their 1949 show at the Pavilion from mid-August for a two-week run. The swift-moving, modern seaside entertainment designed to suit all tastes had a cast of five headed by comedian Will Ambro, supported by pianist Derrick Swan, vocalists Jack Barker and Edwin Spencer and an original Rooster, Percy Merriman, renowned for his Dickensian character sketches. The 'Roosters', originally formed in 1917 in Salonika to tour the Middle East hot-spots during World War I, last appeared in Douglas, at the Villa Marina, twenty years earlier. The affectionate *soubriquet* 'old troupers' could certainly have been applied to them. On Monday 5th September the Variety Highlights Concert Party returned to the Pavilion for the final fortnight of the season with the irrepressible Gladys Morgan, comedians Winsor and Wilton, entertainer Frank Laurie, personality girl Joan Laurie, and compere and concertina virtuoso Billy Reilly.

The Crescent Pavilion

The Crescent Pavilion opened on 23rd June with the revue *Show Time*, billed as a 'Super Summer Attraction', an indispensable ingredient of which was Stella Hartley's on stage 'Party', during which members of the audience were invited to take part in various contests in order to win prizes. The cast included Laurie Watson, a one-man ventriloquist and marionette act, clearly inspired to a degree by the wartime radio show ITMA, entitled 'It's That Mannakin', and Doris Yorke and Harry Tollfree who sang 'Songs from the Shows', together with violin and accordionist Nena Musker, who played a selection of popular pieces, and Dan Richards and the Dorchester Lovelies presented an attractive show-within-a-show entitled 'Stepping Out with a Memory'. Jack Strand acted in the dual roles as resident comedian and host.

Onchan Head Pavilion

The season's show at Onchan Head, *Starlite Serenade*, was fronted by Terry 'Toby Jug' Cantor, 'Radio's Laughter Racketeer', an old-fashioned funny man, short and tubby with a big beaming smile, formerly an entertainer at the piano and partner in no less than three double acts, he eventually became a successful proprietor of shows. His individual turn, 'Panic with a Piano', brought forth plenty of laughs whilst at the same time he demonstrated what an accomplished pianist he really was. The two-and-a-half-hour Latin-American-style show featured J. W. Jackson's Lovely Rendezvous Dancers 'bubbled with zest and energy', in their turn described as 'a colourful and snappy cavalcade of song'. The fast-moving production included spectacular scenes such as 'Voodoo Moon', 'Red Roses' and 'Heaven' and was adjudged a 'good evening's entertainment'. Comedienne and singer Eva Kane, billed as 'the local star making her first appearance in a show of this type', was joined by tap dancers and singers, The Granger Boys (Don and Dennis) and vocalists John Grant and Kathleen Wood. The 'bright and attractive show' was apparently a

'must' with Ramsey audiences 'who may travel further and fare worse' but closed mid-season on Saturday 13th August so that the cast could prepare for their forthcoming television broadcast on the 27th. * Music was provided by Paul Gomez directing George Elrick's Starlite Serenaders.

* Eva Kane may have been the first Manx star to appear on television when she joined Terry Cantor in the 45-minute broadcast of *Starlite Serenade* during the last week of August. 'Her whistling numbers were well appreciated' reported the *Examiner* on 9.9.1949.

Douglas Head

On Douglas Head Harry 'Bones' Orchid's* Swanee Minstrels, an old style 'nigger minstrel group', entertained huge crowds from 27th June until early September with their twice-daily show, assisted by the Darktown Glee Club and the Show Boat Serenaders. The familiar characters were all in place: Harry 'Bones' Orchid, Jack 'Ol man Mose' Baldwin, John 'Mr Interlocutor' Doyle, Corny 'Tambo' Warby, Will 'Dusky Aristocrat' Comery, Stan 'Uke' Lee, Bernard 'Ticklin' dem Ivories' Martin and Ray 'Banjo' Moulton. The Minstrels, who were sponsored by Douglas Corporation, also performed in the Villa Marina on wet mornings.

* Harry Orchid was a nephew of G. H. Chirgwin, 'The White-Eyed Kafir', and one of the most famous 'black face' entertainers of the music hall era.

The smaller venues and the out-of-town resorts all enjoyed plenty of visitors that season. It was 'All the fun of the fair' at White City, and Ralph Fidler directed the orchestra at the Douglas Holiday Camp. There was boating on the Silverdale Boating Lake, open-air dancing at Groudle Glen, and music, dancing and strawberry teas at Rushen Abbey. Disappointingly August Bank Holiday Monday was a wash out as a dull and cloudy morning developed into a cold, wet and windy afternoon. A cold, south-west wind drove the visitors off Douglas Head and into the Hotel concert room, which became uncomfortably crowded; the promenades were deserted by mid-afternoon as holiday makers scurried back to their hotels and guest houses to organise impromptu concerts to entertain themselves. Nevertheless, the cinemas did brisk business and Joe Kirkham and his Serenaders provided indoor musical entertainment in the Coliseum as did Jan Ralfini in the Villa Marina. The *Show Time* matinee at the Crescent Pavilion drew good crowds and the Palais de Danse was open for dancing.

'Now for the Big Effort'*

The long-cherished hope of extending the summer season seemed to be closer to realisation with plans by the Palace & Derby Castle Company and the Villa Marina to keep shows open until 18th September. 'Spirit, determination, confidence and a willingness to make compromises' would be required if plans for an 'Indian Summer' of entertainment on the Island were to be successful. The *Isle of Man Times** enquired whether the Douglas Bay lights were any sort of end of season draw bearing in mind that the nearest neighbours Blackpool and Morecambe were planning

their illuminations. One visitor attested to the popularity of the Morecambe illuminations and recalled frequent tailbacks and congestion in Lancaster as cars headed to the resort. Douglas must do something!

* *Mona's Herald* 23.06.1949.

* See *Isle of Man Times* 10.09.1949

Arthur Helliwell's 'Look Around' column in the *Examiner** provided further insights into the season by way of the reflections of one of the Bathing Beauty Contest judges as reported in *The People* concerning his visit to the Island. In his estimation the Island was too small for any significant 'black market' activity. 'If you tried to kill a pig on the sly', he argued, 'the news would be all round the Island in few hours!' The only racketeer he met was a taxi driver who charged 2s 6d for a half-mile journey. The Taxi driver's response was: 'This place is dead in Winter . . . I have to make my money between May and September'. He concluded that the Island had many advantages: 'Beer at 8d per pint; two bob in the pound income tax; low rates; pubs open all day; bowls of new laid eggs in the café windows and unlimited fresh cream', he observed. So, despite the acute housing shortage ' . . . there is a queue on the mainland of people waiting to take up residence on the IoM'.

At one stage during his visit he fell into conversation with Joe Loss who estimated that in twenty years 10,000,000 had waltzed, fox-trotted, rhumbaed and jitter-bugged past his rostrum. However, he detected a regrettable decline in ballroom manners: 'When I first started twenty years ago there was grace and courtesy even in the ordinary Palais. A young man would ask a girl for the pleasure of the next dance and escort her back to her seat when it was over. But not now. The young ballroom 'spiv' of today jerks his head in the direction of the floor, chews gum instead of making conversation and walks away without so much as a "Thank you" when the music stops'.

* *Isle of Man Examiner* 23.09.1949

By general consent the summer of 1949 had been 'a good season' if not a 'bumper' one. Visitor numbers had been very healthy at around 600,000 and takings were up at the Villa Marina* and all the major resorts.

* The Villa Marina showed a surplus of £6,857 for 1948-49 compared with £4,297 in 1947-48, and between £2,000 and £2,200 for the previous two years. The band and variety and concert artistes cost £21,537 against box office takings of £35,488.

And finally, from the editor of the *Isle of Man Examiner* of 3rd October: 'Summer Comes Early – In BERMUDA. Just the Place for a Care-free Holiday'. Despite currency restrictions, some places can be visited eg the British colony of Bermuda. ' . . . the clean atmosphere in that tiny British colony is appreciated better when one has 'sniffed' the disgusting odours and seen the filth of some of the Arab and Latin pigsties in North Africa

and Mediterranean ports'. This may have been fair comment in 1949, but did no-one detect the sound of an early nail being driven into the coffin lid of the Manx tourist industry?

1950

'Not as good as pre-war years'

This was the year that the Island woke up to the fact that other popular summer resorts in Britain had largely shaken off their immediate post-war blues and, despite ongoing difficulties and shortages suffered by everyone, were forging ahead with plans to entice the holiday makers with the very best of entertainment, both indoor and outdoor, in good weather and in poor. As far as providing adequate poor weather entertainment venues, this was something that, arguably, the Island never fully engaged with until the futuristic development of the ill-fated Summerland complex in the early 1970s. The complacent optimism that July and August would always see record temperatures, and that on cold, wet days, visitors could entertain themselves in their boarding houses and hotels, or head for the cafes, was both short-sighted and invariably misplaced.

In the meantime, it was anticipated that a new thirty-five-minute publicity film made by D.U.K. films on the Island during the 1949 season and entitled *Trophy Island*, would add to the Island's profile as a highly desirable holiday venue. The recent Publicity Board film *Isle of Beauty*, with commentary by Wilfred Pickles, had been shown in 800 cinemas and seen by over 2,000,000 people. The new film received a private showing at the Regal Cinema in April arranged by the Publicity Board. With the narration by Stewart MacPherson and magnificent photography by Cecil H. Williamson, most of the Island's towns, beauty spots, mountains and glens were featured, but for some reason Ramsey was excluded. In June a party from the Scottish press visited the Island once again at the invitation of the Publicity Board and were welcomed by dinner at the Empress Hotel and visits to the Palace and Coliseum.

Eileen Peters won the coveted Cleveland medal at the Manx Music Festival which took place in May between 1st - 13th at the Palace Coliseum and Villa Marina. The 1950 Grand Festival Concert took place on 4th May.

1950 in a nutshell

BBC Radio first broadcasts *Listen with Mother* on 16th January; on 20th February Ealing Studios released *The Blue Lamp* starring Jack Warner and Dirk Bogarde; Clement Attlee wins the General Election in February; the *Eagle* comic first published; the first package holiday air charter departs Gatwick Airport for Corsica on 20th May; radio comedy *Educating Archie* starring Peter Brough with Max Bygraves first aired on 6th June; England lose the Test match to the West Indies by 326 runs at Lord's; the children's television show *Andy Pandy* first shown on 11th July; Sainsburys open

their first purpose-built supermarket in Croydon; Princess Elizabeth gives birth to a daughter on 29th August; C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* published; actress and comedienne Julie Walters born 22nd February; actor Robbie Coltrane born 30th March; television presenter Jeremy 'Paxo' Paxman and radio presenter Jenni Murray born in May; author George Orwell died 21st January; Timothy Evans wrongfully executed for the 10 Rillington Place murders on 9th March; George Bernard Shaw died 2nd November; jazz musician John Dankworth forms the Dankworth Seven.

'Star Value All Through'

In conversation with the *Examiner* in May 1950, D. F. Barwell, General Manager of the Palace & Derby Castle Company, reflected on the reality that competition among the Company's popular resorts meant that it was becoming increasingly difficult to 'ring the changes and find attractions which would maintain the high standards already established'. Confident that the programmes for the forthcoming season 'would be equal to anything the Company had previously presented', he vowed that the shows would represent "Star Value" all through' and would feature artistes from the London stage, radio and the cinema. There was disappointment in April when he had to announce that the circus planned for the Palace grounds that season would not be held. Despite the considerable amount of thought and energy that went into the planning of this 'experiment', the logistical difficulties proved to be insurmountable, not helped by protracted objections by local boarding house keepers, which, although eventually set aside, left insufficient time for arrangements to be made.

The Palais de Danse

Harold Moorhouse and his Havana Band assumed their regular position as the resident Palais band early in the year, but on 2nd July Stanley Broughton and his orchestra took over and organised Sunday variety and instrumental concerts with guest stars from the Derby Castle shows. Monday night was designated 'Old Time Night'; Tuesday, 'Carnival Night'; 'Late Night' and 'Crazy Night' dancing took place on Wednesdays. There were guest appearances from Johnson Clark, known as the 'sportive vent' and Sid Plummer, zylophonist and comedian, billed as 'The Zylifool', whose instrument was fitted with many gadgets giving an array of spectacular effects. In addition to the themed nights there were a host of novelty competitions such as 'conduct the band', crooning competitions, ankle competitions and 'lucky spots'. At the end of the season the Palais de Danse closed for renovation. Thereafter Harold Moorhouse returned with his Havana Band for the winter.

The Gaiety Theatre

The wartime comedies *See How They Run* and *The Chiltern Hundreds*, and other West End comedies and farces inaugurated the summer season of plays at the Gaiety Theatre, a feature of which were special guest appearances of famous stars of stage and screen such as Lana Morris in the family comedy *Acacia Avenue* in May, and later the character actor Bransby Williams. In September the film actress Carol Marsh (Rose in *Brighton Rock*, 1947, with Richard Attenborough, and Fan Scrooge in the Alastair Sim *Scrooge* of 1951) starred in the domestic drama *Fly Away Peter*. The Palace Players Repertory Company would be retained for a further season of West End plays commencing 11th September with Wilfred Lawson appearing in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. The policy of bringing famous stars to Douglas for some productions would continue, but a decision as to whether the company could continue throughout the winter would be made in October. The future of the winter series therefore depended entirely on the support or otherwise of the Manx public. The first season in 1946 had been an immediate success; the following season had been disappointing, and the current season had seen audience figures dwindle alarmingly as the season progressed. One commentator reflected on the fact that the Island's amateur companies were always 'given wonderful support', but did that mean that the Island would be content to let the professional company go?

The Palace and Coliseum

The Palace Ballroom opened for the season on Whit Saturday, 27th May, with Stanley Broughton and his band on their first visit to the Island, but on Saturday 1st July Paul Fenoulhet* and his band took over in the ballroom until 16th September. A special feature of Fenoulhet's dance programmes were his medleys of 'Mingled Tunes' chosen and played by individual band members. Stanley Broughton transferred to the Palace Gardens where he could be heard most afternoons. In August a new event, the Men's Personality Competition, was inaugurated and attracted a crowd of 3,200 who, despite the unseasonably cold weather, watched eighteen competitors go through their paces encouraged by compere Stella Hartley. On that first occasion Mr Ernest Gleave from Knotty Ash was awarded first prize with his impersonation of Danny Kaye. A children's competition was planned on the back of the success of the men's competition. By the end of July the Palace Personality Competitions, compered by Stella Hartley, had been expanded to include a ladies' competition on Wednesdays and a gentlemen's competition on Fridays.

* A highly respected trombonist and arranger for the BBC's *Band Parade*, a 45-minute dance music programme, whose guest singers included Gracie Fields and Petula Clark. At just sixteen year of age he had been engaged at the Empress Ballroom, Blackpool, and later toured with Jack Hylton and his orchestra, and for ten years played with Carroll

Gibbon's Savoy Hotel Orpheans. During WWII he led the RAF Skyrockets Dance Orchestra (the no. 1 Balloon Centre Dance Orchestra, and rival of the Squadronaires) and in 1947 formed his own touring orchestra. In 1950 he took over the reins of the BBC Variety Orchestra for twenty years.

The Coliseum also opened on Whit-Saturday for the first live show of the season, a 'bright and lively' summer revue entitled *Show Time* starring Stella Hartley, Liverpool's 'bad lad' Jimmy Charters, 'vent' Laurie Watson and his mannikin act, and a full supporting cast. The show, in residence until 30th June, was billed as a 'A rollicking holiday entertainment' with 'Good, wholesome humour'. Vocalists Herman Wells and Constance Rae brought 'A breath o' the Highlands' to Douglas, xylophone virtuoso Bobby Wotherspoon, a popular addition to any variety show, and Alice Dells, a charming accordionist and singer, provided the musical turns, and comedians Bob Kerns and Mary Lou, the comic relief. Four gentlemen and four ladies were invited onto the stage for Stella's on-stage 'Party' which was, as usual, a highlight of the show with prizes including a pint of beer and a baby's bottle of milk being won by the contestants. The Show Time Young Ladies sang and danced their way into the affections of the audiences and the orchestra was under the direction of Harold Haddock.

Several new acts were brought into the show in June, but on 1st July a new show, *Rocking the Town*, took over for the height of the season. Billed as 'a super spectacle summer laughter parade', it starred 'rubber-neck' contortionist Ben Wrigley,* the Royal Kiltie Juniors and The Dagenham Girl Pipers in a sensational 'Waterfalls of Scotland' scene, during which thirty tons of water tumbled over rocks every minute, the whirlwind acrobats The Seven Volants, and the Ballet Montmartre's 'saucy' re-creation of the spirited *Can-Can*. *Rockin' the Town* soon had the Coliseum 'rocking with laughter', with 'clever and clean gags and uproariously funny sketches' including Ben Wrigley's 'Laughing Gas' and 'Room 504', that was said to be 'one long scream from beginning to end'. The stage sets were indeed spectacular and designed to resemble the various Palace & Derby Castle resorts in Douglas. The support acts included Welsh soprano Ceinwen Rowlands, master juggler and ball thrower Silvestri, the Twelve de Vere Lovelies, 'Companions in Song' Doreen Lavender and Robert Pendelbury and their *scena* 'Songs from Old Vienna', and vivacious comedienne Joyce Randall who invited members of the audience to join her on stage for a series of three 'spoof' weddings: the country wedding, a cockney wedding and a society wedding.

* Sometimes billed as 'The new look comedian with the rubber neck', Hull-born Ben Wrigley starred in the so-so 1949 British comedy films *Melody in the Dark* with Eunice Grayson, *High Jinks in Society*, which also featured the Radio Revellers and the Squadronaires, and in 1971, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*. Even as he was appearing in Douglas, he was about to travel to America to appear in 'Schnozzle' Durante's Hollywood television show.

The Sunday concerts at the Coliseum began on 2nd July with Paul Fenoulhet and his Grand Augmented Orchestra, and a guest appearance of The Radio Revellers, a four-part vocal group formed after World War II, whose signature song 'Four Men, One Song' ('It's the way the voices bleeend that helps the tune along') was hardly off the air during the 1940s and '50s.* Welsh soprano Ceinwen Rowlands 'delighted the audience with arias and ballads' including *One Fine Day* from *Madame Butterfly*, *Oh My Beloved Father*, *Art Thou Troubled* from Handel's *Rodelinda* and Haydn

Wood's *A Brown Bird Singing*. The colourful American vocal quintet the Ben Yost Royal Guards performed selections from *The Desert Song*, *New Moon*, *The Vagabond King* and *Oklahoma*, each member of the group being over six feet tall and resplendently attired in an old fashioned 'military' uniform. Haydn Wood's *A Manx Rhapsody* was amongst the orchestral pieces in the programme together with da Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance* and Paul Fenoulhet's own *Royal Command March*.

* The Radio Revellers were a good comedy act and had been a big hit at the 1948 Royal Variety Performance. They kept going until the late '50s when they retired 'at their peak'.

The following Sunday, 9th July, The Five Smith Brothers - Mrs Smith's Five Little Boys, thought to be the answer to the American challenge of the *Deep River Boys* and the *Ink Spots* - proved that they were 'the equal of any act of their kind which has ever visited Douglas' with their programme of close harmony arrangements of popular songs and 'delightful humour'. Their twenty-five-minute act included *Dear Hearts and Gentle People*, the popular Scottish song *Down in the Glen*, the Geordie music hall song *Blaydon Races* together with light operatic and Hillbilly numbers. The Lon Dhoo Male Voice Choir, conductor Douglas Buxton, was the main supporting musical ingredient and 'made a very pleasant impression on the audience' with such fine choruses as the *Soldier's Chorus* from Gounod's *Faust* and *Gaudeamus* from Romberg's *The Student Prince*. A quartet of singers from the choir, Messrs Miles, Christian, Gelling and Quirk, also won great applause for their version of *One Alone*, also from the *Student Prince*. Paul Fenoulhet featured his dance band in a selection of 'the brighter melodies of the moment', rather than the augmented orchestra that often played the light classical pieces for the Sunday concerts.

The following Sunday, 16th July, there was standing room only for the two hour appearance of Cavan O'Connor,* the Strolling Vagabond, a top of the bill variety entertainer also known as 'the Vagabond Lover', with his trademark smart tinker stage persona, jacket casually thrown over one shoulder and battered slouch hat set at a rakish angle, who sang his way into the hearts of countless ladies by simply standing virtually motionless and performing song after 'romantic' song in a lilting Irish tenor voice. The audiences would join in the choruses of such favourites as his signature song *I'm Only a Strolling Vagabond*, *I'll take you home again*, *Kathleen*, *Hear My Song* and *Jealous Heart*. In support were husband and wife piano duettists Reub Silver and Marion Day, 'Melody Magic on Two Pianos', who were almost as popular as Rawicz and Landauer. Paul Fenoulhet was praised for the variety of his dance programmes in the ballroom and for his participation in the Sunday concerts.

* He enjoyed an amazing seventy-year career, during the 1930s and '40s he was listened to regularly by some fourteen million people. He died in 1997 aged 98.

One of Douglas' favourite sopranos, Isobel Baillee, appeared on Sunday 23rd July, and sang ten songs with 'an exquisite purity of tone' including *An Eriskay Love Lilt*, *Kisimul's Galley* and two songs by Schubert. She was partnered by baritone Harold Williams who sang songs and arias by Mussorgsky, Leoncavallo, Handel and Cowen. According to one commentator they convincingly demonstrated before a huge Coliseum audience

that 'straight music is not dead as a holiday attraction'. Accompanist Jennie Simpson's contribution to the superb evening was acknowledged by Harold Williams. The following Sunday 'Hollywood's Singing Star', charismatic Allan Jones,* 'sang his way into the hearts of nearly three thousand people in the Coliseum' in songs both light and gay, and was rewarded with prolonged bursts of thunderous applause. More than holding their own on the same stage were Radcliffe and Ray, 'Two Boys in Harmony', well-known from their radio appearances and as part of Norman Evan's *Road Show*, and well-remembered from their Coliseum revue appearances two seasons earlier. *Ellan Vannin* and *The Lord's Prayer* were especially well received, as were R. H. Burke and Horace Gerlach's 1949 'wedding weepy' *Daddy's Little Girl*, Cy Coben's *The Old Piano Roll Blues* ('I wanna hear it again, I wanna hear it again, THE OLD PIANO ROLL BLUES') and *How Can You Buy Killarney?* They, too, received terrific applause as did Paul Fenoulhet and his orchestra, now established as an important feature of the Sunday concerts, whose selections were much appreciated, particularly the conductor's own arrangements.

* The American actor, film star and tenor of Welsh ancestry, best remembered today as the romantic lead in the musicals *Show Boat* and *The Firefly*. His recording of the *Donkey Serenade* was one of the best-selling single discs of all time. His accompanist that evening was Will Fyffe Jr, the son of Scottish music hall stalwart Will 'I belong to Glasgow' Fyffe. His son is the singer Jack Jones who had a number of hits in the 1960s and '70s.

'George still packs 'em in'

On Sunday 6th August George Formby, no longer just a famous entertainer, but a National institution, received his customary 'Big Reception'. Demand for seats was unsurprisingly overwhelming, and although for some his 'gormless Lancashire lad' persona was wearing a bit thin, many more believed that if George was on stage there wasn't much wrong with the world. There were 'spontaneous howls of delight' when he first appeared and with his inimitable grin beaming at the audience began 'to turn gloom into gladness' in a fifty-minute act which included all his best loved songs: *Mr Woo*, *When I'm Cleaning Windows* and, of course, the *TT Races* amongst others. At the end of his act he brought his wife Beryl onto the stage and much to the delight of the audience the pair indulged in some 'connubial backchat'. As so many had failed to obtain seats for this performance, he agreed to give a matinee that week, which was also sold out. In complete contrast the 'Musical Madness' and skilful musicianship of Carter and Doray on a variety of musical instruments was both appreciated and warmly applauded.

'The sensational West Indian pianist' Winifred Atwell,* 'the Queen of Honky-Tonk', appeared at the Sunday Concert on 13th August before an enthusiastic full house. Billed as 'Trinidad's dusky, vivacious pianist' this 'outstanding artiste' with an 'effervescent personality' had appeared at the Derby Castle the previous week, and presented a varied programme which encompassed a Chopin Polonaise, Debussy's *Claire de Lune*, her own composition the *Five Finger Boogie*, *Star Dust* and Khatachurian's *Sabre Dance*. Her co-star and newcomer to Douglas, Michael Howard,

star of radio's *Here's Howard*, treated the audience to a mixture of topical jokes and impressions in a conversational style that hardly 'rocked the house' like the quick-fire patter of some comedians, yet 'created a good measure of amusement'. The Wanderers Male Voice Choir, conductor Effie Fayle, sang Sullivan's *The Lost Chord*, *Love, could I only tell thee*, *Flight of Ages* and the spiritual *I'se weary of waitin'*, whilst Paul Fenoulhet and the orchestra delighted the crowd with a fine selection of popular pieces.

* Winifred Atwell sold over 20 million records during the 1950s and was the first black artiste to have a number one hit in the UK Singles Chart with her 1954 recording of *Let's Have Another Party*. She was a child prodigy and studied the piano in New York and London. Although best-known for her Ragtime and Boogie-woogie hits, Winifred Atwell also made recordings of some standard classical concertos, such as Grieg's piano concerto in A minor with Stanford Robinson and the LPO in December 1954. She appeared in three Royal Variety Performances and on one occasion the Queen herself requested an encore: *Roll Out the Barrell*. She moved to Australia in the late 1950s and continued to travel the world giving performances. She appeared in Australian TV's *This is Your Life* in 1978, retired finally in 1981 but continued playing the organ at her local church, and died in 1983.

The house was full to bursting again on Sunday 20th August for the two-and-a-half-hour concert featuring Afrique with his remarkable impressions of opera stars Tauber and Gigli, his fine voice and quiet humour. Sharing the stage was the irrepressible Issy 'My Yiddisher Momma' Bonn, with his ceaseless flow of quips, Jewish jokes and well-known songs such as *Daddy's Little Girl*, which he sang to an eleven-year-old girl in the audience as if he were singing just for her. After the show he presented the girl with an autographed copy of the song. His act alone lasted some fifty minutes near the end of which he turned to the stage manager in the wings and said 'Leave me the keys . . . I'll lock up!' As always there was 'refined musicianship' from Paul Fenoulhet and the orchestra this time in selections from Ivor Novello's *King's Rhapsody* and Rogers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*.

The Third Annual Theatrical Gala took place on Tuesday 22nd August in the Palace Gardens. There were charity gift stalls, competitions and a chance to meet the stars of *Showtime* and *Rockin' the Town*. This Gala, the successor to Florrie Forde's annual charity galas from before the war, had been revived as recently as 1948 and attracted a huge crowd who besieged the open-air attractions before a deluge of rain mid-afternoon caused the abandonment of the outside events. Nevertheless, the gala raised £246 8s 3d for local charities. The *Ramsey Courier* reporter ruefully reflected that since St. Swithin's Day on 15th July 'there has scarcely been one fully fine day'.

At the height of the season in mid-August the 'Full House' signs for *Rocking the Town* were out every night, and the *Ramsey Courier** felt confident enough to declare that the show was not only the most successful show of the season but 'one of the best shows ever brought to the island', with a significant number of people going two or three times.

* *Ramsey Courier* 25.08.1950.

The final of the Men's Personality Competition took place in the Palace Gardens on Friday 25th August with the awards being by Vic and Joe Crastonian, currently appearing at the Derby Castle. The First Prize went to 'Red' Thomas from Breconshire with his wildlife impressions. A week later fourteen-year-old Juan Shimmin of Douglas won the children's personality competition with the song *My lovely Celia*.

Described as 'a feast of music', the American singing group The Ben Yost Royal Guards were top of the bill on Sunday 27th August. This colourful vocal ensemble normally appeared as a quintet, but sometimes numbered up to eight performers according to some photographs. They were normally attired in white 'Ruritanian-style' uniforms complete with epaulettes and cummerbunds, and sometimes short red jackets. Their programme featured medleys from *Oklahoma*, *The Student Prince* and *Show Boat*, Irish Songs and Spirituals. The group was 'applauded to the echo' on each of their two appearances during the evening, and even after twelve numbers the audience was reluctant to let them go. In support was that 'classy musical act' violinist Jules Adrian accompanied by his wife, the pianist/accordionist Grace Spero.

'Girl Trumpeter Must Stay in Band'

We get a rare glimpse into the background workings behind the summer shows, and particularly the orchestras or bands associated with them, in the following story from the *Ramsey Courier* on September 1st. It transpired that an injunction had been granted to prevent a girl trumpeter, 'said to be one of the best lady trumpeters in the country', from breaking her one-year contract with International Attractions Limited who provided the Royal Kiltie Junior Orchestra, currently appearing at the Palace Coliseum in the JMZ Productions *Rockin' the Town*. Nineteen-year-old Mrs Maureen Shelagh Whewell (married to a Ramsey man and known professionally as Miss Maureen Shelagh Franks) announced in July that she had received an offer of 'a better engagement' and left the show in August, only to return to Douglas shortly afterwards. It appeared that her father, Mr Frank Ludlow, had frequently telephoned Ivy Benson to ask if there was a vacancy in her famous 'all-girl' band for the 'temperamental' young musician. Costs were awarded against the defendants.

Top of the bill on 3rd September as the end of the season approached, Ronnie Ronalde, singer, *siffleur* and yodeller, entertained the huge audience (who certainly got their money's worth) with *In a Monastery Garden*, *Down in the Glen*, *The Windmill Song* and *If I were a Blackbird*. His bird song whistling was adjudged 'outstanding'. Sharing the stage was Irish tenor James Johnstone, no stranger to Douglas, who sang an aria from Bizet's *Carmen*, arias by Puccini and Verdi, ballads and songs from the world of operetta and the musical theatre. His rendering of *Danny Boy* and *The Holy City* brought forth great applause. Paul Fenoulhet and the orchestra played entertaining light classical pieces by Bach and Eric Coates among others. The final Sunday Concert of the season on 10th September featured Allan Jones for the second time that season, and Doreen Lundy from radio show Sweet Serenade, who was the wife of conductor Paul Fenoulhet. Hers was a rich velvety voice in the Anne Shelton style and was equally at home in serious or light-hearted songs such as *If I Loved You*, *Begin the Beguine*, *You can't get a man with a gun* and *I*

remember the corn fields. Allan Jones sang the *Whiffenpoof Song*, *The Monkey and the Organ Grinder*, *On the Trail* and *The Lord's Prayer*, 'an exquisite rendering which received tremendous applause', and his signature song *Donkey Serenade*. It is a testament to the professionalism of all concerned that owing to his delayed arrival on the Island, the orchestra did not have enough time to rehearse with him.

There was a fitting farewell to *Rockin' the Town* on the evening of Saturday 16th in the Coliseum as the fine show played to a packed house of mainly local residents. There was genuine regret when the curtain fell for the last time, for it had been 'a happy sojourn' with the show winning many new friends and generating a huge amount of goodwill which helped to maintain the Island's reputation for 'a high standard in catering for the enjoyment of the visitor'. Joyce Randell, 'vibrant with energy and bubbling over with good spirits' on the anniversary of the Battle of Britain, invited an RAF Sergeant to join her on stage for the duet *Beautiful Doll*. There was a great reception for the Royal Kiltie Juniors and the Dagenham Girl Pipers, and the star of the show Ben Wrigley paid an affectionate tribute to the management of the Palace & Derby Castle Company for the 'hearty co-operation' of the stage staff, the Manx press and the numerous friends of the show. There were bouquets and gifts for all.

The Villa Marina

Visitors to the Villa Marina at the start of the season on Saturday 27th will have been impressed by the extensive renovations undertaken during the winter, at a cost of £20,000. The walls looked bright and fresh in various shades of peach and cream picked out in silver; the sky blue dome with its gold centre and new lighting that could be dimmed was much appreciated; there was new seating in the downstairs balcony, new sprung seating on the ground floor, and new curtains and carpets in maroon and gold throughout including the café and reading room. Two thousand people danced to Jan Ralfini and his orchestra on the opening night in the Royal Hall and from 8th June, weather permitting, he could also be heard every afternoon at 3.00pm in the Villa Gardens when the Bathing Beauty Contests commenced.

The first Sunday Concert of the season took place on 28th May and starred the Australian soprano Joan Hammond. The *Ramsey Courier* reported that she was 'a pure joy to listen to' in a thirty-minute appearance that included ten items including arias by Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Puccini's *O My Beloved Father* – the aria that came to be her signature piece – and *One Fine Day* from *Madame Butterfly*. When Douglas favourite *Home, Sweet Home* was requested as an encore, she said to the audience 'I don't know if it's a hint or not'. She could easily have sung another half-a-dozen songs and arias for the audience was reluctant to let her go. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra in their fourth season supplied the orchestral items in the programme which included a movement from Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnol* played by the orchestra's leader Kurt Hutter. 'Brilliant tenor Don

Rivers, well-known on the Island, but singing with Jan Ralfini for the first time', sang Verdi's *La donna mobile* and *The Isle of Capri*, the popular breezy song in a tango-fox-trot style. Pianist James Whitebread performed a Concerto Pastiche based on Tchaikovsky's piano concerto no. 1. World Ballroom Dance champions Arthur Norton and Pat Eaton were engaged to give nightly dance exhibitions during Whit-week.

Despite the glorious weather, 'House Full' signs were in evidence for the appearance of Derek Roy, 'Dr Roy the Melody Boy', dance band singer and comedian, with his 'terrific impressions' of Frankie Howerd - his co-resident comic from radio's *Variety Bandbox* - Frank Sinatra, Al Jolson, 'proper poorly' comedian Reg Dixon and Bing Crosby. His act, spiced with plenty of topical wise-cracks redolent of his current zany radio show *Hip-Hip-Hoo-Roy*, 'evoked terrific applause'. He was supported by vocalists Don Rivers (*Donkey Serenade*) and Dorothy Duval (*If I'd known you were coming, I'd have baked a cake*), Kid Francis who played a selection from Ivor Novello's *The Dancing Years* on the electric organ, and Jan Ralfini and the orchestra who gave a tidy performance of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* overture, a medley of songs from *Oklahoma* and a concluding march, *Gaily Thru the World*.

Petite brunette Miss Daintry de Cadiz, supervisor of the Court Café in Ramsey, won the first of the Bathing Beauty Competitions organised by the June Effort Committee held in 'brilliant sunshine' in the Villa Gardens on Thursday 8th June. Miss de Cadiz, a finalist in 1948, therefore qualified to compete for the title '1950 Queen of Man' in September. Dance champions Pat Eaton and Arthur Norton were among the judges.

The 'two bright stars at the Villa' on Sunday 11th June were Reg 'Confidentially Yours' Dixon, and Anona Winn, the versatile Australian actress and panto star with an attractive soprano voice, formerly Anona Winn and her Four Winners, best remembered today as a panellist on radio's *Any Questions* and later *The Petticoat Line*. She possessed 'a rare gift in lighter comedy that kept the audience in a happy mood'. Her songs were interspersed with entertaining patter and included *Music, Music, Music, My Foolish Heart* and cowboy number, *I'm tired of talking to horses*. 'I've been proper poorly' Reg Dixon told the audience as he launched into a series of tall stories, often whispered 'confidentially'. His grotesque facial contortions were a source of continual laughter and at the end of his turn the audience joined in his signature song *Confidentially*. His 'big dopey bloke' stage persona belied the fact that, old pro he was, he knew how to work an audience. 'Jan Ralfini and his boys' opened the concert with the overture to Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, and later played a number of pieces in a variety of dance styles including the Samba, and a selection of Dixieland numbers.

Those 'kings of the keyboards', piano duettists Rawicz and Landauer, performed for a near capacity audience in the Royal Hall on Sunday 18th June, and triumphantly confirmed their reputation as 'the most world-famous entertainers of their kind'. The reporter from the *Mona's Herald* observed that 'there is something almost superhuman in the perfection of their synchronisation . . . that was a delight to listen to'. Their programme included such favourites as Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*, a stylish selection from *Merrie England*,

Strauss's waltz *Tales from the Vienna Woods* and much more including four encores. Jan Ralfini's 'celebrated tenor' Don Rivers sang *On with the Motely* and *Be Mine* and Ralfini directed enjoyable performances of that old pot-boiler Hèrold's *Zampa* overture, a 'Fantasia' on Russian, American and Norwegian melodies, and joined the orchestra as a violin soloist in Charrosin's *Castillian Revels*.

'A Joe Loss concert generates a spirit of gaiety'

The 'House Full' boards were out again for Joe Loss when he returned to the Villa Marina for a fifth successive season on Sunday 25th June. He received his customary lively welcome as did the 'fine baritone voice with a flair for humour' Howard Jones, and especially golden-voiced tenor Tony Ventro, whose strong local connections guaranteed him a warm Manx welcome. That season he sported impressive 'mustachios' and completely won over the audience with his first song *The Spaniard who blighted my life*, and brought the house down with *On with the Motley*, *Hear My Song*, *Violetta* and *Come Back to Sorrento*. Dynamic Elizabeth Batey, 'full of "pep" and more mischievous and appealing than ever', and 'sweet voiced' Irene Miller in a selection of light ballads, delightfully sung, both won many new friends. The vocal highlight of the evening was the duet *Go to Sleep* given by Batey and Jones, the latter donning a dressing gown for the occasion. The two-hour entertainment 'in the Joe Loss style' included such numbers as *Skyliner*, *In the Mood*, *Woodchopper's Ball*, *Rag Mop* and the *St. Louis Blues March*. According to the *Mona's Herald* there were three secrets to Joe Loss' success: the perfect teamwork of a well-rehearsed band under his 'perfect control'; a formidable vocal line-up, and the magnetic personality of the 'live wire' maestro himself'.

The concert on Sunday 2nd July was, in the words of one commentator, an 'unmistakable triumph of a distinguished art'. The appearance of The Deep River Boys, five black Americans, and 'one of the truly great racial singing groups', was treat of 'spectacular vocalism and rich vocal harmony in songs both grave and gay'. The group had made a huge impact at the London Palladium the previous year and were given a tremendous welcome. From their reputed repertoire of two thousand songs their programme included *Swing Low*, *Sweet Chariot*, *Down in the Glen*, *Macushla* and *Asleep in the Deep* and the many demands for encores made it difficult for them to leave the stage. Jan Ralfini and the orchestra opened the evening with Nicolai's overture *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and continued with a topical selection entitled 'Music of the Americas' which included Sousa marches and ragtime numbers and a selection from the musical comedy *No, No, Nanette*. There were also much-appreciated vocal contributions from resident dance orchestra singers Terry Kelly, Don Rivers and Dorothy Duval. The following Sunday, 9th July, handsome, beautifully dressed vocal duettists Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, 'sweethearts in song', fully merited their warm reception and gave a programme of popular operatic arias, ballads and duets drawn from Ivor Novello's *Kings' Rhapsody*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Gounod's *Faust*, Puccini, the delightfully catchy duet *Trot here, trot there* from Messenger's *Veronique* and that most frequently requested encore, Brahe's *Bless This House*.

Jan Ralfini and his orchestra performed Rossini's *William Tell* overture, and the star instrumentalist of the evening was the orchestra's 'cellist Miss Violet Robinson of Baldwin who gave a lovely performance of Handel's *Largo*.

'Oh, For the Beautiful Concerts of the Past!'*

The headline in the *Isle of Man Examiner* in July was the result of a complaint by Alderman Robert Cowell at a Douglas Town Council meeting that the standard of the Villa Marina Sunday Concerts was deteriorating. Whilst acknowledging that high-class orchestral concerts were not as popular as they once were, "'smutty" music hall style entertainments should not be tolerated on Sundays' even if they attracted large audiences. Alderman J. H. Skillicorn responded by reminding the meeting that 'it was their duty to entertain the visitors and give them what they wanted'. 'Times and Tastes have changed!' he stated, and agreed that it might seem that 'the demand for "straight" music was almost dead' during the holiday season, yet generally 'a very good class of concert was put on at the Villa Marina on Sundays'. He suggested that it was an exaggeration to suggest that the Villa Marina was presenting only music hall style entertainments on Sundays and averred that 'SMUT was NOT tolerated at the Villa Marina'. Douglas Town Council would continue to promote 'high-class' Sunday concerts. The following week a correspondent to the *Examiner* wrote in response to the argument: 'Whatever our 'City Fathers' - or should we call them our "Grandfathers?" - may think of the cultural value of our local Sunday concerts, they are not lacking in popular appeal' . . . 'the proof is in the pudding' (*sic*) he concluded. The local newspapers devoted several column inches to this debate, the background to which hinged on long-held objections by the church to concerts and entertainments on Sundays of any kind, which had bubbled away just under the surface in various guises for more than eight decades. There was more consternation expressed concerning a rumour that Joe Loss's summer engagement would end on 2nd September and the meeting was anxious to stress that 'this does not signal the end of the season at that time' as the Villa Marina had 'two first-class bands' and Jan Ralfini and his orchestra would continue for a further two weeks.

* *Isle of Man Examiner* 14. 07.1950 and 21.07.1950. It was in Douglas during the season that two traders were each fined £2 for taking orders for kippers on a Sunday, and a further trader was fined £3 for 'exposing goods for sale' on a Sunday, namely a comb, and a toy motor car! See *Mona's Herald* 22.8.1950.

The Sunday Concert given by '*maestro* supreme' Joe Loss and his orchestra on 16th July finally dispelled any lingering doubts about the quality and appropriateness of the series. Simply watching Loss conduct was 'an entertainment in itself' and he invariably filled the Royal Hall to the roof. All seats and standing places were sold long before the 'wholesome and happy entertainment' commenced, leaving 'nothing for the prudes to cavil at!' The resident vocalists took the honours with special praise reserved for tenor Tony Ventro whose voice 'would stir anyone with a love of music'. Baritone Howard Jones was in 'really fine voice allied to (his) really pleasant personality and sense of fun'. The *ad-hoc* 'Loss Choir' of band members' lusty rendering of *Dry Bones* was the hit of the evening. The audience left the Villa Marina 'feeling lighter'.

Hundreds were turned away on Sunday 23rd July when one of the Swing era's premier American barbershop-style close harmony singing groups, The Merry Macs, made their triumphant appearance. The four strong ensemble - three men and one woman - gave a performance that combined effortless, sparkling vitality, beguilingly beautiful harmony, bouncy, jazzy delivery and precision movements. Popular from the 1920s until the 1960s, they are best remembered today for their hit songs *Mairzy Doates* and *Sentimental Journey* and for the recordings they made with Bing Crosby. That evening at the Villa Marina they sang *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*, skilful arrangements of Scottish, Irish and Welsh songs, and Negro Spirituals including *Standing in need of a Prayer*, which had the audience 'whistling, stamping and shouting for more'. They had sung a dozen numbers before they were allowed to leave the stage, and the critics, unanimous in their praise, agreed that 'nobody sings like the Merry Macs'. At the end the Macs thanked the audience for their wonderful reception and paid a generous tribute to Jan Ralfini and his orchestra for their two-hour rehearsal in the afternoon. They even suggested that someone might hint to the management that they might be asked back! Their last words before finally leaving the stage bore the stamp of spontaneity and sincerity: 'We thought the London Palladium had the world's finest audience . . . but you just leave them cold'. Broadway was blocked by crowds hoping to catch a glimpse of them after the show as they dashed to Ronaldsway airport for a special night flight to London for their Palladium rehearsal at 10 o'clock the following morning.

Douglas promenade was transformed into a fashion parade on Tuesday 25th July as the *Daily Express* sponsored Holiday Fashion Parade came to town at the behest of Douglas Corporation. The public were admitted free of charge to the grand finale in the Villa Marina Gardens at 4.15pm that day. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra were in attendance as usual.

'Douglas likes a high standard of entertainment . . . please come again!'

Two great British dance bands visited the Villa Marina at the height of the season. On Sunday 30th July Geraldo and his orchestra* made a special flying visit, their first, to Douglas, and gave two concerts at 3.00pm and 8.00pm with all records broken for audience numbers. The following Sunday, 6th August, Ted Heath and His Music gave matinee and evening performances; the 'House Full' signs were unsurprisingly in evidence for both events. Geraldo had been in Blackpool for the season, yet his 'slick showmanship and merry melodies' were the perfect antidote to the atrocious holiday weather in Douglas. He was accompanied by his usual resident singers: dainty, petite, vivacious Eve Boswell (*My Foolish Heart*), a versatile artiste who could sing in eleven languages, and Nadia Doré (*The Lady is a Tramp* and *June is Busting Out All Over*), a member of Jack Payne's pre-war female close harmony quartet The Crackerjacks and Ambrose's post-war Debonaires. Cyril Grantham (*Riders in the Sky*) had sung with Billy Cotton, Sydney Lipton and Joe Loss and formed his own Dorchester Hotel band that year. Heath also introduced a new young talent, nineteen-year-old Derek Francis from India, whose 'perfect mellow Sinatra style' in *Temptation* and *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* was 'an immense success with the younger members of the audience'. Geraldo's own vocal harmony group, the Geraldtones, drew some of the most

enthusiastic applause of the evening, and trombone soloists Les Carew, Laddy Busby, who had been at the Palais de Danse with Sonny Farrow in 1937, and trumpeter and vocalist Leslie 'Jiver' Hutchinson brought the house down with a Calypso version of *Jericho*. Geraldo and his brother Sydney played piano duets, and the orchestra performed the *Sabre Dance*, *Moonlight Serenade* and *Twelfth Street Rag* along with popular Glen Miller arrangements.

* Despite his suave appearance in beautifully tailored suits, Geraldo (real name Gerald Bright) never lost his 'Cor blimey' London accent. Once, when advised to take elocution lessons, he replied: 'but I 'ave'. His band was popular for four decades, and he was one of the first bandleaders to grasp the potential of dance orchestras on transatlantic cruise liners and after the war set up a booking agency to deal with these engagements. Many famous musicians 'served' in 'Geraldo's Navy', as it became known.

Unsurprisingly, 'House Full' signs were out the following Sunday for Ted Heath's* appearances in the Royal Hall. Although the leader of what was styled 'Britain's Number One Band', Heath's *persona* was urbane rather than showy. His was a big jazz orientated band with an American-style line-up of saxophones, trumpets, trombones, piano, guitar, bass and drums, as opposed to the Geraldo model, which included a large string section. Their playing was both 'sweet and hot' as they encompassed both ballroom and jazz styles. *Claire de Lune*, 'be-bop' hit *Lemon Drop*, *Rhapsody in Blue* and Stan Kenton's *Concerto to end all concertos*, which featured many solo instrumentalists eg Jackie Armstrong, trombone soloist, impressionist, and a member of the comedy Stinkpots Quartet. Vocalist Dickie Valentine was introduced as a new singer whose 'excellent impersonations' of British and American film and radio stars including Lionel Barrymore, Hutch, Dick Bentley, Al Jolson and Peter Lorre were much enjoyed. Versatile and glamorous Lita Roza sang *Bewitched*, *Bothered and Bewildered* and *Stormy Weather*. From 1951-55 she was voted the *New Musical Express's* 'Top British Female Singer', and just three years later, in 1953, would record her number one hit, *How Much Is That Doggie in the Window*. Ace drummer and vocalist Jack Parnell, the nephew of impresario Val Parnell and *Melody Maker's* 'best Drummer' for seven successive years during the 1940s and '50s, gave barn-storming interpretations of *Chattanooga Shoe-Shine Boy* and *Old Piano Roll Blues*.

* Ted Heath was considered to be Britain's most famous post-war band leader, particularly in the 1950s, and long after his death, his band survived as a 'ghost band' supervised and led by trombonist Don Lusher. He played with Geraldo's orchestra during the war and formed Ted Heath and His Music in 1944. In 1947 he began his series of Sunday Night Swing Sessions at the London Palladium which lasted until 1955. Heath recorded over 100 albums and sold in excess of 20 million records.

The Bathing Beauty Contest in the Villa Marina Gardens that week, with Jan Ralfini and his orchestra and singers Don Rivers and Dorothy Duval, attracted an audience of seven thousand.

'A concert of a very high order'

The celebrity artistes on Sunday 13th were Rawicz and Landauer in a programme of piano duets stylishly arranged by themselves from popular 'classics' by Liszt, Weber, de Falla, Borodin, Chopin and Kreisler, and the contralto Gladys Ripley,* accompanied by Mr H. Whitebread of the

Belfast Philharmonic Orchestra, who was in glorious voice in arias by Meyerbeer, Saint-Saëns and Edward German, a song by Haydn and Liddle's setting of *Abide With Me*. Jan Ralfini's orchestra gave Thomas' overture *Raymond* and selections from *The Desert Song* and *Song of Norway*.

* Gladys Ripley returned to the Villa Marina in October to take part in a Festival Concert in support of the British Legion. The Manx Orpheus Choir was conducted by local musical director Harry Pickard, and the Laxey-born violin teacher and conductor Kathleen Rydings led the Manx Amateur Orchestral Society in a programme of music by Mozart, Stanford and Borodin. Baritone Lewis Gale was accompanied by Ethel Barrow.

The Deep River Boys appeared for the second time that season in 'rich and rare harmony' on Sunday 20th and once again made a deep impression in a programme of 'beloved Spirituals and modern rhythm melodies'. Again and again they responded to the tumultuous demands for encores. In honour of the guests, Jan Ralfini's orchestra played the march-medley *Sousa on Parade* and a selection from *Annie Get Your Gun*. Tenor Don Rivers* made a welcome return to the Villa Marina for a third season and was at his best in two Italian songs and Handel's *Largo*. Later that month he took part in the afternoon concerts in the Villa Marina Gardens which often attracted 20-25,000 people each week. On August 25th Joyce Pocklington, a student teacher from Yorkshire, won the Bathing Beauty Contest and was crowned Miss Mona's Queen.

* Don Rivers trained in Italy and London and starred in the concert party *Stars in Battledress* during WWII. He once gave a concert in the bombed opera house in Cassino, Italy, and movingly sang *Bless this Bless* illuminated by just one candle.

'Big Stuff' at the end of the season

There was certainly 'no falling away from the highest standard of entertainment . . .' as the season entered its final weeks, and on Sunday 27th 'a wonderful new comedian', Max Bygraves, described as 'a remarkable discovery', made his debut in the Royal Hall together with Joe Loss and his orchestra. Fresh from his recent overnight triumph at the London Palladium - 'the home of famous American artistes' - and a well-known character from radio's *Educating Archie* and *Variety Bandbox*, his easy, carefree 'let me take you into my confidence' stage manner resulted in 'a feast of fun, song and melody' marked by standing ovations and repeated demands for encores. It was obvious to all that here was a major new talent on the brink of a spectacular career. His clever impressions of Donald Peers, Hutch, Al Jolson, a drunk, a 'spiv' and a man with a broken leg, as well as sketches - particularly one about four men in a pub playing darts - were hugely enjoyed. His fine voice was heard in a selection of songs, particularly *Daddy's Little Girl* - a sentimental old wedding favourite from 1906 traditionally played when the bride dances with her father - was especially enjoyed by the huge audience and was encored. He was recalled several times and sang *I'll String Along with You* before he was finally allowed to leave the stage. The local newspapers were unanimous in their assessment that here was a new star ' . . . the Island would like to see again and again!' Joe Loss' vocalists also triumphed that evening. Baritone Howard Jones and charismatic tenor Tony Ventro received great applause, the latter for a soulful rendition of *There's No Tomorrow* based on the Italian song *O Sole Mio*, later schmaltzified

by Elvis Presley as *It's Now or Never*. Elizabeth Batey and Howard Jones almost achieved the hit of the evening in David Mann's and Bob Hilliard's poignant weepy *Dearie, Do You Remember?* and Irene Miller was charmingly bewitching in *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* from Rogers and Hart's *Pal Joey*.

Joe Loss' farewell evening that season took place on Saturday 2nd September and attracted a large crowd. World dancing champions Eve Lawless and Fred Morrison were the judges for the final of the Joe Loss Trophy dance competition and were engaged to give dance exhibitions every night of the week. The local newspapers speculated on the secret of Joe Loss' success and came to the conclusion that a Joe Loss show was a complete ensemble package, with no 'big' names, but slick team-work from the band, singers and of course the 'magnetic maestro' himself. Jan Ralfini and his orchestra were engaged to continue at the Villa Marina for the rest of the season.

'Zest and gaiety' were the watch words as Bob and Alf Pearson, once known as Britain's Layton and Johnson, appeared at the Villa Marina on Sunday 3rd September. With their signature song 'We bring you melodies from out of the sky, my brother and I', these brilliant variety entertainers appeared on stage immaculately dressed, with big Bob at the piano and little Alf by his side in songs old and new including *Dry Bones*, *Phil the Fluter's Ball*, *Silver Dollar* and *My Foolish Heart*. The reviews spoke of their 'astonishing versatility' which embraced clever impressions of Paul Robeson, the Western Brothers and Rob Wilton, comic songs, funny voices, and the hit of the show, the sketch *The Baby Show* which convulsed the audience. Lester Ferguson, the sweet-voiced American tenor, sang ten items from the worlds of operetta, opera and musical shows, mingled with a selection of lighter ballads and songs, each with his own engaging, light-hearted introduction, including *Begin the Beguine*, *Vienna*, *City of my Dreams*, *La Paloma* and *If I Loved You*. He was generous with encores and eventually left the stage with a cheery 'I really must get out of the way'. Jan Ralfini's selection of old sea shanties, medleys from *White Horse Inn*, *Snow White* and popular pieces from the world of ballet were much appreciated.

* Real brothers Bob and Alf Pearson were frequently billed as 'Britain's foremost duettists' and were at their peak of popularity during the 1930s and '40s. Theirs was one of the longest partnerships in show business - some sixty years - and lasted from the Music Hall era, through the age of variety, radio and television. They were familiar to audiences through their appearances on Ted Ray's radio show *Ray's a Laugh* and countless summer seasons in Blackpool.

Wednesday 6th September ushered in the 'Worst Summer Storm in Memory'. It was 'almost impossible to stand up!' as gusts of wind reached 73 mph and 1.91 inches of rain fell in twenty-four hours causing extensive flooding. The Sulby River was in full spate; trees were brought down; water gushed down a road at Hilberry; Pulrose Golf Links became a lake; there were minor power cuts and the horticultural show at Villa Marina faced a dismal end.

Currently appearing at the London Palladium, the Russian-born Hollywood film star and veteran of more than eighty films, Mischa Auer, was the celebrity guest artiste at the Villa Marina on Sunday 10th September. Best known for Zany, 'screwball' comedy roles, he developed the archetypal 'mad Russian' *persona*, added to which he looked remarkably like the young Igor Stravinsky. He had a fund of 'good stories illustrated with laughable facial contortions' and much 'rolling of the eyes', and amusing impressions made more realistic by a range of 'props' including outrageous wigs. Finally, he played the piano by rolling a grapefruit and an orange along the keys. The advanced publicity had hailed Mischa Auer as 'A Big Capture for Douglas', but his appearance fell short of the triumphs achieved by other American stars who appeared at the Villa, and his reception was respectful and hearty rather than fulsome. Jan Ralfini and his regular vocalists Terry Kelly (*The Highwayman*), Don Rivers (*Ave Maria* and *Bless This House*) and Dorothy Duval (*Choo Choo Gum*) were in support, together with a 'Concerto Pastiche' and an organ interlude from piano soloist Edward Ramonde. Musical comedy came from members of the band, suitably attired in character, as a Hill-Billy-style comedy quartet *a la* Spike Jones and his City Slickers, in *Pass the Biscuits, Mirandy*.

The final Sunday Concert of the season took place on the 17th and featured Semprini's* easy listening classical style in a selection of 'old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones' including a potted version of Grieg's piano concerto. The popular radio vocal duettists Margaret Eaves and Raymond Newell were in support with ballads in the lighter style' including songs from Edward German's *Tom Jones*, Noel Coward's *Bitter Sweet* and Vivian Ellis's *Bless the Bride*. Local 'cellist Claire Robinson of Baldwin played a solo, Saint-Saëns' *Softly Awakes My Heart*, accompanied by her sister Violet. At the end of the evening Jan Ralfini thanked the audience for their support during the season and said he hoped to return in 1951.

* Alberto Fernando Riccardo Semprini, born in Bath of an Italian father and an English mother, studied the piano and 'cello from the age of eight, and became a deputy conductor at La Scala, Milan, before WWII. He became a huge radio star after the war and during the 1950s and '60s was seldom off the air. Although he was associated mainly with light music, he was prolific in the recording studio in music by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Debussy, Chopin and Liszt.

The final event at the Villa Marina took place in the Gardens on Wednesday 13th September when Jean Horsfall from Sussex was crowned 'Queen of Man 1950', and received a sash, a rose bowl and £100.

The Derby Castle and Opera House

The 1950 season at the Derby Castle opened on 19th June and would continue until 9th September with Vincent Ladbroke and his orchestra in the ballroom presenting old-time and up-to-date dance programmes, and in the theatre, All-Star Variety, with a host of acts both familiar and

new with the orchestra conducted by 'smiling' Atty Baker. Advertised as 'An honest-to-goodness vaudeville bill', after an overture the opening show featured 'entertainment to suit all tastes.' Top of the bill was cheery Scot George Elrick, 'the smiling voice of radio' from *Housewives' Choice*, with songs old and new and popular medleys of 'evergreens' made famous by the late, great Harry Lauder. The supporting acts included comedy Indian club, ball and plate jugglers Joe Astor and Rene, mystery man Billington, master of the 'sleight-ly' art of playing card manipulation, and talented impressionist Joyce Golding, whose fine singing voice made her the hit of the evening with her impressions of a Yorkshireman reciting *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and an Italian tenor rendering Verdi's *La Donna e Mobile*. Trick-cyclists Lotto and Constance introduced an audience participation 'bucking bronco' cycle competition into their act which was won by an Onchan lad. Dutch equilibrists the Three Wolgas, parodies of well-known songs from sad-faced veteran comedian Jack Stocks, 'the woman-hater', and 'whirlwind roller skaters' Edna and Jimmy completed the programme. Sprightly and engaging as ever, Beams' Babes danced and tumbled vivaciously throughout the evening.

Later that month 'clean and wholesome' Lancashire comedian Joe Crosbie 'who commands roars of laughter without vulgarity', and two lads and two lasses from Wigan, the close harmony vocal group The Four Kordites - from 'chords' and 'cordite' - topped the bill. Just one year earlier they had been voted the number two best vocal group in *Melody Maker's* readers' poll. The head-liners were supported by Sid Jackson at the piano with his remarkable impression of Gracie Fields singing *Now is the Hour*; comedy instrumentalists Noni, Nita and Dody in 'A Rhapsody of Fun'; the Java Brothers, equilibrists; Rajputna, 'mysterious' oriental-style juggler, and Renee Dymott, acrobat, contortionist, toe, tap and ballet dancer, a veteran of summer seasons and pantomime everywhere. There was mild consternation felt during the turn of George and Fred Eastwood whose patter was judged to be 'rather on the broad side'. Beam's Babes were at their sparkling best when they introduced their unique marionette dance.

'Brilliant thought transference or suave top-class trickery?'

A most remarkable mental telepathy act appeared during the first week of July, The Piddingtons, whose forty-minute turn was judged to be 'completely baffling'. Unassuming Australian couple Sydney,* who directed the act, and his blindfolded wife Lesley, who received 'thought messages' assisted by 'poker-faced' Russell Braddon, were famous for thought transference on both radio, where some 20,000,000 listeners tuned in to them, and on the stage, when members of the audience were asked to assist. On one occasion during their forty-minute act Lesley correctly recited a line from a book selected at random by Sydney. Their act aroused some controversy, but 'even the out-and-out sceptic had to admit that their act provided excellent entertainment' with up to ten visitors being invited to take part on stage. Roy Lester, 'Wise and Otherwise Cracks', cheekily addressed the audience whose 'initial astonishment soon gave way to laughter' after he made some amusing references to the Douglas horse trams, and ventriloquist Johnson Clarke was 'as bright as ever' with his country yokel dummies. Eastern magician

Kardoma produced flags and bunting from mid-air, comedy couple Johnny Mason and Jacqueline indulged in some quick-fire backchat and Rey Overbury, 'the musician with the twinkling feet', assisted by Suzette, simultaneously played two saxophones whilst tap dancing. There was 'bright singing and dancing' as usual from 'delightfully refreshing' Beam's Babes, who introduced a charming ballet scene into their act in addition to the 'usual vivacious romp'.

* Sydney Piddington apparently developed his remarkable skills whilst a prisoner of the Japanese together with Russel Braddon during the war.

Top of the bill from 10th July, Hal 'larf and be 'appy' Monty, the 'fruity-toned' cockney comedian, versatile one-man revue, ventriloquist and impressionist, invited a dozen youngsters onto the stage for his animal balloon sculpture act and presented each of them with an outsize balloon dog. 'Thrills galore' were provided by The Sensational Carsons with their jaw-dropping, sharp-shooting rifle and revolver, lasso, and knife and hatchet throwing act with the attractive Barbara as the 'target'. The Grafton Sisters and Jacques were graceful trapeze and ring artistes; eccentric ventriloquist Saveen, assisted by his flirtatious and knowing schoolgirl dummy Daisy May, *complete with pig-tails and boater, a parrot, a 'live' talking dog which invariably stole the limelight, concluded his act with a signature song in which he expressed the hope that someday Daisy may marry him. Bob Konyot and 'glamorous' Marion Olive presented their 'fast and furious' comedy acrobatic adagio act - if that isn't a contradiction in terms - 'a cross between Grecian dancing and knockabout'. Their 'Painter and His Model' routine was famous. Xylophone virtuoso Douglas Maynard played popular melodies old and new with 'unusual skill' and Ivor Keys 'rattled the keyboard' as he entertained at the piano with his hapless assistant Betty Ross attempting to sing against his Les Dawson-esque accompaniments.

* Unusually, Saveen's act was invariably billed as 'Daisy May and Seveen', thereby neatly reversing the traditional 'vent' and dummy roles.

During the day, away from the theatres and ballrooms, the holiday makers were enjoying a fine period of settled summer weather with 16th July voted the brightest and warmest day of the season so far with 15 hours of sunshine, and an officially recorded temperature of 67 degrees. That week 'silver-voiced' tenor Monte Rey, billed as Radio's Romantic Singer, sang favourites songs and operatic arias including the famous aria *M'Appari* from Flotow's *Marta, a la Caruso, Capri, Sorrento, My Foolish Heart* and 'the inevitable' *Donkey Serenade*. Peter Sinclair, 'The Cock o' the North', appeared in a 'swirling kilt'; his rousing voice and humorous anecdotes went down well with the strong Scottish contingent in the audience. Comedian Charlie Clapham, the surviving half of Clapham and Dwyer, complete with monocle, top hat at a rakish angle, and 'silly ass' *persona*, proved to be 'very popular with a certain section of the audience' as he sang his old favourite, the *Alphabet Song: A is for 'orses; Beef for mutton* and so forth. The evening was enlivened by acrobatic 'slapstick' dancing from The Three Leroy's, 'rising to new heights' with immaculate comedy tap-dancing on stilts from the Three Barbour Brothers, 'The Umbrella Man' Sid Amoy, who juggled with umbrellas and

balanced a spinning top on the edge of a large sword, and stylish dancers MacDonald and Graham who twirled and swirled around the stage *a la* Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

The week beginning 24th July saw the return of one of Douglas' favourite comedians, 'chirpy' Walter Niblo, 'Yorkshire's gift to variety', with 'always clean' quips and comedy tap-dancing. The supporting acts included Radcliffe and Ray, 'harmony boys at the piano' and the 'superb continental tumblers', The Eight Molinoffs, in a 'bewilderingly rapid' series of stunts. Also on the bill were The Two Pirates, a comedy wire act, Sid Plummer's highly original xylophone act which ended with 'snakes, flowers and what-not' issuing forth from his instrument, 'smart' trick-cycling from the Curzons, the 'Family ventriloquists' El Ray, Ronald and Dorothy and their three dummies, and canine fun and frolics from Yeamon's Original Football Dogs. Beams' Babes introduced two new routines into their act: *Irish Rhapsody* and *Ballerina*. A potted version of several Douglas shows named *Summer Time* was recorded live from the Derby Castle on 25th July for broadcast by the BBC for their series 'Holiday Night'. The acts included Radcliffe and Ray, the Dagenham Girl Pipers, Jimmy Charters and xylophonist Bobby Wotherspoon. Admission by invitation was free to local residents.

A four-day courtesy visit of the aircraft carrier HMS *Indefatigable** came to an end at the end of the month, but not before two hundred children and Sea Cadets had been entertained on board, and the crew allowed free admission to the Villa Marina and Derby Castle shows.

* Her aircraft were in action against the *Tirpitz* in 1944, after which she was transferred to the British Pacific Fleet. After the war she was modified to perform transport duties and in 1950 recommissioned as a training ship. She was decommissioned in 1954 and scrapped in 1956.

Described by one commentator as a 'ventriloquial patter act', the Irish comedy song and dance duo Dave and Joe O'Gorman brought their fast moving, anarchic brand of comedy to the Derby Castle for the week beginning 31st July. They were well known from their wartime radio shows *The Boys of the BBC*, Arthur Askey's *Hello Playmates*, their touring show *Hellzapoppin*, several ENSA shows and many appearances in pantomime.* The supporting turns included Lorraine, the singing cartoonist, who 'sang as she drew', the 'Musical Madness' of Carter and Doray whose clowning belied their musical ability and Margery Manners, an old-time music hall trouper *a la* Florrie Forde, known as 'the last of the cool curvaceous chorus singers', who sang the song hits of yesteryear in every style from cowgirl crooner to old time variety belter. Rarely top of the bill, she was a popular, reliable stalwart whose accordion and guitar playing could often be heard in BBC radio's *Workers' Playtime*. The 'grotesque kilts' and bagpipes of Glaswegian A. J. Powers and those 'Assassins of Sorrow', Donovan and Byl, provided on the one hand both off-beat comedy, and on the other 'uproarious' acrobatics. Novel juggler Louise Loyal was assisted by 'Mickey Mouse' and dynamic roller-skating duo Les Rayner and Betty whirled around the stage at dizzying speeds. Beams' Babes presented two new routines: *Hoop-la* and *When the Guards Go By*.

* Incidentally, both were good amateur cricketers and played for the Surrey second XI.

There was enormous anticipation and excitement at the first appearance at the Derby Castle of Winifred Atwell on Sunday 6th August. A major variety headliner known as the 'Queen of Boogie', she played ragtime, blues, jazz, popular classical pieces and sang with a 'smokey voice'. Her own arrangement of a South American Samba 'simply brought the house down'. Another top of the bill act, Morton Frazer's Harmonica Gang, 'took the theatre by storm with the smallest member of the 'gang', midget Tiny Ross, providing most of the knockabout comedy. Dressed as cowboys they played such 'traditional cowboy instruments' such as the washboard and performed with enormous gusto. The full cast included Hamilton Conrad's Pigeons with their 'Battle of Britain' flight and victory roll over the heads of the audience (hopefully without low-level 'bombing' effects); The Leoparos, a 'graceful equilibrist' act; Swiss juggler Felovis, who sometimes juggled with musical instruments, finished his turn by juggling with three blazing rods of fire; Paul Kafka and company, a 'dental wire act'; the 'punning patter' of 'mad magician' Eric Williams; old time music hall comic Billy Matchett, who had played almost every theatre in Britain in variety, revue and pantomime, 'was very funny as a fairy queen, and last by no means least, Beams Babes, who 'pranced gaily' through two new routines: *Kentucky Days* and *Waggon Wheels*.

* From Trinidadian child piano virtuoso to entertaining 'honky-tonk' pianist, she was a household name in the 1950s and '60s. Winifred Atwell eventually emigrated to Australia and continued her 'classical' career.

With 'delightful touches of comedy, a fine tenor voice and clever impressions' of Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, Maurice Chevalier, Donald Peers, Richard Tauber, Gigli, Joseph Locke, Vic Oliver and Jack Benny, Afrique, 'the 100% entertainer', topped in mid-August with a fast-moving thirty-minute act. One would have thought, though, that by 1950, his once-controversial impression of the Duke of Windsor (Edward VIII as was) was wearing a bit thin. A full supporting cast included brilliant card trickery from Lionel King; adagio balancers The Valmar Trio who quickened the heart-beat of many in the audience; the Wonder Wheelers; slick and sophisticated dance routines from Rex Gordon and his two Girl Friends; comedian Cherry Duncan Gray; the speciality French 'muscle, strength and comedy tumbling act', Marc and George and Mexican-style rope sinister spinning and juggling from Lotus and Josie. Jon Pertwee was due to appear the following week but was delayed in Antibes following a car accident. Afrique was therefore retained for a second week together with Vic and Joe Crastonian, Sylvia, who produced 'sweet music' from her musical drinking glasses with the merest flick of a wet finger and slapstick comedy from Foster and Clarke. The supporting cast included 'Radio's Happiest Songsters' Ribton and Richards; 'vent' Peter Raynor and his three dummies; Jim Della's twelve amazing dogs, billed as 'the cleverest dogs in vaudeville'; the Rosinas who provided pulse-quickening mid-air thrills; roller balancers, the Four Hermans, and Beams Babes with their enchanting *Marionettes Dance*. Beams' member Edna McKee charmed the audience with her singing. At the end of the run a tribute was paid to stage manager W. E. Coe in co-ordinating such a complex show.

Whatever the weather Douglas was particularly rich in cinema entertainment as this brief round-up demonstrates. The big hit at the Plaza Cinema in June was *Jolson Sings Again*, a well-made, high grossing sequel to *The Jolson Story*, that many cinema goers preferred to the original. Only three stars, though, for *Challenge to Lassie* at Cinema House, the fifth-of-seven schmaltzy canine capers featuring wonder dog Lassie was based on *Greyfriars Bobby*, Eleanor Stackhouse Atkinson's 1912 weepy tale of doggy devotion. The musical score was by André Previn! The August weather was unkind to the visitors and thus the Crescent Cinema was besieged by holiday makers eager to see *Annie Get Your Gun*, loosely based on the life of sharpshooter Annie Oakley, and starring Betty Hutton, Louis Calhern and Howard Keel. Twelve thousand saw the film in the first two days! Just three days after its London premier, Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* was shown at the Regal Cinema. Hailed as a 'screen masterpiece', and 'the film that dared to take the lid off Hollywood', this highly charged, shadowy *film noir* starred Gloria Swanson, William Holden and sinister Eric von Stroheim. *Rogues of Sherwood Forest* at the Strand Cinema was the kind of limp, swash-buckling drivel to be endured only on a wet Saturday afternoon. Gig Young had the good sense to turn down the role of King John. All-in-all, though, a most gratifying state of affairs for Mr. W. Hughes, the Palace & Derby Castle Co., cinemas manager. In September the 'witty, warm and wholly charming' comedy of school life, *The Happiest Days of Your Life*, starring Alastair Sim, Margaret Rutherford and Joyce Grenfell, was shown at the Royalty Cinema. At the Picture House Walter Pigeon and Greer Garson reprised their roles from *Mrs. Miniver* in the sequel *The Miniver Story*, a warm-hearted domestic weepy with James Fox and Peter Finch appearing in early minor roles.

Freddie Bamberger and Pam topped the bill from 28th August with his 'hilarious fooling at the piano', and an amusing spoof stage interview for the imaginary *Fishmonger's Gazette*. He was supported by the 'Musical Madness' and slap-stick musical clowning of the Ralfinis; hair-raising slack wire routines from Babu Rao, a popular single turn originally the Rao Brothers, and light classical favourites from violinist Jules Adrian & Grace Spero piano and accordion, the highlight of which was an impressive arrangement of Sullivan's *The Lost Chord* for violin and accordion. Doreen Harris evoked fond memories of Florrie Forde, 'the little Yorkshire fellow' Sandy Lane gave sweets and cigarettes to members of the audience whilst regaling them with a torrent of topical quips, whilst Val Merrall, 'The Melody Man', sang catchy songs 'through the microphone'. The reviewers were unanimous: it was 'an exceptionally good show'.

The headline star for the final evening of the season in the Opera House on 4th September was the popular radio vocalist Denny Dennis, notable for his Bing Crosby style husky baritone. He shared the bill with the 'refreshingly breezy' British close harmony group The Fraser Hayes Quartette, better known as the Fraser Hayes Four, who later became well known on the radio for providing the musical interludes in *Beyond Our Ken* and *Round the Horne*, together with vivacious Annabelle Lee from radio's *Variety Fanfare*, who sang the 'novelty numbers'. Top-hatted comedian Joe Crosbie, 'the funny little fellow from Wigan, and Jimmy Elliott with his brilliant impressions of farmyard life provided most of the comedy, whilst Dutch equilibrists The Three Robertis displayed the personification of 'grace and strength'. Eccentric hat juggler Willy Woltard, the comical

lifelike antics of Delvaine's Marionettes, continental comedy magician and illusionist Verdini, 'who can make almost anything vanish', and cartoonist Ed Royale completed the programme. There was a warm and affectionate end of season *Au revoir* to Atty Baker and the orchestra, to cheery Will Dalton the booking agent and to 'those grand little resident troupers' Beams Babes, who also completed their summer engagement. The Babes were also the guests of the Palace & Derby Castle Company for a farewell tour around the Island finishing with tea at Glen Helen and gifts for each of the girls.

Showtime transferred from the Crescent Pavilion to the Derby Castle for the second week of September with Stella Hartley, comedian Jimmy Charters, 'vent' Laurie Watson, xylophonist Bobby Wotherspoon and a full supporting cast. In its place at the Crescent Pavilion came two new shows from the Argyle Theatre, Birkenhead, starring Lancashire comic Harry Marsh one of which was a daily matinee entitled *Children's Playtime*. The traditional end of season Mhelliiah at the Derby Castle took place on Saturday 16th. The hall was lavishly decorated with corn, flowers and vegetables for the occasion. Vincent Ladbroke and his orchestra joined in the boisterous fun. *Rockin' the Town* kept going at the Palace Coliseum, and at the Gaiety Theatre, the 'uproarious' boarding house comedy *Bed, Board and Romance*.

The Onchan Head Pavilion Theatre

The summer show on Onchan Head was Bert Hollman's *Variety Highlights* starring Gladys Morgan, Frank and Joan Laurie (her husband and daughter), Bert Hollman, a review full of 'droll Yorkshire humour' and new sketches. In support was Percy Pride and his Phonofiddle (a stringed instrument with a phonograph type metal horn attached), 'sweethearts of song' Judith Marlowe and Fred McAlister, pianist and accordionist Wally Hillier. In other words, the familiar old gang and new 'highlighters'.

Douglas Head

Harry Orchid and the Swanee Minstrels appeared twice daily in their open-air show featuring the regular characters Bones, Rastus and Mr Interlocutor in what was billed as 'an acceptable holiday show, colourfully presented'. There was plenty of back-chat and jokes; Freddy Lewis played tunes on a bicycle pump, and 'pocket tenor' Lewis King entertained the crowds with popular songs.

The Crescent Pavilion

The Crescent Pavilion opened on 1st July with the hit revue of the season *Showtime* transferred from the Coliseum together with Stella Hartley and her on stage concert party, comedian Jimmy Charters; 'vent' Laurie Watson; Bob Kerns and Mary Lou; vocal duettists Herman Wells and Constance Rae; Bobby Wotherspoon, xylophonist and vibraphone virtuoso, and supporting variety acts Alice Dells, accordionist, and the Pavilion

Young Ladies dance troupe. The show drew large crowds throughout the summer, and during the final weeks of the season in September was still recommended for the 'excellent singing, first-rate comedy and original sketches'.

'Rollicking comedy' at the Ramsey Pavilion

Concert party producer Bert Hollman had booked the *Argyle Follies* (from the Argyle Theatre, Birkenhead, and transferred to the Crescent Pavilion at the end of the season) to open on 3rd July with a children's matinee at 2.30pm on Saturdays. Lancashire comic Harry Marsh was the 'principal fun-maker' with supporting acts including an all-male ballet, a burlesque of an old-time music hall, accordionist Billy York, vocalists and rope spinning and whip cracking from the Mannikinettes! Trick cyclists Lotto and Constance performed on both unicycles and two wheelers, and invited members of the audience to 'have-a-go'. One brave soul disappeared into the curtains and another threatened to plunge across the footlights before being pulled back in the nick of time. A combination of high-speed dancing and piano and violin favourites from the Lloyd Brothers invariably brought the house down; impressionist Betty Marshall and compere George Boyd, with his topical patter and tall stories completed the cast. At the height of the season in mid-August The Scottish Dandies provided a 'Tartan Tonic' together with a puppet act, a magician and a ventriloquist. Among the new acts later in the season was Zahla, the 'amazing blindfold intuitionist' in mental telepathy and mind reading. She claimed no supernatural powers but played tunes on the piano which she maintained members of the audience had 'thought' of! Highland songs 'in a charming fashion' from Scottish boy vocalist Alan Glenn, popular songs and ballads from baritone Roy Burford, a juggler and a dulcimer virtuoso were among the highlights of the show.

White City, the family resort, offered 'miles of side shows' plus the familiar Playdium, Auto Speedway Ride, Roller Skating Rink, Cafes, an Indian Theatre, Speed Boats, a Ghost Train and the Rolo Coaster.* The resort was open all day, wet or fine, and at the Pavilion, a Variety Highlights show. There were small-scale summer concerts at Glen Wyllin throughout the summer, and Glen Helen, where on one occasion eleven hundred attended a Sunday evening concert with Ralph Fidler and local guest vocalists. At Douglas Holiday Camp Gordon Desmond and his band played for dancing.

Even the smallest venues received their share of visitors. At Rushen Abbey there were the famed Strawberry Teas, with large plates of fresh strawberries and huge bowls of thick cream, dancing from 11am – 10pm to an excellent small orchestra and Sunday concerts. In the Sefton Hotel Lounge guests were entertained by an instrumental trio led by pianist Cicely Gordon who, it was claimed, memorised 5,000 melodies! The Mitre Hotel in Kirk Michael under its current proprietors Mr Cyril and Mrs Mary Wolstenholme attracted a different kind of clientele because it became the favoured haunt of many theatrical and variety stars. The entries in the visitors book, which included many photographs, sketches and comments from 'visitors' many of whom were household names: Arthur Askey, Max Wall, Frankie Howerd, Wee Georgie Wood, Issy Bonn,

members of Joe Loss's and Harry Roy's bands, Max Bacon, Donald Peers, Harry Korris, Sam Costa and Richard 'Dicky' Murdoch to name but a few, reveal a genuine affection for the hostel and its owners. This from Harry Roy is typical:

'Mary, Mary, that clever fairy, how does your menu grow? With steaks and chops and old roast beef, no wonder we love her so'.

* According to rare live film footage, the Rolo Coaster was built of massive wooden scaffolding; the passenger cars had a minimal pull-down bar to protect riders. The 'ride' would not pass health and safety regulations today!

No sooner had the season ended than the Island was hit by the worst storms in living memory as eighty-mile-an-hour gales pounded the Island. Trees were uprooted and buildings torn down; hoardings were blown down and shop windows blown in. Electricity supplies were disrupted, and the under-sea telephone cable was severed. Needless to add, air traffic was interrupted and both *King Orry* and *Lady of Man* were forced to ride out the storm for up to seventeen hours.

'Bouquets and Brickbats' at the end of the season inquest

Visitor numbers reached a respectable 535,560 in 1950, although during the ensuing decade the average number would fall to around 520,000. Overall, the impression gathered from letters to the newspapers and anecdotal evidence from visitors who knew the Island well from the summer seasons of the 1930s or even earlier, suggested that 'the Island is not as good as in pre-war years'. The island was certainly not alone in its struggle to recapture its pre-war 'buzz', yet for many 'the old magic' still worked. Douglas Bay still 'draws like a magnet' wrote one holiday maker to the *Ramsey Courier* at the end of the season in September, and in his opinion, the illuminations rivalled Blackpool's but with a lovelier backdrop. Many visitors remembered the band on the promenade as 'really something to remember', although one visitor was saddened to notice that, although gents' hats were removed and audiences stood for the Royal Anthem, the Manx National Anthem was barely acknowledged. The Manx Museum was referred to as 'treasure', and the transport links to the immediate environs of Douglas, allowing ease of access to easy countryside walks with the guarantee of a bus back to town, were praised for their efficiency.

On the distaff side there was a perceived decline in the quality of the Sunday concerts. Visitors noticed that there were fewer top line guest variety and concert artistes - especially at the start and end of the season - and an increasing reliance on the resident orchestras to provide entire programmes for these once prestigious concert series. There was also some disquiet expressed about the material used by some comedians appearing on Sundays. A number of issues were raised in a letter to the *Mona's Herald* in October* entitled 'Impressions of a self-adopted Manxman':

- The failure to offer first class variety shows and stars for the *whole* summer season. For example, Joe Loss *et al* arrived at the end of June or more likely the beginning of July and departed early in September.
- The replacement of top-class variety shows at the Derby Castle during MGP week by only 'goodish' concert party entertainments was regretted. 'Stars should twinkle until the end of the season'.
- The persistent lack of entertainment during wet mornings - a characteristic of Douglas as opposed to Blackpool - leaving only a choice of 'pictures or pubs'. There was nowhere for a small orchestra to give concerts of light music; the 'awful amplified gramophone record type of music that is heard so much' was no substitute. The establishment of a Winter Garden was called for and should be 'a lucrative and long-standing investment'. A Manx party visited Blackpool's illuminations at the end of September and provided first-hand evidence of the value of such places as the Tower Ballroom, Zoo and Aquarium in bad weather: 'Blackpool's season extension efforts are a big attraction'.
- Railway and road services timetables limited except to Peel.
- Prices charged by some motor-coach companies leave visitors feeling 'rooked'.
- Onchan Head 'should be wiped out'. It was deemed 'not suitable for children'.
- Marine Drive was still 'derelict, and a sad reflection on those responsible . . .'
- There was an urgent need for a 'genuine' amusement park on Douglas Head.
- On no account should the horse trams be removed. Even if they make a loss, Douglas Bay would lose much of its uniqueness if they vanished.
- Newspapers, once brought by air during the summer season and available mornings, had now reverted to afternoon delivery and evening availability.

* *Mona's Herald*, 26.10.1950.

Regular repeat visitors to Ramsey remained loyal to the northern resort. 'I have been coming to Ramsey for sixty-one years' wrote one veteran to a local newspaper, 'the people are so friendly and obliging . . . we have been fed like fighting cocks . . . don't try to modernise Ramsey . . . we love it as it is'. Yet there were complaints:

- Motorboats on Mooragh Park Lake were not available until 10.30 am.
- The Park café was in the wrong place. It should be where the kiosk is as this would make it a better place as a viewing point during the regattas.

- Visitors were no longer invited to take part in the organisation of summer events.
- Local caterers 'must desist from using 'stupid Gallicisms' on their 'fancy foreign phrased menus' when describing dishes. Why not introduce a few Manx titles?

'Come on Mona's Isle . . . MUST TRY HARDER!

As the season finally closed *The Isle of Man Times** summed up the various views as to the success of the season by suggesting that it was time for the Island to take stock of its position as a popular summer holiday destination, particularly as visitor numbers were expected to be down by tens of thousands in 1951. The Island was not alone in reporting sluggish business. Competition for visitors was keener than ever, excursions abroad were gaining in popularity and the reputation for quality entertainment and hospitality in British resorts was beginning to suffer by comparison. There was a danger, too, that the increasing reliance on road racing fixtures to boost visitor numbers and income was fast becoming entrenched in the Manx psyche. A serious effort would be needed to make up lost ground, especially as expectations were high that with the coming of the Festival of Britain, 1951 would prove to be a bumper year, with the austerity and gloom of the immediate post-war years finally cast aside.

Ramsey, March 2020.