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CLARK
BROTHERS



Part:

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CLARK BROTHERS

AIM:

Steve Clark (Born 1924)

Jimmy Clark (1922 - 2009)

To develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the origins and development of Black variety entertainment in Britain and how this has contributed to British cultural heritage and entertainment history.



The Clark Brothers, Moss Empire's Pucicity Photo

SYNOPSIS:

In this pack Steve Clark will give an unrivalled insight to what it was like to be born in a time when boxing, singing and dancing were the only legitimate ways a Black boy could escape poverty.

The Clark Brothers have been in show business for 80 years. As dancers they witnessed the birth of Las Vegas, played the Cotton Club and Apollo in Harlem and came to London for the first time in 1948. They shared bills with Gypsy Rose Lee, Elvis and The Beatles and were friends with

Josephine Baker, Billie Holiday, Sugar Ray Robinson and Frank Sinatra.



Marian Anderson
Opera Singer (1887 - 1993)

CHILDHOOD

We were born and brought up during the depression in Philadelphia. We didn't know too much about the Wall Street Crash of 1929, we just knew there wasn't any food on the table.

My mother used to send me out to line up at the soup kitchen with a bucket for me to bring back soup for breakfast. The winter streets of Philadelphia were frozen and one morning I slipped and spilled nearly all the soup, but Mama still managed to stretch the dregs out to feed all of our hungry mouths that day.

My Dad, Cornelius was a cook (when he could get work) and my Mum, Octavia worked in the Jewish bakery - bringing home the day old food to keep us alive.

I shared a bed with my three sisters, Fredretha, Lorraine, Evelyn and two brothers, Cornelius, and Jimmy. We would lie head to toe like sardines. In the winter it was so cold and if one of us wet the bed it was tempting to stay in the wet warmth rather than face the icy room.

I remember one Christmas Eve we were all in a bedroom at the back of the house, Dad fired his gun in the air twice in the garden and then came in and told us Father Christmas had committed suicide.

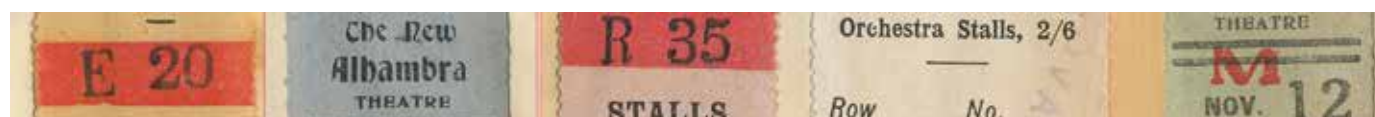
My Mum was a deeply religious lady, she taught us 125 gospel songs. There were six of us kids but only four of us wanted to be singers so we became a quartet called The Clark Family.



Bill Robinson
Tap Dancer (1878 - 1949)



Jack Johnson
Boxer (1887 - 1886)



In the holidays we would visit our grandfather in Wilmington, North Carolina where there was a famous singing group called The Mills Brothers. They had a radio show on Sundays and one week we were booked to stand in for them and were an instant hit.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

During the Great Depression President Franklin D Roosevelt set up The Federal Theater Project, which was the largest and most ambitious effort mounted by the US Federal Government to organize and produce theater events. It was an effort to provide work for unemployed professionals in the theater at a time of great hardship.



Elena Karam as Odette and Rex Ingram as General Christophe in the WPA Federal Theatre Project's 1935 hit "Haiti" at Lafayette Theatre, Harlem



The Mills Brothers, Music Sheet

THEIR FIRST BREAK:

When I was 4 years old we visited some relatives in Atlanta. To earn a few dollars while we were there my older brother Cornelius made a shoeshine box and

asked a man if he wanted a shine. He said yes and while Cornelius was shining his shoes he asked my brother: "Is that all you can do, shine shoes?" My brother said: "No I have brothers and sisters and they sing".



Signed photograph of The Mills Brothers



This cast iron sign was placed outside Broadway Theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee and is a reference to the racial segregation in the Southern United States in 1925

The man was Gene Austin, who became a great part of our lives and gave us our first break on stage.

He invited us to audition for his show. The Theatre was the Erlanger and we went there the next day. Thankfully he liked us. We passed the audition and he put us in the show with him.

Our role was to re-enact how Mr Austin and my brother met. Cornelius would come on stage with his shoeshine box and ask if he could shine his shoes. Mr Austin would then ask if that's all he could do, and that's when we would come onstage singing our gospel songs.

We toured with the show for six months and Mr Austin gave my father one hundred dollars a week for the family, which was a lot of money in those days.

On Saturday our father would go to the bank and get a package of pennies, giving 25 new pennies to each of us. When you're young you see 25 brand new pennies and think that you've got all the money in the world.

As I grew up I realised that we got one dollar between us and my father kept ninety-nine dollars!

If he was born in a different time he could have been one shrewd businessman.

"We toured with the show for six months and Mr Austin gave my father one hundred dollars a week for the family."

TOURING

We toured the Southern states of America with the Gene Austin show and in those states at the time some white folks didn't know that they had lost the war over slavery.

Segregation was still widespread. Travelling the countryside it was not unusual for us to see the body of a Black man hanging from a tree and left to swing by a lynch mob.

Being on the road was hard for everyone. Sometimes the bands didn't even have a place to stay and had to sleep in their cars as many of the hotels wouldn't let Black people stay in them.



A family outside their home in the Southern United States



Paul Robeson
(1898 - 1976)



Show Boat programme, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1928. Paul Robeson played the role Joe.

My brother Jimmy and I never went to any dance school, we taught ourselves, making up the steps as we went along, creating our own style.

“I don’t know what I did but I did something and I did it with all of my heart.”

I was lucky enough to work with Paul Robeson on the 1936 film *Show Boat* and watched as he sang “Old Man River” in front of the cameras.

I was a strange looking kid with a big head and knock knees but by the age of 5 I was a Hollywood old hand.

When I was 6 years old my mother insisted that we come back home to Philadelphia for a bit of schooling. We lived in South Philadelphia on Queens Street.

I was 15 years old when Bill Bojangles Robinson, the man who appears in the Shirley Temple films teaching her how to tap dance, came to Philadelphia to do his show *Hot Mikado* at the Shubert Theater. He was considered the greatest tap dancer of the time. When you watched him he

hardly seemed to lift his feet off the floor at all as he moved around the stage.

Mrs Kean my gym teacher in Audenreid Junior High School took a liking to me because I used to help her put on shows for the school. Without me knowing, she went to see Bill Robinson and told him “I’ve got a boy who fancies himself a dancer” “Bring him along” Bill responded, and a few days later she took me to the matinee show and afterwards we went round to the stage door of the theatre.

We were shown in and directed onto the stage where they had just finished clearing up after

the show. Everyone else disappeared and Bill pulled up a chair for himself and sat astride it (like he would a horse) as Mrs Kean talked to him. He had an open kind-hearted face.

I stood respectfully at the side of the stage and waited to be spoken to. I couldn’t believe that my teacher was speaking to the great man himself.

“Go ahead Steve” he called out, his chubby face breaking into a big smile “dance for me”. I was taken by surprise but wasn’t going to miss this opportunity. I don’t know what I did but I did something and I did it with all of my heart.



Bill Robinson with Shirley Temple

THE COTTON CLUB



Hot Mikado Programme, Hall of Music, New York, World's Fair, 1939



Bill Robinson as "The Mikado" in Hot Mikado

At the end he applauded and asked me a few questions. I told him "I dance with my brother usually, busking around the city". Then I went back outside to sit down and wait for Mrs Kean. Eventually she came out. "What did he say?" I asked, as we made our way out of the theatre. "To leave you alone" she said "You'll get on okay with your dancing". That felt good.

Bill taught me a lot about dance. "Son" he used to say, "you cannot make rhythm in the air."

A few days later at school she called me aside and said "Mr Robinson contacted me about you" "Yeah?" I replied. I could

feel my heart beating in my throat - Bojangles Robinson had actually remembered me, I couldn't believe it!



Duke Ellington (1899 - 1974)

"He wants you and your brother to join him in Hot Mikado at the Cotton club in New York".



Count Basie (1904 - 1984)

We knew all about the Cotton Club in Harlem, it was the main showcase in America for Black artists and bands - Duke Ellington had got his start there and so had Count Basie.

Jimmy and I were 2 of the dozen kids chosen to jitterbug around Bill Robinson as he sat on the throne.

The club was the biggest room Jimmy and I had ever worked at. There was a rail around the square stage with the audience sitting just the other side. They would eat and then watch the show.

After the show the band would play and the customers would come up onto the stage to dance. Our booking with Bill Robinson lasted for 3 months.

Bill taught me a lot about dance. "Son" he used to say, "you cannot make rhythm in the air." He was talking about all the dancers at the time who went in for acrobatics; running up the walls and doing the splits. They all ended up damaging themselves and having to have hip and knee replacements in later life.

SAMMY DAVIS JUNIOR (1925 - 1990)



Golden Boy programme, The London Palladium, 1968

The Clark Brothers leave for Hollywood for a spell at Slapsie Maxies, The Billboard News Paper, January 11th, 1947

While in Hollywood we spent a good deal of time with Sammy Davis Junior. His Dad and my Dad were first cousins.

We used to tap together on the street corners of Los Angeles when Jimmy and I were working in Slapsie Maxies with the comedian Danny Thomas. Our paths crossed a great deal over the years, in Vegas, New York and Los Angeles.

We were working in Los Angeles at a club called Ciro's when Sammy came

to see us with his first wife Loray White.

The night Sammy had his terrible car accident and lost his eye in 1954, Jimmy and I were appearing with Gypsy Rose Lee at Ciro's.

We thought from the radio reports that night that Sammy was dead, but a few days later he appeared at the club with a patch over his eye. When I spotted him I stopped the band and made a speech, welcoming him into the room. Before I could finish the speech he was up on the stage singing with us.

We would be together later when Sammy played at the London Palladium in Golden Boy.



The Clark Brothers in Vegas



Sammy backstage at the Palladium, 1968

BROADWAY

We first made it to Broadway when we took the place of the tap dancer Bill Bailey (brother of Pearl Bailey), in a show featuring Cab Calloway's band at the Zanzibar Club. Each star in the show was the top in their field. Walter Winchell the NY columnist wrote "it was the best show on Broadway" and Bill Robinson visited whilst it was playing and told us how much he enjoyed it.

We danced with most of the big bands in America in various shows. We were the only tap team in the world that could work small rooms and large stages as well. Real tap dance calls for a lot of dexterity, which sometimes calls for extreme softness, and at other times needs to be very loud and fast.

We worked the Paramount Theatre in New York three times a year. One of the reasons was our ability to work in tight spaces.

During this period we made some movies including 'Killer Diller' with Nat King Cole. It was in this film that Andy Kirk and his Clouds of Joy Orchestra said "The Clark Brothers have more steps than the Great Wall of China!".

We were what was called a 'novelty act', so the producers used to slice the footage of us dancing into other films and we would never know anything about it until we suddenly saw ourselves up there on the cinema screen.

There was no protection for artists in those days, until Mickey Rooney went to the union and had the laws changed.



Bernard Delfont presents Pearl Bailey at London's Talk of the Town

"We danced with most of the big bands in America in various shows. We were the only tap team in the world that could work small rooms and large stages as well."

We served our time on the hallowed boards of The Apollo Theater on 125th Street in Harlem. Wednesday night was amateur night and the band playing the theatre that week, however famous, had to play for the amateurs.

All the bands played there too. Dizzy Gillespie

brought his first Bebop band to the Apollo when we were on the bill. The first show was a complete disaster. The band played so fast I had to whisper in Dizzy's ear, "I can't even walk that fast!"

Dizzy Gillespie was a very close friend of mine. We lived together in New York for many years.



Steve Clark and Dizzy Gillespie

THE COPACABANA, NEW YORK

The Copacabana, was managed by Jack Entratter and was the elite nightclub of the day, where all the famous faces played. Guests sat around the band or on the balcony above. They would eat and then watch the show and maybe dance later.

On one particular occasion when we were working with Nat King Cole, Jack Entratter asked Nat, Jimmy and I to perform at a private party.

Nat was staying with us at the Theresa Hotel in Harlem where we usually stayed when we were in New York. The three of us went back a long way, to when Nat had been a pianist for the Peters Sisters who we had worked with in the early Forties at the Chicago Theatre.

Nat and I were old poker playing friends. During a game Nat always had an empty cigarette holder clenched between his teeth and would be attended by a boy whom he called Sparky. Nat would always say "Hey, Mister Twenty Six". He had called me Twenty Six ever since a poker game when I'd had a pat hand and I'd

made him bet \$26, knowing that I couldn't lose since I was holding three aces and two kings. He had believed I was bluffing.



Nat King Cole
(1919 - 1965)

Jack Entratter rolled up in a limousine with a driver to pick us up. We drove out of town for a couple of hours up towards the Catskill Mountains and turned through some gates onto the grounds of a mansion.

The guests, about two hundred of them, all in evening dress and Black Bow Ties, were assembling at tables around the swimming pool. On one side was a piano for Nat and a tap mat for Jimmy and me.



The Peters Sisters



London Palladium poster, 1954

As dusk settled, the lights of the house came on and we could hear the voices of the dinner party as New York society laughed and talked. By the time the show started it was dark. We performed and were well received.

After the show Jack Entratter came to our dressing room to let us know the reception was enthusiastic. There was a knock on the door. Jack opened it and four huge men in black suits walked in. Sandwiched between them was a little man who was dressed to kill in a pinstripe suit, complete with starched collar, tie, boutonniere and an immaculate pocket-handkerchief.

"Thank you for a good show" he said and his hand was as soft as a lady's. "Tell Mr. Entratter if there is anything you want and he'll give it to you."

Then he went on to thank Nat and Jimmy; turned and walked out. "Who's that?" Nat asked me as the door closed behind the group. I shrugged. "Jack" he said, "who's that man?" "That's Frank Costello." Nat looked at me, his eyes wide with mock fear having just encountered a major slice of the New York crime scene. He owned the Copacabana and many other places in town. Known as the "King of the Slot Machines" he wielded enormous power.

The following day Jack said 'You know that little show you did yesterday?' 'Sure,' I replied. 'Mr Costello wants you to open our hotel in Vegas.' 'Um, that's nice,' I said. It was good to know we had pleased him, but I didn't put much into our getting a definite booking. People were always making promises in this business that they didn't deliver on.

VEGAS

Frank Costello was true to his word and we performed at the grand opening of The Sands hotel in 1952.

At that time no one with a Black face was allowed to stay, eat or gamble in the hotels on the Strip. We were only allowed to perform there, park the cars, shine the shoes and wait on tables, but not spend our money.

The first time we went in through the doors, clutching our jangling booty, the guards leapt on us, holding guns to our heads, thinking we were making our way out, rather than in – Black men with bags of money only meant one thing in those days.

Some of the other artists who were performing on the Strip were people like Cab Calloway and Lena Horne, who we knew from the Apollo in New York.

While Lena Horne was headlining at The Sands she chose to have a swim in the pool and a guest made the Sands management drain the pool because she'd been in the water.

African-Americans were not treated as equals in Vegas at the beginning – nothing like today. Soon after arriving in Vegas, Jack Entratter became President of the Hotels Association. He told me "things are going to change around here Steve". I knew he was referring to discrimination, but it was going to take him some time to make those changes.

A Chinese man bought a house in the area. He'd probably come to Vegas when Jack Entratter brought the complete Chinese kitchen staff with him from the New York Copacabana. He saw the potential and started buying up land to create a community for the Black people in town so we would all earn our money on the Strip and then take it back across the tracks to

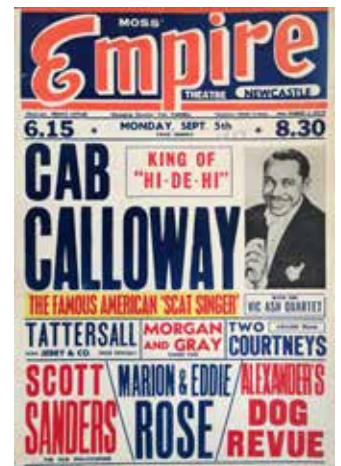


The Clark Brothers, Moss Empire's Pubicity Photo



Cab Calloway
(1907 - 1994)

were excluded from the Strip and eventually in 1960 there was a march, organised by a man called Dr West. It was a peaceful demonstration, just making a point.



Poster advertising Cab Calloway at Moss Empire Theatre, Newcastle, 1955



Lena Horne
(1917 - 2010)



Flyer for Colston Hall, Bristol, 1962

spend. He built a little casino and restaurant that served soul food, things like pig feet, chitterlings, corn bread ham hocks and rice, all laid out on a steam table for people to help themselves to for fifty cents whenever they got hungry.

Other people, mostly those who didn't live in Vegas but came in from places like Detroit, were angry about the way African-Americans

Finally it dawned on the management of the big hotels that by excluding us they were losing money, sending it all down the road into the Chinese man's pocket, so they changed the rules and allowed all nationalities to gamble on the Strip...but we had to pay twice as much to get in!

Jack Entratter had been brought to Vegas to manage the Copa Room and Lounge at The Sands Hotel. He was given a free hand to run the place however he thought best. That meant he could book all the best acts in the world, which made him one of the best impresarios in America. Thankfully he liked Jimmy and I and booked us regularly.

During one of our runs they were filming the iconic 1960 film Ocean's Eleven with all the members of the Rat Pack including Sammy Davis Junior. All the stars were in the hotel at the same time and they would all end up in the Lounge at the end of the night.

When Sammy Davis Junior was in town we used to get invited, as his cousins, to join him and his friends in the bar.

“When Sammy Davis Junior was in town we used to get invited, as his cousins, to join him and his friends in the bar.”



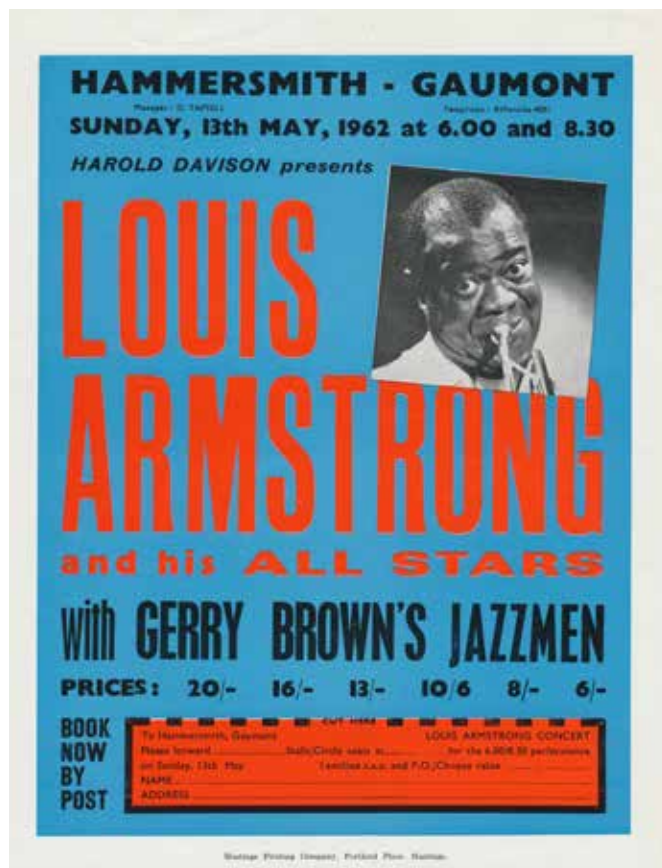
Sammy Davis Junior on set

Sinatra sometimes would get up on the Lounge stage with us and he would sing while we danced around him. He would then sit back down again at the end of the bar with Jack or one of the other guys as if nothing had happened, making the crowd in the bar feel that they were part of the scene.

One morning at about three o'clock, Bing Crosby came into the Lounge. He ordered a drink and sat himself down at the bar. "Hey, Steve" he called out between numbers. "Do Louis!" I obliged and every time I finished one Louis Armstrong song he asked for another, until I had been through the whole repertoire. Whenever he was in The Sands he made me do my impressions of Louis.



Louis Armstrong (1901 - 1971)



Louis Armstrong Hammersmith Gaumont (now Hammersmith Apollo, London) 1962 Handbill

Part:

TWO

THE CLARK BROTHERS IN LONDON

AIM:

To provide pupils with an insight into The Clark Brothers' work in London



The Clark Brothers on stage

In 1948 Frank Sinatra suggested to Olsen and Johnson that they take us to England with the show 'Hellzapoppin', which they did.

Hannen Swaffer, who was a journalist for The Daily Herald newspaper wrote that 'Hellzapoppin' was the worst show America had ever sent to England. But despite this bad review the show ran for one year at the London Casino in Soho, which is now the Prince Edward Theatre. After that the show went to the Princess Theatre, which is now the Shaftesbury Theatre where it ran for another year.



Hellzapoppin on Broadway, 1938



Hellzapoppin, London Casino 1948

Whilst we were there we were snapped up to do a show at Windsor Castle for King George VI so we must have been doing something right!

The Queen Mary cruise ship brought us over from New York on this our first trip to Britain. We were accompanied on the voyage by Gracie Fields.

Cruise ships have different classes: first-class, cabin class and tourist class. One night the captain asked if we would do a show for the first class passengers, but Gracie Fields told him she would only put on a show in the engine room.

All the tuxedo wearing first-class passengers had to come down to the engine room and mix with boys covered in grease in order to hear Gracie Fields sing her heart out while we danced on the tables. The show was a great success.

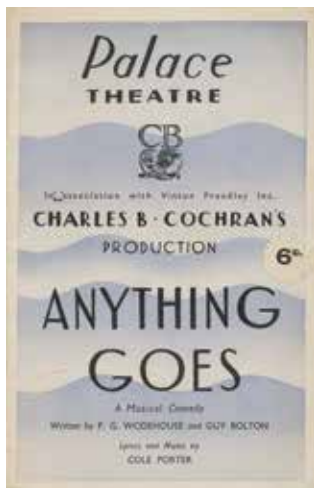


Postcard of The Queen Mary, Britain's largest cruise ship of the time



We disembarked at Southampton where a car was waiting to take us to the Regent Palace Hotel in Piccadilly where bed and breakfast cost us £13.10 a week. As we lived so close to Soho we made lots of friends: the butcher, the baker, the restaurant owners, and the sportsmen in the Jackson Solomans gym.

On the opposite side of the street from the Regent's Palace Hotel was a little dance school where the legendary Buddy Bradley taught tap dancing.



Anything Goes, The Palace Theatre, 1935. Choreographed by Buddy Bradley

This was our first meeting with Buddy and we became good friends over the years.

We also met Harry Meadows who owned the Churchill club in Bond Street, a place where society people like the Queen's late sister, Princess Margaret used to go till the wee small hours of the morning.

Jimmy and I would go to Churchill's after finishing at the theatre. Every night

we would sit at one of the tables in the audience and Harry would get the compere to say "Oh look, who do we have here? It's The Clark Brothers! Maybe we can get them up to do a few dances?" We would have our tap shoes on and do a whole routine.

Princess Margaret came to the Churchill club quite often. Once she had a cast on her arm and asked Harry if he could get us to sign our autographs on it, which of course we did. She said to us "Whenever you are playing please let me know and I'll try and be there".

Jimmy and I hadn't been in England long before we decided we wanted to make it our base. We realised that there was a lot of work to be had in Europe. In those days it was expensive to bring well-known acts all the way across from America, but we reckoned that if we were based in England we would be able to get all the mainland European

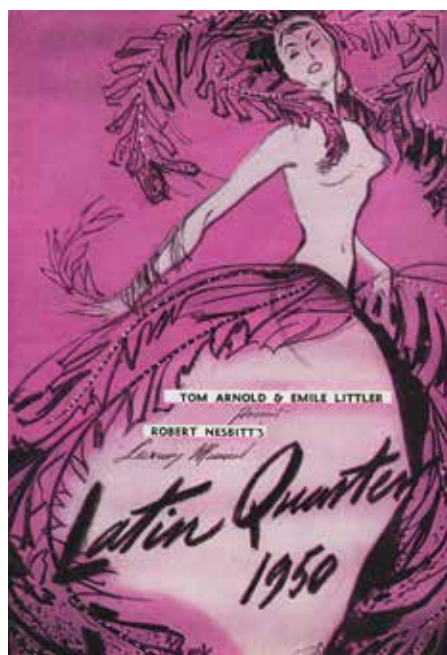


The Clark Brothers

bookings too. It was a smart move and we never stopped working.

We toured up and down the country as well as across Europe and were able to travel back to the U.S. when suitable engagements came up.

Following on from our success in Hellzapoppin, in 1950 we opened at the London Casino in Soho in a show called Latin Quarter for the Grade Organisation with Vic Oliver who married Winston Churchill's daughter.



Latin Quarter programme, London Casino, 1950

THE WEST END STAGE

Some of our fondest memories are of the shows we did in the London's West End.

At the London Palladium we danced with the Tiller Girls, sharing the bill with Margot Fontaine and Rudolf Nureyev, who were considered the best ballet dancers of the time.

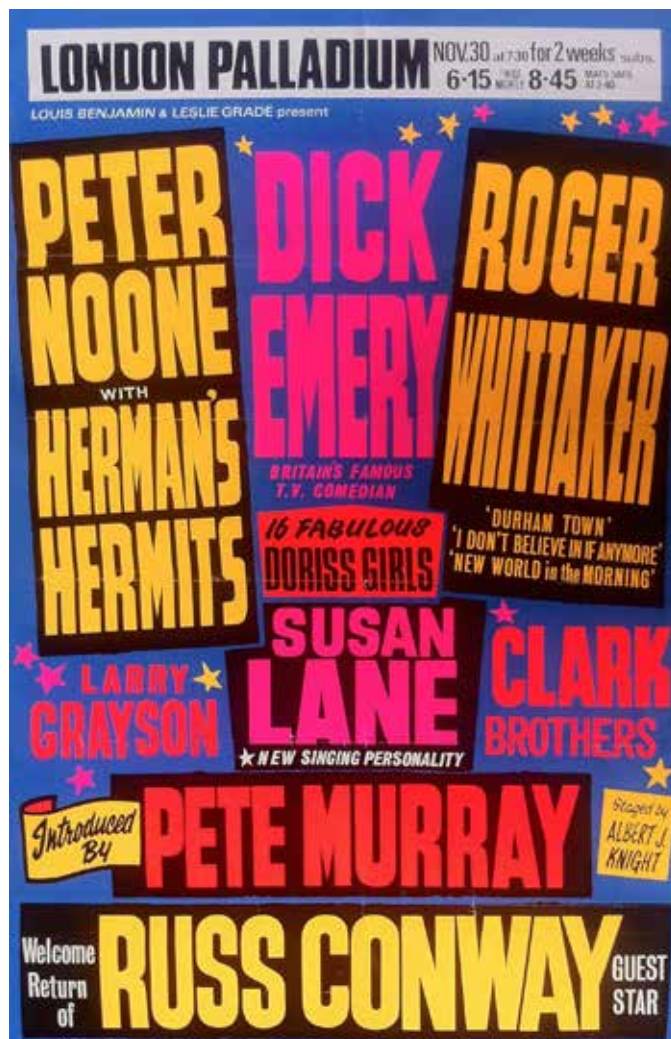
"I can't understand how they keep dancing so fast for so long."

One of the greatest shows we ever had the pleasure of appearing in was at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1963 with The Beatles. It was at this show that John Lennon told the audience, "Would the people in the cheaper seats clap your hands....and all the rest of you just rattle your jewellery!"

It was a Royal Command Performance for the Queen Mother starring Marlene Dietrich.

The whole of Leicester Square was a sea of screaming girls. Beatlemania had exploded onto the world. Marlene Dietrich was billed as the star of the show, but there was little doubt who most of the world wanted to see.

Our dressing room was opposite The Beatles. I walked into their dressing room and said to Ringo: "You think you're big?" which was rather stating the obvious given the pandemonium in Leicester Square at precisely that moment. I said "Watch this!" I lifted the window and heard a voice out of the crowd saying: "there's one of them", the boys all laughed.



Louis Benjamin and Leslie Grade present
International Variety at the London Palladium.



The Clark Brothers meeting Queen Elizabeth II, The Royal Variety Performance, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1981

After the show we all stood in line to meet the Queen Mother. When she got to us I shook her hand and Lord Bernard Delfont asked the Queen Mother if she remembered the Clark Brothers. She said: "Yes, but I can't understand how they keep dancing so fast for so long." I reached over Lord Delfont's shoulder and said to her: "You're not doing so bad yourself!" She smiled and continued along the line.

We have sung and danced before Kings, Queens and Presidents, including Prince Ranier of Monaco and Princess Grace Kelly who was a fellow Philadelphian.

TOURING THE REGIONS

England became our second home. As well as performing on the West End stage we did many tours up North in the big theatres and the working men's clubs where the audiences were very enthusiastic.

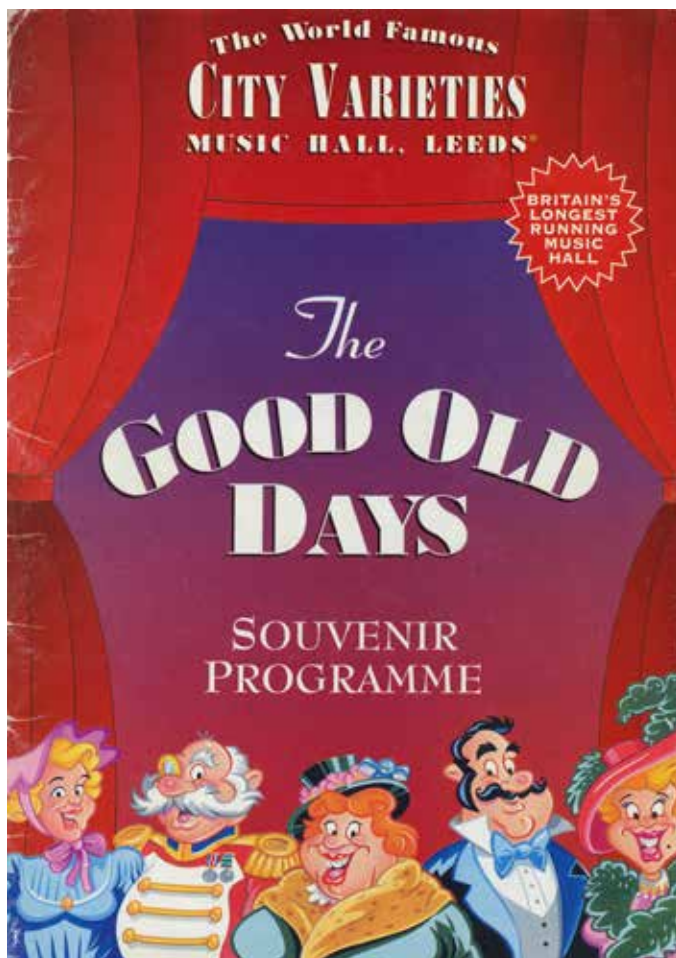
In Leeds there was a Landlady by the name of Mrs Bradley of number 12 Street Lane, who turned her house into a haven for show people. We loved her because she loved show people and we got to know her very well. We stayed with her on every occasion we could when performing around Leeds.

We were booked by an agency called A.T.S.

They were also the agent for a Leeds variety show called The Good Old Days, which we appeared on many times and was televised on the BBC.

Barney Colehan produced The Good Old Days, which ran from 1953 to 1983 and was in the style of Victorian-Edwardian music hall. Barney was a great producer for the shows because he knew his audience and made them dress in period costumes and had all the artists use popular tunes which the public knew and loved.

"We did many tours up North in the big theatres and the working men's clubs"



The Good Old Days programme



The Stars Midnight Spectacular flyer, Opera House Blackpool, 1987

We played Blackpool and The Opera House on numerous occasions. The Blackpool shows were always family orientated. One that sticks out in my mind was in 1959 starring Cliff

Richard and The Shadows, The Tiller Girls and Jimmy and I. The show was so good that the people of Blackpool talked about it for many years afterwards.



The Clark Brothers, Billy Petch's "HighLife" 1972 -73

UNIVERSITY OF SHOWBUSINESS

I started to do a bit of dance teaching when I was a teenager and later in the U.S. Gregory Hines' mother asked me if I would teach him a few steps, so the natural progression was for Jimmy and I to start a dance school. It opened in the mid Sixties and was called 'The University of Show Business' on University Street, off Tottenham Court Road in London.



Hines, Hines and Dad. Gregory is on the right

We were extremely privileged that Princess Margaret cut the ribbon at its opening, which meant that we received a lot of press. I hired a Rolls Royce especially for the occasion, but as we didn't have much money, I told the driver to meet us a couple of blocks away from the school so it was only a short distance to drive and therefore much cheaper.

After Jimmy and I opened our dance school we became permanent residents in Britain; indeed, I am still the only dancing entertainer with the Queen's stamp on my American passport.

It was a time when pop groups were beginning to appear on television and they wanted our advice on



The Clark Brothers, Lord James Baring and Tom Jones at The University of Showbusiness

how make their performance more polished with a few simple dance steps.

They all came to the University: Cliff Richard and The Shadows, Freddie and The Dreamers, The Mindbenders as well as performers like Bruce Forsyth, Dickie Henderson and Roy Castle.

If a film star needed to dance for a particular role, the producer or agent would send them along to the school. When James Fox was cast in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* opposite Julie Andrews The Grade Office brought him to me and offered to pay for private classes for him. I refused and insisted that he must come to the normal class because I knew that was what he would need. He agreed and came along, lining up next to little Bonnie

Langford, who was just setting out on her career at the time and was already able to do everything I asked of her.



The Clark Brothers

"After Jimmy and I opened our dance school we became permanent residents in Britain."

Lord James a member of the Baring family had little recording studio on Denmark Street and asked if he could share our premises. I set it up for him and all the acts of the day started to come through the doors to record, including the Rolling Stones and the Beatles.

"If a film star needed to dance for a particular role, the producer or agent would send them along to the school."

During the day we worked at the school and at night we danced at the Churchill club, working alongside all the cabaret stars of the day. It became too tiring and regrettably we had to close the school down after only two years.

MEMORIES DANCE THROUGH MY HEAD

Jimmy and I have been very fortunate to perform all over the world from the US to Cuba, Australia and throughout Europe, both on land and sea. Indeed, when the Beatles changed the popular landscape and the age of Variety began drifting into history, one great fall-back of ours became the transatlantic cruises and occasionally longer World Cruises. We spent eight years ploughing around the globe entertaining passengers on many of the Cunard Line cruise ships - QE2, RMS Queen Mary, Sagafjord, Vistafjord, Cunard Princess and Cunard Countess.

The Clark Brothers were kept as the headliners for the big show at the end of each cruise so we worked only one day out of ten and on that final show we pulled out all the stops!

Despite performing in so many different countries Britain always called us home. We found a sense of belonging here that was unrivalled anywhere else.

We became part of the British show business establishment, despite the fact that our act continued to be as American as Apple Pie. We got to know almost everyone in the industry and we were invited to join the legendary show business brotherhood The Water Rats in 1968.

Up until Jimmy sadly passed away in 2009 we still performed together for audiences on nostalgia trips as well as for the young jitterbug-swing dance crowd. I miss him greatly but have such wonderful memories of our time together dancing through my head.



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See inside for details

The Clark Brothers featured in a 2006 advertisement for ntl:Telewest/Virgin Mobile



The Clark Brothers taking their round of applause at the end of a show

I am still very active...and working! I do personal appearances, interviews and masterclasses and in 2014 appeared at The Hackney Empire in a show called Don't Knock - Tap! which was inspired by Jimmy and I.

2014 also saw Viral Media Art release and win an award for The Clark Brothers - Happy Scatman, which synchronised old footage of Jimmy and I dancing to contemporary music.

As my dream has always been to leave a legacy for future generations it fills me with an immense sense of pride that our work is still relevant today and can be enjoyed by new modern audiences.

ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CLARK BROTHERS

Read an introduction to The Clark Brothers to pupils and / or get pupils to read it individually.

Choose questions that assess the pupils' learned knowledge. The questions below will help focus the pupils on the origins and development of The Clark Brothers.

Suggested activities:

1) Divide pupils into groups and get them to make up a story based on the following themes:

- Soup Kitchen
- Shoe shine.
- Meeting Bill Robinson
- Touring the South
- Meeting Jack Entratter
- Life in Las Vegas

2) Ask the pupils to:

- Tell their stories
- Act out their stories
- Write their stories down
- Paint a picture depicting their stories.
- Make a shoeshine box

Resources:

- DVD workshop footage of The Clark Brothers
- Art materials and paper

Suggested Questions

- 1) What was the name of Steve's dad? (Cornelius)
- 2) What did his dad do for a job? (Cook)
- 3) Where did Steve's mum work? (Jewish bakery)
- 4) What was one of the errands Steve's mum asked him to do? (Go to the soup kitchen)
- 5) Steve shared his bed with how many brothers and sisters? (2 brothers and 3 sisters)
- 6) How many gospel songs did Steve's mum teach him and his brothers and sisters? (125)
- 7) Name the singing group that Steve and his brothers and sisters stood in for on the radio. (The Mills Brothers)
- 8) For how many months did The Clark Family go on tour with Gene Austin for? (6 Months)
- 9) How much money did Steve and his brothers and sisters make a week working on the show with Mr Austin? (\$100 a week)
- 10) How old was Steve when he heard Paul Robeson sing on the film set of Show Boat? (5years)
- 11) Name the famous song sung by Paul Robeson in the film Show boat. (Old Man River)
- 12) At what age did Steve return to school? (6)
- 13) At 15 years of age what was the name of the celebrated tap dancer Steve met? (Bill Robinson)
- 14) What was the name of the famous club Steve appeared at with Bill Robinson in New York? (The Cotton Club)
- 15) Duke Ellington and Count Basie were famous for? (Jazz music)
- 16) Who was Steve's famous cousin? (Sammy Davis Junior)
- 17) In which club did Steve make his Broadway debut? (Zanzibar)
- 18) What was the name of the film Steve made with Nat King Cole? (Killer Diller)
- 19) Who did Steve live with in New York for many years? (Dizzy Gillespie)
- 20) Who managed the Copacabana in New York? (Jack Entratter)
- 21) What did Nat King Cole call Steve? (Mister Twenty Six)
- 22) Who did The Clark Brothers meet with Nat King Cole after performing at a party? (Frank Costello)
- 23) The Clark Brothers performed at the opening of which hotel in Las Vegas? (The Sands)
- 24) What is discrimination? (not being treated as equals)



25) What were Black people only allowed to do on the Strip initially? (Perform, park cars, shine shoes, wait on tables)

26) What sort of food did the Chinese man serve in his restaurant? (soul food: pig feet, chitterlings, corn bread ham hocks and rice)

27) Which film was shot in Las Vegas while Steve and Jimmy were working there? (Ocean's Eleven)

28) Who got up on the Lounge stage with The Clark Brothers and sang while they danced around him? (Frank Sinatra)

29) Who did Steve do an impression of for Bing Crosby? (Louis Armstrong)

TWO

THE CLARK BROTHERS IN LONDON

Read The Clark Brothers in London to pupils and / or get pupils to read it individually.

Choose questions that assess the pupils' learned knowledge. The questions below will help focus the pupils on the origins and development of The Clark Brothers

Suggested activities:

1) Divide pupils into groups and get them to make up a story based on the following themes:

- Travelling on the Queen Mary.
- Arriving in Britain for the first time
- Performing for royalty
- Performing in the West End and the regions
- The University of Showbusiness

2) Ask the pupils to:

- Paint a picture depicting their stories.
- Tell their stories
- Act out their stories
- Write their stories down

Resources:

- DVD workshop footage of The Clark Brothers
- Art materials and paper

Suggested Questions

1) What year did The Clark Brothers come to London? (1948)

2) In which show did Steve and Jimmy perform when they first came to Britain? (Hellzapoppin)

3) What was the name of the ship The Clark Brothers came over to Britain on? (The Queen Mary)

4) What was the name of the singer who accompanied The Clark Brothers on the Queen Mary? (Gracie Fields)

5) Name the hotel where The Clark Brothers stayed in Piccadilly Circus? (The Regent Palace Hotel)

6) What was the name of the legendary tap dancer who had a school close to the hotel where The Clark Brothers stayed? (Buddy Bradley)

7) What was the name of the royal who frequented the Churchill Club? (Princess Margaret)

8) Why did The Clark Brothers decide to stay in Britain? (So that they could get all the jobs in mainland Europe)

9) What show did The Clark Brothers do at the London Casino in 1950? (The Latin Quarter)

10) What were Margot Fontaine and Rudolf Nureyev? (Ballet dancers)

11) Name two West End theatres that The Clark Brothers performed in. (The London Palladium, the Prince of Wales Theatre, the London Casino, the Princess Theatre)

12) Who did The Clark Brothers perform with at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1963? (The Beatles, Marlene Dietrich)

12) Who did Steve and Jimmy meet after the show? (The Queen Mother)

13) Which princess did The Clark Brothers perform for who also came from Philadelphia? (Princess Grace of Monaco)

14) Which two Northern cities does Steve mention he worked in? (Leeds, Blackpool)

15) What was the name of the televised Variety show on which The Clark Brothers appeared? (The Good Old Days)

16) The mother of which famous tap dancer asked Steve to teach him a few steps? (Gregory Hines)

17) Name the dance school The Clark Brothers founded in London. (The University of Show Business)

18) Which royal cut the ribbon at The Clark Brothers' dance school? (Princess Margaret)

19) What sort of people came to the dance school to learn how to dance? (Pop stars, actors)



20) Name three countries in which The Clark Brothers performed? (U.S, Cuba, Australia, Britain)

21) Name three of the six Cruise ships The Clark Brothers performed on. (QE2, RMS Queen Mary, Sagafjord, Vistafjord, Cunard Princess and Cunard Countess)

22) Which legendary show business brotherhood did The Clark Brothers join in 1968? (The Water Rats)

23) In which year did Jimmy Clark sadly pass away? (2009)

24) In which show did Steve appear in at The Hackney Empire in 2014? (Don't Knock - Tap!)



Part:

THREE

LIVING LEGENDS CLASSWORK AND ACTIVITIES

YOUNG PEOPLE AT URDANG ACADEMY AND ON THE ARTIST DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AT THE HACKNEY EMPIRE 2014



Research The Clark Brothers in your local library or online



Young people at Hackney Empire viewing footage of The Clark Brothers



Young people viewing a Slave Receipt as research for The Clark Brothers touring the Southern United States



Research other artistes of the period



The young people from Hackney were able to benefit from meeting Steve himself, but research into the period can be undertaken by speaking to elders in your own communities to find out their experiences of the time and recollections of The Clark Brothers



Mount your own exhibition using photographs and ephemera



Draw and create your own exhibition



Create a character for your performance



Researching and viewing footage of The Clark Brothers to aide characterisation



Research costumes



Research props



Rehearsals



After all your hard work.....its SHOWTIME!!!



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Positive Steps houses the biggest and most authoritative collection of primary source material on Black artists who have contributed to the cultural landscape of England from the 19th Century onwards. Positive Steps was formed in 1990 by Leon Robinson as a vehicle for exploring, archiving, interpreting and educating about the Black experience in British history, focusing particularly but not exclusively on arts and culture, especially theatre, as this provided an interesting and accessible window to the lived experiences of people through the times.

For more information about the work of Positive Steps contact:
leon.robinson@livinglegends.co.uk

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Cover design by Audley Smith.

RESOURCES

- Living with Legends by Stephen E Clark
- Living Legends Website
- Living Legends Film (available on the Living Legends Website and Vimeo)

We hope you find this Living Legends legacy pack useful to your experience and study of Black performance history.



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