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The British Dandy on the Popular Musical Stage (1866–1915)

Derek B. Scott

In his monograph *The British Pop Dandy*, Stan Hawkins recognized that every age 'has possessed its own brand of dandies, and general characteristics distinguish one period from the other' (2009: p. 15). Hawkins placed his study in historical context (pp. 20–26, 183–84), but his focus was on the dandy of British post-industrial society. That allows me to supplement his work with an account of the British dandy in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. My first brief case study is of the music-hall swell, and it is succeeded by a comparison of Oscar Wilde and the aesthetic dandy Reginald Bunthorne in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience* (1881). Then come the 'masher' characters of musical comedy, followed by some thoughts on the cross-dressing dandy performances of artists such as Vesta Tilley and Ella Shields. Finally, I take a brief look at the blackface dandy, who had been a feature of the early American minstrel shows. This character-type became a popular figure on the British music hall stage in the 1890s and created white audience expectations that needed to be carefully negotiated by the black British dandy.

In the period I am surveying, the British dandy was changing from a person whom Thomas Carlyle described in the 1830s as being dedicated to 'the wearing of Clothes wisely and well' (2010, p. 217), to someone whom, in 1863, Charles Baudelaire claimed to be possessed by 'the burning desire to create a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions' (1981, p. 420). However, Baudelaire then went on to add that a dandy 'can never be a vulgar man' (421), which is an assertion that is contradicted frequently once our focus shifts to the music-hall stage.

THE MUSIC-HALL SWELL

The dandy as the mock upper-class 'swell' rose to prominence in music-hall entertainment of the later 1860s. The subject position of music halls, especially in the West End, was that of the upper-working-class or lower-middle-class male, and the parodic aspect of the music-hall dandy therefore had a considerable appeal to socially aspirational young men in the audience who worked as clerks, or in other positions in which they might nurture hopes of a professional career (see Bailey 1986, p. 55). Many of them had a desire to be fashionable in dress and would put on their 'slap-up toggery' for a Saturday night out, or a Sunday jaunt. There were several performers associated with the swell, but pre-eminent among them were George Leybourne (1842–84) and Alfred Vance (1839–88). It was Leybourne's song 'Champagne Charlie' (music by Alfred Lee), first performed at Princess's Concert Hall in Leeds in early August 1866, that first generated huge enthusiasm for the swell. Yet, Charlie was a double-coded dandy: he might have displayed admiration for fine clothes, wealth and status, but he subverted bourgeois values by celebrating excess and idleness, boasting that he was 'a noise all night, in bed all day, and swimming in champagne'. A key moment came when Leybourne signed an exclusive year-long contract at the Canterbury Music Hall agreeing to maintain a swell persona on and off stage (Bailey 1986, pp. 51–52, Beeching 2011, p. 194). It was not an inflexible imposition, since Leybourne had several swell characters in his repertoire, of which Charlie was the most exaggerated representation of upper-class dissipation.

<Insert Fig. X.1 near here.>

Peter Bailey (1986, pp. 54–55) distinguishes three types of swell: the meticulous dresser, languid or affected in manner; 2) the noisy, alcohol-imbibing, boisterous man about town; and 3) the sham or simulated swell. Leybourne wore striking blue and white striped trousers for his role as Charlie, forming part of an outfit that Bertie Wooster might later have described as 'rather sudden till you got used to it'.[1] His long side-burns (Dundreary whiskers), short top hat, striped trousers, Malacca cane, cigar and champagne bottle all suggest that he is parodying type two of Bailey's swells (see Fig. X.1). His champagne bottle was fitted up to ensure it would pop its cork when struck by the cane, as shown in Alfred Concanen's lithograph for the sheet music cover. Bailey's third type of swell, the sham variety, is represented in the song 'Immenseikoff' (1873), written and performed by Arthur Lloyd (1839–1904). Immenseikoff describes himself as a Shoreditch toff, but Shoreditch at that time was far from the fashionable district it is today. Charlie sang about himself to a vigorous march rhythm, but Lloyd's song was in polka rhythm, suggesting an affected elegance. [Ex. X.1] Immenseikoff boasts that he used to obtain his clothes cheaply from Poole, because of the way he 'showed them off'. The high-quality tailoring firm of Henry Poole still exists today at 15, Savile Row. Immenseikoff might be thought prone to exaggeration in bragging of a deal he has done with a tailor, but it seems that Alfred Vance, whose swell character praised Cliquot in contrast to Leybourne's promotion of Moët, was rewarded with suits by Edward Groves, on the understanding that he would recommend his tailor's shop situated nearby the Canterbury and Metropolitan halls (Bailey 1986, p. 60).

<Insert Musical Ex. X.1 somewhere near here.>

Charlie's sexuality is somewhat ambiguous. He desires – and assures us he obtains – female

adoration, but he prefers a night out with the boys. Like Reginald Bunthorne in *Patience*, he seems happily resigned to his inability to settle down with a woman ('with all my grand accomplishments, I ne'er could get a wife'). In fact, the closest he approached sexual fulfilment was probably the moment when, at the end of his song, he tapped his bottle and the cork flew in the air followed by the fizz. He claims that the thing he most excels in 'is the PRFG game', but we never quite know what takes place in those Private Rooms for Gentlemen. Christopher Beeching, who was first to identify this meaning of the letters PRFG, suggests that another meaning might be the Prize Ring Fighting Game, but it would seem odd to repeat the word 'game' if that were so (2011, pp. 142–43).

The reaction of the respectable middle classes to the disruptive, sham gentility of music-hall swells, and to those on the streets who imitated them, fluctuated between scorn and revulsion (see Bailey 1986, pp. 49, 59, & 68, and Kift 1996, p. 49). The swell was not a morally improving role model. Nevertheless, the self-indulgent dandy represented by Champagne Charlie continued into the Edwardian period. George Lashwood, the 'Beau Brummel of the halls' performed a song, 'I Forgot the Number of My House' (words by Fred W. Leigh, music by George Arthurs, 1911), in which he arrives home somewhat the worse for drink, confessing that he has been out with the boys and feeling 'extremely queer'.

THE AESTHETIC DANDY

I am devoting a large amount of space, here, to Reginald Bunthorne, one of the two dandies in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*. In Bunthorne, Gilbert presents a caricature of the artistic devotee of the Aesthetic Movement, which brought together artists who called for life to be lived intensely and who stressed that the ideal of beauty in art overrode any moral or political dimension – an influential text was Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the*

Renaissance (1873). Bunthorne arrives at a moment when dandyism may be seen moving in the direction of camp and an appeal to gay sensibilities (although the terms 'gay' and 'camp' were, of course, not yet coined). Raymond Knapp has remarked that Gilbert and Sullivan sometimes placed idiosyncratic characters and their stylized song performances in a context that often seems pre-labelled as artificial and, thus, 'readymade for camp' (2018, p. 172).

Richard D'Oyly Carte realized that the reception of *Patience*, when it toured the USA in 1882, would benefit from better acquaintance with the aesthetic movement, and, for that reason, was keen to finance a lecture tour there by Oscar Wilde. When *Patience* premiered in London the year previously, Wilde was not widely recognized as having the status of a premier aesthete. Indeed, Carolyn Williams has argued that, rather than Bunthorne's character being a parody of Wilde, Bunthorne was, in reality, 'the model that Wilde attempted both to imitate and to prefigure on his American tour' (2012, p. 165; for a detailed account of his tour, see Mendelssohn 2018). The very clothes Wilde wore – the velvet jacket and knee breeches – were indebted to the costume Gilbert had designed for Bunthorne. Wilde's period of wearing aesthetic attire was actually of short duration, coming to an end abruptly in March 1883, when he decided to change his image to that of a French bohemian artist (see Kaplan and Stowell 1994, p. 12).

Bunthorne is a figure who is difficult to pin down in terms of sexuality. On the one hand, his effete, or effeminate manner has to be related to a historical context in which such behaviour was thought to be a means of attracting women – which is precisely why the dragoons in *Patience* are motivated to adopt such behaviour.[2] On the other hand, as Williams observes, 'it is not necessary to argue that Bunthorne is meant to represent or "be" a homosexual in order to see the queer implications of the representation' (2012, p. 168). She does not regard the

question of whether there was any intentionality on Gilbert's part as important to this perspective, because he may have been elaborating a particular stereotype without being critically conscious of his actions.

Dennis Denisoff remarks of Bunthorne's exclusion from the happy ending of multiple marriages (often interpreted as punitive) that throughout the operetta Bunthorne has been playing the game of deferring marriage, his unrequited attachment to the milkmaid Patience being part and parcel of 'an indefinite deferral of sexual fulfillment' (Denisoff 2001, 61). As a dandy-aesthete, he wishes to be popular with women, but without commitment. He informs the audience, confidentially, that his aestheticism is 'sham' and has been adopted in order to gain female adoration, but, oddly, he is not prepared to abandon it when it no longer serves that purpose. His confessional song 'If you're anxious for to shine' makes scornful reference to aesthetes who are content with a 'vegetable love', which, he declares emphatically, would certainly not suit him; yet, he announces calmly before the curtain falls that, in the future, he will have to be content 'with a tulip or lily'.

Jay Newman draws attention to the fact that Gilbert's relations with leading figures of the aesthetic movement were cordial, and that nothing in *Patience* could be described as malicious satire (Newman 1985, p. 266; cited in Denisoff 2001, p. 58). Gilbert's views on same-sex relationships should not be assumed to be condemnatory, although this was a topic that could not be addressed openly in contemporary drama. His play *The Wicked World* (1873) may be interpreted as approaching the subject delicately, by depicting a land in which fairies reject mortal love between the sexes for 'sister-love' and 'brotherhood' love, but even that was found indecent by the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Pearson 1957, pp. 42–43; cited in Denisoff 2001, p. 60).

For Williams, the character of Bunthorne marks a key moment in 'the emergence of a queer historiography' (2012, p. 170). Knapp would agree, and stresses it is not only Gilbert's libretto but also Sullivan's music that shapes Bunthorne's character. In his longest solo scene, he enters wondering aloud if he is alone and unobserved. The melodramatic music tells us he is performing theatrically, but when he moves from declamatory recitative to a song in which he reveals what he really feels about aestheticism, the music 'unfolds as a kind of mincing march, adopting the sensibility of a slightly effeminate burgher on promenade' (Knapp 2018, p. 178). Although Knapp concedes that effeminacy was often thought a means of attracting women in the 1880s, and was not generally equated with homosexuality, he discerns an incipient camp taste in Bunthorne's manner, which may have had a covert appeal to those attracted to same-sex relations (2018, p. 182). It should be noted, too, that although Oscar Wilde's demeanor may have owed much to Bunthorne, it was only retrospectively – after Wilde's trial in 1895 – that many people comprehended Wilde's manner as signifying his homosexuality. Yet, that trial took place six years after the Cleveland Street Scandal had shone a light on homosexuality among the aristocracy.[3]

Bunthorne's 'signature moment', in Knapp's opinion, comes after Patience rejects his marriage proposal. He exits with a poetic outburst:

> Oh, to be wafted away
> From this black Aceldama of sorrow,
> Where the dust of an earthy today
> Is the earth of a dusty tomorrow.

Knapp comments that an exaggerated performance style is encouraged by the audience laughter that greets this recitation, and that Bunthorne's modest declaration that it is a little thing of his own called 'Heart Foam', which he will not publish, seems to be addressed as much to the audience as to Patience (2018, p. 173). Some members of the audience would have been aware that Dante Gabriel Rossetti had buried unpublished poems alongside his wife Elizabeth Siddal, after her death in 1862 – and they may also have known that he dug them up in 1869 and published what was still legible the next year. Moreover, Robert Buchanan published a review of Rossetti's verse in 1871, under the heading 'The Fleshly School of Poetry', and Gilbert describes Bunthorne as 'a Fleshly Poet' in the *dramatis personae*.[4] The perception of Bunthorne's emotional outburst is thus coloured by recent events. Ed Cohen has stressed that that theatricality and posing were character traits associated with homosexuality, but also stresses their subversive potential in pointing to a more general theatricality in the performance of gender (Cohen 1996, pp. 39–40). Wilde's aesthetic poses challenged the manner in which normative masculinity – in this period, the gentleman – was constructed. Reginia Gagnier maintains that Wilde's dandyism functioned as a critique of gender ideology and subverted the image of the bourgeois gentleman (1986, p. 85).

Reginald Bunthorne is something of a mixture of three dandies: Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde and James Whistler (see Bradley 1996, p. 290). Bunthorne's verse resembles that of Swinburne more than Rosetti – for instance, 'Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow! – and Buchanan had included a reference to Swinburne in his 'Fleshly School of Poets' review. When George Grossmith Sr first played Bunthorne, he sported the eye glass and white lock of hair associated with James Whistler, although Bunthorne's length of hair and fondness for lilies pointed to Oscar Wilde, who had yet to publish a volume of poetry when *Patience* premiered.

Gilbert labels the second dandy in *Patience*, Archibald Grosvenor, 'an Idyllic Poet', and John Bush Jones has argued that he is a mixture of William Morris and Coventry Patmore (see Jones 1965, pp. 45–53). However, Buchanan had listed Morris, also, as one of his 'fleshly poets', and, at the time of *Patience*, Patmore, far from being a 'young man' like Grosvenor, was in his late fifties. Such infelicities serve to indicate the difficulty in ascribing actual artistic figures of the time to Bunthorne and Grosvenor.

MUSICAL COMEDY AND THE MASHER

Musical comedy, a genre that developed in the 1890s, has now all but disappeared from the stage. Yet, in December 1908, George Edwardes informed the *Manchester Evening Chronicle* that English musical comedies were 'attractions at the principal theatres in Germany, and, for that matter, all over the civilised world' (quoted in Forbes-Winslow, *Daly's*, p. 88). Musical comedy had been promoted by Edwardes as a form of entertainment to replace burlesque, which he felt was becoming stale and inflexible, even if shows such as *Cinder-Ellen up Too Late* were still attracting audiences at the Gaiety Theatre in 1892. Edwardes found evidence that he was correct in thinking that a change was needed, when he staged *In Town* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre later that same year.

The star of that show was comedian Arthur Roberts, and the co-star was Florence St John, who had sung in opera. In other words, it contained the mixture of actor-singer and singer-actor familiar from operetta. *The Sunday Times* described it as 'a curious medley of song, dance and nonsense … and the very vaguest attempt at satirizing the modern masher' (quoted in Hyman 1975, p. 64). In the 1890s, the term 'masher' indicated a dandy philanderer. Even

in that decade, the masher was perceived as a threat to working-class women. In 1896, the music-hall artist Alec Hurley sang 'The Coster's Sister' (words and music by J.W. Nubley), in which he describes the suffering of his sister, after she fell for a masher. As time went by, the term grew more negative, and suggested someone prone to making inappropriate sexual advances. The novelty of *In Town* lay in its contemporary setting and its engagement with modernity and fashion. Out went the burlesque wardrobe of tights for women and eccentric clothes for men, and in came *haute couture* dresses and Savile Row suits. Musical comedy reversed the relationship that had hitherto existed between the stage and the fashionable world. Instead of imitating that world – as the music-hall swell imitated the London dandy – it was now the fashions seen on stage that were imitated by society women and the stylish young men of the West End. The curly brimmed top hat worn by Robinson as Captain Coddington was soon known as the Coddington hat and worn by West End mashers – anticipating the female demand for the *Merry Widow* hat in the next decade. The conundrum faced by Captain Coddington is that he has invited all the young women of the enticingly named Ambiguity Theatre to lunch without the wherewithal to pay for them.

Edwardes's first musical comedy to be produced at the Gaiety was *The Shop Girl* in November 1894. The book was written by H.J.W. Dam, the music composed by Ivan Caryll, and additional music was provided by Lionel Monkton to lyrics by Adrian Ross. It proved to be an enormous success, running to 546 performances, and firmly established musical comedy as the most popular stage entertainment in the West End. The two leading roles were taken by Ada Reeve, a music-hall singer, who played the shop girl Bessie Brent, and Seymour Hicks, who, at this time was a comedian with little singing experience. *The Shop Girl* also witnessed the stage debut of George Grossmith Jr. (1874–1935), son of a famous comedian, and known as Gee-Gee to his friends. He played the masher Bertie Hoyd, the cut

of whose coat was ‘quite the thing’. His masher song ‘Beautiful Bountiful Bertie’, composed by Lionel Monckton to Grossmith’s own lyrics, proved to be one of the show’s hit numbers. Figure X.2 depicts Bertie in his fashionably cut coat. He has the onerous duty of escorting a group of foundling girls around town.

<Insert Fig. X.2 somewhere near here.>

Although musical comedy was at first known for being fond of using the word ‘girl’ in its title and for exhibiting its chorus line of ‘girls’ on stage, there is no doubt that some of its male performers attracted the attention of men in the audience; indeed, Grossmith became a ‘leader of men’s fashions’ (MacQueen-Pope 1949, p. 375). In his autobiography, Grossmith claims to have created a fashion sensation in Paris, also, by wearing a white bowler hat ‘well on the head’ instead of balanced on the top, when appearing in a revue at the Folies-Bergère in 1911 (1933, p. 51). The French were certainly receptive to British dandyism; in 1931, the founder of British dandyism became the subject of Reynaldo Hahn’s operetta, *Brummel*, (libretto by George Gabriel Thenon and Robert Dieudonné), which includes an instructional song ‘Être un dandy’. Hahn was himself a dandy, and one with whom Marcel Proust was, for a time, infatuated (Carter 2006, pp. 31–35).

New ground in musical comedy was broken by *A Greek Slave* (book by Owen Hall, lyrics by Harry Greenbank and Adrian Ross, music by Sidney Jones, additional music by Lionel Monckton), given at Daly’s Theatre in 1898. Not only was this musical comedy lacking the word ‘girl’ in its title and, perhaps surprisingly, the slave of its title was male, but ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ now began to find themselves on show to an audience gaze so mixed that it is probably

safer not to try to gender it. The patrician boys of *A Greek Slave* are revealed in Figure X.3.

<Insert Fig. X.3 somewhere near here.>

THE CROSS-DRESSING DANDY

Not all music-hall swells were performed by men. Jenny Hill (1848–96) had a hit with her song ‘’Arry’ (written and composed by Edwin V. Page, 1882), in which she represented herself as a costermonger swell. This is, again, Bailey’s type three, the sham swell, since costermongers earned a meagre living selling fruit and vegetables from barrows that they pushed along the street. Nelly Power (1854–87) was another performer of swell roles and had begun to imitate Leybourne very soon after he was acclaimed as Champagne Charlie. She enjoyed her greatest success with ‘The City Toff’ (Edwin V.Page, 1879), which made fun of the pretend swell. Bailey is keen to stress that this does not imply that costermonger would-be swells were automatic figures of fun. He cites the barbed final quatrain of Jenny Hill’s song ‘’Arry’, in which she asserts:

> The Upper Ten may jeer and say
> What cads the ’Arries are,
> But the ’Arries work and pay their way
> While doing the lah-di-dah.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the preeminent male impersonator was Vesta Tilley (1864–1952), and she enjoyed remarkable success in both the UK and the USA. Her dandy clothes were ‘absolutely the latest in fashionable men’s attire’, and were

handmade for her by Samuelson, Son and Linney, of Maddox Street, Bond Street (de Frece 1934, pp. 125–26). She often sang third-person narratives that distanced a song's protagonist from her own male impersonation, and unlike Leybourne, she never appeared in dandy attire off stage. In one of her best-known songs, 'The Piccadilly Johnny with the Little Glass Eye, or, Algy' (written and composed by Harry B. Norris, 1895), she sings about the newly acquired wealth of Algernon Brown. Having money, Algy can behave like a genuine swell, and Tilley tells her audience that the girls say they'll never leave him, to which she adds sarcastically, 'while his cash holds out, you bet your Sunday hat they won't'.[5] Algy's 'little glass eye', incidentally, is an eye-glass, and the ambiguity of Tilley's performance is evident in her decision to perform this song wearing a monocle – thus suggesting she is, after all, Algy. Tilley has another third-person narrative in the song 'Burlington Bertie' (written and composed by Harry B. Norris, 1900). Burlington Bertie has inherited money from his father and lives in Kensington. He speaks with 'the Hyde Park drawl', walks with 'the Bond Street crawl', and takes his supper at the Savoy Hotel. As with 'Algy' and others of Tilley's songs, there is a moral message, Bertie may be 'wealthy and foolish' but when duty calls 'just like the rest he is off to the front' to fight for his country (the song appeared during the Second Boer War).

Tilley also related narratives containing first-person pronouns but made it clear that the 'I', or 'me', were the words uttered by a male character and not herself. For example, in 'Introduce Me to the Lady' (words by Worton David, music by Ralph Penso, 1910), she repeats the words of another person: 'he turned round to his pals and loudly cried'. The same is true of 'Come and Be One of the Midnight Sons' (words by Worton David, music by Kenneth Lyle, 1909). Perhaps she felt comfortable about singing 'Following in Father's Footsteps' (written and composed by E.W. Rogers, 1902) in the first person, because she was impersonating a

boy, rather than a man. Yet the words ‘He’s just in front with a fine big gal / So I thought that I’d have one as well’ suggest a certain precociousness. In a slightly later song, ‘Jolly Good Luck to the Girl Who Loves a Soldier’ (words by Fred W. Leigh, music by Kenneth Lyle, 1907) she does adopt an adult male persona, but this time that of a soldier rather than a dandy.

It is difficult to know to whom Tilley appealed the most in her audience – the men or the women – because she was warmly received by both. She remarks in her autobiography, ‘women and girls were almost always in the majority among my audience’ (de Frece 1934, p. 124). The cross-dressing dandy could signify many things, and these could be as much about character and independent spirit as sexuality (Maitland 1986, pp. 88–103, discusses meanings of cross-dressing in relation to Tilley). The puritanical music-hall entrepreneur Oswald Stoll, for one, was charmed by Tilley’s innocent demeanor, and declared that ‘Following in Father’s Footsteps’ was ‘untouched by the *double entendre* of the smoking room’ (Maitland 1986, p. 113).

In discussing the reception of another cross-dresser, Hetty King (1883–1972), during her North American tour, Jacky Bratton points to a range of views about her male impersonation, from an assessment of its realism, to a perception of its being a game, to a sense of its sending out mixed messages. Performing in New York State, in 1910, she was described in the *Buffalo Courier* as ‘a regular Beau Brummel sort of male impersonator’.[6] King appeared as a London dandy, but also in military uniform (as, for example, when singing ‘All the Nice Girls Love a Sailor’, words by A.J. Mills, music by Bennett Scott, 1909). Bratton notes that mixed messages were more likely to be picked up in New York, where a greater awareness of lesbian identities had an impact on the reception of male impersonators (1996, p. 94).

Reception in Britain, she argues, differed in its tendency toward political readings of performances that were seen as burlesquing the masculine or challenging sexual boundaries. In this British context, the women's suffrage movement was important because it had taken on a new prominence after the founding of the militant Women's Social and Political Union in 1903 (an equivalent militant organization, the National Woman's Party, was not established in the USA until 1916).

Ella Shields (1879–1952), who was American born and moved to London in her mid-twenties, sang 'Burlington Bertie from Bow' (1915), a parody of Tilley's 'Burlington Bertie' written and composed by her husband, William Hargreaves. Shield's Bertie is determined to live a fantasy dandy lifestyle, even though he resides in the poor neighbourhood of Bow in London's East End, rather than Kensington. Shields, in a similar fashion to Tilley, often solves the problem of her being personally identified with the male protagonist via a narration in which she tells of a 'he' rather than of herself. For example, in 'Why Did I Kiss That Girl?' (words by Lew Brown, music by Ray Henderson and Robert King, 1924) the verse makes clear that this question in the song's title is not her own by declaring, 'all his friends heard Bashful Johnny say'. Nevertheless, it is easy, in repeats of the chorus, to perceive the words as being those of the singer herself rather than the singer as narrator. In 'Burlington Bertie from Bow', however, unlike Tilley in the original 'Burlington Bertie', Shields adopts a male persona throughout. This is also the case with 'If You Knew Susie (Like I Know Susie)' (Buddy G. De Sylva, music by Joseph Meyer, 1925). It may be that Shields had more confidence singing in the first person as a man because her voice was pitched so much lower than that of Tilley, although that would have eroded the distinction between singer and the male being impersonated. Like Tilley, Shields was not always the dandy; during the First World War, she was likely to be a man in the army or navy.

THE BLACKFACE DANDY

The African-American dandy emerged in the early nineteenth-century in the cities of the free North, such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia (for an overview, see White and White 1998, pp. 85–124). Black dandies were particularly noticeable on parade days organized by African societies. They provoked a reaction from white observers in which derisive laughter was intermingled with anxiety. An uneasy *New York Morning Chronicle* notified its readers that a parade scheduled for July 1827 would contribute to the city's 'criminal calendar, pauper list, and *dandy* register' (White and White 1998, p. 96). Attempts to disarm the black dandy with ridicule were to emerge in caricatures in blackface minstrelsy. The first to appear, in the 1830s, was 'Zip Coon', a character who was soon being portrayed by George Washington Dixon as an alter ego to Thomas Dartmouth Rice's ragged 'Jim Crow'.[7] When the first minstrel troupes emerged in the next decade, the black dandy became a feature of the show, an example being the Virginia Minstrels' performances of 'Dandy Jim from Caroline' in the 1840s.[8]

The blackface dandy had a second coming in late nineteenth-century British music hall in the shape of Eugene Stratton (1861–1918). He had been born in Buffalo, New York State, but moved to England at the age of nineteen and made his career there. In the 1880s, he was performing in minstrel shows, but gradually developed a solo music-hall act (his career is discussed at length in Pickering 2008, pp. 160–83). In the 1890s, music-hall managers were transforming their establishments into 'respectable' variety theatres, and in December 1893, at the Royal Cambridge Hall of Varieties in Bishopsgate, Stratton sang a song that gave him a strapline on posters: 'The Dandy Coloured Coon' (lyrics by Richard Morton, music by

George Le Brunn). Stratton became the most famous of the British proponents of 'coon songs', which were ragtime influenced songs indebted to the late-nineteenth century black musical theatre of New York. Stratton was especially celebrated for his interpretations of songs of that type written for him by Leslie Stuart, such as 'Lily of Laguna' (1898). His dandy persona was at one not only with his smooth, restrained vocal delivery and soft-shoe dancing, but also with the gentle not-quite-ragtime rhythms of Stuart's music (Ex X.2).

<Insert Musical Ex. X.2 somewhere near here.>

The black dandy took some time to arrive on the British stage, largely because of the audience expectations that had been built up by the blackface dandy. No black performer wished to endorse the parodic images and, at times, noxious stereotyping in which certain white performers indulged. It was not until well after the First World War, alongside the social and cultural changes brought about by the dissemination of jazz and syncopated dance music, that the stage was ready to receive a performer such as Leslie Hutchinson (1900–1969). Yet, even as Hutch, as he was familiarly known, serenaded his adoring audiences in the late-1920s and 1930s, G.H. Elliott (1882–1962), 'The Chocolate Coloured Coon', continued to adopt the blackface dandy character associated with Stratton. Hutch's clothes followed the style of an upper-class white dandy, but no parody was ever suggested. Perhaps that had something to do with his powerful social connections, which included a string of celebrities of both sexes, such as Cole Porter, Merle Oberon, Ivor Novello, and Edwina Mountbatten, who became his lovers (Breese 1999, pp. 36, 92–93, 108–12, 128; Thornton 2008).

It was not until the 1940s that the black dandy possessed an individual style, and that was the zoot suit, first worn by African-Americans. The term ‘zoot’ referred to its exaggerated style (White and White 1998, p. 254). The jacket was long, and the trousers were baggy at the knee but narrow at the ankle. It breached the US wartime regulations of 1943 in its excessive use of cloth, and in the summer of that year there were riots in some American cities as its wearers became embroiled in fights with those serving in the armed forces. Hence, the zoot suit was regarded as politically confrontational almost from the start. It proclaimed the black dandy as defiant in the face of white male privilege (see Tulloch 2004, p. 56). It was also rapidly associated with a love of swing music, and zoot suits could be seen in plenty at dance halls such as the Savoy in Harlem. More than anyone else, the singer and bandleader Cab Calloway (1907–94) became inseparable from the zoot suit, especially after wearing an extravagant example in the film musical *Stormy Weather* of 1943.

At this point, I am conscious of having stepped outside of the original time frame I had set myself, but I was reluctant to neglect the significant change in black dandyism brought about by the zoot suit. The reader will also be aware that I have done little more in this chapter than provide a few sketches of British dandyism. As justification, I can only emphasize that a single essay cannot aspire to present as detailed a study as Stan Hawkins provided for the years post-1950. The emerging camp qualities that were noted in the character of the fictional Bunthorne and the actual Wilde were taken a step further by Noël Coward, a later dandy whom Hawkins has named as having an impact on British pop that ‘cannot be overstated’ – an impact made manifest in 1998 by the artists featured on Neil Tennant’s tribute album *Twentieth-Century Blues* (2009, p. 26). However, in addition to Coward’s very British dandy, Hawkins remarks that, in the later 1960s and 1970s, it was ‘near impossible to overlook’ the effect on popular music in the UK of American dandy Andy Warhol (p. 27), and he goes on

to argue that the Warholian aesthetic provided a model for glam rock (p. 31).

The main intention of my survey of the earlier historical period has been to shed additional social and cultural light on the fascinating subject of the British dandy. In spite of its brevity, I hope that my outline has been sufficient to illustrate that there are certain consistent features linking my examples to later pop dandies, especially regarding what Hawkins terms 'self-aestheticization' (p. 34). Nevertheless, there were conspicuous changes, too, as the British dandy became affected by the fresh developments in gender roles and masculinity that came in the wake of postwar immigration, the Women's Liberation Movement, and Stonewall.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The comment appears in P.G. Wodehouse’s short story, ‘Jeeves Takes Charge’, first published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, 18 Nov. 1916. Wooster adds, significantly, that many lads at his club admired his outfit ‘unrestrainedly’.

[2] On this subject, see Andrew Crowther, ‘Bunthorne and Oscar Wilde’, <http://www.gsarchive.net/patience/wilde/wilde.html>.

[3] There was scandal fuelled by a court case – and rumours of an attempted cover up – concerning the involvement of members of the aristocracy in a homosexual brothel at 19 Cleveland Street, London, in 1889.

[4] Robert Buchanan, writing under the *pseudonym* Thomas Maitland, ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti’, *The Contemporary Review*, 18 (Oct. 1871): 334–50, at 334. Available at British Library web site: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-fleshly-school-of-poetry-an-attack-on-the-pre-raphaelites>. (Accessed 7 May 2018.)

[5] The BFI has a Gibson Bio-Tableaux film of Tilley performing this song, synchronized with a gramophone recording, dated 1900. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/5295319929cfb>.

[6] One of several press snippets reprinted in *The Era*, 12 Mar. 1910, quoted in Bratton 1996, p. 91.

[7] There were various versions of 'Zip Coon' circulating in the early 1830s. G.W. Dixon published a reworded version titled 'Ole Zip Coon' in 1835. Today, the melody is familiar as a fiddle tune, 'Turkey in the Straw'. The song 'Jump, Jim Crow' was published in 1832, but Rice had been singing it since 1828.

[8] Published by C. G. Christman, New York, 1843.