



Miss Gracie Fields, the Perfect Minstrel, Charms Relaxed, Hospitable Palladium Audiences

By BROOKS ATKINSON

LONDON, (April 23) — At least for the time being, Gracie Fields has rescued the Palladium from the Yanks. Generally, some American is bawling away in the last number of London's most illustrious music hall. Johnny Ray, the blubbering balladeer, washed out the theatre a few weeks ago, and Tennessee Ernie, the groaning hillbilly, has just done his stuff and moved on.

From the number of Yankees who take top billing at the Palladium, you would think that vaudeville were a flourishing institution in America. Future bookings include Eddie Fisher, "America's No. 1 Singer of Popular Songs"; Al Martino, "America's Great New Singing Star," and Martin and Lewis dubbed in the program as "Hollywood's Greatest Comedy Team."

This cheerful acceptance of Yankees as performers able to fill the Palladium may reflect indirectly the popularity of Danny Kaye, who stands somewhere between Winston Churchill and Field Marshall Montgomery as a household god of London. Mr. Kaye's name turns up twice in the current Palladium bill as a standard of reference. The word "Kaye" seems to be a synonym for "Great."

But Miss Fields has changed all that for the present. Palladium audiences have loved her for years. Every person in the audience seems to know her repertory by heart, and wants her to sing the whole of it before the show is over. She is the perfect music-hall minstrel. Stunningly dressed in a blue evening gown, she is a handsome, wholesome-look-

ing woman with gray hair and a lustrous skin.

Some of the local newspaper constables say that it takes Gracie longer to get "matey" than used to. But that shows the intimate knowledge of Gracie's career that only London people have. To a visitor who knows her work less thoroughly, she seems wonderfully humorous, warm and friendly.

"How much is that doggie in the window?" she sings for her opening number, beseeching the audience to help her bark in the choruses. She makes something comical out of maudlin ballads about "A Bleeding Heart" and "Only a Glass of Champagne," which was the first step toward the ruin of a pure maiden.

In the midst of the merriment Gracie brings everyone up short by singing "The Lord's Prayer" with a reverence that seems thoroughly appropriate. Gracie's authority over an audience is genuine because she is genuine. No one can help believing in this smiling woman, who faces an audience with absolute simplicity.

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You can see that the Palladium does not deny its audiences the finer things of life. If we had audiences as relaxed and hospitable as those that patronize the Palladium, we could have vaudeville in America. We do not lack performers as desperately as audiences. Our performers have to look to the Palladium for employment.

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