

"From Hull, Hell and Halifax good Lord deliver us". Such was my father's comment when, as a boy, a dear old aunt took me for a holiday in the first-named of these locations. Nevertheless, Hull was a brighter city then than it is today. I remember that the strong man SAMSON was topping at the Alexandra, a theatre of which CHRIS WORTMAN always speaks with affection, for it was there that he first played Man Friday opposite BARBARA MILLER's Crusoe. Alas the Alex, a popular home of variety and Frank H. Fortescue repertory seasons, was destroyed by enemy action in the last war.

This left the city with two music halls, the Tivoli and the Palace. Pro's used to speak of the Tivoli as 'a lovely week', although ELLIS ASHTON looks back with sadness to the night ARTHUR LUCAN died on its stage. Our member JOE KERNAN was among those who fought, unsuccessfully to save it from demolition.

The surviving Palace, after Moss Empires gave it up, had a new lease of life as the 'Continental', but here too the developers finally matched Hitler's achievement at the Alex. BILL WRAY, born and bred in the Humberside city, is one who feels particularly strongly about this crime.

"I am one of the nostalgic band who feel that the persons responsible for the demolition should have been

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compassionately put down and buried under its hallowed bricks," writes Bill.

"From childhood I was a regular attender and gained tremendous pleasure from the popular stars it sported, in particular the sophisticated entertainers such as HUTCH and The STREET SINGER and so many more true artists.

"What is there now in Hull to compensate for the mature, theatrical atmosphere of the Palace?"

But never say die. Bill's father had been a pro, having met, during the 1914-18 War, a dame comedian named Charlie Williams, to whom he acted as straight man and pianist. As WILLIAMS & WRAY they played the halls in the immediate Post-War years until Wray Snr. decided to resume his studies and qualify as a dental surgeon.

Bill inherited his father's passion for music and at an early age resolved to emulate his idol, George Gershwin. When he was about 16 he hawked his compositions around the London publishers, meeting many interesting people in the process, including Billy Thorburn, Phyllis Sellick, Allan Jones, Robert Farnon, Stanley Black, Ted Heath, Frances Day, Charlie Kunz and Haydn Wood. The latter, whom Bill describes as a 'merry little elf of a man', is famed as the composer of "Roses of

Picardy", but he was, in fact, the lyric writer's second choice for putting his words to music.

Bill's ambitions were interrupted by National Service in the R.A.F. and although some of his 200 odd compositions had been professionally performed, on the radio and elsewhere, he found the song-writing world a vicious circle in which performers did not like to feature unpublished works, nor publishers to market works not featured by a star. So he settled down to regular employment in the shipping industry, married and brought up a family of three children.

Only recently has Bill found time to revive his interest in song-writing. And as a citizen of Hull - seventh in descent from Peter Wray, created Hereditary Freeman of the City in 1765 - his efforts have been directed to singing the praises of his home town. One of these songs, "Hull Fair", celebrates the city's annual carnival, whose history goes back to the 13 century. Like his other 'local' composition "The Hull Song" it has a lively 2-4 rhythm, and has been accepted by the Lord High Steward of Hull, Lord Coleraine.

Although Bill admits that his style is that of the 1950s is 'hey-day potential' - his subjects are not limited to home-town songs. What could be more out of this world (my joke, not his) than "Song of the Astronauts", which he hopes to promote commercially. An Associate of the Songwriters' Guild of Great Britain, we wish Bill every success in his interrupted career. Who says "Too old at 40"?

J.O.B.



BILL WRAY

HULL  
**PALACE**  
THEATRE  
6.40 MONDAY, DECEMBER 24th, 1954 8.50  
GRAND HOLIDAY SHOW  
SPECTACULAR INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION  
**MONTE CARLO FOLLIES** FIRST TIME IN HULL  
CAST OF 50 ARTISTS include  
**SCOTT SANDERS**  
THE THEATRE AND SHOPS JACK THE BAKER  
**SHAMVAS STOCK**  
**DEZSO RETTER** POLLY DAY  
BEHIND PERFORMING **MULDOON**  
**PIGEONS** FOUR  
**40 BEAUTIFUL GIRLS**  
**COMICAL JOVERS**  
FRIDAY NIGHT IS CARNIVAL NIGHT



WILLIAMS & WRAY, 1918