Marie Lloyd (1870–1922) and Biographical Constructions of the Nineteenth-Century Female Superstar

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It has long been observed that histories of the music hall rarely have much to do with the music (both instrumental and vocal styles) performed in them.¹ Such histories are more concerned with economic, social, and cultural contexts of the institution than detailed studies of repertoire and performers. The reasons for these extramusical preoccupations of the historical record are many and varied, including a lack of information on repertoires and style, coupled with a paucity of primary sources, such as letters, diaries, and memoirs. At the same time, there is a lack of biographical writings on music-hall singers. Indeed, music-hall celebrities whose careers spanned the late nineteenth century, such as Little Tich (1867–1928), Albert Chevalier (1861–1923), and Florrie Forde (1875–1941) are but footnotes to history.² However, one music-hall star of the period, Marie Lloyd, has been the subject of not just one biography, but five biographies, and a bio-pic, though a study of the bio-pic falls outside the remit of this article.³


These five biographies of Lloyd are worthy of study because, like music-hall histories, they lack a detailed analysis of Lloyd’s voice. Instead, the biographical narratives concentrate on aspects of Lloyd’s acting and comedic abilities and what they represented for British culture. Lloyd’s vocal properties have never been scrutinized, despite a small number of recordings from which such studies could be made.

This article is in four parts. The first part provides a brief background to Lloyd’s life and career and very brief commentary about her career and musical and national significance by George Bernard Shaw, T. S. Eliot, and Neville Cardus. The second part documents the work of the book-length biographies of Lloyd that contextualize her as a heroine of Britain and as a key character in late-nineteenth-century music-hall culture. The third part of the article examines the shortcomings of these biographies and suggests a new way in which Lloyd’s career can be cast: as a coster-singer and disœuse; and the possibilities this new context provides for understanding the ways in which vocal styles traversed many sorts of theatrical genres, including opera. I then illustrate Lloyd’s persona as a disœuse, “a woman who is a skilled and usually professional reciter”; in this case, a performer of a monologue entitled “A Little of What You Fancy Does You Good.”

This analysis not only provides a more nuanced and contextualized account of Lloyd’s life, but it provides a musical narrative to her life that is missing in the biographies of her that are preoccupied with social history of music-hall culture and politics. In the fourth part of the article I explore the psychology of the disœuse and propose it was probably employed more widely in all sorts of theaters in late-nineteenth-century London than previously understood.

Marie Lloyd (1870–1922) was a vocal sensation. Born Matilda Wood, Lloyd was born in Hoxton, London in 1870. At the age of seven she began working in the music hall: one of her sisters, Alice, became a vaudeville star in America. Lloyd’s repertoire consisted of around 150 songs, and from 1897 through 1913 she toured South Africa, Europe, the United States, and Australia. Given the risqué nature of some of her songs—or, rather, her interpretation of them—she was required to audition for censorship committees, and on various occasions she was banned from music halls in Canada and Britain. She was also an advocate of the music-hall industry and played a major role in the music-hall strikes of 1907, which saw her, as John Major asserts, passed over in favor of other performers for Royal Command performances in 1912 and 1919. But Lloyd did not just sing the halls; in the 1890s she was employed by the impresario Augustus Harris to sing in pantomimes such as Red Riding Hood and Little Bo Peep. She also sang for troops in various London theaters during the First World War. Lloyd was married and divorced twice and the victim of domestic violence at the hands of both husbands. She died at the age of fifty-two. Despite earning up to $1,170 per week she squandered her fortune. Fifty thousand people lined the streets for her funeral cortège, and within days of her burial over 120,000 people visited her grave, such was the hold she had on music-hall patrons in London and beyond.

Dubbed “Queen of the Music Hall” and known affectionately as “Our Marie,” Lloyd

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was the preeminent music-hall star of her time (plates 1 and 2).\(^7\) She was renowned not only for her voice but also for her stage presence: her cheeky body language, her flirtatious wink, and her suggestive songs. Like many music-hall stars she had songs written especially for her and made particular songs her own. The song “My Old Man,” for instance, written by Fred W. Leigh and Charles Collins in 1919, became one of Lloyd’s signature tunes and Lloyd’s rendition of it was further immortalized after her death by other comedic singers such as Danny La Rue and Frank Oz’s Miss Piggy.\(^8\) Despite her fame, Lloyd’s presence is barely a footnote in the many histories (and general accounts) of British music hall.\(^9\) Her name is largely an absent one from

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\(^8\)See Danny La Rue’s performance at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1NHbs3gE4o and Miss Piggy’s at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkJkrsohzxbg (accessed 5 June 2019). For an actor’s interpretation of Marie Lloyd’s version, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW3TxQhy20 (accessed 5 June 2019). This last URL is from a DVD “Miss Marie Lloyd, Queen of the Music Hall,” Granada International Media 2007, MML 01 01. Copyright Hat Trick Productions.

any account of this extraordinary and multifaceted institution. However, Lloyd’s career, talent, and reputation have been recognized by some of the leading critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. George Bernard Shaw, writing in 1892, admired Lloyd’s acting ability, describing her as having “an exceptionally quick ear for both pitch and rhythm. Her intonation and lilt of her songs are alike perfect. Her step-dance is pretty; and her command of coster-girls patois is complete.” Shaw would later describe Lloyd as an “eminent English prima donna,” along with the other music-hall star Katie Lawrence (1868–1913). In 1934 T. S. Eliot wrote of Lloyd’s “genius” and her “hold on popular affection” and said that she, more than other music-hall singers before and since, had a “capacity for expressing the soul of the people.” Eliot went so far as to claim that her death was “a significant moment in English history,” as she was an icon of the working classes. For the music critic Neville Cardus (1888–1975), commenting on Lloyd in the 1970s, she had “expressed the lives of the people—the pub, the dance palace, and indeed every aspect of life—and it was all done with vitality and a common touch.”

Shaw, Cardus, and Eliot each describe Lloyd’s ability to act and dance and the connection she had cultivated with her audiences, but they are silent on her ability as a singer and do not seem to recognize her as a disease. For Eliot and Cardus at least, Lloyd is a figure of nostalgia.

Biographies of Lloyd: Saint, Heroine, Icon

The earliest biographies of Lloyd are ostensibly hagiographic. Naomi Jacob’s “Our Marie” (Marie Lloyd) was published in 1936. Jacob and Lloyd were friends, and the book is packed full of memories and anecdotes, and interviews with people Lloyd knew. Methodologically, Jacob’s book relies on the usual aspects of biography: archival research, testaments from others [drawing on letters and interviews], and memoir. But its form is a mixed bag of prose interspersed with dialogue giving the appearance of a novel in some parts of the book. This technique may not be so surprising since Jacob was a novelist, and although the transition from prose to dialogue is sometimes jarring, it attempts to capture Lloyd’s speech patterns and cockney accent. It is thus a rhetorical account—of sorts—that gives Lloyd’s voice a hearing. Yet, in other respects, the biography silences Lloyd’s life story. Jacob deliberately omitted details of Marie Lloyd’s finances, experiences of domestic violence, and her ill health. As Jacob writes, “I have purposely tried to avoid too much mention of those things which darkened the last years of her life.”

W. MacQueen-Pope wrote the second and equally hagiographical biography, Marie Lloyd, Queen of the Music Halls [1950]. At the outset, he wrote that his biography “is the story of an immortal. No class or stratum of society has the monopoly of those remarkable individuals [from the music hall],” and he went on to opine that Marie Lloyd was inadequately honored in Britain. MacQueen-Pope described Lloyd as having lived through a period characterized by “a virile surge of British life.” He further defined her as “sensational, supreme, magnetic, terrific, the idol of millions, the zenith of sex appeal, the sweetheart of the world.” MacQueen-Pope remarked further that Lloyd
was a “good Christian” but “not saintly.” He also referred to her as “essentially feminine” and “spotless”; and, although a Bohemian, he was very sure indeed Lloyd had “no casual love affairs” and was “not amoral.”

He further characterized Lloyd as an emblem not only of Britishness but of empire: “The little woman from Hoxton is immortal and likely to endure in memory as long as the English tongue survives. Today she is a legend, a tradition, and the British cling to such things. When they cease to do so, they will cease to be British. May that day be far away. . . . Her [Lloyd’s] radiance will shine down the centuries.”

The three remaining biographers of Lloyd were far more detached and critical of their subject than the biographies by Jacob and MacQueen-Pope. In Marie Lloyd and Music Hall, Daniel Farson was scathing of Jacob and MacQueen-Pope for their inaccuracies; he argued that in “trying to protect the woman they so admired, they did her a disservice. That in concealing the scandals and disasters of her life, they only diminished her.” Farson’s goal—like that of Jacob and MacQueen-Pope—was not to celebrate the tragedy of Lloyd but to celebrate her “triumph.”

His book gave rather more detail to Lloyd’s private life and misfortunes and was not nearly as coy as Jacob and MacQueen-Pope in confronting Lloyd’s lewd style: “Was Marie Lloyd offensive?—NO Was she dirty?—Probably Was she vulgar—Undeniably!” By the 1990s approaches to Marie Lloyd’s biography had radically changed. Richard Anthony Baker’s Queen of the Music Halls concentrated on writing Lloyd’s life in the context of the history of the music hall and was the first biography to list the lyrics of the song texts for which she was famous, as well as listing acts from some of her shows, thus providing a context for understanding the variety of music-hall character and performances.

The trappings of historical method and scholarship are especially evident in Midge Gillies’s Marie Lloyd: The One and Only (1999). The reviews of the book, listed on page 1, described it as “a fine piece of social history” as well as the “most comprehensive” Lloyd biography to date, yet it still cast Lloyd as an icon of the British music hall. Gillies’s book names all the libraries and archives she visited and newspapers consulted. Gillies’s book, like Baker’s, was in fact a social history of the music hall, though more detailed and wide-ranging than Baker’s biography. Still, Gillies wrote extensively of Lloyd’s overseas travel and performances and, like Baker, devoted some chapters to her troubles with moralists and the severe difficulties of her private life, notably her marriages. Gillies’s book, and, to a lesser extent, Baker’s biography, are accounts of Lloyd’s life and work on the international scene; they are not merely accounts of a local superstar in London, unlike Jacob’s biography. Gillies, in fact, wrote of Jacob’s narrow view and concluded that Naomi Jacob appeared “infatuated” by Lloyd, but Gillies found Baker’s biography “accurate and entertaining.”

COSTER-SINGER AND DISEUSE

John Major’s My Old Man: A Personal History of the Music Hall (2012) is part-memoir and part-history, which provides the best account to date for understanding the genre and styles of song that Lloyd sang. Though not a biography of anyone in particular—it is ostensibly a biography of music hall as an institution—Major devotes a chapter to Lloyd. She is the only music-hall star so privileged, though chapter 9 discusses Dan Leno and Little Tich. Major is the only one of her biographers who gets near to discussing Lloyd’s voice, and he does this by attempting to

20MacQueen-Pope, Marie Lloyd, 179.
21Ibid., 184.
22Ibid., 179.
23Ibid., 185.
24Farson, Marie Lloyd and Music Hall, 9.
25Ibid., 10.
26Ibid., 56.
27Quotations from The Oldie and Gay Times (unsigned and undated) on the back cover of Gillies’s book.
28Gillies, Marie Lloyd, 283–84.
establish her in the tradition of serio-comic singers; that is, singers who began their career as singers of sentimental songs or ballads or other similar repertoire but moved on to be essentially comedic singers. In the tradition, Major discusses Jenny Hill (1848–96), Bessie Bellwood (1856–96), Kate Carney (1869–1950), and Ada Lundberg (dates unknown). Major described them as “coster singers,” and this is the tradition to which Lloyd belonged. The songs they sang often reflected their personal experiences. But their personal experiences also overlapped, and not just in style of song. Jenny Hill’s songs, like some of those by Lloyd, were lewd and “scoffed at social conventions.” Jenny Hill, similarly, delighted in singing lewd song, was a feminist and over-worked, and died prematurely, just as Lloyd did. Bessie Bellwood was also a singer of coster songs and, like Lloyd, a philanthropist.

Through the style of repertoire they sang, and the common aspects of these coster-singers’ lives, Major, more than the other biographers, adequately places Lloyd’s style of singing—but it still seems short of conveying what her singing voice was like.

There is no critique in Major’s book, or indeed anywhere, of Lloyd’s disease persona. This style of singing was used widely in music-hall repertoire and was also a staple of French comic song. There is evidence of this style of singing in some early recordings, but it is practically lost in the bio-pic of Lloyd. One song in particular, “A Little of What You Fancy Does You Good,” is a fitting example of this mode of singing. But as a stage performer, acting, gesture, and props form part and parcel of the complete act.

The text of “A Little of What You Fancy Does You Good” (by Fred W. Leigh), made famous by Lloyd, is reproduced below, and a recording of it from 1915 can be found on YouTube.

I never was a one to go and stint myself
If I like a thing, I like it, that’s enough
But there’s lots of people say that if you like a thing a lot
It’ll grow on you and all that sort of stuff
Now I like my drop of stout as well as anyone
But a drop of stout’s supposed to make you fat
And there’s many a lar-di-dar-di madam doesn’t dare to touch it
’Cos she mustn’t spoil her figure silly cat.

I always hold in having it if you fancy it
If you fancy it, that’s understood
And suppose it makes you fat?
I don’t worry over that
A little of what you fancy does you good.

Now, once a year I like a little holiday
And we’ve always had one, my old man and me
But the last time that we had one he brings up a new idea
As we watched the ladies bathing in the sea
He said what a man requires is a change of everything
So he ought to take his holidays alone
Right away from everyday affairs, so I said “Very likely
Well if you prefer a fortnight on your own.”

I always hold in having it if you fancy it
If you fancy it, that’s understood
And suppose it makes you fat?
I don’t worry over that
A little of what you fancy does you good.

I had to catch a certain train the other day
And I very nearly lost it, I declare
But the guard said, “Jump in Missus” Then he shoved me in a first
And I found a nice young couple sitting there
I could see that honeymoon was stamped all over ’em
I felt sorry for the lady and the chap
So I said to them “Excuse me, but if you want to have a cuddle
Have a cuddle ’cos I’m going to have a nap.”

I always hold in having it if you fancy it
If you fancy it, that’s understood
And suppose it makes you fat?
I don’t worry over that
A little of what you fancy does you good.

29Major, My Old Man, 102. For an analysis of some representative coster songs, see Derek B. Scott, “The Music-Hall Cockney,” 237–58.
30Miss Marie Lloyd, Queen of the Music Hall,” Granada International Media 2007, MML 01 01. Copyright Hat Trick Productions.
A little of what you fancy
does you good

Written and Composed by FRED W. LEIGH and GEORGE ARTHURS

grow on you, and all that sort of stuff! Now, I like my drop of
watch’d the la-dies bath-ing in the sea, He said what a man re-
found a nice young cou-ple sit-ting there. I could see that 'hon-
ey-
stout as well as an-y-one, But a drop of stout’s sup-posed to make you
quired was change of ev’ry-thing, So he ought to take his hol-i-days a-
moon" was stamp’d all o-ver ‘em. I felt sor-ry for the la-dy and the
fat, And there’s ma-ny a lar-di-dar-di ma-dam does’n’t dare to
-lone, Right a-way from ev’ry-day af-fairs. So I said "Ve-ry
chap, So I said to ‘em ‘Ex-cuse me, if you want to have a
touch it, ‘Cos she must’n’t spoil her fig-ure, sil-ly cat!
like-ly! Well, if you pre-fer a fort-night on your own,
cud-dle, Have a cud-dle,'cos I’m going to have a nap!
"I al-ways hold in hav-ing it if you fan-cy it, If you
I al-ways hold in hav-ing it if you fan-cy it, If you
I al-ways hold in hav-ing it if you fan-cy it, If you

Plate 3: (continued).
The first-person narrative is not unusual in coster songs—or, indeed many songs written for serio-comediennes—but what is the style in which the song is written? The sheet music (plate 3) prints a vocal line and piano accompaniment that would suggest that the song is sung, but it is doubtful if this song is easily singable, especially with such a close accompaniment. The 1915 recording suggests that the song is not sung per se but is spoken or largely spoken. It could also be described as a technique of “speaking through music”—as Michael V. Pisani has identified in his work on Victorian music hall in nineteenth-century London and New York.32

PSYCHOLOGY OF DISEUSE IN THE THEATER

John Major has argued that the recordings made by Lloyd do not fully capture her vocal dexterity because by the time they were made her voice was tired and over-worked through decades of singing over noisy (and no doubt smoke-filled) rooms and halls. He also suggests that the ad-libs are lost.\textsuperscript{33} This recording, however, does illustrate some ad-libbing (if the song’s texts are compared to the printed lyrics) and her \textit{diseuse} style is unmistakable and remarkable. Still, Major argues that even with recordings the aesthetic of Lloyd in live performance cannot be captured. This then lends the question: what kind of aesthetic was Lloyd seeking to achieve, not only in this particular song, but also in the music halls in which she sang? The answer to this question can be found in accounts of the aesthetic in the theater, with examples taken from both opera houses and music halls. In the context of opera, Michal Grover-Friedlander provides an apposite summary of the theatrical aesthetic:

The operatic voice fascinates. It is hyper-real and irrational. The listener is submerged within its effect. It is seductive and irresistible, and engenders states of ecstatic listening, passionate identification, introjection, the play of fantasy, and secret yearning. It elicits physical, bodily, erotic responses; it is a desired voice, worshipped and fetishized; and it has special forms of obsession, cult, fandom and camp. . . . Such singing is transcendent and transformative.\textsuperscript{34}

This aesthetic, I argue, also extends to the music-hall psychology of Lloyd’s era; indeed, in one of the earliest accounts of music-hall history this seemingly all-embracing aesthetic—the transformation of the listener—is highlighted as one of the ingredients of theater performance at large. In late-nineteenth-century London, performative and stylistic conventions overlapped between all manner of theaters—high brow and low brow, to borrow contentious terms—as seen in the career of one of Lloyd’s contemporaries, Albert Chevalier, whose working week traversed “serious plays, farce, pantomime, sketches, recitals, comic opera and burlesque.”\textsuperscript{35} Another contemporary, Gus Ellen, came to the music hall via London’s Opera Comique.\textsuperscript{36} Cross-pollination of singing styles was inevitable, no matter how slight or altered. If there was a unique psychology to music hall, it was provided in the book \textit{Music-Hall Land: An Account of the Natives, Male and Female, Pastimes, Songs, Antics, and General Oddities of that Strange Country} written by Percy Fitzgerald and published in London in 1890.\textsuperscript{37} As the latter part of the title suggests—“That Strange Country”—the music hall as institution and Utopian experience stood outside the realm of the everyday. As Fitzgerald explained:

In the music-hall country there is a natural simplicity, or candor, which contrasts with the artificial restraint of delicacy found in other professions. To say of yourself in the law or on the stage that you are “the cleverest person alive,” that you excel every one in your personal gifts, that everyone is enraptured with you, would be thought indecorous. . . . But in this Utopian kingdom [of music-hall] every one is allowed to praise himself—particularly herself—as extravagantly as he pleases. . . . This odd inversion is found only in music-hall country.\textsuperscript{38}

The subjectivity of the music hall as described by Fitzgerald might also be claimed for other kinds of theaters: transcendence through art, of course, can affect individuals and audiences differently. But what of the \textit{diseuse}? It is strongly suggested by Fitzgerald in the following description from \textit{Music-Hall Land}:

It may be noted as an extraordinary phenomenon, what strange, extra-human tones—note that cannot be called—or uttered, a sort of half-speech, in which the form of the tune is followed, but not the tune itself. The result is a sort of horny, nasal gamut—very peculiar, and indeed \textit{sui generis}. This art, for art it is, is actually taught in “the schools,” and is considered to give a point to the utterances. The promenading between the verses, the opening and

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33}John Major, \textit{My Old Man}, 126.
\item \textsuperscript{35}Norris, \textit{A Cockney at Work}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{37}Percy Fitzgerald, \textit{Music-Hall Land: An Account of the Natives, Male and Female, Pastimes, Songs, Antics, and General Oddities of that Strange Country} [London: Ward and Downey, 1890].
\item \textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 61.
\end{itemize}
shutting the opera hat at the psychological moment, these and other matters are all carefully rehearsed, and are a matter of regular training.\(^{39}\)

Fitzgerald is undoubtedly describing the psychological and rhetorical effects of *disjuncture* though he does not use the word. We are left wondering if this style of singing was in use in other theaters, and in what different or nuanced ways.

The extracts cited above from observations and scholarship on music hall refer to a transportation of the audience above the experiences of the everyday, to which many writers allude in their writing of the aesthetics of the stage, whether music hall or opera. John Major describes this aesthetic more concretely: he regards the music hall act, especially song, as an expression of life, stating that songs of the music hall were “about life as it was for the vast amount of the audience,” though often these sentiments were greatly exaggerated for comic effect.\(^{40}\) Peter Bailey has articulated this relationship between singer and audience in a more nuanced way, describing the music-hall song as a “naturalistic mode” and “comic realism” that gave rise to a “culture of consultation” or realist empathy exchanged between performer and audience.\(^ {41}\)

A lack of consideration of Lloyd’s vocal style on the part of her biographers might be a curious omission for scholarship today, but as Karen Henson has pointed out in opera, this omission could be explained by a lack of recordings and so the interest has been laid on “textual expression, acting, and physicality,” or what Henson defines as physiognomy, which can at times focus more on a singer’s body than her voice.\(^ {42}\) Mary Ann Smart concurs with her observation that in opera at the end of the nineteenth century “the body was blatantly exhibited and eroticized for the delection of viewers” though Smart observes also that it is difficult to trace any kind of clear development of the use of the female body on stage over time.\(^ {43}\) This physiognomy and indeed eroticization or fetishization is at the forefront of the remarks by the three critics whose appraisals of Lloyd were made at the beginning of the article. It is evident that Cardus, Eliot, and Shaw, who had heard Marie Lloyd and would have had the capacity to describe in detail the singing quality of her voice, left this description blank, offering instead an appraisal of her body and theatricality, as more carefully articulated by Percy Fitzgerald. It is clear that such aesthetic responses were common in various theater forms, not just in opera.

**Voicing Lloyd’s Biography**

Marie Lloyd has been feted and fanfared in many accounts of criticism, history, and biography, but accounts of her singing voice—its quality, style, and aesthetic—are still wanting. The fulsome praises of her artistry are settled on her acting—her gesture, body, and stagecraft—but rarely on her voice. As we saw above, Karen Henson and Mary Ann Smart have outlined in a compelling way that the voice in and of itself at the end of the nineteenth century was sometimes not of primary concern to many audiences. But what I argue is the most significant musicological point missed in these biographies is the observation that the music-hall vocal act was not merely confined to songs with catchy tunes. The *disjuncture* brought a different style to the stage. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss have written of the ways in which the opera diva is real, idealized, and fictionalized—and this is also true of music-hall singers, such as Marie Lloyd, as this article has illustrated.\(^ {44}\) It has shown the ways in which very brief eye- and ear-witness accounts can in fact tell us more about a singer’s voice than writers of biographies of many hundreds of pages. Musically, however, this article illustrates that the near-silence on reference to Lloyd’s voice by any writer appears to be a result

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 17.


\(^{44}\)Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, “Introduction,” *Arts of the Prima Donna*, xxvii.
of an emphasis on documenting the theatricality of her stage presence over the uniqueness of her voice, which may simply be for the reason that the biographers lacked the expertise to analyze it. With recordings now easily available, it is possible to hear Lloyd’s singing voice, and it has shown us that despite what has been said and written about her, Lloyd’s voice was versatile and she was a dexterous singer. It also provides us with evidence that a style of singing, once thought to be the preserve of opera, was in fact a style sung in various theaters in England and France.

These connections surely suggest that our very notions of what constitutes operatic style and, indeed, who makes the cut to be called a “diva” deserve further biographical—and musicological—consideration. In the case of Lloyd, the biographers have sold their subject as a representation of Britishness or womanhood, for example, but the time has come to give voice not only to her place in music-hall history and politics (in the same vein of music-hall histories at large), but to the way that her dexterous, multifaceted, and versatile voice functioned and the various theatrical platforms in which the diseuse traversed in Britain and France.

**Abstract.**

Marie Lloyd (1870–1922) was a vocal superstar of the late nineteenth century. With tens of thousands of ardent followers in Britain and America—and an income that eclipsed even what Adele Patti and Nellie Melba earned—Lloyd was a vocal sensation. Biographers of the prima donna, the female vocal celebrity, are often quick to turn their subjects into heroines through the conferment of appellations such as “The Swedish Nightingale” (for Jenny Lind), “The Queen of Song” (Adelina Patti), and “The Voice of Australia,” in the case of Nellie Melba. Marie Lloyd was also bestowed a heroic title, but in an entirely different milieu: “Queen of the Music Hall.” This article probes the varied reasons—and ambiguities—of this appellation in biographical constructions of Lloyd, especially in relation to the dexterity of her voice that was arguably more varied in its scope than most of her operatic peers. Lloyd’s biographers provide disembodied narratives of her career and achievements, since they have virtually nothing to say about the extraordinary range and versatility of her voice. With the aid of historic recordings it is possible to finally make an estimate of Lloyd’s technique, and the results are surprising: she was no mere music-hall singer. Lloyd’s voice and acting encompassed techniques ranging from eighteenth-century melodrama to nineteenth-century diseuse, allowing for an alternative reading of Lloyd’s reputation as Queen of the Music Hall and the varied range of singing found in this institution.