



## British Theatres and Music Halls

By John Earl

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This book outlines the history of theatres and music halls from the late sixteenth century to the present time, noting changing fashions in entertainment and evolving official attitudes to safety that have, at various times, influenced the architectural character of the buildings. Particular attention is given to the thirty-five years before the First World War, when music hall and variety entertainment developed rapidly, accompanied by a massive surge in theatre building. The account is enlivened with illustrations of theatres, their architects and their audiences. Music hall and variety, popular entertainment that features successive acts starring singers, comedians, dancers, and actors and sometimes jugglers, acrobats, and magicians. Derived from the taproom concerts given in city taverns in England during the 18th and 19th centuries, music hall entertainment was eventually confined to a stage, with the audience seated at tables; liquor sales paid the expenses. London theatres, such as the Hippodrome, displayed aquatic dramas, and the Coliseum presented reenactments of the Derby and chariot races of ancient Rome. These were short-lived, but other ambitious plans kept variety prosperous after the real music hall had been killed by the competition of the cinema. The American equivalent of the British music hall is vaudeville. British taverns had provided musical entertainment since medieval times, and outdoor musical "pleasure gardens" flourished in the 1700s. The early 1800s brought "saloons" offering variety acts and booze, with some going so far as to add theatres to their original structures. When the Theatre Act of 1843 declared that such establishments would only be licensed if run as theatres, the first music halls appeared in suburban London. Although the stress was on entertainment, alcohol flowed, to the delight of customers and the ongoing profit of proprietors. As Great Britain'