“We Sell Them Accumulated Knowledge, Mr. Goodman”: The Informational Economy of Vaudeville and the Business Structure of Mass Entertainment.

It was a fair day in March of 1919, with spring just beginning to break, when Edward M. Fay walked into New York’s Post Office Building to testify before the Federal Trade Commission.¹ As he entering the still-new structure, its gleaming marble columns a magnificent symbol of the progressive power of the rapidly growing city, Fay may have wondered about the day’s events, weighing the challenges before him. Party to an investigation against some of the most powerful men in show business, Fay likely worried about what repercussions his testimony, now in its second day, might hold. The syndicate owners had already tried to cut him out of Vaudeville, using their control over booking in an attempt to bring down his new theater in Providence.² He had fought back, and was surviving so far, but he knew what they were capable of.³

¹ New York Times, March 26th and 27th, 1919.
² Edward Fay Testimony, Page 633, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128, Docketed Case Files 1915-43, RG 122, Records of the Federal Trade Commission, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
³ Fay was well aware of the actions that the syndicate had taken against the White Rats, the Vaudeville union which had been crushed in the late 1910s. The fact that many of the principle acts that had participated in the union were still blacklisted (and thus available for hire) was one of the reasons why his theater could survive against Syndicate. For more on the history of the White Rats, and of the Vaudeville Syndicates extensive efforts to blacklist their leaders, see Kerry Segrave, Actors Organize: A History of Union Formation Efforts in America, 1880-1919,(London: Mcfarland and Company, 2008.), also Sean P. Holmes, Weavers of Dreams Unite!:Actors’ Unionism in Early Twentieth-Century America, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013). Edward Fay Testimony, page 660, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
In his mid 40s, with a shock of dark hair and circular glasses perched tightly on his nose, Fay had spent years in the United States’ burgeoning entertainment industry, first as a violinist and band-leader, and then directing his own orchestra. A few years ago, he had made the plunge, and opened his first theater. Already he had three—one in Rochester, one in Philadelphia, and one in Providence. Taking the stand in front of the commission at eleven in the morning, he answered question after question about the inner workings of his business. How he booked acts, and through whom. How much he paid them, and whether he had to pay them more because of the threat of the theatrical blacklist which applied to any performer playing a so-called “opposition” house. Where he bought his scenery, and how much he had, and whether he transported it along with the performers. As he answered the questions, Fay dug deep into the skill-set of a turn-of-the-century manager, trying to bring into words his finely-tuned sense of how his industry operated. He had learned its ways over many years, as he occupied the different roles of his working life, and when he answered, he called on all of them. As the testimony rolled on, it became clear that it was this hard-won understanding, more than any particular set of skills, that had allowed him to thrive.

“Maurice Goodman (General Counsel for the Defendants): ‘What would you say your business was. Do you sell?’

Fay: ‘What do I sell?’

Goodman: ‘Yes.’

Fay: ‘That is a rather broad question.’

---

5 Edward Fay Testimony, 760, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
6 Edward Fay Testimony, 662, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
Goodman: ‘I know it is. You get certain moneys from the public that comes to your theater. What do you sell them? What do you give them for their money?…Do you sell them entertainment or sell them theatrical properties?’

Fay: ‘We sell them accumulated knowledge, Mr. Goodman.’

While dramatic critics might pin theatrical success on the talent of actors, or on the public’s attraction for a well-told story or enticingly staged spectacle, those who worked behind the footlights knew that in the aggregate, success relied on “definite and concise information.”

For performers setting out to tour the country for months on end, the difference between survival and failure often came down to an innumerable set of small-bore decisions—which of three seemingly identical railroad towns to play in Kansas, for instance, or whether or not to hire a bill-poster for a show in Peoria. Having such information could, according to Gus Hill, publisher of a widely-used theater directory, enable “theatrical men in every branch of the profession” to “transact their business with a greater degree of intelligence…thereby minimizing the risk and loss.”

By the time of the Federal Trade Commission hearings in 1919, when the owners of Vaudeville’s leading circuits were investigated for restraint of trade and monopolistic tendencies, the utility of theatrical information had long since evolved into an industry-shaping force.

---

7 Edward Fay Testimony, 801, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
9 The answer to this latter question is no. J.B. Barnes, the manager of the Grand Opera House, handled billing for acts booked to his theater. Harry Miner, Harry Miner’s American Dramatic Directory For the Season of 1884-1885, (New York: Wolf and Palmer Dramatic Publishing Company, 1884), 118.
10 Hill, Gus Hill’s National Theatrical Directory, 3.
11 For the story of the Federal Trade Commission suit, see Arthur Frank Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Controlled the Big-Time and its Performers, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 233-236. For more on the precise accusations, see Pages 1-3, Box 71, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
men who have become wealthy and powerful,” noted Marcus Grau, the era’s foremost chronicler of the popular stage, “and are in control of the balance of power in the dramatic and Vaudeville portions of the general amusement scheme, have reached their position, far less through any great effort as managers and producers, than by their foresight and ingenuity in creating efficient methods for the ‘booking’ of theaters and attractions.” Ensconced in office buildings, and surrounded by their staff, the heads of the principle Vaudeville syndicates ushered tens of thousands of performers across almost a thousand stages to an audience of millions. It was perhaps the largest entertainment system the world had ever seen, held together by railroad and telegraph, and ordered by punch-card, form, and filing cabinet.

The key to this system was the development of a new type of booking agency. Hubs of information creation and exchange organized around up-to-date principles of corporate management, these agencies worked to regularize the circuit’s previously scattered operations, bringing together managers, booking agents, and artists’ representatives in a set of offices where connections could be made, contracts signed, and routes laid out.

---

12 Exhibit 77, Box 73, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Exhibit 4, Box 73, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
13 It is difficult to overstate how extensive Vaudeville was. At its popular height in the 1920s, the combined Keith-Albee and Orpheum syndicates booked over 15,000 performers on roughly 1000 stages across the country, performing for more than 2 million patrons a day. As an admittedly loose point of comparison, as of 2017, the American movie industry sells roughly 3.4 million tickets, while the population size has roughly tripled in the intervening years. Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, xvii. New York Times, January 27, 1928, Page 14. Current theater statistics http://www.natoonline.org/data/admissions/ accessed March 26th, 2018
14 Timothy D Connors, American Vaudeville Managers: Their Influence and Organization, (PhD Diss, University of Kansas, 1981).
15 In addition to the actual agencies themselves, the major theatrical office buildings also held a wide variety of ancillary businesses, including songwriters, arrangers, artists’ agents, and more. Harry F. Weber Jr Testimony, 1105, Box 72, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Marlis Schweitzer discusses the importance of new office technology to theatrical management in Transatlantic Broadway: The Infrastructural Politics of
storing data about performers and audiences alike, the agencies allowed Vaudeville syndicates to offer entertainment to more people for less money, carefully segmenting performers by popularity and price, and delivering theaters across the country with precisely the quality of show that they could afford.\textsuperscript{16}

Ostensibly a means of distributing performers while ensuring quality and respectability, and tactically a means of depressing salary and reducing competition, the actual operations of the Vaudeville’s booking system made it far more than that.\textsuperscript{17} Built to register and collate the opinions of audiences and managers, it mediated a back-and-forth conversation between centralized authority and local tastes.\textsuperscript{18} Demanding legibility from the performers in order to quickly and easily sort them into successful bills, it helped create new categories of entertainment by simultaneously requiring similarity and uniqueness.\textsuperscript{19} Performed in theaters


\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of the (East coast) reasons for creating the booking agencies, see Wertheim, \textit{Vaudeville Wars}, 95-100. In the larger spaces of the Midwest and west coast, issues surrounding transportation created an added incentive for system building from an early period. “Vaudeville Trust a reality,” San Francisco Chronicle (San Francisco, San Francisco, California) · 29 Jul 1897, Thu · Page 11

\textsuperscript{18} Robert. W. Snyder, \textit{Voice of the City}, XV.

legendary for their intimacy, Vaudeville offered its audiences a direct relation to mass-produced entertainment.\textsuperscript{20} By making all of this possible, Vaudeville’s informational economy created a uniquely influential cultural form, shaping the tastes, preferences, and preconceptions of a generation of Americans during the commercial and corporate transitions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{flushright}
1914 Year Book of the Western Vaudeville Manager’s Association (Ts 10.23.6.2, Houghton Library, Harvard University)
\end{flushright}


Existing scholarship has long pointed to the importance of centralized booking in the
evolution of Vaudeville from a set of scattered theaters into a fully-fledged “corporate
entertainment industry.” In particular, the machine-like precision with which the syndicates
created bills has been understood as contributing to the development of a unique “Vaudeville
aesthetic,” capable of dispensing with plot and logic in favor of force, speed, and laughter—a
style of modernist performance perfectly fitted for America as it entered the 20th century. However despite this acknowledgment, relatively little work has explicitly investigated the
activities of these agencies in and of themselves. Researching a media-savvy business dominated
by a set of monopolistic managers, historians have all too often taken the Vaudeville magnates at
their word, accepting the premise that they were both able and willing to exert systemic control
over all (or at least most) aspects of their industry. This is true both in work that focuses on the
business struggles of top managers like B.F. Keith and Martin Beck, as well as in research that
deals with the more subtle forms of coercion and resistance that took place on stage, as women
and African-American performers utilized the flexibility of the commercial arena to question the
roles into which they were typically forced. While writing that deals primarily with either

---

a more business focused dimension of this process, see Alfred Chandler, The Visible
connects with these processes has been influenced by David Gilbert, The Product of Our
Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace, (The
University of North Carolina Press, 2016) and David Suisman, Selling Sounds: The

22 Snyder, Voice of the City, 105, 35. Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 151-169.
Vaudeville as Ritual, (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 1-15. For a
broader take on the changing nature of experience in this period, see Stephen Kern, The
24 For example, Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars. M. Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender
and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville, (Chapel Hill: University of Chapel Hill
owners or performers has been highly productive in its own right, an investigation more fully focused on the functioning and organization of the system as a whole offers a number of insights capable of enriching existing scholarship. Indeed the few works that have avoided the dyad of power and resistance have been able to raise a number of provocative questions about the connections between management, performance, and the broader implications of commoditized culture in 20th century American life. By explicitly examining the informational economy through which Vaudeville was organized, it is possible to gain a new understanding of why—and how—the form exerted such a massive influence on entertainment culture in the United States.

Originally known as Variety, Vaudeville first gained popularity as a form of amusement in the middle of the 19th century. Initially associated with male crowds content to consume alcohol and flirt with waitresses, the genre was gradually recast in the 1870s and ‘80s by a set of entrepreneurs who saw the commercial possibility of more family-friendly fare. Appealing to middle- and working- class audiences increasingly open to respectable theatrical entertainments, managers like Boston’s B.F. Keith and Manhattan’s Tony Pastor found success through a


mixture of European-flavored refinement, quick-paced novelty, and enjoyable nonsense cheaper than the competition offered by the “legitimate theater.”

Over time, owners like Keith began to grow their operations, opening small strings of theaters, and touring acts between them. By the last years of the 19th century, a generation of rising managers had begun to fuse these circuits together, combining individually-owned chains into region-spanning systems centered around booking agencies. In 1897, the Chicago-based circuits controlled by John. D. Hopkins and George Castle combined their forces “for the mutual benefit of performers and managers,” forming the Western Circuit of Vaudeville Theaters, an organization that included properties in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and St. Louis. Within the year, the organization had formed an alliance with the powerful Pacific-coast Orpheum circuit, as well as a number of other Midwestern chains. In 1900, the western circuit connected with a newly developed combine of prominent eastern Vaudeville houses. After years of outright economic warfare, the most important of the eastern managers had come together under the leadership of B.F. Keith and Edward Albee, forming a centralized operation akin to the Chicago Vaudeville Agency. Agreeing to cooperate with routes and bookings, the eastern and western managers joined together as the Association of Vaudeville Managers, a single agency designed to dominate Vaudeville at a national scale. Despite its economic promise, the Association was not able to survive its internal tensions, and in 1904, months before the end

---

28 The importance of this European element is notable throughout the history of Vaudeville and variety, and includes an interest in both “high” cultural performance such as opera, and the more diffuse meaning of physical performance such as acrobats or jugglers. For more on this, see Gevinson, *The Origins of Vaudeville*.


32 Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 103-105.
of its initial 5-year agreement, the eastern and western groups once again split into distinct, semi-competitive organizations.33

The growth of these circuits allowed managers to offer performers long consecutive runs, while enabling increased managerial control over the behavior and salary of the artists being booked.34 Expanding beyond the theaters directly owned by the syndicates, these booking organizations began to form relationships with a wide swathe of formerly independent operators, bringing them into direct connection with the Vaudeville mainstream.35 By the end of first decade of the 20th century, the two successor organizations to the original Vaudeville Managers’ Association—the Western Vaudeville Manager’s Association [WVMA] in Chicago, and the United Booking Agency [UBO] in New York—reigned as the central powers of Vaudeville, able to exert tremendous influence through their simultaneous hold over artists (who needed the agencies to get bookings) and theaters (who needed them to obtain artists).36

33 Along with these developments, this period also saw numerous reports of the (potential) creation of other large-scale syndicates, including numerous articles suggesting the imminent creation of a Vaudeville/legitimate syndicate. These never came to fruition, and it has not yet been possible to ascertain whether they were truly being considered. Chicago Tribune (Chicago, Cook, Illinois, United States of America) · 28 Mar 1905, Tue · Page 15. “Greater Theatrical Trust,” The Washington Post (Washington, District of Columbia) · 12 Nov 1906, Mon · Page 3. Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 117-123.
36 M. Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender and Hierarchy in American Vaudeville, 17.
Unlike competitors in the circus, minstrel shows, or the “legitimate stage,” every Vaudeville performance consisted of a series of 8-10 unrelated acts, each of which could include anything from dancing or singing to more unusual fare like a Hebrew-Juggler-Magician or human chicken impersonators. Every act toured individually, with bills lasting only a week (and sometimes less) before its members went their separate ways. Not only did performers have to be successfully routed to theaters located throughout the country, but each bill had to be balanced and organized, gradually increasing in quality and excitement before climaxing in satisfying headliner. Bills were assembled by the booking agents who worked at the syndicate’s

37 “Kope The Komedy Klub Konjuror” Box 2, Folder 50, Emerson Vaudeville Collection, New York Public Library, New York, New York
38 The smallest Vaudeville houses, however, were often booked as so-called “cut weeks,” in which performers would spend 3 nights at one house, and 3 nights at another. This is likely because these small houses attracted such a limited audience that longer runs would begin to bring in significantly reduced profits. Pat Casey Testimony, 73, Box 72, Docketed Case Files 1915-43, RG 122, Records of the Federal Trade Commission, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
central offices, and then fine-tuned by local managers. Repetition (too many singers, for instance, or more than one acrobat), an unwise ordering, or a bad act could doom a theater’s business for the week.\(^{40}\)

The venues in which these performances took place were ordered around a hierarchy of class and quality.\(^{41}\) At the top were the “big time” theaters, most of which were owned by the Orpheum and Keith circuits that dominated (respectively) the western and eastern Vaudeville syndicates. Luxurious, palatial structures that often served as the anchors for the entertainment districts in which they were constructed, these theaters offered audiences top-notch bills twice a day for (relatively) high prices.\(^{42}\) The acts that played the big time were the cream of Vaudeville—combined salaries typically ran into the thousands of dollars, and the top earners on the circuit could be paid upwards of three thousand for a week’s work.\(^{43}\) Below this were the far more numerous “small time” theaters, in which tickets cost ten or twenty cents. Performers playing the small time were paid far less (typically in the hundreds), and were expected to do three to five shows a day. Underneath the “small time” stretched innumerable gradations of increasingly cheap and (ill-reputed) houses, reaching from the rough western march of the Ackerman and Harris “Death Circuit” all the way down to tiny storefront establishments offering 10-12 shows a day at 45 minute intervals.\(^{44}\)

\(^{40}\) Brett Page, Writing for Vaudeville, (Home Correspondence School: 1915).
\(^{41}\) “Audiences may have been sitting in Bushwick, but their eyes were on Times Square.” Snyder, Voice of the City, 125.
\(^{42}\) While still cheaper than the “Legitimate” theater, the cheapest ticket in a “Big-Time” Vaudeville house could be as much as a dollar. This is compared to a ten or twenty cent ticket at a second or third rate house. Pat Casey Testimony, 73-74, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
\(^{43}\) Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 171.
\(^{44}\) So called because, “The jumps were terrific and the acts had to play three days and lose the rest of the week to make the next jump. They would owe themselves money when they finished the tour.” Joe Laurie Jr. Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the
Regardless of whether an artist worked through the Eastern (UBO) or Western (WVMA) organizations, the process of booking was essentially the same. Unless they were either foolish or particularly lucky, performers would first obtain the service of an agent. While it was possible to directly contact either theaters or their booking representatives, the chances for success were slim.45 Artists constantly crowded the exterior waiting rooms of the booking agencies, desperately passing their cards to the office boys who worked at the front desk, begging for time to make their case with a manager or representative.46 Agents, armed with long-standing industry connections and close personal relationships with booking managers, were a far surer path to success, and represented a significant majority of all acts employed by the principle Vaudeville circuits.47

Both agents and the booking agencies were paid by commission. Although the fee that an employment agency could legally receive was set by New York state law at a maximum of 5% of an artist’s salary, legal technicalities allowed artists to pay far more. The booking agencies themselves charged artists 5% of their salary for their services in finding them theaters in which to play. Agents, who claimed that they did not directly procure employment, but rather represented artists to those who did (namely, the theaters), typically charged another 5%, and sometimes higher. In essence, performers paid 10% or more of their salaries back to the

45 While existing booking correspondence suggests that it was possible to fill in a few weeks of open time by direct contact, it seems that longer runs were almost impossible without going through the booking agencies.
46 A similar system was also in place between the agents and their clients. Daniel Hennessey, 984-985, 1032, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
47 Wertheim states that between 1914 and 1918, nearly 72 percent of the artists who worked through the UBO were represented by Agents. Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 158.
companies for which they worked. As a bemused lawyer for the Federal Trade Commission explained, “the employee employs the employer to get the employer to employ the employee.”

In the major booking agencies, a select group of artists’ representatives (or rather, the small companies which they headed) were given so-called “franchises,” or “privileges of the floor,” which allowed them to do business on the central “booking floor” of the office as they pleased. These chosen agencies retained this privilege—as well as other financial benefits—at the pleasure of the syndicates, which could revoke them at any time. For agents, a franchise was a valuable commodity, allowing entree into the center of the Vaudeville industry. It was nearly impossible to consistently book acts through the “big-time” theaters without them, and up-and-coming agents would go to significant lengths in order obtain the kind of access they provided.

In the case of Harry F. Weber, a Vaudeville agent originally booking small-time acts out of Chicago, it was well worth moving to New York and fusing his business with the booking operation of Reed Albee, the son of UBO Executive Edward Albee, in order to gain access to the latter’s franchise. “I got too good for Chicago,” Weber told the Federal Trade Commission, “my attractions were too good, and I could not get rid of them on the small western time.” Booking agents were segregated by the size of the houses they worked with—without the “big-time” franchise, Weber would have remained stuck working with a lower paygrade of performers, limiting his own financial position. After partnering with Albee, Weber was able to place his

48 Pat Casey Testimony, 182, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
49 Pat Casey Testimony, 88-89, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 158.
50 Ibid.
51 Harry Weber Testimony, 1067, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
52 Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 914, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
“already-developed” acts in top theaters, allowing him to attract better clients, and further expanding his operations. Franchised agents also benefited in other ways from their position. For example, when the U.B.O. set up the Vaudeville Collection Agency, which charged agents 50% of their commission for the “service” of collecting the fees owed by artists and delivering them to their offices, favored agents were not charged. In his testimony to the Federal Trade Commission, Pat Casey, the head of a major agency, and later the manager of the Vaudeville Manager’s Protective Association, an anti-union trade group, claimed that this special treatment was due to the fact that he “handle[d] a grade of goods that are necessary for their theaters.”

Arranged “like a bank,” the booking floor itself was made up of a series of desks or small rooms, each manned by a representative of a theater or circuit, whose job was to put together diverse, balanced bills for the houses that they represented. Like the artists, each of these theaters paid for the right to be associated with the booking office. While in the early days, it seems that many managers either came in themselves or sent a direct representative, over time, the professional staff of the booking agency took over much of this work. Clerical workers, female with the sole exception of the “office boys,” were expected to be in by 9:00, while the

---

53 Indeed, Weber did so well that he eventually bought out Albee altogether. Harry F. Weber Testimony, 1070, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
54 This meant that the booking agencies, in effect, were paid 7.5 percent of the salary of each and every performer who worked in their system. Timothy D. Connors, American Vaudeville Managers: Their Organization and Influence, 116.
55 Pat Casey Testimony, 72, 95, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
56 Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 523, 1392, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
57 These theaters were charged a weekly fee that varied depending on their individual agreement with/association with the powers behind the booking agency. Henry Walden Testimony, 832, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
58 For certain small circuits or prominent stand-alone theaters, this appears to have remained true throughout the Vaudeville period. Samuel K Hodgdon Testimony, 520, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
booking representatives were reachable by 9:30.\textsuperscript{59} Throughout the day, the office was a buzz of information—actors and agents lined up along the grillwork that ran around the floor, attempting to connect with the managers inside, while representatives with franchises came down from their offices on the upper-floors of the building and walked directly to the managers they wanted to negotiate with.\textsuperscript{60} Meanwhile, the representatives of the various theaters kept up their own conversations—they “visited each other at their desks,” trading information, and working to pull together the acts they needed for their bills.\textsuperscript{61}

![Diagram demonstrating the basic layout of the booking system.]

Skilled white collar workers, the booking agents for the associations were each responsible for a set territory, typically encompassing somewhere between 5-10 theaters.\textsuperscript{62} They

\textsuperscript{59} Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 523, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.  
\textsuperscript{60} Wertheim, \textit{Vaudeville Wars}, 158-161.  
\textsuperscript{61}Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony,523, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.  
\textsuperscript{62}Particularly important theaters could have their own booking representative. For instance, Eddie Darling, one of the top Keith executives, exclusively booked the Palace theater, which was the chain’s flagship.
were supported by a staff of lower-level bookers who would handle correspondence and deal with individual theaters. Working alongside these syndicate employees were booking agents from the association’s constituent circuits, chains like Butterfield or Allardt in the west, and Shea and Poli in the East. Rather than booking on the general floor, these chains typically had their own private offices, as well as their own subsidiary division of booking labors. While on occasion, these individual units took independent action, for the most part, they simply operated as another subsidiary of the broader syndicate.

Through all of this, ownership was—seemingly intentionally—blurred. Keith and his right hand man Edward Albee owned a controlling stake in the UBO, which meant that they not only had a direct interest in the supposedly neutral marketplace through which they booked their theaters, but also had at least partial control over the activity of the ostensible competitors who also relied on the office. Likewise the artists’ agents, who supposedly represented the interests of their clients, were only able to work as a result of their franchises, and were thus also dependent on the approval of the principle managers. This conflict of influence was widely criticized at the time. “We understand generally,” complained the actor and union organizer Edward Clarke, “that a man representing an actor is the actor’s representative only inasmuch as

---

63 Samuel K Hodgdon Testimony, 520, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
64 Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 522, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
65 For example, Katheryn Oberdenk’s “Contested Cultures of American Refinement” tracks the ways in which Sylvester Poli lost specific control over his bookings when he enters the UBO, a control that he reasserts through on the spot firings of offending performers.
66 Ownership of the WVMA is harder to establish, although given the importance of the Orpheum within it, it seems extremely likely that a similar arrangement was under effect. For the supposed neutrality of the exchange see, Samuel K Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
67 In fact, performers themselves were sometimes (quite understandably) confused about whether or not their artist representative worked for the booking office. Margaret Torcat Testimony, 60, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
he collects money from him, but that his sympathies and endeavors are with the other side…he is not working for the actor, but for the manager.\textsuperscript{68}

Except in the rare cases in which the artist was “booking direct,” agreements were concluded between an artist’s agent and the booking representative for a theater.\textsuperscript{69} Once the terms of date and price were agreed upon, the booking representative made out a “booking slip,” stating the terms of the deal just made. This slip was then taken to a “time clock and stamped,” locking in the deal, and preventing any other booking agent from attempting to steal the slot and double-book the performer.\textsuperscript{70} Once on the books, the agreement was filed away, and contracts were drawn up by a clerical manager with power of attorney for the theater. After being signed by the artist, the contracts, designed by the agency and standard across their bookings, were printed in triplicate.\textsuperscript{71} One went to the theater, one to the artist, and one remained on hand to serve as a record.

Along with these contractual services, the booking agencies also offered artists, managers, and representatives a variety of other useful amenities. Whether in New York or Chicago, the offices contained telephones and telegraphs, conference rooms for private negotiations, as well as neatly apportioned sitting rooms for engaging in business with female performers. The booking offices also offered agents and managers a number of informational resources crucial for effective activity. In addition to maintaining the association’s books, which

\textsuperscript{68} Edward Clark Testimony, 1443, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
\textsuperscript{69} Documents provided by the Keith organization to the FTC state that between 1914-1918, 71.88% of acts were booked through agents, with 28.12 percent booking direct. While these numbers are not broken down along big-time/small time divisions, it seems likely that much of the direct booking was through relatively low-level small time performers who were not yet able to gain representation.
\textsuperscript{70} Samuel K Hodgdon Testimony, 524, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
\textsuperscript{71} Daniel Hennessy Testimony, 920, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
revealed the pay records and touring schedules of every performer who contracted through the office, and which were open to anyone with a right to the floor, the offices also held a vast collection of manager reports, sent from every theater affiliated with the association, and reflecting a detailed, running review of almost every Vaudeville act in the country.\(^{72}\) Filled out by local managers on the Monday of every week, these reviews carefully noted performers’ behavior and the style and quality of their acts, while also tallying audience response and providing an overall judgement of the balance of the show and its fit with regional expectations.\(^{73}\) As a part of the determination of the syndicates to provide their patrons with high quality, respectable content, the reports also contained a running tally of the lines that the managers had demanded artists “cut” from the act for crudity, along with a description of any reformulating work necessary to whip an act into shape (or time).

The creation of the Vaudeville syndicates was a result of many of the same forces driving similar consolidations in other industries in this period.\(^{74}\) First and foremost, the syndicate was designed to control competition or, as the New York Clipper put it, “decidedly unprofitable friction,” between the managers.\(^{75}\) Given the significant sunk costs associated with opening and maintaining a theater, and the relatively high elasticity of entertainment purchases in a period consistently rocked by financial turmoil, managers held a frequently expressed fear of excess capacity rendering their businesses unprofitable.\(^{76}\) Along with this coordination came the benefits

---

72 Samuel K Hodgdon Testimony, 536, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
73 For a description of these resources, and the unlikely story of their survival, see Kibler, M. A. "The Keith/Albee Collection: The Vaudeville Industry, 1894-1935." Books at Iowa, no.56, 1992, pp. 7-24.
74 Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 97.
75 6/24/1897 New York Clipper.
of price control, a tendency which accompanied the creation of the syndicates from the
beginning. 77 “The ‘regulation’ of salaries, for which the alliance was chiefly formed, will begin
at once,” dryly noted the Chicago Tribune in 1900, an analysis that was echoed by an official
statement from B.F. Keith himself. 78 “An effort will be made,” he wrote in 1900, “to regulate the
salaries of certain actors who have taken advantage of…the brisk demand of acts to inflate their
salaries to such a point as to render it impossible for a manager to conduct his business on a
reasonably paying basis.” 79

While claiming that a national organization of managers specifically designed to keep
records on each and every Vaudeville performer currently touring “is not in any sense a trust”
pushes the boundaries of credulity, it does appear true that Vaudeville’s stars, who developed
into national celebrities during the early 20th century, were able to leverage their notoriety into
salaries that increased dramatically throughout the period. 80 Although various industry-level
agreements may have managed to control theater construction, they never really functioned in
regards to top talent. 81 Competition—both between the various circuits desperate for headliners,
and from the over-the-top Broadway “reviews” which began to poach Vaudeville stars in the mid-to-late 1900s—proved particularly remunerative for performers. In the face of this, the Vaudeville managers had two distinct problems. On one hand, they had to make case-by-case decisions about booking the budget-busting headliners, some of whom could be paid as much as $2,500 a week, the same as an entire bill’s salary at a more modest theater. On the other, they had to ensure that the lower grade of Vaudeville performers, most of whom made between a tenth and an eighth of the stars, were paid as little as possible.

The establishment of standard business practices, kept uniform between regions, circuits, and theaters, was an important element in restraining prices. Touring the country as individual units, without any cohesion from show to show, performers in Vaudeville were entirely responsible for their own travel, scenery, and material. The costs associated with moving and maintaining an act, when also including the commission owed to agents and the booking agency itself, could easily reach as high as 50% of a performers salary. In fact, performers occasionally spent weeks touring at a loss while waiting for better bookings because any money made helped reduce the sunk weekly costs already incurred. Standard contracts included a clause through

---

82 In his unpublished autobiography, UBO booking agent Eddie Darling discusses the high-price competition for stars (as well as the potential that a once pliable performer could be “ruined” by being given too much money. Darling Vaudeville Collection, New York Public Library, T-MSS 1986-005 Box 1, Folder 3. Also see Edward Albee’s discussion of this poaching in Albee, “20 years of Vaudeville,” Charles Stein Ed. American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries, (New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1984) 214-223.

83 The autobiography of Eddie Darling, who booked the UBO’s Flagship Palace Theater, is full of precisely these types of negotiations. Darling Vaudeville Collection, New York Public Library, T-MSS 1986-005 Box 1, Folder 3, PG 19. Also Hartley Davis, “The Business Side of Vaudeville,” In American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries, 114-115.

84 Connors, American Vaudeville Managers. 116.

85 Margaret Torcat Testimony, 41, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
which managers could cancel a performer if he or she appeared at a theater with an act that had changed in any substantive fashion. This included any wear and tear that might occur on the road.86 Because a performer’s route was, despite the central apparatus through which it had been created, actually a series of individual agreements between the act and each theater in which it played, every individual theater was able to demand a prompt arrival and full show, regardless of what might have occurred elsewhere on the circuit.87 On the other hand, this meant that local managers could (legally or illegally) cancel an act without causing any potential issue for the subsequent theaters on the performer’s route.88 Unable to be late to their next appearance, and without any connections in the town, performers usually accepted the cancellation and moved on rather than fighting it.

In addition to the salary-reducing measures made industry-standard by the agencies, a more complex form of cost control was established around the system for determining an artist’s salary. Unlike performers in plays or revues, whose individual talents, no matter how noteworthy, were ultimately subsumed within the artistic impact of the broader production, every Vaudeville performer not only could but—within the span of a week—would be replaced another.89 As a result, the logic of the system forced all of those operating within it towards a constant, commodifying process of comparison, with the cash value (per week) of an act serving as a stand-in for a far broader set of aesthetic, cultural, and commercial concerns.

86 See the discussion of the depreciation of scenery in Daniel Hennessy Testimony, 964, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
87 It is less clear whether this legal fiction continued to function when a performer was traveling entirely within a circuit. Certainly in these circumstances, they still signed individual contracts with each theater they planned to play. Beatrice Morgan and Company Contracts, Beatrice Burton Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library *T-Mss 2003-027
88 Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 170-171
Within this system, the payment received by acts had a remarkable level of inertia. Rather than rising or falling with demand, they moved by clear, step-by-step motion.\textsuperscript{90} A $300 a week act was a $300 a week act, and unless something happened to render it either significantly more or less successful, it would stay that way.\textsuperscript{91} Sudden changes in salary occasionally occurred when an act moved between circuits, playing a substantively different size of town or theater, but when they returned to the previous type of theater, their payment would typically resume without pause.\textsuperscript{92} The same was not true, however, when considering variations in price within the same class of theater. Once an act had been given a raise by the booking agency, its essential identity changed. Once a $300 act, it was now (for instance) a $400 act, and in the future would unwaveringly demand as much as its standard price.

This tendency towards price stability was accentuated by the expansive schedules that the vast size of the syndicates made possible.\textsuperscript{93} Centralizing the once-scattered activities of arranging a tour within the confines of single space, the booking offices also compressed it within time.

\textsuperscript{90} Although Wertheim claims that “salaries often depended on supply and demand,” all evidence I have found points against this being true in the immediate sense he describes. While, as discussed previously, the prices for Vaudeville acts seem to have risen gradually over the period between 1890 and 1920, there is far less evidence for a tight connection between the overall strength of the labor market and the salaries paid to performers. The reason for this might be that Vaudeville was, to a certain extent, counter-cyclical. Because of its relatively low-prices, downturns sometimes lead theater patrons to shift their business from the more expensive “legitimate theater.” On the other hand, by the late teens, the heavy sunk costs associated with the extensive construction of Vaudeville “palaces,” meant that any downturn was a threat to the syndicates, and was responded to by across the board wage cuts. Wertheim, \textit{Vaudeville Wars}, 172. Robert C. Allen, \textit{Horrible Prettiness}, 319-320.

\textsuperscript{91} Daniel K Hennessey Testimony, 931, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Wertheim, \textit{Vaudeville Wars}, 171.

\textsuperscript{92} For example, see the Madden and Fitzpatrick booking records, entered as exhibit 104 in FTC testimony. Also the Beatrice Morgan and Company Contracts, Beatrice Burton Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library *T-Mss 2003-027.

\textsuperscript{93} Marian Spitzer, “The Mechanics of Vaudeville, in \textit{Vaudeville as seen by its Contemporaries}. 23
Where earlier forms of entertainment could (and often would) determine their route on the fly, successful Vaudeville performers often received bookings of 20 or 30 weeks of consecutive performances, all of which were drawn up and signed simultaneously. With a handful of representatives often responsible for most or all of these theaters, what legally comprised dozens of individual contracts was actually conducted as a single negotiation, further pushing prices towards standardization across performance.

Although this system of pricing may have been created by the practical requirements of the booking system, over time, it came to assume more complex meanings. Instead of simply reflecting the going sale-price of a commodity in a market, the payments that the acts received were infused with a broader social significance, determining hierarchy and position within the profession. In some senses, payment in Vaudeville seems to have been understood along the idea of a “moral” economy or a “just price,” in which acts should be paid what they were fundamentally “worth.”94 Anything more or less was not simply the result of a poor business decision or an aggressive bargaining tactic, but an assault on the entire value system undergirding the performing life.95

---

94 For the idea of the Moral Economy, see E.P. Thompson, *The Moral Economy of the Crowd in the 18th Century England, Past & Present*, No. 50 (Feb., 1971), pp. 76-136 I believe this analytic framework can be effectively used to consider the moral ideas of the “producerist ethos” discussed in works like Rossana Currimo, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

95 This same understanding underscored many Vaudevillians concern over union activity—both the idea of a closed shop or the set rates of pay that would accompany it were viewed as potential disruptions to a system in which people should be paid correctly. Frank Fogerty Testimony, 1191-1193, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. For more on the tensions between ideas of art and unionism, see Holmes, *Weavers of Dreams*. 


The importance of the information contained within an act’s price-point can be seen in the steps that the Vaudeville syndicates took to ensure that these prices could not be manipulated. Indeed, booking agencies feared such manipulation to the point that they suspected potential collusion between artists and theater managers to artificially raise a performer’s price, just to get this new price on the books, and therefore in circulation for other theaters. In order to prevent any such occurrence, prior to the drawing up of contracts, the price agreed upon between the artist’s representative and the booking agent was checked by a female clerical worker against the prior salary of the act. If it was substantially higher, the contract was returned to the booking agent for explanation. That such a system was necessary at all is remarkable—it reflects the extent to which the entirety of the booking acumen of the central offices was contained in an act’s price. If it were successfully manipulated, it would not merely be a one-time scam but a long-term coup, with the new valuation disseminated and validated by the very functioning of the system.

The reverse of this, it is interesting to point out, was also true, and there are numerous records of performers jealously guarding the “genuine” price of their acts. On occasion, an act seeking to prove its worth to a booking manager would take a so-called “tryout” week at a theater in suburban New York. The unusually low salaries that acts would be paid for these weeks were the one exception to the Syndicate’s open books policy, and were hidden so that other managers would not demand to book them at this artificially low, status-altering price. Similarly, while acts would (under duress), play theaters they considered below their status while

96 Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 930, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
97 Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 928-929, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
98 “We do not want him to say to the agent or the actor ‘you worked such and such a week for $40,’ if it is below his scale” Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 1000, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
on tour, they typically refused to do so within a major city, citing the damage such a booking would do to their status and “scale.” Questioned as to whether there was work for actors at the smaller theaters that dotted New York, union organizer and comedian Frank Fogerty explained that “there is, but you are stepping down. You are going back. You cannot leave the U.B.O. today and go to Mr. Loew’s time [a cheaper, small-time chain] right here in New York…and then come back and expected to be the fellow you used to be….”

For Fogerty, at least part of the issue was monetary—why should people pay a dollar to see him at the Palace, when they could seem him at Loews for 15 cents? Yet this seemingly simple argument quickly runs into more intangible questions of quality, popularity, and stardom. “I think,” he explained “when a house is asking… 1.00 in their price from the public, they expect to see a dollar entertainment. I believe if you have a house down the street…that charges 15 cents, they expect to see 15 cent entertainment. I think if the name “Frank Fogerty” appears at the Palace this week and then appears at Loew’s a week afterwards…the polish has gone off Fogerty, as far as the public is concerned.”

To Fogerty, entertainment at the Palace is worth a dollar, because it is worth a dollar—playing the Palace makes it so, and playing elsewhere would change what it was.

While artists, through their agents, proposed their desired salary, the actual decisions about what they would be paid were made at meetings held by the various circuit managers and booking agents. Armed with the ability to check past salaries, as well as to read several years of performance reviews, and draw on their own first-hand experience of the artists in question, the managers would gather multiple times a week to set collective prices for the actors who were to play their houses. Although Daniel Hennessey, testifying before the Federal Trade

---

99 Frank Fogerty Testimony, 1234, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
100 Frank Fogerty Testimony, 1235, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
101 Daniel K Hennessey Testimony, 924, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
Commission in 1919, claimed that each manager would choose his own price, he also described the meetings in a distinctly non-competitive fashion. “There is a certain act, for instance, conceded by everyone to be of a certain value. It gets so much….That is agreed upon.”

Pushing further, the examiner wondered whether the managers, “try to come to some understanding as to what the values of the acts are, at this meeting?” “Yes,” replied Hennessey, “what they should get.” Samuel K. Hodgdon, who ran small-time booking for the U.B.O, explained that “usually the artist has a price, and unless it has been established and played for some time, it is usually higher than the booking representative wants to play.” While new acts were open to negotiation, established acts would be booked for the price determined by the activities of the system. This price was the “correct” price for an act—a decision based on the informational economy of Vaudeville, and encapsulating a wide set of historical evaluations about the performer.

This same understanding of what the price of acts meant is echoed in many of the surviving Manager's reports from theaters in the Keith circuit. Put together in relation to the strict budget available for performers’ salaries, a successful bill needed to present a wide enough variety of talent to appeal to the heterogeneous Vaudeville audience, not repeating, not offending, and not boring. As a result, performers were frequently not simply discussed in terms of their skill or success, but analyzed by the ratio between their abilities and their cost to the theater. For example, on August 8th, 1910, R.G. Larsen, the manager of the Keith’s theater in Boston, wrote that the Alexandroff Troupe, Russian dancers who performed for 10 minutes, was “hardly as good as some troupes of the same kind that we have had in years past, but filled the

102 Daniel K Hennessey Testimony, 922, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
103 Daniel K Hennessey Testimony, 933, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
104 Jenkins, What Made Pistachio Nuts, 64.
spot and is a fair value for the money,” while despite the fact that their “singing was on the average of a team of this kind,” Klein and Clifton “work so hard and so conscientiously that they win the audience worthy of a much higher priced act.” Even more precisely, in 1916, Charles Lovenberg, the manager of Keith’s theater in Providence, Rhode Island, complained that the comic duo Madison and Winchester, “didn’t do very well as a whole, got laughs in spots, and from the way they went with the audience, they are not worth the salary I am paying them which is at a $50 cut. The act is worth 150.” Such reports were mailed in to the central office by theatrical managers every Monday, collated, and then mailed back out, to help inform managers about the acts currently playing on the circuit. Armed with this information, booking agents would be well situated to determine the “accurate” price of an act, whether overpriced or a potential bargain.

Taken as a whole, the system by which the salary of a Vaudeville artist was determined served as a powerful means of organizing and storing information about the cultural value of a performance. Created through the collective actions of large groups of managers and booking agents, each of whom had access not only to discrete knowledge about conditions in the theaters for which they worked, but also, through reports and booking contracts, of the broader horizon of activity in Vaudeville, they created a genuine venue for information exchange about the tastes and preferences of the American public. Modeled after the stock exchange, the booking floors of

106 Keith Albee Collection, Manager's report book, November 13, 1916-January 21, 1918, pg VIII (1), University of Iowa.  
107 Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 576, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.  
108 When an act was considerably underpriced, it did seem that the threat of poaching could occasionally raise the salary. However, while the process by which this occurred was understandable for a rising star, it’s harder to see how a standard “trouper” would ever receive this kind of attention.
Vaudeville functioned in a similar way, providing a “market place for the transaction” capable of compiling a wide array of information and condensing it into a single price.\(^{109}\) However, unlike grain futures or pig-iron prices, they dealt with artistic performance, a distinctly different sort of commodity.\(^{110}\)

By applying these logics directly to aesthetic experience, the booking floor helped to create a new paradigm for popular entertainment. Despite the Syndicate’s overt adoption of a policy of performative respectability, the informational economy at the core of the Vaudeville system gradually worked to divorced the form from the social structures that had long circumscribed American entertainment.\(^{111}\) This process had been developing for some time, and can be traced through the middle of the 19\(^{th}\) century, as the gradual expansion of “feminized” museums and theaters gradually worked to reconstruct—within the realm of commerce—the kind of public sphere that had previously held sway on American stages.\(^{112}\) This new development sought to

\(^{109}\)Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Discussing the system, Daniel Hennessey argued that it was capable of functioning in a centralized fashion without a single individual making decisions for the whole. “There is not,” he explained, “anyone in absolute charge of the booking from the fact that the managers have the right to reject anything that might be booked for them.” Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 914, Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128. The comparison to the stock exchange is drawn from quotes in “Arthur Frank Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars.

\(^{110}\) The classic account of the transformation of individual items into generalizable commodities during this period is found in William Cronon, Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1991).

\(^{111}\) An analysis of the ways in which precisely such a new, potentially disruptive, aesthetic could be developed on the Vaudeville stage during the early 20\(^{th}\) century can be found in Rick Desrochers, The New Humor in the Progressive Era: Americanization and the Vaudeville Comedian, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

\(^{112}\) Arguably drawing from a more class-inflected vision of the theories of Habermas, historians like Robert Allen and Richard Butsch all argue that the 1830s and 40s saw the downfall of cross-class theatrical space understood as operating in ritualistic continuum with the rest of society. While some literature exists on the ways in which late 19\(^{th}\) century crowds came to understand themselves as such, less has been written about the
replace the more organic restrictions of an older vision of entertainment with market-based forms
controlled by their close relationship to the profoundly gendered notions of Victorian
respectability. While this compromise held for much of the 19th century, by the turn of the
twentieth it had begun to badly fray. By placing so much of the base-level decision making
power in the functioning of its self-enclosed market, Vaudeville laid the foundations for an
entertainment industry that would begin to bypass such safeguards completely. In their place, it
reoriented entertainment towards a commercial vision of culture in which the desires of the
audience, as mediated and refracted by the organization of the market, would ultimately decide.

In addition to pricing culture, the informational economy of the Vaudeville industry also
helped to shape it. Among the most obvious of these mechanisms was the need for artists to have
systemic legibility. Only acts that could be understood and categorized could be easily sorted,
organized, and booked. While booking representatives would sometimes have the opportunity
to see a new act play at one of the so-called “try-out” houses, much of the time, they were
signing a contract on faith and reputation. To make this possible, agents needed to be able to
easily understand and explain the artists they represented to the managers who booked them,
“describing the act and making comparisons with other acts of similar nature or style. A booking

113 The classic text on the relationship between a relatively bounded theater and the
broader market is Jean-Cristophe Agnew, World’s Apart: The Market and the Theater

114 Jenkins, What Made Pistachio Nuts, 64.
agent who has been doing business of eight or nine years with him has a very fair conception of just about what that act is.”115 This legibility was particularly important because of the need to avoid repeats within a single bill, an event that was understood to mean “death to one of the acts and injury to the show as a whole.”116 Even acts that were superficially similar could “cut the edge off” of each other’s work, dulling the novelty necessary to connect with the audience.117 “The show is good,” wrote the manager of Keith’s Providence theater in 1902, “The only fault I have to find is too much rag time and coon songs…however, the show went very well with the audience.”118 Despite the line-up’s success, the simple fact that a style was over-present reflected a mistake by the booking offices, and needed to be corrected for future performances.

Because of these needs, regularized styles of description flowed throughout the industry—manager’s reports are full of them, able to identity and sort acts with only a few words. For example, of the seven acts that performed at the Hudson theater in Union Hill, New Jersey on May 16th, 1910, fully five are identified and categorized by Manager John. C. Peebles in this tightly descriptive vocabulary before entering into a longer evaluation of the performance. The Jordan Trio is a “Novelty wire act,” Mcbride and Goodrich are “Comedy Singers and Dancers…really an old fashion Song-and-dance team,” Gertrude Vandyck, the “Girl with

115 Daniel K. Hennessey Testimony, 916. Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
116 No two acts in a show should be alike. No two can be permitted to conflict. ‘Conflict’ is a word that falls with ominous meaning on a Vaudeville performer’s or manager’s ears, because it means death to one of the acts and injury to the show as a whole. If two famous singing ‘single’ women were placed on the same bill, very likely there would be odious comparisons—even though they did not use songs that were alike.” Brett Page, Writing for Vaudeville, (Home Correspondence School), 8.
118 Keith Albee Collection, Manager's report book, sept 2nd 1902 – sept 3 1903, pg 11, University of Iowa.
Golden Voice,” is “a novel singing act in 1,” the Five Columbians are a “novel dancing act,” while Lewis and Green are a “clever two-man act.”

This same process of categorization can also be seen in Vaudeville performer’s own self-descriptions, suggesting the extent to which the generic expectations baked into this shorthand helped to proscribe the types of performance that could be bought and sold through the booking agencies. A wide array of these descriptions are discussed in Vaudeville: From the Honkey-Tonks to the Palace, in which ex-performer and journalist Joe Laurie spends hundreds of pages exhaustively enumerating the basic classifications of Vaudeville performers as they were understood within the industry. These include “dumb” acts (non-speaking players including jugglers, acrobats, top-wire and bicycle performers), song-and-dance men, comic sketches, solo female singers, group singers, two-man (straight man and comic), female impersonators, male impersonators. quick-change artists, mimics, magicians, special attractions (people famous for other activities touring the Vaudeville stage), blackface acts, family comedy troupes, animal acts, monologists (essentially the forerunners of stand-up comedians), “freaks” or eccentrics, and male-and-female groups (who usually performed a mixture of comic banter interspersed with songs). Given that many of these categories came complete with numerous sub-groupings, and it was possible for many artists to locate themselves within a remarkably precise performance taxonomy.

The prevalence of these categories is also reflected in much of the surviving booking correspondence from the period, always present in the eye-catching promotional letterhead that

---

119 Keith Albee Collection, Manager's report book, June 13th 1910-Feb 20th, 1911, pg VIII (1), University of Iowa.
typically consumed the top quarter of a performer’s stationary, and particularly clear in the text of the letters themselves. Writing to Fred Softon, Jas. H. Johnson describes himself as “a straight musical act, working in ‘one,’ using four instruments and playing popular music.” Al E. Hutchinson was a “comedy blackface banjo singing and talking act,” while Lane and Suzinetta were “jugglers.” George Harris and Rita Beauregard, presenting their “Rural Comedy Sketch,” wondered whether the booking agent Fred Sefton had anything “open in [their] line.” The Jolly Jesters, whose letterhead depicts them as “Live Wire Talkers and Singers,” went into slightly more detail in their 1912 letter to Sefton. In it, they articulate the basic setup of their act, before diving into the less common attributes that made them unique, asking if the manager could use a “live wire comedy act, sure fire laugh hit, original wit and humor, using (3) exclusive songs, classy wardrobe, both make change.”

---

121 By definition a last-minute request operated outside the standard bounds of the system, so these requests likely required the artists to be clearer than usual. Still, the fact that they are able to understand themselves in this fashion at all seems to be a substantial indication of the extent to which the system had shaped their performance identities.


123 Emerson Vaudeville Collection, Box 2, Folder 34.
Establishing a clear identity based on such uncommon characteristics was crucial for Vaudeville performers seeking success. Vaudeville acts typically took between 8 and 25 minutes, and the brevity of stage time required that their audiences understand—and react—immediately.\textsuperscript{124} Acts typically referred to such a success as “putting it over,” creating a sense of shared community “that fostered real and immediate communication between artist and audience” while also leaving them stunned and satisfied by a perfectly structured act capped by a “wow” finish.\textsuperscript{125} In the tightly competitive world of Vaudeville, each of the acts on a bill was attempting to make their mark and “stop the show.” To do this, they needed to both let the audience know what they doing and, simultaneously, to surprise them, providing the pleasure in

\textsuperscript{124} Edwin Milton Royle, “The Vaudeville Theater,” in \textit{American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries}, 30.
novelty that was so important to the Vaudeville aesthetic. In their brief letter, the Jolly Jesters attempted to address all of these concerns, indicating to potential employers that although audiences were used to male-female comedy acts, they were almost certainly less ready for both performers to make a “classy” wardrobe change. Meanwhile, the group’s possession of original songs would ensure that their material stood out as completely unique.

A legendary incident recounted in the Vaudeville star Sophie Tucker’s autobiography Some of These Days reflects the other side of this process. Always possessing a frame larger than the thin silhouette popular in entertainment during the early years of the 20th century, the first incarnation of Tucker’s act was violently transformed by the expectations of the system. After qualifying as a singer for a slot in an influential amateur night in Manhattan, the manager worried that she wouldn’t “go-over” as she was, and called to his assistant for help in reshaping the singer. “This one’s so big and ugly the crowd out front will razz her. Better get some cork and black her up. She’ll kill em.” Potentially illegible to the audience because of her appearance, Sophie was forced to become a blackface performer, complete with “a pair of black cotton gloves, a red bandanna…[and] a grotesque grinning mouth.” Once cast in this role, she spent years unsuccessfully attempting to get out of it, while simultaneously working to incorporate small characteristics that both allow her to fit in (more skilled “high-yellow” makeup for the stage lights) and stand out (the incorporation of Yiddish into her performance routine). Despite talent and success, a succession of managers did not believe that Tucker would function

126 Success of Vaudeville explained by Manager, Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, United States of America) · 10 Feb 1905, Fri · Page 12
128 Ibid.
129 Tucker, Some of These Days, 43-44.
as a recognizable type of act to the audiences if she appeared without blackface. It was not until her luggage went missing hours before a show that she finally had the opportunity to play under a new category, claiming an identity that was explicitly both Jewish and white, while changing little else in her performance. ¹³⁰ This change, however, also required the adoption of a new role in order to maintain legibility—the manager lent her a gown from an actress with “the finest wardrobe” on the syndicate, “tightly laced black velvet” complete with a tail of “red chiffon ruffles.”¹³¹ Transition complete, Tucker would perform within this “grand dame” version of the solo female vocalist for the rest of her career.¹³²

Repeated at an industry-wide scale, the result of these processes meant that, unlike its competitors in the “legitimate theater” or the increasingly popular “revues” put on by Florence Ziegfeld and the Shubert Brothers, Vaudeville’s managers were fundamentally unable to assert final creative control over the products that they sold.¹³³ Instead, Vaudeville’s artists remained in

¹³⁰ Tucker, Some of these Days, 64.
¹³¹ Sophie Tucker, Some of These Days, 65.
¹³² In Vaudeville Melodies, Nichoals Gebhardt offers an analysis of this passage from Tucker’s autobiography focused on the social implications of masking and recognition in Vaudeville performance. While I agree with his analysis of the importance of show-business/commodification derived “personality” as a means of fostering recognition between Vaudeville’s audience and stars, I think that that he misses the fact that even when she performers as Sophie Tucker, she is still operating within a legible category for her crowds, albeit one that her own fame has increasingly shaped around her. For a lengthy exploration of a performer who worked to navigate a similar set of performance roles, see Sharon Ammen, May Irwin: Singing, and the Shadow of Minstrels, (University of Illinois Press, 2016).
¹³³ These large-scale productions were superficially similar to a Vaudeville bill, and highlighted a barely-connected set of performers delivering their specialties within the structure of a large-scale performance. However unlike Vaudeville, in which each performer directed themselves, these shows were designed and managed as a single unit, with total control exerted by the producer. For more on the “Review” Shows, see Hirsch Foster, The Boys From Syracuse: The Shuberts Theatrical Empire, pg 83-93. For a comparison between the individualistic aesthetic of Vaudeville and developments in the legitimate theater, see What made pistachio nuts, 67. For a discussion of the way in which large-scale spectacular shows can be connected directly to the standardizing
possession of their process of production. While some performers wrote their own material, many others purchased it, and a thriving market for songs, sketches, and playlets existed around the theater. Similarly, booking agents helped to shape acts that they “discovered” around the world, and occasionally even worked to put them together outright, a process of development that was crucial for the continued flow of talent in the industry. Yet despite this, it was widely understood that only individual talent and personality—what Sophie Tucker referred to as “character”—could provide the spark that allowed an act to successfully “get over” with the discerning Vaudeville audiences. A corporate system designed to organize and deliver an aesthetic of performative individuality and personal connection, the Vaudeville syndicates were unable to eliminate the labor power contained in the final performance. As a result, although their working conditions were far from fair, they were structured by a fundamentally different logic than the ideology concurrently stripping knowledge and control from craft workers in industries across the country. Yes, managers could crush efforts at unionization, cutting out

---

135 Page, Writing for Vaudeville, 12.
136 Harry F. Weber Jr. testimony, 1058-1060, Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
137 Gebhardt, Vaudeville Melodies, 19.
138 This was not for lack of trying however. The syndicates repeatedly worked to develop producing departments that could create star-less extravaganzas. While the popularity of these plays seems to have boomed around 1905, ultimately, they seem to have been a fad rather than a continual element in Vaudeville. This may have been because the results appeared too close to the aesthetic then being developed by rival theatrical forms “Martin Beck Plans Unique Theater,” The Butte Miner (Butte, Montana, United States of America) · 20 Sep 1909, Mon · Page 7. Joe Laurie Jr, Vaudeville, 236-238.
potential competitors, and blacklisting performers who stood against them. But the constant need to create innovative performances remained in the hands of these same performers—and the managers knew it. “That is the way we live,” explained UBO booking manager Daniel Hennessy, “by new material.” By taking such material, and subjecting it to the mechanics of the booking system, Vaudeville produced a result that surpassed the potential abilities of any individual entrepreneur, one ultimately derived from the summed and averaged desires of its geographically and culturally heterogeneous audiences. “The difference of opinion regarding those different managers is what makes our business,” Hennessy said. “If I booked all the houses in the United States for three years, after that you would not have any Vaudeville, because I would have my idea of shows, and they would be played to death.”

Given the complexity of the system constructed by these entrepreneurs, it is impossible to believe that they either possessed, or desired to possess, day-to-day control over the functioning of the myriad theaters in their orbit. Indeed, the benefits of the informational economy built into their booking agencies, in which local preferences were tracked, and then fed back into the system through the mechanism of price and reportage, only worked if a certain level of control

---

140 Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 135-148.
141 Agents and managers, it is important to point out, did have a role in this too, albeit one that the system did not fully admit into view. Manager reports frequently reference changes or cuts demanded to strengthen a performance, while artists representatives sometimes took acts under their wings, developing native talent with their theatrical knowledge. However, as far as can be ascertained, there was no sense that a star could be manufactured out of thin air. Similarly, while performers would often pay for their songs and acts, the system functioned according to a theory of what Sophie Tucker referred to as “personality”—performers needed songs, but the songs only took on their true relationship to the audiences form the performers who popularized them. Old or bad material could sink a performer, of course, but great material couldn’t make one. Harry F. Weber Jr. Testimony, 1060, Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
142 Daniel Hennessey Testimony, 949, Samuel K. Hodgdon Testimony, 535, Box 72, FTC Vs. VMPA Docket #128.
was intentionally abandoned. For the managerial elite, the implications of this lack of control seem to have elicited two types of response, distinct in implication but overlapping in practice.

The first of these was the drive towards censorship, and respectability that has long dominated discussion of big-time Vaudeville. Obsessively working to “refine” the acts appearing on his stages, East-Coast magnate B.F. Keith attempted to eliminate any and all vulgarity from both audience and crowd, earning his organization the nickname “the Sunday-school circuit.” Similarly, in 1906 Martin Beck, manager of the Orpheum circuit, ordered actors playing his stages to “cut all gags and acts of a suggestive nature, whether a vulgar word or a risqué situation,” warning them that “the booking agency is governed in arranging dates quite as much by the report on the personal conduct of the performers as by their artistic success.” The very need to focus so vocally on order reflected the lack of its existence on the ground. Although Keith’s managers did in fact keep a running tally of “cut” phrases, they also repeatedly mention raucous crowds, explicit innuendo, and good-looking women without flinching, or even attempting to exert editorial control. Given the well-known need for their houses to attract a broad and varied audience, at least some of the performative purity exerted by the managers seems likely to have been an effort to counterbalance the lack of control at the heart of their activities. Yes, they may have legitimately hoped to uplift their customers to the point at

---

143 For example, the account in Ashby, Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830, (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 120-121.
144 Martin Beck is Due Here, Salt Lake Telegram (Salt Lake City, Utah, United States of America) · 11 Oct 1906, Thu · Page 3
145 Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies, 50.
147 The question of sexual tension in Vaudeville is discussed at length in Erenberg, Blue Vaudeville.
which they would require only the most advanced and artistic acts. But they also needed to make money in the here and now, and booked the bills necessary to do so.

Alongside this “grant me chastity and continence but not yet” strategy, an alternate reaction can be seen in many of the top managers’ adoption of an explicitly entrepreneurial identity, one performativity embodied in both words and setting. “[The] Chicago offices” wrote the veteran journalist Hartley Davis, in a piece about Martin Becks’ Western Vaudeville Managers Association, “resemble those of a New York financial institution, with the mahogany desks for the heads of departments, and richly carpeted floors, and a small army of clerks and stenographers.”148 “I am a businessman, and my business is to amuse people” explained Beck to Hartley. “149 Beck’s superior Morris Meyerfeld described his activities in the theater similarly to an interviewer in 1908—“The determination of the value of an act is the fascinating part of this business…the element of speculation is a pleasant feature of the game.”150 Like the attempts at censorship discussed above, which likely connected with genuinely-held religious and social beliefs while also reflecting the evolving pressures of the system, the assumption of an identity of “business first and last,” likely had a number of straightforward advantages.151 Tactically, cultivating an image of calm, ordered rationality would have been a benefit to the operations of the firm overall. Both the Orpheum and (somewhat later) Keith circuits were publically traded companies, and required extensive financing for their operations.152 Similarly, much of big-time

148 Hartley Davis, “In Vaudeville” in American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries, 81.

149 Hartley Davis, “The Business side of Vaudeville,” in American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries, 121

150 Morris Meyerfeld, Dreamer and Doer, The San Francisco Call (San Francisco, San Francisco, California, United States of America) · 3 May 1908, Sun · Page 17

151 Hartley Davis, The Business side of Vaudeville, 121

152 The San Francisco Call (San Francisco, San Francisco, California, United States of America) · 3 May 1908, Sun · Page 17. F
Vaudeville’s expansion during the decade between 1905-1915 developed through partnerships with various local businessmen who would either share or assume-outright the cost of theater construction, which would then be leased (or booked) by the UBO or WVMA. Again, in this circumstance, adopting the social forms associated with corporate life would have been a valuable aid.

In addition to these pragmatic concerns, it is also possible to see the turn towards a corporate business aesthetic by Vaudeville managers in the early years of the 20th century as a reaction to the set of tensions emerging from their creation of a fundamentally new form of mass culture. “In Vaudeville,” wrote Edward Albee, “there is ‘something for everybody,’ just as in every state and city, in every county and town in our democratic country, there is opportunity for everybody, a chance for all.” Similarly, Martin Beck claimed that his primary policy was, first and foremost, “[to] give the public what they want. If the public preference is for dancing that is what we give them; if singing is the craze, the public gets that.” Explicitly linking a market for desire and entertainment with a politics that validated the will of the majority, statements like this proposed a vision of market democracy that, in the context of the social upheaval of the progressive era, trod decidedly unsteady ground. Inasmuch as what they sold was genuinely

---

153 Joe Laurie Jr., *Vaudeville*, 360.
154 “Capital has been...attracted to our business” Morris Meyerfeld, Dreamer and Doer, The San Francisco Call (San Francisco, San Francisco, California, United States of America) · 3 May 1908, Sun · Page 17
155 Edward Ablee, “Twenty Years in Vaudeville,” in *American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries*.
popular, that is, all-inclusively consumed across gender and class without offense, such a practice could be understood as unproblematically good. In the earliest decades of the 20th century, however, the idea of democracy was undergoing a period of real and sustained questioning—without education, without uplift, the desires of the masses could be disruptive, and degenerate into anarchy.\textsuperscript{158}

Intentionally associating themselves with the ideologies of market freedom, business success, and commercial progress that had become so powerfully linked during the post-war years, these managers found a strategy that could hold at bay at least some of the threat of the definitively non-local performance culture they were projecting into countless towns and cities throughout America.\textsuperscript{159} Avoiding the taint of theatricality by embracing the hush of the boardroom, the managers of Vaudeville helped to shift the operations of commodified culture away from heated moral debates and towards the cool, naturalizing systems of American capitalism. In doing so, they also worked to draw attention from myriad ways in which the system of entertainment that they had built functioned around and beyond their control. Moving away a 19th century managerial role, in which the owners of entertainment were responsible to the communities in which they operated, the magnates of Vaudeville helped mark a point of transition in American conceptualizations of the business of culture.\textsuperscript{160} Going forward, those who produced entertainment could be understood as running a “business, first and foremost.” For audiences, the functioning of the Vaudeville system had a similarly profound aesthetic and cultural impact. The appeal of the form was its frothy mixture of novelty, cosmopolitan glamour,

\textsuperscript{159} Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 87.
\textsuperscript{160} For example, the theaters discussed in Butsch, \textit{The Making of American Audiences}, 44-65.
and well-oiled efficiency—all elements closely allied to its rationalized, corporate construction, and made possible by the informational economy behind it. In newspaper after newspaper, the arrival of a theater affiliated with one of the major Vaudeville chains is something to boast of, providing access to the high-quality mainstream of American culture.\textsuperscript{161} Indeed, the power of the syndicates was often explicitly incorporated in articles and advertising.\textsuperscript{162} Highlighting a promise to deliver the same acts to theaters and cities across the country, Vaudeville enabled its audiences to experience a local instantiation of a nationally circulating culture.\textsuperscript{163} Built around a standardized success of unique acts, it placed the burden of individuality on certain aspects of performance while accepting the legitimacy of the system as a whole. In doing so, Vaudeville provided a potent experience of a form of cultural organization still in the process of construction, helping to define the limits and structures of mass entertainment by articulating


\textsuperscript{162} The Temple Theater in Detroit, one advertisement crowed, “was the connecting link between the great Eastern Circuit of the United Booking Offices of America, controlling eight-seven Vaudeville theaters in the east and Midwest, and the Western Vaudeville Manager’s Association, controlling eighty-three Vaudeville theaters, and extending north, west and south, from the Canadian border...to the Gulf of Mexico...” and thus could offer its patrons “THE GREATEST VAUDEVILLE TALENT IN TWO HEMISPHERES.” Detroit Free Press (Detroit, Wayne, Michigan, United States of America) · 2 Jan 1908, Thu · Page 3

\textsuperscript{163} “They are my Friends” said Vaudeville star Nora Bayes of her relationship to her audience, “I can think of no better symbol to express my own feelings toward the audience than that of a small party seated at a friendly table...The Vaudeville audience is the most sensitive, because it is there to meet old friends.” Of course, “the audience,” is itself a creation of the system through which Bayes moved so successfully—it reflects both a generalization of individual crowds into a general public, and intimate relationship with each of them. Bayes quoted in American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries.
how and where it could connect with audiences, what kinds of claims it was capable of making, and what vision of identity it might attempted to put forth.\textsuperscript{164}

Throughout this process, audiences seem to have understood themselves to be engaged in something fundamentally modern, interacting with an art that operated along a set of dynamics profoundly different than those surrounding the the legitimate stage.\textsuperscript{165} “It represents,” argued Hartley Davis in 1905, “the almost universal longing for laughter, for melody, for color, for action, for wonder-provoking things…it is joyously, frankly absurd.”\textsuperscript{166} Stripping away the connective tissue of performance, Vaudeville’s essential appeal was precisely a bold, self-confidently commercial pleasure.\textsuperscript{167} “It was neither bad sociology or absurd morals. The singing girl…does not ask you to believe that she is not painted, or that her fantastic costume resembles anything every worn by man. And therefore she is the incarnation of pure art, existing for its own

\textsuperscript{164} “We might say then that on the circuits a new form of life was invented by the Vaudeville managers and the booking agents for American popular performers, and that it was the emergence of this form of life that explains many of the claims that were made about the significance of show business.” Nicholas Gebhardt, \textit{Vaudeville Melodies}, 35. For sense of the extent to which the interlinked questions of production, class, and culture seemed open in this period, See James Livingston, \textit{Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution}, especially 173. For an expansive view to the types of social claims it is possible to make with theater, see Agnew, \textit{World’s Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought}.

\textsuperscript{165} In his discussion of the unionization efforts that resulted in Actors Equity, Sean Holmes points out that the early union leaders “bought into the high-cultural notion of acting as an art form as opposed to a labor process.” Sean Holmes, \textit{Weavers of Dreams Unite! Actors’ Unionism in Early 20th Century America}, 32. This was significantly different than Vaudeville artists who, it can be argued, understood themselves as always already operating in a fundamentally commercial environment. Mclean, \textit{American Vaudeville as Ritual}, 25.

\textsuperscript{166} Hartley Davis, “In Vaudeville,” in \textit{American Vaudeville as Seen by its Contemporaries}, 97.

\textsuperscript{167} For a discussion of the broader spread of this type of aesthetic during the early 20th century, see Leach, \textit{Land of Desire}. 
sake, not boring you by a faulty imitation of nature.”168 Placeless and yet intimate, the functioning of the Vaudeville industry allowed a circulation of temporally distinct pleasure, fashion, and experience.169 “The Vaudeville theater,” famously wrote Edwin Milton Royle, “belongs to the era of the department store and the short story. Maybe it’s a kind of lunch-counter art, but then art is so vague and lunch is so real.”

In retrospect, the Federal Trade Commission hearings at which Fay testified represented the high-water mark of the Vaudeville syndicates. Despite their enormous power, they were already struggling to compete with the circuits that had begun combine films and live performance. As visual technology continued to develop, stand-alone cinemas became a desperate threat. Easy and cheap to set up, these store-front “nickelodeons” soon vastly outstripped their Vaudeville competitors among the “low-class” theaters, while the development of increasingly grand “movie-palaces” (not to mention resurgent challenge from new styles of musical theater) helped to cut into the form’s success with the upper echelons of its audience.170 By the early 1920s, the principle Vaudeville syndicates were obviously in trouble. By the end of the decade, they were gone, stripped for parts by Hollywood executives hungry for their valuable properties.171

While the fall of Vaudeville is often presented as predestined by the course of technological development, the analysis of the informational economy at its core suggests a more

168 The Golden Age of Vaudeville, in American Vaudeville As Seen By Its Contemporaries, 113.
171 Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 262-273.
complex story. The operations of Vaudeville’s informational economy allowed the industry to continue to learn from and adjust to the desires of its customers, creating a connection in which both parties gradually developed a set of shared understandings.\textsuperscript{172} Played on hundreds of stages by thousands of performers in front of millions of audience members, with results constantly reported back to the central booking offices, stored through the mechanism of salary, and then redistributed throughout the country, the end result was a form uniquely suited to adapt to the challenges of an industrialized, corporatizing America. Created by a set of managers focused on centralizing power, Vaudeville thrived precisely because of the extent to which its products remained undetermined by any single group. Performers—and the Vaudeville theaters that housed them—acted as mediators for the development of both the culture and the business of mass entertainment. By the time that cinema achieved paradigmatic status, audiences had already spent three decades adjusting to—and connecting with—a form explicitly built on their accumulated knowledge.

\textsuperscript{172} This conceptualization of the development of a shared culture is drawn from David Hancock, Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of Trade and Taste, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009).
This agreement made through the
B. F. KEITH VAUDEVILLE EXCHANGE (Agency)
1584 Broadway, New York City

WILMER AND VINCENT CIRCUIT
Wilmer and Vincent Theatre Co., Prop.

AGREEMENT made this 14th day of October 1922, by and between
WILMER AND VINCENT THEATRE CO. of New York, N. Y.
the “Manager,” and
Beatrice Morgan A. Co.
the “Artist.”

WITNESSES: 1. The Manager engages the Artist, and the latter agrees to present
a certain Sketch specially, with 3 persons
therefor for 3 days commencing on October 25th 1922
at Orpheum Theatre, in the City of Allentown, Pa.
at three shows per day except that on Saturdays, Sundays when lawful, and Holiday
performances occurring during this engagement the artist will present his act at four
shows per day, upon the following terms for which the manager agrees to pay the sum of
Two hundred, 00 dollars ($200.00)

2. If above place of performance is changed the manager will pay any extra railroad
fares and baggage charges caused thereby, but artist is otherwise to pay all transportation.
If space of the theatre is prevented by fire, casualty, public authority, strikes, or any other
cause beyond the manager's control, the manager shall pay only for the number of perform-
ances rendered on a pro rata basis.

3. The artist agrees to abide by the rules and regulations in force at said theatre or other
place of performance, (b) report for rehearsals promptly at 10 A. M. on opening day,
(c) furnish photographs, and also complete orchestration of music used in act, (d) eliminate
any part of the act deemed objectionable by the manager and (e) not to permit any
reduction or change in personnel or number of persons in said act or any change or
alteration therein.

4. If Sunday concerts cannot lawfully be given during this engagement, the artist will
not be required to give performances in another city in lieu thereof unless expressly
agreed to by the artist in writing or by endorsement on this contract.

5. If the manager receives notice that the aforesaid act is an infringement of a property
right, copyrighted or patent right, the artist agrees to furnish security satisfactory to the
manager before continuing with his act, to indemnify the manager against any loss or
damage whatsoever, by reason of his permitting the presentation of said act.

6. The artist will not appear for any other person between the date hereof and the end
of this engagement, either publicly or at clubs or private entertainments in the city men-
tioned in paragraph 2 hereof unless consented to in writing by the manager.

7. FRANK O'BRIEN, of 1584 Broadway, New York City, is acting for the manager in
employing the artist.

8. The artist designates New York City, as his personal representative to and from whom all notices, agreements, consents, etc., may be sent or accepted as the case may be.

9. Five per cent. (5%) of above salary is to be deducted for B. F. Keith Vaudeville
Exchange for procuring artist this engagement.

10. If the artist wilfully violates or refuses, Sundays or other engagements with a
theatre on the Wilmer & Vincent Circuit of which the theatre mentioned in paragraph 2 is
a part, the manager hereof may terminate this contract.

11. The artist promises and agrees that if he refuses or fails to pay this engagement
he will pay to the manager without demand as liquidated damages an amount equal
to the salary stated in paragraph 2 hereof.

12. SPECIAL--

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have hereunto set their hands and seals
the day and year first above written.

WILMER AND VINCENT THEATRE CO.
(Artist sign here giving address)

Photographs and billing must be sent one week in advance

SPECIAL NOTICE.--No statement or promise by the manager or its representatives or
the artist or his representative concerning the artist's position on the bill, dressing
room, advertising or any other thing whatsoever shall be binding on the artist or the
manager unless clearly endorsed in writing on the face of this contract.