

THE PASSING SHOW ONLINE EXHIBIT



INTRODUCTION

The Passing Show was a series of 12 annual revues produced on Broadway from 1912 to 1924 (with the exception of 1920) by J.J. and Lee Shubert (“Messrs. Shubert”) at the Winter Garden Theatre, which they owned. In fact, *The Passing Show* was the first American revue to use the term, spelling it “review.” What is now a familiar structure, was to use a thin story line to link together songs and sketches. The name, *The Passing Show*, was not originated by the Shuberts. On May 12, 1894, a revue with that name opened at the Casino Theatre. The name, *The Passing Show*, reflects its content, which consisted of topical extravaganzas that spoofed and parodied theatrical productions from the past season. The title conveys the idea of a fleeting, momentary glance at the entertainment of the time, capturing the essence of what was popular and noteworthy in theatre.

The Shuberts’ *The Passing Show*, was produced during the summer months to fill in the gap between productions of the *Ziegfeld Follies* (which did use that name until 1911). But *The Passing Show* did not play second fiddle to the *Follies*. One measure of the success of a show is how many performances it had. For the first six years and again in 1921, *The Passing Show* outperformed the *Follies*. As reported by Robert Baral, “on occasion they cut into Ziegfeld and his series with frequently snappier songs and broader sketches.”

The Passing Show also had some marvelous stars, such as Fred and Adele Astaire, Charlotte Greenwood, Willie and Eugene Howard, George Jessel, Fred Allen, Marilyn Miller, Ed Wynn, and many others.

And, of course, some terrific composers and lyricists, such as Sigmund Romberg and George Gershwin (whose first Broadway song was in *The Passing Show of 1916*). Several songs from *The Passing Show* have become popular standards still enjoyed today, such as, “Smiles,” “Pretty Baby,” “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles,” just to name a few.

This Exhibition is in four Parts: Part I: 1894-1914; Part II: 1915-1917; Part III: 1918-1919; and Part IV: 1921-1924. It will bring alive again, through sheet music and other memorabilia, the magic of the original Broadway revue, *The Passing Show*.