

THE PASSING SHOW OF 1912

(1st Annual)

Dates: July 22, 1912, to November 16, 1912

Type: A musical review in two acts and 7 scenes, preceded by a Ballet in 3 scenes

Venue: Winter Garden Theatre, NY

Music: Louis A. Hirsch, Earl Carroll, Harold Orlob, Irving Berlin

Lyrics: George Bronson-Howard

Performances: 136

Trivia: Broadway debut of John Charles Thomas

With the coming of summer the Shuberts . . . revived a great name from the past, and, with the obvious intention of making it an annual affair like the *Ziegfeld Follies*, presented *The Passing Show of 1912*. For the new venture they engaged, or retained from previous assignments, what was to be a fairly permanent production personnel. Ned Wayburn, one of the slickest masters of show-dance routines, became the dance director (nobody called them choreographers in those days). Melville Ellis remained as costume designer. Harold L. Atteridge wrote the lyrics for George Bronson Howard's book; in subsequent editions Atteridge took care of both book and lyrics. Louis A. Hirsch, who did not stay on to do another one, wrote the score.

The chief performers in *The Passing Show* were all new to the Winter Garden, except Jobyna Howland The book was nominally concerned with take-offs on such current theatrical hits as *The Quaker Girl* and *Buntty Pulls the Strings*, for to this extent *The Passing Show of 1912* was conceived in the image of its predecessor of 1894. But the people in it were more important than its material. The eighty artfully chosen girls—by whom, according to *Variety*, “the *Sumurun* runway [extending from the stage into the audience] was again fully tested to its limit”—answered to three specialized classifications, “show girls” (the tall, statuesque ones), “mediums,” and “ponies.” Longer-legged than the show girls was the future Letty [“*So Long Letty*” (1916)], Charlotte Greenwood, who swung her legs about and tangled them up in her usual fashion. Eugene and Willie Howard graduated from vaudeville into a partnership that retained its hold on popular affections for thirty years. [Smith, pp. 186-187]

The Passing Show of 1912 opened with passengers debarking from a newly arrived steamship. . . . What followed was another tour-of-the-town, with a heavy emphasis on spoofing the theatrical hits of the moment. Interestingly, the work that preceded the revue was *The Ballet of 1830*, a three-scene mime-drama imported from London's Alhambra. . . . Their roster of performers [included] such rising young players as . . . Oscar Schwarz (who as Oscar Shaw would soon be a popular leading man). [Bordman, p. 71]