7-2019

Strangers at home: Guido Deiro and his accordion in the American vaudeville theater

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STRANGERS AT HOME:

GUIDO DEIRO AND HIS ACCORDION IN THE AMERICAN VAUDEVILLE THEATER

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

June, 2019

BY

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Strangers at Home:
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DePaul University, 2019

My thesis considers the influence of vaudeville on the popularization of the accordion in America between the 1910s and 1920s. Scholarship on the accordion has tended to echo historical caricatures of the instrument as a consequence of folkloric, lowbrow, and even indecent class mores. In this paper, I explore the accordion as a thoroughly modern and complex cultural symbol through the locus of Guido Deiro (1886–1950), an Italian accordionist who first introduced the piano accordion to the American vaudeville in 1910. To reconstruct and contrast various facets of Guido's vaudeville career, I use archival materials, historical sources, and recordings that reveal the trajectory and reception of his performances in the early twentieth century. I examine two related but conflicting perspectives conducive to the general acceptance of Guido's accordion: the promotion of commercialized decency that stabilized vaudeville as a nationwide mass entertainment and its inherent instability that reflected shifting and contradictory interests within the vaudeville industry. While Guido inducted the accordion into mainstream culture as a form of respectable entertainment, his accordion aligned and misaligned with the cultural standards set by vaudeville administrators. It was the tension between Guido's accordion and vaudeville's unstable taste rhetoric that inscribed the popular, commercial, and cultural significance of the instrument. By showing the linkage between the rise of the accordion in vaudeville and its cultural contradictions, I will provide new ways to conceptualize Guido Deiro and the emergence of the accordion in early-twentieth-century America.

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Note on Abbreviations

Throughout the notes, I use the following abbreviations to refer to specific manuscript collections.

BRTC	Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
DC	Deiro Collection, 1910–2010, City University of New York Graduate Center, Mina Rees Library Special Collections
KAV	Keith-Albee Vaudeville Theater Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Library
MTC	Music and Theatre Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
RLC	Robinson Locke Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
TPC	Theater Programs Collection, Chicago History Museum

Introduction

On the night of April 1, 2019, after a day sorting through faint, yellowed papers about the accordion and the American vaudeville theater at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, I stepped into the Bruno Walter Auditorium on the ground floor. An inky Titano piano accordion appeared alongside the in-house Steinway piano on the stage. This concert—entitled "Accordion Mixology: Drink in the Essence of the Accordion!"—was part of a week-long series celebrating the acquisition of the William Schimmel archive. As the lights dimmed, Schimmel, a New York-based concert accordionist, walked onstage with his fellow pianist, Hugo Goldenzweig. As a way to introduce the first piece on the program, "Scenes from Childhood / Scenes from Adulthood for piano and piano accordion," Schimmel invited the audience to discern and listen for any incongruent musical elements that would make the accordion, as he put it, "ironic."

When the music began, it became apparent to me that a sense of irony was marked by the tongue-in-cheek juxtaposition of Robert Schumann, a nineteenth-century German composer who wrote "Scenes from Childhood," and William Schimmel, a postmodern mind behind this performance. As Goldenzweig and Schimmel collaboratively rendered a musical sequence based on Schumann's "Scenes from Childhood," they dialogued with each other in two very different playing styles. Schimmel's eccentric, complex, blithe musical utterances constantly disrupted Goldenzweig's literal, almost childlike reading of Schumann's canonic classical composition on the piano. What stood out to me about this performance, however, was not the ironic layering of these elements, but the sheer sonic incompatibility of the piano and the piano accordion.

Although both instruments share the keyboard feature, the piano produces sound through the percussive action of hammers hitting strings, whereas the accordion hums as the player bellows

airstream into its reeds. On this occasion, the two instruments produced a strikingly contradictory sonority. Next to the solidly planted concert Steinway, the accordion perpetually collapsed into a swamp of timbres, relegated to a sonic space that was not already occupied by the piano's clean, proper articulation—as though the sound of the accordion was emitting from another dimension, only to amorphously manifest in the auditorium. Albeit distinct, the sound of the accordion defied easy classification; it dispersed into the crevice of the wall before it materialized. The presence of the accordion obscured the solemn performance space, turning the auditorium into a mixology of incongruent sounds, localities, and temporalities.

Conspicuous yet shapeless—the sound of the piano accordion dampened the crisp acoustics of the auditorium. It echoed the instrument's peculiar emergence in America in the early twentieth century. Starting in 1910, professional accordionists in the United States began to perform on the piano accordion, transmitting the sound of the instrument across the country. Although the accordion started to gain traction in the American mainstream, it remained an oddity in the cultural discourse. As the instrument enthralled the public in the vaudeville theater between the 1910s and 1920s, its idiosyncrasy was widely recognized, felt, and desired. At the same time, the accordion continued to wander in different taste hierarchies, refusing to settle for a particular cultural register.

One of the leading accordionists responsible for popularizing the accordion in America was Guido Deiro (1886–1950), who first introduced the piano accordion to vaudeville in 1910. Guido's popularity in vaudeville coincided with the rise of middle-class prosperity and commercialized entertainment in the early decades of the twentieth century. These social changes shaped how one listened to music, steering the public toward a more gentrified modality of musical engagement. Through the establishment of commercialized decency, vaudeville mediated a wide range of aesthetic preferences in a shared leisure space. In vaudeville, the accordion gained immense popularity as it reincarnated into a more socially compatible form as the piano accordion. Under the vaudeville

spotlight, Guido enticed the audience with his spectacular performances on the piano accordion, recontextualizing the accordion from a base instrument to a respectable one in a public setting.

Even though Guido's music continued to resonate with the audience after the curtain had fallen, at the end of the day, he failed to fully assimilate the accordion into a particular register of American culture. In spite of its organological conversion into the piano accordion, the instrument continued to stroll between highbrow and lowbrow cultures. As Guido's music rippled through the vaudeville texture and reached a wide audience in the early twentieth century, its meaning kept dissolving in the distinct yet ambiguous sonority of the accordion. To stabilize the meaning of the accordion required the containment of its pervasive yet slippery sound. The emergence of the piano accordion in America is a story about the untethered sonic presence of the instrument against various dominant but unstable forms of mass entertainment that delineated and legitimized its music.

My thesis explores Guido Deiro and his accordion in his primary exhibition space in the early twentieth century, the American vaudeville theater. I use Guido's stardom to illustrate the ways in which the contradictions of vaudeville and the accordion were linked in a historical context. In historical caricatures, the accordion was a consequence and source of indecent class mores. Because these stereotypes signal a process of cultural stratification at work, scholars of the accordion tend to position their analyses of the instrument in relation to taste hierarchies, foregrounding social mobilization of the instrument on a high-low cultural axis. While the notion of cultural hierarchy is useful in tracing the general development of the accordion in America—particularly in describing its social elevation through vaudeville, the accordion in fact occupied complicated and contradictory roles when it first entered mainstream culture in the early twentieth century. As the accordion gained respectability and popularity in vaudeville, it aligned and misaligned with cultural norms promoted by vaudeville administrators. By showing the linkage between the popularization of the accordion in vaudeville and its cultural contradictions, I seek to provide new ways of understanding the emergence

of the piano accordion and Guido Deiro, a pioneer vaudevillian responsible for transforming the status of the accordion during his career between the 1910s and 1920s.[1]

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1, "Remembering the Accordion," I lay out the lineage of the accordion and address issues regarding the stereotypes of the instrument. I suggest that accordion caricatures have persisted to this day and continued to stimulate a hierarchical perception of the instrument in part because our contemporary sensibilities are incongruent with the "user interface" of the accordion, a design that has not changed since its inception in the early nineteenth century. The aesthetic implications of this interface shape how one perceives the instrument. They also help explain why historians tend to approach the accordion as an anachronistic instrument, the ironic status of which is to be alleviated by analyzing how the accordion is mobilized in a social and historical context. This type of analysis, however, does not fully encapsulate the legacy of Guido's accordion and its cultural contradictions in vaudeville.

In Chapter 2, "Becoming Middle Class," I discuss the ways in which the accordion adopted middle-class values and how its base connotations were transformed in vaudeville. I first examine big time vaudeville and its operating rhetoric and programming rationale. Vaudeville tycoons painstakingly promoted their business as wholesome family entertainment and advertised their affinity with middle-

[1] Although I primarily examine historical sources concerning Guido's legacy, I will occasionally refer to his younger brother Pietro Deiro (1888–1954) in conjunction with other contemporaneous accordionists and vaudeville musicians. Collectively, they weave together a more comprehensive narrative of the cultural phenomenon surrounding the piano accordion than any alternative would yield. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the Deiro brothers by their first name throughout this paper.

class respectability. I analyze Guido in the context of commercialized decency, discussing how the accordion was transformed into a socially acceptable instrument. Vaudeville provided an opportunity for both performers and their instruments to gain social recognition. The story of the piano accordion parallels the tale of Guido's social uplift as he sought to establish a reputable identity in America as an Italian immigrant in the early twentieth century.

In Chapter 3, "Tasteless Vaudeville," I extend my discussion of vaudeville in Chapter 2, following scholars who challenge the notion that vaudeville was a homogeneous site and argue for its inherent contradictions. I demonstrate that vaudeville was an unevenly sanitized space, using examples that highlight the tension between its advertised social decorum and an imperative to deviate from its moral promises. Even though vaudeville sought to cater to a respectable crowd, its moral taxonomy was inconsistent. The social boundaries mandated by vaudeville administrators did not necessarily reflect the preferences of the audience, entertainers, or vaudeville managers. In reality, vaudeville propagated a form of public amusement in the "middle ground," pitting itself against both highbrow and lowbrow cultures.

In Chapter 4, "Accordion in the Middle Ground," I synthesize the previous chapters by situating Guido's accordion in a cultural register where taste hierarchies were blurred. Alluding to Guido's performance and reception, I suggest that his accordion, although presented as a respectable and decorous form of entertainment, was not as wholesome as claimed by vaudeville administrators. I discuss the surrounding elements that animated Guido's performance to show how they complicated the genteel image of the accordion. Guido's reception illustrates that his accordion never entirely abandoned its connection to certain devalued cultures. Details in Guido's performance and reception indicate that the gentrified image of the piano accordion was intrinsically linked to more "problematic" characteristics that were eclipsed in vaudeville's middle-class rhetoric.

Because Guido's vaudeville accordion held multitudes and contradictions, it stirred unfaltering enthusiasm in the early twentieth century. By positioning my analysis of Guido's accordion in conjunction with vaudeville's inherent contradictions, I problematize the notion of cultural decency and social mobilization surrounding the piano accordion. In the following chapters, I seek to offer an alternative way to conceptualize the accordion in early-twentieth-century America, to appreciate its complex characteristics, and to understand why, even though it ascended on the social ladder with Guido's vaudeville fame, the accordion, as its sound indicates, continued to elude total assimilation into a particular social venue.

1.0 Remembering the Accordion

While folklore has it that the accordion was developed from the Chinese *sheng*—an ancient free-reed instrument, it is in fact a thoroughly modern invention. Historical records show that the accordion shares a more definitive pedigree with several European inventions in the nineteenth century than with the Chinese *sheng*. In May 1829, Viennese organ maker Cycil Demian patented what was arguably the oldest form of the modern accordion, the *akkordeon*. The patent described the instrument as "a little box with bellows [and] five keys, each able to produce a chord."[2] Around the same time as Demian's patent, instrument makers in Vienna, Bavaria, Paris, and London were experimenting with making different types of free-reed instruments.[3] Following Demian's invention, various forms of the accordion started to sprout over Europe in the early nineteenth century. One of these experiments was French instrument maker M. Busson Brévèté's brainchild in 1855, the *accordéon-orgue*—also known as *flûtina* or *hamoniflûte*.[4] Conceivably the earliest form of the piano accordion, this instrument had a piano keyboard on the right panel but no bass buttons on the left. The *accordéon-orgue* was essentially a lap harmonium to be played on the player's tilted laps as the musician maneuvered the keyboard with the right hand and pumped the bellow with the left.

Throughout history, the accordion was often linked to devalued cultural and class mores. In this chapter, I first use historical examples to illustrate a range of accordion symbolism since the instrument was invented. Additionally, I suggest that the user interface of the accordion also plays a

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[2] Helena Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," in *The Accordion in the Americas: Klezmer, Polka, Tango, Zydeco, and More!*, ed. Helena Simonett (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 19.

[3] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 20–21.

[4] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 20.

role in propagating stereotypes of the instrument and engendering its seemingly obsolete status. Finally, I argue that by focusing primarily on the mobilization of its cultural and historical fixture, we are prone to understanding the accordion in simplistic terms, overlooking the complexity and contradiction of its legacy in vaudeville. My focus in this chapter is not to investigate specific cultural factors that produced certain images of the accordion, but to suggest that the cultural associations of the accordion necessarily drive our analyses of it.

1.1 Accordion Symbolism

Since Demian invented the *akkordeon* in 1829, the accordion has come to symbolize and predicate a range of sensibilities. In 1855, the *accordéon-orgue* was exhibited at the World's Fair in Paris, being promoted as "a desired object of female distraction."[5] The same instrument was depicted in an undated instruction book published by the Musical Bouquet Office in London. Titled "Busson's Tutor for the Organ-Accordion or the Harmoniflute," this tutorial contained "a plate illustrating the instrument, viewed from both front and rear and hand positions," technical exercises, scales, and eighty musical examples.[6] The book cover featured a well-dressed young lad playing the *accordéon-orgue* on a Victorian balcony. The instrument was ornately and meticulously designed—possibly with

[5] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 20.

[6] "BUSSON (M," Whyte's Auctions, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.whytes.ie/art/busson-m/139103/?SearchString=&LotNumSearch=&GuidePrice=&OrderBy=HL&ArtistID=&ArrangeBy=list&NumPerPage=30&offset=763

"rosewood and marquetry, with mother-of-pearl keys."[7] A product made with fine, costly materials and strenuous labors, early accordions like Busson's *accordéon-orgue* were emblems of upper and middle-class fashion.[8]

Among various cultural factors that shaped the reception of the accordion, scholars tend to focus on the mode of production and how it generated low class caricatures. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the production of the accordion was radically industrialized, which made the instrument more affordable.[9] The accordion along with industrial machines witnessed the progress of modernity and a new social consciousness split between advancement and chaos.[10] At the backdrop of the new production mode loomed an anxiety in a society stratified by industrialization, urbanization, and social mobilization. Around the mid nineteenth century, the accordion became a source of ridicule. In 1865, a French cartoon depicted a café scene where a working-class accordionist ominously bellowed and gestured the accordion toward a bourgeois billiard player, leaving him and guests sitting at a remote table in gasping shock. The caption read, "The accordion knocked out the music—one does not yet have the right to kill the people who play this instrument, but there is hope that one soon will have."[11]

In early-twentieth-century America, opponents of the accordion deemed it a distasteful artefact. The instrument was regarded as "an awful piece of musical machinery when heard

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[7] "Lot 554: A French flutina stamped Busson Brevete, Paris, in rosewood and marquetry, with mother-of-pearl keys, 19th century, in associated mahogany box," Invaluable Auctions, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/a-french-flutina-stamped-busson-brevete,-paris,-i-554-c-ahuw49khis

[8] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 19.

[9] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 23.

[10] Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 182.

[11] Simonett, "Introduction," in Simonett, *The Accordion in the Americas*, 7–8.

generally."[12] Vaudeville critic Caroline Caffin classified the accordion along with the ocarina as "weird instruments."[13] The negative connotations of the accordion also affected public perception of the piano accordion. A reporter wrote after seeing a piano accordion performance of Guido's brother Pietro, "It's really an absurd looking contraption to a layman anyhow. It looks a little like a piano, a little like a peanut roaster, a little like a typewriter and a little like the dash-board [of an?] old-time auto."[14]

The diatonic button accordion had been a popular type in Europe in the nineteenth century,[15] but its circulation to America via European immigrants might explain its ethnic bond in the New World. At the turn of the century, the repertoire of commercial button accordionists in America primarily consisted of folk music. John Kimmel made the first accordion record in America with the Zon-o-phone Company around 1903.[16] He performed and recorded Irish and Scottish music for major labels such as Edison, Victor, Columbia, and Emerson, fastening the accordion's ethnic associations.

Contemporary references to the accordion confirm the lasting influence of accordion stereotypes. Boisterous and square, the accordion prompts the colloquial coinage of "stomach Steinway," "waistline Wurlitzer," and "Belly Baldwin."[17] Crude and unbearable, the accordion is depicted in a 1986 *Far Side* cartoon as a welcome gift that the Devil bestows upon a line of sinners

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[12] Untitled review, [1910–11?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 2, DC.

[13] Caroline Caffin, *Vaudeville: the Book by Caroline Caffin, the Pictures by Marius De Zayas* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1914), 82.

[14] "New Accordion Winning Fame for Developer," n.d., Pietro's Scrapbook, DC.

[15] Jacobson, *Squeeze This! A Cultural History of the Accordion in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 16–17.

[16] Peter Muir, " 'Looks like a cash register and sounds worse:' The Deiro Brothers and the Rise of the Piano Accordion in American Culture 1908–1930," *The Free-Reed Journal* 3 (Fall 2001): 65.

[17] Simonett, "Introduction," 8.

entering hell.[18] Unholy and base, the sound of the accordion is mocked to harmonize "the sentiments of an assassin."[19] Hackneyed and boorish, the accordion differs from the onion in that, as the joke goes, no one actually cries when you chop one up.[20]

The accordion symbolism conveys a common uneasiness with the instrument. While cultural factors such as modes of production, class, gender, and race play a role in shaping the accordion symbolism, the user interface of the accordion also mediates how it resonates with contemporary souls and influences one's perception of the instrument.

1.2 The "Digital" Interface of the Accordion

The inception of the accordion and other types of free-reed instruments in the nineteenth century reflects a shift in aesthetic preferences for pitch content. These new instruments—aeolina, accordion, concertina, mouth harmonica, bandoneon, house organ, harmonium, cecilium—relied on a set of buttons or keys for pitch selection and an air-streaming mechanism, such as a bellow or a musician directly blowing into the instrument, for sound production.[21] They differ from older Western single-reed and double-reed instruments in that each available pitch on the free-reed instrument is

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[18] Tamara Ghattas, "Playing from Memory: Essays on Music in Life" (M.A. thesis, DePaul University, 2010), 1.

[19] Ghattas, ""Playing from Memory," 2.

[20] Richard March, "Accordion Jokes: A Folklorist's View," in Simonett, *The Accordion in the Americas*, 39.

[21] Tellef Kvifte, "Musical Instruments and User Interfaces in Two Centuries," in *Material Culture and Electronic Sound*, ed. Frode Weium, and Tim Boon (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013), 205.

fixed and determined by its corresponding reed.[22] The user interfaces of the free-reed instruments primarily control "the discrete pitch entities of scale step."[23]

The consolidation of pitch control was also reflected in standard musical notation in the nineteenth century, which continued to dominate European concert music. This notational system organized music based on discrete pitches and rhythmic proportion, rather than inflections of tonal, rhythmic, and timbral content.[24] In this notational system, pitch and rhythmic content prevailed because they aided musical syntax. According to Leonard Meyer, musical parameters that can be "segmented into perceptually proportional relationships," such as pitch, duration, melody, rhythm, and harmony, which he calls primary parameters, tend to function syntactically.[25] Other musical aspects that cannot be readily measured, such as dynamic, tempo, sonority, timbre, and texture, which Meyer calls secondary parameters, tend to take a backseat in articulating musical content.[26] The standard musical notation foregrounds primary rather than secondary musical parameters.

Meyer's definition of primary and secondary musical parameters shares similarity with Tellef Kvifte's distinction between "discrete" and "continuous" variables. For Kvifte, discrete and continuous variables characterize the user interface of an instrument. In Kvifte's terminology, "digital" interface controls discrete variables, and "analog" interface controls continuous variables.[27] The term digital interface relates to input of musical information with one's fingers, or "digits;" the accordion has a digital interface because its keys (buttons) correspond to scale steps. Theremin, on the other hand, has an analog interface because it creates and controls "continuous" musical variables.

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[22] Kvifte, "Musical Instruments and User Interfaces," 205.

[23] Kvifte, "Musical Instruments and User Interfaces," 204.

[24] Kvifte, "Musical Instruments and User Interfaces," 224.

[25] Leonard Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 14.

[26] Meyer, *Style and Music*, 14.

[27] Tellef Kvifte, "On the Description of Mapping Structures," *Journal of New Music Research* 37, no. 4 (2008): 355.

Due to its discrete pitch input, the accordion is especially suitable for playing music that foregrounds discrete variables (or primary musical parameters) such as melodies and tonal harmonies. The convenient pitch layout on the accordion facilitates transposition. Because of the intervallic consistency of its pitch arrangement, one can easily render the same melody in a different tonality by simply maintaining the same hand position on a different starting button. In addition, the Stradella Bass System, a common feature on the accordion, configures standard chords (major, minor, dominant seventh, and diminished chords) in the circle of fifths, an arrangement idiomatic to many European vernacular music traditions.[28] These designs effectively make the accordion a homophonic instrument.

While some accordions have features producing the effect of "continuous variables"—for instance, register switches ("stops") that activate different sets of reeds to create different timbres, the accordion still functions "discretely." The stops are discrete keys on the instrument and fundamentally part of its digital interface; they do not facilitate the production of continuously varied musical elements.

1.3 Anachronism and Beyond

Our perception of the accordion is mediated not only culturally but also through its digital user interface. Because this particular interface is incongruent with our contemporary aurality, we tend to perceive the instrument from an elevated, detached vantage point, which in turn influences how we approach and analyze the accordion as a historical topic.

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[28] Jacobson, *Squeeze This*, 20–21.

Since the inception of the digital interface in the early nineteenth century, musical instruments have shifted from a design that controls discrete pitches to timbral qualities. According to Kvifte, user interfaces mirror a larger cultural context in terms of production mode, distribution technology, and aesthetic preference.[29] Kvifte observes, "There has been a development from a digital pitch-class-oriented culture to a preoccupation with control of analog musical qualities—especially timbre—in the last part of the 20th century."[30] The evolution from digital to analog interface indicates that our sensibilities have departed from a pitch-oriented aurality that conditioned the inception of the accordion and its close relatives in the nineteenth century to a preference for timbre control.

As William Schimmel's accordion concert in 2019 suggests, the meaning of the accordion is built upon its obsoleteness. Even at its most genuine, this contemporary celebration of the accordion honored the instrument through irony. Of course, we may find examples of accordion use in contemporary musical styles in such a way that it does not sound obsolete or ironic but rather cutting edge or eclectic. However, these upgraded settings are more compatible with our aurality precisely because they develop from our present-day aesthetics. On a fundamental level, these music settings still rely largely on the anachronistic use of the accordion to achieve relevance and effectiveness. The persistent obsolete quality of the accordion implies that in addition to particular cultural factors, there is a constant element that mediates one's perception of the instrument. Its "dated" user interface may help to explain why we tend to perceive the accordion as an incompatible historical instrument.

Historians have yet to mention the ways in which the accordion interface mediates cultural perception and shapes the accordion discourse. This is a sufficiently independent topic that merits a space beyond this paper. My aim here is merely twofold: first, I acknowledge that the accordion

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[29] Kvifte, "Musical Instruments and User Interfaces," 223.

[30] Tellef Kvifte, "Musical Instrument User Interfaces: the Digital Background of the Analog Revolution," abstract (lecture, Oslo, Norway, [May 30–June 1, 2011?]), accessed June 1, 2019, https://vimeo.com/26838505

interface affects how one reconstructs the accordion history; second, I suggest that in order to adequately understand the emergence of the accordion in vaudeville, we need to adjust our conceptual framework in such a way that our analyses of the accordion is not driven by its perceived anachronism.

The user interface of the accordion shapes our analytical framework or, in other words, we tend to project the mediating effect of the interface upon us into our analyses. Because we are mediated to perceive the accordion as an instrument detached from us, we tend to form a hierarchical relation to it and readily externalize its history. Meanwhile, we are pressured to seek relief from such rigid conceptualization of the accordion history: our need for conceptual mobility diverts our attention to analyzing how the accordion was mobilized historically. By constructing a narrative of how the accordion moved from one taste hierarchy to another, from one class to another, and from one cultural register to another, we temporarily alleviate the severity of our analytical framework. However, these terms are not discrete but muddied cultural categories; indicating how the accordion moved from one to another obscures the ambiguity of these categories.

Inevitably, the themes of taste culture, social class, and ethnic associations in the accordion's early history would continue to flourish as the instrument travelled into new parts of the globe. In the hands of star performers like Guido and Pietro, the accordion would demonstrate its social mobility as it gained mass appeal in vaudeville, a decidedly middle-class venue. However, the emergence of the accordion was a phenomenon more than a mobilization in social hierarchies, as my analysis of Guido's vaudeville accordion will indicate. In the following chapters, I illustrate how we might conceptualize the history of the vaudeville accordion beyond a mobilization of high-low, new-old cultural axes and a reversal of its anachronism. In order to show the complexity of this history and cultural contradictions of the accordion, I will first demonstrate in Chapter 2 how the accordion became middle class, a notion that will then be substantiated and revised in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.0 Becoming Middle Class

Guido and Pietro grew up playing the button accordion. Coming from a family of merchants and landowners of minor nobility in Salto Canavese, Italy, they respectively migrated to the State of Washington in 1907 and 1908. In the next two decades, Guido and Pietro would follow the rise of vaudeville, touring as solo piano accordionists in major cities in America and Canada under the aegis of leading vaudeville circuits.

By the time Guido appeared in vaudeville in 1910, vaudeville had already become one of the most popular forms of amusement in America. Vaudeville was a type of stage entertainment generally consisted of six to nine independent acts, each between ten to twenty-five minutes. Typically, a vaudeville program was performed twice a day on a weekly basis. Each day, vaudeville attracted two million patrons in America to experience its theatric delights.[31] Catering especially to the middle class, vaudeville promised to entertain those who cared for a puff of Victorian propriety in its opulent interior. As audience members flocked into these extravagant, highly commercialized theaters, they formed a respectable leisure community in the name of middle-class decency.

While the accordion had already appeared in vaudeville before Guido arrived in America, his piano accordion caught the audience's attention with its novel look, complicating the negativity associated with its less glamorous forebears. With a piano keyboard on the right-hand panel, this peculiar instrument invited inimical critics of the accordion to reconsider its legitimacy. By performing

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[31] Arthur Frank Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits Controlled the Big-Time and Its Performers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xvii.

on the piano accordion, Guido directly exposed the instrument to a respectable crowd, effectively setting the groundwork for the accordion's social transformation.

In this chapter, I first explore how vaudeville promoted its affinity with the American middle class through its rhetorical stress on social decorum. I then illustrate how Guido and his accordion gained social recognition and respectability in vaudeville. Guido's public persona reflects a version of European refinement that was compatible with vaudeville's definition of decent taste. Vaudeville not only gave Guido's accordion visibility but provided proper space and leverage for its upward social mobilization.

2.1 Manufacturing Decency

Vaudeville was a self-proclaimed guardian of wholesome family entertainment between the 1890s and 1920s. Reaching its peak around 1910, vaudeville sanitized America's popular theater tradition into a decent, respectable form of amusement by promoting its affinity with middle-class values. In the late nineteenth century, under the pressure of economic instability and moral sanction on the entertainment industry,[32] innovative entrepreneurs experimented with their business models by manufacturing non-offensive programs in a "cleaned up" theater environment in order to distance themselves from concert saloons, variety theaters, and dime museums. These base venues were often replete with alcohol, prostitution, vulgarity, and disorder. Saloons were considered "the destination of

[32] Gillian Rodger, *Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 168.

slumming voyeurs out to see what [was] thought to be the sinful side of city life."[33] Vaudeville emerged out of the theater reform efforts to be recognized preemptively as a socially acceptable form of popular entertainment. In 1905, journalist Hartley Davis commented, "the evolution of the 'v'riety business' into vaudeville is one of the most cheering and significant demonstration of a universal growth in intelligence and refinement;" whereas variety "pander[ed] to the depraved instincts of the few," vaudeville "provid[ed] clean amusement for the multitude."[34]

Vaudeville entailed a variety of management practices. Big time theaters, primarily controlled by the Keith-Albee and the Orpheum circuits, presented high profile entertainers in "two-a-day" performances. The Keith-Albee Circuit owned the majority of theaters eastward of Cincinnati, stretching from Washington, D.C. to eastern Canada. The Orpheum Circuit dominated the west coast, southern regions from Louisville to New Orleans, and western Canada.[35] In addition to the big time chains, small time vaudeville, ranging from "run-down houses in remote towns … to attractive venues in metropolitan areas," featured shows three or more times a day at cheaper prices.[36] A typical vaudeville bill consisted of a wide range of acts, such as comedies, playlets, novelty acts, acrobatics, musical acts, animal acts, magic, tableaux vivants, movies, and incidental music provided by the house orchestra or pianist.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, big-time was the most prominent form of vaudeville. Vaudeville moguls Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward Albee revamped their theaters with ornate interior design, introducing high class, highly salaried performers in order to entice a

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[33] Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10.

[34] Hartley Davis, "In Vaudeville," *Everybody's Magazine*, August 1, 1905, 232.

[35] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 123.

[36] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 239.

respectable crowd. Moreover, to attract middle-class women and children customers who had historically avoided variety theaters, Keith's theater managers scrutinized each act at the Monday morning rehearsals, eliminating content they deemed inappropriate for families. They dutifully took notes and sent their weekly reports to the Keith-Albee headquarter in New York City. If performers did not comply with the cuts, managers held the right to throw them out of the theater. The sanitized image of big time vaudeville was a result of entrepreneurs' deliberate effort to sustain business and maximize earnings. As the audience entered big time theaters, they experienced what Snyder calls the "respectable thrills."[37] Once they began to feel reassured by the overbearing concept of middle-class decency, they were more willing to loosen their imagination, moral aspiration, and wallet.

Vaudeville's social decorum was further consolidated through its commercial outlets. In newspapers, the Orpheum Circuit advertised itself as the "safest and most magnificent theater in America" and the "standard of vaudeville."[38] Indeed, many affluent theater goers felt just as comfortable going to vaudeville shows as attending legitimate theater. A Chicago theater patron documented her outings throughout 1916 in her personal scrapbook, "Plays and Players: A Theatre Goer's Record." She attended not only local legitimate theater productions on a biweekly basis but also vaudeville at the Majestic Theatre of the Orpheum Circuit.[39] Vaudeville attracted cultural elites like eminent soprano Lillian Nordica, who had seasonal subscriptions to the Winter Garden and would invite her social circle to vaudeville shows; music critic Henry Finck and renowned tenor Enrico Caruso were among her guests.[40]

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[37] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 130.

[38] Advertisement, [1910–11?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 2, DC.

[39] Ephemera, "Plays & Players: A Theatre-Goer's Record," 1916, MTC.

[40] Richard Canedo, "Entertaining America: Vaudeville and the Middle Ground of American Culture, 1865–1920" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2007), 179; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 136.

Big time circuits emerged from theater owners' financial ambition to establish a transcontinental oligopoly. In order to oust its external and internal competitors, big time owners deployed cunning management tactics. Keith and Albee were notorious for exploiting and blacklisting performers in times of financial threat. When vaudeville's top independent agent William Morris planned to establish his own circuit from New York to Chicago in 1908, the Keith-Albee Circuit started blacklisting Morris' acts from performing in their theaters, a ban that by mid-1909 had affected over eight hundred acts and lasted for two years until Morris, unable to compete with Keith and Albee, sold his chain to Marcus Lowe, an owner of top-tier small time theaters.[41] Between 1916 and 1917, Albee banned performers affiliated with the White Rats Actor's Union in his theaters in response to a series of strikes organized by the union.[42] The malicious practice of blacklisting helped the Keith-Albee Circuit secure its performers, strengthen its enterprise, and consolidate its leadership in the eastern half of America.

Big time vaudeville created its populist appeal by promising that "there is always something for everyone," as Edward Albee presumptuously claimed.[43] In order to live up to this standard, vaudeville managers, agents, and bookers worked in a frenzy to produce well-balanced programs.[44] They developed a complicated formula to assemble kaleidoscopic acts in a strategic order, creating an emotional arc that could be emulated, reconfigured, and reassembled. A review by Edward Haffel for a Monday matinee at the Palace Theater in New York City illustrated the structure of a favorable vaudeville program. Haffel charted the entertainment value for each act: with an intermission after the seventh act, the rated values for each act were 0 percent, 10 percent, 65 percent, 70 percent, 75 percent,

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[41] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 143, 144, 147.

[42] Wertheim, Vaudeville Wars, 224–227.

[43] David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 23.

[44] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 157.

80 percent, 85 percent, 10 percent, 80 percent, 100 percent, 75 percent, and 70 percent. According to Haffel, "If the Palace can continue to put over bills like that of this week, there is little likelihood of it losing its reputation as that of America's foremost vaudeville house."[45] Thanks to managers' virtuosic programming skills, a carefully crafted vaudeville program would not fail to put the audience on a satiating journey and fulfill their eclectic expectations.

In order to produce varied, attractive, and highly entertaining programs every week, managers treated each act as "merchandise to be bought and sold, packaged, and sent on the road."[46] Printed programs reflect the commercial characteristic of a vaudeville bill. Many program books read more like jumbled classifieds than a playbill. The acts were often not the main feature in the book but rather were broken up in the same way as featured advertisements and scattered throughout the program. This arrangement indicates that the vaudeville experience consisted of various building blocks subject to different assemblage. Many vaudevillians, particularly instrumentalists, were billed by one name; for instance, Guido and Pietro were advertised respectively as Deiro and Pietro. Taking on a stage name signals a performer's departure from formal identities and induction into the "essential values of show business."[47]

Content consistency allowed managers to promote each act as a distinct selling point. Throughout his career, Guido's act retained a high level of consistency; he was billed as "Master of the Piano Accordion," "The Piano Accordionist," "Original Master of the Piano Accordion," and "Wizard of the Piano Accordion." While vaudevillians frequently borrowed and revised performance ideas from one another, their materials generally circulated within the vaudeville talent bank. By

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[45] Edward Haffel, "B. F. Keith's Palace," n.d., Peitro's Scrapbook, DC.

[46] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 167.

[47] Nicholas Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies: Popular Musicians and Mass Entertainment in American Culture, 1870–1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 41.

commercializing and stabilizing each act, vaudeville managers were able to arrange their programs in different configurations and achieve variety in a rigid program structure. Coupled with the promotion of middle-class decency, the vaudeville booking system effectively made every show and every act click.

With its ingenious programs and rhetorical stress on propriety, big time vaudeville persisted until the late 1920s. However, even at its zenith, big time vaudeville did not fare without any financial concerns. As early as 1910, about half of New York's population were going to movies, whereas only about a quarter of the residents attended a vaudeville theater.[48] When small time theaters began to feature films as the main attraction in the 1910s, big time vaudeville was adhering firmly to its operation principle, dismissing motion pictures as a fad. As movies became immensely popular in the 1920s, big time vaudeville was late adapting its business practices, which accelerated its obsolescence. In the face of increasing competition from motion picture impresarios, the Keith-Albee and Orpheum circuits merged as the Keith-Albee-Orpheum Corporation in January 1928 and in October that year were taken over by the Radio Corporation of America and Film Booking Offices of America to form Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation.[49] By then, the movie industry had become a tangible threat and continued to haunt vaudeville into its waning years during the Great Depression.[50]

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[48] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 254.

[49] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 262. 269.

[50] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 250.

2.2 Guido's Rise to Fame

Within two years after his arrival in America, Guido had secured a prominent spot in the entertainment industry. In April 1910, Guido made his vaudeville debut with singer Mr. Porcini in the Orpheum Circuit in Salt Lake City, Spokane, Seattle, and Portland.[51] In December that year, Guido played at Keith & Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City, a major hub of big time vaudeville. Most notably, on the week of April 21, 1913, Guido performed at the Palace Theatre in New York City, a new venue on Broadway and Forty-Seventh Street, soon to be the mecca for aspiring vaudevillians. That Monday evening saw the largest audience since the Palace Theatre opened two months earlier, the crowd forming a line in front of the box office that stretched to the tail end of the block.[52] Reviewer Jack from *New York Clipper* praised Guido for "duplicat[ing] the success that is always his" among the twelve star acts that week.[53]

Until 1922, Guido was very active in big time vaudeville, having a full touring schedule contracted at least a year in advance with the Orpheum, the Keith-Albee Circuit, and their business partners such as Michael Shea, Percy Williams, Oscar Hammerstein, and Sylvester Z. Poli. In addition to playing for the big time, Guido also performed in the Interstate Circuit in 1917. At the time, the Interstate Circuit was a relatively new, self-advertised big time vaudeville originating in Texas that by the 1920s also owned theaters in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama.[54]

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[51] "The Life Story of Guido Deiro and Pietro Deiro: Part Two," Guido Deiro, official website of Guido Deiro, accessed June 1, 2019, http://guidodeiro.org/lifestory2.html; "Vaudeville Route List," *New York Clipper*, May 7, 1910, 14.

[52] Jack, "Palace," New York Clipper, 26 April 1913, 9.

[53] Jack, "Palace," New York Clipper, 26 April 1913, 9.

[54] In 1917, Interstate advertised itself in a program book with the heading "Interstate—Orpheum—Keith / 'Big Time Vaudeville.' " Program, Majestic Theatre, San Antonio, TX, March 7, 1917, BRTC.

Even though Guido was best known for being a big time headliner, he seemed to disappear from the Keith-Albee Circuit between 1922 and 1926. In 1921, Guido signed with the Shubert brothers' new enterprise, Advanced Vaudeville, for the 1922–23 season, which was to prove an unfortunate decision. The Shubert brothers attempted to recruit performers in the Keith-Albee Circuit with higher pays, a move that enraged Albee and prompted him to boycott performers who had double contracts.[55] Guido was part of this operation: not only was he supposedly banned from the Keith Office for life,[56] but during that season he was laid off for consecutive weeks due to the Shuberts' shaky management.[57] After his term with the Shuberts, records indicate that Guido did not show up in the Keith-Albee Circuit until 1927. During his hiatus, Guido performed in the Interstate Circuit, the Orpheum, and the WVMA (Western Vaudeville Managers' Association) Circuit. Briefly in 1922, Guido contracted with the Bert Levey Circuit, a San Francisco-based company.[58] He also played in the "big" small-time such as the Lowe Circuit and movie theaters like Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre in Los Angeles and Strand Theatre in San Francisco. In 1927, Guido reappeared in the Keith-Albee Circuit, but by November that year he decided to leave the Keith-Albee and Orpheum circuits altogether for the Paramount Publix circuit over a $50 salary raise.[59] In 1928 and 1929, Guido toured in Australia and Europe respectively. Guido's mishap with the Shuberts in 1922 might explain why in

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[55] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 243.

[56] Even though *Variety* reported that "Deiro will be the first Shubert act to be taken back by the Keith office," there is no record of Guido's booking again with the Keith Circuit until 1927. "Keith Books Deiro, 1st 'Shubert Act' 'Back,' " *Variety*, December 29, 1922, 1.

[57] "A Warning to Vaudeville Artists from Guido Deiro," *Variety*, December 22, 1922, 27.

[58] Contract, September 8, 1922, Guido's Scrapbook I, 82–83, DC. This contract was agreed upon on August 25, 1912, which was most likely a typo. Considering Guido's commitment to the big time during the 1910s, Guido most likely made arrangements with the Bert Levey Circuit after he was blacklisted in the Keith-Albee Circuit. Moreover, if Guido were to play in San Jose on September 8, 1912, this engagement would have conflicted with his Orpheum show in Spokane, WA. See Appendix A.

[59] "Deiro Leaves K-A-Orph. over $50 Salary Raise," *Variety*, November 16, 1927, 34.

the 1920s he was most active on the west coast while Pietro worked around New York City. Pietro, who continued to book through the Vaudeville Managers' Protective Association (which was affiliated with the Keith-Albee monopoly) remained in big time into the late 1920s.

Guido's popularity at some of the most high profile vaudeville houses in America reflects his penchant for cultural prestige and an awareness of his social standing. Predominantly a vaudevillian, Guido cultivated a public persona that was closely linked to the cultural values shared by vaudeville and its middle-class patrons. Guido channeled his immigrant status into a narrative of social uplift and became a figure who embodied Victorian respectability. As Richard Canedo suggests, vaudeville provided a tangible environment of being and becoming middle class for individuals who were aspired to social mobility.[60] Over time, Guido would come to embody the kind of cultural and social advancement so valued and cherished by big time vaudeville.

Guido consistently sported a posh temperament that mirrored the grandeur of big time theaters. As Pietro recalled, Guido always appeared meticulously groomed and dressed.[61] A reporter described Guido as "a most pleasing chap and with excellent taste as to dressing."[62] Guido's elegant persona was so ingrained in the general public that a clothing company named its necktie after him. This "rich, rare, Roman striped, accordion Knit Tie" was "pure silk, firmly knit;" it allegedly matched Guido's refined taste.[63]

Outside vaudeville, Guido's slick exterior resonated in lush social gatherings. Guido frequently appeared as performing musician or guest of honor on occasions such as dinner parties held by hotel

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[60] Richard Canedo, "Entertaining America," 192.

[61] "About Guido Deiro," Pietro Deiro, accessed June 1, 2019, official website of Guido Deiro, http://guidodeiro.org/pietroarticle.html

[62] "Deiro Hammerstein's," *N. Y. Telegraph*, January 18, 1913, RLC, vol. 364, 10.

[63] Advertisement, n.d., Guido's scrapbook I, 73, DC.

owners and Italian officials.[64] In July 1914, Guido was the headliner at the Roof Garden of Hotel La Salle in Chicago, a "high living" venue repeatedly advertised in local theater program books.[65] The Roof Garden featured "entertainment continuous from six to one every evening" during the summer months and was equipped with "large double doors which can be closed around the 'garden' at a moment's notice" during bad weather.[66] Guido's habitual appearances at extravagant venues suggest that he was familiar with social tiers and his intention to carve out his own niche.

Guido's proclivity for social prestige also manifested in his overbearing attitude toward Pietro. Guido moved to Merz, Germany around 1903, during which time Pietro was working as a miner. According to Pietro, one time he traveled to hear Guido play in a café without changing his work clothes. Guido, appalled by Pietro's sloppy appearance, brought him backstage and insisted that he must change his clothes so as not to embarrass him.[67] And on June 2, 1917, *Variety* featured a two-page advertisement, supposedly launched by Guido, insisting on setting the record straight regarding who was the superior piano accordionist. The ad stated that it was Guido, not Pietro, who first played the piano accordion in vaudeville, who was the highest paid piano accordionist, who won the Gold Medal at the San Diego Exposition, among several other feats.[68] Personal grudges between the two brothers persisted after vaudeville declined in the 1930s. In 1935, Guido wrote two letters to Pietro within a span of four days, ridiculing Pietro's endeavor as a columnist for *Metronome* and *Accordion News*. In the letters, Guido accused Pietro of hijacking his stage name to jumpstart his career in the

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[64] "Deiro Honored," *New York Clipper*, November 4, 1911, 8; "Italian Dinner was a Grand Success," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC; "Accordionist Honor Guest," *Fresno Morning Republican*, n.d., Guido's Scrapbook II, 19, DC.

[65] Program, Palace Music Hall, August 24, 1914, TPC.

[66] " 'High Eating' Attracts Crowds: Throngs at Hotel La Salle Roof Garden Uphold Chicago as Summer Resort," *Chicago Examiner*, July 18, 1914.

[67] "About Guido Deiro," Pietro Deiro, official website of Guido Deiro, accessed June 1, 2019, http://guidodeiro.org/pietroarticle.html

[68] "THE EXPOSE!!! THE FACT!!!" *Variety*, June 2, 1917, 38–39.

1910s.[69] Guido's quest for a rightly recognized legacy indicates that he was well aware of his social standing. In spite of the controversy surrounding the superiority of the Deiro brothers, Guido was considered one of the best accordionists of his time. Vaudeville managers often measured an accordion act to the high standard that Guido had set with his performances.

Guido fit comfortably with a particular taste culture endorsed by big time vaudeville. In the same way that big time owners incorporated high class European performers to signal social prestige, Guido's Italian heritage enhanced his elevated status. As Lawrence Levine remarks, by the early twentieth century, "the very word 'culture' [became] synonymous with the Eurocentric products."[70] This taste narrative, which William Howland Kenney terms "Euro-American high cultural consensus," created a space for European descendants in American popular culture.[71] Facing the demands for "European" music, many Italian immigrants seized the opportunity to publish sheet music and sell instruments.[72] Italian accordion makers brought their manufacturing skills to America in the early 1890s and established the first Italian accordion factory in San Francisco, the Guerrini Company.[73] While many other ethnic groups also contributed to the development of the accordion in the United States, the accordion manufacture was predominantly an Italian enterprise at the turn of the century.[74]

Press releases indicate that Guido's Italian flair was conducive to his popularity. Ads and vaudeville circuits constructed Guido's heritage as a particular kind of Italian-ness suited to their purposes of cultural uplift. Guido was portrayed as an "Italian maestro" hailing from "the land of

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[69] Guido to Pietro, July 13 and 17, 1935, box 11, folder 2, DC.

[70] Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 146.

[71] William Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69.

[72] Christine Zinni, "Play Ma a Tarantella, a Polka, or Jazz," in Simonett, *The Accordion in the Americas*, 159.

[73] Jacobson, *Squeeze This*, 20–22.

[74] Jacobson, *Squeeze This*, 21–22.

undiscovered artists," who "cuddles [the accordion] in his playful Italian fingers—a dynamo of happiness—a radiator of music."[75] Rarely did news articles ridicule the Deiro brothers for their non-native qualities. Even when reporters brought up the brothers' certain mannerism, they were often amused rather repelled by it. A reporter accentuated Pietro's speech as he expounded on the origin of the piano accordion: "We just-a exchange de piano wid de old fashioned accordion and as we say in de udder countree, 'cambio non e furto' and so we make-a de one instrument, out of de two."[76] Similar utterances went on for the next six paragraphs. The reporter described Pietro's accent as "attractive broken English, with its soft intonations of Italian."[77] The reporter likely fabricated parts of the scenario, as the dialogues covered in this article seem unrealistically detailed. Nonetheless, the way in which Pietro was portrayed in this article suggests that his ethnicity was fascinating enough to warrant embellishment.

Italian classical music, especially operatic transcriptions, was a significant part of Guido's repertoire. In "Guido Deiro: World's Foremost Piano-Accordionist," a 1929 seven-minute film made by Vitaphone, Guido performed two pieces both of Italian origin—Overture to *I Capuleti ei Montecchi* by Vincenzo Bellini and Serenade from *Les Millions D'Arlequin* by Riccardo Drigo. In each selection, Guido inserts a cadenza passage to showcase his finger work, aligning his performance with the classical virtuosic tradition. The first number opens with a pedal point in A that establishes the dominant in the piece, after which Guido leaves out the bass and breaks into a brief cadenza: he swiftly hits a stop behind the keyboard with his right wrist and immediately descends to a lower register

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[75] "Plays Unique Instrument," *Pittsburgh Post*, May 11, 1911, RLC, vol. 364, 8; "Guido Deiro Once a Street Musician," [1911?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 5, DC; "Deiro," [1913?], Guido's Scrapbook, I, 30, DC.

[76] [Holly?] Dalrymple, newspaper clipping, box 11, folder 9, DC.

[77] Dalrymple, newspaper clipping, box 11, folder 9, DC.

before working his way up in broken A-major arpeggios and lingering in the treble register.[78] In the second number, Guido animates the piece with several other artistic devices. He not only uses counter melodies, dynamic, and texture to signal different instrumentation, but also incorporates vibrato by wiggling his right hand over long held notes, imitating an operatic singer at a cadential moment. When the main theme occurs, he adds subtle but continually varied and incredibly sophisticated tempo fluctuation to the waltz beat to complement his phrasing.[79] Although both renditions in the film are abridged versions of the original compositions, Guido's interpretations adhere to the musical sequence in the original, which suggests that they were meant to be taken as authentic representations of these classical works. Furthermore, it is significant that Guido performed exclusively Italian classical music for his only cameo appearance. Whether it was a decision made by Vitaphone or Guido himself, his musical selection signaled a move to establish his connection to the Italian classical lineage.

According to Albert McLean, the vaudeville phenomenon encapsulates America's myth of success, prestige, and wealth. For McLean, vaudeville offered an "esthetic encounter that immigrant and rural segments of the population longed to make with the urban civilization that was absorbing them."[80] With the synergy of the entertainment industry, vaudeville catalyzed the notion of social aspiration and cultural uplift. As vaudeville appropriated European proxies into its middle-class rhetoric, it helped improve the livelihood of many European performers, who in turn theatricalized the process of cultural assimilation through their stardom. Guido enacted the vaudeville myth along with immigrant performers and agents who constituted a large part of the industry. Harry Houdini, Al

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[78] "Guido Deiro World's Foremost Piano-Accordionist - Part 1," accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qjXdL1u8Xo

[79] "Guido Deiro World's Foremost Piano-Accordionist - Part 2," accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMb0KiNUkLY

[80] Albert McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1965), 11.

Jolson, the Marx Brothers, the Dolly Sisters, Belle Baker, Sophie Tucker, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, Jimmy Durante, Sylvester Poli, Martin Beck, Oscar Hammerstein, William Morris—all came from an immigrant background.[81] As they thrived in the industry, Guido and his fellow immigrant performers became vaudeville's univocal agents who promoted an Americanized version of what it meant to be and become a respectable crowd.

Richard Butsch points out, even though vaudeville painstakingly stressed middle-class decency, hegemony was most prominent in the center of the vaudeville network and less pervasive in the periphery.[82] Similarly, M. Alison Kibler observes that "Keith's control was strongest in 'big-time,' as opposed to 'small-time,' vaudeville."[83] Nevertheless, secondary sites were often less interested in maintaining their marginality than reinforcing dominant ideology. Between May 15 and 17, 1916, Guido performed at the Bijou Theatre in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, a theater in the Keith-Albee Circuit that booked only three acts to fill half of the week, unlike its cosmopolitan counterparts in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia with a more substantial weekly bill. Guido was the third act and shared the program with Montague's Comedy Birds and Lester Trio, each playing for ten to fifteen minutes. The Woonsocket manager thought Guido's act "went fair" in the afternoon and "very good" at night.[84] But Guido was apparently very disappointed about the poor reception at the matinee. He boasted to the manager about his performance in Philadelphia a week earlier, claiming that his typical stage time was twenty-five minutes. In the report, the manager hastily noted that "[Guido] went a

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[81] Trav S. D., *No Applause, Just Throw Money, Or, the Book That Made Vaudeville Famous: A High-Class, Refined Entertainment* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 207.

[82] Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120.

[83] M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 18.

[84] Report Book, July 4, 1915–November 13, 1916, 161, KAV.

good bit better [at the evening show] but not what he deserved"—as if he was apologizing for the inadequate reception on behalf of his audience who should have known better.[85] There is no record verifying Guido's Philadelphia engagement prior to Woonsocket or his claim for a longer stage time.[86] Regardless, the small town manager's note suggests that when dealing with big time celebrities like Guido, he was anxiously aware of his subordinate stature in the vaudeville hierarchy.

Guido's rise to fame cast a compelling narrative of social metamorphosis. Wielding his European heritage, Guido enacted a version of cultural uplift familiar to his vaudeville audience. In line with Euro-American high cultural consensus and vaudeville's self-advertised decency, Guido's popular persona encompassed two coveted qualities—high class Italian culture and homebound populist appeal—that propagated vaudeville's taste agenda. Guido attained his fame along with an expanding middle class who valued Victorian etiquette in the context of popular entertainment. The piano accordion was Guido' companion on his path to social respectability. The glistening status that Guido obtained through his affiliation with vaudeville laid the groundwork for the making of a new accordion myth.

2.3 Respectable Accordion

Guido was a vaudeville rarity: his straight instrumental act was overwhelmingly successful.[87] While many instrumentalists resorted to extra-musical appeals in order to sustain audience interests,

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[85] Report Book, July 4, 1915–November 13, 1916, 161, KAV.

[86] Most vaudeville acts rarely went over 25 minutes except for playlets. Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 163.

[87] Bruce Vermazen, *That Moaning Saxophone: The Six Brown Brothers and the Dawning of a Musical Craze* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

Guido was billed and remembered exclusively as a solo piano accordionist. In a typical routine, he "comes out on a bare stage, sits down in the middle of a spotlight, and with a big accordion that has an abbreviated keyboard, makes a noise like a piano, an organ and a full orchestra of woodwind, strings, brass and drums."[88] At his most capricious, Guido might "[do] a little singing and occasionally his feet [would] not keep still, but insist on moving to the melody."[89] For a short time, Guido seemed to incorporate brief comic bits into his act. A reviewer noted that Guido "ranks among the real comedy musicians of vaudeville."[90] Likewise, on May 1, 1911, Keith's Philadelphia manager C. E. Barns. reported that Guido added "a little comedy in the ragtime line which caught the crowd."[91] But unlike Mike Bernard, popular ragtime pianist who often teamed up with other musicians, or the Brown Brothers, pioneering saxophonists who wore whimsical outfits and performed musical comedy on multiple instruments, or Violinsky, "the Eccentric Musician" who played violin and piano at the same time, or Klauss, "Musical Encyclopedia" who took live audience requests and played anything by memory,[92] Guido won over the vaudeville crowd with his one and only prop, the piano accordion.

Guido's accordion act expedited the legacy of Frosini, who was billed as "The Man Who First Dignified the Accordion in America."[93] Pietro Frosini migrated to America a few years before Guido and made a name for himself in vaudeville by performing classical repertoire on the chromatic button accordion with dazzling technique and robust musicianship. In 1906, *Variety* critic Rush commented on Frosini's impressive performance at the Keeny's Theatre in New York City; Rush noted, "By force of his excellent interpretation of operative and semi-operatic musical numbers he does much to raise

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[88] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

[89] "Deiro Makes a Great Hit," n.d., Guido's scrapbook I, 30, DC.

[90] "Deiro Improves on Act," [May 1912?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 11, DC.

[91] Report Book, February 27–December 11, 1911, 46, KAV.

[92] Advertisement, *New York Clipper*, December 19, 1917, 120.

[93] Report Book, November 13, 1916–January 21, 1918, 230, KAV.

the rather discredited accordeon to a position where it may claim place as a medium of delicate musical expression."[94] After Guido entered vaudeville, he would join Frosini to elevate the status of the accordion. *Variety* critic Bell observed that Guido was one of the best performers who followed "the virgin path [Frosini] opened."[95] While Frosini's use of the chromatic button accordion rarely drew public attention, Guido's novel instrument was an instantaneous hit. With his focused, poised stage presence, Guido created a specific cultural temperament around his performance that invigorated the status of the accordion.

Guido's accordion was more than a passing fancy. His status as a soloist imbued the accordion with artistic gravity. As Levine argues, at the turn of the twentieth century, a sharpened divide between elitist culture and mass entertainment intensified the "highbrow" and lowbrow" bifurcation. Levine continues, the status of high art relied on a commitment to its autonomous, unmediated presence;[96] the increasingly purist presentation of classical music reflected this notion accompanying the process of cultural bifurcation. Guido's solo performance facilitated an association with pristine music, gesturing toward high class entertainment. On the week of January 6, 1913, a reporter indicated that Guido was one of "several high class novelties on the current bill at Poli's" in Springfield, Massachusetts.[97] Another reporter noted, with his classical selection, Guido "clearly brought out the possibilities of an accordion as a concert instrument."[98] Guido was considered to remain "in the plane of classical music."[99]

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[94] Rush, "Frosini," *Variety*, December 1, 1906, 9.

[95] Bell, "81st Street," *Variety*, November 7, 1919, RLC, vol. 364, 14.

[96] Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 146.

[97] "Novelties at Poli's," [January 1913?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 15, DC.

[98] "Deiro Thrills with Accordion Melodies on Keith Program," [1929–30?], Guido's Scrapbook II, 27, DC.

[99] "Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 69, DC.

In July 1916, Guido gave an open-air classical concert at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Diego. His program included March from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, Musetta's waltz from Puccini's *La Boheme*, along with Overture to *Maritana* by William Vincent Wallace, Ave Maria by Gounod, Humoresque by Dvorak, and "Under Northern Stars" by Leoncavallo [?].[100] Photographs of this performance show Guido standing under an awning in Plaza de Panama, being supported by a full orchestra in the shade. This setup gave Guido a look of a concerto soloist.[101] A reporter suggested that this recital would "afford Exposition music lovers an excellent opportunity for hearing a great artist and for realizing the musical possibilities of the accordion."[102]

By performing exclusively on the piano accordion, Guido projected a sense of discipline required to achieve artistic proficiency. His musical expertise favorably met the middle-class values of devotion, self-advancement, and professionalism. In order to be able to "display brilliant fingering," as one review described Guido's act, one must undergo rigorous training.[103] Unlike an amateur accordionist who might struggle to make a decent sound, Guido's virtuosic capacity implied that the piano accordion was a sophisticated instrument that required craftsmanship and education to unlock its noble potential. As one reporter commented, "the accordion has a soul the same as a violin, but only a very few of the professional artists in this country are able to find that soul."[104] With his professional halo, Guido was likened to an artisan who "moulds his own interpretations like sculptor moulds clay."[105]

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[100] Untitled article, [July 12, 1916?], Guido's Scrapbook II, 6, DC.

[101] Photograph, Guido's Scrapbook I, 80, DC; "Panama Pacific Exposition," official website of Guido Deiro, accessed June 1, 2019, http://guidodeiro.org/exposition.html

[102] Untitled article, [July 12, 1916?], Guido's Scrapbook II, 6, DC.

[103] "Deiro Hammerstein's," *N.Y. Telegraph*, January 18, 1913. RLC, vol. 364, 10.

[104] "The Accordion," [1924–26?], Guido's Scrapbook II, 21.

[105] "Deiro's Accordeon Has Twice the Tone Compass of Piano," *San Antonio Evening News*, n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 70, DC.

In many ways, straight instrumental acts exemplified middle-class decency in the most genteel manner: they excited but never punched, uplifted but never dragged, pleased but never placated. When pianist Zardo played at Keith's Providence on September 29, 1919, theater manager Charles Lovenberg praised his well-balanced taste, noting that "[his] program is exceedingly well adapted to vaudeville and at the same time not offensive to lovers of good music."[106] Lovenberg warned against excessive styles, especially to instrumentalists who incorporated non-musical components. He criticized Flavilla the "Girl Accordionist" on the week of March 12, 1917 for "overacting" in an otherwise good performance.[107] Managers almost never made cuts to an instrumental act unless it involved verbal or theatrical components.

Guido's act displayed certain correctness that appealed to a middle-class audience who might shun extreme musical expressions. In report books, managers scantily took notes about Guido's act, only providing general impressions. The fact that they were not occupied with any particular details implies that Guido's act conformed to vaudeville's moral standard. Guido's pleasant demeanor caught a reporter's eye, who wrote that "Deiro is gifted with abundant personality, but does not abuse it. He is content to be pleasing; he is artistic rather than eccentric, and for this reason he is to be commended."[108] Another reporter appreciated Guido's shrewd sense of self-control for he "descend[ed] to 'rag' just enough to show that he [could] do it."[109] These remarks suggest that Guido's performance was considered appropriate and "good" because it adhered to moderate taste.

Vaudeville reception was often shaped by how an act was framed—from the ways in which performers delivered their materials to what they were wearing. When Rosa Lee Tyler, an African-

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[106] Report Book, June 30, 1919–July 26, 1920, 58, KAV.

[107] Report Book, November 13, 1916–January 21, 1918, 64, KAV.

[108] "Deiro Hammerstein's," *N. Y. Telegraph*, January 18, 1913. RLC, vol. 364, 10.

[109] "Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 69, DC.

American classical soprano, performed at Keith's Boston in her informal street clothes due to a luggage delay, the manager thought that she "[was] a very good singer, and went well with the audience."[110] But a week earlier, when Tyler performed at Keith's Providence supposedly in her formal outfit, another manager criticized her simply for having "attempt[ed] classical singing … Seems beyond the Negro race to do this. Her voice is metallic and screechy and her make-up decidedly bad as she powders up considerably in order to disguise the fact that she is a Negro."[111] While these conflicting opinions had to do partially with individual tastes, they also seem to stem from whether Tyler was wearing a formal attire when she performed classical music. Minute details like this played a role in reinforcing certain stereotypes and shaping reception.

Part of Guido's success relied on his refined clothing choice and gentlemanly varnishing. A reporter found Guido likable because "[he] is very correctly garbed in white flannels, which are vastly becoming to him."[112] When Guido played at the Hudson Theater in Union Hill, New Jersey on January 27, 1913, manager Jos. R. Smith wrote, "he dresses neatly in white serge suit. His personality goes right over and his winning smile gets to them."[113] Guido's stage persona embodied Victorian masculine norms that helped put the accordion in a more favorable light. Audience members were mesmerized by Guido as they watched attentively to his pleasant smile while getting distracted by the equally enchanting accordion music.

Even though the timbre of the piano accordion was not noticeably different from other types of accordion, Guido's fans found his instrument "utterly unlike the strains usually heard from an

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[110] Report Book, September 21 1903–March 24, 1904, 135. KAV.

[111] Report Book, September 21 1903–March 24, 1904, 127. KAV.

[112] "Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 5, DC.

[113] Report Book, September 9, 1912–February 24, 1913, 193, KAV.

accordion."[114] A reporter compared its sound to "the resonance of an organ … [, c]himing bells ringing out in a carillon of joy, or dying away in the distance."[115] Some reviewers attributed this "new" sound to Guido's skill and the "exceptionally large instrument" he was using.[116] Accordionist Henry Doktorski has examined one of Guido's accordions and used it to make a redux recording of one of Guido's earliest recorded music, "Sharpshooter's March." Doktorski confirms that Guido's 1926 instrument indeed has a few special features.[117] However, as much as the rich sonority might be a direct result of the unique instrument, the listeners likely described Guido's accordion in vivid sonic metaphors because these disparate sounds were unified on a particular occasion of listening. Realistically, they might not resemble one another at all—in fact, accordion and chiming bells could not possibly sound more different. But as Guido's performance activated a particular aurality and memory, the accordion might begin to sound like chiming bells experientially.

A reporter remarked that Guido played his accordion "as if he were seated at a big Mason-Steinway, and accomplishes a swell and diminuendo that one has a right to expect only from an organ."[118] The listener likely related Guido's accordion to "a big Mason-Steinway" because the atmosphere of listening to Guido conjured up a refined moment. Similarly, one might conceive that Guido gave " 'Ramona' and 'Ain't She Sweet' … the effect of an orchestra" because the experience

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[114] Untitled articles, [May 1912?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 11, DC.

[115] "The Regent Theatre / An Attractive Programme," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook II, 25, DC.

[116] Untitled articles, [May 1912?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 11, DC.

[117] Guido owned several accordions throughout his career. This particular instrument examined by Doktorski was made by the Guerrini Company in San Francisco, with the date June 3, 1926 stamped on its reed blocks. This accordion has three sets of middle reeds and one set of low reeds, operated by the master and the violin register switches. It has no tone chamber, which makes the instrument sound brighter, according to Doktorski. Additionally, it has a bass mute that covers the round portholes on the instrument's back panel. Henry Doktorski, *The Brothers Deiro and Their Accordions* (Oakdale, PA: H. Doktorski, 2005), 17.

[118] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

of watching Guido perform these tunes simulated an impression of attending an orchestra concert.[119] It is undeniable that Guido's accordion skill played a part in creating an orchestral texture. However, these vivid sonic epiphanies were also linked to the audience's particular aurality. Guido's accordion was not only mediated through his musicianship but also shaped by the listeners who contextualized the sound of the instrument.

Listeners likely perceived the accordion as an elevated instrument because the vaudeville environment facilitated an association with affluent cultural forms. Advertisements in program books created a fertile ground for listeners to reposition the accordion in their taste hierarchies. For instance, an ad in a 1913 program book spelled out how vaudeville wanted its audience to be understood: they are people "who have money / who have the spending habit / who like the good things of life / who can indulge in whims, if they like."[120] This ad boosted the listeners' sense of financial security, making them feel especially good about having chosen to attend a vaudeville show. If "the good things of life" were what they were paid for, then that "absurd looking contraption" on the stage must not be so tedious after all, but worthy of their spending habits and musical taste.

In addition, the keyboard feature of Guido's accordion encouraged an association with the piano, a link further strengthened by ubiquitous piano ads in program books. Piano was a staple of musical life in middle-class families since the 1890s.[121] Piano ads pervaded nearly every printed program for big time vaudeville shows in major American cities. In a 1914 program, an ad for piano and victrola was placed right above Guido's billing.[122] Appeared on the following page was another

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[119] "The Regent Theatre / An Attractive Programme," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook II, 25, DC.

[120] Program, B. F. Keith's Hippodrome Cleveland, OH, August 1913. BRTC.

[121] Donna R. Foy Braden, " 'The Family That Plays Together Stays Together': Family Pastimes and Indoor Amusements, 1890–1930," in American Home Life, 1880–1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 155.

[122] Program, Keith's Bushwick Theatre, Brooklyn, NY, October 4, 1914. BRTC.

piano ad, promoting "New York's Greatest Sale for Pianos." At the top of this ad was a drawing of a pair of hands in white sleeves and a dark suit reaching out to a piano keyboard, playing a C major chord in first inversion around middle C. It was a realistic view from a pianist in action—a beginner, perhaps, but aspirational enough to be wearing a concert attire. This ad invited those who held it up to slip into those firm, capable hands and imagine themselves at the keyboard, making concert-worthy music—a dream that could come true if one would pay for one of the pianos on sale. As the audience members looked up from the ad to Guido who was making splendid music on the piano accordion, they might begin to consider it as part of their cultural aspiration.

According to Daniel Cavicchi, listening entails the ability to differentiate "good from bad sound."[123] It marks social distinction and expresses a particular social standing through consumption choices. In this sense, the piano accordion gave the vaudeville audience an opportunity to exercise and display their social consciousness. As listeners began to consider the piano accordion as part of the respectable culture, they redrew social boundaries around Guido's instrument, transforming it into a badge of gentility and middle-class interests. With an elevated status, the accordion turned hackneyed melodies into fresh musical experiences. A reporter remarked that Guido's accordion version of "Row, Row, Row" gave this song "an entirely new treatment."[124] Sometimes, this game of cultural elevation surpassed vaudeville's own taste standard. One reporter marveled at the sound of the instrument and noted that "this 'noise' is real music, not just vaudeville music, but regular music."[125]

The emergence of the piano accordion in vaudeville largely mirrors immigrants' social uplift that affirmed middle-class values. As Marion Jacobson suggests, in Guido's hands, the accordion became "a tool with which to enrich one's musical tastes and sensibilities" and "to express social status

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[123] Cavicchi, Listening and Longing, 46.

[124] "Deiro Hammerstein's," *N. Y. Telegraph*, January 18, 1913, RLC, vol. 364, 10.

[125] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

and power."[126] Guido's refined stage persona helped relocate the piano accordion from its humble immigrant background to the middle-class cultural register. It is said that Frosini was so impressed by Guido's success with the piano accordion that he pasted a dummy piano keyboard over his chromatic button accordion.[127] In 1911, Frosini did take up a real piano accordion to perform at the Fifth Avenue Theater in New York City.[128]

The advent of the vaudeville piano accordion was generally seen as a watershed in the accordion history. Toni Charuhas observed his 1955 study, *The Accordion*, that the piano accordion is "far removed from the primitive, crude instrument first invented and called an accordion. It is no longer cumbersome and clumsy to play" due to the inventiveness of manufacturing companies.[129] Charuhas traced the origin of the accordion across a span of millennia from the regal, the portative, to the Chinese *sheng*, presenting the accordion as an instrument with a legitimate genealogy. Charuhas' book was a byproduct of the accordion's social uplift. It was conceived in an era when the accordion had moved beyond its crude stereotypes and gained respectability in mass culture. This cultural establishment was mirrored in Charuhas' intention to frame the instrument not only as a legitimate one but also as a legitimate topic of study.

The symbolism of upward mobility attached to Guido's accordion was one aspect among many of its induction into the American mainstream. In the next two chapters, I suggest that the popularization of Guido's accordion was a more complex ongoing process which belied vaudeville's vested interests. In Chapter 3, I examine the instability inherent in vaudeville's middle-class trope. In

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[126] Jacobson, *Squeeze This*, 16, 10.

[127] Jacobson, *Squeeze This*, 46.

[128] A reviewer wrote of this performance: "The piano-accordion routine started with 'The Glow Worm' and closed with a riot with 'Mysterious Rag.' In between he gave other 'rags,' his act totaling fifteen minutes. Frosini left them howling for more." *Variety*, November 4, 1911.

[129] Toni Charuhas, *The Accordion* (New York: Accordion Music Publishing Company, 1955), 13.

Chapter 4, I explore elements in Guido's performance and reception that might have defied vaudeville's self-proclaimed social decorum.

3.0 Contesting Decency

Vaudeville and its commercial outlets formed a network that propagated its own cultural values and interests. Its emphasis on "righteousness" and "cleanliness" inspired contemporaneous actor Edwin Milton Royle to dub vaudeville "the Sunday-school circuit."[130] In the process of sanitizing program content, vaudeville also became a site for contesting taste preferences. Vaudeville managers, performers, and audiences reacted to one another's demands and desires, collectively forging an eclectic culture that wavered between highbrow and lowbrow cultures.

Richard Canedo uses the phrase "middle ground" to describe the intermediary zone where highbrow and lowbrow cultures mingled in vaudeville. For Canedo, this middle ground is not exactly what Joan Shelley Rubin calls the middlebrow culture, which she refers to a higher cultural register that mediates between high culture and popular sensibility.[131] Canedo writes, "vaudeville occupied a great cultural middle ground that borrowed elements from what had been defined elsewhere as 'high' and 'low,' and which crossed and blended such categories constantly."[132] Even though taste culture is inextricably tied to social class in a heterogeneous society like America,[133] one's class and taste do not necessarily circumscribe each other. In the middle ground, vaudeville's effort to promote sanitized culture encountered parallel, oblique, and contrary motivations that complicated vaudeville's vested

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[130] Edwin Milton Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," reprinted in American Vaudeville as Seen by Its Contemporaries, ed. Charles W. Stein (New York: Knopf, 1984), 26.

[131] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 169.

[132] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 169.

[133] Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

interests. Managers needed to appeal broadly in order to make money; performers used salacious materials to draw attention; audience members felt compelled to actively participate in the show.

In this chapter, I continue the discussion of vaudeville and reframe it as a heterogeneous site even though it predominantly catered to middle class Americans. While vaudeville commercialized the notion of cultural decency, it also generated alternative modes of entertainment that obscured its self-proclaimed Victorian etiquette. By locating the vaudeville audience, performers, and managers in the "middle ground," I illustrate vaudeville as a system of inconsistent and mixed taste hierarchies, a perspective that I will further apply in Chapter 4 to an analysis of Guido and his accordion.

3.1 Unstable Moral Taxonomy

In principle, vaudeville manufactured wholesome family entertainment. In reality, it hosted a wide range of cultural interests beyond polite samplings of clean, decent programs. Vaudeville strived for moral decency in performances insofar as it could still attract a variety of customers. There was often a discrepancy between vaudeville's advertised decency and what was actually taking place on the stage or in the audience. Press reviews and managers' report books provide a realistic view of vaudeville, hinting at tensions in its moral taxonomy. Even though these documents cannot directly speak for a middle-class audience who might indeed appreciate the public display of social decorum, they indicate the precarious nature of vaudeville's censorship effort and how it left room for transgression.

Before a program was performed in front of a live audience, performers typically rehearsed on a Monday morning with the theater manager who took notes of inappropriate materials and profane verbal content. Some managers banned references to wars and alcohol; others eliminated

phrases such as "Washington is famous for its marble domes," "there's nothing out there you can't get in here," "catfish don't have kittens," and "hotdog."[134] On February 5, 1917, Keith's Philadelphia manager asked a comedian not to "call attention to persons leaving or entering" the theater.[135] Managers also made cuts to physical gestures. On April 18, 1921, a Boston manager asked a comedy musician not to "wiggle with back to audience."[136] These notes reflect not only rhetorical concerns but realistic conjectures: they imply just how horribly wrong a vaudeville act could go from a manager's standpoint. Among the most frequent censored words in report books were "damn," "hell," "God," "devil," and "Lord." Their commonality suggests that these words were uttered repeatedly and persistently in rehearsals. Even if these unfit elements did not make it into a live show, they were nonetheless transgressive incidents that took place in vaudeville.

The degree to which managers revised an act varied significantly. The imperative to bar vulgarity from vaudeville tended to be most prevalent in high profile venues. Report books show that in the Keith-Albee Circuit, theaters in Boston were particularly strict in maintaining its cleanliness to meet the high moral standard of its patrons.[137] While some expressions were clearly out of line, others seemed less self-explanatory if not arbitrary. As cultural critic Marian Spitzer observed, moral standard was geographical. She explained, "jokes that get by, as the vaudevillians say, in Toledo, Ohio, are under a diocesan ban in Providence, R. I., while wheezes that are regarded as simply too lascivious for utterance in Lynn, Mass., are quite lawful in such Byzantine centers as Detroit, Mich."[138]

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[134] Marian Spitzer, "Morals in the Two-a-day," *American Mercury*, September 1, 1924, 38.

[135] Report Book, November 13, 1916–January 21, 1918, 39, KAV.

[136] Report Book, September 13, 1920–December 8, 1921, 160, KAV.

[137] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 20.

[138] Spitzer, "Morals in the Two-a-day," 36.

Not only was censorship inconsistent but it was less coercive than what vaudeville administrators might have admitted. Wertheim observes, "Despite their crusade to censor performers, the big-time owners bent its rules on proprietary when it involved acts that were popular with the audience."[139] Erotic content sometimes were presented at actual performances and framed in such a way that they were not bluntly sexual per se. Belly dancers twirled in front of a predominantly middle-class audience not to erotize female bodies but to enact women "suffering from a bee sting."[140] Eugene Sandow's nearly nude weight-lifting routine was motivated, supposedly, by a noble sentiment to educate the public about physical culture.[141] Female models performed living tableaux and impersonated classical statues in full body tights to recreate "high art."[142] These incidents show that vaudeville's middle-class rhetoric was stretched to accommodate popular acts with suggestive elements. Managers took moral sanction with unspoken flexibility, rarely acknowledging or hinting at the presence of potentially out-of-line materials.[143]

Fundamentally, vaudeville owners were less interested in moral sanction than making profits. They upheld the banner of social decorum in order to bring families into the theater. At the same time, they were willing to embrace male clients and lower class audiences who were historically associated with less reputable venues so long as they would pay for the show. The impossible need to sell uniform programs to a heterogeneous group of people pushed managers to sacrifice propriety for profits. Middle-class respectability—a notion that defied universal definition, measurement, and enforcement—was often compromised by money. Beneath vaudeville's glamorous décor laid a lax

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[139] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 167.

[140] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 144.

[141] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 51.

[142] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 142.

[143] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 25.

grip on the risqué and transgressive. It was vaudeville's own financial incentive that destabilized its moral taxonomy.

3.2 Working the Audience

The tension between decency and bawdiness permeated both the vaudeville stage and the audience. As Canedo suggests, "Vaudeville was not, strictly speaking, a 'middle class' entertainment. It featured a widely varied price structure and broad geographic dispersion within America's cities and towns."[144] According to Michael M. Davis, Jr.'s survey in 1911, the New York vaudeville audience consisted of 60 percent "working" class, 36 percent "clerical" class, and 4 percent "vagrant," "gamin," or "leisured."[145] Even though the methodology for Davis' study is questionable, as Snyder argues, this survey suggests a more complex audience constitution than a homogenous middle-class body. As Kibler points out, big time vaudeville also attracted working-class patrons even though the majority of its audience might indeed be "the burgeoning class of white-collar workers."[146] With its 10-cent or 15-cent gallery seats, even high end theaters like the Orpheum in San Francisco could become a regular pastime destination for the working class.[147]

The vaudeville audience was therefore a shifting entity. While vaudeville catered to the middle class by offering generally lower admission prices than legitimate theater, it also invited those who could pay for a ticket from the lower social strata into the theater. Its tiered price structure encouraged

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[144] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 12.

[145] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 199.

[146] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 26.

[147] Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars*, 290.

a mixed group of audience members to engage with middle-class decency in the context of their own enculturation. The eclectic assemblage of advertisements in program books reflects the broad range of patrons whom vaudeville might attract. As Canedo observes, ads in the Providence and Philadelphia programs around 1910 range "from lower-end butchers, grocers and coal dealers to the middle class's dentists, hotels and photographers, to high-end customers' tailors, automobile dealers and ocean liner vacations."[148]

Because the vaudeville patrons were an unstable entity, their taste preferences could not be systematically rationalized or predicted. The ever shifting audience body made it especially difficult for managers to accurately predict reception. Managers were pressured to interpret their audience correctly in order to hone their programming strategies and secure profits.[149] But more often than not, they were surprised by audience behaviors, which did not always conform to gender and class norms. Managers had not expected to see women patrons showing erotic interests in exposed male bodies and being particularly enthused about boxing match acts and the display of "strong men" like Sandow.[150] On September 23, 1909, the "gallery gods" in Woonsocket listened attentively to a classical cello performance by Ralph Smalley, a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.[151] The manager was amazed at the sophistication displayed by these patrons occupying the cheapest seats in the house. Similarly, a Providence manager was surprised by the overwhelming reception of a classical soprano on February 6, 1911. He wrote, "To say that Mme. Norwood made a hit would be to put it most mildly. The applause was simply terrific and I didn't expect much from the afternoon crowd with out

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[148] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 212.

[149] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 33.

[150] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 50–51.

[151] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 44.

popular price balcony, but both balconies 'ate it alive.' "[152] These incidents suggest that although managers attempted to best understand the audience, they could not effectively conceptualize taste culture in vaudeville based on gender and class differences.

More fundamentally, audience behavior seemed arbitrary because there was no clear directive for it. Vaudeville managers tended to hold conflicting ideas about how the audience should behave. In order to gauge reception, managers observed the way in which an audience physically responded to a performer. As Kibler suggests, an act was considered a hit when it caused a "riotous" reaction, "conveying the exuberance incited by an act as well as the ongoing influence of the low in vaudeville."[153] Additionally, tangible audience response was significant to performers who sought to connect with the vaudeville audience who, according to Snyder, generally appreciated being an active part of the act.[154] Lowell Henderson recalled attending Guido's show in Pennsylvania around 1919. His recollection of this performance captures the ongoing dynamic between the performer and the audience: not only was Guido expected to involve the audience directly, but the crowd felt just as comfortable working their power reciprocally on Guido. Henderson wrote,

> Number after number he played on his great white accordion with never anything but stern, almost ferocious countenance. The young country schoolteachers, especially the women, had never seen such rigidity of expression, and taking it as a challenge, tried as a group to make him smile. Toward the end of the concert they were winking and even waving hands, genteelly of course, in an effort to break down that face of stone. They succeeded, and as the final notes of the last number

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[152] Report Book, June 13, 1910–February 20, 1911, 231. KAV.

[153] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 40.

[154] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 105–106.

died away Guido made a big smile and the young and pretty teachers squealed with delight.[155]

While expressive audience behaviors were important to both the performer and manager, the manager was bound to maintaining order in the theater. Program books constantly instructed the audience to behave discreetly. Gentlemen were asked to "please applaud with their hands only, omitting all shouting, whistling and noise with glasses or canes."[156] As for female patrons, "the attention of ladies is respectfully called to the hat rack on the back of each seat."[157] When the pit orchestra played musical interludes during intermission, the audience were also asked to "return to their seats as quietly as possible."[158] A 1906 program book recommended the patrons to remain seated during the showing of moving pictures until the theater was lighted.[159]

In spite of these regulations, vaudeville thrived in physical expressions. As Goodeve remarks, vaudeville happenstance was "utterly dependent upon the presence, proximity, interaction, and memory of physical bodies."[160] The vaudeville experience was characterized by an "immediacy generated by audience and entertainer [that] resisted reproduction."[161] A successful act was defined by its ability to provoke physical response from the audience. The contradictory need for order and enthusiasm prevented managers from prescribing consistent audience behaviors. Managers understood that riotous behaviors must be contained according to vaudeville's moral precepts. But as

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[155] Lowell Henderson to Jim Walsh, 1954, folder 79, box 3, Jim Walsh Collection, Library of Congress, Recorded Sound Research Center, quoted in Muir, "Looks like a cash register," 67.

[156] Program, Atlantic Garden, September 1907, BRTC.

[157] Program, Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre, New York, NY, April 2. 1906

[158] Program, Colonial, [New York City?], November 28, 1915. BRTC

[159] Program, Colonial Theatre, [New York City?], November 5, 1906. BRTC.

[160] Thyrza Goodeve, "Houdini's Premonition: Virtuality and Vaudeville on the Internet," *Leonardo* 30, no. 5 (1997): 370.

[161] Goodeve, "Houdini's Premonition," 371.

they shepherded the audience in tidiness, they also left room for physical assertion in order to better understand reception. The managers' double standard ruptured the mixed audience body, further destabilizing vaudeville's reception culture.

3.3 Tasteless Vaudeville

From the perspective of cultural authorities, taste is inextricably tied to an awareness of correct social behaviors.[162] How one responds to a performance or listen to music reflects a particular class consciousness. For those who favored passive audience behaviors, vaudeville presented a threat to high taste culture: rowdy audience behaviors went against their version of social decorum. More problematic was the fact that in vaudeville there was no clear directive for optimal behaviors. Due to managers' conflicting moral and financial motives, the vaudeville patrons were suspended in the sensation of the theater, forever oscillating between active and passive modes of audience participation. Since there was no "correct" behavior, taste was a precarious concept that, on the one hand, defined vaudeville as a cultural institution and, on the other, held no real ground for a particular way of enforcing cultural hierarchies.

The confusion of class, ethnicity, and taste—all conveniently collapsed under the envelope of middle-class interests—affected theater managers, performers, and audiences in vaudeville. Such unwholesome mingling in the guise of social decorum was a feature of vaudeville's theatricality. It mirrored a diffusion of social identity as socioeconomic patterns evolved. At the turn of the twentieth century, clerical workers emerged as a new workforce that by 1900 had outnumbered the working

[162] Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 184.

class.[163] These workers, an offshoot of white-collar employment, were sandwiched uneasily between the white-collar and middle-class strata. Even though they labored side-by-side with white-collar workers and shared similar material interests with them, these clerical workers did not own cultural capital like the established middle class.[164] Furthermore, as immigrants and women began to work in these clerical and sales positions, class divisions that were formally structured around racial and gender lines became increasingly fussy.[165] As a result, by the early twentieth century, former class division no longer effectively demarcated one's place in society.

Through respectable public amusement, these nascent urban nomads fostered an independent social consciousness and relocated their ambiguous identity among a decent crowd of theater goers. For them, vaudeville was a token for social admission as much as for leisure. Their need to connect to middle-class decency reflects a deep-seated anxiety around being denied of social participation. As Elizabeth Ewen comments on the New York immigrant communities, commercialization of leisure provided an opportunity for immigrants "to see and to be seen."[166] However, vaudeville did not completely mitigate their insecurity. After all, vaudeville was made up by an assembly of people, many of which were these urban nomads. Vaudeville reiterated and reinforced social confusion by drawing different cultural strands into the middle ground, where performers, managers, and audiences expressed their disparate voices. Vaudeville coped with this social anxiety by making it a public spectacle.

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[163] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 44.

[164] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 44.

[165] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 44.

[166] Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890–1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 24.

The opportunity to construct a temporary identity through mass entertainment was a mixed blessing: it fulfilled one's need for social participation without having to fully subscribe to a fixed identity. This social muddiness was evident in the tensions between managers who were motivated by both profits and moral decency and a diverse group of audience who displayed varying senses of decorum in the theater as well as their desires for some degree of lewdness. In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which identities, genres, and tastes mingled around Guido's accordion in a grand social masquerade that was only made possible in vaudeville.

4.0 Accordion in the Middle Ground

In Chapter 2, the persona of Guido discussed was one constructed from highly circulated media. These materials—vaudeville program books, press releases, advertisements, and reviews—were manufactured especially for vaudeville's primary audience, white middle-class families. They produced an image of Guido that resembled the archetype of a vaudevillian and an aspiring social climber who enacted middle-class interests. This particular bias elevated the status of the piano accordion and at the same time concealed certain features that might be incompatible with vaudeville's class and taste rhetoric. If we were to fully accept the empirical evidence of Guido and his accordion, we would inevitably overlook certain characteristics implicit in his act that were shadowed by his middle-class projection.

In this chapter, I provide an extended narrative of Guido and his accordion, revising the idea that Guido only played music that appealed to middle-class tastes in vaudeville. Guido's Victorian persona was complicated by his showmanship, his incorporation of ragtime music into his act, and his masculinity. Furthermore, there is even some evidence—based on the diverse target audiences of the recordings Guido produced as well as how he was depicted in newspaper cartoons—to suggest that there were multiple ways of characterizing and appreciating this man who blended genres and whose charismatic theatricality enchanted an audience besides middle-class Americans.

4.1 The Vaudeville Method

Victorian decorum was not an end in itself but a token for social participation. Even though vaudeville managers, performers, and audiences used the concept of middle-class decency to structure

their enterprise, program content, and leisure experience, by no means were their individual tastes and social standings confined to the notion of social propriety. As Snyder argues, "Victorianism was only one element of a complex and volatile cultural equation that simultaneously recognized Victorianism's lingering power and asserted alternatives to it."[167] Realistically, Guido's accordion appeared in the midst of overlapping taste preferences where cultural hierarchies were blurred. Moreover, Guido performed his accordion with a high dose of showmanship, channeled gripping elements of his act in the most effective way, and temporarily suspended preexisting taste hierarchies.

The heart of vaudeville's contradiction rested in the need to feature not only technically polished but also emotionally appealing acts that would elicit a strong audience response. It was not sufficient to succeed in vaudeville by merely delivering a sanitized instrumental act. As *Variety* critic Jolo remarked about accordionist Charles Klauss' act at the Hammerstein's in New York City, "He simply plays—probably well enough in its way, but just playing any instrument in vaudeville doesn't count for much."[168] When Guido performed, he provoked a passionate and rowdy response supposedly antithetical to vaudeville decorum. If all Guido did was show up onstage in an impeccably white flannel shirt and a shiny tuxedo while strapped in a piano accordion, what was there to be stirred by? If all he possessed was a sleek demeanor, he could not possibly arouse such a resounding passion from the audience, one that would match the ardent greeting of a gallery god at Denver's Orpheum, "Oh, you D-I-E-R-O! [sic]"[169] If Guido "sets the gallery to whistling and the rest of the house to marking time,"[170] his appeal—whatever it might be—could not solely be his high culture persona.

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[167] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 132.

[168] Jolo, "Charles Klass." *Variety*, December 16, 1911, 16.

[169] "Oh, You D-i-e-r-o! Cry Gallery Gods at Orpheum Show," *The Denver R … [missing]*, n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 13, DC.

[170] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

Guido's enduring popularity and raucous reception imply that his music animated a combustive, titillating energy beyond vaudeville nicety.

The "vaudeville method" of playing was crucial to a successful instrumental act. This method entailed any approach necessary to physically and emotionally move the audience—be it special musical effects, tricks, showmanship, or theatricality. In his notes, Keith's Columbus manager W. W. Prosser consistently mentioned this indispensable ingredient when he documented acts that failed and succeeded in his theater. In 1911, he commented on a performance of Farland, "The Banjo Wizard:" "This man is a wonderful player but is handicapped through giving a concert style of performing, rather than a vaudeville method. He can deliver his material but lack the knack of doing so in a showman's way."[171] Three years later, Prosser made a similar criticism about vocalists Marie and Mary McFarland. He wrote, "they haven't a very good idea of putting their stuff over. In fact, they lack showmanship. Their method is more of the concert or lyceum order."[172] While the "concert style of performing" connoted certain social prestige, it was apparently not suitable for Prosser's patrons. Prosser valued visceral and showy presentation more than technical perfection in the context of instrumental acts. This preference is understandable: a straight instrumental act did not have any conspicuous textual elements and needed extra "oomph" to enhance its relevance.

When Guido performed on the same show with Marie and Mary McFarland in 1914, Prosser recorded one of the most extensive notes about Guido's act in managers' report books:

> By all odds the greatest artist on the Piano-Accordion that has ever hit this town. He can play more and better with two fingers than all the others we have had can play with ten. A thorough musician, with style,

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[171] Report Book, February 27–December 11, 1911, 52, KAV.

[172] Report Book, October 27, 1913–May 11, 1914, 178, KAV.

> temperament and all the necessary attributes. He was the biggest Monday afternoon hit of the season, and could have almost given the whole show alone. Several encores and bows galore.[173]

Guido's stage time was seventeen minutes, one of his longest. Even though Prosser did not explicitly invoke the "vaudeville method" in this note, his hands-down approval of Guido's act suggests that Guido indeed had the necessary flair to succeed in his vaudeville house.

Prosser's praise, when paired with his critique of Farland, is even more significant. Farland's and Guido's acts shared striking similarities. Both Farland and Guido mixed classical and popular music in their vaudeville acts. In fact, Farland was one of the pioneers who initiated the trend of mixing genres among vaudeville banjoists.[174] In the same way that Guido performed classical music on a much despised instrument, Farland rendered "serious" music—such as Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Beethoven Sonatas, and Rossini's overture to *William Tell*—on the banjo, an instrument that has a cultural lineage in transatlantic slavery, minstrel show, and white Appalachian "hillbilly" music.[175] The fact that Prosser favored a similar type of program delivered by Guido over Farland speaks volumes about Guido's mastery of what Prosser called the "vaudeville method."

When an instrumental act was executed effectively, it softened rigid genre stereotypes. Journalist John L. Davis described a moment in Pietro's accordion performance when genre difference was temporarily suspended:

> Pietro is a regular "mixer" with his piano accordion. He mixes them up—high-brow music and "rag"—so thoroughly that they all sound

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[173] Report Book, October 27, 1913–May 11, 1914, 178, KAV.

[174] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 175–176.

[175] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 176; Karen Linn, *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19.

> good. Some people pretend to shudder at rag time. It tears their nerves ragged, don't you know. Some other people—equally as sincere—just can't "get" that "classical stuff." But Pietro takes the shudders out of all of them. First he rips off something with a swinging melody, and smashing, spirited rhythm. Then, coaxing his instrument, caressing and petting it, he strikes off into the by-ways and the lanes of rag-time. Insinuatingly, tantalizingly, he plays. First the audience is moving, shoulders swaying, heads bending and bodies unconsciously responding to the gladsome influence.[176]

According to Davis, the appeal of this particular performance was not so much the juxtaposition of high and low music, a thrilling transgression in a rigid cultural hierarchy. Rather, the crust of Pietro's performance laid in his ability to redirect the audience within a preexisting genre framework. Pietro reoriented the audience by mixing genres "so thoroughly that they all sound good." As this review indicates, Pietro's performance shattered the "shudder" attached to genres, mediating music not through taste hierarchies but through physical gestures that extended from Pietro's "ripping," "smashing," "coaxing," "caressing," and "petting" all the way to the side of his audience who physically responded to Pietro's music with "swaying shoulders " and "bending heads." Instead of listening through genre stigmas, the audience physically engaged in the performance, whether it was classical or popular music. The "vaudeville method" blurred taste hierarchies, bringing together a wide audience otherwise confined to clear cultural boundaries.

Like Pietro's shattering performance, Guido consistently performed mixed programs in a visceral playing style, bringing physicality to his act. Throughout his career, Guido's repertoire ranged

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[176] John L. Davis, "Undescribables Are Orpheum Feature," n.d., Pietro's Scrapbook, DC.

"from operatic overtures to the latest ragtime."[177] A reporter considered his mixed program scandalous, writing that "nothing else in the world [except Guido's accordion] would have the courage so to mangle melodies ranging from the 'Butterfly' aria, 'One Fine Day,' to 'Waiting' for the Robert E. Lee.' "[178] More significantly, Guido made the "same big hit as ever," "each number being greeted with a round of applause," and never failed to "bring down the house."[179]

Showmanship was an integral part of Guido's musical persona. Several statements indicate that Guido continually employed the "vaudeville method" whenever and wherever he played the accordion. A reporter observed that when Guido performed, "he is also very much of an actorman, with a pose for every chord and a wriggle for every reed."[180] For another reporter, Guido's lively stage presence distracted the audience from his music. Although the reporter admitted that Guido could produce worthy music with "his abysmal oblong of pleats," his facial expression was over the top.[181] The reporter wrote, "some strong stage manager ought to unpaint Mr. Deiro's satisfied face … That complexion looks like an eruption of his native Vesuvius."[182] When Guido practiced, as Guido's son Count Guido Roberto Deiro recalls,

> he would never do scales or exercises but, instead, would roll into certain pieces that were technically difficult and obviously popular with him. These included the Hungarian Rhapsodies, Czardas, Tango

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[177] Report Book, March 3–November 3, 1913, VIII, KAV.

[178] "Piano-Accordeon Does Execution," *Minneapolis Journal*, December 16, 1912, RLC, vol. 364, 8.

[179] Report Book, March 3–November 3, 1913, VIII, KAV; Report Book, July 4, 1915–November 13, 1916, 20, KAV; untitled article, n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 7, DC.

[180] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

[181] "Squeeze Harmonies Cleverly," *Chicago Examiner*, July 4, 1911, 6.

[182] "Squeeze Harmonies Cleverly," *Chicago Examiner*, July 4, 1911, 6.

Jealousia and once in a while a popular tune like 'Torna a Sorrento.'

He played everything as if he were standing in front of 2000 people.[183]

Guido established this performance style early in his career. Around 1912, a reporter extolled Guido with the title "Paderewski of the Barnum Accordion."[184] This coinage implies that Guido prioritized showmanship over genre boundaries.[185] It is worth noting that the reporter did not simply call him "Paderewski of the Accordion." The synthesis of "Paderewski," "Accordion," and "Barnum" involves a more ambiguous, messier process of taste negotiation than a straightforward mobilization within the taste hierarchies.

At first glance, the reporter seems to be lauding Guido's ability to level the difference between "Accordion," a conceivably lowly keyboard instrument, and "Paderewski," a well-known contemporaneous Polish classical pianist.[186] On a deeper level, the reporter suggests that Guido undergoes a more complicated synthesis of cultural registers: the word "Barnum" obscures the verticality of taste hierarchies. If Guido were simply entitled "Paderewski of the Accordion," his artistic status would be easily located on a high-low cultural taste axis. By adding "Barnum" to the mix, the synthesis of the three cultural registers requires more than an upward transformation. In order for "Paderewski" to embrace the "Barnum accordion," it must not only elevate the low but also deliver music in a "Barnum" fashion, a style that cannot be categorically located in taste hierarchies.

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[183] Guido Roberto Deiro, "Remembering My Father, Count Guido Pietro Deiro," booklet to Guido Deiro, Complete Recorded Works, Vol. 4 (Archeophone Records 5019, 2010, compact disc), 22.

[184] "Deiro Improves on Act," [May 1912?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 11, DC.

[185] Barnum connoted showmanship. For example, James Joyce wrote around 1914, "It's absurd: it's Barnum. He comes into the world God knows how, walks on the water." *Stephen Hero* (1944), ed. John J Slocum, Herbert Cahoon, and Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions, 1963), 133.

[186] See Lawrence Levine's remark on the cultural hierarchy in Chicago's Columbian Exposition: "If visitors to the White City heard Paderewski performing Chopin, those on the midway heard Scott Joplin playing ragtime." Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 208.

"Barnum" is essentially incongruent with the cultural plane set up by "Paderewski" and "Accordion." Showmanship prevails *in spite of* cultural hierarchies and does not necessarily operate through register switches. In this sense, when the "Barnum Accordion" manifested in Guido's act and hooked the audience, it did not matter so much to them whether Guido matched highbrow or lowbrow cultures. "Barnum" obscured, dismissed, and defied fixed, distinct categories; taste mobilization was beside the point. And it was this blurring effect that made Guido's act memorable: an element of sorcery that reoriented the audience in taste hierarchies.

Guido further complicated vaudeville's middle-class façade by incorporating ragtime into his act. In the early twentieth century, ragtime was considered lower end popular entertainment. Since it emerged in the 1890s, ragtime had been a controversial genre to many cultural authorities.[187] As Berlin indicates in his monograph *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*, the genre encompassed different musical settings and styles with a range of structural, textural, rhythmic, and instrumental features; some evoked regional and racial characteristics while others did not. Nonetheless, ragtime as a musical idiom was linked to black culture and generally conceived as developed from "coon songs."[188] Coon songs first circulated in popular saloons and variety theaters before being labeled as ragtime in the 1890s. Vaudeville performers, music publishers, and phonograph companies inducted ragtime into reputable venues, promoted the genre to more affluent consumers, and transformed it into a socially acceptable soundtrack. However, the fact that ragtime was "deracialized" and absorbed into the American mainstream did not detract its racial association.[189] Between 1900 and 1920, ragtime spurred unresolved debates among music critics over its legitimacy.[190] Given that ragtime had become a

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[187] Edward Berlin, *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 32.

[188] Berlin, *Ragtime*, 5.

[189] Berlin, *Ragtime*, 123.

[190] Berlin, *Ragtime*, 41.

broader musical category by the early twentieth century, Guido's reviewers might not be effectively describing the same style when they tried to label his music. Still, the fact that Guido's performance was identified as such attests to a musical intensity surrounding his act that was felt by his audience.

Ragtime was perceived as decidedly "un-Victorian" in vaudeville.[191] By Guido's time, ragtime was mainstream enough to be featured in vaudeville but still not entirely divorced from its suggestive "coonness" in the public discourse, as incessant debates surrounding the genre implied. Ragtime performance intensified the racial tension implicit in the vaudeville middle-class narrative. As Nasaw argues, vaudeville's taste culture was constructed along racial lines; in order to effectively consolidate commercialized decency, vaudeville administrators had to pit vaudeville against an "indecent" scapegoat based on racial difference.[192] Even though vaudeville sought to provide "something for everyone," big time vaudeville catered predominantly to white middle-class audience. For this reason, Guido's ragtime performance likely heightened a racial tension that stratified cultural hierarchies around vaudeville.

Paradoxically, when Guido performed ragtime in vaudeville, he did not incite heated debates as the music did for ragtime critics but, on the contrary, was able to "bring down the house." Part of it had to do with Guido's theatrical command that relieved the white patrons from tangible racial threats, creating a controlled tension between the decent crowd and a genre that was ambiguous but controversial enough to induce thrills. In this setting, ragtime became an elastic focal point mediated through multiple lenses—racial tension, middle-class decency, audience participation, theatricality, and a particular performance style. On the one hand, ragtime engulfed racial separation that engendered vaudeville's sanitized culture; on the other, vaudeville embraced ragtime as a popular selling point that

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[191] Snyder, *The Voice of the City*, 135.

[192] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 47.

bridged social division. Furthermore, Guido's ethnicity added another layer to what ragtime signified to the audience. As Ewen suggests, for urban immigrants, ragtime was an expressive sound of American life that signaled assimilation into the city.[193] Guido's ragtime performance occupied multiple semantic planes, inviting the audience to engage in a genre that was not only marked by racial opposition but experienced through vaudeville's sanitized culture and Guido's own ethnic context.

What further hindered Guido's propriety was the accordion's gendered implication. Due to its masculine characteristics, Guido's piano accordion operated against the feminized vaudeville environment. Vaudeville was considered a sanitized social space because, unlike variety theaters that were frequented by mostly lower class males and prostitutes, it drew female patrons of good social standings. Kibler notes, the promotion of vaudeville's wholesomeness was enhanced by the presence of women and children in the audience.[194] Canedo echoes, female musical acts, such as the Fadettes Women's Orchestra, or high class female musicians like Katherine Bloodgood signaled a sense of gentility.[195] From this perspective, female presence was the trophy of vaudeville's social decorum that defined its cleanliness.

Although the accordion was played by both women and men in vaudeville, it was not a thoroughly feminized instrument. While male accordionists were billed simply as accordionists, female accordionists were often specified by their gender, which suggests the accordion was primarily associated with male performers. Maria (The Celebrated Lady Piano Accordionist), Flavilla (Girl Accordeonist), Yvonne (Girl with the Accordion), Dorothy (Girl Playing Accordeon) were among

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[193] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 214.

[194] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 32.

[195] Canedo, "Entertaining America," 161.

those billed as "female accordionists."[196] The piano accordion had an especially masculine undertone. Top ranking piano accordionists were exclusively male, against whom other piano accordionists were measured. Moreover, Guido's accordion was decidedly unfeminine. In spite of its ornate design, it was exceptionally bulky and not particularly elegant. A reviewer described Guido's instrument as "mammoth," "the largest instrument of its kind ever introduced on any stage."[197] Guido himself also took pride in the musical prowess of his instrument, not attempting to cover it up in false domesticity. He claimed that "the instrument covers five octaves and has twice the tone compass of a piano."[198] Part of the excitement about Guido's act, then, stemmed from the sharp contrast between Guido's colossal machinery and the delicate sound of which it was capable.

Compounding the accordion's masculinity was Guido's charged sexuality. Guido not only held several highly publicized love affairs with female celebrities but, as his son recalls, had a voracious appetite for hunting, race cars, and outdoor activities.[199] A reporter attempted to locate Guido's looming sexuality by peeling away his multilayered persona:

> All the same, his face is that of an impishly mischievous faun. Looking at his smilingly alluring face, watching the play of his supple hands upon his unique instruments, seeing the graceful movements of his body even under the flannels, and feeling the "temperament" that he puts into his music, whether operatic, sentimental or the most banal of

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[196] Report Book, November 13, 1916–January 21, 1918, 177, KAV; Report Book, November 13, 1916–January 21, 1918, 19, KAV; L.F., "Dorothy," *New York Clipper*, August 1, 1917, 18.

[197] Untitled article, [May 1912?], Guido's Scrapbook I, 11, DC.

[198] "Wants to Quit Stage to Make Piano-Accordion and Marry," *Columbus … [illegible]*, Mar 19, 1914. RLC, vol. 364, 11.

[199] "Outdoorsman," official website of Guido Deiro, accessed June 1, 2019, http://guidodeiro.org/outdoorsman.html

> rag-time ditties, you are constrained to think that the most appropriate costume for Deiro would be a leopard's skin—and nothing more. He might don tights for the sake of the conventions, but a faun he surely ought to be.[200]

In this reporter's mind, Guido's surface propriety concealed the sexuality of a faun and leopard. This rare but candid portrayal of Guido's unsighted lustfulness cannot be further away from the image of a refined Italian man who serenaded with a jeweled accordion.

Guido found an avenue to channel the ragtime thrills and his sexual appeals to the audience in the format of straight instrument act. As a solo instrumentalist, Guido negated making explicit textual references. By making "pure" sound, he retained some degree of respectability while opening up a space in his music for multiple interpretations. Although Guido's music effortlessly passed censorship, it concealed a much more subtle resilience against the overarching middle-class interests. His showmanship disrupted and suspended vaudeville's moral taxonomy, physicalizing the audience's listening experience. While it may be too pretentious to consider Guido's act transgressive, the combination of vaudeville method and the format of instrumental music nonetheless gave tremendous leeway to receptions that diverged from conventional taste narratives. By coating his act in the middle-class glaze, Guido made his audience ever more desperate for what was hidden. The piano accordion—surrounded by ears sensitive to the tickles of Guido's vaudeville method—was in a golden spot; it was ready to cross genres, bend social decorum, mingle tastes, and sound out contradictions in Guido's reception.

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[200] "Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 5, DC.

4.2 Guido's Reception

Guido's sustained popularity in vaudeville from the 1910s to the 1920s implies that he appealed to a diverse audience beyond the decent middle-class patrons. After all, vaudeville exemplifies a form of urban mass culture which, as Ewen remarks, "carved out public spaces that made possible a limited degree of cultural integration" of "distinct classes [that were] geographically set apart" in an urban economy.[201] This geographical and class division in the vaudeville audience was a prerequisite that made mass culture possible.[202] Albee's democratic vision of "having something for everyone" required that vaudeville represented multiple interests of the general public.

Guido's primary audience in vaudeville likely consisted of mainstream Americans and European immigrants. Even though there is no evidence suggesting the composition of his vaudeville audience, Guido's recording market indirectly reflects the communities who might be drawn to his vaudeville act. Guido's recordings were often advertised along with vaudeville news in entertainment magazines, mainstream newspapers, and ethnic press. It is very likely that Guido's record-buying public first learned about his recordings while attending a vaudeville show.

Between 1911 and 1928, Guido was a Columbia recording artist who made a total of 106 cuts, among which 44 were issued for ethnic markets either domestically or internationally.[203] Guido's ethnic recordings were featured in catalogs for a wide variety of groups, including Irish, Italian, Polish, German, and Scandinavian communities, among which the Italian-American, Polish-American, and

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[201] Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars*, 24.

[202] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 25.

[203] Peter Muir, "The Deiro Recordings: Italian-American and Other Ethnic Issues, 1911–1932, with a Complete Discography of the Recordings of Guido and Pietro Deiro," *The Free-Reed Journal* 4 (2002): 6.

German-American communities were the largest in the domestic market.[204] Guido also appeared in Italian, Swedish, Lithuanian, Slovenian, and Polish newspapers. He likely appealed to these ethnic communities because the accordion was a popular instrument among European immigrants. In these contexts, his music activated ethnic bonds rather than undermining them. On a few occasions, Guido's recordings were advertised with other Columbia mainstream issues by artists such as Al Johnson, Ted Lewis' Jazz Band, and Art Hickman's Orchestra.[205] His ethnicity positioned him outside the mainstream marked by recording companies, which contradicted with the Americanized high class status of Italian classical music.

Generally, Guido's recordings were labelled with three Columbia label categories: the "A" category number denoted standard domestic issues (27 of Guido's Columbia recordings were issued exclusively with the A prefix); the "C" denoted distribution to various Latin-American communities (Italian belonged to this category); the "E" denoted general ethnic labels.[206] A record might be distributed across different categories ("Dill Pickles Rag" was labeled in all three categories) or to an exclusive market ("Washington Post March" was issued with the "C" label). Among Guido's 106 Columbia cuts, 15 of them were distributed in all three categories. Many of Guido's mainstream domestic records contained "Italian" music and operatic selections familiar to the general public, such as "O Sole Mio" and Rossini's *Tancredi* Overture. Guido's ethnic issues, on the other hand, were not limited to Italian folk music and Neapolitan songs, but encompassed a range of selections from mainstream music in the United States—such as ragtime, light classical pieces, operatic selections, and

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[204] Muir, "The Deiro Recordings," 7.

[205] For example, see the same ad that appeared in three Chicago-based ethnic newspapers on March, 1921. *Glas Svobode*, March 4, 1921, 6; *Draugas*, March 3, 1921, 3; *Dziennik Chicagoski*, March 2, 1921, 3.

[206] Muir, "The Deiro Recordings," 16.

marches—to various folk selections like polkas, waltzes, mazurkas, and "authentic" and "semi-authentic" ethnic music.[207]

Columbia's strategy for marketing Guido's recordings suggests that his music appealed to an overlapping audience. His ragtime number "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee" was marketed both domestically and ethnically in 1912.[208] For its issue in the "C" and "E" categories, Columbia retitled the song "En Espera" (Waiting) for the Italian and Spanish communities, removing the historical specificity in the original title. Similarly, "Deiro Rag," originally a standard domestic issue, was retitled "Allegro Deiro" for the ethnic markets. For sixteen years "En Espera" remained in Columbia's Italian catalog, which implies that it had a steady ethnic market.[209] The fact that Columbia was confident about selling the same recording to a different audience confirms that multiple listeners understood and appreciated the same piece of music for very different, if not conflicting, reasons. Moreover, it indicates that Guido appealed to a mixed audience.

Because Guido's music was distributed to multiple audiences, its meanings necessarily changed in different contexts. While record companies attempted to gauge consumption trends and dictated musical selections,[210] genre did not necessarily determine consumption principles but framed the act of musical selection. As Oberdeck suggests, by engaging in mass culture, audiences from a spectrum of class and cultural background were able to exercise concepts such as autonomy and hierarchy to

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[207] Muir, "The Deiro Recordings," 8.

[208] Muir, "The Deiro Recordings," 10.

[209] Muir, "The Deiro Recordings," 6.

[210] As a news article indicates, "Deiro does not select the pieces he plays for the Columbia Grafonola Company; his program is arranged for him. On the vaudeville stage he, of course, changes his own program to suit the taste of the audience he has to face. He is as wall true musicians are, a true lover of the classics, but has to perform a great deal of the lighter music, even rag time to satisfy the people who attend … [illegible]." "When Good Fellows Get Together," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 67.

construct, negotiate, and enact their own experiences.[211] When Guido's fans congregated under the vaudeville roof, they experienced the accordion through their own tastes in conjunction with prescribed genre labels. Guido's listeners were mobilized by consumption possibilities to personally engage with his music. They might not always conform to commercial categories and respond to his music in a way that followed such marketing logic.

Charles Hamm suggests, the genre of a piece of music is determined by both its "intended and received meaning."[212] While a composer may signal a specific genre with musical indications, genre is also constructed by a particular interpretation and a reception circumstance.[213] Since there are multiple factors involved in genre construction, a piece of music may encompass more than one genre. Nicholas Gebhardt follows this line of thought. He argues, "popular music has no intrinsic content; it refers only to a practice of putting a song or tune together, and to the possibility of keeping the audience members involved in each dramatic situation as the performances unfold."[214] From this perspective, genre is not fixed by a particular music producer, consumer, or distributor. Even though Guido performed mostly transcriptions of preexisting music, he necessarily added personal interpretations to these compositions and further expanded their genre possibilities. Additionally, since Guido played for a diverse audience, the listeners recontextualized the accordion on each occasion, shaping the genre of his music by discerningly choosing among available consumption possibilities structured around ethnic and class lines.

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[211] Kathryn Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario: Religion, Entertainment, and Cultural Politics in America, 1884–1914*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 418.

[212] Charles Hamm, "Genre, Performance, and Ideology in the Early Songs of Irving Berlin," in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 300.

[213] Hamm, "Genre, Performance, and Ideology," 306.

[214] Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies*, 112.

Guido's music was a constellation of overlapping musical elements that materialized in recognizable genres. In his number "I Don't Care," Guido incorporated and adapted elements from beloved vaudevillian Eva Tanguay's signature song of the same title. Even though Guido's number was essentially an accordion polka, the fact that it made explicit and implicit references to Tanguay suggests that it was meant to be experienced and appreciated from multiple perspectives. This number demonstrates a range of musical associations that Guido's accordion engendered.

"I Don't Care" was the song that made Eva Tanguay famous in vaudeville; the song was so popular that she became known as the "I Don't Care Girl." When Tanguay performed at the Palace Theater in New York City in 1915, the audience would not let her go until she had sung this number.[215] The title of the song reflects Tanguay's blithe, charming, obnoxious, and promiscuous persona. This persona was not only expressed in the lyrics but also in the way in which Tanguay performed the song. A 1922 recording gave out clues to Tanguay's singing style.[216] The song is in strophic form. In each verse, Tanguay banally and emphatically expressed her carefree spirit by delivering her lines in a boldly pedestrian, almost *sprechstimme* fashion. In the refrain, she repeated "I don't care" in a slightly more defined but still imprecise musical contour. Vaudeville critic Caroline Caffin called Tanguay "a song and dance artist who does not dance, cannot sing, is not beautiful, witty or graceful, but who dominates her audiences more entirely than anyone on the Vaudeville stage."[217] Throughout the song, Tanguay seemed to be flexing at her own quirkiness with off-the-chart rhythmic expressivity and polemic intonation.

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[215] Review, *Variety*, May 21, 1915.

[216] "I Don't Care," Internet Archive, accessed June 1, 2019, https://archive.org/details/EvaTanguay

[217] Caffin, *Vaudeville*, 35–36.

In early vaudeville, songs were often called "shouts" because singers had to communicate to a large audience in sufficient volume and clear diction.[218] As David Monod and Lyndsay Rosenthal remark, "leading shouters, like May Irwin and Sophie Tucker, were known for singing loud not well."[219] In this sense, Tanguay adopted the style of these diagrammatically well-endowed entertainers and developed her stage persona around it. Even in the recorded version, Tanguay sang in a rowdy manner as if she was dismissing the intimacy offered by the microphone. Her bluntness, while seemingly harsh and contrived in a recording, would have been stylistically effective and convincing in a large theater where a big voice was needed.

Guido's "I Don't Care" is an entirely different musical treatment from Tanguay's rendition.[220] It shares Tanguay's title insofar as it briefly borrows the "I Don't Care" melodic motif. Unlike the original, the secured sound of Guido's accordion replaced Tanguay's desperately coarse voice. Moreover, Guido's number has distinct melodic and structural contours. It has two large sections: the first comprised of two subsections (in the tonic I and the dominant V) in ternary form; the second (trio section), similarly, has two subsections (in the subdominant IV and the supertonic ii) in ternary form. If Tanguay's song is marked by her blabbering that obscures the separation between the verse and refrain, then Guido's uniform, steady accompaniment makes this piece effectively a polka with foot-tapping regularity. Guido's version is so different from Tanguay's song that one would not be able to discern any connection between the two from the start.

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[218] David Monod and Lyndsay Rosenthal, "Staging Vaudeville for a Twenty-First-Century Audience," Popular Culture Review 30, no. 1 (2019): 223.

[219] Monod and Rosenthal, "Staging Vaudeville," 223.

[220] "I Don't Care," track 16 on Guido Deiro, *Complete Recorded Works, Vol. 2*, Archeophone Records 5014, 2009, compact disc.

Tanguay's "I Don't Care" motif (8̂-9̂-7̂, 7̂-8̂-6̂) appears in Guido's trio section. This section is refreshing in two ways. First, it reorients the listener in a new tonality. Second, the "I Don't Care" motif jumps out of the texture right away. Amidst the polka accompaniment on an unchanging F-major chord and a persistent enharmonic note on the top line, the "I Don't Care" motif is immediately audible. Even so, the appearance of this motif is not as blatant as Tanguay's singing style. In fact, Guido reconfigures this motif, by adding a passing tone between the second and third note and shifting the rhythmic emphasis to the first note. Whereas Tanguay emphasizes the "Care" by making it the longest note, Guido tightens up the motif by making it into a conjoined chain of long-short-short patterns (8̂--9̂-8̂-7̂--8̂-6̂).

If the listeners were able to catch the reference to Tanguay in Guido's polka, they would likely experience this ethnic genre with an Americanized subtext in mind. Even though the listeners would not encounter the "I Don't Care" motif until the trio section, once it revealed itself, this reference would necessarily recontextualized the first section and change its meaning when it returned after the trio. According to Caffin, Tanguay's "I Don't Care" embodied her "eccentricities," "extravagances" and "defiance of all conventions."[221] In Guido's musical setting, these characteristics were planted in a seemingly straightforward polka arrangement. Once the listeners discovered how Tanguay was coded in a polka, they might begin to hear Guido's music as a more distinct and evocative expression.

Due to the fragmentary nature of the audience discourse, it is difficult to lay out exactly how a cohort of overlapping listeners might have perceived Guido's music in their own context. Newspaper cartoons hint at how listeners might visualize Guido's music in their personal context. They show

[221] Caffin, *Vaudeville*, 38.

what Guido "looked like" to contemporaneous eyes, suggesting several ways of interpreting Guido's vaudeville performance.[222]

Most of the Guido cartoons depict his accordion in a realistic fashion. Even in most whimsical sketches, the instrument retains good details that range from the ornate grille and accurate depiction of the keyboard to vividly drawn bass buttons and bellows in action—in one cartoon, the bellow emits musical notes;[223] in another, it creates trembling soundwave.[224] These accurate sketches of the piano accordion suggest that the instrument needed no exaggeration to draw sufficient attention. One cartoon shows the accordion in less flattering light. It depicts Pietro as a clownish, balloon-like, quasi-musical-monkey figure who stretches out the accordion at arm's length, making the tiny instrument look more like an outstretched concertina than a piano accordion. However, it should be noted that the same cartoonist also satirized nearly all the other entertainers in the same setting.[225]

In most sketches, Guido wears formal attire, either a jacket suit with a bow tie or a full tuxedo. But he also appears in a monk robe or a pair of sturdy pants with their legs cuffed.[226] His posture varies from confident, serene, devilish, seductive, to solipsistic, authoritative, cunning, pious. He is depicted leaning, seated, standing, singing, listening, wiggling, watching. In the cartoon "What Fay King Saw at the Orpheum," Guido is the first performer Fay King walks into; she mumbles, "Oh, You!" with a finger touching her lower lip, pondering.[227]

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[222] I have compiled eight Guido cartoons from DC and three from RLC (two duplicates), and five Pietro cartoons from DC.

[223] "With Cartoonist Brewerton at the Forsyth," *Atlanta Journal*, July 22, 1913, RLC, vol. 364, 11.

[224] "Deiro, Who Squeezes a Whole Lot More Music out of an Accordeon than Anybody Else," *Columbus Journal*, March, 20, 1914, RLC, vol. 364, 12.

[225] "At the Regent," n.d., Pietro's Scrapbook, DC.

[226] Cartoon, *San Francisco Bulletin*, n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 17, DC; "What Fay King Saw at the Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 18. DC.

[227] Cartoon, "What Fay King Saw at the Orpheum," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 18. DC.

Guido's hair, a particular interest to several cartoonists, appears with variations. It is often slicked back but occasionally loosened. In a few drawings, his hair turns maniac, or branches out like a fountain, or swirls above a caption that reads "His Crowning Glory."[228] Several reporters also express a fixation with Guido's hair. One noted, although Guido appeared in a "natty white suit, frenzied smile and pink makeup," he very much needed a haircut.[229] Another reported, Guido "managed to shake his hair down over his face" at one of his performances.[230] Guido's varied hair style suggests that his stage persona was not confined strictly to a clean-cut Victorian mien or a subversive unkempt look. Rather, he seemed capable of pulling off an eclectic, "middle-ground" style.

These cartoons show an asymmetrical correspondence between what Guido's act signified and what an audience might have perceived, complicating Guido's well-groomed public image. Cartoonists extracted a certain element from Guido's overall presence with their acute eyes—be it attire, posture, hair, or the instrument. Similarly, avid listeners might exercise an individuated aurality to filter particular characteristics of Guido's music. The range of cartoons suggests that within the vaudeville aesthetics, there was space for myriad ways of viewing and interpreting the same performer.

Two cartoons stand out from the rest; they characterize Guido as an archetypal genius in the Romantic tradition. In these cartoons, Guido is portrayed to play the accordion in a swift motion, whose menacing, foxy gaze either directly confronts the audience or cunningly eludes their scrutiny.[231] These depictions imply a thin line between refinement and chaos, a precarious boundary that a musical genius may puncture with his acumen, unleashing ecstasy and disorder into the theater. But on another

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[228] "Keith's Alhambra Theatre," *New York Evening Journal*, October 15, 1913, Guido's Scrapbook I, 9, DC.

[229] "Piano-Accordionist Does Execution," *Minneapolis Journal*, December 16, 1912, RLC vol. 364, 8.

[230] "Colonial Feature … [missing]," n.d., Guido's Scrapbook I, 31, DC.

[231] Cartoon, "Keith's Alhambra Theatre," *New York Evening Journal*, October 15, 1913, Guido's Scrapbook I, 9, DC; Cartoon, "Deiro, Who Squeezes a Whole Lot More Music out of an Accordeon than Anybody Else," *Columbus Journal*, March, 20, 1914, RLC, vol. 364, 12.

level, the imminent chaos embedded in Guido's accordion also mirrored the tension inherent in the audience body. The threat of disorder was pertinent to the tantalizing effect of his music as well as the diverse listening possibilities it engendered. These mad genius cartoons indicate that the range of listening possibilities around Guido's accordion was vast enough to trigger a riot, if the listeners were to express their diversity openly.

Guido's music was experienced in the midst of rich cultural textures. Ample examples show that Guido's act was surrounded by risqué content. At the Orpheum Theatre in New York City, the "Girl in the Air" preceded Guido, who sang several songs in a suspended seat in midair until it descended to the orchestra level, where she festooned male audience members with flowers and kisses.[232] At the Keith & Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre, Guido shared a program with "The Bells Girls." In their act, they sang and danced in short skirts with bells fastened to their garter before bringing the jingle to a finish as they laid on their backs and turned their faces toward the audience, feet in the air.[233] On the same program was "The Trapeze Sextette a la Carmen," six "Indian men" and six girls who stripped on swings that were decorated with garlands and color light bulbs.[234] A few years later in the same theater, Guido shared a bill with "The Two Smiletta Sisters," contortionists who began their act in ankle length dress but finished in tights.[235] Some of Guido's co-entertainers were more subtle about delivering inappropriate materials. At the Fifth Avenue Theatre, Natalie and Farrari managed to perform "shimmey" and justified their act as a satire of cheap dance moves from cheap dance halls.[236] Sometimes, raunchy elements were framed as merely fictional within a narrative

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[232] Review, I. S., "Orpheum," *New York Clipper*, 26 February 26, 1919, 10.

[233] Review, "Keith & Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre," *New York Clipper*, December 10, 1910, 9.

[234] Review, "Keith & Proctor's Fifth Avenue Theatre," *New York Clipper*, December 10, 1910, 9.

[235] Review, E. W., "Fifth Avenue," *New York Clipper*, February 13, 1918, 8.

[236] Review, I. S., "Fifth Avenue," *New York Clipper*, December 25, 1918, 11.

sketch form. When Guido played at the New Brighton Theatre, the audience also witnessed a performance of "Maybloom," a playlet that involved a man roleplaying with a female stranger who mistook him for a friend and, throughout the act, kept insisting on posing.[237] Guido shared the bill with these acts at some of the most high end vaudeville houses. With much critical acclaim, these acts received positive responses from the same audience who warmly applauded Guido's performance, making his act seem relatively high class and simultaneously questionable.

In the absence of narrative coherence, vaudeville reflects a conglomeration of tastes that made it thrilling and disorienting. Acts with problematic content relied on the good faith of their counterparts to maintain a sense of decency—they balanced each other out. Like its surrounding acts, Guido's accordion skirted middle-class decency and took delight in the hodgepodge of theatricality. The hype surrounding vaudeville indicates that the audience enjoyed being entertained by well-performed acts that might or might not indulge with an administered taste. As Kibler suggests, vaudeville "uplifted low culture and unraveled high culture; it aspired to bourgeois standardization but did not neglect working-class, immigrant pride."[238] With his accordion, Guido effectively communicated with an audience of mixed tastes. Guido's accordion mingled with a wide assortment of acts in the middle ground, slipping through a singular cultural narrative, only to be adequately understood in the context of a particular billing, vantage point, and listening occasion.

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[237] Review, S. K., "New Brighton," *New York Clipper*, August 21, 1918, 7.

[238] Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 11.

4.3 The Accordion Leaving Vaudeville

Vaudeville nurtured Guido's piano accordion in the early twentieth century before its sound spilled beyond the big time circuits. As public amusement evolved, leisure communities gradually retreated to their own home and entertained themselves with radio and phonograph.[239] Phonograph machines channeled uninterrupted flows of music from theaters into domestic spaces. Victrola advertised the convenience and exclusivity of having vaudeville music at one's home. Music publishers sold vaudeville tunes and invited the audience to replicate the musical experience with different means. In a 1906 vaudeville program book, an ad for sheet music promised that every musical number sung or played at this particular show could be purchased, encouraging vaudeville patrons to "Have It Played."[240] These transmission modes overlapped with vaudeville, soliciting a musical experience that could be sustained in a customized space and time.

Although audience reception was underrepresented in writing, the fragmentary nature of the audience discourse indirectly suggests the way in which Guido's audience might have *not* replicated their vaudeville experience. The fact that they seemed to not bother with meticulously documenting their vaudeville outings implies that they did not rely on discourse to retrieve their experience. Music fans documented their listening experience in different ways in order to replicate a particular aesthetic experience. As recurrent advertisements of Guido's records suggest, it is entirely possible that his fans predominantly expressed their enthusiasm for the accordion not by writing about their experience but by listening intensively to Guido in real time.

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[239] Nasaw, *Going Out*, 241.

[240] Program, Proctor's Newark Theatre, May 1906, BRTC.

Guido's career spurt in vaudeville took him to other performance settings. In 1916, Guido gave a half-hour accordion concert at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Diego. Guido was also active with the San Francisco Accordion Club, the first of its kind in the nation. It was formed in 1916 with thirty-nine members and consisted of mostly piano accordionists. The Accordion Club organized concerts and annual accordion picnics throughout the 1920s.[241] In 1920, Guido was invited to play at a high school auditorium in Healdsburg, California along with a pianist and two classical singers. This event, according to the newspaper, was considered "Catholic church entertainment."[242]

In June 1929, Vitaphone's film of Guido was shown in the Strand Theater in New York City. The added layer of camera provided the audience another lens into Guido's accordion. In the absence of live sound, a *Variety* reviewer commented on Guido's virtual presence and how his musicianship was mediated in film. The reviewer noted that Guido's "pleasant style fits in the opening spot on a talking short program to a nicety," but then went on to observe how different camera angles captured Guido's musical presence:

> Opening is a shot of the musicians' finger technique as he goes into an aria from the opera "Romeo and Juliet." Medium shot shows him seated instead of standing, as one is led to believe by the lens angle used. Closing selection, "Drigo's Serenade" is handled in approved musicianly manner for good results.[243]

These different entry points into Guido's music mediated and enriched the meaning of the accordion. As it moved beyond vaudeville, new audience members deployed new listening techniques,

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[241] Muir, "Looks like a cash register," 72.

[242] "Fine Program Saturday Night: Catholic Church Entertainment at High School Auditorium," *Healdsburg Tribune* (Healdsburg, CA), November 5, 1920.

[243] "Deiro / Vitaphone No. 2968 / 7 Mins.; Piano-accordion," *Variety* June 12, 1929, 16.

which in turn shaped the accordion discourse. It becomes clear that the piano accordion not only encompassed middle-class values but also reflected aesthetic interests of ethnic, folk, and working class cultures. The degree with which these elements manifested in a particular setting varied, but they compositely added layers to the popular, commercial, and cultural significance of Guido's accordion.

The glamor of the vaudeville accordion was less a break from its prosaic mien and more an affirmation of the instrument's versatility. Guido's vaudeville accordion synthesized multiple taste registers and sounded out both middle-class interests and ethnic bonds. As Helena Simonett claims, "the accordion remained an emblematic immigrant instrument, a symbol of the working-class people, throughout the twentieth century."[244] This perspective contests the notion that vaudeville's taste narrative precluded subordinate aesthetic preferences. While vaudeville's commercial power might have disrupted working class and ethnic groups, mass culture also sustained subsidiary cultures. As Cohen demonstrates, Chicago Italian immigrants enlivened home life and expressed their shared experience by purchasing and listening to commercial recordings of Enrico Caruso, an Italian tenor who recorded for the Columbia record company.[245]

By manufacturing social decorum, vaudeville rhetorically insulated itself from a seemingly treacherous moral terrain; it obscured and collapsed a connection and continuity between its elevated status and surrounding banality. However, vaudeville did not effectively ostracize salaciousness from real life but rather bridged the two. According to Herbert Gans, the process of gentrification entails not only the higher culture "taking up selected choices of the poor, sometimes bowdlerized" but also the poor dropping them.[246] Because Guido's accordion reflected and borrowed elements from

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[244] Simonett, "From Old World to New Shores," 19.

[245] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 105.

[246] Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 11.

multiple cultural registers—high, low, and the "Barnum," it is futile to determine which part of it was rich, poor, being taken up, or dropped. For this reason, Guido's accordion was never thoroughly elevated; it was only gentrified to a point where the middle-class rhetoric effectively shaped vaudeville into a respectable form of popular entertainment.

Locating an instrument's meanings in a concrete cultural phenomenon discounts the ambivalent, amorphous, and multivalent immediacy of a musical experience imprinted on an individual. Meanings, like any form of power, tend to totalize as they gain traction in the public discourse. While one's listening habit reflects one's social status and enculturation, middle-class goals do not account for all listening possibilities surrounding Guido's vaudeville accordion. On the same token, class and racial narratives do not adequately encapsulate individuated sonic encounters. A cultural interpretation of each listening occasion necessarily entails a tension between collective meanings and individuated experiences. As Guido's accordion accumulated social meanings and expressed collective middle-class interests, it also engendered experiences beyond an overarching vaudeville narrative. This dual characteristic of the accordion reflects an inherent tension of vaudeville—between its taste rhetoric and how it was manifested in the actual experience, and between cultural hierarchies and the slippery sound of the accordion.

Conclusion

Thanks to the American vaudeville theater, the accordion grew to become an unmistakable icon in the first half of the twentieth century. As Peter Muir comments, the drastic transformation of the accordion from its humble origin to its induction into the mainstream American culture was one of the most miraculous musical phenomena in the century.[247] However, the cultural meaning of the accordion was not stable. As the accordion traveled across America in different vaudeville circuits, it resisted the production of an overarching narrative that would reify its conspicuous but amorphous musical presence.

While vaudeville delineated new social boundaries around the accordion, the transposition of the instrument into the middle-class taste register did not limit the affordance of the accordion but, on the contrary, channeled its pervasive sound in a reconfigured cultural discourse, mediating the instrument's working-class and ethnic associations in a new context. As the piano accordion looked upward to the prospect of social prestige and respectability, it also embodied a stage presence that resonated beyond middle-class interests. Like vaudeville itself, the piano accordion occupied a middle ground where the highbrow-lowbrow distinction was blurred. Through Guido's "vaudeville method" of playing, his accordion receded from a pull toward middle-class assimilation. Guido's accordion blended vaudeville's sweeping middle-class ideology with its variations that colored and discolored upward mobility and social decorum.

The popularization of the piano accordion was an epiphenomenon of audience members responding individually to the collective concept of middle-class interests. The accordion was an

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[247] Muir, "Looks like a cash register," 55.

avenue for asserting personal tastes and skirting the trope of Victorian propriety. Guido's accordion was shaped by the vaudeville machine as well as the intensely personal experiences that expanded the instrument's cumulative meanings. As various social classes and ethnicities shared the experience of listening to the piano accordion, they forged new bonds to the instrument. In this regard, the golden age of the accordion is not only a direct statement about middle-class solidarity but also a celebration of individuated expressions that diverted from a centralized class ideology.

Because of its capacity to hold contradictions, the piano accordion fit within multiple cultural registers and was never exclusively assimilated into any one of them. Even in its most glorious phase in vaudeville between the 1910s and 1920s, Guido's accordion occupied complicated and even contradictory roles. This peculiar cultural phenomenon exemplifies a set of tensions that characterize the milieu: those between American and European heritages, between mass culture and private consumption, and between cultural hierarchies and sound. The sound of the piano accordion—populist and individuated, distinct and elusive—ensconced a variety of anonymous experiences beyond readily available cultural vocabularies, while articulating these esoteric engagements in an exoteric, socially compatible register.

Pietro's son Pietro "Lee" Deiro Jr. remembers an anecdote that his father made up and retold throughout his life. Pietro said that in his meager childhood, he often took his accordion to the street, wandered through various parts of his hometown, and witnessed scenes from all walks of life. One day, he meandered to the king's palace. Seeing its splendid décor, Pietro started bellowing out his accordion with all his might, sending accordion music all the way to the king's window. The king, perturbed and puzzled by the sound, finally came out to greet Pietro and asked him how much he earned from each street performance. Seizing this rare opportunity, Pietro boosted his confidence and

with a straight face replied, "Five lira." The king immediately handed Pietro fifty lira and said, "Here is your wage; go play at least ten blocks away from my palace."[248]

This fictional tale echoes the motivation for social mobility among immigrant communities in America in the early twentieth century. In the story, Pietro eagerly follows the contour of cultural hierarchy in the king's domain in order to be heard and participate in a society where class division, ethnic difference, and taste hierarchy are institutionalized. The accordion becomes an avenue for cultural uplift. When Guido first set foot in America, it was the prospect of fame and social standing that propelled him to bring his accordion to the music-loving public; it was the trope of middle-class aspiration that conditioned the accordion's encounter with its first fervent followers.

Additionally, Pietro's story speaks to the friction between the desire for social elevation and the viable space to enact such desire. Even though Pietro earns extra wages when he plays for the king, he is circumscribed by his own music and subordinated to a space where the instrument's bashful sound ceases to intrude. In exchange for Pietro's reward, the accordion is to remain outside of the king's domain. Pietro simply cannot camouflage the sound of the accordion and its lower class associations. The sound of the accordion remains incompatible with its exhibition space.

In vaudeville, Guido's accordion fascinated the audience. As he masqueraded its unruly sound in clever and virtuosic display, it persistently defied straightforward genre classification. Even if we cannot experience this reception ourselves, the cultural contradictions of Guido's accordion point us toward a way of appreciating its magnetism and significance retrospectively. Guido's accordion occupied a sonic space fundamentally inaccessible from the vaudeville rhetoric that shaped the industry and its overarching taste culture. It was in this sonic space where accordion fans found their resonance with Guido's instrument, where they resounded their craze for the squeezebox in its non-

[248] Pietro Deiro Jr., memorandum to Bio Boccosi, n.d., box 11 folder 3, DC.

convertible, esoteric register, and where we, by attending to the cultural complexity of the accordion, may enter.

Appendix A An Overview of Guido's Vaudeville Performances, 1910–1929

I compiled this information from historical newspapers and magazines—including *Chicago Examiner*, *Day Book*, *New York Clipper*, *Player*, *Vaudeville News*, and *Variety*—as well as documents in the Deiro Collection, Keith-Albee Collection, Music and Theatre Collection at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the Billy Rose Theatre Collection and Robinson Locke Collection at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. I use only dated sources that mention vaudeville billings under the name Deiro or Diero and respective venues, eliminating sources that contain only partial information.

Date	Theater/Circuit	Location
1910/04/30 †	Auditorium	Spokane, WA
1910/05/07 †	Orpheum	Portland, OR
1910/07/16	Chutes	San Francisco, CA
1910/09/17	Orpheum	Kansas City, MO
1910/10/15	Majestic	Milwaukee, WI
1910/12/10	Keith & Proctor's Fifth Avenue	New York, NY
1910/12/24	Alhambra	New York, NY
1911/01/14	Bronx	New York, NY
1911/01/23 *	Keith's	Baltimore, MD
1911/02/06 *	Keith's	Providence, RI
1911/03/20 *	Orpheum	San Francisco, CA

1911/04/08	Greenpoint	New York, NY
1911/05/01 *	Keith's	Philadelphia, PA
1911/05/11	Grand	Pittsburgh, PA
1911/07/04	Majestic	Chicago, IL
1911/07/29	Orpheum	Seattle, WA
1911/07/31–08/05 *	Orpheum	Portland, OR
1911/09/23	Orpheum	Los Angeles, CA
1911/10/14	Orpheum	Salt Lake City, UT
1911/10/16–10/21 *	Orpheum	Denver, CO
1911/11/18	Orpheum	Des Moines, IA
1911/11/20–11/25 *	Orpheum	Sioux City, IA
1911/12/02	Orpheum	St. Paul, MN
1911/12/22	Orpheum	San Francisco, CA
1912/01/13	Keith's	Indianapolis, IN
1912/01/15–01/20 *	Keith's	Cincinnati, OH
1912/01/23	Keith's	Louisville, KY
1912/03/23	Proctor's	Newark, NJ
1912/03/30	Colonial	New York, NY
1912/04/01 *	Chase's	Washington, D.C.
1912/06/01	Bronx	New York, NY
1912/08/24	Orpheum	Winnipeg, Canada
1912/09/07	Orpheum	Spokane, WA
1912/09/14	Orpheum	Seattle, WA

1912/09/21	Orpheum	Portland, OR
1912/09/28	Orpheum	Sacramento, CA
1912/10/05	Orpheum	Oakland, CA
1912/10/25	Orpheum	San Francisco, CA
1912/11/02	Orpheum	Los Angeles, CA
1912/11/23	Orpheum	Denver, CO
1912/12/16	Orpheum	Minneapolis, MN
1913/01/07	Poli's	Springfield, MA
1913/01/18	Hammerstein's	New York, NY
1913/01/27 *	Hudson	Union Hill, NJ
1913/03/10 *	Chase's	Washington, DC
1913/03/17 *	Keith's	Philadelphia, PA
1913/04/19	Poli's	Hartford, CT
1913/04/26	Palace	New York, NY
1913/06/21	Hammerstein's	New York, NY
1913/07/11 ‡	Hammerstein's	New York, NY
1913/07/19	Hippodrome	Pittsburgh, PA
1913/07/21–07/28 *	Forsythe	Atlanta, GA
1913/08/11–08/16 *	Shea's	Buffalo, NY
1913/09/22 *	Orpheum	New York, NY
1913/10/03	Colonial	New York, NY
1913/10/13 *	Alhambra	New York NY
1913/11/01	Dominion	Ottawa, Canada

1913/11/14	William Penn	Philadelphia, PA
1913/12/06	Bronx	New York, NY
1914/01/10	Proctor's Grand	Albany, NY
1914/01/24	Union Square	New York, NY
1914/02/15	Palace Music Hall	Chicago, IL
1914/02/17	Palace	Spokane, WA
1914/03/16 *	Keith's	Columbus, OH
1914/03/30 *	Grand Opera House	Pittsburgh, PA
1914/04/26 *	Keith's	Cincinnati, OH
1914/05/04 *	Majestic	Chicago, IL
1914/05/30	Ramona	Grand Rapids, MI
1914/06/20	Great Northern Hippodrome	Chicago, IL
1914/09/08	Majestic	San Antonio, TX
1914/10/04 *	Bushwick	Brooklyn, NY
1914/10/17	Hammerstein's	New York, NY
1914/12/21–12/23 *	National	New York, NY
1914/12/24–12/26 *	Orpheum	New York, NY
1915/8/21	[34th St between 8th and 9th Ave]	New York, NY
1915/08/30 *	Keith's	Philadelphia, PA
1915/09/18	Keith's Hippodrome	Cleveland, OH
1915/09/25	Shea's	Buffalo, NY
1915/10/16	Temple	Rochester, NY
1915/11/13	Proctor's Fifth Avenue	New York, NY

1915/11/20	Prospect	Brooklyn, NY
1915/11/29 *	Colonial	New York, NY
1915/12/11	Orpheum	Brooklyn, NY
1916/01/01	Bushwick	Brooklyn, NY
1916/02/12	Proctor's Grand	Albany, NY
1916/03/25	Keith's	Washington, DC
1916/04/15	Fifth Avenue	New York, NY
1916/05/15–05/17 *	Bijou	Woonsocket, RI
1916/05/18–05/20 *	Scenic	Pawtucket, RI
1916/09/24–09/30 *	Orpheum	San Francisco, CA
1916/10/02–10/07 *	Orpheum	Oakland, CA
1917/01/[30?]	Orpheum	Memphis, TN
1917/02/28	Bushwick	Brooklyn, NY
1917/03/07 *	Majestic	San Antonio, TX
1917/03/21	Keith's	Toledo, OH
1917/09/18	Orpheum	St. Paul, MN
1918/02/04 *	Keith's	Philadelphia, PA
1918/02/13	Fifth Avenue	New York, NY
1918/02/25 *	Keith's	Boston, MA
1918/03/13	Royal	New York, NY
1918/06/05	Harlem Opera House	New York, NY
1918/08/21	New Brighton	Brighton Beach, NY
1918/12/25	Fifth Avenue	New York, NY

1919/01/01	Harlem Opera House	New York, NY
1919/02/26	Orpheum	New York, NY
1919/03/12	Royal	New York, NY
1919/03/19	Riverside	New York, NY
1919/07/30	Orpheum	San Francisco, CA
1919/11/07	81st Street	New York, NY
1920/01/28	Crescent	Syracuse, NY
1922/03/29	Apollo (Shubert Circuit)	Chicago, IL
1922/09/09–09/16 *	Hippodrome (Bert Levey Circuit)	San Jose, CA
1922/09/18	Grauman's	Los Angeles, CA
1922/10/21	Strand	San Francisco, CA
1923/06/22	Orpheum (Orpheum Circuit)	Los Angeles, CA
1924/02/15	Majestic (Interstate Circuit)	Dallas, TX
1926/12/11	(Interstate Circuit)	Wichita, KS
1926/12/18	(Interstate Circuit)	Oklahoma City, OK
1926/12/18	(Interstate Circuit)	Tulsa, OK
1927/01/01	(Interstate Circuit)	Fort Worth, TX
1927/01/08	(Interstate Circuit)	Dallas, TX
1927/01/15	(Interstate Circuit)	Houston, TX
1927/01/29	(Interstate Circuit)	San Antonio, TX
1927/02/05	(Interstate Circuit)	New Orleans, LA
1927/02/12	(Interstate Circuit)	Baton Rouge, LA
1927/02/12	(Interstate Circuit)	Alexandria, LA

1927/02/12	(Interstate Circuit)	Monroe, LA
1927/02/12	(Interstate Circuit)	Shreveport, LA
1927/02/12	(Interstate Circuit)	Texarkana, AR
1927/02/19	(Interstate Circuit)	Fort Smith, AR
1927/03/05	(Interstate Circuit)	Atlanta, GA
1927/03/19	Tower (Orpheum Circuit)	Chicago, IL
1927/04/16	Keith's	Indianapolis, IN
1927/06/11	Nixon (Keith-Albee Circuit)	Philadelphia, PA
1927/06/11	Capitol (Keith-Albee Circuit)	Trento, NJ
1927/09/10	Orpheum (Orpheum Circuit)	San Francisco, CA
1927/09/17	Orpheum (Orpheum Circuit)	Los Angeles, CA
1929/04/13	Fairmount, Lowe Circuit	New York, NY
1929/04/13	Victoria (Lowe Circuit)	New York, NY
1929/04/20	Metropolitan (Lowe Circuit)	Brooklyn, NY
1929/04/27	American (Lowe Circuit)	New York, NY
1929/04/27	State (Lowe Circuit)	New York, NY
1929/05/04	Willard (Lowe Circuit)	Long Island, NY

Unless noted, dates are press release dates, typically on the same week of the bill.

* Asterisked dates reflect the actual week or dates of the bills.

† billed with Porcini

‡ billed with Pietro

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