

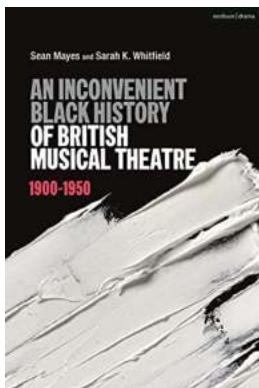
An Inconvenient Black History Of British Musical Theatre 1900-1950

British musical theatre has a rich and vibrant history, but it is a history that has often overlooked the contributions and experiences of Black artists. This article dives into the untold stories of Black actors, singers, and dancers who played a significant role in shaping the British musical theatre scene between 1900 and 1950.

The Era of Minstrel Shows

During the early 20th century, minstrel shows were a popular form of entertainment in Britain. These shows featured white performers in blackface, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and creating a racist portrayal of Black people. However, hidden within this problematic practice, there were talented Black artists who defied the odds and showcased their skills.

One such artist was Bert Williams, a Black actor who gained recognition for his humour, wit, and exceptional singing abilities. Despite the challenges he faced, Williams managed to break barriers and pave the way for future Black performers in British musical theatre.



An Inconvenient Black History of British Musical Theatre: 1900 - 1950 by Sean Mayes (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 4017 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 346 pages
Screen Reader	: Supported



Breaking Barriers in West End

As the 1900s progressed, Black artists started to make their mark on the West End. Performers like Paul Robeson, a talented actor and singer, showcased their talents in shows such as "Show Boat" and "Othello." Robeson's powerful voice and commanding stage presence challenged the stereotypes associated with Black performers, earning him critical acclaim.

Another significant figure during this time was Elisabeth Welch, a Black American singer and actress who found success in Britain. Welch's soulful voice captivated audiences, and she became a regular performer at popular venues like The Savoy Theatre. Despite facing racial discrimination, Welch's talent and perseverance allowed her to become a trailblazer for Black artists in the UK.

Trailblazers on Tour

Outside of London's West End, Black artists were also carving out their place in British musical theatre by touring the country. From theaters in Leeds to Edinburgh, performers like Adelaide Hall and Leslie "Hutch" Hutchinson brought their considerable talent to diverse audiences.

Adelaide Hall, an American-born actress and singer, gained fame for her jazz-infused performances. She mesmerized crowds wherever she went and became a prominent figure in the British entertainment scene. Hutchinson, a skilled pianist and singer, was equally popular and enjoyed successful tours across the UK. Their performances challenged the prevailing attitudes towards Black artists and showcased their immense talent.

Challenges and Triumphs

While there were certainly triumphs, Black artists in British musical theatre also faced numerous challenges. Racial discrimination was prevalent, and many talented performers were denied opportunities due to the color of their skin. The limited roles available often perpetuated stereotypes, making it difficult for Black artists to break free from narrow characterizations.

However, despite these obstacles, Black artists continued to push boundaries and achieve success. Their resilience and determination helped lay the foundation for a more inclusive British musical theatre scene in the future.

Legacy and Recognition

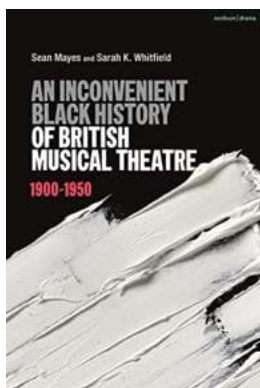
Today, the contributions of Black artists in British musical theatre between 1900 and 1950 are increasingly being recognized and celebrated. Their talent and resilience have paved the way for future generations, inspiring a more diverse and inclusive industry.

Thanks to their groundbreaking achievements, Black artists no longer have to face the same barriers their predecessors did. British musical theatre is now a more inclusive space, with diverse stories and voices being celebrated on stage.

The history of British musical theatre is incomplete without acknowledging the often overlooked and inconvenient Black history. From minstrel shows to breaking barriers in the West End, Black artists made significant contributions to the industry between 1900 and 1950. Their talent, perseverance, and determination have helped pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse British musical theatre scene today.

It is important to pay tribute to these trailblazers and ensure that their contributions are recognized and celebrated. By doing so, we can highlight the

rich diversity of British musical theatre and create an environment where all artists feel seen and valued.



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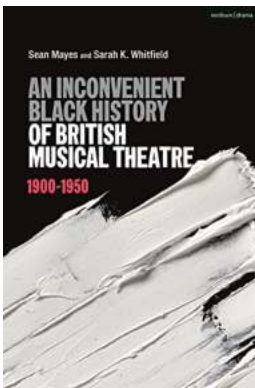


A radically urgent intervention, *An Inconvenient Black History of British Musical Theatre: 1900 - 1950* uncovers the hidden Black history of this most influential of artforms. Drawing on lost archive material and digitised newspapers from the turn of the century onwards, this exciting story has been re-traced and restored to its rightful place. A vital and significant part of British cultural history between 1900 and 1950, Black performance practice was fundamental to resisting and challenging racism in the UK.

Join Mayes (a Broadway- and Toronto-based Music Director) and Whitfield (a musical theatre historian and researcher) as they take readers on a journey through a historically-inconvenient and brilliant reality that has long been overlooked. Get to know the Black theatre community in London's Roaring 20s, and hear about the secret Florence Mills memorial concert they held in 1928. Acquaint yourself with Buddy Bradley, Black tap and ballet choreographer, who reshaped dance in British musicals - often to be found at Noël Coward's

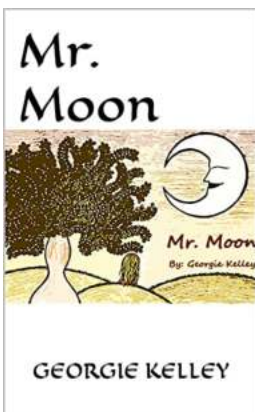
apartment for late-night rehearsals, such was Bradley's importance. Meet Jack Johnson, the first African American Heavyweight Boxing Champion, who toured Britain's theatres during World War 1 and brought the sounds of Chicago to places like war-weary Dundee. Discover the most prolific Black theatre practitioner you've never heard of, William Garland, who worked for 40 years across multiple continents and championed Black British performers. Marvel at performers like cabaret star Mabel Mercer, born in Stafford in 1900, who sang and conducted theatre orchestras across the UK, as well as Black Birmingham comedian Eddie Emerson, who was Garland's partner for decades.

Many of their names and works have never been included in histories of the British musical - until now.



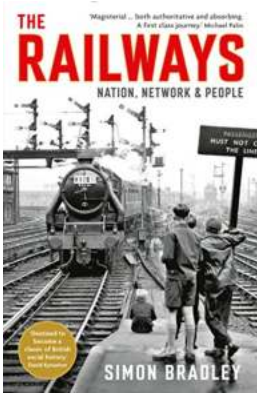
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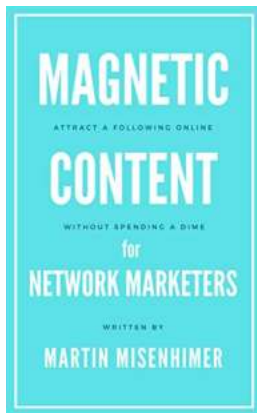
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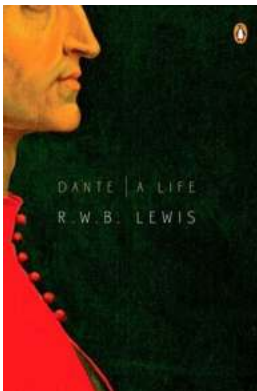
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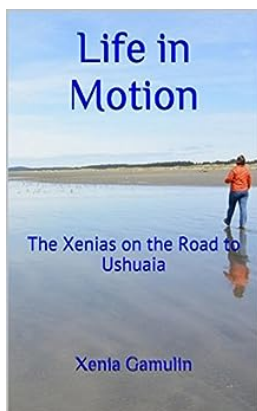
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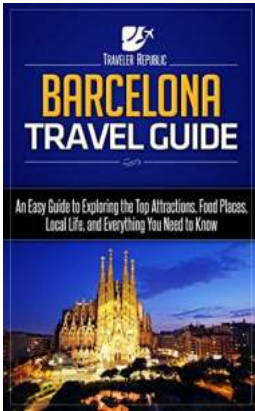
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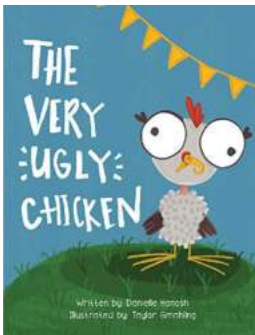
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