

## Music Analysis

### Abbie Whitehurst, Bassoon Performance

Although R. H. Burnside was best known as a director and producer of huge, circus-like productions at the Hippodrome, he was also a songwriter and lyricist. In collaboration with Raymond Hubbell, he wrote many of the songs performed in *Tip Top* and *Good Times*. Unfortunately, the musical scores for both productions have been lost, so there is no way of knowing for sure what the exact instrumentation of each number was. Luckily, it was common practice in the 1920s and 1930s to produce vocal sheet music with piano accompaniment of showtunes. Not everyone had a record player, but many did have cabinet pianos in their homes, so they could play their favorite numbers themselves. Although not every song was reproduced, the more popular ones were, including “Colorland”, “You Can’t Beat The Luck of the Irish”, and “Hello Imagination”. Because we do have a record of all of the song titles and a synopsis of the shows, one can make educated guesses as to what each song sounds like in context.

These three pieces have a lot in common; for starters, they all follow the same song structure of verse 1, refrain, verse 2, and the refrain again. All three of these examples are also in a major key, up-tempo, and in simple meter. Light syncopation and offbeat accompaniment throughout make the tune bouncy and fun, but doesn’t throw off the audience. This is what makes these songs so catchy, they repeat themselves and they’re easy to sing, hence as to why they were produced as piano reductions for the public. “Colorland ” and “Hello Imagination” both have whimsical lyrics, utilizing cute double entendre to transport the audience. While “You Can’t Beat the Luck of the Irish” has far less fanciful words, they still reel the listener into this candy-colored fantasy, these one-song episodes in the world of a Burnside production. *Entrance of the Gladiators* by Julius Fučík comes to mind as a good comparison and possible inspiration for this music, as all of these pieces sound a lot like circus music with lyrics.

When it comes to figuring out what these songs sounded like in the Hippodrome with a pit orchestra alongside the production, it’s really difficult to guess what exactly was happening, especially without even a record of the instrumentation, let alone a full score. Raymond Hubbell’s notes and rhythms are preserved in the piano reductions, but not necessarily his entire vision. Just from looking at the production value of *Good Times*, one would assume that Hubbell wrote for a larger group of musicians, a healthy brass section, some woodwinds, most likely piano, and possibly strings. The piano score for “Hello Imagination” starts with a telephone bell cue, which would be an auxiliary percussion instrument (or possibly a phone ringing on stage, that would be played live from the pit) in this context. This means he also must have written for more than one percussion player, which says something about the ensemble size and instrumentation. If someone were to orchestrate one of these pieces, low brass offbeats would probably keep time while the woodwinds and upper brass play melody lines and the strings provide counter-melody and harmonic support, a pretty standard set-up for stage tunes. While it’s too bad the score doesn’t survive today, it’s fortunate that these piano reductions can provide a glimpse into the musical world Burnside and Hubbell built together.

### Works Cited:

Hubbell, Raymond and Burnside, R. H, "Colorland" (1920). Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection.

Score 2858. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mmb-vp/2858>

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Hubbell, Raymond and Burnside, R. H, "You Can't Beat the Luck of the Irish" (1920). T. B. Harms & Francis, Day & Hunter, 1920. Irish Sheet Music Archives, <https://irishsheetmusicarchives.com/Sheet-Music-Catalog/You-Cant-Beat-The-Luck-Of-The-Irish-IF-SM-01-873.htm>