



Hindle, Annie (ca 1847-19??)

by Gillian Rodger

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Annie Hindle was the first woman to gain significant attention as a male impersonator in the United States, and most likely introduced this performance style to the American variety stage. In 1891, the *New York Sun* declared that she was "the first out-and-out 'male impersonator' the New York stage had ever seen."

Born in England in the mid- to late-1840s, and adopted by Mrs. Ann Hindle, Annie Hindle arrived in the United States in late August 1868. According to the *New York Sun*, Hindle had been active on the provincial English and London music hall stages since the age of five.

Hindle performed on the American variety stage from 1868 to 1886, and during this time she was rarely idle. She was a flexible and resourceful performer who appeared in variety as a solo act and in minstrel shows. On occasion she also took roles in the short dramatic pieces that appeared at the end of each variety bill in that period.

During the 1870s Hindle worked, very briefly, as the manager of the Grand Central Variety Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, but poor attendance caused the theater to close. This failure was due in large part to effects of the 1873 financial crash, which lasted into the late 1870s.

Hindle's reviews, and steady bookings, attest to her popularity with American audiences. One reviewer described one of her early performances: "Miss Hindle is of medium stature, with a pleasing figure and voice. The Lingard style of business [that is, playing both male and female parts] is the lady's *forte*. . . . The changes were cleverly executed and the songs given with a vim and dash that was really refreshing" (Review of a performance at the Metropolitan Music Hall, Washington, D. C. "Music Halls," *New York Clipper*, December 19, 1868).

Some eight years later, the great skills of this performer continued to astound her audience. A reviewer from Texas noted: "Annie Hindle has proved a great success. As a male impersonator her sex is so concealed that one is apt to imagine that it is a man who is singing" (Review of a performance at the Adelphi Theatre, Galveston, Texas. "Variety Halls," *New York Clipper*, December 16, 1876).

Hindle's career began to decline in the early 1880s and ended in 1886, when she married for the third time.

Hindle's first marriage had been to the character and ballad singer Charles Vivian, the founder of the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks in America, which was originally a theatrical fraternity. The couple married in 1868 but after six weeks they parted ways.

Hindle and Vivian did not divorce, and Hindle later claimed he had abused her. In 1878 the *Clipper* reported that she had married the minstrel performer W. W. Long, but no confirmation of this event has been found. If this marriage did occur, it is likely that it was a marriage of convenience for Hindle, as she did not ever perform, live, or travel with Long.

Hindle's third marriage took place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, while she was leading her own troupe on a tour through the Midwest. A local Baptist minister married Hindle and her dresser Annie Ryan one evening after Hindle's performance. Hindle gave her name as Charles and dressed in male clothing while her bride wore her traveling gown.

Gilbert Sarony, a female impersonator in Hindle's troupe, acted as best man and a local bank clerk, presumably pulled in off the street, was Hindle's second witness. This marriage, which was discovered almost immediately, caused a stir in Grand Rapids and was also reported in the *Clipper* as well as in the scandal sheet *National Police Gazette*.

Both papers declared that Hindle was really a man and her career as a male impersonator was ended. Upon the collapse of her variety troupe in the wake of the marriage, Hindle and her wife retired to her home in Jersey City, New Jersey. The two women lived there until Ryan's death in late 1891, both dressing in female clothing.

In 1890 Hindle attempted to return to vaudeville. She found small-time bookings and continued to perform into the early twentieth century, though she seems never to have appeared in big-time vaudeville. It is not known when this remarkable woman died.

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Gillian Rodger, Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, completed her Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh with a dissertation entitled "Male Impersonation on the North American Variety and Vaudeville Stage, 1868-1939," which received the 1998 Philip Brett Award for exceptional work in the field of queer musicology. Her current work focuses on American popular music and musical theater from the mid-nineteenth century and on gender representation in contemporary popular music and music videos.