

# BY THE WAY



Occasional Newsletters from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

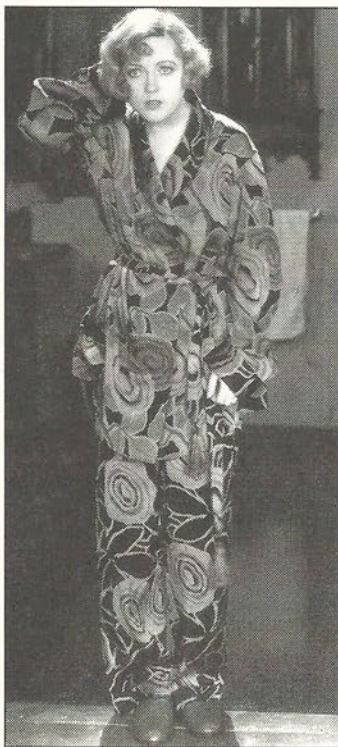
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## The Girls on Wodehouse's American Stage

As announced in *By The Way* for March 2006, the theme of the March issues for the next few years will be the stars of the stage who appeared in Broadway and West End shows associated with Wodehouse. The summaries have been compiled by **Eddie Grabham**.

### Marion Davies



Born in Brooklyn on January 3rd, 1897, Marion Davies will be remembered mainly as a silent film star and for her relationship with tycoon William Randolph Hearst. She had been a chorus girl on Broadway before winning a role in the Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern Princess musical *Oh, Boy!* in February, 1917, the year in which she made her first film, *Runaway Romany*. Marion Davies was also cast in the short-lived Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern musical *Miss*

*1917* in November. The rest of her career was dominated by the cinema; in 1918, Hearst had decided to make her a great star and, in 1919, formed a company, Cosmopolitan, to produce her films. More successful in comedy roles, she appeared in the Hollywood silent feature-length film version of *Her Cardboard Lover* a year before it was filmed as a short in Britain with Tallulah Bankhead. Marion Davies continued making films well into the talkie era and died in 1961, ten years after William Randolph Hearst.

### Justine Johnstone

From 1914, Justine Johnstone appeared on Broadway in a number of successful musicals, including two editions of the *Ziegfeld Follies* (1915 & 1916). She played Estelle in Irving Berlin's first book show, *Watch Your Step* (1914), which starred



dancing sensations Vernon and Irene Castle. Justine went on to play Polly in *Oh, Boy!* at the Princess Theatre in 1917. In *Bring On The Girls*, Bolton and Wodehouse describe in a highly amusing account how Johnstone and Marion Davies were poached (with the promise of the named parts they were given

in *Oh, Boy!*) from Ziegfeld's chorus line.

### Georgia O'Ramey



Equally at home in musicals and straight plays, Georgia O'Ramey appeared in *Miss Springtime* (1916), Plum's first collaboration with Guy Bolton, and *Leave It To Jane*, one of six Broadway shows with lyrics by Wodehouse which opened in 1917. (In addition, *Miss Springtime* was still running as the year began.) Georgia had appeared on stage with the legendary Al Jolson in one of his earliest Broadway shows, *Dancing Around* (1914), and she played Pauline in the original Broadway production of *No, No Nanette* in 1925. She died, tragically, at the age of forty-one, in April 1928.



**Marilynn Miller**



One of Broadway's brightest musical stars of the twenties, Marilyn Miller made her debut in *The Passing Show of 1914*. She was in the next year's edition, graduating to the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1919* with Eddie Cantor. She was the eponymous star of Kern's *Sally* (1920), which included a couple of Plum's lyrics. Miller was to have sung *Bill*, but her voice was not considered suitable for the number, which finally reached Broadway in a version slightly revised by Oscar Hammerstein II (though Wodehouse was initially given sole credit) in *Show Boat* (1927). She played the title role again in *Sunny* (1925); it had been intended that Plum should write the lyrics, but as he was unable to do so, they were written by Harbach and Hammerstein. Marilyn Miller also had the lead role in *Rosalie* in 1928, which had numbers written both by Wodehouse and Sigmund Romberg, and by George and Ira Gershwin. Later shows included *Smiles* (1930) with Fred and Adele Astaire and *As Thousands Cheer* (1933). Marilyn had become Marilyn by the time she made the film versions of *Sally* (1930) and *Sunny* (1931), but died at the tragically early age of thirty eight.

**Vivienne Segal**

A stroke of luck brought eighteen-year-old music student Vivienne Segal early stardom when she was a last-minute replacement to play the lead in *The Blue Paradise*. She scored a hit, having had only had four rehearsals before the opening in 1915, and went on to enjoy a long and successful Broadway career. She sang several numbers in *Miss 1917*, which also included songs by Victor Herbert, and, in 1918, played Mollic in Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern's *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*. She was to sing *Bill*, but the number was replaced by one considered more appropriate to the character of the hero before the show reached New York. (A later attempt to include the song in *Sally* also faltered later – see the narrative for Marilyn Miller alongside.)



Vivienne Segal played Lady Constance in Rudolf Friml's *The Three Musketeers* which boasted a couple of lyrics by Plum. (D'Artagnan was played on Broadway and in London by Dennis King.) Other successes on Broadway included Romberg's *The Desert Song* (1926), once again stepping into the lead just before the opening, and Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey* (1940 with Gene Kelly and the 1952 revival with Harold Lang). She made a handful of films between 1930 and 1933.

**Details of the Relevant New York Shows**

<i>Miss Springtime</i>	with Georgia O'Ramey	New Amsterdam Theatre, 1916
<i>Oh, Boy!</i>	with Marion Davies and Justine Johnstone	Princess Theatre, 1917
<i>Leave It To Jane</i>	with Georgia O'Ramey and Oscar Shaw	Longacre Theatre, 1917
<i>Miss 1917</i>	with Vivienne Segal and Marion Davies	Century Theatre, 1917
<i>Oh, Lady! Lady!!</i>	with Vivienne Segal	Princess Theatre, 1918
<i>Sally</i>	with Marilyn Miller	New Amsterdam Theatre, 1920
<i>Rosalie</i>	with Marilyn Miller	New Amsterdam Theatre, 1928
<i>The Three Musketeers</i>	with Vivienne Segal	Lyric Theatre, 1928