



BY THE WAY

Occasional Newsletters from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

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Occasional Performers in Plum's Plays

It is perhaps not too surprising that so many famous and well-loved actors appeared in the numerous stage works of P G Wodehouse. In this penultimate foray into Plum's theatre, Eddie Grabham gathers together five performers who played a single Wodehouse character in London or Chicago and have not yet been referenced in this series. Between them, they appeared in four Plum plays (*A Thief for a Night*; *Good Morning, Bill*; *The Play's the Thing*; and *The Inside Stand*), all from the era before World War II.

Alice Brady (1892–1939)

Alice Brady had a successful career both as singer in operetta and as dramatic actress. Among her many roles, she appeared with John Barrymore in *A Thief for a Night* in what was described as 'an unusually good cast' in Chicago in 1913.



She scored as the romantic lead in silent films following her screen debut in 1914. Alice had a ten-year break from moviemaking from 1923, but made a successful return to Hollywood in *When Ladies Meet* (1933). Then in her forties, she had become a versatile character actress, playing everything from sophisticated comedy to heavy drama, and she remained a film actress for the remainder of her short life. Alice Brady received an Oscar nomination for *My Man Godfrey* in 1936 and two years later won a golden statuette as Best Supporting Actress for *In Old Chicago*. Among her comedy roles on screen, she scored a hit in the 1934 Astaire-Rogers film of Cole Porter's musical *The Gay Divorce*, which had a sparkling plotline that would not have shamed Plum himself. Her last film was *Young Mr Lincoln*, released in 1939, the year of her untimely death.

Ursula Jeans (1906–1973)



Ursula Jeans was born Ursula Jean McMinn in India in 1906. Having studied at RADA, she made her stage debut at the Criterion in 1922 before joining the cast of the London production of *The Play's the Thing* with, among others, Gerald du Maurier, Ralph Nairn, Henry Daniell (before he went to Hollywood), and Henry Forbes-Robertson. In 1922, Ursula made her film debut in *A Gypsy Cavalier*, though she was only an occasional visitor to the film studios. In 1931 she married Robin Irvine, who sadly died in 1933. During the 1930s, she appeared at the Old Vic playing in Shakespeare and Shaw, and in 1937 she married her second husband, fellow actor Roger Livesey. During World War II, Ursula Jeans worked with ENSA, returning to film work briefly in 1947 when she appeared in *The Woman in the Hall*, playing Jean Simmons's mother. In 1948, she was in the better-remembered *The Weaker Sex*, where she also played a mother in a film with a wartime setting. Following her role in *The Dam Busters* (1955), she joined her husband in a tour of *The Reluctant Debutante* in Australia and New Zealand (1956–58). Ursula was in her sixties when she appeared in a revival of *Oh, Clarence!* (adapted from Wodehouse's Blandings stories) in Edinburgh in 1970. She and Roger Livesey remained married until her death in 1973. Ursula's sister Isabel also made her name as an actress, and had appeared in *Kissing Time* (with lyrics by Plum) in 1919.

Ralph Lynn (1882–1962)

The archetypal stage ‘silly ass’, Ralph Lynn made his professional stage debut in Wigan in 1900 and remained in the provinces for many years before appearing in London for the first time in 1914. His first really big success came when he appeared in *Tons of Money* at the Shaftesbury in 1922. The farce transferred to the Aldwych Theatre, where Ralph and his fellow cast members Robertson Hare, Tom Walls, and Mary Brough remained for some ten years playing in a riotous series of farces mainly by Ben Travers (*A Cuckoo in the Nest*, *Rookery Nook*, *Thark*, and others), affectionately known as the Aldwych farces. One would have thought that Lynn was a natural to play characters created by Plum, but the only theatrical role he took was that of Freddie Widgeon in *The Inside Stand*, based on the novel *Hot Water*. It proved to be Plum’s last performed play before the outbreak of WWII, and was his only non-collaborative work for the theatre. *The Inside Stand* ran at the Saville for 50 performances from 21 November 1935. Ralph Lynn also appeared in the 1933 film version of Plum’s *Summer Lightning* which was adapted for the screen by Miles Malleston.

Gerald du Maurier (1871–1934)


Gerald du Maurier (right) made his London debut in 1894, one year before appearing at the Haymarket Theatre with the legendary Beerbohm Tree in *Trilby*, a stage version of the novel by du Maurier’s father George. He remained with Tree



SAVILLE THEATRE
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.C.2

JACK WALLER
presents

RALPH LYNN



IN
THE INSIDE STAND
A FARCE BY
P. G. WODEHOUSE

“An almost continuous stream of wit.”
Evening News.

“This is a Wodehouse triumph — a feast of healthy fun.”
Morning Post.

EVENINGS 8.30
MATINEES
WEDS. & SATS. AT 2.30

until he appeared in J M Barrie’s *The Admirable Crichton* in 1902. In 1904, he created the roles of Mr Darling and Captain Hook in Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Having appeared in such notable productions as *Raffles* (1906) and *Arsene Lupin* (1909), du Maurier became both a director and manager. Indeed, he both directed and co-produced (with Gilbert Miller) the London production of Plum’s *The Play’s the Thing* from 4 December 1928 at the St James’s Theatre, as well as playing the lead role of Sandor Turai. Although the play had been a big success on Broadway, it failed to raise big enough audiences in London, closing after less than a fortnight on 15 December. His daughter Daphne is still remembered for a series of very popular novels, including *Rebecca*, which also became a successful play and Hollywood film.


Ernest Truex (1889–1973)

Born in America, Ernest Truex first set foot on the stage when he was just five years old and played in American stock (repertory) before making his Broadway debut in 1908. He was at the 299-seat Princess Theatre as Eddie Kettle in *Very Good, Eddie* in 1915, shortly before the theatre became

ERNEST TRUEX
IN
Good Morning, Bill!
A Farcical Comedy,
by
P. G. WODEHOUSE
Based on the Hungarian of
LADISLAUS FODOR

with
VERA LENNOX
DOROTHY MINTO
FRANK CELLIER
LAWRENCE GROSSMITH

Produced by
ATHOLE STEWART



ERNEST TRUEX

famous for the Wodehouse-Bolton-Kern small-scale musicals. In 1926, he came to London and the following year created the role of Bill Paradene in *Good Morning, Bill*, Plum’s play based on the original by Hungarian Ladislaus Fodor, at the Duke Of York’s in a cast which included Lawrence Grossmith and Vera Lennox. Following the play’s 136 performance run, Ernest Truex returned to New York in 1929 and then resumed a film career in Hollywood which had begun in 1913. Following *Whistling in the Dark* (1933), he played character roles in many more films, including *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938), *Christmas In July* (1940), and *His Girl Friday* (1940).