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BEN DAVIS, Jr.,  
Feature Editor

# Meet Her Majesty—Milady of the Chorus

WHEN the curtain rises upon a musical comedy, be it one of those gorgeous things that command ticket scalpers' prices for the opening, or one of the tabloid miniatures with which those of more moderate incomes are more familiar, there are those captious critics who note every defect in the machinery of presentation.

The success of every performance depends upon her ability to stand the gaff of many torturing hours of prancing before the footlights—and for her faithfulness she generally gets the shortest end of the box office receipts—and sometimes not even that.

Billie Rickmon, the New York stage beauty, formerly of "Keep Shufflin'." She is one of the typical choral beauties who trip a strenuous routine in order to delight the tired business man. She has probably never received one of the "polite notices."



Lydia Bourke, a chorine in "Blackbirds of 1928," rated as the most successful Negro musical comedy of the season. The well-drilled performance of the "Blackbird" chorus indicated many weeks of gruelling work and nervous strain. But this photo shows Miss Bourke has managed to retain her beauty.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**  
James A. Jackson, the writer of this story, now a business specialist in the United States Department of Commerce, where he has charge of the Small Business Unit of the Domestic Commerce Division, is known throughout the country and to much of the world as "Billboard Jackson." This sobriquet was acquired because of his connection as an editor on the staff of the Billboard, the theatrical organ, where for its years he functioned as the mouthpiece of the Negro in the entertainment world.  
This was not his only connection with theatricals. His father was a bass with the first commercial troupe of jubilee singers organized. Mr. Jackson has been secretary to several of the great theatrical producers, including the corporation that launched the first travelling company, the late Al. G. Fields, Jules Hurlig and Ernest Hogan when Hogan and McClain were names in conjure with in theatricals. Albert Jackson, Jr., third of the line, is today a Keith circuit comedian and stage manager of a flash act.  
Mr. Jackson writes with authority born of genuine interest and intimate knowledge of the traditions and history of amusements. This is one of a series of stories from the pen of the man who has enjoyed a half century of the most diversified experiences, a great number of which involved travel.

girls begin trooping to the home office or office of the producer or director. Those holding promise, according to the judgment of that worthy, are instructed to report to a designated hall or empty theatre on a specified day.

On that day, with little preliminary explanation, all present are placed in line, slips of



Floyd G. Snelson, Jr., former editor of the Tatler and a widely known newspaper man who has always given the chorus girl a "break" in the columns of his publications. He is now editor of the Apex News.



There are also those who wonder just how it all came about, and still others who take the show for granted as always having been just like the sun that shines daily.

To the wondering one, that person who has curiosity enough to want to know how the show came into being, a visit to a rehearsal would not be without its compensations. The opening night of a musical comedy production marks the culmination of many weeks of gruelling work and nervous strain for all—the business organization of the company, the cast, and most of all the pretty little choristers who svelt figures and graceful dances give essence and character to the show.

It is the diminutive bit of femininity known as the milady chorus girl, upon whom the burden of grief that is called a rehearsal rests most heavily. For many weeks these chorus girls have struggled against the human instinct to err in order to become personified precision in the dance steps, drills, marches, entrances, and exits, through which they must go in future performances.

Behold the chorister for just what she is, without the traditional idea that she is but a sublimated gold digger. Nothing could be more wrong than this popular conception of the majority of the girls who trip the merry, merry toe to the daily entertainment of tired business men, and many others not nearly so imbued with business, nor so tired as they might be. The girls are tired enough to make up for all on an opening night (for have they not walked, run, danced and ambled through nerve wrecking numbers until every bone in their supple bodies ached?).

A tabloid show has from four to ten numbers. The larger productions—those of standard two hour and twenty minute duration—include between sixteen and twenty-two songs and medleys with at least two lengthy finales to acts. Each of these requires a routine of dance steps that runs from half a dozen different cross-leg movements to as many as fifty different dance steps.

To the well-seasoned chorister working under a dance director with experience, many of these steps are simple; but only so because the girls' stage-practice, and previous seasons of hard work have riveted the routine of many dances upon their minds, and habit has bestowed a name upon these steps as a sort of a convenient handle by which one might grasp them.

However, the cry of theatre patrons for something new compels the dance instructor to devise a new and different arrangement of dance steps for his every new production; and it is the chorister upon whom the burden of accomplishing these rests. The director having passed the critical first night's judgment, may find himself with a bonus for his work in thinking up those harrowing movements, but the poor girls who have executed them so faithfully as to create that happy judgment, keep right on doing it while the show lasts and drawing the same salary as that with which the show started. It is the girl who pays—this time in energy.

In response to the "call" published in trade papers or following up the tip passed by word of mouth around the district where show folks live, move and have their being when "at liberty," the

paper carrying the chorus words of an opening number are passed out and the vocal director, a pianist, plays the first piece.

The director, if he is a young man, executes what he regards as a proper routine of steps for the number. If age has endowed him with too much surplus fat for that activity, or if rheumatism or some such similar ailment is his master, a girl is given an intensive period of instruction in the number and she becomes the model for the others.

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The famous "Blackbirds" chorus, probably the highest paid group of Negro chorines within recent years. Their success has been due to long and strenuous hours of rehearsing.