



King's Jester, The: The Life of Dan Leno, Victorian Comic Genius

Barry Anthony

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Who was Dan Leno? In 1901 everyone in Britain knew who he was. They had seen him live on the music hall stage, listened to his jokes on the new gramophone and watched his funny antics in some of the earliest moving pictures. Even King Edward VII was a fan and the popular press dubbed Dan Leno “The King’s Jester”. But his path to fame was a hard one: he journeyed from being a child performer in the London and Liverpool slums to a chaotic career in hard-bitten northern variety theatres. Dan became the nation's favourite comedian, but as one of the first mass media stars he suffered from this continual exposure and died at the early age of forty three.

Drawing on many previously unused sources, this is first, authoritative, biography of Dan Leno. Only Charlie Chaplin, often compared to Dan in style and appearance, was to occupy a similar position in the hearts of the British public. In telling the full story of Dan’s life and career on the stage and screen, Barry Anthony brings to life the everyday life of Victorian Britain, as well as Dan’s unique brand of humour and its resonance with later comedians such as Spike Milligan and the Monty Python team.

'Barry Anthony has learned so much more than I about the great little clown who became the King's Jester. He has brought it all together in this fascinating and so well documented story of Dan Leno's life and times.'
- Roy Hudd President of the British Music Hall Society

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