

Victorian Lady Trombonists

Gavin Holman, 17 February 2024

This photograph of an unknown trombonist was taken in Cardiff, probably in the mid to late 1880s. Unfortunately, as is the case with many such images, there is little else to identify the lady in question. She does not match any of the other similarly aged images of female trombone players I have.

Female brass musicians in this period were somewhat rare, and although the cornet was perhaps the most popular instrument chosen by female players, the trombone was not that unusual, comparatively. Most seem to have either been part of a ladies' orchestra, e.g. Miss Yette Handel's Imperial Ladies' Orchestra, which was active in the late 1890s, or appeared in musical acts or troupes in theatrical productions or vaudeville.

I know of five such ladies from the UK – the dates indicate years they were known to have performed.

- Anna Fuller - 1892
- Marie de Solla - 1901
- Annie Knowles - 1902-7
- Frances Toft - 1898
- Marie Walker - 1916



On the other hand, I have records of quite a few more female trombonists active in the USA during this time:

- Jessie Avery - 1892
- Ida Pearl Baugh - 1917
- Tillie Brohaska - 1901
- Alice Kellogg - 1878
- Anne Carumann - 1909
- Lillian Given - 1909
- Josephine Harvey - 1899
- Lillian Hayden - 1909
- Mae Mullins-Moore - 1913
- Gladys Kirksmith - 1905-15
- Maud Noble - 1896
- Katibel Park - 1895-1905

- E. Ralphena Parsons - 1905
- Black Patti - 1904
- Belle Yeaton Renfrew - 1902
- Minnie Rich - 1889
- Oda Rudolph - 1895
- Georgia Rymer - 1910
- Agnes Salter - 1901
- Lydia Siegl - 1887
- Rebecca Strohl - 1875
- Edith Swan - 1900
- Frankie Tice - 1914
- Lotta Navara Tobin - 1896
- Hilda Wanichek - 1907
- Annie Whiting - 1883-1890
- Lydia Worsley - 1917

One possible candidate for the above photograph would be Annie Whiting. She toured the USA with her brother (assumed) Charles Whiting in a double act, and they also spent a year on the vaudeville circuit in the UK. The duo seemed to have started their musical and theatrical careers around 1877.

Tony Pastor's Theatre, New York - Charles and Annie Whiting first sang a duet , after which Miss Whiting, having rapidly changed her costume, played a solo on the trombone , and they concluded by giving a neat double song-and-dance, their costumes having been again changed.¹

They then toured the USA for the next five years, to October 1882.



Performance at Haverly's Theatre, Chicago, 9th June 1880

Travelling across the Atlantic the duo attached themselves to a touring company for the 1883 season, appearing in theatres and music halls across the country, including Sheffield, Birmingham, London, Bristol, Manchester, and Cardiff.

Novel Entertainment at Cardiff. The stage at the Theatre Royal, Cardiff, is now occupied by a party of ladies, who, unassisted by the sterner sex, are giving an entertainment of a varied character. The performance is opened with "A New Idea," and a new idea it certainly is. The rising of the curtain introduces the audience to a picturesquely grouped

¹ The New York Clipper, 1 December 1877

body of young ladies, numbering something like 30, who do their best to please in vocal and instrumental directions, and last night they succeeded in catching the hands and the ears of the audience. They played some taking instrumental pieces in a creditable way, and a number of sprightly choruses were sung with verve and effect. Several songs were pleasingly rendered, and a violin solo by Miss Sydney was applauded. Among the other specialties were a concertina solo by Miss Vaughan; trombone solo by Miss Whiting, which received the honour of a double encore, as did the song, "Thou art so near," by Miss Gertine. The comic effusion, designated "Coaxy Woaxy," by Miss Bashall, was encored, and the other items in the programme were not without "go". The performance of "Au Adamless Eden," in which all the characters were played by ladies, followed, the singing of Miss Jongmans, Miss Alice Yorke, Miss Beryl, and others of the company being duly appreciated. To those in search of novelty, the theatre this week will prove, we dare say, attractive.²

If the photograph is of Annie Whiting, then this is when it was likely to have been taken. However, there are a lot of assumptions in that assertion! The couple completed their UK engagements in May 1884 and returned to the USA. Next appearing in Montreal, Canada in July 1884. They continued to appear in various musical and theatrical productions until 1891.

Of course, there is another possibility – that this lady was not a trombonist at all, but merely had her photograph taken with the trombone as a prop. Photographs were often staged with various backgrounds, costumes and furniture.

Moving back to real performers – here is a selection of photographs.



Tillie Brohaska, 1901



E. Raphena Parson

² South Wales Daily News, 22 April 1884



Gladys Kirksmith



Oda Rudolph, 1895



Georgia Rymer



Lady from Philadelphia, PA



Lady from Philadelphia, PA





