

“Those Entertaining Frisco Boys”: Hedges Brothers and Jacobson

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Abstract

Charles Frederick (Freddie) Hedges (1886–1920), his brother Elven Everett Hedges (1889–1931), and Jesse Jacobson (1882–1959) converged as Hedges Brothers and Jacobson in 1910 in San Francisco. Elven played piano, saxophone, and guitar, and all three sang and danced. In 1910–11, critics in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and smaller cities greeted the act as something new and exceptionally good. Instead of pursuing more general fame in North America, the trio accepted a music-hall contract in England, where they became leaders in creating a craze for American ragtime singing, a craze that prepared the English public for the momentous arrival of jazz after the First World War. The trio recorded eight released songs for Columbia in 1912–13. In 1913, they also performed in Paris and South Africa. In 1914, after eight months back in the United States, they returned to English success but soon dissolved the act and performed separately until 1919, when they reunited to accept an unprecedented contract (£30,000 for six years). Early in 1920, Freddie killed himself. Forest Tell (b. 1888) replaced him in the trio, and the new group recorded six released songs for Zonophone in 1920. The trio disbanded at the end of the contract. Elven retired shortly afterward, but Jesse stayed in show business at least through World War II.

The Hedges Brothers and Jacobson were a vocal/instrumental trio whose brilliant but discontinuous career lasted from 1910 until 1926. They performed in cabaret, vaudeville, music halls, and musical comedy in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and South Africa and recorded fourteen released sides for English Columbia in 1912–13 and English Zonophone in 1920.¹ They are better known in England than in the United States because their career in the former spanned 1911–14 and 1919–26, whereas in the latter they performed only in 1910–11 and 1913–14, and the recordings that helped spread their fame were probably never released on the western shore of the Atlantic.

The trio brought a distinctively Californian style of entertaining to the East Coast of North America and a distinctively American style to Britain, France, and South

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¹ Two members of the group, Jesse Jacobson and Elven Hedges, also recorded separately as members of the Two Rascals and Jacobson (in 1915–16) and Hedges and Fields (in 1927–28). Much of the discographical information in this article was kindly supplied by Mark Berresford. The group's complete recordings may be heard at www.journals.cambridge.org/sam2013001.

Africa. Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre, their first New York City venue, billed them as "those entertaining Frisco boys,"² and *Variety's* reviewer noted that the unfamiliarity of their West Coast repertoire "may be one of the reasons the boys did so well" in their New York debut.³ J. B. Priestley, the English novelist, who heard them in Leeds in about 1913 during their first English residency, fairly raved about them in a 1962 memoir:

It was as if we had been still living in the nineteenth century and then suddenly found the twentieth glaring and screaming at us. We were yanked [a pun?] into our own age, fascinating, jungle-haunted, monstrous. We were used to being sung at in music-halls in a robust and zestful fashion, but the syncopated frenzy of these three young Americans was something quite different; shining with sweat, they almost hung over the footlights, defying us to resist the rhythm, gradually hypnotising us, chanting and drumming us into another kind of life in which anything might happen.⁴

The Hedges Brothers and Jacobson were in the forefront of an exciting influx of performers that created a British craze for American ragtime in 1911–12, a craze that lasted through the years of the Great War and prepared the British public for the jazz craze that followed the war. In virtue of their position in the ragtime vanguard, they can now be seen as key agents in the international diffusion of jazz. In 1919 they accepted the biggest music-hall contract ever offered. Now they are forgotten or at best misremembered; only two of their remarkable recordings are available on CD reissues.⁵ Here is the bare outline of their story.

By 1910, when the trio converged, each of the musicians had already earned acclaim on his own as part of San Francisco's ebullient entertainment scene. The city was rebuilding itself after a 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire that had destroyed about a third of its structures, so money abounded at all levels of society, facilitating what was called The Life Joyous in dance halls, cabarets (then called cafes), and theaters. Future legends such as Sophie Tucker and Al Jolson appeared on the vaudeville stage; such astonishingly talented pianists as Mike Bernard and Jay Roberts played ragtime in saloons; and the rapidly ascending Blossom Seeley had just left for Los Angeles after establishing herself as one of Frisco's leading musical-comedy stars. Comedian Lou Holtz, who was just starting in show business at the time, looked back from 1939 and saw in the San Francisco of that era the birth of a style of entertainment that came to dominate U.S. night clubs right through the 1920s and 30s.⁶

The Hedges brothers, Charles Frederick (Freddie) and Elven Everett, came to San Francisco from Iowa with their parents, John Alonzo (called Lon; 1861–1937) and Flora (1866–1947). Lon was probably a farmer when the boys were born, first Freddie (in Colfax, Iowa, 23 June 1886), then Elven (in Sprague, Washington Territory, 25 October 1889).⁷ But in the 1900 census, back in Colfax, Iowa, he gave

² "Hedges Brothers and Jacobson," *New York Clipper* (hereafter *Clipper*), 8 October 1910, 849.

³ "New Acts This Week," *Variety*, 1 October 1910, 14.

⁴ J. B. Priestley, *Margin Released* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 66.

⁵ "The Land of Cotton" is on *From Ragtime to Jazz*, vol. 4 (Timeless CBC 1–085), and "On San Francisco Bay" is on a disc in the collection *That Devilin' Tune: A Jazz History*, vol. 1 (WHRA-6003). Both were recorded for the English Columbia label in 1913.

⁶ Reported in Damon Runyon, "The Brighter Side," *Washington Post*, 1 August 1939.

⁷ The dates are from "List of United States Citizens, S. S. 'Oceanic' sailing from Southampton, October 26, 1913, Arriving at Port of New York November 6th, 1913" (Ancestry.com), and "List of United States Citizens, S. S. Franconia, sailing from Liverpool, 24 Oct 1914, Arriving at Port of

his occupation as “showman.”⁸ The show was a wagon-borne family circus that Elven and Freddie talked about to a Newcastle, England, reporter in 1912. In an early version of the spectacle, Freddie walked the tightrope, Elven danced barefoot (on “cutglass,” according to the report), and “they both sold song books, red lemonade and other things.” In a later, improved version, the family traveled with a large tent in case they couldn’t find an indoor performance venue in the town where they had landed, and “the boys did blackface acts and monologues” in addition to singing, dancing, and working with trained animals: a fox, a bear, a raccoon, and pigeons “painted to make them appear strange birds.”⁹ What Lon and Flora did in the show was not reported in Newcastle, but Lon, who played bagpipes and violin, and Flora, who played mandolin, doubtless joined in making music. Flora, who may have had both European and Native American ancestry, would braid her long hair and dress in “American Indian” garb. The show’s name (perhaps it was the Bonanza Shows¹⁰) and itinerary are lost, but family tradition preserves the story of a stand in Indianapolis, Indiana, probably in the first decade of the twentieth century, when Frieda Hedges, a younger first cousin, taught Freddie and Elven their first chords on the piano. Tent shows were usually summer phenomena, but a December 1902 newspaper story from Davenport, Iowa, suggests that the Hedges family was in winter show business as well, as teenaged Freddie and Elven fought to a draw in a preliminary bout at a boxing tournament in that city.¹¹ By the time of the 1906 San Francisco disaster, the Hedges family was living in the unlucky city and extending help to other victims.¹²

A remarkable source for details of San Francisco entertainers’ lives in 1907–17 is a pair of sporting-life magazines called *The Referee* and *The Announcer*, merged in 1914 into *The Referee and Announcer*. These journals were principally concerned with boxing, horse racing, baseball, and the like, but the “sports” who read them were steady patrons of the city’s cafes and theaters, so the pages were bordered with ads for drinking establishments, and over the years a growing amount of

New York 30 [October] 1914” (Ancestry.com). Elven’s birth year is given in some sources as 1888, but more likely it was 1889, because he is not listed with his parents and brother in “Census of the Inhabitants in [Sprague?], in the County of [Lincoln?], Territory of Washington,” (taken in April 1889) (Ancestry.com). The Hedges family’s temporary move to Washington Territory may have been motivated by the relocation there of Lon’s mother, Lucinda Summers (Hedges) Vernon.

⁸ “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900,” for Colfax, Iowa (Ancestry.com).

⁹ Untitled clipping, *Sunday Leader* (Newcastle, England), n.d. [February or March 1912], Frieda Hedges DeHoff collection of memorabilia (hereafter HDC). Some details come from Mary Jane Cartwright and Carol Cartwright, interviewed by the author, 17 October 2011. Mary Jane Cartwright is a daughter of Frieda Hedges DeHoff, a first cousin of Elven and Freddie. Carol Cartwright is Mary Jane Cartwright’s daughter.

¹⁰ “Penobscot Medicine Co. Notes,” *Clipper*, 3 August 1901, 495, mentions “Mr. and Mrs. Hedges . . . of the Bonanza Shows.” Perhaps they were Lon and Flora.

¹¹ “Ten Rounds to a Draw,” *Davenport* (Iowa) *Republican*, 10 December 1902. Evidently the boys were good athletes. A few years later, Freddie was reportedly offered a tryout with the Chicago Cubs baseball team (“Racing,” *The Referee*, February 1909, 4).

¹² Florence Roberts, *Fifteen Years with the Outcast* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet, 1912), 80–81. The untitled Newcastle *Sunday Leader* piece cited earlier says that the front of the Hedges house was demolished by a falling water tank and that their circus tent was appropriated by “military authorities” for use as a hospital tent.

space was devoted to show business reportage and gossip.¹³ As early as September 1908, the *Referee* noted that Elven Hedges and Jesse Jacobson, along with two others, were appearing at The Cave, a basement dive in the Barbary Coast, San Francisco's celebrated red-light district, which was rapidly reawakening after near-total devastation in the earthquake and fire. Jesse was also one of the establishment's managers. The advertisement didn't indicate whether they worked together or how they entertained, for example by singing, playing piano, telling jokes, or dancing barefoot on broken glass.¹⁴ Sophie Tucker said that, "San Franciscans boasted [that The Cave] was the toughest place in the world."¹⁵ At 611 Jackson Street, it was just across the way from a capacious whorehouse playfully dubbed the Municipal Brothel or Municipal Crib because of participation in its ownership by several city officials.

Freddie first appeared in a *Referee* advertisement a few months later, teamed with Elven at a gambling roadhouse called A-Mon-Chateau in Colma, a suburb just southwest of San Francisco.¹⁶ A month after that, the duo of "comedy entertainers"¹⁷ entertained at The Cave, though not yet musically united with Jesse.¹⁸ And in May, they were back at A-Mon-Chateau, teamed with tenor Curly Monroe and pianist Eddie Jewell, two of San Francisco's best-known cafe entertainers.¹⁹

Alas for gambling, it was illegal in California, and in September 1909 the proprietors of A-Mon-Chateau closed the roadhouse without notice, leaving the musical staff suddenly unemployed.²⁰ But they landed on their feet. San Francisco's city government had recently decided to turn a blind eye to the establishment of a new red-light district in the burned-out footprint of the old "uptown tenderloin." The "Cafe District," as it was called, was intended to supplement and compete with the Barbary Coast, but also to be higher-priced and better policed than the Coast, in order to attract not only clients with more disposable income, but also crowds of "respectable" ladies and gents who wanted to drink, dance, and be amused for an hour or two in the numerous cafes that quickly blossomed. The quartet from A-Mon-Chateau, augmented by baritone Charles Cohn, opened at Stack's Cafe, one of the District's sparkling new showcases, in October, but the quintet quickly dwindled to a trio and disappeared by December.²¹

¹³ The volumes are housed at the Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

¹⁴ Advertisement, *The Referee*, 30 September 1908, 13. Advertisement, *The Referee*, February 1909, 6, identifies Jesse as The Cave's manager.

¹⁵ Sophie Tucker, *Some of These Days* (New York: Garden City, 1945), 103.

¹⁶ Advertisement, *The Referee*, 2 January 1909, n.p.

¹⁷ "Theater Benefit Nets Over \$2,000," *The Call* (San Francisco (hereafter *Call*)), 15 January 1909.

¹⁸ Advertisement, *The Referee*, February 1909, 6. Freddie was said to be performing concurrently at Uncle Tom's Cabin, a roadhouse within the city near the eastern entrance to Golden Gate Park ("Racing," *The Referee*, February 1909, 4). In March, the brothers formed part of the small audience at the wedding of Jesse and his bride, whose name is given only as Miss Lorraine ("Racing," *The Referee*, March 1909, 4). Aside from one other brief *Referee* item, in which she is called "Torraine," I have not run across any further mentions of this Mrs. Jacobson.

¹⁹ "Seen and Heard around the Town," *The Referee*, May 1909, 1, and "Seen and Heard about Town," *The Referee*, 19 June 1909, 4.

²⁰ "Passing of Big Gambling Resort," *Call*, 26 September 1909.

²¹ Advertisements, *The Referee*, October 1909, 3, and 6 November 1909, 2; and Advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 October 1909. In the *Chronicle* advertisement, the Hedges boys are characterized as "comedians." Jewell, Monroe, and Cohn left Stack's, replaced by singer Blondy Clark

Nevertheless, the brothers' reputation remained strong. In December 1909, *The Referee* named Elven as one of three candidates for “the best ragtime pianist on the [Pacific] coast” aside from the universally acknowledged champion, Mike Bernard.²² Freddie and Elven were out of work for only ten weeks during 1909, according to the 1910 census, whereas Lon, now a “theatrical stage hand,” had missed thirty-six weeks (probably owing in part to the reconstruction of the city's theaters, slowed by strict new fire-code requirements).²³

As 1910 dawned, a *Referee* piece, “San Francisco's Leading Entertainers,” yielded a morsel of information about the Hedges boys' act: Freddie, “the skinny one,” sang, and Elven played piano, guitar, and saxophone. The brothers were then performing as a duo at another Cafe District resort just around the corner from Stack's, the Mirror Cafe.²⁴ By April, a prospering Freddie was “wearing a diamond ring that would make a head light on a Santa Fe engine look like a pin head.”²⁵

It was probably in April or May 1910 that Jesse Jacobson and the Hedges boys formed their act.²⁶ Jacobson (b. 13 December 1881 or 1882) was slightly older and, given his experience managing “the toughest place in the world,” probably more worldly than his new partners.²⁷ His father, Herman, had emigrated to the United States at age nineteen from the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (later to become part of Germany) in 1868,²⁸ well before the first great wave of Jewish immigration to the United States, and by 1880 was a saloon keeper in Mexico, Missouri, midway between Kansas City and St. Louis.²⁹ Jesse, the fourth child, grew up in a family of entrepreneurs. In 1900, his mother, Rachel, and sisters, Fannie and May, opened an ice cream parlor in the city,³⁰ and the following year his older brother Fred went into the hotel business in Santiago de Cuba.³¹ By 1910, all but Fred had moved to San Francisco, where Herman kept the books for a liquor store.³² A February 1910 *Referee* item suggests that Jesse was at that time better known as

(*The Referee*, 20 November 1909, 2). The Cafe District consisted of the three blocks bounded by Mason, Turk, Taylor, and O'Farrell Streets, now a mostly blighted part of a district still referred to as “the Tenderloin.” According to “Hedges Boys Go Up In Vaudeville” (clipping), unidentified newspaper [San Francisco?], n.d. [ca. February 1911], HDC, Elven and Freddie were also “campaign songsters” for P. H. McCarthy, who was elected mayor of San Francisco in November 1909 and who promised to make San Francisco “the Paris of America.”

²² The Rounder, “Seen and Heard around the Town,” *The Referee*, 4 December 1909, 3.

²³ “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910,” for San Francisco, California (Ancestry.com).

²⁴ “San Francisco's Leading Entertainers,” *The Referee*, 1 January 1910, 15.

²⁵ The Rounder, “Seen and Heard around the Town,” *The Referee*, 23 April 1910, 4.

²⁶ Of course, they may have performed together ad hoc while Freddie and Elven were engaged at The Cave in February 1909.

²⁷ “List of United States Citizens, S. S. ‘Oceanic’ sailing from Southampton, October 26, 1913, Arriving at Port of New York November 6th, 1913” (Ancestry.com) gives 1882 as Jesse's birth year, whereas “Twelfth Census of the United States” for Mexico, Missouri (Ancestry.com) gives 1881.

²⁸ “Form for Naturalized Citizen” [passport application] for Herman Jacobson, 29 August 1881; Untitled [passenger list for the S. S. *Pennsylvania*, arriving in New York City from Liverpool, England, and Queenstown, Ireland, on 23 July 1868] (Ancestry.com), 7.

²⁹ “Schedule 1.—Inhabitants in City of Mexico, in the County of Audrain, State of Missouri, enumerated by me on the 11th day of June, 1880” (Ancestry.com).

³⁰ Untitled, *Mexico Missouri Message*, 10 May 1900, 3.

³¹ Untitled, *Mexico Missouri Message*, 3 October 1901, 3.

³² “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910—Population” for San Francisco, California (Ancestry.com).

a saloon keeper than as a singer when it reported that “the genial proprietor of the Cave . . . put on a song at the Grotto [a cafe in nearby Oakland]” and that “Buck Reilly [the manager] immediately tried to sign him up as an entertainer.”³³

Jesse, Elven, and Freddie inaugurated their act at Dunn’s Cafe, a block away from the Mirror, and enjoyed rapid and enormous success in the city’s highly competitive entertainment market. Lou Holtz recalled their act decades later: “One kid played a boogie beat on the piano with one hand and a hot saxophone with the other. All three were handsome and sang terrific harmony. They were so great.”³⁴ They left Dunn’s without notice to take up an offer from Freddy Train’s Cafe in Chicago, and by the end of May they were entertaining there, on the glamorous edge of the Levee, the Windy City’s equivalent of the Barbary Coast and Cafe District.³⁵

The Orpheum vaudeville circuit, one of the era’s two principal U.S. variety theater chains, quickly snatched the trio from Train’s and by the end of June had sent them on the road through the Midwest.³⁶ The move into vaudeville, then the best-paid branch of North American show business, meant a chance at long-term employment by a circuit of theaters instead of a constant struggle for the next cafe date. It also offered a chance of much wider fame than could be garnered in the red-light districts even of large cities such as San Francisco and Chicago.

The move paid off. Just a few weeks into their tour, they earned the praise of Ashton Stevens, the influential critic of the *Chicago Examiner* (and a former San Franciscan). In his review of their Chicago debut, he pronounced Freddie ragtime’s “fair July savior,” whose singing of “Some of These Days” was the high point of that week’s whole vaudeville program at the Majestic Theatre: “it takes an entirely new sort of youth to sing ‘Dad-ad’ as C. F. [Freddie] does. A youth with the boy yet left in him, an enthusiast without being an egotist, a chap that can get beneath the cuticle of his ditty and project it with human pictures almost visible to the nude eye. Such a youth is C. F.” Stevens also rhapsodized about Elven’s piano playing: “His rambling, cascading, somersaulting right hand is always just the right beat behind his straightmarching left. Mr. E. E. Hedges at the piano is certainly a wonder.” Stevens then jokingly compared Elven to Onaip, a “Hindu illusionist” who appeared to play a piano while suspended (along with the piano) upside down by

³³ One Who Knows, “What the Oakland Sports Are Doing,” *The Referee*, 26 February 1910, p. no. illegible.

³⁴ Quoted in Bill Smith, *The Vaudevillians* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 121. The “boogie beat” detail is not as implausible as it might seem. Paul Oliver’s article “Boogie-woogie,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., ed. Barry Kernfeld (London: Macmillan, 2002), 1:268–69, cites published examples of boogie bass patterns from 1909–11. In the second and third choruses of the trio’s 1913 recording of “On San Francisco Bay,” the piano accompaniment uses a stomping eight-to-the-bar bass pattern that might be remembered as a boogie beat. Reviewers of the trio in vaudeville sometimes mention Elven’s “double bass,” which probably refers to an eight-to-the-bar pattern. Reviewers don’t mention the simultaneous saxophone and piano playing, however.

³⁵ The Rounder, “Seen and Heard around the Town,” *The Referee*, 7 May 1910, 2, and 14 May 1910, 2 and 3; The “Crab,” “Side Lights around Town,” *The Referee*, 28 May 1910, 1. The 7 May item adds that “it is a treat to hear Elvin [*sic*] Hedges play that Zaxaphone.” Percy Wenrich (composer of “When You Wore a Tulip”) described Train’s Cafe ca. 1902 in Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, *They All Played Ragtime*, rev. ed., (New York: Oak, 1971), 125: “a decent place with the atmosphere of a dump.”

³⁶ “Vaudeville Route List,” *Clipper*, 25 June 1910, 491, says they opened at the New Columbia Theatre, St. Louis, MO, on 20 June.



Figure 1. Charles Frederick (Freddie) Hedges, his brother Elven Everett Hedges, and Jesse Jacobson ca. 1912. From the author’s collection.

“hypnotic influence.”³⁷ “Any working clairvoyant can explain the dipping, diving, climbing, circling Onaip . . . , but E. E.’s accompaniment to his little brother’s ‘Dad-ad-ad-ad-ad’ is raggicking that defies detection. . . . It takes an ear with a twist in it to play that accompaniment, and fingers as spry as banjo strings.”³⁸ (Figure 2 is a photo of the trio from the cover of the sheet music of “Some of These Days.”)

In late September 1910 they hit New York City and received their first reviews in nationally distributed show business periodicals, both the old-line *New York Clipper* and its brash new competitor, *Variety*. Favorable notices in these two weeklies were vital to the careers of vaudevillians, because they were written from a business point of view (in *Variety* even more so than in the *Clipper*) and because among their readers would be theater managers all over the United States and Canada, who would make hiring decisions based in part on the reviewers’ opinions. Newspaper reviews, no matter how effusive (or caustic), did not have the same weight. The reviews of the act in both *Variety* and the *Clipper* were enthusiastic, and, more importantly for the historical record, both gave details of the trio’s stage routine.

The *Clipper* called their opening “the most pronounced and emphatic hit scored by a musical act in many seasons” at Hammerstein’s Victoria, and *Variety* judged

³⁷ “New York Hippodrome,” *Clipper*, 2 May 1909, 293.

³⁸ Ashton Stevens, “Hedges Is Ragtime’s Savior,” *Chicago Examiner*, 20 July 1910. Stevens also devotes a dismissive paragraph to Jesse, whom he considers only a run-of-the-mill ballad singer: “Perhaps somebody else has to warble while young Hedges catches up with his breath instead of responding with a fifteenth encore—and perhaps it might as well be Jacobson.” Because Freddie was in fact three years older than Elven, I surmise that Freddie portrayed himself as the “little brother” on stage. This age reversal became part of the Hedges Brothers’ legend.



Figure 2. Freddie, Jesse, and Elven ca. 1910. From the author's collection.

that the trio had “cleaned up.” The act opened with Elven at an upright piano with Freddie and Jesse seated on top and all three singing “a catchy coon song.” They continued with vocal solos, duos, and trios, all accompanied by Elven. Freddie was praised for his “character” singing (that is, directly impersonating the imagined African American, Italian, Jew, or chorus girl—for example—who “spoke” in the

lyrics) and Jesse for his ballads.³⁹ Their singing "caused the entire audience to break into their songs with ringing applause even before the songs were completed." Elven did a piano solo called "Frisco Rag"⁴⁰ "with the speed clutch thrown back to the last notch" and "a wonderful amount of finger movements," though *Variety's* reviewer sneered that "the backstanders at Hammerstein's who placed him on a par with Mike Bernard were stretching it a bit." For their final number, Freddie and Jesse sang and did "a little 'raggy' dance" while Elven played the saxophone. (The *Clipper's* characterization of Elven's saxophone playing as "his 'rag'" suggests that he played a syncopated ragtime obbligato rather than straight melody; Lou Holtz, in the 1939 piece cited earlier, claimed that Elven "was the first man to play . . . a 'hot sax.'"⁴¹) The closer "caught the house like wildfire," and "won them five or six bows and kept the gallery applauding after the intermission sign was out."⁴² A newspaper reviewer two nights later added some detail in describing the finale as

unquestionably the greatest finish ever seen on a New York stage, introducing the song, "Play That Rag," and it is in this number that Young Hedges plays rag time on the saxophone, in a manner never before shown, while the other two sing with him, doing the real Frisco Bear Dance, the first part by Hedges and Jacobson and the second part by the Hedges Brothers; the savophone [*sic*] player never stops playing while dancing.⁴³

They scored similarly as they toured other eastern cities.⁴⁴

It is an indication of the success of the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson that, although the circuit's bookers could have sent them anywhere in the United States and southern Canada, the trio spent at least half the period from October 1910 to early February 1911 in New York City theaters, leaving an imprint on the East Coast to match the ones they had made on San Francisco and Chicago. But they didn't tour widely enough to create the kind of national reputation that figures such

³⁹ The only songs named in these two reviews are "You Goin' to Miss Me," which I conjecture is actually "Some of These Days," and "On San Francisco Bay." Another review, of a July 1910 performance at the Majestic in Chicago, says the trio featured the songs "Some of These Days," "My Wife's Away," and "Dear Mame, I Love You" ("Chicago Variety Bills," *Billboard*, 30 July 1910, 44).

⁴⁰ This number could have been Harry Armstrong's "Frisco Rag" (1909), but reviewers were often creative in assigning titles to the selections they heard performed.

⁴¹ Runyon, "The Brighter Side."

⁴² "Vaudeville Reviews of the Week," *Clipper*, 1 October 1910, 837; "Hedges Brothers and Jacobson," *Clipper*, 8 October 1910, 849; and "New Acts This Week," *Variety*, 1 October 1910, 14. An earlier review of the act at the Majestic Theatre, Chicago ("Chicago News," *Clipper*, 30 July 1910, 604) had averred that Elven's piano playing was "close to that of Mr. [Mike] Bernard." Holtz is cited in Runyon, "The Brighter Side." Perhaps it bears mention that all three had blue eyes (according to their passport applications and draft registration cards), although reviewers did not point out the fact.

⁴³ "Vaudeville" (clipping), unidentified newspaper [New York City], n.d. [after 28 September 1910], HDC.

⁴⁴ See Keith-Albee Vaudeville Theater Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa (hereafter KA), *Manager's Report Books*, 12:152. Manager's reports of this sort were very important for an act's future bookings on a particular circuit. They were submitted to a central office and used to guide management decisions about salary, routing, and even retention. See also clipped reviews from the *Providence Bulletin* and the *Providence Tribune*, both dated 22 November 1910, in KA, *Clipping Books*, 46:151. Although the trio was a hit with the audience, theater manager Charles Lovenberg grumbled in his report that they were paid too much money, a complaint he also lodged against Blossom Seeley and Sophie Tucker (KA, *Manager's Report Books*, 12:138, 119; and *ibid.*, 16:18).

as Sophie Tucker and Al Jolson were to enjoy. Instead of carrying their new style of entertaining to the endless “sticks” of North America, they took a transatlantic chance on one of England’s storied music halls. The *Clipper* announced that the trio, “‘Those ‘Frisco Boys,’ who do a piano and singing act which has been a riot in vaudeville, sail for London, Eng., Feb. 8, to open at the Palace, Feb. 20 for six weeks. This will be the first American piano act over there, and their opening will be watched on this side with great interest.”⁴⁵

The *Clipper*’s “London Letter” followed up a few weeks later with a brief report of the Palace debut noting that the trio’s songs and the saxophone finale “were greatly admired.”⁴⁶ But the admiration didn’t carry them beyond a single week of the promised six. They told a reporter two years later that “their manager [Martin Sampter, an American agent and producer who accompanied them to England] compelled them to give their act in the American style, doing seven numbers in twelve minutes. The audience could not grasp what they were doing.” The manager of the Palace “told them that the English people did not care for ragtime,” and they moved on to short engagements in Manchester and Glasgow. “No more contracts came along, and the boys went to book their passage back to America, when they met an American lady whom they knew, and through her influence secured an engagement at the Metropolitan Music Hall, London.⁴⁷ Since that time they have never looked back . . .” The key to their ultimate success, according to their unnamed spokesman, was that they slowed the act down, from the former seven numbers in twelve minutes (“the real, unadulterated, overproof ragtime that is furnished in America”) to six numbers in eighteen minutes.⁴⁸ Reporting on the Metropolitan opening, the *Clipper*’s “London Letter” correspondent, reserved as always, said that they “made an effective beginning” and “certainly got in all right here.”⁴⁹ Within the writer’s narrow register of expression, this amounted to explosive enthusiasm.

Finally launched in London, the Frisco Boys sailed on to success after success. Circuit bookers in England, no less than those in the United States, could send

⁴⁵ “To Open at the Palace, London,” *Clipper*, 11 February 1911, 1289. The Hedges Brothers and Jacobson were far from being the first Americans to bring ragtime across the Atlantic. Bert Williams and George Walker had preceded them by more than a decade (see Camille F. Forbes, *Introducing Bert Williams: Burnt Cork, Broadway, and the Story of America’s First Black Star* [New York: Basic Books, 2008], 66), and numerous U.S. acts were touring British circuits in the year or so before the Frisco Boys arrived, among them fellow San Franciscans Vardon, Perry, and Wilber (who played harp-guitars) and the Two Bobs (Adams and Alden), who would seem to qualify as a “piano act,” because they alternated at the piano as they sang (“News from Chicago,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 15 May 1909, 7). See also Rainer E. Lotz, *Black People: Entertainers of African Descent in Europe and Germany* (Bonn: Birgit Lotz Verlag, 1997). Although Williams and Walker were very successful in England during a 1903 visit, even garnering a royal command performance, their music didn’t create a craze for ragtime, although it sparked a cakewalk revival (Forbes, 119–24).

⁴⁶ “Our London Letter,” *Clipper*, 18 March 1911, 22 (datelined 25 February).

⁴⁷ The Metropolitan stand was probably one that began 17 April 1911, just eight weeks after they fizzled at the London Palace (“Our London Letter,” *Clipper*, 6 May 1911, 12).

⁴⁸ “Kings of Ragtime” (clipping), unidentified newspaper [England], n.d. [ca. early 1913], HDC. “London Notes,” *Variety*, 11 March 1911, 13, confirms that “the Palace audience is not educated up to the American ‘rag stuff’ that these boys put over in such good shape. . . . These boys will make good over here but it is going to take some time before they are thoroughly understood by the English.”

⁴⁹ “Our London Letter,” *Clipper*, 6 May 1911.

performers wherever they thought best, and the norm was to send them on extended tours of theaters all over the British Isles. Such was the case with the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson until they had an opportunity to settle down for a couple of months in one place. Starting on Boxing Day 1911, they were featured in one of England’s best-loved theatrical formats, the Christmas pantomime, this one entitled *Humpty Dumpty*, at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle. Jesse distinguished himself in the role of the Chief Fakir of the City of Benares, and the trio’s turn was judged to be “one of the undoubted triumphs” of the vast and lavish production. So comfortable had the boys become in England that they told reporters that they intended to settle there, and during the pantomime’s long run, Lon and Flora crossed the Atlantic and announced that they too were there to stay.⁵⁰

“*The Stage*” *Year Book 1913*, an annual publication of *The Stage*, an English equivalent of *Variety* and the *Clipper*, singled out the trio in its review of the English theater scene of 1912:

Another “craze” to be mentioned is that of Ragtime. Syncopated melody, introduced from America, caught the London Public in its grip about half-way through the year, and ragtime troupes of varying degrees of excellence made their appearances all over the country. One of the first among the best of these companies was that of Hedges Brothers and Jacobson.⁵¹

The trio’s publicist bought a full-page ad in the same publication, billing them as “The Pioneers of Rag-time Shows in England” and attributing to them the following:

We do not want to throw bouquets at ourselves, but who will deny that the present boom in Rag-time is due to the success achieved by us? Since our first appearance at the Palace we have consistently featured REAL Rag-time at all our performances throughout the Kingdom. We have trained British audiences to appreciate Rag-time. For the result See our date-book, and count the Rag-timers who have followed us.⁵²

The advertisement went on to note that the group was “Booked at all the Principal Halls until 1917.” (See Figure 3.) The projected six weeks at the London Palace burgeoned into two years and nine months away from North America, during which the Frisco Boys entertained not only in the British Isles, but also in Paris (March 1913) and South Africa (August–October 1913).⁵³ They also made their first records in late 1912 and early 1913, at least one of which (“Trail of the Lonesome

⁵⁰ Details about *Humpty Dumpty* come from “Newcastle’s Fine Pantomime” (clipping), unidentified newspaper [Newcastle, England], n.d. [ca. 27 December 1911], HDC, and “Revels at the Royal” (clipping), unidentified newspaper [Newcastle, England], n.d. [ca. 27 December 1911], HDC; the trio’s intention to stay in England is reported in “Trans-Atlantic Visitors” (clipping), unidentified newspaper [Newcastle, England?], n.d. [ca. January 1912], HDC; and Lon and Flora’s arrival is reported in an untitled clipping, *Sunday Leader* (Newcastle, England), n.d. [February or March 1912], HDC.

⁵¹ “*The Stage*” *Year Book 1913* (London: The Stage, 1913), 30–31.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵³ “Our London Letter,” *Clipper*, 12 April 1913, 6, and 23 August 1913, 4; “Names and Descriptions of Alien Passengers” on R. M. S. *Kenilworth Castle*, arriving at Southampton, England, 28 October 1913 (Ancestry.com).

THE STAGE YEAR BOOK. xxi.

The Pioneers of Rag-time Shows in England.

HEDGES BROTHERS & JACOBSON



We do not want to throw bouquets at ourselves, but who will deny that the present boom in Rag-time is due to the success achieved by us? Since our first appearance at the Palace we have consistently featured **REAL** Rag-time at all our performances throughout the Kingdom. We have trained British audiences to appreciate Rag-time. For the result—See our date-book, and count the Rag-timers who have followed us.

Rag-timers may come,
Rag-timers may go,
But we'll be with you for ever.

Booked at all the Principal Halls until 1917.

Address: Vaudeville Club, 98, Charing Cross Road, w.c.

Figure 3. Elven, Jesse, and Freddie ca. 1912. From the author's collection.

Pine”) was reportedly used as the soundtrack disc for a Hepworth Talking Picture.⁵⁴ (See “Appendix: The Recordings” below.)

According to *Variety*, the trio ignored their English contracts in order to play Paris (at Ciro’s, a restaurant for the wealthy), because their English wages were stuck at an amount “agreed upon when the act was first here” which, by 1913, were “very much under the present ragtime salary.”⁵⁵ It is not known if the walkout enabled them to negotiate higher pay when they returned to Britain.

Although the trio made a splash wherever they appeared, rumors of internal strife reached California. In April 1912, *The Referee* reported that Elven had quit the group, and in September of the same year, it claimed that all three had returned to New York, where they were working separately.⁵⁶ Both stories were false, but they foreshadowed what was to happen a couple of years down the line.

In October 1913, the *Clipper* reported that the act, at that point engaged in South Africa, had cancelled its future European engagements in order to return to the United States to appear in a Lew Fields musical comedy called *Fancy Free*, which was to open in Chicago on November 18.⁵⁷ A month earlier, another source had said that they were about to leave for Australia, where they had been booked for a year on the Rickard circuit.⁵⁸

Whether bound for Chicago or Australia or neither, the Frisco Boys arrived in New York on 1 November 1913 and dived back into American show business. (The fact that they left Lon and Flora behind suggests that from the outset they intended to return to England. Perhaps part of the motivation for the trip—like that for their Paris jaunt—was to boost their stock.) By November 17 their act was featured, along with, but not in, a one-act play called *Fancy Free* at Lew Fields’s Forty-fourth Street Music Hall. In their finale, Elven still played the saxophone as Jesse and Freddie danced.⁵⁹ The following week, at a Friars Club gathering, they were given “a rousing welcome” by a large crowd that included show business luminaries such as Sophie Tucker and Irving Berlin.⁶⁰ In December, the trio began

⁵⁴ Personal communication from Ian Whitcomb. The film is not known to exist.

⁵⁵ “London,” *Variety*, 14 March 1913, 17 (datelined 5 March). The article also noted rumors that “the boys will go to Australia or somewhere far away.”

⁵⁶ “Abe” Stump, “Late Edition News Squibs of the Professional Entertainers,” *The Referee*, 27 April 1912, 14, and Jesse James, “Out where the Ocean Rolls,” *The Referee*, 21 September 1912, 14 (unnumbered). “Three-Act Splitting,” *Variety*, 6 April 1912, 4, says only that there were plans for the act to dissolve: “Elvin [*sic*] Hedges has had a serious disagreement with the others. It is said that their women folk are back of the quarrel.” Perhaps the breakup was stopped by Martin Sampter, who sailed for England on 31 May 1912 (“Martin Sampter,” *Variety*, 1 June 1912, 7).

⁵⁷ “Returning to America,” *Clipper*, 4 October 1913, 1.

⁵⁸ “Merely Musings,” *Announcer*, 27 September 1913, 7.

⁵⁹ “Lew Fields’s Music Hall Show,” *New York Tribune*, 18 November 1913; “44th St.,” *Variety*, 28 November 1913, 20. Unfortunately, none of the trio’s recordings includes Elven’s saxophone playing. On 21 September 1917, he made a test recording of Carrie Jacobs Bond’s “A Perfect Day” as a saxophone solo for the Gramophone Company, Ltd., but it was not released, and no test pressing is known to exist (Alan Kelly, *Gramophone Company Matrix Series, MAT115* [York, England: Alan Kelly, 2003], 89). Likely the solo was not a straight reading of the sentimental ballad, but a comic version that Elven was then featuring in his act (Thomas Reece, “London Letter,” *Billboard*, 10 November 1917, 66). “Some temerity,” exclaimed Reece.

⁶⁰ “Friars,” *Clipper*, 22 November 1913, 17.

a series of vaudeville engagements that lasted through most of January 1914, then returned to their cabaret roots at the Folies Marigny, atop the Forty-fourth Street Music Hall.⁶¹

Their next move was from vaudeville and cabaret to the musical-comedy stage, in a farce called *Bringing Up Father* (based on the popular comic strip), for which Elven had written much of the music.⁶² This move should probably be seen as a gamble. Theater, whether musical or not, was in general remunerated more poorly (except in prestige) than vaudeville, but an actor or composer who managed to establish a strong reputation in the field could end up based in New York (or a smaller metropolis), working in a series of shows and making a handsome living without the necessity of constant touring, as had such contemporary figures as George M. Cohan, Lew Fields, and Fred Stone. But the gamble was a long shot.

A large cover photo of the trio, with Elven at the piano, adorns the published songs from *Bringing Up Father*. The show opened 9 February 1914 in Middletown, New York, and, after several weeks of brief stands in small cities, moved to the Broadway Theatre in Brooklyn, New York, on March 28 for a longer run.⁶³ Besides doing their usual stage routine in the last act, the three had speaking and singing roles in the play. Jesse was Tom Hamilton, the romantic lead who wins the heart and hand of Jiggs and Maggie Mahoney's daughter Elinor; Elven was Oswald, the Mahoneys' butler; and Freddie was Billy McGee, the elder Mahoneys' son-in-law. A *Clipper* review of a March performance in Brooklyn praised the work of all three: Freddie, with "a splendid tenor voice," "proved himself a clever light comedian"; Elven "got much fun out of the role of a 'cissy' butler, keeping the part entirely free from vulgarity"; and Jesse "scored heavily, especially with his singing." In their last-act specialty, a version of their vaudeville routine, the trio was "a real genuine 'knockout.'"⁶⁴ The play seems to have done very well, culminating the season with five weeks in April and May at the Globe Theatre in Boston.⁶⁵

Bringing Up Father then disappeared from *Clipper* itineraries, possibly for the summer hiatus that was customary in the days before theaters were air-conditioned. Although the tryout season had been successful enough that three touring

⁶¹ Advertisement, *Evening Telegram* (New York), 25 January 1914.

⁶² U.S. Copyright Office, *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Part 3: Musical Compositions, 1914*, lists ten songs from the show (all of them published in a folio called *Song Hits from Gus Hill's Production of Geo. McManus' Latest Success Bringing Up Father* [New York: Waterson, Berlin and Snyder, 1914]). Elven wrote the music for all of them, along with the lyrics for "Come Back to Italy," and Freddie and Jesse wrote the words for two, "Molly McGee" and "Waiting for the Stackalee." One of Elven's songs for the show, "Dance of the Tango Moon," may (at this writing) be viewed and downloaded from the Library of Congress website at lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihis/loc.natlib.ihis.100005730. Elven composed the music for at least twenty-five other published songs, five of which were recorded by the trio in 1920: "Dear Old Songs," "I Want a Boy," "If I Had the Lamp of Aladdin," "Oh, You Little Thief," and "Old Fashioned Mammy of Mine." Another Elven composition, "Why Don't Flies Get Fat?," was recorded by Hedges and Fields.

⁶³ "The Drama," *Schenectady* (New York) *Gazette*, 12 March 1914; "Has a Punch That Is a Wallop," *Amsterdam* (New York) *Evening Recorder*, 3 March 1914; "Bringing Up Father," *Clipper*, 4 April 1914, 9. Some Internet sources say the show played on Broadway, but in fact it never got closer to Broadway than Brooklyn.

⁶⁴ "Bringing Up Father," *Clipper*, 4 April 1914, 9.

⁶⁵ "Route List[:] Dramatic and Musical," *Clipper*, 18 April 1914, 16, and 9 May 1914, 27.

companies were sent out in the fall, the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson were no longer part of the cast.⁶⁶ About ten days after the Boston closing, the trio had returned to vaudeville, but their first stand, at the New Brighton Theatre in Brooklyn,⁶⁷ was cut short after three days, when “a motorcycle with basket attachment” in which the brothers were zipping along Ocean Parkway “became unmanageable and crashed into a tree.” Elven’s nose was broken, Freddie was knocked out, and both men were badly cut and bruised. The remainder of the Brooklyn engagement was canceled.⁶⁸ As far as I can determine, that was their final engagement in the United States, not just for 1914, but forever.⁶⁹

They returned to England in July 1914 and resumed their music-hall career, but the renewal was brief. In December the *New York Dramatic Mirror* reported that the trio had dissolved, with Freddie already back in the States and Jesse remaining in England.⁷⁰ The article didn’t mention Elven’s whereabouts, and the evidence is equivocal as to whether he stayed in England or returned to America with Freddie. In either case, he seems to have been (back?) in England in March 1915.⁷¹

Freddie soon joined a new turn called “Those Four Boys” that debuted at the Colonial Theatre, New York, in February 1915, “did very big” at the Monday matinée, and then, reportedly at their manager’s suggestion, failed to show up for the evening performance. The other three Boys were pianist Mike Bernard, whom Freddie must have known from San Francisco, Eddie Goodrich, and “Happy” Naulty. Bernard quickly ditched the act, and the remaining three, instead of

⁶⁶ “Bringing Up Father,” *Clipper*, 22 August 1914, 1.

⁶⁷ “New Brighton,” *Clipper*, 6 June 1914, 6. Said *Clipper*’s reviewer, “It is one of the cleverest acts in the business . . . What these boys don’t know about putting over a song isn’t worth knowing.” “On San Francisco Bay” was still one of their showpieces, according to “Music Prominent in Vaudeville,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 June 1914.

⁶⁸ “Hedges Brothers Injured,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 4 June 1914. The article doesn’t say which brother was driving.

⁶⁹ Although “Route List: Vaudeville,” *Clipper*, 20 June 1914, 7, forecast a run at Hammerstein’s Victoria for the week of June 15–20, a review of that week’s bill (“Hammerstein’s,” *Clipper*, 20 June 1914, 18) didn’t mention them. An advertisement in *Billboard*, 19 August 1914, 46, announced their engagement for the whole summer at the Apollo Grill in Atlantic City, NJ. Although the advertisement was repeated for many subsequent weeks, the trio’s presence in England during the summer is well documented. Perhaps the announcement had been paid for in advance.

⁷⁰ Untitled, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 23 December 1914, 19.

⁷¹ “Best Splitters Finally Split,” *Variety*, 5 December 1914, 4, reported that the brothers were to leave England together on December 5, although “London News Letter,” *Billboard*, 2 January 1915, 20, reported that Elven was still in England on December 14, where he inaugurated a new single turn, “Hedges and a Piano.” Perhaps he left somewhat later and is the E. E. Hedges who embarked at New York for Liverpool aboard the *Megantic* on 31 March 1915 (“Passengers for Europe,” *New York Times*, 31 March 1915). Elven had applied for a passport (in London, allegedly for a trip to Ireland) on 16 October 1914, just before Lon and Flora sailed from Liverpool to New York 24–31 October (“List of United States Citizens, S. S. Franconia, sailing from Liverpool, 24 Oct 1914, Arriving at Port of New York 30 [October] 1914” [Ancestry.com]). Untitled clipping, unidentified newspaper [Baxter, Iowa?], n.d. [probably after 27 May 1932], HDC, states that Lon, Flora, and the brothers all returned to the United States at the same time and spent the next six months together. Although the story seems not to be true in detail, it lends some weight to the conjecture that, for some stretch of 1914–15, the boys and their parents were together in the States. According to “London Letter,” *Clipper*, 14 November 1914, 2 (datelined 31 October), the trio was slated to open at the Olympia, Liverpool, on 2 November 1914. (Liverpool was a principal port for sailings to the United States.) This is the last (projected) British engagement in 1914 that I have discovered.

replacing him to take an already scheduled engagement in Atlanta, decided to throw in the towel. *Variety* reported that Freddie “expects to make San Francisco.”⁷²

By May 1915, perhaps with stops in San Francisco and Salt Lake City,⁷³ Freddie had moved west to Reno, Nevada, where he sang in a cafe. He was brought to the attention of the *Reno Evening Gazette* by an arrest on the “charge of being drunk at city hall,” followed by a night in jail.⁷⁴ His move to Reno may have been motivated by Lezette Hoskins, a Nevada native whose stage career had started as early as 1893, when she was a five-year-old performing on autoharp, piano, and alto horn in San Francisco.⁷⁵ She was born of the union of two western show-business families, and by 1904, at age fifteen or sixteen, she was traveling with her maternal uncle’s troupe, the Bob and Eva McGinley Comedy Company, through the Pacific Northwest, singing songs illustrated with projected slides and performing as a “novelty trick pianist.”⁷⁶ She may have retired from show business for a time, as the 1910 United States census lists her as a “teacher of instrumental music.”⁷⁷

Freddie had met Lezette in London, just after she had “completed a tour of the old world,” and a romance ensued. Six weeks after Freddie’s night in jail, still in Reno, they married.⁷⁸ The *Evening Gazette* reported that “the couple will go to San Francisco soon, and probably again enter vaudeville.”⁷⁹ It isn’t known whether the newlyweds went to San Francisco, but they did form a duo, Hedges and Hedges, at the Sagebrush Cafe in Reno, debuting on December 18.⁸⁰ (Figure 4 shows them a year or two later.) With the help of Freddie’s old associate Eddie Jewell, the new act landed some long cafe engagements in San Diego and Venice, California,⁸¹ and from October to early January they toured the East Coast, Canada, and the

⁷² “In and Out,” *Variety*, 6 February 1915, 6; “Four-Act Breaks Up,” *Variety*, 6 February 1915, 7; “New Acts,” *Variety*, 20 February 1915, 14. The act had been conceived as a singing trio without its own pianist (“Jack,” “N. Y. Vaudeville Whispers,” *Billboard*, 30 January 1915, 14).

⁷³ “Late Locals,” *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, UT), 4 March 1920, refers to him as “Charles Frederick Hedges of Salt Lake.”

⁷⁴ “Footlight Idol Sleeps in Jail,” *Reno (Nevada) Evening Gazette*, 22 May 1915.

⁷⁵ “A Musician,” *Reno (Nevada) Evening Gazette*, 10 August 1893. Hoskins’s first name is spelled differently in different sources, but on the one signed document I have seen, “Emergency Passport Application” for Lezette Hoskins, 13 August 1914 (Ancestry.com), she clearly uses “Lezette.”

⁷⁶ “Notes from Bob and Eva McGinley,” *Clipper*, 23 September 1905, 773; Advertisement, *Clipper*, 7 April 1906, 210; “Vaudeville and Minstrel,” *Clipper*, 18 May 1907, 353.

⁷⁷ “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910,” for Esmeralda County, Nevada (Ancestry.com).

⁷⁸ According to “Emergency Passport Application” for Lezette Hoskins, 13 August 1914 (Ancestry.com), Lezette had left the United States on 21 October 1913, so she could not be the otherwise unidentified “Mrs. C. F. Hedges” listed as a guest in an untitled clipping, unidentified newspaper [London, England], n.d. [August 1913], HDC, about an August 1913 London farewell banquet as the trio were about to leave for South Africa. Lezette was back in North America on 31 August 1914, according to Untitled [passenger list for H. M. S. *Lake Manitoba*, arriving in Québec, Canada, August 1914] (Ancestry.com).

⁷⁹ “Lizette [sic] Hoskins Weds C. F. Hedges,” *Reno (Nevada) Evening Gazette*, 7 July 1915.

⁸⁰ Advertisement, *Nevada State Journal*, 6 December 1915.

⁸¹ They entertained for about a month at the opulent new Trocadero Cafe in downtown San Diego during the city’s Panama–California Exposition, a two-year event that brought in millions of tourists. Freddie played guitar during this engagement in addition to singing. In May, they moved on to Venice, a relatively licentious Los Angeles beach suburb, dubbed “the Atlantic City of the West Coast,” (“San Diego the City Now in the Limelight,” *The Referee and Announcer*, 25 March 1916, 12, and 1 April 1916, 12; “Joe Gorman’s Chatter of the Stars in San Diego,” *The Referee and Announcer*, 22



Figure 4. Lezette and Freddie Hedges, ca. 1917. Photograph courtesy of the DeHoff-Cartwright family.

Midwest in a musical comedy called *Bringing Up Father in Politics*, a sequel to the show Freddie had been with in 1914. Most of the itinerary consisted of one-night stands, but there were weeklong runs in Chicago and St. Louis.⁸² Freddie reprised

April 1916, 13; “San Diego the City Now in the Limelight,” *The Referee and Announcer*, 6 May 1916, 12).

⁸² A *Clipper* department, “Route List: Dramatic and Musical,” between 14 October 1916 and 27 December 1916, gives the details. The final engagements were the longest, at the National Theatre in

his Billy McGee role and Lezette played Peggy, one of the Mahoney daughters. Their singing, according to one review, included a number of “foreign songs” and “helped relieve the situation when the comedy seemed to drag.”⁸³

Meanwhile, Elven and Jesse were following separate paths on the opposite shore. In February 1915, the Variety Controlling Company, a booking office, won a judgment of \$1500 against the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson for breach of contract. The following month, Elven declared bankruptcy, and the court appointed a receiver in July.⁸⁴ Perhaps Jesse shared in taking the hit. Elven must have worked to rebuild his position, but I have no information about his itinerary until his appearance in the cast of a “musical comedy mélange” called *Step This Way* in January 1916.⁸⁵ In December he “joined forces” with Nella Webb, a slightly older fellow expatriate who had made a place for herself in English show business, and the duo appeared together until at least May 1917. But as of July, he was again working single.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, in March 1917 he married Blanche Courty (or Decourty), a French citizen who had lived in England since the beginning of the Great War.⁸⁷ For the balance of 1917–19, he seems to have worked mostly as a solo turn.

Jesse (now using “Jess” as a first name) stayed in the music halls as a single for a short time but soon formed a new trio, Two Rascals and Jacobson, with fellow Americans Charles O’Donnell (b. 30 March 1888) and Edward Greenfield (“Eddie Fields” on stage; b. 5 August 1894). Jesse had met his new partners in the United States in 1910, probably on the Frisco Boys’ eastern vaudeville tour.⁸⁸ The fact that the two arrived in Liverpool from the States together in February 1915 suggests that Jesse had sent for them.⁸⁹ O’Donnell had been one of the Three Rascals, a trio

Chicago, 24–30 December 1916, and the American Theatre in St. Louis from 31 December 1916 to 6 January 1917, both on the “Route List” in *Clipper*, 27 December 1916, 24. Curiously, a review of the show in “Baltimore,” *Variety*, 13 October 1916, 47, calls it *Bringing Up Father in Society*, which was later the name of a show in the same series.

⁸³ “Poli’s,” *Washington Times*, 3 October 1916; “Musical Comedy Offering a Hit at Knickerbocker,” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger*, 14 November 1916; “McManus Farce at Grand,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 12 December 1916.

⁸⁴ “The Bankruptcy Act, 1914,” *Times* (London), 31 July 1915.

⁸⁵ This information is from the Bristol Hippodrome website www.hippodromebristol.co.uk. In September 1916, Elven applied for a passport to allow him to continue residing in London in order to fulfill his theatrical contracts (“Emergency Passport Application” for Elven Hedges, 2 September 1916 [Ancestry.com]).

⁸⁶ “In London,” *Variety*, 22 December 1916, 4; “Varieties, &c.,” *Times* (London), 1 May 1917; “London at a Glance,” *Clipper*, 18 July 1917, 10 (datelined 7 July).

⁸⁷ The information about Blanche and her marriage to Elven is from “Department Passport Application” for Blanche Hedges, 11 December 1918 (Ancestry.com). In that document, she uses “Courty” as her maiden surname, whereas in the *England and Wales Marriage Index* for January–March 1917, 59 and 165, “Decourty” is used. She too may have been an entertainer, because the passport application says that in 1913 she spent four months in Egypt “professionally.” “Reviving Hedges Bros. and Jacobson,” *Variety*, 16 May 1919, 5, reports that after the 1914 breakup, both Elven and Freddie went on stage with their wives, but this late source is the only one that suggests that Elven and Blanche formed a two-act.

⁸⁸ Jacobson attested to six years’ acquaintance with both men in “Department Passport Application” for Charles O’Donnell, 5 December 1916 (Ancestry.com), and “Department Passport Application” for Edward Greenfield, 7 December 1916 (Ancestry.com).

⁸⁹ “Form for Native Citizen” [passport application] for Charles O’Donnell, 18 January 1915 (Ancestry.com); “Form for Native Citizen” [passport application] for Edward Greenfield, 18 January

similar to the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson that toured Britain and South Africa in 1912–14 and recorded for Fonotopia, Ltd.’s Jumbo label.⁹⁰ The Two Rascals and Jacobson quickly occupied the variety niche left vacant by the Frisco Boys, and they recorded nine released titles for Regal in 1915 and 1916. In May 1917, just after the United States entered the war in Europe and the new trio returned from a South African tour, Jacobson, O’Donnell, and Fields went to France as Red Cross volunteers for five or six months.⁹¹ After some sort of rift developed, Jesse defected from the act just as it was about to leave England for a second South African tour. Lawsuits were brought against him by the African Theatres Trust, Ltd., and by a booking agency. In April 1918, he lost both suits.⁹² The Two Rascals continued as a duo⁹³ and Jesse as a single.

We left Freddie and Lezette in St. Louis in January 1917. Evidently they spent part of that year honing their two-act in smaller towns, and by early August they were entertaining on the Keith vaudeville circuit.⁹⁴ Later in the month they made their New York vaudeville debut at the Harlem Opera House. The *Clipper*, noting that the audience had greeted the new turn with unusual warmth, reviewed Hedges and Hedges briefly in “New Acts,” with mixed emotions:

The pair can successfully put over any popular song, for they inject an abundance of ginger into their work and harmonize excellently. The man in the act, however, has paid little or no attention to his wardrobe and owes it to the audience to appear in something classier than ordinary street attire.⁹⁵

A couple of weeks later, Lezette’s wardrobe also came under fire, when a *Variety* columnist snarled that Lezette’s attire “may have seen better days” and that she “is below even the average small time act—in her dressing. . . . [S]ome good dressing will help this act immensely.”⁹⁶

1915 (Ancestry.com). The new act, “an immense success,” debuted on 1 March 1915 at the Holborn Empire, according to “London News Letter,” *Billboard*, 27 March 1915, 135.

⁹⁰ The Three Rascals’ New York debut was reviewed in “Keith’s Union Square,” *Clipper*, 23 November 1912, 14, very shortly before the act left for England. According to Ross Laird, O’Donnell was the trio’s pianist. See Laird, *Tantalizing Tingles: A Discography of Early Ragtime, Jazz, and Novelty Syncopated Piano Recordings, 1889–1934* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 115–16. The other two original Rascals were Monte (sometimes spelled “Monty”) Wolf and Walter Kaufman.

⁹¹ The trio’s arduous return from South Africa, probably in April, is noted in “London at a Glance,” *Clipper*, 2 May 1917, 12 (datelined 21 April). “Two Rascals [*sic*] with Red Cross,” *Clipper*, 15 August 1917, 12, says the trio left for France on May 23 of that year. “Americans Volunteer in England,” *Variety*, 25 May 1917, 4, reported that Jacobson, O’Donnell, and Fields had “volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps.” On “Registration Card” [U.S. draft] for Charles O’Donnell, 3 July 1918 (Ancestry.com), and “Registration Card” [U.S. draft] for Edward Greenfield, 2 July 1918 (Ancestry.com), both men reported having served in France. O’Donnell mentions the Red Cross, and Greenfield said that he drove an ambulance. An affidavit attached to “Department Passport Application” for Edward Greenfield, 31 October 1921 (Ancestry.com), states that Greenfield was in France May–September 1917. I don’t know whether the trio served together.

⁹² “*The Stage*” *Year Book 1919* (London: The Stage, 1919), 154.

⁹³ “Emergency Passport Application” for Charles O’Donnell, 3 August 1918 (Ancestry.com).

⁹⁴ “Bills Next Week,” *Variety*, 3 August 1917, 15.

⁹⁵ “Hedges and Hedges,” *Clipper*, 29 August 1917, 19.

⁹⁶ “Patsy” Smith, “Among the Women,” *Variety*, 31 August 1917, 22.

Despite this lukewarm reception in Manhattan, the pair was booked into Keith and Orpheum houses through September, although they mostly played “split weeks” (three-day stands) and never achieved the topline status or the degree of acclaim Freddie had enjoyed with the old trio. At the end of the month, they canceled an engagement because of “illness”⁹⁷ and disappeared from *Variety* and *Clipper* rosters until November, when they were given a split week at Proctor’s in Troy, New York.⁹⁸ Perhaps something untoward happened there, for the next time they appeared on a published roster, almost a month later, they had been exiled to Texas and Iowa, far from the East Coast metropolises where big reputations could be built, and booked by the much less prestigious Western Vaudeville Managers’ Association.⁹⁹

Soon after returning to the Keith and Orpheum circuits in January 1918,¹⁰⁰ Hedges and Hedges ran into further trouble. In March, the *Clipper* printed two short notes about the act, one stating that they had been “removed from the bill” at a theater for being “indisposed when the time for their appearance came” and another that Orpheum management had canceled all their future bookings. The latter item pointed out the significance of the incident: “The act was at the Royal [in the Bronx] for its first real showing and was to have established a salary and spot for the balance of its vaudeville time.”¹⁰¹ In a letter to the weekly’s editor, Hedges and Hedges said that it was they, not the Orpheum circuit, who had canceled the bookings. But they didn’t deny the part about being indisposed.¹⁰² The particulars of their indisposition went unreported, but perhaps Freddie was drinking again.

The blow to Freddie and Lezette’s reputation had broad repercussions. In 1906, the Orpheum and Keith circuits had come to dominate all but a small share of big-time vaudeville bookings via the formation of the “Combine,” a partnership according to which they agreed not to open theaters in each other’s territory and to cooperate in the management of the vaudeville business. Although the two circuits maintained separate booking operations, from 1913 both were housed in the same building in New York, ensuring even closer and quicker cooperation. In general, a bad relationship with one circuit would result in a bad relationship with the other. Freddie and Lezette’s contretemps with the Orpheum circuit would have effectively excluded them from prestigious venues, comfortable working conditions, and decent pay.

In fact, only a single notice for the act surfaced in the trade press from March until August,¹⁰³ and none after that. It appears that their stage career had reached its end. When Freddie registered for the draft on 6 September 1918, he reported that

⁹⁷ “In and Out,” *Variety*, 28 September 1917, 10.

⁹⁸ “Bills Next Week,” *Variety*, 2 November 1917, 27.

⁹⁹ “Bills Next Week,” *Variety*, 23 November 1917, 17; 30 November 1917, 16; 7 December 1917, 19 and 39; 14 December 1917, 17; 21 December, 22; and 28 December 1917, 48.

¹⁰⁰ “Bills Next Week,” *Variety*, 4 January 1918, 15; 1 February 1918, 36; and 22 February 1918, 17.

¹⁰¹ “Jefferson” and “Changes on Bills,” *Clipper*, 13 March 1918, 8 and 6 respectively.

¹⁰² “Cancelled Their Own Route,” *Clipper*, 3 April 1918, 11.

¹⁰³ “Philadelphia,” *Variety*, 9 August 1918, 29. The venue was the Cross Keys Theatre, which was not affiliated with any circuit.

he was working in Philadelphia and gave a New York address for Lezette.¹⁰⁴ Then suddenly in November Lezette was gone, one of the twenty to forty million victims of the worldwide influenza epidemic. She died the morning of 4 November 1918 in her room at the New Victoria Hotel in New York, just off Times Square.¹⁰⁵ Death from the 1918 strain of influenza was a gruesome affair, a result of the lungs filling with blood and ceasing to function. We can conjecture that, whether Freddie was present or not, the death of his young and beautiful wife, his lover and professional partner for the previous three years, was an emotional catastrophe. Her remains were sent to Reno for burial.¹⁰⁶

In March of 1919, Freddie, living in New York, applied for a passport to go to France and Great Britain under the auspices of the YMCA to entertain American soldiers awaiting their return to the United States.¹⁰⁷ The passport was issued but remained in the organization’s hands. Crusading prohibitionists that the YMCAers were, perhaps they were put off by Freddie’s affection for alcohol. Although his impending April departure on the *Noordam* was announced in the press, he was not on the boat when it sailed.¹⁰⁸

A few weeks later, on 7 May, Freddie received a momentous cablegram from his brother in London: “FIXING OLD ACT HEDGES BROTHERS JACOBSON OPENING STOLL JUNE TWENTYTHIRD CABLE SAILING DATE TO EUGAT-NOM LONDON/HEDGES.”¹⁰⁹ The following week, Freddie filed a new passport application and was soon back in England with Elven and Jesse. *Variety* reported that the contract was for six years in variety for £30,000.¹¹⁰ (Other sources give a different figure, but they all stress that it was an unprecedented sum for a music hall turn.) The reconstituted act began touring,¹¹¹ but despite the lavish contract and renewed acclaim from audiences who remembered them from five years earlier, Freddie continued to drink too much, to his brother’s distress. A 1931 source says that Freddie “signed the pledge [to abstain from alcohol].”¹¹² But he went on drinking heavily,¹¹³ and in February 1920, after a stand in Southsea, near Portsmouth, he stayed behind as his partners continued to tour. Three weeks later, alone in

¹⁰⁴ “Registration Card” [U.S. draft] for Charles Frederick Hedges, 6 September 1918 (Ancestry.com).

¹⁰⁵ *State of New York Certificate of Death* #37788, 6 November 1918.

¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, on Christmas Eve, 1918, Freddie appeared in *Pretty Polly*, a new play staged in Stamford, Connecticut, by the producers of *Bringing Up Father in Politics*. The one-night production seems not to have been enough of a success to launch the work (and Freddie with it) into a longer run (“Nancy Hanks Revival,” *Billboard*, 21 December 1918, 3; “Pretty Polly Singers,” *Billboard*, 28 December 1918, 14; “Stamford Sees ‘Pretty Polly,’” *Clipper*, 1 January 1919, 29).

¹⁰⁷ “Form for Native Citizen” [passport application] for Charles Fredrick [sic] Hedges, 26 March 1919 (Ancestry.com).

¹⁰⁸ “Sailings,” *Variety*, 11 April 1919, 5.

¹⁰⁹ The cablegram is an attachment to “Form for Native Citizen” [passport application] for Charles Frederick Hedges, 13 May 1919 (Ancestry.com). “Stoll” refers to Stoll tours, an approximate equivalent to an American vaudeville circuit.

¹¹⁰ “England’s Biggest Contract,” *Variety*, 27 February 1920, 4.

¹¹¹ The earliest notice I have found is in “Theatres,” *Times* (London), 9 September 1919.

¹¹² “Music Hall Idol a ‘Broken Man,’” *Singapore Free Press*, 24 April 1931. The article appears to be based on an interview with Jesse Jacobson.

¹¹³ “Freddie Hedges Dead,” *Variety*, 5 March 1920, 4 (datelined 3 March).

his room, he killed himself by inhaling gas.¹¹⁴ The *Variety* article reporting the coroner's "verdict of unsound mind" observed that Freddie had "changed utterly after his wife's death."¹¹⁵

Although Freddie was gone, the contract prevailed, and by June he had been replaced by Forest (sometimes spelled "Forrest") Tell (b. 22 June 1888), a U.S. entertainer residing in London (and nephew of Eugene Stratton, an U.S.-born music hall topline of an earlier generation).¹¹⁶ The new trio made six released sides for Zonophone in November 1920. (See "Appendix: The Recordings.")

The three men seem to have gotten along well with one another. It was probably in the spring of 1921 that the new Hedges Brothers and Jacobson (or so it is alleged in two apparently independent sources) spent an off week golfing their way across the countryside between Castle Bromwich (Birmingham) and Hull, a distance given in one source as 152 miles and in the other as 175. The golfers were forbidden to shave or to change their clothing or boots during the competition, which lasted six days and seven- and-a-half hours and offered as a prize a week's salary from each of the defeated partners. The only clubs allowed were a driver and a mashie. Tell (referred to in the reports as Forest Hedges or F. T. Hedges) dropped out a third of the way on, but Jesse and Elven slogged on through five snowstorms, with Jesse the winner by sixty-seven strokes. At the end of the round, their feet were so badly swollen that they had to cut off their boots.¹¹⁷

In 1923 they likely toured France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.¹¹⁸ A 1925 review notes that in their act, even at that late date, "Elven Hedges presides at the piano, harmonizing occasionally with the other two . . . Elven seems to be able to play anything from a tin whistle to a saxophone, and plays exceedingly well. On one curious instrument, his imitation of the bagpipe is very realistic."¹¹⁹ They continued to perform until at least February–March 1926, when they headlined a traveling revue called *Hey Hey*.¹²⁰ By the mid-1920s, the British craze for American ragtime had long been supplanted by a craze for American jazz. In the absence of recordings, we can only wonder how the Frisco Boys adapted to the new epoch.

¹¹⁴ "Cables from London Town," *Billboard*, 13 March 1920, 7. Two other articles place Freddie's death in Swansea, Wales: "Late Locals," *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City, UT), 4 March 1920, and "Artist Found Dead," *Montréal Gazette*, 2 March 1920. Both Swansea and Southsea had Moss theatres where the act would likely have performed.

¹¹⁵ "Hedges Suicide Findings," *Variety*, 12 March 1920, 4.

¹¹⁶ Ivan P. Gore, "In London," *Variety*, 25 June 1920, 2 (datelined 5 June).

¹¹⁷ "Plenty of Golf," *Border Cities Star* (Windsor, Ontario), 20 May 1921, and "152 Miles Golf Match," *Ashburton* (New Zealand) *Guardian*, 2 August 1921. The articles differ enough on details that they do not seem to come from a common press release.

¹¹⁸ On 9 January 1923, Jesse applied for a passport for the purpose of "theatrical work" in those countries as well as Great Britain and Ireland ("Department Passport Application" for Jesse Jacobson, 9 January 1923 [Ancestry.com]), but I have not found 1923 passport applications for Elven or Forest Tell, so it is possible that Jesse traveled as a single. Tell had had some association with the trio as early as August 1913, when he was present at a London farewell banquet for them on the eve of their departure for South Africa (Untitled clipping, unidentified newspaper [London, England], n.d. [August 1913], HDC).

¹¹⁹ "Grand Theatre, Hanley," *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 1 September 1925.

¹²⁰ *The Stage Year Book 1927* (London: The Stage, 1927), 149.

By September 1926, the trio seems to have dissolved, and Elven was performing alone.¹²¹ He soon joined with former Rascal Eddie Fields to form a duo called Hedges and Fields,¹²² which continued on stage until at least June 1928, and in 1927–28 recorded a number of sides released on the Edison Bell Electron label.¹²³ Elven’s face was familiar enough to the English public that, in May 1928, he was featured in a British Pathé newsreel segment called “Eve Takes Up Baseball,” in which he demonstrated baseball batting technique to a group of actresses from the London shows *Yellow Mask* and *So This Is Love*.¹²⁴

Elven quit the stage in 1928 or 1929 and opened a members-only nightspot, the Elven Hedges Club, in London. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the authorities “the premises were . . . disqualified from being used as a club,” that is, unlicensed. A plainclothes policeman got the doorman to waive the membership requirement, and once inside he bought drinks for himself and a too affable Elven. The place was raided and closed on 7 December 1929, and Elven was fined £140 plus court costs.¹²⁵ According to another source, he was then deported to France (perhaps because of his wife’s nationality). In 1931, Elven was “found wandering lonely and deserted, through the streets of Paris” and put “in the care of a French mental hospital . . . in a room with eighteen other patients.” Jesse traveled to Paris to help his old partner, but Elven remained in the hospital,¹²⁶ probably the Hôpital Bicêtre, just south of Paris, where he died on 2 May 1931.¹²⁷

Lon and Flora didn’t learn of Elven’s death for more than a year. They had quit show business and moved back to Iowa to live in an isolated house in the countryside near Colfax. In 1930, Elven had sent them gifts and money and promised to visit them the following year, but that was the last they heard from him. Puzzled, then worried, they sent an inquiry to the U.S. consulate in London, whose staff responded with the distressing news.¹²⁸ Elven’s much younger cousin, Edward DeHoff (a son of Frieda Hedges DeHoff), visited Lon and Flora a few years later and remembers the parents’ near-reverence for their extraordinary sons and Lon’s saying that the brothers had “lived a lifetime in just a few years.”¹²⁹

Jesse seems to have been a minor celebrity in London entertainment circles through the 1930s and the Second World War. In a rambling chapter about “the lesser lights” of the music halls, London journalist S. Theodore Felstead spoke of “handsome Jesse Jacobsen [*sic*], a tenor whose voice, I am sorry to say, succumbed all too soon to overwork. He became too popular; there was hardly a cabaret show

¹²¹ “The Pavilion,” *The Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), 7 September 1926.

¹²² This information is from the Bristol Hippodrome website, www.hippodromebristol.co.uk.

¹²³ Elven doesn’t play saxophone on these records, but he was still using it in his 1928 single act, along with the piano and the piano accordion (“The Pavilion,” *The Herald* [Glasgow, Scotland], 18 December 1928). It may also be Elven who plays guitar—impressively—on the Hedges and Fields recording of “The Rain Kept Pattering Down,” Edison Bell Electron 0155.

¹²⁴ The film may be viewed at www.britishpathe.com.

¹²⁵ “£140 Fine for Selling Drink without License,” *Times* (London), 14 January 1930.

¹²⁶ “Music Hall Idol a ‘Broken Man.’”

¹²⁷ Untitled clipping, unidentified newspaper [Baxter, Iowa?], HDC. The same item says that Elven is buried near the hospital, at the cemetery of le Kremlin-Bicêtre.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Edward DeHoff, interviewed by the author, 17 October 2011.

in the West End considered complete without Jesse Jacobsen.”¹³⁰ In 1933, Jesse got into the *Times* by getting into a scrape as manager of the Water Rats Social Club, a Soho retreat for members of the Grand Order of Water Rats, an association of variety artists. An undercover policeman found gambling and, after a jury trial, Jesse was fined £10 and costs for “keeping and conducting . . . a betting house.”¹³¹ In 1945, just after the catastrophic war in Europe ended, he applied for a new U.S. passport and in May 1947 returned to San Francisco.¹³² When the 1953 and 1954 numbers of *Polk’s San Francisco Directory* were compiled, he was living with his wife Adele (or Adelaide) in a modest neighborhood just a few blocks from San Francisco Bay. But they separated shortly after, she remaining in Frisco and he settling in Stockton, California, a shabby agricultural port on the San Joaquin River about 70 miles to the east. On Independence Day 1959, at San Joaquin General Hospital, he died of pneumonia brought on by chronic emphysema, and his remains were cremated three days later.¹³³

In their prime (1910–14), the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson were recognized as among the best performers on the American and British variety stages. “One of the first among the best”¹³⁴ of the acts that brought a ragtime craze to England in 1911–12, they should be given a share of the credit for an important development in British popular music: a turning away from homegrown music hall songs and toward the syncopated American style that paved the way to an affection for and understanding of jazz, the arrival of which after the Great War constituted, according to jazz scholar Chris Goddard, a “profound upheaval, an overturning of [musical] tradition of almost volcanic proportions.”¹³⁵

A second historical distinction, much more difficult to document, would be Elven Hedges’s status as “the first . . . to play a ‘hot sax,’” as claimed by his contemporary Lou Holtz.¹³⁶ If Elven was, or was among, the first, he was well situated to influence other players. Musicologist Lawrence A. Gushee reportedly conjectures in unpublished research that “a vogue for saxophones in cabaret bands seems to have begun in the San Francisco Bay region around 1910 and to have spread to Los

¹³⁰ S. Theodore Felstead, *Stars Who Made the Halls: A Hundred Years of English Humour, Harmony and Hilarity* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1946), 154 and 159. I would classify Jacobson as a baritone.

¹³¹ “Alleged Betting in a Soho Club,” *Times* (London), 16 May 1933; “The Water Rats Social Club,” *Times* (London), 30 May 1933; “Betting at a Club,” *Times* (London), 5 July 1933. Forest Tell, incidentally, was elected an officer (Collecting Rat) of the Water Rats in 1918, according to “Water Rats Elect Officers,” *Clipper*, 1 January 1919, 5.

¹³² “List of United States Citizens, S. S. Marine Falcon, sailing from Southampton, 15 May, 1947, Arriving at Port of New York May 23 1947” (Ancestry.com). As “J Jacobson,” he appears in the 1947/48 number of *Polk’s Crocker-Langley San Francisco City Directory* (San Francisco: R. L. Polk and Co., 1948).

¹³³ *State of California Certificate of Death* #3900–1225, 7 July 1959. The certificate gives his wife’s name as Adelaide, but issues of *Polk’s San Francisco City Directory* (San Francisco: R. L. Polk and Co.) for 1953–54 and 1957–59 call her Adele.

¹³⁴ “*The Stage*” *Year Book 1913* (London: The Stage, 1913), 31.

¹³⁵ Chris Goddard, *Jazz Away from Home* (New York and London: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1979), 10.

¹³⁶ Runyon, “The Brighter Side.”

Angeles and Chicago by 1914.”¹³⁷ If some of these saxophones were “hot,” their heat may have been indebted to Elven’s playing, according to the following line of thought, suggested by Rudy Wiedoeft scholar Douglas Caldwell.¹³⁸ One of the apparent consequences of the vogue for saxophones in San Francisco was what is often (if hyperbolically) said to be the first addition of a saxophone team to a dance band (Art Hickman’s Orchestra) in the late 1910s.¹³⁹ Hickman was an habitu  of the Cafe District and a staff writer for *The Referee*, so likely would have known of Elven’s saxophone playing and remembered it when he added hot saxophonist Bert Ralton to the band in 1918.¹⁴⁰ Lines of influence in the poorly documented popular music world before 1915 are virtually impossible to discern. I offer this speculation only to suggest the importance that Elven’s saxophone playing may have had.

As outstanding entertainers, as key agents in the preparatory stage of jazz’s international diffusion, and possibly as a showcase for the father of the hot saxophone, the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson deserve a place in the history of popular music. We are fortunate to have their recordings to study and enjoy.

Appendix: The Recordings

Discography of Hedges Brothers and Jacobson

The main sources for this discography are Brian A. Rust, *British Music Hall on Record* (Harrow, England: General Gramophone Publications, 1979), 116; an unpublished discography of the group (and related groups) compiled and kindly provided by Mark Berresford; and a personal communication from Alan Kelly regarding the Gramophone Company’s “Weekly Returns” or recording sheets. Although Berresford conjectures that the pianist on the recordings is Jesse Jacobson, all documentary sources identify Elven Hedges as the pianist in stage performances, so I have credited the accompaniment to Elven in most cases. Identification of the singers is based on close listening to these recordings and to other recordings where, for example, Jesse or Elven is present but not the other.

In each entry, the first element is the recording location and approximate recording date. (Rust usually based his conjectures about Columbia recording dates on known release times and the normal interval between recording and release.) Next the personnel is given, followed by the matrix number, title, composers, and release number of each side. When only one or two singers are heard on a side, their initials, preceded by “v,” are given in parentheses after the title, thus: (v EH, FH). Columbia and Zonophone issues are on the English, not the U.S., labels so named.

¹³⁷ Bruce Vermazen, *That Moaning Saxophone: The Six Brown Brothers and the Dawning of a Musical Craze* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 240n15.

¹³⁸ Douglas Caldwell, personal communication with the author.

¹³⁹ See Bruce Vermazen, liner notes to *Art Hickman’s Orchestra: The San Francisco Sound*, Archeophone Records ARCH 6003, 2004, 6–8.

¹⁴⁰ During January and February 1910, Hickman wrote a column for *The Referee* called at first “At the Theaters [or Theatres]” and later “Show Talk.” In “At the Theatres,” 29 January 1910, 14–15, he describes a visit to Eddie Hanlon’s Cafe in the Cafe District.

London, ca. December 1912

Elven and Freddie Hedges, Jesse Jacobson, vocal, accompanied by orchestra

28357 “Let Me Live and Stay in Dixieland” (Elizabeth Brice and Charles King)
Columbia 2108

28359 “The Ragtime Violin” (Irving Berlin) Columbia 2086

Elven and Freddie Hedges, Jesse Jacobson, vocal, accompanied by Elven Hedges, piano

28361 “Pucker Up Your Lips, Miss Lindy” (Eli Dawson and Albert Von Tilzer)
Columbia 2086

28362 “When We Are M-A-Double R-I-E-D” (v EH, FH, possibly accompanied by JJ) (George M. Cohan) Columbia 2108

London, ca. April 1913

Elven and Freddie Hedges, Jesse Jacobson, vocal, accompanied by Elven Hedges, piano

28529-1 “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine” (Harry Carroll and Ballard MacDonald)
Columbia 2172, reissued on EMI MRSSP513 (*After the Ball: History of Pop*)

28530-1 “The Land of Cotton” (v FH, JJ) (Eddie Leonard)
Columbia 2172, reissued on Timeless CBC 1–085 (*From Ragtime to Jazz*, vol. 4)

28535-2 “On San Francisco Bay” (Gertrude Hoffman and Vincent Bryan)
Columbia 2191, reissued on WHRA-6003, disc 2 (*That Devilin’ Tune: A Jazz History*, vol. 1)

28539 “Put a Bet Down for Me” (George M. Cohan) Columbia 2191

Hayes, Middlesex, November 1920

Elven Hedges, Jesse Jacobson, Forest Tell, vocal, accompanied by Elven Hedges, piano

22190-2e “Oh! I Wish I Was Tarzan” (Cecil Law) Zonophone 2101

22191-2e “Oh, You Little Thief” (Billy Howard and Elven Hedges) Zonophone 2101

22192-2e “If I Had the Lamp of Aladdin” (Billy Howard and Elven Hedges)
Zonophone 2088

22193-2e “Dear Old Songs” (Billy Howard and Elven Hedges) Zonophone 2120

22194-e “I Want a Boy” (Billy Howard and Elven Hedges) Zonophone 2088

22195-e “Old Fashioned Mammy of Mine” (Billy Howard and Elven Hedges)
Zonophone 2120

The Performances

The eight recordings that the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson made for Columbia in 1912–13 give us a fairly rich aural portrait of the original trio’s work that includes a

vocal duet by the brothers, vocal solos by Freddie and Jesse, and vocal trios, both a cappella and accompanied. Although there is no extended piano solo of the sort that reviewers lauded, there are short piano introductions and interludes, along with some very engaging accompaniments. Unfortunately, Elven’s saxophone playing was not recorded.

Their three voices covered a range wide enough to allow for varied textures. Jesse’s strong baritone carries the melody on most of the selections, with the harmonies stacked above. Elven’s mid-range tenor confines itself to harmonizing, except for “When We Are M-A-Double R-I-E-D.” Freddie’s high and wide-ranged tenor allows him to vary the trio’s harmonies to structural effect. For example, at the end of the final chorus of “Pucker Up Your Lips, Miss Lindy,” Freddie sings a higher harmony than he does on the first chorus, to create a more exciting and so climactic sound; he does the same toward the end of “The Ragtime Violin,” “When We Are M-A-Double R-I-E-D,” “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,” and “On San Francisco Bay.”

The most salient feature of their singing to twenty-first-century ears—the feature that I conjecture contributed centrally to their aural impression on their audiences—was the rhythm. Aside from the built-in syncopation of the songs they sing, the two devices that mainly constitute this feature are what I will call “staggered attacks” and polyphony. Staggered attacks consist in the three voices occasionally attacking a syllable at slightly different times, a stylistic trait that creates a sense of urgency and excitement.¹⁴¹ The staggered attacks sometimes become more frequent as the performance builds to a climax, for example on the second (final) statement of the chorus on both “Let Me Live and Stay in Dixieland” and “The Ragtime Violin.” Both sides create a theatrical sense of almost frenzied climax by employing final choruses where the accompaniment switches from none to an orchestra, the frequency of staggered attacks increases noticeably, and Freddie’s part “goes high.”

“On San Francisco Bay” has three mildly polyphonic passages, where the separation of voices seems to grow out of the lesser anarchy of staggered attacks. All three instances start with a growling glissando by Jesse, followed the first time by laughter and the other two times by his syncopated obbligato around the written melody. In the second chorus, Freddie briefly interjects a line with its own rhythm. All three choruses, with their playful departures from coordinated ensemble singing, end with the trio’s perfectly straight, slower, emphatic, and rubato repetition of the clause, “on the golden strand, I won her hand,” almost a parody of mainstream popular choral singing,¹⁴² followed by the title phrase. Besides being comic in itself,

¹⁴¹ Similarly staggered attacks can be heard on two tracks on the collection compiled by Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1891–1922*, Archeophone ARCH 1005, 2005: “Who Broke the Lock” sung by the Unique Quartette (ca. 1895), and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” sung by the Apollo Jubilee Quartette (1912).

¹⁴² What I mean by “mainstream choral singing” of the period can be heard on cylinder recordings of three of these numbers accessible on the website of the University of California, Santa Barbara’s Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project, cylinders.library.ucsd.edu, namely “Let Me Live and Stay in Dixieland,” sung by Billy Murray and chorus, Edison Amberol 674 (1911), “Pucker Up Your Lips, Miss Lindy,” sung by Campbell and Gillette, Edison Amberol 1025 (1912), and “The Ragtime Violin,” sung by the Premier Quartette (whose principal voice is that of Billy Murray), Edison Amberol 966 (1912). Murray was primarily a recording artist, but he had entertained in vaudeville and in minstrel shows 1893–1903, according to Frank W. Hoffman’s notes in *Billy Murray Anthology*:

the contrast, functioning as a kind of caesura, intensifies the effect of a chain of tempo increases and changes in the piano accompaniment. The second chorus is faster than the first, the third faster than the second, and the piano accompaniment underscores the increases in tempo with changes in rhythm, from two strong pulses per bar in the first to eight even pulses per bar in most of the second and third, while in the third Elven's right hand covers a wider range. This arrangement, judging from other popular vocal recordings of the period, puts the Hedges Brothers and Jacobson in the vanguard of ensemble singing. Nothing comparable can be heard from contemporary American groups in England such as the Two Bobs, the American Ragtime Octette, and the Three Rascals.¹⁴³

Because of Freddie's contribution, the singing on "The Land of Cotton" is just as exceptional. The verse, divided between Freddie and Jesse, hints at a parody of old-fashioned minstrel style, beginning and ending with broad rubato, but with a sudden change to a fast and steady tempo in the middle. Freddie begins to sing the chorus by himself, again at a fast tempo, with great agitation and enigmatic alterations of the song's published lyrics, only to be interrupted by rubato passages from other songs, sung sometimes by Jesse, sometimes by both men. The performance ends without ever arriving at the end of the original song, whose content (yearning for the Old South) is subverted by the performance. The abrupt alternation of styles, the mocking of minstrel conventions, and the general air of non sequitur bring to mind the Marx Brothers.

Gaps in the series of matrix numbers for the 1912–13 sessions suggest strongly that the trio attempted additional selections, but recording ledgers for Columbia are not known to have survived, so likely we will never know. Perhaps somewhere there is a test pressing of Freddie singing "Some of These Days" and Elven playing "hot sax."

The six 1920 recordings, with Forest Tell replacing Freddie, don't present the variety of approaches that the 1912–13 recordings do. Jesse is the dominant personality on all of them, leading the ensemble and taking short solos that range from a phrase or two to almost the whole of "If I Had the Lamp of Aladdin." Forest Tell is an adequate replacement for Freddie in the ensemble singing, as his voice has similar strength and range, but it lacks Freddie's tinge of madness. Elven's voice is heard only in the ensemble, and his piano playing stands out only a couple of times. The staggered attacks so characteristic of the trio's style in 1912–13 may still be heard, but not as often as before.

Although the Original Dixieland Jazz Band had started a vogue for jazz with its visit to England in 1919–20, there is no obvious trace of jazz in these performances. The performance emphasis is much more on the songs themselves than on the manner of presentation, as if to promote the sales of Elven's portfolio. The innovation and excitement of the 1912–13 recordings are gone, replaced by the kind of polished professionalism necessary to last out a six-year contract.

The Denver Nightingale, Recordings, 1903–1940, Archeophone ARCH 5501, 2002, so his precise and polished style fairly represents the "straight" extreme of variety-stage singing.

¹⁴³ The Two Bobs may be heard on the reissue compilation *The Two Bobs: Paddy McGinty's Goat*, Windyridge Music Hall Records CDR34, n.d., which includes six sides from 1912–13.

Except for brief introductions and transitional passages on the recordings, Elven’s piano playing during the life of the trio is heard only in accompaniments. He made no solo recordings. His most impressive backings occur on “Pucker Up Your Lips, Miss Lindy” (first half of the second chorus), “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine” (third quarter of both choruses), “The Land of Cotton” (almost throughout), “On San Francisco Bay” (second and third choruses), “Put a Bet Down for Me” (second chorus), and “Oh, I Wish I Was Tarzan” (measures 5–10 of the second chorus). Elven was clearly an outstanding pianist for his time and performance niche¹⁴⁴ (that is, vaudeville rather than the concert stage), but what can be heard doesn’t furnish a basis for comparing his playing with that of Mike Bernard, for deciding whether reviewers who mentioned them in the same breath were right or not. Bernard’s formidable technique is documented (if faintly) on a CD reissue of all but one of his records.¹⁴⁵ He plays fast, cleanly, and accurately, with plenty of brio. Eleven of Bernard’s recorded ragtime performances date from the same 1912–13 period as Elven’s first recordings, the most apposite being “That Peculiar Rag,” “Everybody Two-Step,” “1915 Rag,” and “Tantalizing Tingles.”

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¹⁴⁴ The ragtime-recording scholar Ross Laird (who attributes the accompaniment on “The Land of Cotton” to Jesse), says, “Recordings by similar groups are normally outside the scope of this discography [of piano recordings], but the above example has been included because of the exceptionally interesting accompaniment,” Laird, *Tantalizing Tingles*, 86.

¹⁴⁵ Brad Kay, compiler, *Mike Bernard, “The Rag Time King of the World”: Virtuoso Piano Solos 1912–1918*, Superbatone 739, 2003.

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