



Edwardian Beauty: Lily Elsie & The Merry Widow

David Slattery-Christy

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This 3rd edition compilation includes a new foreword by the author, the book 'Anything But Merry!' and the Screenplay version adapted from the book titled The Last Edwardian Star. With a foreword by Sonia Berry. Discover the extraordinary life of one of Edwardian England's most celebrated and revered musical comedy stars, Lily Elsie. From her childhood days in the music halls of Salford and her rise to fame as the child singing star "Little Elsie" (hailed by press and public as "the infant Patti", after the world famous opera star Adelina Patti) to her arrival in London as a young woman. Her association with the most powerful theatre impresario of the time, George Edwardes, the father of the musical comedy genre, with his innovative and lavish productions at The Gaiety and Daly's Theatre. Her friends included Gertie Millar, the most powerful and luminous of the "Gaiety Girls". Elsie's rise to fame as Sonia in Lehar's The Merry Widow in 1907, produced by Edwardes at Daly's Theatre, was achieved in spite of her lack of confidence and overwhelming stage fright that would leave her sick with nervous exhaustion and cause the press to accuse her of being "a part time actress" when she missed performances. Her image would endorse everything from toothpaste to face creams; the costumes and hats she wore for The Merry Widow were emulated everywhere. Retiring from the stage in 1911 to marry a handsome and wealthy husband, she enjoyed a brief period of domestic harmony as Mrs Bullough. But it wasn't to last. The early signs of the paranoid neurosis and mental health problems which would overwhelm her in later years were already in evidence. She mastered the art of being reclusive long before Garbo took up the mantle. Her final years were spent in isolation, her personality eroded by her mental health problems. Elsie died alone in 1962, a tragic end to a life which had promised so much. In fact her life had been Anything But Merry from the very beginning.

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