

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 04.04.19

Dette dokumentets nettadresse (URL) er:

<https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no/cm4all/uproc.php/0/vaudeville.pdf>

Vaudeville

(_drama) En vaudeville kan være et skuespill med sanginnslag, men er også en teaterform der varierte skuespill-, artist- og musikkinnslag skal underholde publikum. I Norden skrev blant andre dansken Johan Ludvig Heiberg og nordmennene Henrik Anker Bjerregaard og Henrik Wergeland vaudeviller. Vaudeville som varieté-teater har vært spesielt vanlig i USA.

“Some scholars have focused on France as the birthplace of vaudeville. The word itself is thought to derive from the val-de-Vire (or vau-de-Vire), a river valley in Normandy, home to fifteenth-century poet Oliver Basselin, who was born in the town of Calvados. He wrote popular songs, some say drinking songs, which he named *chansons du vau-de-Vire*, after his native valley. At agricultural fairs, around the close of the seventeenth century, these songs, refreshed with topical lyrics, were put together with sketches and called *vaudevilles*. Other academics hold that vaudeville’s French origins were more urban, growing out of the medieval entertainments found in Paris: *vau de ville* (“worth of the city” or, twisted about, worthy of the city and its patronage) or *voix de ville* (“voice of the town/city,” more liberally interpreted as voice of the people). In a stricter sense, *voix de ville* refers to collaboration between poets and musicians of the sixteenth century. Described at the time as profane and pagan, poems by writers such as Joachim de Bellay, Clément Marot, Pierre Ronsard and François Rabelais were set to lyrical tunes by musicians of the day such as Pierre Certon, Jean Chardavoine, Clément Janequin and Pierre Sandrin.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xi-xii)

En betydning av ordet er en sang som synges mye på byen, med en melodi som er lett å huske, og som handler om en intrige eller uvanlig hendelse (ifølge en ordbok fra slutten av 1600-tallet, her gjengitt fra Boileau 1984 s. 20). Ordet gikk så over til å bety et teaterstykke med sanger og ballett-innslag (s. 20).

“We get yet another explanation from vaudevillian Sophie Tucker in her autobiography *Some of These Days* (1945, pp. 155-156). Her agent, the now-legendary William Morris, claimed that a red windmill in the Vire valley started serving wine and cheese to farmers waiting to have their wheat milled. Traveling

entertainers took advantage of this readymade audience by performing for the crowd and passing the hat. This arrangement proved so popular that others soon copied it. Morris insisted this place not only gave birth to the term “vaudeville” – it also inspired the name of the popular Parisian nightclub *Le Moulin Rouge* (“The Red Mill”).” (John Kenrick i <http://www.musicals101.com/vaude1.htm>; lesedato 05.03.12)

“In England, the term *vaudeville* was used by Ernest Short and others as a catchall for musical comedy, revue and cabaret as well as music-hall and variety, which were more nearly the English equivalent of American vaudeville. All were dependent upon highly individual turns, or acts, to be successful. Both music-hall and variety offered a series of unrelated acts grouped together on a bill for an evening’s entertainment. Variety spread from London to all corners of the English-speaking world. [...] The older term, *variety*, had been debased in America through its associations with unsavory elements, ribald performance and its male-only clientele.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xii)

Vaudeville som teatersjanger er i Norge representert ved blant andre Henrik Anker Bjerregaard. Hans *Fjeldeventyret* (1824), et “syngespill” eller “lystspill” med musikk av Waldemar Thrane, rommer kjærlighetsintriger og spenning, komedie og nasjonalromantikk. Det fikk god mottakelse da det ble spilt i Christiania for første gang i 1825, ikke minst fordi handlingen foregikk i Norge, ikke Danmark, og i et bondemiljø mange kunne gjenkjenne. Personene snakket dessuten norsk, og under framføringen i 1825 skal én ha talt Vågå-dialekt. I stykket blir tre studenter fra Christiania, som har reist til fjells for å beundre norsk natur og drive vitenskapelige sysler, mistenkt for å være tre ettersøkte forbrytere. En dum lensmannsbetjent arresterer dem, delvis for å imponere en vakker ung kvinne han ønsker å gifte seg med. Men hun er en av studentenes hemmelige forlovede fra en gang hun var i hovedstaden. Dette leder til forviklinger. Mye av handlingen foregår på en stor og rik lensmannsgård i Gudbrandsdalen, men også delvis på en seter. Lensmannen vil gifte bort sin datter Marie til sin underlensmann Mons, for at jobben skal forbli i familien, men Marie vil ikke og er allerede forlovet. Personskildringene er overdrevne og komiske, og handlingen har høyt tempo, avbrutt av sanginnslag, blant annet en kulokk. Musikken var inspirert av franske, satiriske syngespill, men også av Mozart og andre store komponister. Henrik Wergeland skrev i 1844 et etterspill til *Fjeldeventyret*, som ble oppført samme år.

“Syngespillene var en svært populær teaterform i første del av 1800-tallet. Dialogen i slike stykker var dels i vers, dels i prosa, og sangen bryter inn i dialogen på avgjørende punkter i handlingen. [...] Til fremføringen av et syngespill ble det alltid komponert ny (dvs. original) musikk. Den kunne fremføres melodramatisk (dvs. som bakgrunnsmusikk, mens dramapersonene snakket i prosa) eller i form av de sangene dramapersonene av og til uttrykte seg gjennom. Slik nærmet syngespillene seg i formell forstand operaen. Likevel er det langt mer prosadialog og langt mindre musikk i et syngespill enn i en vanlig opera. [...] Syngespillet lå også

nær en annen dramagenre, den såkalte vaudevillen. Dette var en populær teaterform i Danmark, innført fra tysk og fransk teater i løpet av 1820-40-årene og især videreutviklet av forfatteren Johan Ludvig Heiberg. Også i vaudevillene vekslet dialogen mellom vers og prosa, men her ble sangtekstene fremført til visemelodier som allerede var velkjente på forhånd. Innholdet i disse to formene for musikkteater hadde et noe ulikt preg. Mens vaudevillene var aktuelle lystspill (f.eks. J. L. Heibergs *Kong Salomon og Jørgen Hattemager*, 1825), kunne syngespillene være mer seriøse, beslektet med de såkalte romantiske komedier som i tiårene frem mot midten av 1800-tallet ble en populær genre. [...] Wergeland skrev en rekke tekster beregnet fremført som musikkteater og forsynte dem med ulike undertitler: Syngespil, Syngestykke, Opera-Vaudeville osv.” (Vigdis Ystad i <http://www.wergeland2008.no/wergelands-liv-og-verk/mangfoldige-wergeland/dramatikerer/syngespill/syngespil/>; lesedato 30.10.18)

I første halvdel av 1800-tallet bestod teaterforestillingerne i USA ofte av en blanding av ulike framføringer. Et sjongleringsnummer kunne avsløses av en Shakespeare-scene som ble avløst av et danseopptrinn (Esquenazi 2017 s. 56).

“If the clergy targeted a theatre, people shied away from patronage, fearing a ruined reputation. So theatres, at the first hint of trouble, would replace an offending play with a variety program. Most actors had polished set pieces that showed them to advantage, so a program could be cobbled together easily and quickly. Certain soliloquies from Shakespeare were above reproach. Orations were deemed morally instructive, whether from ancient Greek philosophers, Roman statesmen or esteemed contemporary American political figures. The actors’ young children were judged to be pure and beyond the reach of Satan until puberty, so their simple recitations, songs, dances and playing of musical instruments did not threaten moral well-being. Dancing was acceptable on a variety bill, but only if the dances were familiar forms like hornpipes, clogs and jigs from the mother countries or chastely performed ballets and the dancers were decorously clad. Acrobatics were popular, but the performers had to be careful that their clothing did not accent too much their fine figures.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xiii-xiv)

“One thing above all else was important to the vaudevillian: the act. A vaudevillian’s act was his essence, the product of his personality, talent and skill. [...] Years of practice and performance were trimmed into a tight act. Whether it was 8 minutes, 22 minutes or in between, the ideal vaudeville act was proof that human performance can be perfect and that we, the audience, shared in its celebration.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. 7)

“An act could be darn near anything that was inoffensive and entertaining. A performer’s gender, race and appearance were no barrier to success, and nothing was too eccentric if it gave an audience ten to fifteen minutes of diversion. While singers and dancers were part of every bill, the specialty acts set vaudeville apart –
- mind readers

- instrumentalists
- escape artists – Houdini and his many imitators
- flash acts – any “showy” act boasting its own lavish set, a large chorus, special effects, etc.
- high divers
- quick-change artists
- strong men
- living statuary
- contortionists
- balancing acts
- freak acts – anyone acting crazy or silly – eccentric dancers, etc.
- regurgitators – these individuals drank liquids and then brought them back up to fill fish tanks, etc. Hadji Ali would swallow water & kerosene, then spew kerosene onto open flames, followed by the water to put the flames out. Not pretty, but audiences were fascinated.” (John Kenrick i <http://www.musicals101.com/vaude2.htm>; lesedato 05.03.12)

På 1800- og begynnelsen av 1900-tallet var “lightning sketching” et vaudeville-innslag i USA. Publikum ble underholdt med at en tegner skapte morsomme, overraskende tegninger på en tavle, et lerret eller lignende. Det kunne være karikaturer, rare dyr, portretter av folk i salen m.m. “There are today a score or more of this kind of entertainers in the United States. Frank Beard, however, was the author of the business” (Frank G. Charpenter i 1895; sitert fra Massuet 2013 s. 40).

“A popular stage act around 1900 was the lightning sketch artist. These performers drew quickly in front of the audience, providing a lively patter as they brought the drawing through amusing or surprising transformations. [...] Typically they worked in charcoal on a big piece of paper on an easel, but sometimes they used chalk and a chalkboard. The act often required strategically adding new lines that changed the drawing into something else. Sometimes the transformations involved turning the drawing upside down. [...] A few of the acts by the original performers were filmed, including a 1906 performance called “Humorous Phases of Funny Faces” by J. Stuart Blackton (1875-1941)” (<http://gurneyjourney.blogspot.com/2014/02/lightning-sketch-artists-part-1.html>; lesedato 10.01.19). Amerikaneren Winsor McCay var tegneserieskaper, men hadde også “his other career as a lightning sketch artist on the vaudeville stage. [...] Impresario F. F. Proctor approached McCay in April 1906 to perform chalk talks for the vaudeville circuit. For \$500 per week he was to draw twenty-five sketches in fifteen minutes before live audiences, as a pit band played a piece called “Dream of the Rarebit Fiend”. In his “The Seven Ages of Man” routine, he drew two faces and progressively aged them.” (<http://gurneyjourney.blogspot.com/2014/02/lightning-sketch-artists-part-2.html>; lesedato 10.01.19)

“During the last quarter of the nineteenth century there emerged from the beer gardens, honky-tonks, variety shows and music halls a distinctly American form of entertainment – Vaudeville. All the conglomerate of specialty and novelty acts from the minstrel “first parts” and “afterpieces”, the “olio” [en kort dans eller sang] or burlesque, and the feature specialties of the hippodrome and variety show combined in bringing to fruition this new lusty young giant of the amusement industry. For vaudeville, in the aggregate, was – everything. To the American vaudeville stage came Emma Trentini and Schumann-Heink from the grand opera; Sarah Bernhardt, Bertha Kalish, Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Lillian Langtry from the drama; the acrobats, aerialists, wire walkers and trained animal acts from the circus; soloists and ensembles from the greatest musical organizations; silent fun-makers from the European pantomimes; banjo strummers and blackface comiques from the minstrel and medicine show; toss in the trick cyclists, quartettes, magicians, rope spinners and whip snappers, jugglers and equilibrists, dancers, monologists, ventriloquists, novelty musical acts, sister teams, lightning cartoonists, dialect comedians, piano teams, sketch artists, mimics and mummers of every brand; put them all together and mix well – this was vaudeville. George Lederer is said to have been the first manager to apply the name “vaudeville” to a stage show. This was in New York in the eighteen-nineties. Prior to this it was simply a “variety show.” ” (Alfred O. Philip i <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/wpalh0/07/0710/07100106/07100106.pdf>; lesedato 07.12.16)

“Acrobats, ice and roller skaters, cyclists and other non-talkers were known as “dumb acts.” A few of these went on to stardom when they added humorous repartee to their routines, including juggler W.C. Fields and rope trickster Will Rogers. A few unique acts defied definition. Think-a-Drink Hoffman came onstage with an empty cocktail shaker and somehow made it pour forth any alcoholic concoction audience members called for. Celebrities from other fields were also popular. Helen Keller, Carrie Nation, Babe Ruth, movie star Douglas Fairbanks and the scandalous beauty Evelyn Nesbitt all received thousands of dollars a week for personal appearance tours in vaudeville. [...] Vaudeville audiences were not passive observers. They were vocal and sometimes physical participants in performances. Their cheers, jeers or painful silences would make or break an act. At New York's Palace, the reaction of the show biz pros attending a Monday matinee affected an act's bookings and pay for months to come. But a bad reaction in any vaudeville theatre could ruin an act's reputation.” (John Kenrick i <http://www.musicals101.com/vaude2.htm>; lesedato 05.03.12)

“A dancer was a “hooper,” a horizontal bar act was a “Stick act,” a tumbler was a “kinker,” and a contortionist was a “snake.” A vaudeville performer whose act had achieved a great success, and who was the recipient of tumultuous and prolonged applause, might describe his success through the use of various typical phrases. The following are characteristic: “I knocked ‘em dead.” “I stopped the show cold.” “I knocked ‘em off the seats.” “I had ‘em rolling in the aisles.” “I was a panic.” “I wowed ‘em.” However, when a performer walked off the stage at the conclusion of

his act with little or no applause, it was said that he “died.” Or that his act was a “flop.” And, in describing the recalcitrant audience to a fellow performer back stage, he might remark: “They’re sitting on their hands out there.” This was a very common expression. A “cold” audience which refused to applaud was invariably described as “sitting on their hands.” [...] In the event that your act lacked sufficient merit, or “entertainment value,” to qualify for the better class vaudeville theatres, then you simply had to play the “dumps.” This is not underworld jargon. “Dumps” was a word of common every-day usage in the old vaudeville days; it was used to indicate the smallest, cheapest, and most shabby theatres that used vaudeville acts.” (Alfred O. Philip i <https://memory.loc.gov/mss/wpalh0/07/0710/07100106/07100106.pdf>; lesedato 07.12.16)

“All types of animals were trained to amuse and astonish, most often dogs, monkeys and birds [...] Among the best-known animal acts were Coin’s Dogs, Swain’s Cats and Rats, Fink’s Mules, May Wirth & Family, Poodles Hanneford Family and Powers’ Elephants.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. 25-26)

“Vaudeville was more than an assembly of ragtime pantaloons, topical monologists, eccentric dancers, barrelhouse songbirds, ventriloquists, magicians, tumblers and jugglers, more than a coast-to-coast network [i USA] of once-gilded theatres now shambling into plaster dust. Vaudeville was a people’s culture.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xi)

Amerikanerne B. F. Keith, F. F. Proctor og E. F. Albee “were the first to turn vaudeville into an industry. Keith, whose first showbiz enterprise was a dime museum of oddities, was persuaded in 1885 by his right hand man, Albee, to open a theatre, which they named the Bijou, on Boston’s busiest commercial thoroughfare, Washington Street. They introduced a daylong repeating cycle of variety acts that they promoted as vaudeville, geared to the passersby who, spur of the moment, were looking to pass an hour before resuming shopping or returning home. Later, this rotation of acts would be called *continuous vaudeville*. [...] Keith and Albee were committed to wholesome entertainment, which they called *polite vaudeville*, and stressed its suitability for the entire family. To court family patronage, neutralize censors and encourage favorable press, it was critical to set apart vaudeville from the coarse and common entertainments of the concert saloons, the dime museums and the circus. Various theatre owners adopted the policy – calling it *polity variety*, *polite vaudeville*, or *refined vaudeville*. The goal was to provide a respectable place and decent entertainment that families could patronize without damage to their reputations. Vaudeville developed into a big business. Its growing popularity prompted the building of more and even-larger theatres. Modern American show business had arrived.” (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xvii-xvii)

“Vaudeville had thrived from the 1880s through the early 1900s despite bank failures, economic depressions and the growing urban and rural poverty of the late

nineteenth century. During the first decade of the twentieth century, it looked as though vaudeville was king and would last forever. By 1914, when the First World War erupted in Europe, its future seemed less sure as motion pictures began to tell stories artistically and stole some of vaudeville's audience. By 1921, one out of five vaudeville houses had switched to silent films or split their bills between movies and vaudeville. Yet classic, big time vaudeville managed to survive for another decade, and salaries for the big-name performers continued to grow, due largely to competition for stars." (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xxiv-xxv)

"[A]udience grew blasé with the standard of excellence and no longer were awed by effects that took months or years to perfect. The technological marvels of the big silver screen became the standard by which a live act was judged. [...] When were vaudevillians to know that their way of earning a living was over? When the recessions of the 1890s hit? When motion pictures began offering plots or later matured into an art form? When burlesque offered great comedians, sultry strippers and less-expensive tickets? When radio hookups meant that one singer, one orchestra and one comedian could play 1,000 cities and towns at once? When they understood the promise and threat of films that could talk, sing and dance?" (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xxx)

Noen av de første filmframvisningene på slutten av 1800-tallet var innslag på vaudeviller, og med orkestermusikk som akkompagnement (Krohn og Strank 2012 s. 86). Det var ofte høy kvalitet på filmmusikken når filmer ble vist som innslag i vaudeville-forestillinger, fordi vaudeviller ofte hadde godt kvalifiserte musikere i sitt orkester (Krohn og Strank 2012 s. 86).

"At its peak, from 1905 to 1925, big-time vaudeville usually presented, in well-appointed theatres, eight or nine acts on a bill that played twice a day – a matinee and an evening show. Thus *two-a-day* became synonymous with big time. The reality for most performers, however, was three, four or more shorter shows per day [...] There was another group of theatres, what some called *small, small time* vaudeville houses. These were as various as dime museums, melodeons, opera houses, ramshackle theatres too run down for more established fare, storefront theatres, saloons, tabernacle tents, converted grange halls, nickelodeons, medicine wagons, showboats, seaside piers and beer halls. [...] there were nearly 40,000 performers playing some form of vaudeville on any given weekend. [...] Factoring in turnover between 1905 and 1925, the number of performers who played vaudeville during its heyday probably topped 50,000." (Cullen, Hackman og McNeilly 2007 s. xxxiii)

Mange av franskmannen Eugène Labiche sin skuespill har blitt kalt vaudeviller (Dousteyssier-Khoze 2000 s. 92).

Innslag basert på 1800-tallsforfatteren Nikolaj Gogols komedier, satirer og andre tekster har vært populære på russiske vaudeviller (Gourfinkel 1956 s. 124).

I USA dukket det på 1940-tallet opp TV-apparater i noen barer i store byer, der sport og vaudeville var de foretrukne programmene (Lynn Spiegel gjengitt fra Esquenazi 2017 s. 33).

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>