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0521474728 - The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict

Dagmar Kift

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With the exception of the occasional local case study, music-hall history has until now been presented as the history of the London halls. This book attempts to redress the balance by setting music-hall history within a national perspective. Kift also sheds a new light on the roles of managements, performers and audiences. For example, the author confutes the commonly held assumption that most women in the halls were prostitutes and shows them to have been working women accompanied by workmates of both sexes or by their families. She argues that before the 1890s the halls catered predominantly to working-class and lower middle-class audiences of both sexes and all ages and were instrumental in giving them a strong and self-confident identity. The halls' ability to sustain a distinct class-awareness was one of their greatest strengths – but this factor was also at the root of many of the controversies which surrounded them. These controversies are at the centre of the book and Kift treats them as test cases for social relations which provide fresh insights into nineteenth-century British society and politics.

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Translated by Roy Kift



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