

# GEORGE LEYBOURNE CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE



**A** right you Jolly lot! Here before you stands the one and only Champagne Charlie. George Leybourne is the name my parents gave me, when I was born in Gateshead, near Newcastle in 1842, but I was best-known as Champagne Charlie. My act was to sing comical songs in a flamboyant style to amuse the folk who would come to the music halls.

## WHAT STAGE NAME WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF?

 The joke was, everyone knew I was from a poor background but I would dress up and behave like I was very rich and posh! Oh they loved it they did. I was even sponsored by Moët and Chandon, the champagne makers, because I drank and sang about champagne so much, and so got the name Champagne Charlie, but it was a music hall manager Bill Holland who paid for the wonderful horses and carriage that took me to different Music Halls around London, including Wilton's! I would do several performances at different halls in one night as the people back then couldn't get enough of me! My act was very simple, I would dress as a toff or a swell (what a wealthy person was called), and sing songs. The songs became so well known that the audiences would often join in with me.

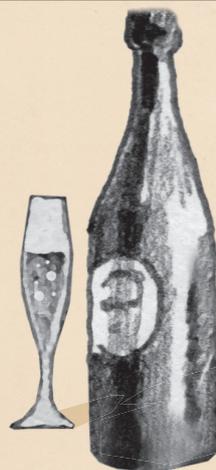
## HOW WOULD YOU DRESS AS A WEALTHY PERSON TODAY?

 I would put my heart and soul into every performance, being very loud and over the top, as they were a rowdy lot back then, but I made sure I had everyone's attention. The songs people liked the most were Champaign Charlie and the Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze. I would sometimes bump into Madame Senyah and I would sing it at her!

## { WHAT YEAR DID GEORGE LEYBOURNE DIE? }

 Despite all of my success I died at a young age of 42 with not a penny to my name. The champagne people paid me in Champagne and the lifestyle took its toll on me, but I made a lot of great memories and a lot of people happy through my songs and comedy!





**W**ith an impressive stage presence, George Leybourne was the biggest star of the early music hall period. Although he depicted many different characters on stage, he was best-known for portraying swells and toffs, imitating the manners of the dandified, leisured upper classes. Far from leisured himself, he began life in one of the worst slum areas in Gateshead. His phenomenal success was partly due to the commercialism of popular entertainment in the 1860s. Under contract for a year to music hall manager William Holland, he was obliged to live the life of a swell on and off stage, appearing each day in a carriage with postilions and grooms, smoking a cigar and drinking champagne. He also agreed to consume large quantities of champagne, given free by wine shippers to gain publicity. An exceptionally highly-paid music hall performer, sometimes earning over £100 per week, he worked relentlessly, often appearing at six halls a night, gave generously to charity, but died penniless of liver disease and exhaustion at the age of 42.



## **LEYBOURNE BEGAN SINGING CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE**

in August 1866. Champagne first became available in music halls in the mid-1860s at 6 to 10 shillings a bottle, with a cheaper equivalent Bass pale ale appearing in the late 1860s. Champagne was always associated with glamour, sparkle and success, and to fizz meant to succeed in music hall slang.

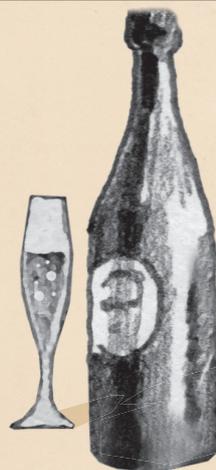


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**Leybourne appeared at Wilton's for a number of special performances between 1868 and 1880, and for a 10 week engagement from December 1869 to March 1870**

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# GEORGE LEYBOURNE CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE



One of the best-remembered stars of  
**MUSIC HALL.**

The most famous of the 'lions comiques',  
**LIONS OF COMEDY.**

His best-known songs are 'CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE' which sums up the character of the music hall swell or toff, and 'THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE', about the first flying trapeze artist, Leotard, who performed in London in 1861.

HE USED HIS REAL NAME GEORGE LEYBOURNE, but many people think of him as **CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE**, because of his most famous song.

He was tall, handsome and very charming, with a deep, baritone voice  
**AND POWERFUL STAGE PRESENCE.**

He was born on 17th March 1842 in one of the poorest parts of Gateshead, a town near Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Leybourne began working as an engineer, but was inspired to become **A PERFORMER AFTER SEEING ARTHUR LLOYD** on stage.

HE ACHIEVED SUPERSTAR STATUS when he was given a year's contract by the music hall manager William Holland at the Canterbury Hall. Holland paid Leybourne an unprecedented salary of **£120 PER WEEK**, and promoted his act.

Leybourne was under contract to Holland to ride every day in an open carriage drawn by four white horses, driven by postilions and attended by grooms,  
**SMOKING A CIGAR AND DRINKING CHAMPAGNE.**

LEYBOURNE LIVED THE LIFE OF A TOFF on and off stage. He wore an extreme form of the fashionable dress of the day, in top hat, with long, drooping whiskers, known **AS PICCADILLY WEEPERS**, a yellow or puce well-cut jacket, and impossibly tight striped trousers, which showed off his extraordinarily long legs.

He lived in a very grand house in Mayfair and gave a large amount of money to  
**CHARITY.**

He continued to work very hard, playing **AT SIX HALLS A NIGHT.**

HE DIED PENNILESS OF LIVER DISEASE AND EXHAUSTION AT THE AGE OF 42.