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Al Fike The Modern Minstrel Man 1912 - 1996

Kay Hoflander

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Life in the early 1900's was quite different from today. The pace was slower (or so we believe in retrospect). The music was sweeter. And, one learned life by the living. Then came the roaring Twenties. The pace quickened. The music became more upbeat, spiked with heady mixtures of jazz, ragtime and blues. By the early 1930's the entire country had metamorphosed. Entertainers like Al Jolson, Jimmy Durante and Sophie Tucker were the rage, and country and western was just beginning to come into its own. Sitting back in his Missouri home and absorbing it all was a young man named Al Fike. Born in 1912, and a schoolteacher by trade, he listened to the sounds of the country growing around him, absorbed them, and made them his own. This "collection period" continued until the late 1940's when, to the surprise of family and friends, he announced a career change, and the legend of Al Fike the Entertainer was born! After that, Al Fike, The Modern Minstrel Man, regaled audiences from coast to coast. Whether dressed in candy-striped jacket and straw hit reprising the classics of George M. Cohan or mimicking such greats as Ted Lewis, Durante and Jolson, Al Fike single-handedly kept the traditions of vaudeville alive in this country. He also introduced new music and new stars to his routines so that his show was a virtual "performance library" of American music, idioms, composers, and styles. In short, Al Fike was a living legend, preserving and enhancing the traditions of the American musical stage as no other performer has ever done. Seeing The Al Fike Show was a rare opportunity to see an entertainer's entertainer perform.

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