

May 9, 2024

Culture as Tourism

To start our time in London, we will be exploring mainstream theatrical elite entertainment: London's famous West End and a quintessential British afternoon tea. Although these two sites of cultural tourism *seem* British, they are also geared for tourists and perpetuate what the world *thinks* is British. As you embark on your inquiry into culture as tourism, think about what seems manufactured as British for the sake of tourism. Tourism is a major part of economy and important way countries create revenue and employ folk. In your travels today, pay attention to any merchandise, advertising, street performers, etc. that seem to be manufacturing the "idea" of British theatre. Are there stereotypes perpetuated? Can you locate authenticity in any of these spaces?

Leicester Square

Through the docile tones of Sir Ian McKellen, you will be guided on a walking tour through Leicester Square. Download the Voice Map podcast, "Theatreland," [here](#), if you haven't already. Initially this plot of land was known as Leicester Fields which was named after the 2nd Earl of Leicester, Robert Sidney. It was originally a residential area where 18th century artist Joshua Henry resided.



Leicester Square ca. 1910



Leicester Square ca. 2022

Over the course of the next century Leicester House transformed into the Square and became a center of commercial activity and entertainment. By the mid-19th century major theatres were converted into cinemas. Today, movie houses Odeon Luxe and Empire are used for movie premieres. After your walking tour, we encourage you to visit the park, take a rest, have a snack and people watch. (Also, if you are looking for additional theatre tickets, note the TKTS booth that offers discounts the day of a performance)

Afternoon Tea

Pinkies up! In the afternoon, like the upper crust we are, we will indulge in tea and finger sandwiches. Don't confuse high tea with afternoon tea! High tea was established for the lower and middle classes after a long day's work, where they had a nice pot of tea and a hearty meal on high-back chairs. Afternoon tea was established by Anne, Duchess of Bedford, circa 1840. The Duchess was a close confidante of Queen Victoria and served as a Lady of the bedchamber

between 1837 and 1841. The Duchess created afternoon tea because between lunch and dinner she would have a “sinking feeling” and needed a bit of sustenance before her 8pm dinner time.



Duchess of Bedford (1783-1857)



A typical Afternoon Tea ☺

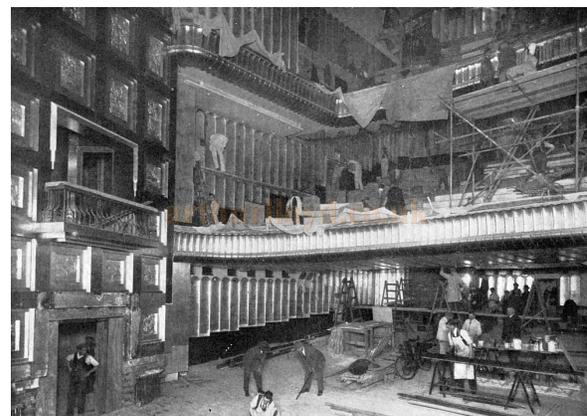
Notice your behavior and that of your peers during tea, i.e. how holding a teacup and saucer or eating a finger sandwich asks a certain posture of your body. Notice how your surroundings prompt a type of “polite” or even “elite” behavior. How might we consider this meal a performance of class?

West End Theatre

The iconic West End theatre district is home to 39 theatres. The first West End theatre is noted as the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which opened in May 1663. In 1881 the Savoy Theatre introduced the magic of electricity, primarily illuminating the musicals of Gilbert and Sullivan. The Savoy Theatre of today is actually a reconstruction of the earlier theatre, which opened on 29 October 1929 with Gilbert & Sullivan’s *The Gondoliers*. Many consider New York’s Broadway and London’s West End to be the highest caliber of theatrical production. There is certainly room for debate especially considering the Eurocentric history of these two phenomena! That being said, the West End is indeed a destination. As we take our spectatorship to various theatres – fringe, commercial, popular – always keep a critical eye on the target audience. In this case, the West End draws tourists to their spectacular shows.



The Auditorium and Stage of the Savoy Theatre for *Patience*, 1881



Finishing touches made to the Savoy Auditorium, 1929

Les Misérables

Today we will be seeing Boubil and Schönberg's musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. In the spirit of thinking about being tourists in London, let's think about the cultural politics of adaptation. In other words, this is a French story about the revolution yet through the lens of British theatre, the musical form, and entirely in English. For example, the sex workers song "Lovely Ladies" is performed with a Cockney accent. What are some other moments you can identify British sensibility filtered through this iconic French revolutionary story?

Assignment: Choose 2 out of 3 tasks

1. On our Instagram account, post a photo of a place, person, or thing, that represents what tourists may recognize as "British."
2. Take a photo from the afternoon tea and write a short reflection on Instagram reflecting about the event as a performance.
3. Record and upload a video of you and one of your peers about 2 minutes in length. Discuss *Les Misérables* addressing what came through as British versus French. This can connect to dialects, themes, storytelling, etc. You can also discuss your favorite moments of the production.