

# Vaudeville



**Vaudeville**, or the variety show, was the most popular form of stage entertainment at the end of the 19th century. Vaudeville was a lot like English music hall shows, which featured song and dance numbers and an emcee that lead the audience through the entire show. Variety shows featured music and dance, but also feature acts like plate-spinning, ventriloquism, magic, and even dog tricks. There were usually 12 or more acts in one show, and one show could last for hours! Though variety shows featured all kinds of acts, the big draw was comedy. People would go to vaudeville shows to see the latest comedians, and many vaudeville comedians became big celebrities.

However, in the early 1900s, movies became popular, and people began buying radios for their homes. Once movies with sound were invented, vaudeville slowly disappeared. After all, listening to the radio was free, and movies were much cheaper than a night at the theatre.

Vaudeville-style comedy is seen most in the movies today. The most famous vaudeville performers were able to find work in movies, bringing their silly faces and sight gags to the big screen. Variety shows acted as a proving ground for tons of types of performers, and you can see similar vaudeville styles on late-night talk shows and in sketch comedy shows. While it only lasted for a few decades, the variety show left a lasting impact on the performing arts.

**Often times, a vaudeville act was made up of brothers and sisters, or sometimes an entire family. What sort of act could you and your family do together? Draw a poster for it in the box below.**

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing a poster.

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When vaudeville was popular, immigration was at an all-time high. Many immigrants found work performing in vaudeville shows, or started their own shows that appealed to people from the same country as them. How do you think this helped them fit into American society?

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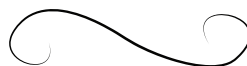
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Put on your own variety show! Gather up some friends and see what special talents each of you has. Make sure no two acts are the same, even if two or more people have the same talent: Sure, you and your friends might all be great singers, but how is each person unique? You can also have friends team up and do a group performance, or have one performer go twice.