



FREGOLI---THE MARVELLOUS LIGHTNING IMPERSONATOR.

"MARVELLOUS!" Marvellous!" "Impossible!" "I can hardly believe my eyes!" "That can't be the same man, it's actually uncanny! Sort of gives me the creeps." "Bra-a-avo! Fregoli!"

The last was an enthusiastic Italian, who was vociferously demanding an encore. The others had not yet recovered from the shock of surprise over the first performance, and were too busy with uttering exclamations of amazement to ask for more.

Such is the reception of Fregoli in Hammerstein's Music Hall each night, and half the audience is composed of those who have seen him the night before. If there is one word in the English tongue that defines his performance more forcibly than any other, it is "wonderful."

Now, entirely aside from his remarkable ability, Fregoli is a relief. The variety hall public is jaded and blasé. One performance is, as a rule, exactly like another, and usually a trifle worse. We have had Yvette Guilbert and Chevaliers by the score, and when you have seen the worst you can imagine what the rest is like, and vice versa. The Sisters Plopsy Wopsy in their song and dance, the Brothers McKill or McSwill, who perform what they call "sketches," the people who dive into tanks, the performing dogs and the acrobats seem to have been playing the same old tune since time out of mind. And now, like a cool breeze upon a burning forehead, a glass of sparkling water down a parched throat, comes Fregoli.

So, hail to Fregoli!

Fregoli's performance lasts an hour. For that hour you are in a state of utter bewilderment. You see a man doing something that you never saw or dreamt of before—a sensation that is always startling to the mind—and you see him doing it so well that you almost lose your breath.

A young man, of slight figure, who looks as if he might be anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five years old, his brown eyes smooth shaven and extremely plain in appearance—that's Fregoli. The programme says he impersonates so and so many characters. Throw the programme away and keep your eyes upon the stage.

A young man in a red riding coat, with a white waistcoat gleaming underneath, knee breeches, terminating in silver buckles, comes out and bows. That's Fregoli. He babbles something in Italian, speaking at a furious rate, and backs off the stage. You turn to your companion and begin—

"I wonder what he's..."

"Ah-h-h!"

"You hastily look up and before you stands an old-fashioned, gray-haired music teacher, with filled shirt-front, hat in hand, bowing meekly and jabbering in an old, cracked voice."

"Fregoli," says somebody.

"Wonderful!" you exclaim.

The old man sings in a tea-kettle voice, goes behind a piano, which has been arranged for his pupils, hides there for a moment and then shows his head. The head stares at you stupidly, there is a moment of silence, the curtains rustle and a tall female form, with golden curls glides out upon the stage, and, in a blood-curdling soprano voice such as the average pupil possesses, begins to sing.

"Fregoli!" cries some one. You open your eyes, hesitate for a moment, and then join in the burst of applause. Then the female turns her back on you and faces the head of the music teacher—a dummy head, as you now see—and the cracked tea kettle voice begins to sing. It is as pretty a bit of ventriloquism as you ever heard.

Then they sing alternately, and you almost imagine, at times, that they are singing together. The singing teacher has the best of it, however, and winds up with a finale that almost lifts his head to the ceiling, and as the head rises, you see the halo upon which it is fastened. Then Fregoli makes a sweeping bow, and retires.

The curtain rises again. A corpulent, bewhiskered Italian, valise in hand, backs out upon the stage, crying, in a ponderous voice, "Addio!" and, in the distance, you hear a shrill female voice answering, "Addio!"—both Fregoli.

The man looks at his watch, announces that he is off for a journey, and leaves the stage at one end. And in less than ten seconds a golden-haired blonde, in a magnificent blue silk dress, sweeps in at the other end. The transformation seemed magical. With lightning-like rapidity the silk hat, the whiskers, and even the gloves of the man had been discarded for the golden hair, the gown and the white gloves of the woman. It takes the audience a little longer this time to realize the fact that it is still Fregoli.

The woman takes a note from her bosom—every movement, every gesture is strikingly feminine—and reads aloud the information that, now that her husband is gone, her lover will call upon her. And at that very moment a boyish voice is heard singing outside the window—another pretty piece of ventriloquism. The woman goes to the window, looks out and an expression of happiness comes into her face, and in dumb pantomime, she shows her joy over her lover's arrival. And all the while Fregoli is singing.

Fregoli—the woman—runs off the stage uttering loud exclamations, and, hardly has

FREGOLI TO THE JOURNAL.

I HAVE been in the United States less than a week, and I am overwhelmed by the generous reception given me by its people. I look forward with pleasure to my stay of a year in this great land of which I have heard so much. I came prepared to find a great country. While four months in South America I heard everywhere, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Ayres, Valparaiso, "Ah, brother, you think we are a great people, wait until you have seen the great republic of the north."

As to the reception of my performance, I had no doubt. All the world loves to be amused. It is not my province to thrill, to enslave the senses as does my great countrywoman, Duse, who has, I learn, found her way to the hearts of your people. By hard work and constant study I strive to please, to amuse. Yet I was not prepared for the reception of last Tuesday night. The great audience embraced me before I had spoken a word. Ah, it is the country of the warm heart, that does not say "wait until we have seen and heard." How I regret that I have never in my busy life learned the English tongue. I should love to talk to those whose faces beam so cordial a welcome. I shall always try to please such a people.

In 1890 I volunteered in the Italian Army, then engaged in the first Abyssinian campaign, and was sent to Massowah. General Baldissera, who was in command, took great interest in the theatre that was maintained by the Military Club. A small company of players was engaged. On the eve of the arrival of some inspecting dignitaries the company suddenly deserted on account of some grievance. The General was in despair. One of the officers told him that there was a trooper in the garrison that could furnish some entertainment. I had been in the habit of amusing my commander in quarters. The General sent for me. He explained that arrangements had been made to play a certain little comedy with five characters in the cast. I replied at once: "I can give the whole performance." "Beware, boaster," said the General.

The next night I gave the entire performance, adapting methods that suggest those I follow to-day, namely, quick change of costume, mimicry and ventriloquism. I must have made what you Americans call "a hit." The next day I was relieved from active military duty and detailed as manager of the little theatre. I enjoyed the favor of General Baldissera and his staff, steadily developed my art, and when, at the end of my term I returned to Rome, I had 20,000 francs. This I spent in less than four months, a large sum being laid out in the purchase of costumes, wigs and other properties. This was in the Spring of 1893.

The first music hall was at that time opened in Rome. I accepted my first regular engagement at ten francs a night, which was soon increased to forty francs. Then I went to Leghorn at eighty francs per night, and then to Genoa at 200 francs. Next I played in Barcelona, and in Portugal for two months, from whence I made a tour of South America, returning to Portugal for one month. I then went to Madrid, where I played at the Apollo for eight months at advanced prices, that being the largest engagement ever played by any artist in Madrid.

I came from Madrid here. I write all my sketches, and am the author of the opera "Dorothea," which I sing, introducing fifteen characters. I carry a force of dressers, a musical director, a mechanical wandrobo, and baggage men, etc., twelve in number, not including my wife, who assists me in the designs of my rapid changing costumes, which are unlike any others made. My baggage consists of 63 theatre trunks, 26 hotel trunks and 65 sets of scenery, all of which weigh five and one-half tons, and cause me great trouble at certain houses. I have 200 wigs and appear in more than that number of characters. I hope that these details about myself do not weary you.

the soprano voice died away, when Fregoli—a young man in a straw hat—climbs boldly through the window. So quickly does it all pass and so clever is the deception that you refuse to believe for a moment that the two are the same, but, hardly have you grasped the fact when the young man pricks his ears, listens intently for a moment and then runs out of the room. And he could hardly have gained the stairs—so it seems to you—when the bewhiskered husband, valise in hand, returns upon the scene. Now the audience roars with applause at the cleverness of it all.

Then follows a series of changes that takes your breath away.

The husband goes out through one entrance, the wife comes in by another, disappears after her husband, the young lover appears, hides under a draped table—which communicates, of course, with the back of the stage—a few shots are fired and an old man, roused from his sleep, comes upon the stage in his nightgown, holding a lighted candle in his hand and asks in a sleepy voice what all the fuss is about. And now, before you realize that this, too, is Fregoli, the curtain falls and the young man in the red riding coat stands before you again, smiling and bowing.

Wonderful as it seems at the time, it is even more startling as you look back at it. The impression which the whole performance makes upon the mind—that is, the impression of the next day—is that of an actual scene of a play in which so many different actors appeared. It is then that the cleverness of it fully dawns upon you.

Now the manager steps out and announces that Fregoli does not speak a word of English but that, to show his gratitude for the cordial reception which he has received, he will appear in a sketch which he arranged himself, in the course of which he will impersonate fifteen different characters.

The plot of this piece you will probably not understand. Nobody does. The young man talks like a house afire and very few Italian ears could keep pace with his tongue.

A series of ten different characters follow each other upon the stage at rapid intervals. They all go off talking and almost before the voice of one has died away the other appears. First it was an old man who had been decorated with a medalion, then came a poor musician, long-haired and ragged, who insisted upon singing his own composition in a voice that Fregoli had not used before—a rich baritone. Then came a Commissioner, then an old hag, and after her a pretty French danseuse.

Oh, but this danseuse was delightful! The baldheads gave several gasps of de-

light before the cruel fact became apparent that it was still Fregoli, and then they shouted their applause. And the danseuse sang and prouctted, and winked and smiled and tossed her fan just as a coquetish French girl would do. She sang alto and it gave a man's mental balance a rude shock to grasp the fact that this was the same Fregoli that had just left the stage as an old hag.

Yet, hardly had the danseuse slipped off the stage when an overgrown girl, in short skirts, came out and sang a hard song in a nursery voice. Her dress was always slipping off her shoulders as a little girl's low-cut dress always does. As she went out of the right entrance a dark-looking man with a goatee came on, announced that he was a magician, and performed a pretty trick of throwing the floor with flowers that came out of an apparently empty bag. A moment later Fregoli appeared as a musician and now came the most delightful part of the performance.

Stepping down from the stage to the chair of the leader of the orchestra, he announced that he would impersonate half a dozen famous composers and lead the orchestra.

He stepped into a box-like affair, popped out of sight and the real leader of the orchestra hung up a placard bearing the name "Weber." The next instant the orchestra began a selection from "Der Freischutz" and up popped the grizzled head of Weber. In turn he impersonated Wagner, Verdi, Mascagni, Breton and Gomes, and not only were the changes made with incredible rapidity and the likeness excellent, but in each case he imitated the mannerisms of the men as they are known to all musicians. His imitation of Wagner conducting the "Pilgrims Chorus" was greeted with a roar of laughter.

And when he finally jumped upon the stage, hid his head for a second and then showed it again as that of plain Fregoli, the applause fairly shook the walls.

A word as to his methods. In the first place, every change, every motion, every transformation is the result of long, long study and practice. A dozen carefully trained assistants stand at the entrances to help him off with one costume and on with another. Often, as he walks slowly out of the stage, you catch a glimpse of his leg or his arm shooting out with wonderful activity. As he takes off his hat to make his last bow in one role, the hat is torn from his grasp by one assistant, while another replaces it with a fan, a third having already jammed a curly wig over his head.

Still, for the complete enjoyment of his performance, it is better not to know all these details of the prosaic "how?" It is enough to see Fregoli.

Fregoli

FRASCO

FRASCO



FRASCO