

The Music of *Ah, Wilderness!*



The Fourth of July The Day Before (1906). [Image: Library of Congress]

ARTHUR BRINGS MUSIC to *Ah Wilderness!* right from the start of the play. While stuffing his pipe, he hums a song popularized by Billy Murray, "Waltz Me Around Again, Willie." Billy Murray was the son of Irish immigrants and one of America's best-selling recording artists during the phonograph era. He was also a star of the vaudeville stage. Another song he popularized, "Bedalia," plays on the nickel-slot player piano in the bar of the small hotel where Richard and Belle have a drink.

While the Miller family waits up for Richard's late night return home, Arthur sings at his father's behest to mollify his mother. O'Neill chooses "that old sentimental favorite," "Then You'll Remember Me," as the first in the series of songs Arthur sings. This song was popularized by John McCormack, a celebrated Irish tenor who made his operatic debut in 1906. "Dearie," another sad sentimental song of the era, is the next song Arthur sings. This song was so popular that the composer and lyricist wrote an "answer to the famous song" "Since you called Me Dearie."

The last song of the evening, "Waiting at the Church," is a song made famous by Vesta Victoria. Sid says, "You oughta hear Vesta Victoria sing that! Gosh she's great! I heard her at Hammerstein's Victoria..." Born Victoria Lawrence in Leeds on November 26, 1873, Vesta Victoria was one of the greatest Music Hall stars of her era. Her father, Joe Lawrence, was also a performer and Vesta appeared on stage at a very early age with him as "Baby Victoria" and later as "Little Victoria." She was popular in both the United States and Britain. The song that made her famous was "Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me A Bow-Wow," which she introduced in 1893 at the age of 19. She went on to have such great hits as "Waiting At The Church," "It's All Right In The Summer Time," "Our Lodger's Such A Nice Young Man," and "Poor John." ♦

(THERE WAS I) WAITING AT THE CHURCH

Music by Henry E. Pether

Lyrics by Fred W. Leigh

*I'm in a nice bit of trouble, I confess
Somebody with me has had a game
I should by now be a proud and happy bride
But I've still got to keep my single name*

*I was proposed to by Obadiah Binks
In a very gentlemanly way
Lent him all my money so that he could buy a home
And punctually at twelve o'clock today*

*There was I, waiting at the church
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church
When I found he'd left me in the lurch
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote
"Can't get away to marry you today
My wife, won't let me!"*

*Lor, what a fuss Obadiah made of me
When he used to take me in the park
He used to squeeze me till I was black and blue
When he kissed me he used to leave a mark*

*Each time he met me, he treated me to port
Took me now and then to see the play
Understand me rightly, when I say he treated me
It wasn't him, but me that used to pay*

*There was I, waiting at the church
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church
When I found he'd left me in the lurch
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote
"Can't get away to marry you today
My wife, won't let me!"*

*Just think how disappointed I must feel
I'll be off me crumplet very soon
I've lost my husband, the one I never had
And I dreamed so about the honeymoon*

*I'm looking out for another Obadiah
I've already bought the wedding ring
There's all my little fal-the-riddles packed up in my box
Yes, absolutely two of ev'rything*

*There was I, waiting at the church
Waiting at the church, waiting at the church
When I found he'd left me in the lurch
Lor, how it did upset me!*

*All at once, he sent me round a note
Here's the very note, this is what he wrote
"Can't get away to marry you today
My wife, won't let me!"*