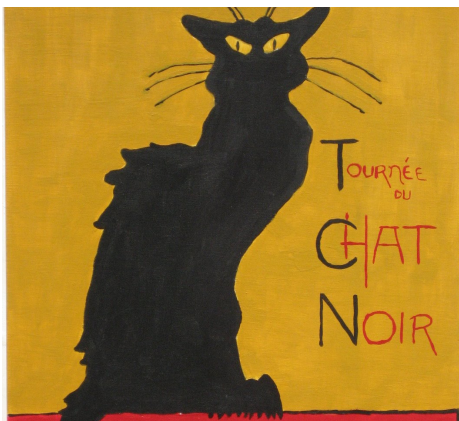


# Theatre in Louis' Day

At the turn of the twentieth century, the British theatre scene was divided into two distinct halves: "Theatre" and "Music Hall". Theatre was attended by the upper classes and featured dramas and classics produced in large ornately decorated theaters. Music Hall was produced in smaller auditoriums on simple raised platforms. The audience consisted of the lower classes, and the plays were comedies or vaudeville acts: songs, skits, displays of various talents such as acrobatics, and even travel stories. It is in music halls that Louis and his touring company would have staged his incredible tales.

**Here's a look at some of the early-twentieth century stage techniques that Louis and Co. would have used when putting on their entertainment:**



A poster for *Le Chat Noir*

## Black Cats and Shadows

Shadow puppet shows were performed both on the streets and in cabarets. Screens were hoisted onto the stage or positioned in front of the portable booths of street performers. Candles, oil lamp, or limelight would backlight the screens, and puppets made of tin and card performed between the light and the screen. Street shadow shows were called Galanty Shows. During the day, street puppeteers put on popular Punch & Judy shows—comedies performed by a single puppeteer that featured the adventures of the mischievous, hook-nosed Punch and the arguments he had with his wife, Judy. At night, the puppeteers transformed the booths and performed the Galanty Shows. Stage shadow shows were inspired by productions from the infamous Bohemian French cabaret *Le Chat Noir*.

## Testing...testing...1,2,3...hello?

There were no microphones in Louis' day. Nor were there speakers or endless databases of computerized sounds to insert into a show. Instead, theatre-makers had to create sound effects on the spot, using various contraptions and found materials. For instance, to make thunder, sound techs hit a large metal sheet known as a thunder sheet with a mallet, or rolled cannonballs down a large chute known as a thunder run. There were also rain boxes and wind machines. By the time Louis was hitting the stage, he would have also been using a "high-tech" alternative: the gramophone. Now, pre-recorded sounds could be played on stage—you could have the neigh of a real horse rather than a human imitation coming from the wings.



A gramophone



Punch and Judy Show

## And then there was...electricity!

In the end of the nineteenth century, gas lamps and a gaseous mixture known as limelight were used to light the actors and scenery up "on the boards." These highly flammable gasses, combined with the wooden architecture of the theatres, led to many disastrous fires. Luckily for Louis and his audiences, the turn of the century marked the widespread use of electric lights in the theatre (the first electric lights appeared in British theatres in the 1880s).