



Anna Held and the Birth of Ziegfeld's Broadway

Eve Golden

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" Anna Held (1870?-1918), a petite woman with an hourglass figure, was America's most popular musical comedy star during the two decades preceding World War I. In the colorful world of New York theater during La Belle Époque, she epitomized everything that was glamorous, sophisticated, and suggestive about turn-of-the-century Broadway. Overcoming an impoverished life as an orphan to become a music-hall star in Paris, Held rocketed to fame in America. From 1896 to 1910, she starred in hit after hit and quickly replaced Lillian Russell as the darling of the theatrical world. The first wife of legendary producer Florenz Ziegfeld Jr., Held was the brains and inspiration behind his Follies and shared his knack for publicity. Together, they brought the Paris scene to New York, complete with lavish costumes and sets and a chorus of stunningly beautiful women, dubbed ""The Anna Held Girls."" While Held was known for a champagne giggle as well as for her million-dollar bank account, there was a darker side to her life. She concealed her Jewish background and her daughter from a previous marriage. She suffered through her two husbands' gambling problems and Ziegfeld's blatant affairs with showgirls. With the outbreak of fighting in Europe, Held returned to France to support the war effort. She entertained troops and delivered medical supplies, and she was once briefly captured by the German army. Anna Held and the Birth of Ziegfeld's Broadway reveals one of the most remarkable women in the history of theatrical entertainment. With access to previously unseen family records and photographs, Eve Golden has uncovered the details of an extraordinary woman in the vibrant world of 1900s New York.

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