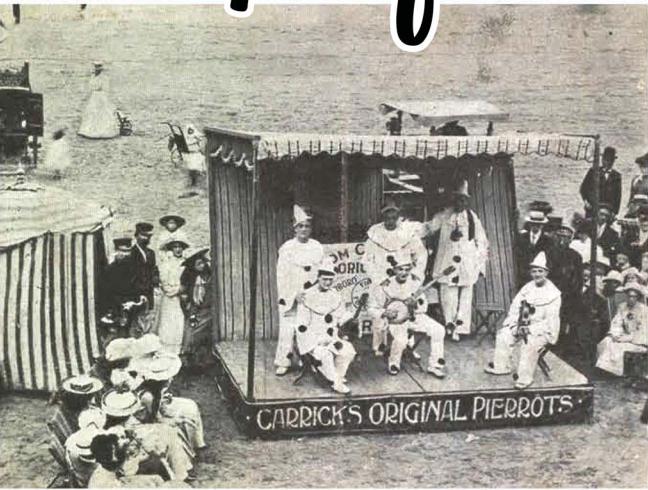


Performance & material



Early pierrot troupes performed in the open air (*al fresco*), directly upon the sand, or on boards with a canvas cover (or 'tilt') to keep the sun and rain off; as they became more popular, some created simple, bespoke venues.



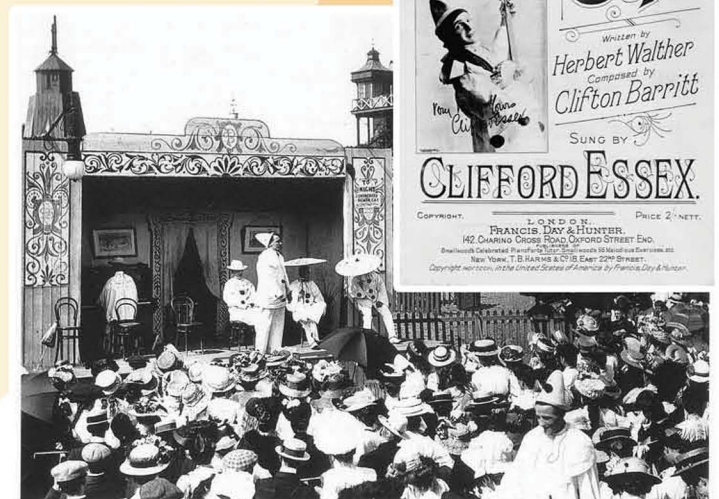
A Catlin ventriloquist

Their material and style of presentation was drawn directly from the black-faced minstrel form: as a result, each pierrot show would include a series of songs, sketches (known as *scenas*), monologues, stump speeches and speciality acts.

Like the minstrels, they all sat in a semi-circle, in full view of the audience, on chairs or podiums and would perform for an hour or more, 2 or 3 times daily. Audiences would pay a couple of pennies for a deckchair near the stage and the troupe would collect (or busk) the audience standing behind.

Their comic material represented a conventional view of society, typically reinforcing the stereotyping of women and race, in ways that are seen as offensive today. Songs would be written by and for the troupes each season, but they would also sing popular songs from the music halls and encourage the audiences to join-in with catch-phrases and choruses.

The pierrot troupes were perfectly adapted to the British seaside audiences and over the next 50 years, there were more than a thousand troupes performing!



'The Southport Pierrots', 1905