A decorative gold floral border with intricate scrollwork and leaf patterns surrounds the text.

Extracts from the diaries of Miss Gwen Berry (later Mrs Gwen Stanier),
(from 1927 to 1930)

Mrs Stainer played the cello in the orchestra pit of the *Grand Cinema, Alum Rock Road, Saltley*, for several years until March 1930, when the orchestra was disbanded.

She subsequently played (from 1929) in the City of Birmingham Orchestra (from 1948, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) until she retired in 1961.

She died in 1974, aged 79.



1927


23 June - Nearly all day at the show. helped the 'Count' to fit the picture 'Aloma of the South Seas' which made me want my misty blue island set in a jade green sea very badly.

27 June - Have been up at the show all day, cataloguing music and fitting pictures.

20 October - We now have a musical box at the show instead of a relief pianist. It sounds a bit of Pat Collins show and the boys and I amuse ourselves by playing we're on roundabouts. I'm the fat lady and Reggio the wild man from Borneo. Great fun.

1928

28 October - I heard the P.C.T. and M.U. [Musicians' Union] have had a row in London over the reducing of the orchestra's salaries at the Tivoli on account of the Vitaphone. Several of the West End and Futurist men offered contracts for £9.10 a week there so have let George Parker know there was a vacancy as Tommie Huggins is going. But hear now that the M.U. have telephoned Freddie Lees - the members are debarred from going up as the musicians are on strike.







1929

17 April - Visit to 'The Singing Fool' [first proper talkie shown at Futurist, 18 March, 1929] to hear to what extent the talkies are going to crush the poor little musician.

29 April – I had one of my revulsions of feelings against Alum Rock today, which was naughty as I've vowed to suppress my snobbish and superior feelings and be thankful for a job in a place which isn't likely to be invaded by talkies immediately. But sometimes I feel that the place is strangling me – that is, sapping all my enthusiasm and ambition.

1 June – These terrible talkie pictures are going to hound us out of house and home. Sometimes I worry about being done out of another job by machinery, and at others I worry that we shall be kept on and I'm fixed there for life. I sometimes feel that I am being worried from pillar to post by horrible martial Wellsian figures, with three tripod legs, a black square body and hooded head, for that is exactly what they look like.

However, why worry – surely I was created for something more than just to play to Alum Rock audiences all my life.





4 June - Heavy snuffly cold and heavy head ... sniffed loudly all through the Love Themes. The Talkies have arrived and we are having a cushy time. For how long?

6 June – Having a very restful week on account of 40 mins. Talkies – the voices come through very well.



7 June – Tonight during the Tommy Atkins pictures, we played ‘Where are the boys of the Old Brigade’.

16 June – It is said that 5 men at the West End had their notices yesterday and in view of the Talkies in August, they regard this as the thin end of the wedge. It is certainly a very worrying outlook for all cinema musicians.

24 June – I hear that Mr. Stone, late leader of Futurist, has gone to Bordesley Palace [High Street] and Carl Boot from the Edgbaston [Monument Road] has gone to the Gaiety [Coleshill Street], and poor old Pratt will be out of a job again.



19 August – I returned to Alum Rock to find that Mr Cozens and Joseph [Engelmann] had had words. Joseph having called him an impolite version of a cowardly



custard, with the result that Joseph had his notice to depart in a fortnight's time. Also the West End Orch. We're finishing in a fortnight, and lots of other houses turning Talkie. So that it was obvious that the trouble was spreading. We find that there are several big Talkie pictures booked at our place very soon which I suppose will mean our departure.



25 November – Actually got a full time week at the Picture House. Hurrah – quids in. Sid Mann is ill at the Broadway [Bristol Street] and they wanted me to play there. We've got a new pianist, a Miss Wallbank.



27 November – Spent the morning tearing round after a dep. for our place as I'd promised to play at the Broadway. Got dreadfully fagged and found the matinée and evening show very hard going in spite of a light programme.

Mark Beard very anxious for me to play the banjo so I had to tell him I wouldn't. But I must learn the dashed thing.

1930

3 January – Friday night and we haven't received the sack yet.









6 January – *We have been about seven miles to do 7 minutes playing today. Only a selection and a march to play at the Picture House. soon I suppose they won't want us at all. At least I hope we shan't go on long like this, it's too unsettling.*

16 January – *A p.c. from Mr Cozens to turn up for the matinée as the Talkie was a failure and he had returned to silent films. Hurrah. A poster outside the show saying silent film WITH ORCHESTRA. We nearly fainted away, Claude included.*

27 January – *And a day at the show being a half and half week. The Talkie was The American Prisoner with Madleine Carroll. I didn't admire a lot of her work – can't say I remember the girl much in the West Bromwich hockey club, but still many years have "dragged their weary length between".*

29 January – *We hears that a woman died at the P.H. last night, had fatty heart and died laughing at the comedy which wasn't supposed to be funny, being a ghastly German magic mirror spooky picture. I tell Mr Cozens he should turn it into an advert. – 'Come to the Grand, the comics are killing', or 'See this comedy and die of laughing'.*





30 January – And full time at the P.H. for a change. It's so jolly having Nellie Clift [probably the wife of Sidney Clift, a cinema company director] on the piano, she is so jolly. We are a very jolly crowd altogether, even old Claude.

7 March – Went over to Alum Rock to get my pay in the evening. Micky says they did well with the Talking Picture so roll on the sack and let's get on to something else.

21 March – Still no sack from the show. How long are we going on?

28 March – The Sack! It's really come at last! 2 ½ years I've been there. Quite enough too, but will there be anything else? Must hope on, and look round.

June – A message came along to play a fortnight at Alum Rock. Corn in Egypt. So I did till last Sat. back at the old shop as the Talking Machine had been scrapped in favour of a new one and the Sonophone had selected that very moment to break down.





THE END