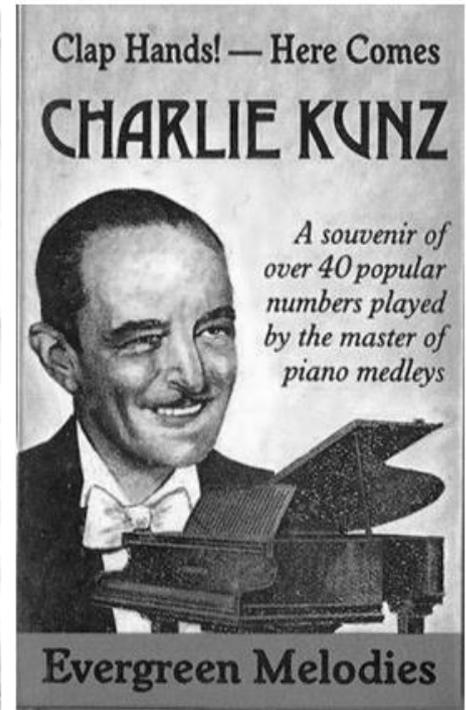




## Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie!

Charlie Kunz was an American pianist and jazz band leader. His signature tune was 'Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie' and he reached the peak of his career in England in the 1930s, when he was the highest paid pianist in the world, and topped the bill at music halls throughout the country, including Ventnor's Winter Gardens. Sadly we don't have a poster for that concert, but the one reproduced here is for the Edinburgh Theatre Royal, which he played in 1935.



Ventnor resident Ron Pusey recalled his brother John telling him the story of Charlie Kunz's visit:

*'It was said that no tune could be said to have really arrived until Charlie Kunz had played it before an audience or recorded it. The great successes of composers like Richard Rodgers (Oklahoma, Carousel, South Pacific, etc) of Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern all received the loving attention of CK's versatile fingers. It was around Coronation year (1935) that Charlie came to Ventnor to perform for holidaymakers at the Winter Gardens.'*

*'My brother John was at that time a junior employed at the Spring Hill stores of A. J. Sharpe, working under Mr James of the High Street faggot and pea shop opposite the old Bijou Cinema. He told me that when Kunz arrived in Ventnor his publicity stunt was to ride down through the High Street on a white horse, and Sharpes had to transport specially a white piano to the theatre for the celebrated musician to entertain his audiences thereon. Ventnor loved that! This type of publicity stunt to attract people to the Box Office was quite novel and must have done the trick for his popularity was proved in full houses during his time there and on the Pier'.*

John worked in Sharpes Furniture Stores on Spring Hill, the building that is now the Ventnor Heritage Centre. The mention of Mr James as being from the High Street faggot and pea shop recalls the fact that during the intervals between programmes at the cinema the customers would stream across the road for pies, faggots and peas.

Ventnor does have another piano story, which took place about 50 years earlier. Hans Von Bulow, the world famous pianist who later founded the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, stayed in Tweed Mount Villa in Bath Road from July to Sept 1875, preparing for his performance of Tchaikovsky's No 1 Piano Concerto which was to premier in Boston USA in October that year. According to his biographer, Alan Walker, *'Hans Von Bulow's stay was made more pleasurable for him by the arrival of a fine Chickering grand piano, sent from Boston'*. This may have been another marketing ploy, this time by the piano manufacturers: the Chickering Piano was a huge black heavily carved beast - and only six of them were apparently sold. It must have been a mighty business manoeuvring it up or down Bath Road.

Lesley Telford, *Ventnor & District Local History Society*. Sources: records in our archives, including Fay Brown's indexes.