

THE GLOBETROTTERS

Comprising comedian/manager Dick Norton, two former Smart Set Diggers female impersonators, Charles Holt and Ralph Sawyer, singer Florence "Bobby" Broadhurst, comedienne Leila Forbes, soubrette Dorothy Drew, comedian Jack Creighton, and pianist/comedian Wallingford Tate, the Globetrotters were put together for a tour of Asia (then referred to as the East). The itinerary included Java, Singapore, Malaya, Thailand and India, Hong Kong, China and Japan. Presenting a standard variety entertainment, the repertoire included sketches, songs (both comic and popular), light classical piano instrumentals, dances (especially featuring Ralph Sawyer), comedy routines and patter.

The Globetrotters consisted of eight vaudeville entertainers led and managed by the comedian Richard (Dick) Norton. He and some of the other performers had toured previously to India and the East with the Bandmann Opera Company and their publicity often emphasised this, suggesting that they were well-known in the region. New to the troupe were the female impersonators Charles Holt and Ralph Sawyers from the Smart Set Diggers as well as a young Queensland contralto, Florence "Bobby" Broadhurst, who had previously sung at a Smart Set Diggers concert in Toowoomba at which two other Globetrotters, Norton and Leila Forbes, also appeared, although neither is known to have been otherwise associated with the Diggers' company. Presumably the idea for an Asian tour was discussed around this time, although the Globetrotters were a new group who did not perform war-related material apart from a comic "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" routine, a version of which had also been staged at the Toowoomba concert.

The Globetrotters left Brisbane on the "Montoro" on 4 December 1922 for Java and then went to Singapore, Malaya, Thailand and India (1923) and afterwards to Hong Kong, China and Japan (1924). A photograph from near the start of the tour shows eight performers, all in pierrot costumes and ruffs, although at some venues fewer performers appeared and the costuming varied. Newspaper reviews which Broadhurst clipped and kept, no doubt selectively, are all enthusiastic, the *Delhi Eastern Mail* calling the troupe "A Brilliant Combination" (n.d., ca. Sept. 1923). Most of the material was standard 1920s' popular vaudeville fare: Norton and soubrette Dorothy Drew did a parody of *Camille* and a routine where he sat behind her pretending his arms were hers while she sang. The comedian Jack Crichton sang topical songs about recent events; Wallingford Tate played light classical piano numbers and performed comedy sketches including a "[London] Coster in the Gallery", possibly inspired by the "At the Play" section of C.J. Dennis's *The Sentimental Bloke*, already well-known through the 1915 story and 1919 film. Broadhurst sang serious songs such as "The Enchantress," "My Dear Soul", and "Sink, Sink, Red Sun" in what the *Eastern Mail* called "a magnificent contralto voice" (op. cit.). Most original were the contributions of the two female impersonators. Holt was often billed anonymously as "? ? ? ?," taking off his wig at the end of his glamorously-dressed impersonations to reveal that he was a man, while Sawyer danced as a woman including as Salome, the *Pinang Gaxette and Straits Chronicle* acclaiming her/his "delightful exhibition of the terpsichorean art" (n.d., Feb./Mar. 1923).



**Florence "Bobby"
Broadhurst**

Source: www.signatureprints.com



CHARLES HOLT.

RALPH SAWYER.

Theatre June (1921), 18.

The Globetrotters for the most part followed a long-established circuit of colonial outposts with large English-expatriate communities. Interestingly, some reviews in Malaya, India and Japan each expressed disappointment at the lack of interest displayed by the indigenous population, the *Manchuria Daily News* (28 Mar. 1924) mentioning that

"only a few" Japanese attended the Yamato Hotel season in Dairen (Dalian). Such circuits often opportunistically followed a calendar of local events, the Globetrotters managing to arrive in Kuala Lumpur during race week, attracting "a very fair audience there" including "Lady Guillemond" and her "party" (*Pinang Gazette*, op cit). However, reviews of their performances in India in mid-1923 noted that they were appearing in the oppressively hot summer "off" season; to allow for this, evening shows started at 9.30pm. Some advertisements claimed "120 laughs in 120 minutes" and boasted that there would be 24 different items.

After her return to Australia in mid-1927 Broadhurst claimed in an interview with the Bundaberg *Daily Times* (23 July) that the company had visited "India, Assam, Burma, Siam, Malay States, Java, Sumatra, China and Japan" and embellished the account of her adventures by claiming that she had performed for the King of Siam, that an Indian Maharajah had "shot a tiger in her honour," and that she had been besieged in a house in Nanking (Nanjing) during a 1924 uprising and was only rescued thanks to a barrage of shells fired by the British naval warship *Emerald*. Holt, who returned to Australia shortly after this incident, likewise stated that the tour had been abandoned because of the unrest in China. He too added oriental exoticism to his reminiscences, claiming the costume he was shown wearing in an accompanying photograph "is the gift of an Indian Rajah. It is heavily embroidered in silver by hand on thick white crepe-de-chine, with ermine trimmings. The headdress alone is valued at £200" (*Theatre, Society and Home*, 1 Nov. 1924, 1).

After the Globetrotters disbanded, Crichton, Tate, Broadhurst and Beryl Lucina formed a quartet, the Broadcasters, who revisited some of the East Asian venues including Hong Kong and Kobe. By 1926 Broadhurst was resident in Shanghai where she appeared in the "Carlton Follies" and also with a group called the Frothblowers; a surviving photograph showing an amateurish back scene suggests that this last was an ad-hoc and probably amateur community group. Broadhurst had by then acquired and learned to play a "Bangulela banjo" (*Bundaberg Daily Times*, op. cit.) to accompany her songs which she also performed on radio; claiming in the *China Press* (21 Mar. 1926) that "the banjolele has been made famous by the Prince of Wales and other members of royalty."

SEE ALSO

- [Smart Set Diggers](#)
- [Charles Holt](#)

PERSONNEL

1. Troupe members:

- **Florence "Bobby" Broadhurst:** Singer (contralto).
- **Jack Crichton:** Comedian
- **Dorothy Drew:** Soubrette, comedienne, dancer, singer (soprano)
- **Leila Forbes:** Comedienne. Forbes was with the troupe at the start of the tour and may have been Norton's companion; she later disappears from the reviews (although often only a few performers were singled out for specific mention so this is not conclusive proof: Drew also goes unmentioned in the East Asian reviews). Several other female performers were specifically mentioned in later seasons (see "Associated guest performers" below).
- **Charles Holt:** Female impersonator.
- **Richard (Dick) Norton:** Comedian, manager
- **Ralph Sawyers:** Female impersonator/dancer
- **Wallingford Tate:** Pianist, comedian

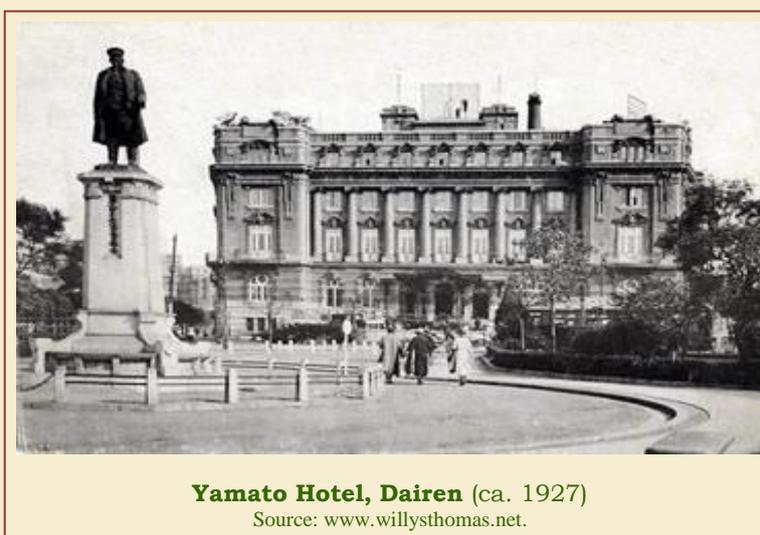
2. Associated guest performers: Kitty Farrell (1923, India), Beryl Lucina (1924, East Asia).

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Florence Broadhurst (1899-1977), later the well-known Sydney fashion artist and wallpaper designer and manufacturer, was born at Mt Perry near Bundaberg and had had some success as an amateur singer although her contract with the Globetrotters was probably her first professional engagement. Broadhurst's papers in the Mitchell Library in Sydney (MSS 4145) include a scrapbook of cuttings from the Globetrotters' and Broadcasters' tours which are the source for the chronology below.

The present-day "Florence Broadhurst Handmade Rugs" company website includes a section "About Florence" which claims the Globetrotters were an "avant-garde" troupe "performing to the upper echelons of society and befriending royalty" (http://www.florencerugs.com.au/content_common/pg_about-florence.seo). In fact they offered standard popular vaudeville routines (solo and duets) and short farces, playing primarily to whichever members of the English-speaking community in each city chose to attend their publicly-advertised seasons.

2. Charles Holt in the *Theatre, Society and Home* interview suggested that he had been the manager of the company, but all surviving advertisements and reviews refer to them as "Dick Norton's Globetrotters" or a similar phrase.
3. Kay Saunders claims Broadhurst joined the Smart Set Diggers as a professional performer (149); no evidence has been found for this other than her appearance at the single concert in Toowoomba which Saunders dates ca. August 1918, although the Smart Set Diggers did not commence their first Australian tour till mid-1920. Broadhurst herself in the 1927 Bundaberg *Daily Times* interview says she was "approached by the Globetrotters", not the Diggers. A photograph Saunders reproduces on page 152 is of "The Carlton Follies," a later show put together for the Carlton Club in Shanghai while Broadhurst was living there after the Globetrotters had disbanded. Saunders claims this was a "nearly all-boy review" [sic]: Broadhurst is cross-dressed in top hat and tails but there is no evidence that the other performers, all in dresses, are men, though possibly some are. (No review of the earlier Globetrotters' or Broadcasters' performances suggested that Broadhurst cross-dressed as a man so this too may have been a one-off staging idea.). A printed reproduction of the "Carlton Follies" photograph and a newspaper title *The China Press* "Sunday Pictorial Section Shanghai, Sunday December 20, 1925" are pasted on the same page in Broadhurst's scrapbook suggesting that this was approximately when the performance(s) took place, although this is not true for all the material pasted side by side on other pages of the scrapbook; she seems to have grouped cuttings by geographical location but not necessarily from the same season, year or company.



Yamato Hotel, Dairen (ca. 1927)

Source: www.willysthomas.net.

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

1923: **Indonesia** (Pathe Th, Batavia, Java 15, 16 Jan.) • **Singapore** (ca. Jan. - Feb.*) • **Malaysia** (Kuala Lumpur TH; 16 Feb.) • (Penang TH; 24 Mar.) • **Thailand** (Royal Bangkok Sports Centre, Bangkok; 26-30 Mar.) • (Butsapanata Theatre, Bangkok; 31 Mar., 2 Apr.) • (Royal Bangkok Sports Centre, Bangkok; 14-23 June > return season) • **India** (Empire Theatre, Calcutta; ca.25 Aug.) • (Calcutta; no details > return season); • (Delhi; no details) • **Pakistan** (Palace Theatre, Karachi; 6 Nov. - *)

NB: Batavia is now known as Jakarta

1924: **Hong Kong** (Kowloon; 4-6, 9 Feb.) • (Th Royal, Hong Kong; 11 Feb. - *) • **China** (Shanghai; 9, 11-15 Mar.) • (Gordon Hall, Tianjin); • (Peking, no details) • **Japan** (Yamato Hotel Lounge, Dairen; 27 Mar. -*) • (Kobe; 1 Apr. - *)

NB: Dairen is now known as Dalian (a Manchurian seaport situated in Northeast China, Dairen was part of Japanese territory between 1895 and 1945). Peking is also known as Beijing. Calcutta has been known as Kolkata since 2001. Tianjin is also known as Tientsin.

FURTHER REFERENCE

- Florence Broadhurst Papers. Mitchell Library, Sydney. [MLMSS 4145]
"Five Years Abroad." (Interview with Miss Florence Broadhurst). *Daily Times* (Bundaberg), 23 July (1927), n. pag.
"Ch[a]rl[e]s Holt, 'The Digger Mannequin'." *Theatre, Society and Home* 1 Nov. (1924), 1.
O'Brien, Siobhan. *A Life by Design: The Art and Lives of Florence Broadhurst*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin (2004).
O'Neill, Helen. *Florence Broadhurst: Her Secret and Extraordinary Lives*. Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2006.
Saunders, Kay. "Florence Broadhurst." *Notorious Australian Women*. Sydney: ABC Books (2011), 148-62.



Town Hall, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Source: www.hydroponicsonline.com

This entry contributed by Richard Fotheringham

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