

HUXHAM'S SERENADERS

Incl. **The Harmonious Huxhams**

A box-office record breaking company that featured refined comedy sketches, musical scenas, burlesques, dancing and a high proportion of singing, Hugh Huxham's Serenaders was one of the leading purveyors of costume entertainment in the Antipodes during the 1910s and 1920s. Especially well known for its intricate harmony arrangements, the troupe specialised in lavish Oriental musical scenas from 1918 onwards. Several well-known performers were associated with the Serenaders at various times, notably Dan Weldon, Syd Hollister, Hugh Steyne and Syd Burchill.

Along with Edward Branscombe's Dandies companies, Huxham's Serenaders was one of the leading costume comedy companies to regularly tour the Antipodes during the 1910s and 1920s. The troupe, originally comprising nine artistes, made its debut season with Ted Holland in Brisbane in March 1912 after Huxham, his wife Edith, and her brother had spent some two years touring for Harry Rickards and Fullers' Theatres as The Harmonious Huxhams. Following its Empire Theatre engagement, the troupe travelled throughout Australia and New Zealand almost constantly up until the mid-1920s. The only breaks in its Antipodean tours established to date were two engagements on the Bandmann Indian circuit tour in 1914 and 1926. The Serenaders' fifteen years of operations saw the troupe engaged by most of the leading variety organisations in Australia and New Zealand, including Harry Rickards' Tivoli Theatres, Holland and St John (Brisbane), John N. McCallum (Brisbane), Birch Carroll and Coyle (Queensland), Dix and Baker (Newcastle), and Cedric Johnson (St Kilda, Melbourne).

Huxham's Serenaders was essentially a refined costume comedy company which featured a high proportion of singing. Other forms of amusement included comedy sketches, musical scenas and burlesques and dancing. It became especially well known for its intricate harmony arrangements (arranged and scored by Hugh Huxham). Edith Huxham also designed and helped create the company's costumes. From around 1918 onwards, Huxham began featuring lavish Oriental scena (mini-musical extravaganzas) that were likely inspired by the Huxhams tours through India and China. Although the Serenaders initially followed the tradition of costume comedy companies by having only a pianist for accompaniment, by 1915 it was being accompanied by an orchestral ensemble.

The *Theatre* magazine provides an insight into the troupe's first four years of operations in its October 1915 issue:

The Serenaders were organised by Hugh Huxham nearly four years ago for a season with Holland and St John, of the Empire Theatre, Brisbane. As a start, the Serenaders did fourteen weeks at the Empire and a nine weeks tour of North Queensland on the Birch-Carroll circuit by arrangement with Holland and St John. They were then with Ben J. Fuller, without break, for four weeks at the national (Sydney), a year in New Zealand, four weeks in Adelaide, four weeks in Broken Hill, eight weeks in Tasmania, six weeks in Melbourne (at the Gaiety Theatre, being the first show of the kind at that house), and four weeks in smaller places. They finished up with Mr Fuller at Geelong (V.) on a Wednesday, and on the Saturday began a six weeks' season in Adelaide with Hugh D. McIntosh... By Mr McIntosh they were sent to the Bandmann circuit in India, where they worked for eleven weeks, and would have remained much longer only for a desire to get back to Australia because of the war... Returning to Australia in September 1914 the Serenaders did a season in the west with Mr McIntosh and from there came to Melbourne and opened at St Kilda where they put in six months. From St Kilda they went back to Mr Fuller, with whom they are just completing a twenty-weeks season, or a run that will take them right up to date on which they are to re-open at St Kilda - October 30 (44-45).

Hugh Huxham formed the Serenaders while playing a season at the Empire Theatre, Brisbane in early 1912. The concept, possibly developed in association with managers Ted Holland and Percy St John, was a deliberate attempt move away from the minstrel show format, as the *Brisbane Courier records* a few days before the troupe made its debut:

The Empire will reopen next Saturday evening when Messrs. Holland and St John will present an entirely new company, with a departure from the old form of the now practically obsolete first part. In its place will be substituted an attractive entertainment by "The Serenaders," a company in themselves, who will introduce an interesting programme in which attractive and refined specialties, coupled with a spice of genuine comedy, accompanied by excellent harmonized numbers, will be the predominant features. This portion of the bill has been organised by those old favourites the harmonious Huxhams, and in addition to themselves it includes



1913

Source: State Library of Tasmania

Misses Vera Barber (soprano), Gertie McLeod (soubrette), Messrs Norman Leslie (comedian), Gilbert Lauri (monologue entertainer), Mark Phillips (basso) and James Opie (baritone). The second part will be full of star turns (29 Feb. 1912, 4).

In its review of the first Empire show the *Courier* further records:

New scenes, new turns, new stage effects, new dresses, and many new faces were welcome at the Empire on Saturday. Strike and strife and rain combined could not dampen the ardour of the audience, and the reopening performances were a triumph for all concerned. One of the most charming and altogether pleasing innovations in variety entertainment was the first appearance of the Serenaders. Headed by the Harmonious Huxhams, this mirth-provoking company of gaily-garbed ladies and gentlemen occupied it to such highly agreeable effect with a "pot pourri" of vocal gems, humorous hits, and dainty dances, that every one of them was encouraged doubly, and sometimes trebly. Their choruses and humming accompaniments, and in fact, all their contributions were tastefully chosen and delicately refined, and their roguish by play and picturesque posing constituted not the least admirable of their accomplishments... The first part closed with the representation of "The Organ Girl" and the chorus "Farewell" (4 Mar. 1912, 9).

In June the troupe undertook a tour of mid-north Queensland region under the direction of Holland and St John's regional manager Sidney Cook and tour manager Barney Levy. The tones visited included Rockhampton, Barcaldine, Clermont, Emerald, Blackall, Alpha and Longreach. The troupe then returned to Brisbane to play another at the Empire Theatre.¹

The extent of the Serenaders' popularity can be seen in both the length of their seasons and the regularity of their return engagements. The troupe's first tour of New Zealand, for Fullers Theatres in 1912, was originally scheduled for twelve weeks, but lasted fifteen months. Huxham later secured five summer seasons in St Kilda (Melbourne) between Christmas 1914 and January 1920, and played several lengthy seasons in Brisbane, including fifty-five weeks over 1918 and 1919. The troupe also broke a number of house records during its career, including the attendance record for Hobart's Theatre Royal twice, in 1918 and 1922 (ctd. BC: 27 July 1918, 2 and TT: Nov. 1922, 23).

Among the Serenaders were several performers who went on to carve out long careers in the Australian entertainment industry, notably Syd Burchell, Syd Hollister, Claude Holland, (son of Ted Holland) and Dan Weldon.

HISTORICAL NOTES

1. The 1914 tour of Maurice Bandmann's Indian circuit was arranged by Hugh D. McIntosh, general manager of Harry Rickards' Tivoli Theatres. The Serenaders were then playing a six-week season in Adelaide for the firm.

PERSONNEL

All dates shown below are established years only. In some instances, people may have been associated with the company prior to or after the dates shown, but these years have not yet been identified.

1. **Principal troupe members incl.** Sadie Anderson (1922), W. H. Aye (1922), Elsie Barber (1913), Miss Pop Batterby (1918-23), Syd Beck (1924), Sydney Burchell (1923), Gladys Campbell (1922), Lena Deane (1922-23), Reg Harrison (1918-1923), Fred Heraud (1915-22), Claude Holland (1922-23), Sydney Hollister (1918-19), Fred Huxham (1913), Hugh Huxham (1912-25), Edith Huxham (1912-25), Gertrude Johns (1922), Adele Kelly (1915), Madoline Knight (1922-23), Sam La Mert (1913), Norman Leslie (1913), Dora Lyall (1922-23), Pearlie McKenzie (1918-19), Gertie McLeod (1913-15), Nance Maunsell (1915), Ina Milne (1915), Renn Miller (1922-23), Kitty Morton (1918-19), Bert Munyard (1922), Paulasto Bros (Ern and Fred, 1922), Mark Phillips (1913), Les Richmond (1922-26), Olive Seddon (1918-19), Hugh Steyne (1913-15), Maud Telfer (1923), Lalla Ward (1919), George Welch (1922-23), Dan Weldon (1915-18).

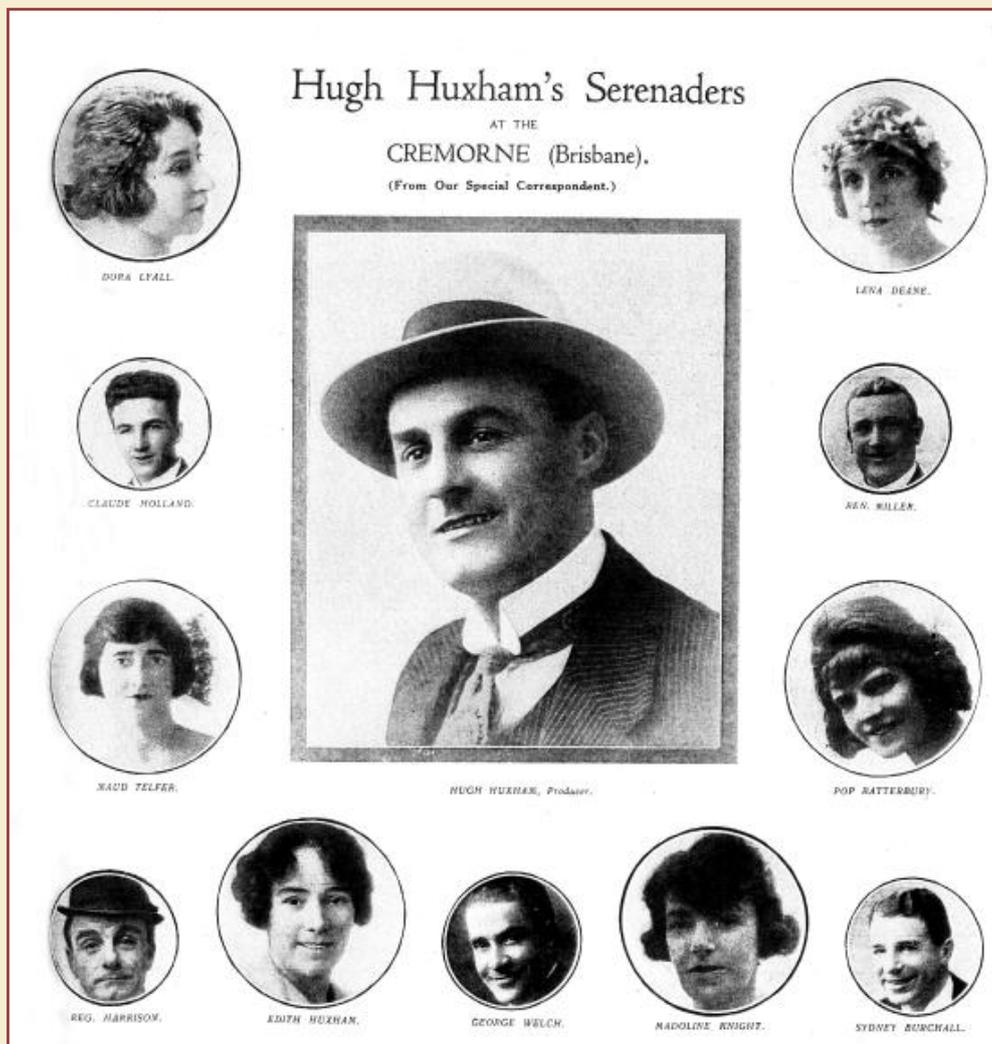
Brisbane Courier 27 July (1918), 2.

2. **Additional notes and/or historical clarification:**

CREMORNE THEATRE.
Stanley-street, South Brisbane.
JUST OVER VICTORIA BRIDGE.
Direction Dandies (Qld.) Limited
Managing Director: John N McCallum
HUGH HUXHAM'S
SERENADERS.
REOPENING NIGHT,
SATURDAY, AUGUST 10th.
The "Serenaders" have appeared at the Follies Theatre, St. Kilda, Melbourne, for the past four consecutive summer seasons with conspicuous success.
Last Saturday, at the Theatre Royal, Hobart, they broke all records for booking and attendance. The whole theatre, including the pit, was booked at the highest prices, and seats were also reserved on the stage.
A BRILLIANT COMPANY OF HARMONIOUS HUMORISTS.
POPULAR PRICES.
POPULAR PRICES.
The Box Plan will be on view at Paling's on MONDAY, 5th August.

¹ For the first few years the troupe tended to be billed as The Serenaders (or 9 Serenaders) featuring the Harmonious Huxhams.

- **Elsie Barber:** Soprano/soubrette
- **Pop Batterby:** Later married J. Foote, a Sydney businessman, and became associated with the Mosman Operatic Society.
- **Syd Burchell:** Appeared in musical comedies and operettas in the 1930s, including *The Student Prince* (1933).
- **Reg Harrison:** Became a Sydney-based businessman in the 1930s.
- **Fred Heraud:** surname is sometimes spelled "Herand." He retired from the theatre in the 1930s to join a Hobart-based firm.
- **Syd Hollister:** joined a Melbourne radio station in the 1930s.
- **Sam La Mert:** Whistling specialist.
- **Gertie McLeod:** Scottish dancer.
- **Pearlie McKenzie:** later married Hugh Black and moved to Mackay (Qld).
- **Renn Miller:** Christian name is sometimes spelled 'Ren.'
- **Norman Leslie:** Character comedian.
- **Mark Phillips:** Actor/vocalist.
- **Les Richmond:** was conductor and pianist for the Serenaders between 1922 and 1926. In the 1930s, he was organist at Brisbane's Regent Theatre.
- **Olive Seddon:** moved to Ballarat (Vic) in the 1930s.
- **Hugh Steyne:** English comedian.
- **Dan Weldon:** joined a number of high-profile revusical companies before taking up a radio career in Sydney in the 1930s as a programme director.



Green Room Oct. (1918), 31.

3. Special guest artists incl. Enid Parker (violin, 1919), Master Walters (violin, 1919).

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY (1911- 1926)

An asterisk (*) beside a date indicates that it is either approximate or has yet to be established.
The Harmonious Huxhams were invariably billed as feature artists between 1912 and ca. 1916

- 1912:** HOLLAND & ST JOHN (Empire Th, Bris 2 Mar. - 7 June > reopening of the Empire) • (Mid-North West Queensland regional tour; June - Aug. *) • (Empire Th, Bris; 10 Aug. - ca. Sept. *) ► FULLER-BRENNAN (Nat Amph, Syd; 16 Sept. - 1 Oct.) • (New Zealand tour; ca. 26-31 Dec.)
- NB 1:** Mid North-West Queensland tour incl. (in assoc. with Birch & Carroll > Th Royal, Rockhampton; 20-27 June) • (Longreach; 29 June- 1 July) • Shire Hall, Barcaldine; 3-4 July) • (Alpha, 5 July) • (Blackall; 6-8 July) • (Clermont; 10-11 July) • (Emerald; 12 July) • (Th Royal, Rockhampton; 13-15 July > return season)
- NB 2:** New Zealand tour incl. (Op House, Christchurch, 26-31 Dec.)
- 1913:** FULLER BRENNAN (New Zealand tour; ca. Jan-June *) • (King's Th, Adel; 23 Aug. - *) ► BEVERIDGE & SADLER (Th Royal, Hobart; 7 Nov. - *) ► n/e (Council Chambers, Geeveston, Tas; 13 Dec.) ► (Franklin TH, Tas; 15 Dec.)
- NB 1:** New Zealand tour incl. (Op House, Christchurch; 1 Jan. - *) • (Th Royal, Wellington; ca. May - June*) ► WILL JAMISON (Op House, Wanganui; 12-13 June)
- NB 2:** It is unclear if the New Zealand was fully managed by the Fuller-Brennan firm.
- 1914:** CEDRIC JOHNSON (Follies Th, St Kilda, Melb; ca. Nov. - Dec. *)
- 1915:** CEDRIC JOHNSON (Follies Th, St Kilda, Melb; ca. 30 Oct. - 31 Dec. *)
- 1916:** CEDRIC JOHNSON (Follies Th, St Kilda, Melb; 1 Jan. - 29 Apr. > 6 months season) • n/e (Temperance Hall, Hobart; 9 July- *) • (Follies Th, St Kilda; 28 Oct. - *)
- 1917:** (Toowoomba TH, Qld; ca. 19 June - *) ► (Follies Th, St Kilda, Melb; ca. Dec. *)
- 1918:** (Follies Th, St Kilda, Melb; ca. Jan. *) ► (Th Royal, Hobart, Tas; ca. June-July *) ► (Cremorne Th, Bris; 10 Aug. - 31 Dec.)
- 1919:** (Cremorne Th, Bris; 1 Jan. - 9 June) ► (Th Royal and Empire Th, Bris; 21 June - 29 Aug.) ► (Rockhampton, Qld; 1 Sept. - * > 12 nights) • (Mount Morgan, Qld; ca. Sept. *) ► (West Australia tour; ca. Oct. - 31 Dec.)
- NB:** The Empire Theatre was closed down temporarily by the Queensland Health authorities on 10 June due to the Spanish influenza epidemic. The Fullers subsequently transferred their operations to the Theatre Royal while undertaking work on the Empire Theatre's air circulation.
- 1920:** (West Australia tour; ca. Jan. *) ► (Lyric Th, St Kilda, Melb; 16 Oct. - *)
- 1921:** (Lyric Theatre, St Kilda, Melb; ca. Jan. *)
- 1922:** (Hobart; ca. Oct.* > no details)
- 1923:** (Cremorne Th, Brisbane; ca. Sept. *)
- 1925:** (Bandmann circuit, India; no details > ctd. BC: 17 July 1939, 2).

FURTHER REFERENCE

- Djubal, Clay. "[Huxham's Serenaders.](#)" *AustLit* (2007).
- "Harmonious Huxhams – at the Princess (Sydney)." TT: July (1915), 32.
- "Hugh Huxham's Serenaders at the Cremorne (Brisbane)." GR Oct. (1923), 31.
- "Huxham's Serenaders." TT: Oct. (1915), 44-45.
- "Old Cremorne Leader in Brisbane Again." 17 July (1939), 2.
- "Serenaders, The." 21 Sept. (1918), 14.
- "Serenaders, The." BC: 23 Nov. (1918), 7.
- "Serenaders, The." 14 Dec. (1918), 3.

LYRIC LYRIC	THEATRE THEATRE
ESPLANADE — ST. KILDA.	
"Wet or Fine, Patrons will Always Find Lyric Theatre Very Cozy."	
Lessors ——— Ben and John Fuller. Lessee ——— CEDRIC JOHNSON.	
TO-NIGHT and EVERY EVENING, at 8.30, TO-NIGHT and EVERY EVENING, at 8.30, BIGGER, BRIGHTER, AND BETTER THAN EVER.	
BIGGER SUCCESSES EACH EVENING. Delighting Capacity Houses Nightly, The Show Its Own Advertisement.	
(By Arrangement with Hugh Huxham), CEDRIC JOHNSON	
Presents the Brightest of All Attractions,	
HUGH HUXHAM'S SERENADERS, HUGH HUXHAM'S SERENADERS,	
UNCEASING HILARITY NIGHTLY. NEW SONGS, DANCES, SKETCHES. BOOK NOW AND AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT.	
BOX-PLANS.—Allan's (city): Van Breda (St. Kilda). 8/, 2/, and 1/ (plus tax). Booking, 3/6 (plus tax).	
NOTE.—Patrons are requested to note that all Saturday night seats must be claimed by 12 o'clock Saturday, otherwise resold. This rule will be strictly adhered to.	
Late Booking ring Theatre, Wind. 4675.	

Argus 16 Oct. (1920), n. pag.



Huxham's Serenaders (1915)

1. **Dan Weldon** (bass) 2. **Nance Maunsell** (contralto) 3. **Hugh Steyne** (comedian) 4. **Hugh Huxham** (tenor, comedian, proprietor, producer) 5. **Adele Kelly** (soubrette and monologist) 6. **Edith Huxham** (soprano and comedian) 7. **Reg Harrison** (comedian) 8. **Ina Milne** (singing soubrette) 9. **Fred Heraud** (baritone)

Theatre Oct. (1915), n. pag.)

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