

MOON AND MORRIS

Regarded as the greatest-ever back-to-back dancers of their era, George Moon and Dan Morris came to Australia in 1918 under contract to the Tait brothers. Over the next decade they were engaged on the Tivoli, J.C. Williamson's and Fullers circuits, and also toured their own troupe – the Moon and Morris Revue Company. When Morris retired in 1929 Moon toured with his son, George Jnr, and played feature roles in Pat Hanna's two *Diggers* films.

Englishmen George Moon and Dan Morris developed a highly popular dance which veteran variety artist Charles Norman records was possibly the only one in the world to perfect the back-to-back in soft shoe (77). After taking their act on the road through Great Britain and the USA the pair came to Australia in 1918 under engagement to the Tait brothers.

1918-1921

Moon and Morris's arrival in Australia in 1918 was timed to coincide with the Tait's Christmas pantomime, *Jack and Jill*. The production, which premiered at the King's Theatre, Melbourne on 21 December, also starred Barry Lupino as Dame Durden and Bert Bailey as Ginger. George Moon was cast as Private Baff and Dan Morris as Private Boff. When the pantomime's national tour was cut short due to the Spanish influenza epidemic, the act was taken on by the Fullers. Their first engagement was in Brisbane in July 1919 as one of the opening acts on a bill headlined by Hugh Huxham's Serenaders. The pair renewed their association with the Tait's later that same year, however, when they were engaged to appear as the "Hubbard boys" in *Mother Hubbard* at the King's Theatre, Melbourne. Of their performance in the revival staged at Sydney's Palace Theatre in early 1920 (the second stop on the production's national tour), the *Sydney Morning Herald* records: "A specialty which caused deserved enthusiasm was the simultaneous dance-duet by George Moon and Dan Morris, exquisitely graceful to flute music of airy charm" (26 Apr. 1920, 5). The *Brisbane Courier* similarly records that their specialty turn 'was one of the most distinctive features of the whole programme (30 June 1920, 8).

At the end of 1919 Moon and Morris were offered a contract with J. C. Williamson's Ltd, which cast them as Bam and Boozle (the king's bodyguards) in its Christmas pantomime extravaganza, *Humpty Dumpty* (Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne). The production later toured most of the other Australian capital cities as well as New Zealand. The *Argus* critic wrote of their "slate" scene in the Melbourne production, "Moon and Morris, well made up as crudely drawn figures, walk off a slate and show their notable accomplishment as simultaneous dancers" (20 Dec. 1922, 8).



Green Room Mar. (1920), 12.

1922-1924

In early 1922, Moon and Morris joined the newly formed Tivoli Frolics. In addition to vaudeville-style turns, the pair also took part in the feature revues. After a season in Melbourne, beginning ca. 4 March, the company undertook a national tour. Among the other feature artists were Eric Masters, Madeline Rossiter (who soon afterwards joined Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers, Hector St Clair, Dorothy Summers, and Vera Benson. During the company's Brisbane season, and the fourth visit by Moon and Morris, the two men 'were again at the fore with irresistible fun-making and clever dancing,' writes the *Brisbane Courier* theatre critic. The same review reports that their sketch "'Interrupted Melody" had the audience in continual roars of laughter, popular melodies being parodied in a manner characteristic of this talented pair' (25 Nov. 1922, 4). Another musical sketch, "Jazz-o-Mania," performed with Madeline Rossiter, Lena Ryan, Alma Gumbley, and the Tivoli Eight, is said to have brought forward a "veritable storm of applause" (BC: 2 Dec. 1922, 5). Among the more notable revues they appeared in were *At the Seaside*, *Hunting Days*, *The Cafe Chantant*, and *Hoch Aye*, along with the 1922/1923 Christmas pantomime *The Babes in the Wood*. In its review of the opening night performance, the *Brisbane Courier* reports that "Messrs. Moon and Morris, as



Green Room June (1919), 12.

Bam and Boozle, the robbers, carried a heavy burden of the humour, but it would have been difficult to find two better fitted for the task... as the incorrigibles, [they] had the building almost rocking with laughter" (23 Dec. 1922, 15).

Although details of their movements over the next few years are somewhat unclear, it is believed that the pair remained with the Frolics company throughout most of 1923 and possibly into 1924. In December of that year, they returned to the Fullers, having accepted a contract to appear in the combined Ward-Fullers'-produced pantomime *Cinderella*, which premiered at Melbourne's Princess Theatre.

1925-1927

Sometime around July 1925, Moon and Morris began an eight-month tour of New Zealand for the Fullers. After returning to Australia in late February or early March 1926, they renewed their act with Sydney audiences, playing a brief season at Fullers' Theatre. Shortly after concluding that engagement, the two dancers took up an offer from Sir Benjamin and John Fuller to put together their own touring company. The Moon and Morris Revue Company debuted at the Bijou Theatre in May and then went on the Fullers' Australian circuit. Much of its repertoire, which was largely a combination of revue sketches and vaudeville, was written by Ed Warrington, who had previously been associated with Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers. However, the company did occasionally stage revivals, with two of the more popular being *My Mountain Maid* and *Dad, Choom and Co.* In addition to Warrington (who also acted as producer), the troupe boasted several well-established and high-profile performers, notably Alec Kellaway, Americans Durham Marcel and Nell Fleming (ex-Bert Le Blanc Travesty Stars), Irene Vando, and Kathleen Howard. Following the Bijou season, the company travelled to Brisbane for a three months engagement. The Brisbane Courier provides a little insight into the shows offered"

The current offering, *Wit and Wisdom* goes with a swing from the first to the final curtain. It is a pot pourri of dancing, music and song, backed up by a clever ballet and colourful stage settings, and through it all Messrs. Moon and Morris have infused a series of skits that bristle with fun. This quaint pair long ago danced their way into the hearts of Brisbane audiences, but there seems no end to the diversity of their dancing, and this week they introduce much that is new (BC: 19 July 1926, 9).

Other known revues from 1926 are: *Make it Snappy*, *Words and Music*, *This and That*, *Heads or Tails*, *Issues*, *Chuckles*, *A Mixed Grill*, *Next Please*, *Some*, and *Salads*. Brisbane was followed by an extended engagement at Fullers Theatre (Syd) beginning late October. This season also saw most of the company appear in the Fullers' *Cinderella* pantomime.

By March 1927 Moon and Morris had left the Fullers to undertake a seven months tour of Northern Queensland for Minna's Enterprises - playing such towns as Townsville, Cairns and Rockhampton. Following the close of the Rockhampton season in late September the troupe disbanded, with Moon and Morris, George Moon Jnr and Nell Fleming taking a contract to appear at the Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane, with Elton Black's New Follies Company. As with the previous year the pair spent the festive season in pantomime, this time in a new and up-to-date version of *Aladdin*.

1928 - 1935

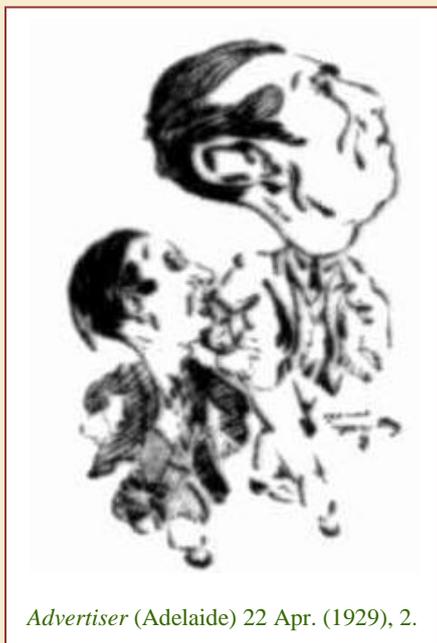
When *Aladdin* finished in late January 1928, Moon and Morris remained with the New Follies until its season ended with the departure of Elton Black. The pair remained at the Cremorne, however, continuing on with the Vic Roberts-produced *Mirthquakers*, which made its debut on 18 February. While an exact date for their departure from Brisbane is yet to be established, this likely to have been sometime around late June or early-to mid July. The engagement also included George Moon Jnr. The partnership has next been associated with a lengthy period of advertising for their appearance in Perth at the Luxor Theatre. Although the engagement was not to start until the end of July, frequent press announcements and advertisements began appearing in Perth newspapers from as early as 2 June. Although initially billed as appearing with Paul Daly's Sunbeams, the company that opened on 29 July was instead billed as Paul Daly's Supremes. Again performing with the pair were Moon's son, George Jnr, and Nell Fleming.

MOON AND MORRIS FOR PERTH

Arrangements have now been completed for Daly's Sunbeams to open at the Luxor about June 29. This combination is just concluding a long season at Brisbane. Paul Daly, who is already in the State is a first-class entertainer and will be associated with Moon and Morris and George. Moon jun. Other Sunbeams are Nellie Laferty (soprano), Linda Foy (soubrette), Gwen Matthews (soubrette), Gladys Ensor (solo danseuse), whilst Syd Burchall will join the company on their arrival in Perth.

Mirror (Perth) 2 June 1928, 2.

On Wednesday 19 September Vic Roberts made his first appearance at the Luxor in partnership with Lilian Grey. Two nights later, and without any previous announcement the Supremes was reorganised as Vic Roberts Smilestones. Moon and Morris continued as the feature act, with George Moon Jnr and Nell Fleming also maintained, up until the close of the season in mid-January 1929. Almost two months later they opened for the Fullers at the Bijou Theatre (Melb) with the Moon and Morris Revue Company. Several of the artists engaged had also been members of the Paul Daly/Vic Roberts Luxor Theatre companies the previous year - notably George Moon Jnr, Nell Fleming, Durham Marcel, Nellie Lafferty and Gwen Matthews. The company played at least one more season - the Majestic Theatre, Adelaide. Moon and Morris's next established engagement after Adelaide was under the management of Union Pictures, presenting a turn between films at Sydney's State Theatre.



Advertiser (Adelaide) 22 Apr. (1929), 2.

Little information regarding Moon and Morris's whereabouts after 1929 has been located to date. Charles Norman records that Dan Morris settled in Sydney, where he bought a business "and was quite happy." Norman also recalls that Morris "delighted in showing their top billing on Broadway, New York... over, Al Jolson!" (77). In correspondence with the AVTA, R. Higgins, who counts Dan Morris as a distant relative, indicates that Morris's retirement was short-lived, however, with the dancer dying prematurely in the Sydney seaside suburb of Bondi in 1933.

George Moon's post-1929 career movements are somewhat difficult to determine due to the emergence of his son, George Moon Junior, on the Australian variety stage during the early 1930s. Because the advertised billing does not always distinguish between the father and son, it is not always clear which one of the two men is being referred to. It is almost certain that the George Moon who formed a partnership with Bert Le Blanc at the Gaiety Theatre in Sydney in 1929, under the direction of ex-Travesty Stars/Moon and Morris troupe member Durham Marcel, was Moon Snr. A review in *Everyone's* records, 'Comedy is the outstanding feature [of the show], with Bert Le Blanc and George Moon running a neck and neck race and each with a sum total of laughs that assures favouritism' (18 Dec.1929, 37). It is unclear, however,

if George Moon or George Moon Jnr appeared in Ernest C. Rolls revue spectacular, *The League of Happiness Revue*, which was staged at the Palace Theatre beginning Boxing Day 1931. The company also included variety veterans Fred Bluett, Gus Bluett, Vernon Sellars, Alf J. Lawrence, Al Mack, Lou Vernon, and Jennie Benson. Moon Jnr is known, however, to have been engaged by J. C. Williamsons' to appear opposite Gus Bluett and Cecil Kellaway in the musical comedy *Follow Through*, staged the previous year at Melbourne's Theatre Royal (8 Feb. 1930).

MOON AND MORRIS PERFORMANCE STYLE

Charles Norman recalls that while both were small men, George Moon was the smaller, and hence his shoulder blades fitted comfortably under his partner's when doing their famous back-to-back dancing: 'It brought a lump to your throat to watch Dan and George in waltz time on a full stage, with only a spotlight following them, and the music down under in tone to help bring out the soft touch of their feet as they glided around that big stage' (77).

A review of one of their performances at the Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane, in 1922 provides some additional insights: 'Messrs. Moon and Morris were probably the most popular performance of the evening, and they were given an even warmer reception than usual. They reeled off dozens of new jokes and "gags" in their own inimitable style and concluded with a characteristic simultaneous dance. There is always something bright and breezy about the work of this duo and they never seem to lack fresh business' (BC: 16 Dec. 1922, 10).

Some six years later the *Brisbane Courier* recorded several descriptions of their appearances during Elton Black's New Follies season at the Cremorne Theatre:

There is a happy blending of the grave and the gay; there is good music, interspersed with ultra-jazz, and there are comedians, with George Moon as the laughter-maker-in-chief, who keep the audience in good humour whenever they step on to the stage. George Moon is one of nature's comedians. His face is his fortune. There is no need for the quaint little man to speak a word; but when he does speak he always has something funny to say. All he has to do is walk on, in a ludicrous garb, work that wonderfully mobile face, or give one of his amusing gestures. In "A Restaurant Episode," he was very funny as the man who bumped into Colonel Testy's wife, and flew for safety to a restaurant hiding under the table at which the dignified Colonel sits and countermanding his orders for drinks. The Colonel calls testily for "canary wine." The voice under the table calls for "beer." Beer is brought. The Colonel is angry. "Bring me canary wine," he roars. "Idiot! I ordered canary wine." Canary wine is brought by the dumb-founded waiter (Elton Black). "Drink it," calls the voice under the table. The waiter drinks.

So it goes on. Little George is also very amusing in a picnic episode "Bang the Tray," when he keeps the picnickers within bounds of propriety. With Dan Morris he makes a tremendous fuss "Regarding Rhubarb," making it plain that all things desired are not to be compared unto it (23 Jan. 1828, 11).

The second half of the programme on Saturday night followed much of the same plan, the climax being achieved by an uproarious reviewing of troops - not on "Digger" lines, but dainty damsels and assorted European soldiers in burlesque uniforms. The reviewing was done by a General and a Colonel (Messrs Moon and Morris) under the regulations not to be found in any books of military instruction.... The outstanding sketch [of the night] was "Silent Jim" played by Messrs Moon and Morris. An excellent piece of acting that might easily have been overdone. These two also gave a demonstration of their famous simultaneous dancing, with their usual trimmings of humour (6 Feb. 1928, 18).

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- [Mirthquakers - Cremorne Theatre, Brisbane]: Among the laughmakers are such clever comedians as George Moon, who seems positively to radiate humour through every pore, and Dan Morris, who provides an excellent counterpart. They seem to be imbued with the essence of drollery, which exudes in every item in the form of enjoyable facetiousness, buffoonery, and whimsicality - all making for the scintillating merriment of the show (BC: 16 Apr. (1928), 24.)

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. A comparison of a photograph of George Moon (published in 1919) with stills from Pat Hanna's two films *Diggers* (1931) and *Diggers in Blighty* (1933) indicates that George Moon Snr played the character Joe Mulga, and not George Moon Jnr (see GR: June 1919, 12). It would appear in this case that a number of sources devoted to cinema, including the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDB), have inadvertently collapsed the film careers of father and son together due both to the similarity in names and because they have been aware of George Moon Senior's career as an internationally renowned vaudeville performer. It is likely, too, that George Moon Snr also appeared in *A Co-Respondent's Course* (1931) and not his son, as the IMDB and other sources currently indicate. Although little is known of that film, it does have the distinction of being the first narrative film to have been released in Australia with sound.
2. Richard Fotheringham indicates in his entry on Hanna's Diggers Company in the *Companion to Theatre in Australia* that George Moon took over the role of Joe Mulga from Joe Valli when Valli decided to develop a new character, Jock McTavish (191).
3. The review and advertising associated with Moon and Morris's first appearance in Brisbane report that they were Americans (BC: 12 July 1919, 2, 12). In later years, they are more correctly described as Englishmen. The *Courier's* error is believed to have stemmed from their arrival in Australia the previous year with an American company that starred principal boy Virginia Roche (ARG: 23 Dec. 1918, 8). It is possible that Moon and Morris had either accepted the Australian contract while in the US or had undertaken a short tour there prior to coming here.
4. George Moon was the father of actor/comedian George Moon Jnr and grandfather of actress Georgina Moon.
5. In his email to the AVTA (21 Nov. 2011), R. Higgins writes:

Dan Morris was born in Liverpool, UK in 1883, the son of a house painter. His real name was Daniel Dougherty and I have established that he died in Bondi, near Sydney in 1933. He was the eldest boy in a family which featured at least two other variety performers who I suspect remained in England

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The Tivoli Frolics

Brisbane Courier 10 Nov. (1922), 2.

TROUPES

- [Moon & Morris Revue Co](#) • Elton Black's New Follies • [Mirthmakers](#)
 • Paul Daly's Supremes • Town Topics (1930)

MOON AND MORRIS ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

Incl. Moon and Morris Revue Company

- 1918:** J. & N. TAIT (King's Th, Melb; 21-31 Dec. > *Jack and Jill*)
- 1919:** J. & N. TAIT (King's Th, Melb; 1-28 Jan. > *Jack and Jill*) • Victorian and South Australian tour; Mar.-Apr.* > *Jack and Jill* • Palace Th, Syd; 17 May - 26 June) ► FULLERS (Empire Th, Bris; 12 July - *) ► J. & N. TAIT (Palace Th, Syd; 20-31 Dec. > *Mother Hubbard*).
- 1920:** J. & N. TAIT (Palace Th, Syd; 1 Jan. - 24 Mar. > *Mother Hubbard*) ► JCW (Her Majesty's, Bris; 29 June - * > *Mother Hubbard*) • (His Majesty's, Melb; 18-31 Dec. > *Humpty Dumpty*)
- 1921:** JCW (Her Majesty's, Melb; 1 Jan- 25 Feb. > *Humpty Dumpty*) • (Her Majesty's Th, Syd; 5 Mar - 15 Apr. > *Humpty Dumpty*) • (His Majesty's, Bris; 18-30 Apr. > *Humpty Dumpty*) • New Zealand Dominion tour; ca. May-June* • (Adelaide; ca. June-July *) • (Perth; ca. July-Aug.*).
- 1922:** TIVOLI FROLICS (Cremorne Th, Bris; 3 Nov - 31 Dec. > incl. *Babes in the Wood*).
- 1923:** TIVOLI FROLICS (Cremorne Th, Bris; 1-19 Jan. > incl. *Babes in the Wood*) • TIVOLI THEATRES (Tivoli Th, Syd; 3-23 Feb.) ► UNITY VARIETY THEATRE (Trades Hall Buildings, Perth; 16 June - * > 1st time in Perth)
- 1924:** FULLERS (Princess Th, Melb; 20-31 Dec. > *Cinderella*)
- 1925:** FULLERS (Princess Th, Melb; 1 Jan - 14 Mar. > *Cinderella*) • (New Zealand Dominion tour; July* - 31 Dec.
- 1926:** FULLERS (New Zealand Dominion tour; 1 Jan. - Mar.*) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; 15 Mar. - *) • (Bijou Th, Melb; 8 May - 25 June > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Empire Th, Bris; 3 July - 15 Oct. > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; 28 Oct. - 17 Dec. > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Fullers Th, Syd; 26-31 Dec. > *Cinderella*)
- 1927:** FULLERS (Fullers' Th, Syd; 1-14 Jan. > *Cinderella*) • (Majestic Th, Newtown; 15 Jan. - * > Moon & Morris Revue Co) ► MINNA'S ENTERPRISES (Minna's Th, Townsville; 31 Mar. - 18 June > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Minna's Th, Cairns; 20 June - * > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Minna's Hippodrome, Rockhampton; 4 July - 29 Sept. > Moon & Morris Revue Co) ► JOHN N. McCALLUM (Cremorne Th, Bris; 5 Nov. - 16 Dec. > Elton Black's New Follies Co) • (Cremorne Th, Bris; 17-31 Dec. > *Aladdin*)
- NB:** Moon and Morris temporarily disbanded their revue company at the end of September in order to undertake a season at the Cremorne Theatre (Bris) with Elton Black's New Follies. They were joined by George Moon Jnr and Nell Fleming.
- 1928:** JOHN N. McCALLUM (Cremorne Th, Bris; 1-20 Jan. > *Aladdin*) • (Cremorne Th, Bris; 21 Jan. - 17 Feb.* > Elton Black's New Follies Co) • (Cremorne Th, Bris; 18 Feb. - ca. May/June* > Vic Roberts' Mirthquakers) ► (Luxor Th, Perth; 29 June - 14 Sept. > Daly's Sunbeams) • (Luxor Th, Perth; 20 Sept. - 15 Dec. > Vic Roberts' Smilestones) • (Luxor Th, Perth; 17-31 Dec. > *Aladdin*)
- 1929:** • (Luxor Th, Perth; 1- 11Jan. - * > incl. *Aladdin*) ► FULLERS (Bijou Th, Melb; 9 Mar. - * > Moon & Morris Revue Co) • (Majestic Th, Adel; 22 Apr. - 14 June > Moon & Morris Revue Co) ► UNION THEATRES (State Th, Syd; ca. 28 Sept - Oct. * > between films entertainment) ► n/e (The Ambassadors, Syd; 12 Oct. > "Special Gala Race Dinner" - George Moon only) ► JAMES JOHNSON - producer, Marcel Durham > (Gaiety Th, Syd; 14-31 Dec.* > George Moon /Town Topics Co)
- NB:** All engagements from 1930 onwards are for George Moon only (unless otherwise noted)
- 1930:** JAMES JOHNSON - producer, Marcel Durham > (Gaiety Th, Syd; ca. Jan-* > /Town Topics Co) ► JCW (Th Royal, Melb; 8 Feb. - * > *Follow Through*)
- 1931:** (Palace Th, Melb; 26-31 Dec. > *League of Happiness* - Moon Snr or Jnr)
- 1932:** (Palace Th, Melb; ca. Jan. > *League of Happiness* - Moon Snr or Jnr)

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Mirror (Perth) 6 Oct. (1928), 6.

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"Cremorne, The." BC: 2 Apr. (1928), 25.

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