

LYRIC THEATRE (St Kilda)

An open-air theatre situated on St Kilda's Upper Esplanade, the Lyric was known in 1912 as the Lyric Summer Picture Gardens. The following year it was converted into a 1,700 seat all-weather venue - presenting both live theatre and moving pictures. By 1924 the Lyric was almost exclusively exhibiting films. It was converted into the Earl's Court dancehall in 1928 and over the next six decades operated as either a dancehall or a nightclub (and under different names). The building was demolished in the late 1980s.



Source: Peter A. D. Fogerty
St Kilda Historical Series No 2: Cinemas

Initially situated next to the former Paradise cinema at the northeast corner of the Upper Esplanade and Alfred Square, the open-air Lyric Summer Picture Gardens was established in time for the 1912-1913 summer season. Although management exhibited a combination of first release pictures and live variety performers (supported by the Lyric Orchestra), the venue did not go over as successfully as hoped and it was soon afterwards taken over by Callen and Stuart. The new owners quickly converted the theatre so that it could be used in winter. The new building allowed for a seating arrangement of 1,400 in the stalls and 300 in the dress circle.

Under its new management the Lyric's 1913-1914 season presented a live show called Butterflies, with a half-hour of pictures being screened prior to the main show. Sometime around mid-1914 Callen and Stuart merged their theatre with the adjacent Paradise, thereby expanding the venture considerably. As Peter A. D. Fogerty notes in his insight into St Kilda cinemas, by the following year management was at pains to stress that the theatre could be completely covered, Fogerty also records that a new floor was also laid that year, with the addition of heating and tip-seats provided, thus making it in effect an indoor theatre. The ability of the sliding sides to be opened in appropriate weather," he writes, served as the only reminder "of its earlier outdoor status." The Lyric continued as a theatre, with either films or live shows (and sometimes both) in association with Cremorne Gardens until the early 1920s.

In 1924 an attempt was made to build a fully enclosed picture theatre on the site with a cafe in front. A company called Esplanade Theatres Ltd was formed, and the directors sought and received interest from Bert Howell (Victory and Australasian Films). It appears, however that a lack of capital saw the venture fall through (Esplanade Theatres was eventually wound up in 1929). Four years after the cinema/cafe proposal was floated the Lyric became a dancing saloon. Peter Fogerty records that "the front was later reconstructed in mock-medieval style by the Eureka Trust Company and the venue operated as the Mayfair Theatre." In 1932 the venue's name was again changed, this time to Earl's Court. Although re-opened primarily as a dance hall, the management nevertheless intermittently showed films. Up until its demolition in the late 1980s the venue was used both as a dance hall and as a nightclub, with the various names changes including Palm Grove, Sergios, The Taxi Club and The Venue (ctd. Fogerty). The building which replaced it (also called Earl's Court) was designed as public housing accommodation for elderly people.

FURTHER REFERENCE

Fogerty, Peter A. D. [*The Screening of St Kilda: A History of St Kilda's Cinemas*](#). St Kilda Historical Society, 2003
[sighted 18/06.2011]

First published: 20/06/2012

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:
Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/theatres-vic/>