

# PERCY DIX

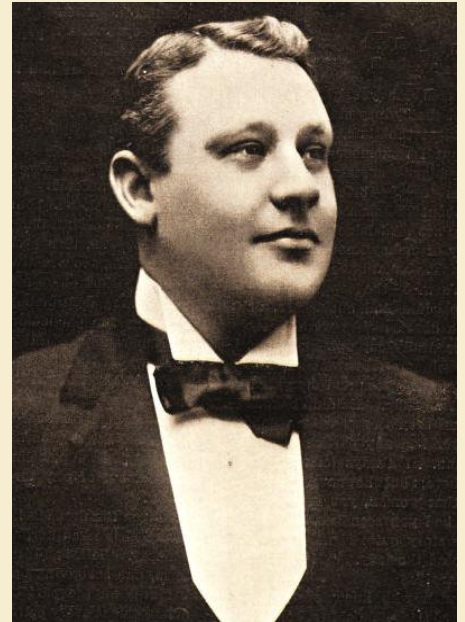
## Incl. Dix's Gaiety Companies

A qualified chemist, Percy Dix became interested in variety entertainment after moving from Australia to New Zealand. He began putting on concerts in Auckland in 1895 and operated his own troupe, billed as Dix's Gaiety Company, in the city from around 1899. Between 1900 and 1905 he operated a circuit comprising Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and later Dunedin, and at one stage formed an alliance with Harry Rickards, leasing some of his artists to play in New Zealand. In 1905 Dix moved back to Australia and went into partnership with Reuben Baker (as Dix-Baker) in the Hunter Valley region of NSW. Their main centre of operations was King's Theatre in Newcastle. Dix died in 1917, leaving his partner to run the business through until the early 1920s.

Born in Launceston sometime around 1867, Percy Reginald Dix became a qualified chemist in Tasmania before moving to Melbourne, where he learnt the tea trade. In 1891, he travelled to New Zealand and set up a business in Auckland. Around 1895, he began to expand his interests into the entertainment industry, initiating Monday Popular Concerts in the city. Four years later, on 1 April 1899, he debuted Dix's Gaiety Company at the Auckland City Hall and soon afterwards began exploring opportunities in other New Zealand centres, including Wellington, and later Christchurch and Dunedin. The *Auckland Star* records in this respect:

Mr P. R. Dix, who has done so well in Auckland and Wellington with his variety shows, is extending operations to Christchurch. He has taken a six months lease of the Opera House in the Cathedral City, and will move in with a company on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Mr Will Jameson, so long "in front" of the Montgomery Company, will manage the Christchurch branch (18 Aug. 1900, 2).

Among the artists engaged by Dix in 1901 were Olive Lenton, Connie Devereux, Frank Clark, Joe Cowan, George Dean, Harry Gray, and Arnold Jarvis - "the Australian Cinquevalli" (OW: 5 June 1901, 57).



*Australasian Stage Annual 1902, 25.*

Although he and the Fullers soon went into direct competition, the market for quality variety entertainment was large enough for both organisations to initially prosper. In this respect, Dix found himself moving into larger venues and putting on ever-larger shows, including annual pantomimes. He also formed an alliance with Harry Rickards to bring over some of the Australian-based entrepreneur's stars.

24 THE AUSTRALASIAN STAGE ANNUAL.

— P. R. DIX —  
SOLE PROPRIETOR AND DIRECTOR

**DIX'S GAIETY COMPANIES**  
(MINSTREL AND VAUDEVILLE).

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P. R. DIX,  
THEATRE ROYAL,  
WELLINGTON.

*Australasian Stage Annual 1902, 24.*

By around 1902, Dix's New Zealand vaudeville empire began to struggle, as competition with the Fullers intensified. His decision to close down his operations in Dunedin was soon followed by the closure of his Christchurch theatre. In 1903, he decided not to renew his lease of the Auckland City Hall. By then, his only theatrical enterprise was the

Theatre Royal, Wellington, where his Gaiety Company still continued to draw large audiences. The sheer weight of competition from the Fullers, however, led to Dix closing down his Wellington show on 4 August 1905. Shortly afterwards, he returned to Australia, where he went into partnership with Reuben Baker at the King's Hall, Newcastle. The pair formed the Dix-Baker vaudeville company and later took over a number of other theatres in the Hunter Valley region, including Newcastle's Victoria and Lyric theatres.

Following Dix's death on 13 March 1917, Reuben Baker continued to run the company until the early 1920s.

### ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- An idea has got abroad that Mr P. R. Dix has purchased the Provincial Hotel and the Princess Theatre [Dunedin]. The only truth about the statement is that Mr Dix is negotiating for the purchase of the hotel and the theatre. There is a purchasing clause in the lease, and at the end of 1901, when the lease expires, Mr Dix will probably close on the property (OW: 5 June 1901, 57).
- Dix's Gaiety Company, in consequence of the drought and the famine, is drawing like the Cement Works Ghost, but, unlike the ghost, there is some reason for the crowd who struggle for admittance to the Dowling street Theatre. The show goes for two hours with a bang, and for that length of time are the people amused. When the show goes over that time and encroaches on the farce pasture (unless it has some particular merit), the people struggle out in twos and threes, well satisfied that they have had their money's worth. There are some people who would sit out a show till the cows came home, and then think they were only getting their due in amusement (OW: 5 June 1901, 57).

Alhambra Gaiety Company Manager Seager has a novel advertisement parading the town. This is no less than a donkey which plays an important part in "Muldoon's Picnic," bearing on its back a small boy and a cover, upon which is printed (on the cover—not the boy) "Dix's Gaiety Company." The donkey is much travelled, and has appeared in the northern towns with great success. It made its first debut in Auckland, and while there made such a "hit" that the call boy was nearly knocked

out. The donkey does not draw his salary on "treasury" the same as any other artist, because he belongs to the Dix show, body and soul, and has not been tried on the instalment system. The public will have an opportunity next week of seeing the Neddy in its inimitable impersonations in "Muldoon's Picnic." In the meantime, while the donkey is wandering around town, I congratulate Manager Fred Seager on his novel "sandwich."

*Otago Witness* 5 June 1901, 57.

### FURTHER REFERENCE

Djubal, Clay. "[Dix, Percy Reginald](#)." *AustLit* (2007).

Downes, Peter. *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand – The First 70 Years* (1975), 148-49.

#### **See also:**

**AV:** 3 Dec. (1913), n. pag. [photo of the Dix-Baker Company at Newcastle Beach]

**ASA:** 3 (1902), 25 [photo]



Courtesy of the Fryer Library  
(Nat Phillips Collection, UQFL9)

## A CHAT WITH MR. P. R. DIX.

### A RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT WITH MR. HARRY RICKARDS.

What may be described as the federation of the Australian and New Zealand music hall stage was accomplished on Monday morning, when Mr Harry Rickards and Mr. P. R. Dix, accompanied by his general



Mr. P. R. DIX.

manager, Mr. Fred. Duval, met at the Tivoli Theatre and signed a reciprocity agreement. By the arrangement entered into between the two enterprising entrepreneurs, all foreign artists who visit Australia will, on the conclusion of their engagement with Mr. Rickards, go to New Zealand and tour over the circuit of Mr. Dix.

It is now only a little over two years since Mr. Dix launched into the variety world, and the fact that he is in such a strong position financially as to be able to provide his patrons with all the biggest salaried people whom Mr. Rickards will import, is, in itself, a flattering testimony to his business capacity and enterprise. In addition to conducting the City Hall, Auckland (his headquarters); the Theatre Royal, Wellington; the Opera House, Christchurch; and the Alhambra Theatre, Dunedin, Mr. Dix, just prior to his departure, purchased the Princess Theatre and the Provincial Hotel adjoining, at Dunedin, the price being considerably over £20,000. This theatre is the principal one in the Land of the Moa, and is let to leading touring companies. Since December last he has also spent over £2000 for decorations and alterations to his different houses.

"You must have your hands pretty full, Mr. Dix?" said the "Referee" theatrical representative, in the course of an extremely pleasant chat at the Metropole.

"There is, of course, a good deal to do," was the reply; "but as I have a splendid staff of managers, headed by Mr. Duval, and believe in system, the work and worry is lessened very considerably. Some idea of the systematic way we work may be gathered from the fact that during a six months' engagement the Haytors will lose only two nights, while Dainty Irene Franklin, during four months, will lose but one performance. When I left there were 316 people on the salary list, and as most of them are married, it may be said, roughly speaking, that 1000 people are dependent on the circuit."

"Could you give an idea as to the whereabouts of some of your principal people for the present week?"

The Haytors, Mr. Frank Yorke, Little Alma Gray, and Miss Emmie Owen are at Auckland; Dainty Irene Franklin, Pope and Sayles, the Les Thieres, Martyn Hagan and Lucy Fraser, and Miss Maud Hewson, at Wellington; Johnston, Riano and Bentley, Mr. Wallace King, and the Galardi Sisters, at Christchurch; Prof. Almond, Miss Daisy Harcourt, Mr. Frank Clark, and Mr. Harry Gray, at Dunedin."

"Now about some of the people you have already fixed with to visit New Zealand?"

"Now about some of the people you have already fixed with to visit New Zealand?"

"First and foremost are the Dantos (who are, when fares are taken into account, a £100 a week act), the Latonas (to return in 1903), Mr. Austin Rudd, the De Wynne Brothers, Mme. Celina Bobe, Little Eric, Mr. Harry Shine and Miss Violet Elliott, Mr. Rodda Perry (the male alto, who was with Mr. Philip Newbury), Zobedie, Mr. Jas. Watts, Miss Maud Fanning, Miss Pearl Lovell, Miss Jennie Ople, Mr. Chas. Fanning (after he finishes with Mr. Fuller), Mr. Frank Leon, Miss Lizzie Kirk, and many other favorites. I have arranged to see trials of any other first-class turns which may be available at the Queen's Hall, Pitt-street, this morning, at 11 o'clock."

Mr. Fred. Duval will leave on his return to New Zealand on Saturday, and Mr. Dix will bid us adieu this day week.

Referee 17 July (1901), 10.