

ARNOLD JARVIS

Juggler, equilibrist, lighting sketch artist. Although best known today as a leading 20th century Australian landscape painter, Arnold Jarvis actually started out as variety performer, having taught himself acrobatics while growing up in Adelaide in the late 1890s. During his brief career on the stage Jarvis was routinely billed as "the Australian Cinquevalli," performing an act which was acclaimed more for his talent than his originality.

The son of Henry Jarvis, an early horse-tram driver from Erindale in Adelaide (one of the suburb's streets is named after him), Arnold Henry Jarvis was born in 1883. He began to establish a reputation as an equilibrist in the late 1890s and by 1899 he was performing his act at locally. In 1900 was offered an engagement by Jones and Lawrence to perform it in Perth, and travelled there in late September, aged only 17 or 18. In response to his debut at the Cremorne Theatre, a *West Australian* critic wrote: "the ease with which he performed the most difficult feats excited special attention and secured [him]... rounds of applause" (1 Oct. 1900, 7).



South Australian Register 23 Sept. (1899), 8.

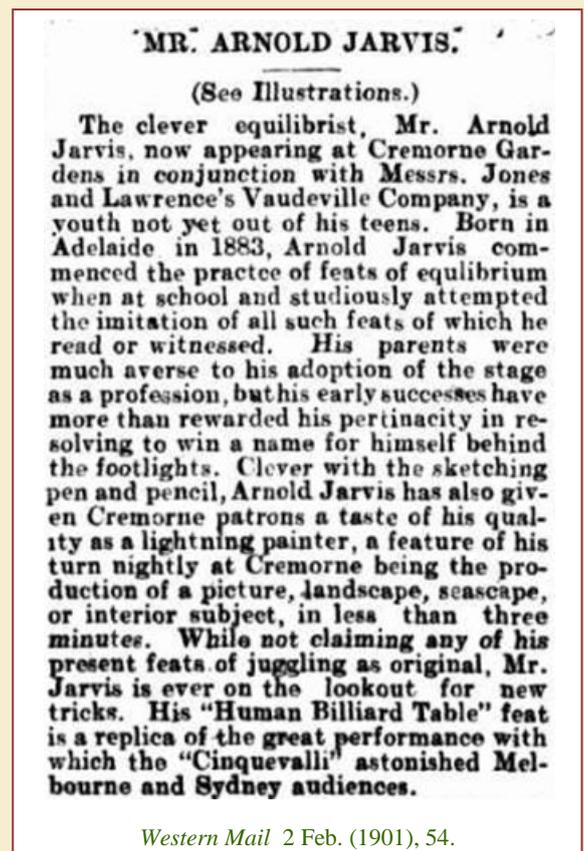
In addition to his juggling skills Jarvis was an adept lighting sketch painter – reportedly being able to paint landscapes, seascapes and interior scenes in less than three minutes. While not viewed as an original creator of juggling acts, he was nevertheless regarded as a highly talented performer. One of his early turns was the replication of Cinquevalli's "Human Billiard Table."

It is presently unclear how long Jarvis continued his career in variety. No reviews and advertising bearing his name have been located after 1901. He later became recognised as one of Australia's leading watercolour landscape artists in the style of Hans Heyson, however. Jarvis died in Melbourne in 1959. Today his paintings can fetch between a few hundred dollars to upwards of \$4,000.

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- Cremorne Theatre, Perth: In the olio Mr Arnold Jarvis, an equilibrist, described as "the Australian Cinquevalli," made his debut before a Perth audience. Youthful in appearance, Mr Jarvis performed attired in regulation costume, and displayed remarkable dexterity in juggling balls, plates, dishes, and innumerable small articles. The ease with which he performed the most difficult feats excited special attention, and secured the artiste, whose act is a decided acquisition to the company. rounds of applause (WA: 1 Oct. 1900, 7).
- Lovers of art are given an opportunity to view some water colour paintings by Arnold Jarvis, which are on exhibition at Richardson's Art Gallery, 121 Liverpool Street, Hobart.

London cables have just reported that Arnold Jarvis's pictures are being shown on Old Bond Street, London, and attracting considerable attention. Jarvis's works are becoming more valuable every day, and admirers of his art should take advantage of the moderate prices quoted at Richardson's (HM: 19 June 1928, 12).



"MR. ARNOLD JARVIS."
(See Illustrations.)
The clever equilibrist, Mr. Arnold Jarvis, now appearing at Cremorne Gardens in conjunction with Messrs. Jones and Lawrence's Vaudeville Company, is a youth not yet out of his teens. Born in Adelaide in 1883, Arnold Jarvis commenced the practice of feats of equilibrium when at school and studiously attempted the imitation of all such feats of which he read or witnessed. His parents were much averse to his adoption of the stage as a profession, but his early successes have more than rewarded his pertinacity in resolving to win a name for himself behind the footlights. Clever with the sketching pen and pencil, Arnold Jarvis has also given Cremorne patrons a taste of his quality as a lightning painter, a feature of his turn nightly at Cremorne being the production of a picture, landscape, seascape, or interior subject, in less than three minutes. While not claiming any of his present feats of juggling as original, Mr. Jarvis is ever on the lookout for new tricks. His "Human Billiard Table" feat is a replica of the great performance with which the "Cinquevalli" astonished Melbourne and Sydney audiences.

Western Mail 2 Feb. (1901), 54.

GUM TREE PAINTING.

Mr. Arnold Jarvis's Work.

Three pictures of Australian landscape, done in watercolours by Arnold Jarvis, a South Australian, are on view at the Book-lovers' Library, Central Hay-street. Mr. Jarvis is plainly a close follower in the wake of Hans Heyesen, the supremely gifted interpreter of Australian hills, valleys and gum trees. The difference is that Mr. Jarvis has restricted himself to a study of the technique of gum-tree painting. The pictures, "Evening Glow," "The Vista," and "Morning Haze," are all similar in subject; a few trees fill the foreground and the artist patently relies on his treatment of the tree trunks to capture the interest of the spectator. The trunk of a grown blue gum or salmon gum is a strange and beautiful patchwork of colours; in painting the trees Mr. Arnold is clever and finished and true.

Hardly the same can be said for the general colour scheme in the first two pictures named. In these there is a range of red-golden tints which impresses one as being rather false and artificial to Australian landscape. "Morning Haze" is a bigger piece of work and done with a truer Australian feeling. One would like to see more of Mr. Jarvis's work in Perth.

West Australian 25 Apr. (1928), 12.



Beach Scene



A Track Through the Gums

FURTHER REFERENCE

- Campbell, Jean. *Australian Watercolour Painters: 1780 to the Present Day*. Sydney: Craftsman House (1989), 328.
McCulloch, Alan McCulloch, Susan McCulloch, Emily McCulloch-Childs. *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*. 4th Edition, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press (2006), 551.
Molyneux, Robert G. *The Arnold Jarvis Story*. Geelong, Vic.: R.G. Molyneux, ca. 1988.



Red Gums, Woodside



Morning in the Bush

Paintings sourced from Theodore Bruce Auctions.

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