

## GEORGE A. JONES

(1859-1917) George Jones started out in the early 1880s as a minstrel comic, singer and dancer. After working for managers like F.M. Clark, the Cogill Bros, Dan Tracey and Percy St John, he went into management in Perth with George R. Lawrence (1896-1902) and with later with Leonard Davis. The Jones and Lawrence partnership was particularly significant in that the two entrepreneurs were the first to introduce moving pictures to Perth (1896-97), while also being the first firm to lease and operate the city's newly-built Theatre Royal (1897). Jones was still performing and working as a manager on the East Coast in the early to mid- 1910s.

George Arthur Jones has first been identified with Melbourne's People's Concerts in 1883, where he presented comic love songs, dancing and Ethiopian impersonations. During the remainder of the 1880s he was associated with F.M. Clark's Red Stockings (1885), and the Cogill Bros (ca. 1886-88), and for whom he also acted as a stage manager.

The early 1890s saw Jones secure engagements with Clark's New Folly Co (1891), Dan Tracey (1892, also as stage manager), and the World Star Gaiety Co (1893), a troupe which featured such luminaries as W. Horace Bent, Priscilla Verne, W.B. Warner and Ettie Williams. He also performed with the Up to Date Minstrel and Specialty Company, along with Slade Murray that same year. After an engagement in Brisbane with Percy St John's Empire Minstrels, followed by a pantomime tour of regional Queensland with the same company (the feature production was *Sinbad*), Jones returned to the Queensland capital where he co-founded a company with Frank York.

York and Jones's Empire Minstrels made its debut at the Gaiety Theatre on 9 November 1894, continuing through until January the following year, at which time they took the show on the road through regional Queensland regional. This was followed by a six weeks return season at the same theatre. During its time together the troupe included a number of seasoned artists, notably Tom Edwards, Gus Franks, Jake Friedman, Will Wallace, Charles and Will Bovis and Steve Adson. Mid-way through the return Brisbane season York and Jones effectively put together a new troupe, which the *Brisbane Courier* suggested was a sign of their "determination to maintain the freshness and liveliness of their variety entertainment" (15 Apr. 1895, 3). The final weeks of the season indeed saw the troupe enhanced by the arrival of the Perman Trio, J. C. Bain and baritone, Mr J. Bottger. Another high profile practitioner to be associated with the troupe was Lance Lenton, who doubled as business manager at one stage.

**G A I E T Y — T H E A T R E.**

Lessees and Managers.. Messrs. YORK AND JONES.  
**THE EMPIRE MINSTREL COMPANY.**  
**THIS (FRIDAY) EVENING, 9TH NOVEMBER.**  
Grand Opening Programme,  
**CREMORNE BY NIGHT.**

Tambos: Interlocutor: Bones:  
**Frank York. Mr. Harry Gilbert. Geo. A. Jones.**  
**J. Clunes.**

Quasimodo the Jester: W. Robinson.  
A Novel and Unique First Part Setting, excel-  
ling anything in this particular department  
hitherto attempted in Brisbane.

INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES.

Then will be ushered upon the stage a Cycle  
of Clever Specialties, namely:—  
**MISS PHEBE VERNON,**  
In her Fire Skipping-rope Dance.  
**MR. HARRY GILBERT**  
Will introduce his Pathetic Coster Impersonation.  
**ANNIE. | THE GRAY SISTERS. | AGGIE.**  
"The Time to Spoon."  
**MISS ETTIE WILLIAMS,**  
The Bewitching Serio-comic.  
**FRANK YORK AND Miss ANNETTA BODIN**  
Will purvey a Choice Selection of Knick-knacks.  
First Appearance of the Renowned English  
Comedian **HARRY STEELE,**  
Who has glided into World-wide Fame as  
**THE SKATING MASHER.**  
**WALLY | SMITH AND CLUNES | JAS.**  
Will contribute a Selected Moreau, entitled  
"Love's Endeavour."

*Brisbane Courier* 9 Nov. (1894), 2.

On 20 May 1895, York and Jones's Empire Minstrels opened at the Opera House, Sydney, with many of the artists from the Brisbane season still engaged. Within a few weeks the theatre was renamed the Empire Theatre, and according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* the management transformed the theatre's stage, improving upon "any setting that had been arranged there for a long times past." Noting that the new company had made rapid strides in terms of securing the support of audiences, the same review further indicates that York and Jones had made additional changes since then to provide an even superior setting (17 June 1895, 6). Notable new members over the next few months included Martyn Hagen and Lucy Fraser (ca. June), Delohery Craydon and Holland (ca. July) and W. H. Speed (ca. July). Neither Frank York nor George Jones were content to remain behind the scenes with their company, however, and were regularly accorded good reviews for their appearances. The Empire Minstrels continued to be run by York and Jones until around mid-September, when W. H. Speed and Thomas Delohery assumed control, continuing to use the name Empire Minstrels.

In late 1895 Jones and his wife, known professionally as Ettie Williams, travelled to Perth for a 12 weeks engagement with promoter Ralph Potts. After making their debut with Perth's first Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre (YOEF), they took Williams's Happy Hours Company around the state, with the tour lasting around seven or eight months (ca. Mar-Oct.). In addition to performing Jones also acted as the company's business manager. In late 1896 he and George R. Lawrence revived Perth's second YOEF in Hay Street, Perth. The two entrepreneurs reportedly knew each other from some time back when they were engaged to appear in the same variety troupe. This initial venture is historically significant in terms of Western Australian history in that Jones and Lawrence introduced for the first time to Perth

audiences the new entertainment technology known as the cinematograph. In her 1994 article "Innovation and Standardisation," Ina Bertrand writes about Jones and Lawrence's role as film exhibition pioneers:

**YE OLDE ENGLISHE FAYRE.**  
Directors.....Messrs. Jones and Lawrence.  
**LAST NIGHT OF THIS MONSTER PROGRAMME.**  
Success Greater than Ever.  
**LOOK, READ AND WONDER.**  
**SATURDAY NEXT**  
Edison's Latest and Greatest.  
The  
**THE CINEMATOGRAPHE**  
**THE CINEMATOGRAPHE,**  
Specially brought from Sydney for  
**YE OLDE ENGLISHE FAYRE,**  
Notwithstanding Enormous Expense.  
**NO ADVANCE IN THE PRICE**  
**1/- GENERAL ADMISSION 1**  
No Extra Charge for the  
**CINEMATOGRAPHE.**  
Also First Time of Ed. Stowe's  
**CHINESE LAUNDRY.**  
**NEW PROGRAMME.**

*West Australian 20 Nov. (1896), 1.*

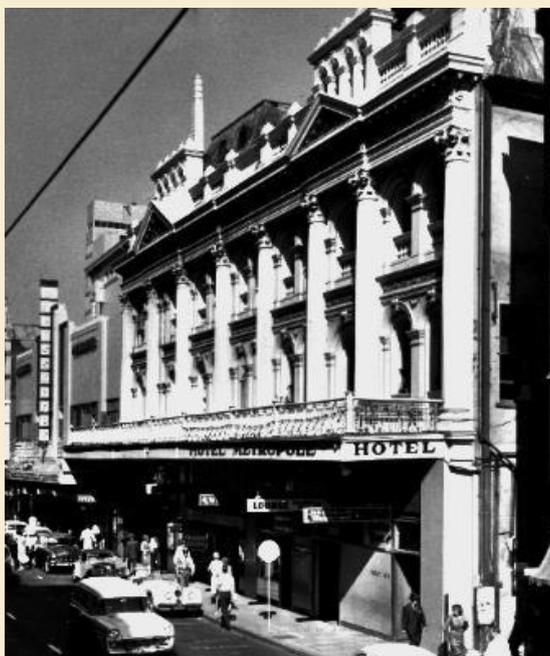
Over the summer season of 1896-97, entrepreneurs Jones and Lawrence leased the pleasure grounds on the corner of Hay and King Streets, known as Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre, This was an attractively laid out grassed area of refreshment stalls and stages, where patrons could wander around or settle to watch the vaudeville performances. Here Edisons' Cinematographe - "especially brought from Sydney... notwithstanding enormous expense" - opened for a season of more than three weeks, from 21 November to 15 December 1896. Advertisements for the season are full of superlatives.<sup>1</sup>

Jone's and Lawrence's return seasons at the Fayre included the first Australian-made films to be shown in the West - those of Melbourne Cup Week, 1896:

Our audience last night were spellbound when they saw NEWHAVEN WIN THE MELBOURNE CUP. THE ARRIVAL OF LORD AND LADY BRASSEY at FLEMINGTON was CHEERED to the ECHO. The weighing in of Newhaven created a furore. The Judges, Starter, Stewards and other familiar faces were Instantly Recognised and greeted with Immense Applause.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this success, with the closing of the Fayre at the end of the summer season, film screenings ceased in Perth till the next summer. When the Fayre re-opened in November 1897 it no longer featured the cinematograph... exhibitions of short films as part of a vaudeville programme continued to be typical, but there were also exceptions. For instance, two full hours of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons prize fight were screened by Jones and Lawrence at the Theatre Royal in Hay Street from 26 December to 2 January 1898 (81-83).

Jones' and Lawrence actually ran their first season at the Fayre well beyond summer, closing it down at Easter, so they could take on the first lease of the newly built Theatre Royal. The venue was opened on 19 April. Jones and Lawrence didn't confine themselves only to the Royal, however. In November that same year they reopened the YOEF, operating it up until late February.



**Theatre Royal and Hotel Metropole, Perth (1950s)**

Photography by Arthur Styles.

Source: *WA Cinemaweb* (Australian Museum of Motion Picture and Television Inc)

<sup>1</sup> There is some confusion over which machine Jones and Lawrence used to project their films at Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre. See "Historical Notes and Corrections" (below) for further details.

<sup>2</sup> *West Australian* 2 Feb. (1897), n. pag.

## CREMORNE THEATRE

TO-NIGHT. TO-NIGHT.  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 9.

### A GRAND COMPLIMENTARY BENEFIT

Will be Tendered to  
GEORGE A. JONES,

The popular Theatrical Manager, who has  
catered Amusement for the West Australia  
Public for the past seven years.

### SPECIAL PROGRAMME,

In which the following Ladies and Gentle  
men have kindly consented to assist:—

Miss TRACY HAMILTON.

The Gifted Young Tragedienne.

Mr. BERT LEIGHTON,

Late of the Hawtreys Comedy Company.

Mr. DAVE SHARPE.

Mr. RICHARD FELLOWS.

PIPE-MAJOR BALLOCH.

Mr. WAL. LAUNDER.

The RAFFETYS.

Mr. JACK PERRYMAN.

Mr. HARRY SHINE.

Mr. STAN. CARIS.

Mr. JACK HODGE.

And a host of others.

Also, the

FULL STRENGTH of the CREMORNE  
DRAMATIC COMPANY.

In Scenes from the Great Military Drama,  
"CURRENT CASH."

*West Australian* 9 July (1902), 1.

It would appear that Jones and Lawrence over-extended their Perth operations, as both men applied for bankruptcy in March 1898. Jones is thought to have returned to performing for a period of time, being recorded as appearing on a bill with Martyn Hagan and W. H. (Billy) Speed's XLCR Burlesque and Specialty Company during the year. Interestingly, although declared insolvent, Jones and Lawrence nevertheless still managed to take over control of the Cremorne Gardens in December 1899, opening their account there with a production of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Over the next three years the two managers continued to run the Cremorne while also operating occasional "rational concerts" on the site of the Perth YOEF.

After the partnership dissolved in 1902, Jones briefly ran the Cremorne on his own, his association with the venue concluding shortly after he was given a complimentary benefit in July 1902. Around 1905 he was associated with Leonard Davis at the Palace Gardens, appeared with the Mid Lewis Company and presented his own Sunday Concerts at His Majesty's. While little of Jones' career after 1905 has yet been established, he and Williams are believed to have left the West sometime between that year and 1908, with Jones recorded as appearing in Brisbane with Ted Holland on several occasions between 1908 and 1911. He also made a return appearance, with Williams, at the People's Concerts, Melbourne, in 1911. By 1915 Jones was residing more or less permanently in the Victorian capital, and by 1915 was Secretary of the Variety Artists Federation. Jones died in Melbourne in late January 1917, survived by his wife.

### SEE ALSO

- [Frank York](#) • [George R. Lawrence](#)
- [Jones and Lawrence](#) • [Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre](#)
- [Cremorne Gardens](#) (Perth)

### SUNDAY CONCERT.

Mr. Geo. A. Jones will give the third  
of his series of Sunday Concerts at His  
Majesty's Theatre, to-morrow (Sunday)  
evening, commencing at 8.30. New ar-  
tists are announced, and an excellent  
programme of vocal and instrumental  
items is promised.

*West Australian* 4 Nov. (1905), 14.

### ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

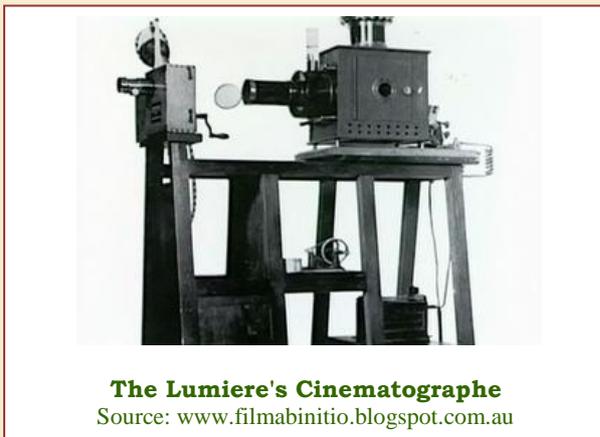
- The death took place in Melbourne recently of George A. Jones, an old and well-known vaudeville performer, who appeared in the Temperance-hall here some years back when Mr J. C. Bain had that house of amusement. The deceased at one time was a member of the firm of Jones and Lawrence, the pioneer theatrical entrepreneurs of West Australia. George Jones was extremely popular in his profession, and was a good performer. He is survived by his wife, who is known professionally as Miss Ettie Williams (HM: 13 Feb. 1917, 7).
- Old-time Perth amusement lovers will regret to hear of the death in Melbourne recently of George Arthur Jones, formerly of the firm of Jones and Lawrence, the pioneer theatrical entrepreneurs of West Australia. In the gold boom days Messrs Jones and Lawrence secured the best talent available, and many celebrated English, Continental and Australian artists appeared under their management. They leased and opened the Theatre Royal, and for some years conducted the well-known Cremorne Gardens in this city, also other places of amusement in other parts of the state. The firm were the first to introduce the now popular cinematograph to Perth audiences. This was at Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre, where now stands His Majesty's Theatre and Hotel. George Jones was a good comedian and belonged to the school that produced Horace Bent, Will Whitburn and others of whom he was contemporary. He was extremely popular in his profession. He is survived by his wife, who is known professionally as Miss Ettie Williams ("Peeps at People." STP: 4 Feb. 1917, 24).

### HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. In 1915 Jones received some press coverage after he was assaulted by vaudevillian, John Ridsen while running the entertainment at the Richmond Town Hall, Melbourne, in mid-August. The incident occurred when Jones went to inform Ada Delroy that it was her turn on stage. He entered the room Delroy was supposed to be in but instead found Ridsen and fellow performer Eileen Power in the middle of an argument. Ridsen ordered him out and

according to Jones punched him in the face before slamming the door. In court Ridsen denied he'd punched the manager, claiming he only slammed the door in self defence and because he didn't want Jones intruding. Ridsen was found guilty of assault and fined £2. [For further details see the "Face and Furious" link below - "Further Reference"]

- Ina Bertrand notes that there is some confusion over the type of projector used by Jones and Lawrence at Perth's Ye Olde Englyshe Fayre. She points to Chris Long's *Cinema Papers* article (No 92) in which he claims that it was a Vitascope, the name used by Thomas Edison for his machines. Bertrand notes on the other hand that the advertisements published at the time "continually call it Edison's cinematographe "(81). The confusion arises from the fact that the latter camera/projector was aligned with the Lumiere brothers. The *West Australian* article [right] indicates, however, that the machine used by Jones and Lawrence was a Lumiere cinematographe - the same machine Bertrand notes was also used by King Hedley for his season of vaudeville at the Cremorne Gardens beginning 10 December 1896.



**YE OLDE ENGLISH FAYRE.**

There could scarcely be any better indication of the possibilities to be achieved by the Lumiere cinematographe than the presentation of a series of pictures at the Olde Englyshe Fayre last evening, by which a very fair idea was conveyed to a large crowd of the magnificent spectacle at Moscow on the occasion of the coronation of the present Czar. The march of troops, the excitement of a surging mass of people, and the beautiful decorations for the event were all shown with life-like realism. Then followed an exceedingly pretty view of Venice, a scene from a Russian theatre, and a number of pictures which attracted the artistic eye and excited the mirthful vein. The eccentricities of Mr. Clarence Lyndon, the amusing and clever dancing of Mr. James Mooney, and the comic singing of Mr. Bob Bell were all factors in the success of the entertainment, whilst Miss Millie Herbert, Miss Madge Stagpoole, and the Anderson Sisters were also pleasing contributors. This evening an entire change will be made in the programme, a special feature of which will be the first appearance of Mr. Daniel Cusack, an Irish comedian. A new list of pictures will be presented by the cinematographe, which will also be exhibited on Sunday evening next. Messrs. Jones and Lawrence announce the engagements of the Bauvards, the Lucifers and Miss Daisy Chard, who will appear in succession.

*West Australian* 13 Feb. (1897), 5.

- George A. Jones should not be confused with George H. Jones, another variety performer from the same era.

### FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Farce and Furious: Vaudeville Artist Fined."** RA: 17 Aug. (1915), 4.  
**"Peeps at People."** STP: 4 Feb. (1917), 24.  
**"Innovation and Standardisation: Moving Pictures in Perth from the First Film Screenings to the first Purpose-built Cinemas."** *Studies in Western Australian History*. 15 (1994), 81-91.  
**"Tribulations of Theatrical Managers: Jones and Lawrence on Examination, The"** WA: 22 Mar. (1898), 3.  
**"Tribulations of Theatrical Managers: Jones and Lawrence on Examination, The"** WM: 25 Mar. (1898), 41.

#### See also:

- HM:** 13 Feb. (1917), 7.  
**WA:** 7 Nov. (1896), 1 • 3 Feb. (1917), 6 [obituary]

**JONES.**—On January 15. at St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, George Arthur Jones (late of Jones and Lawrence, Perth), aged 58 years.  
 The play is done; the curtain drops,  
 Slow falling to the prompter's bell,  
 A moment yet the actor stops,  
 And looks around to say farewell.  
 —Inserted by his friend and former partner,  
**George R. Lawrence.**

*Western Mail* (Perth) 9 Feb. (1917), 30.