

BERT LE BLANC

One of the pioneers of the revusical genre which dominated the Australian variety stage between 1915 and the late 1920s, Bert Le Blanc, along with his on-stage partner Jake Mack (as Ike and Morris) rivalled Nat Phillips and Roy Rene (Stiffy and Mo) as the most popular comedy partnership of the World War I era. Mostly associated with the Fullers circuit, Le Blanc endeared himself to audiences with a larrikin-style persona despite portraying a heavily-accented Hebrew character (similar to Rene's "Mo"). This popularity with the Australian public no doubt played a large part in his decision to remain in the country for the rest of his life. Although now largely forgotten his influence and impact on both the local variety industry and the popular culture generation of war and immediate post-war era was as significant as Phillips and Rene, and indeed Le Blanc was readily accepted by his peers as belonging in the same class as other iconic Australia comedians such as George Wallace and Jim Gerald.

1889-1912

Born in Downieville, Sierra County, California, in 1884 and raised in San Francisco, Bertram Leon Cohen, best known as Bert Le Blanc, began his show business career in America at an early age. After starting out in Bothwell Browne's Juvenile Opera Company sometime around 1905, he made rapid advancement and at one stage travelled to England with a vaudeville act called "Cleopatra." On returning to America Le Blanc joined several New York-based theatrical companies, appearing at one stage in Jessie L. Lasky's production of *Birdland*. He later undertook a minor role in the original American production of the musical comedy *The Girl in the Taxi* (1910). By the beginning of the second decade Le Blanc had also begun to establish himself as a Hebrew comic on the American minstrel circuit, and claims to have worked with Al Jolson in San Francisco in 1906 (SMH: 28 Oct. 1950, 2). Described in the *Brisbane Courier* as an "expert baseball player" who was at one time a member of the Camden (New Jersey) baseball team (6 Sept. 1913, 12), Le Blanc had also been married and divorced prior to arriving in Australia.¹ In a *Theatre* interview he recalls that the marriage break-up had been given a good deal of publicity in San Francisco while he was appearing there for a season of musical comedy and burlesque under the management of W. R. Hughes. At one stage during *The Grafters* (a burlesque later staged in Australia), Le Blanc's character is asked if he is a married man, to which he replies: "Well I used to be; but my wife and I don't live in harmony. Le Blanc recalls that while the line ordinarily gets a laugh, when given in 'Frisco at the time I speak of, it brought the biggest shriek I was ever responsible for" (July 1913, 20).



Theatre June (1913), 1.

In late 1912, having spent most of the previous three under contract to Hughes, Le Blanc was offered one of the principal performing roles in a company that the entrepreneur planned to send on tour overseas. Operating as the Oriental Amusement Company of America Pty Ltd, but billed as the American Burlesque Company, the sixty-odd member troupe departed San Francisco on 23 November 1912 for a tour of the Pacific circuit, which included China, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand.

1913-1915

The American Burlesque Company arrived in Australia in March 1913. Among the other leading members of the troupe were several performers who remained more or less permanently in the country thereafter - these being Le Blanc, Paul Stanhope, Carlton Chase and Harry Burgess. The Australian tour opened in Melbourne on 15 March, and was accorded such an enthusiastic reception that the company was subsequently taken over by William Anderson for the remainder of its stay in the country. Under Anderson's management the company played an equally successful season in Sydney beginning 14 June, and later undertook engagements in Newcastle and Brisbane, followed by a hurried tour of New Zealand. The company then returned to Australia to play Melbourne and Sydney again. Although some critics found the repertoire too American in its flavour and decidedly low in its content, most regarded the musical aspects as being the strength of the company. Among the comedians Harry Burgess, Dave Nowlin, Frank Vack and Eugenie La Blanc (no relation) were routinely singled out, but none received the amount of attention that Bert Le Blanc was accorded. As one of the troupe's principals Le Blanc very quickly established a considerable reputation with local audiences. *Australian Variety* reports, for example: "There is no mistaking the fact that Bert Le

¹ See NSW Marriage Certificate (Bertram Leon Cohen and Winifrid Walls) 1916 / 005096.

Blanc is an exceptionally fine Hebrew comedian. His work in the present production of *A Day at the Races* is particularly funny, thanks to the doleful yet expressive manner in which he utilises his face. For all-round success, Le Blanc has put up the best performance of any Jewish comedian we have yet seen" (24 Dec. 1913, 1).



"The Speculators"
American Burlesque Company
 Frank Vack (L) and Bert Le Blanc (R)
Theatre Aug. (1913), 17.

When the American Burlesque Company folded in early 1914 Le Blanc decided to remain in the country in order to capitalise on the success he had established throughout the previous twelve months. During his first year in Australia, which saw him perform in Sydney and Melbourne for the Fullers while also being leased out temporarily to other managements like Dix-Baker in Newcastle (ca.1914), Le Blanc largely performed solo comedy routines. Although popularly received by audiences, the act was criticised in some quarters. While one reviewer suggested that his projection still needed work, the consensus among critics was that he was an amusing comedian who 'would score better in vaudeville if he had a feeder' (AV: 18 Nov. 1914, p3). The partnership he needed came about through his engagement as Weary Willy in George Willoughby's 1914 pantomime *Babes in the Wood* (Adelphi Theatre, Sydney). The production, which starred Daisy Jerome as Maid Marion, saw Le Blanc cast alongside American comedian Jake Mack (born Jacob Snoek, 1889) who played the role of Tired Tim. Mack, who was also a specialist Hebrew comedian, had only recently arrived in the country on a contract with the Fullers. The Le Blanc/Mack partnership in the pantomime was so successful that the pair went on to spend the best part of the next ten years working off each other in revivals and vaudeville. Following its Sydney season, which ended in early February 1915, *Babes in the Wood* went on tour through Queensland (including Brisbane) and to other interstate centres around Australia.

Its Melbourne season was staged, however, by two other theatrical organisations. George Marlow produced the pantomime at the Kings Theatre in late August/early September with much of the original cast still intact, before the production was taken up by briefly the Fullers at their Bijou Theatre.

In an interview with *Australian Variety* in 1916 Le Blanc recalls the highs and lows of his first few years in the country:

After the [American Burlesque Company's] closing season I immediately went under the management of Ben J. Fuller, who put me in vaudeville, and later in [the] *Babes in the Woods* pantomime where I must candidly say I had the worst part I have ever had handed me in my theatrical career. At the close of the panto I was placed to produce the show now bearing my name, and which has been a record breaker everywhere. Within the past six months I have produced five shows and have thirty more on my list to turn out (5 Jan. 1916, 17).



Paul Stanhope (L) and Bert Le Blanc (R)
Australian Variety 7 Jan. (1914), n. pag.

The company he speaks of was Bert Le Blanc's Musical Travesty Company (later known as Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Stars). Put together in mid-1915 with backing from the Fullers, the troupe began breaking box office records for the organisation in every city they played. Much of the company's success can be put down to the partnership between Le Blanc and Mack who together created Ike Cohen and Morris Levi, two Hebrew characters who nevertheless encapsulated the larrikin traits favoured by the contemporary Australians popular culture which packed the theatres wherever they played.

The Compliments of the Season to All!

FROM

Bert Le Blanc

Producer and Comedian.

BERT LE BLANC'S

Musical Travesty Stars

The Record-Breaking Show, having topped the Box Office receipts in every City shown, including Melbourne, Perth, Fremantle and Adelaide.

Under the Personal Direction of Ben. J. Fuller.
Booked Solid until 1917.

"Papareki."

Australian Variety 29 Dec. (1915), n. pag.

1916-1920

On 27 May 1916, Le Blanc married fellow vaudevillian Winnie Knight (born Winifred Adeline Walls) at the Registrar General's Office in Sydney. Both were aged twenty-six. Coverage of the wedding in *Australian Variety* indicates that the ceremony (which was private by personal request) was attended by members of Le Blanc's troupe (including best man Jake Mack) and close associates such as Ben Fuller and *Variety* editor Martin Brennan (31 May 1916, n. pag.). There was little time alone for the couple, however, as the Travesty Stars continued touring constantly throughout Australia and New Zealand over the next four years, providing them with the opportunity to rival Nat Phillips' Stiffy and Mo Revue Company as the Fullers' most popular revusical company operating at that time. Typical of the reviews of the company's shows around this time was a 1915 *Australian Variety* report on *Central 3251* (later known as *In Old Seville*) at the Bijou Theatre, Melbourne. "It scored immense throughout with the customers," wrote the critic. "A bright, breezy combination of singing, dancing and gagging, it put the punch into the bill solid. Bert Le Blanc and Jake Mack have still a long vein of genuine humour, and they had the house anyhow with real laughs right through" (28 July 1915, 13). Among his other popular hits staged between 1916 and 1920 were: *The Gay Mrs Cohen*, *At the Exposition*, *Keep it Dark*, *Then They Woke Up*, *Fuzzy Wuzzy* and *In Watts* (adapted from the earlier American Burlesque Company hit, *The Grafters*).



Theatre June (1916), 40.

The level to which Le Blanc's popularity rose in Australia is demonstrated by the fact he appeared on the front cover of *Australian Variety* on four occasions during this period - once in 1916 and three times in 1917. He and his company also received considerable coverage in both major industry magazines (*Australian Variety* and the *Theatre*) and within metropolitan and regional newspapers throughout the country.² Such was the demand for Le Blanc's services that not even his publicised wedding to fellow vaudevillian Winifred Knight³ in Sydney on 27 May 1916, allowed him a break. The couple spent their honeymoon in New Zealand while touring the Fullers' Dominion circuit. Sir Benjamin and John Fuller also thought highly enough of Le Blanc that they engaged his troupe to open two theatres for them - an honour not even accorded Stiffy and Mo during their career. The first opening occurred on 2 June 1917 when the Fullers began operations at their newly built Majestic Theatre in Newtown (later known as the Elizabethan Theatre). The second occasion was on 8 March 1919, when they opened the newly refurbished National Amphitheatre, which was renamed the National, but became better known simply as Fullers Theatre. Le Blanc's choice of production for the grand opening was one of his most popular revusicals, *Do it Now* (TT: Apr. 1919, 27).



26 Apr. (1916)

7 June (1916)

6 June (1917)

4 July (1917)

² As the above photograph also records, Le Blanc had appeared on the front cover of the *Theatre Magazine* during the American Burlesque Company's tour of Australia.

³ The couple's marriage certificate indicates that Winifred Adeline Walls (also aged 26) was a widow.

The Travesty Stars movements throughout 1918 provide an insight into the schedule the company was required to maintain for the Fullers. The troupe, which by then included Lance Vane (brother of Jim Gerald), Lillian Colenzo and Will Raynor, continued its Brisbane season (beginning late November 1917) up until the end of January. It then transferred to Melbourne, followed by engagements in Adelaide, Northern NSW (including Broken Hill), Kalgoorlie, Perth (under the management of Harry Sadler) and Fremantle. The troupe then returned through Kalgoorlie (including two nights in the suburb of Boulder), Adelaide, Melbourne, and by early November was back in Brisbane where it remained until late January 1919.

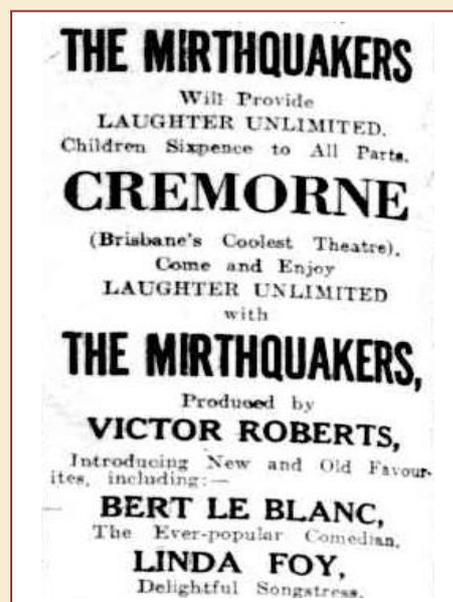
For the Australian theatre industry, and the population in general, 1919 became an enormously trying year due to the Spanish influenza epidemic which swept the world killing millions of people. Nearly every theatre company or troupe was affected by the epidemic, either through performers or their close family members being infected. By March that year most enclosed venues, whether in metropolitan or regional centres, along the more densely populated east coast of Australia were finding audience numbers drastically reduced as public concern spread. At the beginning of April, barely three weeks after Le Blanc's company opened the Fullers' New Theatre, legislation was enacted which forced public spaces like theatres to cease operations. Although the Fullers' were able to quickly satisfy the new health requirements for theatre ventilation, and thus reopened by mid-May, several of the company's members were still in recovery. The Fullers' complex and tight circuit schedule also meant that the Travesty Stars was unable to complete its Sydney season. Effectively in limbo for several weeks awaiting its appointed time to tour New Zealand, Le Blanc and Mack were able to put together a well-received "Yiddisher" comedy/singing/patter act at the Fullers Theatre for several weeks.

The Travesty Stars' New Zealand engagement lasted just under a year - a respectable tour by Fullers' standards to that time (by the mid 1920s companies such as Stiffy and Mo, Jim Gerald and George Wallace were able to extend their tours to around 18 months). However, after completing the circuit, Le Blanc announced that he had disbanded the Travesty Stars and returned to Australia with Jake Mack to work their double act. The pair also temporarily left the Fullers organisation to work for Harry Clay at the Princess Theatre, followed by a Queensland tour for Birch and Carroll (ca. May-July). Returning to Sydney by August the pair once again accepted an engagement on the Clay circuit, where it is believed they continued to perform throughout the remainder of the year.

1921-1929

In 1921 the Le Blanc/Mack partnership parted ways for a short period of time, with Le Blanc teaming up with one of Clay's leading comics Ted Stanley to present revusicals and comedy sketches. *Everyone's* indicates that Clay's audiences found the pair well up to expectations, writing: "A rather clever travesty dealing with the mishaps of two woebegone sailors occupies the first half of the bill, the fun makers being Bert Le Blanc and Ted Stanley" (10 Aug. 1921, 15). Sometime between August and October 1922 Le Blanc and Mack returned to America, where they are said to have obtained "a big list of new revue scripts" which they intended staging in Australia. After arriving back in the country in October the pair reformed the Travesty Revue Company with a "specially selected supporting [ensemble] and a fine range of scenery and wardrobe" (BC: 23 Dec 1922, 16). The new troupe debuted with George Marlowe at the Grand Opera House (Sydney) before returning to the Fullers circuit at Christmas. Although details concerning the company's movements after their season in Adelaide (beginning ca. 23 Dec. 1922) are unclear, it is believed that Le Blanc disbanded the troupe within twelve to 18 months. He continued to tour the country over the next few years as a solo act and in 1924 was back on Fuller time. One of the year's highlights was his role as performer and co-writer of the pantomime, *Mother Goose*, which was staged at the Majestic Theatre, Newtown.

1925 saw Le Blanc return to revusicals after taking up an offer from American comedian George H. Ward to appear in his company, which had by then been touring the Antipodes for some five years (E: 14 Jan. 1925, 36). While details are yet to be located concerning his early association with the troupe, by late 1927 he had not only taken over the roles previously played by Ward's off-sider, Charles L. Sherman, but had also helped develop a number of new productions. He is also believed to have created an updated version of his iconic Hebrew character Ike Cohen, who was now known as Abe Cohen. Mixed in among classic Ward revusicals like *Right Turn*, *In Wrong*, *Out West*, *Some Hotel* and *Bombs and Beauties* were new Ward/Le Blanc shows like: *The Lure of the Ring*, *Cohen's Vacation*, *Keeping Fit*, *Hotel Topsy Turvey* and *A Trip to Morocco*.



In early 1928 Le Blanc travelled to Brisbane to take up a contract with John N. McCallum to appear under Victor Roberts' direction with the Mirthquakers company. Following the company's debut at the Cremorne the Brisbane Courier reconfirmed the comedian's status as a audience favourite, describing him as a "Hebrew mirth-maker of merit," whose whimsical way purveyed a "quaint brand of humour" (20 Feb. 1928, 7).

1930-1974



TIVOLI THEATRE
 Direction... BERT LENNON
 Where the Show is Always Good
AGAIN TODAY AT
2.30
 Another Big, Bright Revue

BERT LeBLANC — GEO. WARD
 Together With the Talented
TIVOLI FOLLIES

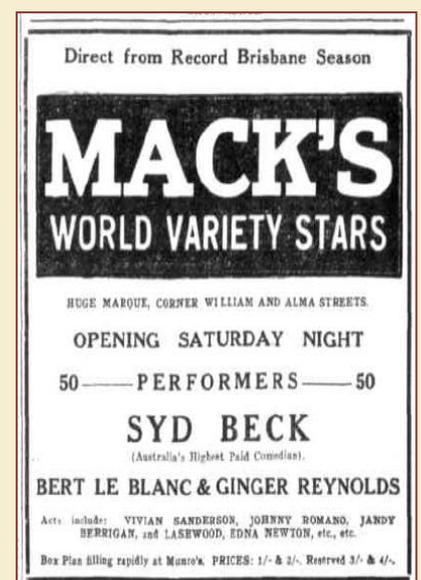
Advertiser (Adelaide) 14 July (1934), 2.

Although the variety industry was undergoing difficult times from the late 1920s onwards, Le Blanc still managed to find regular employment with various companies right through until the mid-late 1940s. He is recorded as having been one of the principal attractions in the Town Topics Company (Gaiety Theatre, Syd) around 1929/1930, for example, and in 1931 he and Jake Mack appeared in *The High Cost of Loving*, a musical burlesque produced by Frank Neil at the Palace Theatre in Sydney. That same Christmas the two comedians were engaged by George Marlowe to appear in his Christmas pantomime, *Babes in the Wood* (beginning 19 Dec.). They followed this in mid-January 1932 with feature appearances in a revue and pictures programme at the same theatre (beginning 18 Jan.). He and George Ward were both with the Tivoli's Frivolities of 1932 (which played a seven months season in Adelaide) and the 1934 Tivoli Follies company. That same year Le Blanc was cast as the character, Lowenstein, in Roy Rene's film *Strike Me Lucky* (1934).

Actor Peter Finch also recalls working opposite Le Blanc in Sydney with Joe Cody's Vaudeville Company sometime around the mid-1930s (one season was played at the Maccabean Hall, Darlinghurst). In a 1954 interview with George Johnson, Finch especially recalls his association with Le Blanc saying: "[He] was wonderful to work with; he was fast and unpredictable. He had 60 fixed comic routines and he'd change any of them right in the middle when he wasn't getting the laughs, and you'd have to think fast" (23). It was Le Blanc, too, who suggested that Finch take his voice the ABC... telling him "it's all crème caramel there." Finch apparently did an audition as a joke and wound up getting a job playing in radio serials (ibid 23). Le Blanc is also known to have performed on radio, with programs for Sydney stations 2FC and 2BL in 1933 indicating that he and comedian Bert Barton were presenting sketches such as "Cohen Gives Casey Advice, and Vice Versa" (see for example SMH: 22 Mar. 1933, 6).

By the late 1930s Le Blanc was presenting the character "Hammy" on tours with such shows as Mack's Variety Stars, Coles New Varieties and "The Quest for Talent" Competitions. In speaking with the *Barrier Miner* prior to opening in Broken Hill in 1942 Le Blanc records that all the variety touring companies had gone out of business due to travel restrictions and petrol rationing and that his last stage appearances had been at the Brisbane Tivoli. He had subsequently taken on a job as a sector warden in King's Cross (Sector 351). After the end of the war he returned as the headline act for Coles New Variety Company in 1946, playing regional centres with a troupe said to comprise 30 international artists.

As to his later years, John West records in *Theatre in Australia* that when the comedian was old enough to qualify for a pension "he got himself naturalised and voted in his first election in his late sixties - a fact of which he was quietly proud" (121). This is believed to have occurred in the early to mid-1950s. When Le Blanc died in a Sydney hospital on 27 August 1974 his wife Winnie had already passed away. The pair had resided in their last years at 171 Horsley Drive, Fairfield. Although he had no children of his own, Le Blanc's funeral notice records that he was "the fond step-father of William and Brenda Knight and fond uncle of Ken and Iris Howard." The notice ends with the line 'So mote it be' (28 Aug. 1974, 56). Le Blanc was 90 years of age.



Direct from Record Brisbane Season

MACK'S WORLD VARIETY STARS

HUGE MARQUE, CORNER WILLIAM AND ALMA STREETS

OPENING SATURDAY NIGHT

50 — PERFORMERS — 50

SYD BECK
 (Australia's Highest Paid Comedian)

BERT LE BLANC & GINGER REYNOLDS

Acts include: VIVIAN SANDERSON, JOHNNY ROMANO, JANDY HERRIGAN, and LASHWOOD, EDNA NEWTON, etc., etc.

Box Plan filling rapidly at Munro's. PRICES: 1/- & 2/-. Reserved 3/- & 4/-.

Morning Bulletin 15 June (1938), 2.

THE BERT LE BLANC AND JAKE MACK PARTNERSHIP

Bert Le Blanc and Jake Mack first appeared on stage together in the Brisbane season of George Willoughby's *Babes in the Wood* pantomime (beginning 22 February 1915). Le Blanc had previously played Weary Willie in the debut Sydney production (1914), while Mack replaced Ted Stanley as Tired Tim for the Australian tour.

Although Le Blanc was considered one of the country's foremost comedians, he did not, in fact, take on the role of principal comic in his revivals, working more often than not as Jake Mack's feed. This was "a generous arrangement from Mr Le Blanc's point of view," suggested the *Theatre's* vaudeville critic, X-Ray, "for Mr Mack is given every opportunity of scoring with the audience, even at the expense of Mr Le Blanc" (June 1916, 39). Not all of the dialogue between the two was weighted in favour of Mack, however. As the following gag demonstrates, Le Blanc's sense of larrikin humour undoubtedly struck a chord with Australian popular culture audiences, even though he was playing a Hebrew. In the skit *Le Blanc*, a diner in a restaurant asks the waiter (Mack), "What do you charge for bread?" "Nothing" replies Mack. "And for the gravy?" asks Le Blanc. "Nothing." "Then bring me some bread and gravy."

It appears that Le Blanc and Mack maintained the same formula throughout their partnership. A 1919 *Theatre* review of *Do it Now* indicates, for example, that while Le Blanc had no end of admirers and received plenty of laughs, Mack was "much the funnier of the two" (Apr. 1919, 27). The *Theatre* provides a further insight into the onstage relationship between Le Blanc and Mack in its June 1916 issue:

Mr La Blanc [sic] and Mr Mack are, in short, an ideal pair. As Hebrews they are entirely different. Mr La Blanc is stiff and stolid - or rather those are the qualities he seeks to get out of his characterisation. On the other hand Mr Mack is as lissom as an eel, and as light-headed as a rabbit. Mr La Blanc more or less acts the part of Mr Mack's feeder. Thus it is a generous arrangement from Mr La Blanc's point of view, for Mr Mack is given every opportunity of scoring with the audience, even at the expense of Mr La Blanc. Evidently Mr La Blanc is more concerned in the success of the show as a whole than in any individual personal triumph (40).

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"What do you charge for bread?"
"Nothing."
"And for the gravy?"
"Nothing."
"Then bring me some bread and gravy" (ibid 40).

BERT LE BLANC'S COMIC STYLE

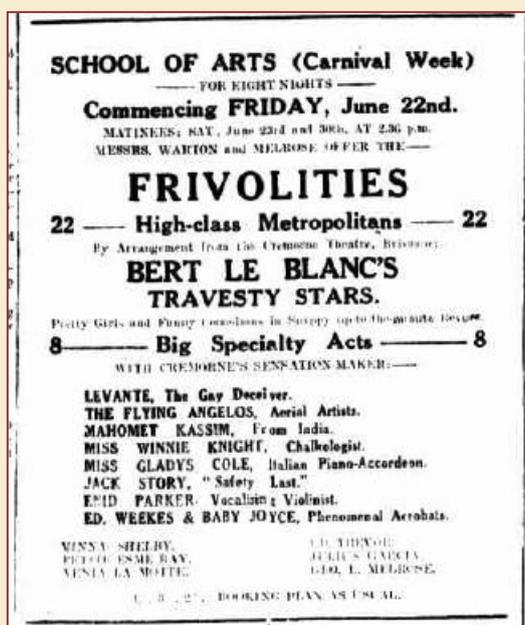
For much of his career Le Blanc portrayed characters with strong Hebrew characteristics. In a 1913 interview with the *Theatre* magazine he defended his style of work saying that there was nothing wrong in presenting a member of his race from the stage in a light humorous manner. "The trouble" he declared, 'is that some so burlesque the character as to make it offensive to members of the Jewish race. I avoid doing that.... [My] stage humour is of the dry kind...My idea is that a laugh got by something told in an easy, quiet, dry manner is worth three laughs secured by a performer as a result of his having to make a hard strained, noisy appeal to them" (July 1913, 20). Le Blanc's other endearing comedic trait was his wilful mispronunciation of words. "Flavour" for "favour" was one of the words that always gets him a big laugh', records one of the *Theatre* magazine's writers. "Another word he gets a lot out of is 'explanatio' for 'explanation'" (July 1913, 20). Other examples of Le Blanc's word play include: "So-and-so was a civilised engineer" and "he was a coward" (TT: Dec. 1914, 52). A 1913 *Sydney Morning Herald* review of *The Grafters* sheds similar light on the comedian's style of delivery, suggesting that Australians found him endearing not just for the larrikin attributes imbued in his characters, but also for his self-deprecating humour and unpretentious outlook on life. The critic writes:

Mr La Blanc [sic]... comes on in rags and the remains of an awful peaked-cap and delivers himself of many droll ideas only half-clothed in a truly horrible lingo which is doubtless the dialect of the typical Russian Jew. 'I explanation you' or 'I ask you simplicity' are his usual forms of address, and in confidence (he has the voice of a fog-horn) he reveals that 'his horrible-scope tells him that one day in the near future he will die in his infancy (16 June 1913, 4).

An analysis of reviews published during the course of the Travesty Stars time together indicates that while Le Blanc and Mack were the stars, the troupe's popularity was also largely in response to the experienced support ensemble. This is a factor that was similarly significant in the success of Stiffy and Mo. Both Le Blanc and Nat Phillips have acknowledged the importance of the performers who supported them, and were keenly aware that they needed experienced and versatile performers capable of handling any type of performance situation - especially improvisation. In a 1916 interview with *Australian Variety* Le Blanc draws attention to this aspect of his success when he says: "I am very fortunate in securing the services of the people whom I have. To my way of thinking no man should attempt to produce unless he is a capable actor, and [and he should be] not be afraid to do the same things he is telling his actors to do" (5 Jan. 1916, n. pag.). In 1917, the company contained a number of well-known artists including Carlton Chase (ex-American Burlesque Company), Essie Jennings (wife of Jim Gerald, who was overseas on active duty), Le Blanc's wife Winnie and of course Jake Mack. The following year the company secured the services of Queenie Paul and her future husband, Mike Connors. Connors was then working in a duo with Fred Witt, and the pair would also often present a turn in the first-part vaudeville section. In 1919 Essie Jennings and Lance Vane were briefly joined in Sydney by Jim Gerald for the Fullers' Theatre season.

With regard to Le Blanc himself, the numerous reports published in newspapers and industry magazines around the country between 1915 and the early 1920s indicate that he was one of the most popular comedians and revusical writers of his era. The *Theatre* notes in this respect: "Even if as loud-voiced as ever, Le Blanc is a man whom the gods love" (June 1921, 17). An *Everyone's* review that same year provides further evidence of this when it reports: "The tabloid offerings of Ted Stanley and Bert Le Blanc [at the Gaiety] are greatly relished at this popular Oxford Street house" (7 Sept. 1921, 15). In Charles Norman's semi-autobiographical recall of variety entertainment in Australia, *When Vaudeville Was King*, the veteran performer refers to Le Blanc as one of the original "nut" acts to tour Australia. According to Norman performers like Le Blanc and Mack were "sometimes impossible to describe":

Even if you had a script of their act it would avail nothing, for how could it indicate the falls of Jake onto his blown up rubber stomach, which Bert, in his fury, would kick right in the centre. Jake would then bounce all over the stage till he came to a stop. This would bring on the sniggering, coughs, squeaks and spontaneous business as he tried to get back on his feet and right side up. It all depended on the performer's appeal. Their Jewish songs in harmony had to be heard to be believed. Newspaper reviewers had a hard time finding new ways of saying "excruciatingly funny" and winning the lion's share of laughter and applause (48).⁴



Morning Bulletin 16 June (1928), 2.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. The term "Hebrew" – as in Hebrew comedian - (which we today understand as a language) was the term applied to comedians and any type of humour relating to Jewish people and culture during the period in question. Thus, comedians such as Bert Le Blanc, Jake Mack, Roy (Mo) Rene, and Julian Rose, for example, were almost always described as Hebrew comedians. For further insights, see 'Evolution of Hebrew Comedy: Through Vaudeville and Burlesque to the Legitimate,' (TT: Sept. 1918, 3).

⁴ Although the photograph of Bert Le Blanc and Frank Vack (with the blow-up suit) was taken during their 1913/1924 American Burlesque Company tour, it is possible that Jake Mack, as described by Norman, also used a similar blow-up suit during his time with the Travesty Stars.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS



Australian Variety 18 Nov.
(1914), 5.

- 1915:** **The Gay Mrs Cohen** [revusical] • **Fuzzy Wuzzy** [revusical] • **At the Exposition** [revusical] • **In Old Seville** (aka Central 3251) [revusical]
- 1916:** **In Watts** [revusical]
- 1917:** **Keep it Dark** (aka Cohen and Levi in Paris) [revusical] • **Then They Woke Up** [revusical] • **What's the Use** (aka Cohen and Levi as Pawnbrokers) [revusical]
- 1918:** **Do it Now** [revusical] • **Cohen and Levi at Monte Carlo** [revusical] • **Get the Habit** [revusical] • **Dr Dippy's Asylum** [revusical]
- 1921:** **High Life on Deck** [revusical]
- 1922:** **Can You Beat It?** [revusical] • **Wy Wurrie?** [revusical] • **Holcum-Jazzbo** [revusical] • **Keep Laughing** [revusical] • **Razzle Dazzle** [revusical]
- 1924:** **Step Lively** [revusical]
- 1925:** **Cohen's Vacation** [revusical]
- 1927:** **My Boy Johnny** [revusical]
- The Lure of the Ring** [revusical] • **Keeping Fit** [revusical] • **Ku-Klux-Klan** [revusical] • **The Suffragettes** [revusical] • **Oh Boy** [revusical] • **Variety Isle** [revusical] • **Hotel Topsy Turvey**[revusical] • **In Mexico** [revusical] • **A Trip to Morocco** [revusical]

BERT LE BLANC ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY 1913 to 1935

Includes Bert Le Blanc's solo engagements, Le Blanc and Mack, the George Ward Revue Company, Town Topics Company.

All dates between 1914 and 1932 are for Le Blanc and Mack unless otherwise noted

For details regarding **The American Burlesque Company**, **Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Star's** and **Who's Who Costume Revue Entertainers** see each troupe's individual entry.

An asterisk (*) beside a date indicates that it is either approximate or has not yet been established.

- 1914:** FULLERS (Le Blanc > Bijou Th, Melb; 19 Sept. - Oct. *) • (Le Blanc > Nat Amph, Syd; 14 Nov - ca. Dec.*) ► GEORGE WILLOUGHBY (Le Blanc > Adelphi Th, Syd; 26-31 Dec. > *Babes in the Wood*)
- 1915:** GEORGE WILLOUGHBY (Le Blanc > Adelphi Th, Syd; 1 Jan. - ca. Feb. * > *Babes in the Wood*) • (Her Majesty's Th, Bris; 22 Feb. - 6 Mar. > *Babes in the Wood*) • Queensland regional tour; 8 March - ca. May* > *Babes in the Wood* • Princess's Th, Melb; 21 Aug- 10 Sept. > *Babes in the Wood*) ► FULLERS (Bijou Th, Melb; 11-17 Sept. > *Babes in the Wood*)
- NB:** For engagements between 26 June and 6 Aug. and ca. Oct. - Dec. 1915, see Travesty Stars entry.
- NB:** For engagements between 1 Jan. 1916 to ca. May 1920 see Travesty Stars entry, except – except 1919 (ca. 7 June - *) in which Le Blanc and Mack played a season of vaudeville at Fullers' Theatre, Sydney, due to flu restrictions.
- 1920:** HARRY CLAY (Princess Th, Syd; May *) ► BIRCH & CARROLL/GEORGE MARLOW (Queensland regional tour; June-July *) ► FULLERS (Fullers' Th, Syd; July *) • (Empire Th, Bris; 16 Oct. - Nov. *) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; ca. Dec.*)
- 1921:** FULLERS (Fullers Th, Syd; ca. Jan.*) ► HARRY CLAY (Le Blanc > Sydney circuit; May-July* > incl. Princess Th, Bridge Th, and Gaiety Th).
- NB:** From 15 October - 26 November 1921, see Travesty Stars entry.
- 1922:** HARRY CLAY (Sydney circuit; July-Aug. * > Incl. Princess Th, Bridge Th and Gaiety Th)
- NB: 1922-1924:** From 7 October 1922 - ca. February 1924, see Travesty Stars entry.
- 1924:** HARRY CLAY (Le Blanc > Sydney circuit; ca. Mar-Apr.*) ► n/e (Le Blanc > Tattersall's Club, Syd; ca. Nov.*) ► HARRY CLAY (Sydney circuit; Nov-Dec. *) ► FULLERS (Le Blanc > Majestic Th, Syd; Dec.* > *Mother Goose*).
- 1925:** FULLERS (Le Blanc > Majestic Th, Syd; Jan.* > *Mother Goose*)
- 1927:** GEORGE WARD (Le Blanc > Bijou Th, Melb; 7 May - 16 Sept. > George Ward Co).
- 1928:** JOHN N. McCALLUM (Cremorne Th, Bris; 18 Feb. - 15 June > The Mirthquakers Co) ► WARTON & MELROSE (S of A, Rockhampton; 22 June -* > Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Stars; return season 4 Aug., one night) • (Townsville; 9 July - * > Frivolities Co, under canvas; return season 30-31 July) ► BIRCH, CARROLL & COYLE (Hibernian Hall, Cairns; 23-24 July > Frivolities Co) ► FULLERS (Empire Th, Bris; 26-31 Dec. > George Ward's Whirl of Mirth Co).
- 1929:** FULLERS (Empire Th, Bris; 1 Jan. - 15 Feb. > George Ward's Whirl of Mirth Co) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; 30 Mar. - * > George Ward's Whirl of Mirth Co) ► GEORGE MELROSE (S of A, Rockhampton; 21 June -* > Frivolities of 1929) ► JAMES JOHNSON/DURHAM MARCEL (Le Blanc > Gaiety Th, Syd; 14 Dec.* > Town Topic Co).

- 1930: JAMES JOHNSON/DURHAM MARCEL (Le Blanc > Gaiety Th, Syd; Jan.* > Town Topic Co) ►
SMILESTONES OF 1930 (Th Royal, Bris; 11 Oct. - ca. Nov.*)
- 1931: FRANK NEIL (Palace Th, Syd; 3 Oct. -*) ► GEORGE MARLOW
 (Grand Op House, Syd; 19-31 Dec. > *Babes in the Woods*)
- 1932: GEORGE MARLOW (Grand Op House, Syd; 1-23 Jan. > *Babes in the Woods*) ► TIVOLI THEATRES (Tivoli Th, Adel; 5 Mar. - 12 Sept.* > Frivolities of 1932) ► FULLERS (Le Blanc > Bijou Th, Melb; 17 Sept. -*)
- 1934: TIVOLI THEATRES (Tivoli Th, Adel; ca. 7 July - ca. Aug. > Tivoli Follies)
- 1935: MACK'S MUSICAL COMEDY CO (opposite Gresham Hotel > Rockhampton, Qld; 11 June - * > under canvas)
- 1936: COLES VARIETIES Co (Broken Hill, NSW; 19 June - *)
- 1937: COLES VARIETIES Co (Broken Hill, NSW; 2 June - * > under canvas)
- 1939: COLES VARIETIES Co (Flinders Street, Adel; 26 July - * > under canvas)
 • (Market Green, Launceston, Tasmania; 6 Dec. - *)
- 1940: COLES VARIETIES Co (Queen's Domain, Hobart, Tasmania; 29 Jan. -*)
 • (cnr Hay and Irwin Streets, Perth; 24 Sept. - 23 Nov. > under canvas)
- 1942: QUEST FOR TALENT COMPETITIONS (Crystal Palace, Broken Hill, NSW; 5 June - ca. July *)
- 1946: COLES VARIETIES Co (Queanbeyan, NSW; 1 Mar. - * > under canvas) •
 (Crystal Palace, Broken Hill, NSW; 10 June - *)

Barrier Miner 19 June (1936), 2.

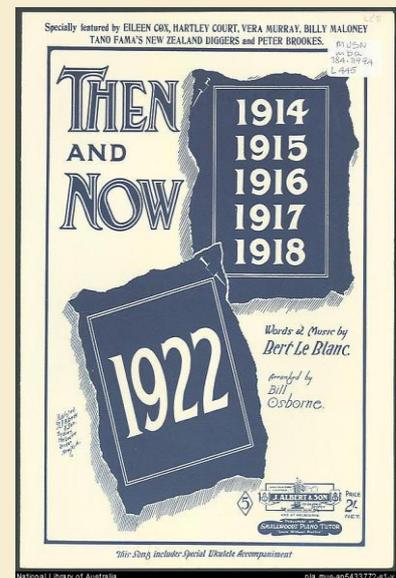


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See also:

- AA: 7 Mar. (1932), 8.
- BM: 28 Mar (1953), 7.
- CP: 13 Nov. (1930), 9.
- SMH: 5 Oct. (1931), 2 • 28 Jan. (1933), 10 • 8 Mar. (1933), 6.



Source: National Library of Australia