

MATSA VAUDEVILLE COMPANY

Following the end of the Melbourne revival in May 1897, J. C. Williamson engaged a number of cast members to form the *Matsa* Vaudeville Company, which toured New Zealand between June and early August. Among those engaged were John Coleman, Alice Learmar, Frank Lawton, Little Gulliver, Ernest Fitts and Mr Leoni Clarke (the "Cat King").

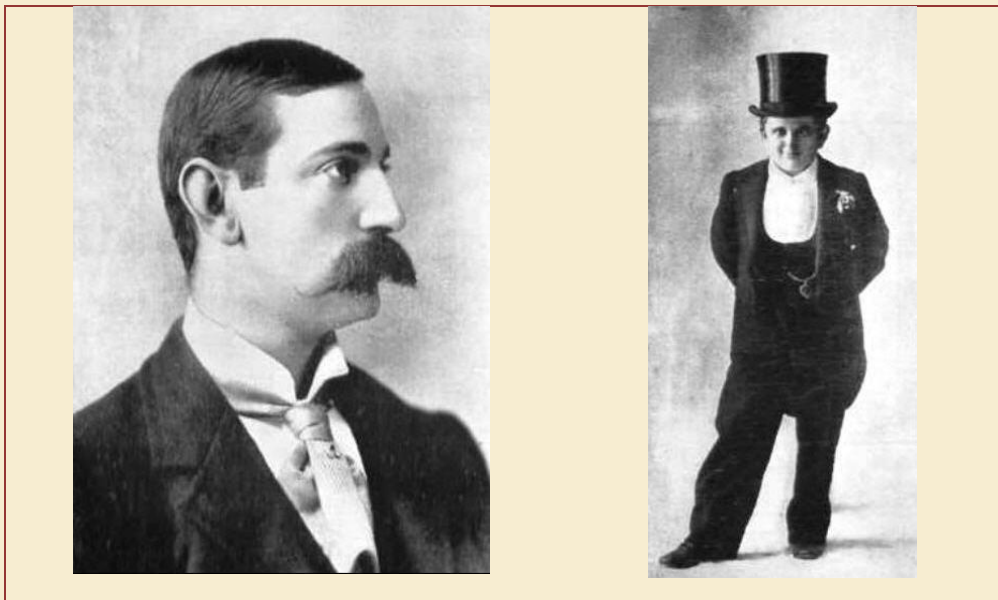
Taking advantage of the interest by New Zealanders in the hit Williamson and Musgrove pantomime, *Matsa Queen of Fire*, J. C. Williamson contracted a number of the productions stars, primarily those who had been engaged as specialty acts, to tour the country after the close of the 1897 Melbourne return season on 20 May. At short notice he sent his representative Harold Ashton to New Zealand, beginning with Auckland to arrange. When the company eventually arrived in early June the line-up comprised some 32 artists (HNS: 21 June 1897, 2). He also engaged Carl Reidle, the Princess Theatre (Melb) music director to oversee the musical aspects of the tour. According to the *Wanganui Herald* the orchestra comprised 9 musicians (18 June 1897, 2).

While only a smattering of details regarding the tour are presently known, including the names of only a handful of performers, a preview of published in the *Ashburton Guardian* in mid-July provides an insight into the company's reception and reputation:

This is a large number to bring to provincial towns, and naturally means big expense and great risk, especially as the salaries paid to the individual artistes are said to exceed those ever paid previously to artistes touring this colony. As an instance, we may mention, without breach of confidence, that three of the leading artistes' weekly salaries total the respectable sum of £187. So far the company's New Zealand tour has been a huge success. Both in the North and the South they have been acknowledged to be absolutely the best Vaudeville artistes ever seen in the colony. Says one exchange: - 'Every artiste is a "star" in his or her own line. None of them come here in search of a reputation; they all have already attained a world-wide one. The consequence is an entertainment that none but a first class management can provide (19 July 1897, 2).

In addition to the individual specialty acts, the company also presented a selection of musical and farcical comedies, including *Fun in the Kitchen*.

Among the company members were John Coleman, Alice Learmar, Frank Lawton, Little Gulliver, Ernest Fitts and Mr Leoni Clarke (the "Cat King"), The (3) Delvines, and the Winterton Sisters. Alice Lemar and John Colman returned to Australia a few weeks prior to the end of the tour, being replaced by the Lucifers and Miss Angus.



L: Ernest Fitts; R: Little Gulliver

Source: *Matsa, Queen of Fire* Melbourne program
State Library of Victoria

SEE ALSO

- [*Matsa, Queen of Fire*](#) (Works: 1896)

PERSONNEL

1. **Performers:** Incl. Miss Angus, Miss M. Champion, Leoni Clarke, John Coleman, The Delavines, Ernest Fitts, Frank Lawton, Alice Leamar, Little Gulliver, The Lucifers, The Winterton Sisters.
2. **Production team:** Harold Ashton (representative); Carl Reidle (music director/conductor); Mr Cane (orchestra leader); J. St Clair (business manager); John Wallace (stage manager)
3. **Additional notes and/or historical clarification:**
 - **Leoni Clarke:** Billed as the "Cat King," Clarke's act included some 200 trained animals - including cats, rats, mice, canaries, cockatoos, rabbits and monkeys.
 - **John Coleman:** Comedian and grotesque dancer. Brought to Australia from America Coleman was one of the big stars of both *Djin Djin* (1895) and *Matsa* (1896).
 - **The Delvines:** Also billed as The Three Delvines, "grotesque artists."
 - **Little Gulliver:** Pocket comedian.
 - **Ernest Fitts:** Baritone.
 - **Frank Lawton:** American whistler (siffleur).
 - **Alice Leamar:** Singer. Previously a star at the Gaiety Theatre, London and the London Gaiety Company which toured Australia.
 - **Winterton Sisters:** Instrumentalists and terpsichorean artists.

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY (New Zealand only)

1897: Auckland (7-14 June) • Thames (Aof M; 15-16 June) • New Plymouth (Alexandra Hall; 18-19 June) • Hawara (21 June) • Wanganui (Oddfellows Hall; 22-24 June) • Palmerston North (Th Royal; 25 June - *) • Wellington (Opera House; 28 June - 3 July) • Christchurch (Theatre Royal; 5-10 July) • Dunedin (Princess Th; 12-17 July) • Timaru (20 July) • Ashburton (Oddfellow's Hall; 21 July)

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "[Matsa](#)" AG: 19 July (1897), 2.
"[Matsa Vaudeville Co.](#)" HNS: 21 June (1897), 2.
"[Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" EP: 24 June (1897), 6.
"[Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" WC: 19 June (1897), 2.
"[Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" OW: 15 July (1897), 47.
"[Matsa Company, The.](#)" TH: 20 July (1897), 3.
"[Matsa Company, The.](#)" CCS: 3 July (1897), 6.
"[Williamson and Musgrove's Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" THNP: 15 June (1897), 2.
"[Williamson and Musgrove's Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" THNP: 17 June (1897), 2.
"[Williamson and Musgrove's Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" MT: 21 June (1897), 2.
"[Williamson and Musgrove's Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" WH: 21 June (1897), 2.
"[Williamson and Musgrove's Matsa Vaudeville Company.](#)" WWT: 24 June (1897), 3.

OPERA HOUSE

Lessees.....Messrs Williamson and Musgrove
Business Manager.....Mr W. Houghton
Treasurer.....Mr Bert Hoyle
Stage Manager.....Mr John Wallace

**TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!
TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!**
And for
POSITIVELY SEVEN NIGHTS ONLY.
Messrs Williamson and Musgrove will have the
pleasure of introducing the renewed
"MATS"

VAUDEVILLE COMPANY.
Being a combination of Leading Comedians and
Specialists, who appeared in their latest and
most brilliantly successful extravaganza, en-
titled "Matsa," which has just completed an
unprecedentedly successful run of five months
in the Australian Colonies.
The programme will commence each evening
with the intensely amusing Musical Comedy,
FUN IN THE KITCHEN.

Penelope Miss Alice Leama
Tosser Mr Frank Lawton
Pitcher Mr John Coleman
Mrs Crocker Miss M. Campio
Walker Chalks Mr E. Fitts

Incidental to the Comedy, Mr Lawton will in-
troduce his wonderful Whistling Specialties

PART II.
THE WINTERTON SISTERS,
And
THE THREE DELVINES,
In their splendid Instrumental and Terpsichorean Quartette.
Our own Pocket Comedian, the Funniest Man
of his Inches in the World,
LITTLE GULLIVER.
The Famous English Burlesque Artist,
MISS ALICE LEAMAR,
Who will introduce a number of her most fam-
ous Songs and Character Impersonations.
Australia's Most Popular Baritone,
MR ERNEST FITTS.

Then comes
MR JOHN COLEMAN,
Who will be seen in his inimitable "Scarcrow
Dance," together with the execratably funny
"Saucy Kate, the Flower Girl," etc.

PART II.
THE THREE DELVINES,
In their weird and marvellous act, "Satan's
Gambols."
MR FRANK LAWTON
Will introduce amusing Specialties, and feature
his remarkable Bone Solos.
Concluding the Programme comes
"THE CAT KING,"
MR LEONI CLARKE,
With his
170-ROYAL CATS-170
Rats, Mice, Canaries, Cockatoos, Monkeys, etc
An Astounding Performance.

Auckland Star 7 June (1897), 4.