

## STANLEY MCKAY'S NO 1 PANTOMIME COMPANY

aka **Stanley McKay' New Pantomime Company / Mother Goose Pantomime Company**

Stanley McKay's second pantomime company was formed in 1914, a few weeks after the previous troupe returned from New Zealand and disbanded. Initially known as his New Pantomime Co., it was later referred to as the No 1 Co. when McKay established another simultaneously touring company in 1915. Headed by Jim Gerald (dame) and Essie Jennings (principal boy) the troupe's feature pantomimes were *Mother Goose*, *Old Mother Hubbard*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Cinderella*. The troupe disbanded after McKay and Gerald enlisted for active service in 1916.

Stanley McKay ran two touring pantomime companies and at least one dramatic company between 1910 and 1916, with each of these presenting their shows to the public either under canvas or in local theatres and halls. The first pantomime troupe, known variously as Stanley McKay's Pantomime Company, the Royal Pantomime Company or Stanley McKay's Moving Theatre (and sometimes Mammoth Moving Theatre) operated between 1910 and March 1914. The principal performers included Bruce Drysdale (dame) and Phyllis Faye (principal boy). After the troupe returned from New Zealand in March 1914 McKay disbanded it and soon afterwards put together another company which initially toured under the name Stanley McKay's New Pantomime Company.

Later referred to it as the No 1 Pantomime Company (and sometimes as the *Mother Goose* Company) the new troupe started out by travelling through the western, northern and southern regions of New South Wales. The company's line-up is believed to have initially included Will Raynor, Fred Keeley, Annie Lillilund and the Aldous Trio. One of the earliest reviews found to date indicates that while its initial line-up was strong, much responsibility was being shouldered by Will Raynor:

As Phillip Lytton leads the drama so the pride of place in pantomime must be awarded to Stanley McKay. His name stands for excellence... On Tuesday night [he] achieved his greatest triumph in Dubbo. The Empire Theatre was packed. And comprehensive as was the patronage, every fraction of it was richly merited. *Mother Goose*, the best of all pantomimes, was produced in suburb style. The players were all artists; there is not a mediocrity in their ranks. The comedy was simply irresistible; it was of that bright, intelligent kind which contrasts so strongly and advantageously with the buffoonery too often served up as comedy. The one compels generous and genuine laughter; the other inspires contempt. The mounting was almost perfect - the scenery was most appropriate and pretty; the transformation scene, the orthodox finale, was gorgeous; the costumes were fetching, and there were fully 150 changes. The dancing had the merit of being up to date, and it was all poetry of motion.... The choruses were well-balanced and submitted with spirit, and the orchestra was quite in keeping with the general excellence of the cast. Suffice it to say that we doubt if a better tenor voice than Mr Will Raynor's has ever been raised to the delight of a Dubbo audience. Mr Raynor can take upper C with the utmost ease - in full volume and richness of tone. And his versatility as Old King Cole, is almost unlimited. He is an entertainment in itself. Miss Hettie Peel very capably sustained the character of the leading boy (Boy Blue) and Miss Rosie Coleman made a charming Red Riding Hood. Another strong character was Mother Goose, represented in all her eccentricities by Mr Arthur King, also a host, or should we say spurious hostess, in himself. Misses Ivy and Ilma Aldous, Mlle Rhys and Mr Fred Keeley are wonderful dancers and altogether the company are all top-notchers (DLMA: 19 June 1914, 3).

*Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate* 31 July (1914), 5.



By the time they returned to Dubbo in late July, McKay had struck a deal with Benjamin and John Fuller which allowed him to lease two of their emerging stars, Jim Gerald and Essie Jennings, as the company's new dame and principal boy. Following the remainder of the New South Wales engagements McKay took the company on tour through regional Victoria beginning sometime around August/September. The itinerary is known to have included such towns as Wangaratta, Shepparton, Eroa and Beechworth. At the end of October the company headed to the Melbourne, opening at the Lyric Theatre in the seaside suburb of St Kilda on 2 November. The season was followed by a suburban tour which lasted well into the following year.

**Stanley McKay**  
*Theatre* Sept. (1916), 42.

On 13 March 1915 the company opened at the Bijou Theatre, Melbourne, under the management of Fullers' Theatres. This arrangement, possibly part of the Gerald/Jennings deal, saw the company continue to tour the company's circuit for several more months. In early April, around the time that the No 1 Company was in Broken Hill, McKay sent a second pantomime company to tour Tasmania. This new troupe, which McKay referred to as his No 2 company, featured Bruce Drysdale and Phyllis Faye, two of the principal artists in the original Royal Pantomime Company.



SOME OF THE BALLET.

*Prahan Telegraph* 31 Oct. (1914), 3.

Following its season in Broken Hill, the Gerald-led troupe travelled to Adelaide to play at the Fullers King's Theatre, followed by a Western Australian tour. Among the places played were Perth (Melrose Theatre), Fremantle and the Western Australian goldfields. Reportedly comprising between 25 to 35 performers and musicians, the troupe provided the entire show in each city (apart from Melbourne where they presented only half the bill). The principal actors and ballet were also augmented by an array of specialty acts - some staying on for long periods while others appeared only for selected engagements in the major centres. Among the more prominent were the Fredo Bros (acrobatic musicians), the Atlas Bros (strength act), the Greshams (Three and Four) and William "Billy" Speed (trick cyclist). Stanley McKay also made occasional appearances with the company.



**A: Jim Gerald**

*Green Room* Aug. (1922), 9.

**R: Essie Jennings**

*Theatre* Sept. 1915, 33.

**L: Will Raynor and the Coleman Sisters.**

*Theatre* Sept. (1915), 29.

According to the September *Theatre* magazine issue, by the time it had settled into a season at the Fullers Princess Theatre (Syd), the company had travelled no less than 27,000 miles during the previous twelve months (52-3). Several reports in *Australian Variety* indicate that the company's productions at the Princess had drawn record houses for the entire season. In November, after a four-week engagement at the Victoria Theatre, Newcastle, McKay and his troupe sailed to New Zealand for a tour under the direction of George Stephenson (*Theatre Magazine* February 1916, p.4). The tour opened in Auckland at the Fullers' Grand Opera House on 4 October, with advertising indicating that this was very much a Fuller's production. The remainder of the six months tour appears to have been staged in association with George Stephenson, however. This relationship had been forged previously when McKay's Royal Pantomime Company (aka No2 Company) toured the Dominion for a similar period of time in 1913 and 1914.

Although the *Theatre Magazine* reported that the New Zealand repertoire comprised *Mother Goose* and *Cinderella* (May 1916, p.10), advertisements and reviews published during the tour indicate that the company also staged *Old Mother Hubbard* and *Bo-Peep*. The *Thames Star* records, too, that in addition to a splendid array of scenic settings the company travelled with upwards of 120 costumes (30 Oct. 1915, 5). Interestingly *Mother Goose* was sometimes billed as *Boy Blue*, possibly to distinguish it from another Mother Goose pantomime toured around the same time by J. C. Williamson's.

Sometime after the company returned to Australia McKay closed down all his operations and enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces, along with several other men from his two companies - notably Jim Gerald and Bruce Drysdale (No 2 Company). When McKay re-established a touring pantomime company in the early 1920s he re-engaged at least two former No 1 Company artists - Will Raynor and Richard Dunbar.

### SEE ALSO

- [Stanley McKay](#)
- [Stanley McKay's Royal Pantomime Company](#)
- [Jim Gerald](#) (incl. Essie Jennings)

### HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

- One newspaper incorrectly reported in mid to late-1914 that the No 1 company had toured New Zealand earlier in the year. The paper either mistook the No 1 Company for the Royal Pantomime Company (which had toured the country), or McKay's publicity machine had provided false information.

### PANTOMIMES

Entered according to first known year it was staged by the company.

**1914:** **Mother Goose** [pantomime] • **Robinson Crusoe** [pantomime] • **Little Bo-Peep** (1910) [pantomime]

**1915:** **Old Mother Hubbard** (1912) [pantomime] • **Cinderella** [pantomime]

### PERSONNEL

- 1. Personnel** included: Miss Bilson (1914), Carmen Coleman (1914-16), Rose Coleman (1914-16), Miss Connolly (1914), Richard Dunbar (1915-1916), May Erne (1915-16), Phyllis Faye (1914), Jim Gerald (1914-16), Robert Green (1915-16), Essie Jennings (1914-16), Fred Keeley (1914-15), Arthur King (1914), Lee-Aldous Trio (1914-15), Annie Lillilund (1914-16), Florence Nightingale (1914), Jenny Lynne (1915-16), Hettie Peel (1914), Will Rayner (1914-16), Ruby Raymond (1914-15), Mdlle. Banto Rhys (1914-15).
- 2. Production team** included: Ernest Griffiths (advance rep, 1912-13), Alf Linley (NZ co-producer, 1915-16), Robert Pollack (business manager/advance rep, 1914-16), Ross B. Simpson (manager, ca. 1914-15), Leslie J. Smith (tour manager, 1915-16), George Stephenson (NZ co-producer, 1915-16), Harry Whaite (scenery 1914-15), Zenda (costumes, 1914-15).
- 3. Ballet** included: Vera Drummond (1914-15), Eva Morris (1914-15), Tessie Morton (1914-15), Melba Mowbray (1914-15), Sioyal Ray (1914-15), Iline Scott (1914-15), Gertie Studholme (1914-15), Bessie Utting (1914-15),
- 4. Guest artists** included: Atlas Bros (1916), Denis Carney (1916), Éclair Twins (1915), Stanley McKay (1910-16), Jessie and Dolly Miller (1916), Herman and Shirley (1916), Rowley and Tointon (1915-16), Wahine Trio (1915-16), William Speed (1915-16), Billy Wells (1915).

## 5. Additional Notes and Historical Clarification:

- **Atlas Bros:** Strength act
- **Dick Dunbar:** Was reportedly the brother of actress Nellie Ferguson (and therefore possibly also the son of actress Helen Ferguson)
- **Phyllis Faye:** Previously a member of McKay's Royal Pantomime Co (with husband Bruce Drysdale).
- **Robert Green:** His Christian name is sometimes recorded as Rupert.
- **Fred Keeley:** His surname is sometimes spelled Kealey.
- **Lee-Aldous Trio:** Whirlwind dancers. Included Alma and Ivy Aldous.
- **Annie Lillilund:** Tango expert.
- **The Millers:** Jessie and Dolly - instrumentalists.
- **Ruby Raymond:** Her Christian name is sometimes spelled Rubee.
- **Will Raynor:** Tenor.
- **Mdlle. Banto Rhys:** Solo dancer. Her Christian name is spelled variously as Banto, Banty and Bante. Her surname has also been spelled Ray. She joined the No 2 Company sometime around late 1915/early 1916.
- **William Speed:** Eccentric trick cyclist (is not African-American minstrel comedian W. H. "Billy" Speed). He is first known to have been engaged to play Matilda the Goose for the No 1 Pantomime Company's season at the Princess Theatre (Syd) in August 1915.

## ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

*LBP* = Little Bo-Peep • *CA* = Cinderella • *MG* = Mother Goose • *OMH* = Old Mother Hubbard • *RC* = Robinson Crusoe;

**1914:** STANLEY McKAY (New South Wales regional tour; ca. April-Aug.) • (Regional Victorian tour; ca. Sept - Oct.) • (Melbourne suburban tour; 2 Nov. - 31 Dec.)

**NB 1:** New South Wales tour incl. Singleton (30 Apr. - 1 May > *MG*) • Dubbo (Empire Th 16 June -) • Lismore (Federal Hall; 7 July -) • Grafton (Market Square; 15 July - \* > *MG* 15 July - \*) • Dubbo (Empire Th; 31 July - \* > return season: *RC* 31 July - \*)

**NB 2:** Victorian tour incl. Wangaratta (cnr Reid and Ovens streets; 14 Sept. - \* > *MG*, *RC* and *LBP*) • Beechworth (Federal Hall; 3-5 Oct. > *MG* 3 Oct; *RC* 5 Oct.) • Euroa (12-14 Oct. > *MG*, *RC*, *LBP*) • Shepparton (behind Post Office; 26-27 Oct. > *MG* 26 Oct.; *LBP* 27 Oct.)

**NB 3:** Melbourne tour incl. St Kilda (Lyric Th; 2 Nov. - \* > *MG* 2-6, 14 Nov.; *LBP* 7-13 Nov.) • Brunswick (Stadium Grounds; 21 Nov. - \* > *MG*) • Footscray (Barkley Th; 12-18 Dec. - \* > *MG*) • Footscray (Barkley Th; 26-31 Dec. > *LBP*). The company's whereabouts between 19 and 25 December have not yet been established (the Barkley Theatre presented a vaudeville programme for that week).

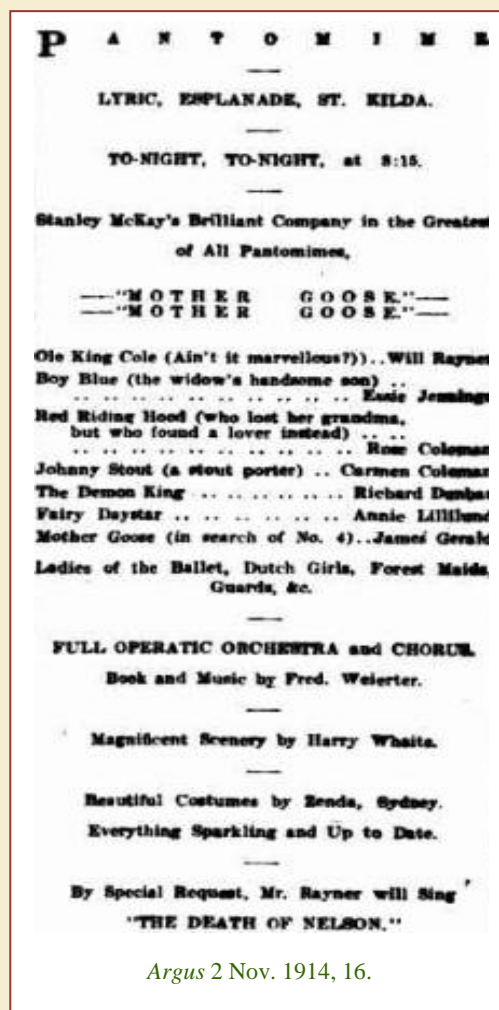
**NB 4:** On Sundays the troupe would often give a "Sacred Concert" instead of a pantomime (see for example Euroa; 4 Oct.).

**1915:** STANLEY McKAY (Melbourne suburban tour; 2 Jan. - ca. Mar.) ► STANLEY McKAY/FULLERS' (Bijou Th, Melb; 13-31 Mar.) • (Crystal Th, Broken Hill; 3-17 Apr. > *OMH* 3-9 Apr., *MG* 10-14 Apr., *LBP* 15-17 Apr.) • (King's Th, Adel; 1-21 May) • (Melrose Th, Perth; 29 May - \*) • (Western Australian goldfields tour; ca. June-July) • (Princess Th, Syd; 14-21 Aug.) ► STANLEY McKAY/FULLERS/GEORGE STEPHENSON (New Zealand Dominion tour; ca. Oct-Dec.)

**NB 1:** Melbourne suburban tour incl. Prahan (Empress Th; 2 Jan. - \* > *MG* 2-8 Jan; *LBP* 9-15 Jan.) • Footscray (Barkley Th; 16-22 Jan.) • Bijou Th, Melb; 13-31 Mar. - > *LBP*, 13-26 Mar., *OMH* 27-31 Mar.)

**NB 2:** Western Australian Goldfields tour incl. Boulder (Town Hall; 12 July - \*) • Kalgoorlie (Town Hall; 15 July - \*)

**NB 3:** New Zealand tour incl. Auckland (Op House; 4 Oct. - ca. 25 Oct. \* *OMH* 4 Oct., *LBP* 11 Oct.) • Thames (King's Th; 30 Oct. - 1 Nov. > *MG* 30 Nov., *CA* 1 Nov.) • Paeroa (Criterion Th; 3 Nov. > *MG*) • Hawera (Op House; 24 Nov. > *MG*) • Wanganui (Op House; 18 Nov. > *MG*) • Eltham (26 Nov.) • Patea (27 Nov.) • Waverley (29 Nov.) • Palmerston North (ca. 5 Dec.) • Shannon (Gillandria Hall; 7 Dec.) • Greymouth (Op House; 31 Dec. > *MG*)



*Argus* 2 Nov. 1914, 16.

**1916:** STANLEY McKAY in assoc. with FULLERS/GEORGE STEPHENSON (New Zealand Dominion tour; ca. Jan. - Mar.)

**NB 1:** Tour itinerary incl. Greymouth (1-3 Jan. > *MG* 1 Jan., *OMH* 2 Jan., *LBP* 3 Jan.) • Nelson (Th Royal; 15-17 Jan. > *MG* 14 Jan; *C* 15 Jan., *OMH* 17 Jan.) • Blenheim (His Majesty's Th; 19-21 Jan. > *MG* 19 Jan., *LBP* 20 Jan. *OMH* 21 Jan.) • Gisborne (Opera House; 1-5 Feb. > *MG* 1-2 Feb. *OMH* 3-4 Jan., *CA*: 5 Jan.) • Masterton (Town Hall; 15-16 Feb. > *MG* 15 Feb., *OMH* 16 Feb.) • Auckland (Grand Op House; 19 Feb. > *MG* 19 Feb., *OMH* 20 Feb.) • Wellington (Grand Opera House; 26 Feb. - \*) • Levin (Town Hall; 6 Mar. -). The Auckland season was produced under the management of the Fullers (in association with Stanley McKay). All other engagements appear to have been produced under the direction of George Stephenson (in association with McKay).

### **FURTHER REFERENCE**

"Lyric Theatre." PT: 7 Nov. (1914), 6.

"Pantomime." GRA: 4 Jan. (1916), 3.

"Pantomime in Prahān." MALS: 26 Dec. (1914), 5.

"Pantomime of Mother Goose: At the Stadium." BCL: 27 Nov. (1914), 1.

Prompter. "The Lorgnette." OBS: 9 Oct. (1915), 6.

"Seaside Pantomime: Mother Goose." ARG: 3 Nov. (1914), 11.

"Stanley McKay Company." OMA: 7 Oct. (1914), 2.

"Stanley McKay's Pantomime Co. Lyric, Esplanade, St Kilda." PT: 31 Oct. (1914), 3.

"Stanley McKay: His Panto Company Scores in Dubbo." DLMA: 19 June (1914), 3.