

1854

BOHEMIAN GIRL: [burlesque] **Txt/Mus.** [n/e]

A burlesque on Balfe's opera, *The Bohemian Girl*, J. C. Rainer's Ethiopian Serenaders performed the production for one night only. Advertising in the *Argus* records: "The company respectfully announce to the ladies and gentlemen of Melbourne and its vicinity that they have engaged the Queen's Theatre... for the purpose of performing one of their Negro Operas" (6). The burlesque is said to have contained "some of the most popular melodies of the day, including a choice selection of quartette, songs etc from the company's store of Ethiopian melodies interspersed with witticisms, conundrums and Negro sayings."

- 1854:** Queen's Theatre, Melbourne; 20 May
- **Dir/Prod/M Dir.** J. C. Rainer.
 - **Troupe:** Rainer's Original Ethiopian Serenaders.
 - **Cast** incl. J. C. Rainer, Mr White, T.P. Brower, Neil Bryant, J. M. Foans, Mr Moran.

[*Argus*](#) 20 May 1854, 6. Advert.



J. C. Rainer
Warren Faye. Folklore Unit

A TURK IN DISTRESS: [musical entertainment] **Txt.** F. M. Soutten; **Mus.** [n/e]

Advertised as a "comic situation" and "musical vaudeville" (*Argus* 1 June 1854, 8), this short piece for one actor was written specially for Alfred Nelson by F. M. Soutten. The characterisations called for are Mr Augustus Spivvans (a fast character), and the voices of Mr Jollybanks (a steady character), Mrs Jollybanks (a middle-aged character), Miss Susan Sniggers (a queer character), Popkins (a monthly character), Mr Green (an agricultural character), Miss Fanny (an interesting character). The piece includes the song "I Dreamt that I Danced at Jullien's Mask'd Ball" [sic].

- 1854:** Mechanics Institute, Melbourne; 1, 9 June, 17 July
- **M Dir.** Sydney Nelson.
 - **Troupe:** Nelson Family.
 - **Cast:** Alfred Nelson.

[*Argus*](#) 1 June (1854), 8. Advert.

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THE RUSSIANS IN MELBOURNE: [musical entertainment] **Txt.** F. M. Soutten; **Mus.** Sydney Nelson

Advertised in the *Argus* as a "sketch," and "an entirely new and original, highly probable, versified catastrophe" (26 June 1854, 8), it capitalised on the current fears of Russian aggression. The story concerns Mr Rostrum, a retired auctioneer, his groom, James, and his daughter, Clarinda. Another character, Mary Ann, was advertised as being played by Miss Invisible Green. The Russian invaders of the title are "supposed to exist in the imagination's of several elderly ladies" (*Argus* 6 July 1854, 8).

The songs incorporated into the work are "No More Glasses" and "The Rumours Fast Increase" (Carry Nelson), "Come Down with Me" and "Pray Father" (Sara Nelson), the duets "Sir, What's the Reason," "Now Work, Good James" (Carry and Alfred Nelson) and "Tramp to Bendigo" (Sara and Carry Nelson), and the trios "Oh, Dear Me," "The Russians are Coming" and "Now, Our Doubts and Fears" (finale).

- 1854:** Mechanics Institute, Melbourne; 29 June, 6, 10, 13, 20 July, 10 Aug.
- **M Dir/Arr.** Sydney Nelson.
 - **Troupe:** Nelson Family.
 - **Cast:** Alfred Nelson (Mr Rostrum), Sara Nelson (James Curricomb) Carry Nelson (Clarinda Rostrum).

- 1854:** Queen's Theatre (Melb); 21 Oct.
- Cast and production as for previous Melbourne season.

Argus 29 June (1854), 8. Advert. [see also advert. 6 July 1854, 8]

Kelly, Veronica, ed. [Annotated Calendar of Plays Premiered in Australia: 1850-1869](#). (1995), v. pags.

THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN: [burletta] **Txt.** W. M. Akhurst; **Mus.** Sydney Nelson

Set in a chamber on the first floor of the Hippopotamus Hotel, it concerned the characters Julian Vincent (a "brief-less Barrister" out of town for the sake of quiet and to escape the sheriff), Miss Blanche Evans (a strong-minded lady who is a "Pupil of the New Age" and a firm supporter of the Rights of Women); Cora Perks (a waitress at the hotel who is a lover of long chins); and a voice from offstage, "which is at first considered foreign to the subject, but eventually contributes to a happy denouement" (*Argus* 3 Aug. 1854, 8). The songs incorporated into the narrative are "What Life as a

Poor Little Maid" (a recitative and air sung by Carry Nelson), "Woman's Rights" (Sara Nelson), "Stay and Let Me Hear My Fate" (Alfred and Sara Nelson), "There's the Clock and the Cream Jug" (Alfred and Carry Nelson), and the finale, "Away with Idle Fantasies."

1854: Mechanics Institute, Melbourne; 24, 31 July, 3 Aug.

- **M Dir/Arr.** Sydney Nelson.

- **Troupe:** Nelson Family.

- **Cast:** Alfred Nelson (Julian Vincent), Sara Nelson (Blanche Evans), Carry Nelson (Cora Perks/The Voice).

Part II.
To conclude with (1st time) an entirely original opera.
Letta, by the author of "Quite Colonial," "Romances
and Reality," etc., entitled
"THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN!"
The music composed and arranged by Mr. S. Nelson.

Argus 24 July (1854), 8

[*Argus*](#) 24 July (1854), 8. Advert. [see also advert. 3 Aug. 1854, 8]

Kelly, Veronica, ed. [*Annotated Calendar of Plays Premiered in Australia: 1850-1869*](#). (1995), v. pages.

THE BLACK RIVALS: [aka THE NIGGER RIVALS]: [burlesque] Txt/Mus. [n/e]

Advertised in Sydney's *Empire* newspaper in 1855 as an "operatic burlesque" (4), the characters, according to Hobart's *Colonial Times* (16 Aug. 1854, 4), were Cuff (a postman), Bob William's (his second in the prize fight), Charles Gravier (in love with Fanny), Bill Johnson (his second in the prize fight), Miss Fanny Bloomer, and Dick May (timekeeper). The Times also records that during the course of the piece there would be a serenade duet ("Lubly Fanny Let Me In") and the dance favourite (Fancy Dance") performed by J. M. Foans (as Fanny). The production climaxed with the "Grand Combat" scene between Cuff and Charles and ended with the "Festival Dance" performed by "the Champion of Dancers, Moran" (4).

Advertising for the possible 1854 Hobart benefit production indicates that Cuff's second was called Peter Thompson (see note below).

NB: Hobart's *Courier* (15 Aug. 1854, 2) and *Colonial Times* (16 Aug. 1854, 4) newspapers both record that one of the items on the programme for J.P. Nash's farewell benefit for 16 August would be *Robbing the Mail*. However, the characters, songs, and specialty acts identified in the *Colonial Times* advertisements are all related to *The Black Rivals*. While it possible that the wrong information was supplied both newspapers, it is as yet unclear which work was actually produced. The concept of a mail robbery does not appear to have any relationship with the *Black Rivals* storyline. Furthermore, no other production of *Robbing the Mail* has yet been identified in relation to Rainer's Ethiopian Serenaders during the troupe's time in Australia.

1854: Royal Victoria Theatre, Hobart Town; 2 Aug.

- **M Dir.** J. C. Rainer; **Agent** J. P. Nash

- **Troupe:** Rainer's Original Ethiopian Serenaders

- **Cast:** Mr Moran (Cuff), T. P. Brower (Charles), Neil Bryant (Peter), J. C. Rainer (Bill), J. M. Foans (Fanny).

- Possibly also staged on 16 August. See note above.

1854: Astley's Amphitheatre, Melbourne; 23 Dec.

- Cast and production as for previous Hobart season.

1855: New Concert Hall, Royal Hotel, Sydney; 7 May [as The Nigger Rivals]

- Cast and production as for previous Melbourne season.

- J. P. Nash, who also appeared with the company during the 1854-55 period, may ended his association by this stage. His last known appearances with the Serenaders were in Adelaide in March 1855.

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY: [musical entertainment] Txt. F. M. Soutten; Mus. Sydney Nelson

Described as "musical vaudeville," and a ghost story with music, this was written expressly for the Nelsons by F. M. Soutten. Set during the reign of William III, the story concerns the characters Captain Arthur Tyrone, an officer in the Jacobite service, the Honourable Miss Villiers, a lady of fortune, and Margery, her unsophisticated maid.

The songs incorporated into the narrative are the duets "What a Fearful Night" and "The Legend" (Sara and Carry Nelson), "How Joyous and Sportive" (Carry Nelson), "Let Youths Never Listen" (Sara Nelson), and the trios "It's Useless Resisting" and "How our Little Plot is Ended" (finale).

1854: Mechanics Institute, Melbourne; 7, 10 Aug.

- **M Dir/Arr.** Sydney Nelson.

- **Troupe:** Nelson Family.

- **Cast:** Alfred Nelson (Captain Tyrone), Sara Nelson (Miss Villiers), Carry Nelson (Margery).

[*Argus*](#) 7 Aug. (1854), 8. Advert.

Kelly, Veronica, ed. [*Annotated Calendar of Plays Premiered in Australia: 1850-1869*](#). (1995), v. pages.

HARLEQUIN KING BLEAR AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS; OR, THE FAIRY OF THE ENCHANTED PALACE ON THE SILVER LAKE: [pantomime]

Lib. Henry Thornton Craven; **Mus.** [n/e]

Paisy and Fryer, 1854.

An advertisement placed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for the 1854 premiere describes *Harlequin King Blear* as a "grand scenical, historical, fictional, parodical, balygalical, musical match-if-you-can-ical, comical Christmas Pantomime" (26 Dec. 1854, 1), while an *Age* reviewer describes the 1855 Melbourne revival as: "A rich burlesque on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, whereby the king seeks to relieve himself of the cares of state in favour of what he seems to think the more agreeable delights of drinking potations deep" (27 Dec. 1855, 5). Although the two productions involved mostly different companies (with the exception of Frank Belfield as Bloatero), there is evidence in the form of similar synopses and characters (published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Argus*) which indicates that they are related (at least in the dramatic action). New comic business and songs are believed to have been added to the latter production.

VICTORIA THEATRE.—On TUESDAY EVENING, December 26th, 1854, the evening's entertainment will commence with a grand scenical, historical, fictional, parodical, balygalical, musical, match-if-you-can-ical, comical Christmas Pantomime! entitled HARLEQUIN KING BLEAR, AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS!!
N.B.—To forestall criticism, the conviction is publicly avowed, that on this Pantomime the immortal Shakespeare founded the sublime tragedy of King Lear!

Sydney Morning Herald 26 Dec. (1854), 1.

According to the *Age's* plot synopsis, King Blear decides to abdicate and announces that he will divide his kingdom and possessions between his three daughters (Scragina, Fatima and Lightstep) if they will each promise to provide him with comfort in his declining years. Meanwhile Blear is also persuaded by his right-hand man Demon Goggle to promise his youngest and finest daughter (Lightstep) in wedlock to a Falstaffian lothario, Bloatero, much to the dismay of the damsel and her true knight, Edward. The lovers are, however, given support by Queen Graceful who promises not only her protection but also her best assistance to thwart the schemes of Goggle. The Sydney production included Sydney's George Street Market, the exterior of Woolloomooloo Gaol, Castlereagh Street, the Newtown races, Homebush Nursery Grounds, and the Prince of Wales Restaurant in Pitt Street. The Melbourne production had these scenes changed to local settings (*ibid*, 5).

The songs incorporated into the Sydney production included: "Gin a Fairy Meet a Fairy, Comin' Through the Sky" (Fairy chorus), and "Bonny Done" (Queen Graceful and ladies). The musical aspects of the revival were described in the *Age* as "creditable." They included "new and beautiful songs," two of these being "Hot Coddlin's," and "Tippetwitchet." The production also involved several dance sequences (*ibid*, 5).

1854: Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 26 Dec. 1854 - 5 Jan. 1855

- **Mngr/Lse.** Andrew Torning.

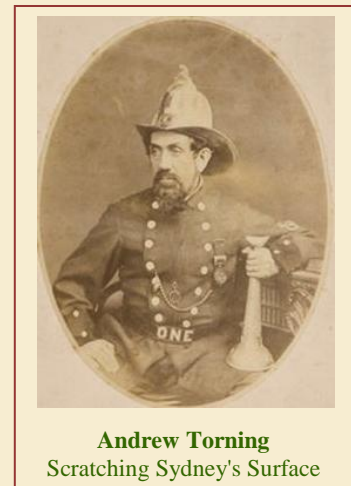
- **Cast:** Frank Howson (King Blear), Julia Matthews (Queen Graceful), Mrs Matthews (Spangleskirt), Mrs Moore (Silk-ho-ia), Miss Hart (Tynyshoe), Miss Seymour (Sweetankle), Miss Sinclair (Scragina), Miss Wheeler (Fatima), Mrs R. McGowan (Lightstep/Columbine), Mr Howard (Demon Goggle), Mr Long (Slithoof), Mr Dobsen (Blackhard), Mr Jones (Spiketail), Mr Lloyd (Baldun), Mr Cramp (an imp), Frank Belfield (Bloatero), Lachlan McGowan (Edward), Mr Turner (Spittytony), Mr Corder (Selvote), Mr Styles (Guzzle/Lushus), C. King (Duke of Allbony), Mr Ryall (Earl of Spindleshanks), Mr Mayson (Swigwack), Mr Hall (Harlequin), Andrew Torning (Clown), H. Twright (Pantaloony), Master J. Glover (Sprite).

1855: Queen's Theatre, Melbourne; 26 Dec. 1855 - 10 Jan. 1856

- **Dir.** Mr Chambers and Mr Walsh; **Mngr.** H. N. Warner.

- **Cast:** H. N. Warner (King Blear), Minnie Clifford (Queen Graceful), Mr Chambers (Edward), Miss Fortesque (Scragina), Miss Roberts (Fatima), Miss Chambers (Lightstep/Columbine), Charles Walsh (Clown), J. M. Wolf (Pantaloony), Mr Robbins, Frank Belfield (Bloatero), Mr Drummond (Earl of Spindleshanks), Mr Ryan (Duke of Allborey), Mr Chambers Jnr (Harlequin).

- The 1-3 January shows included three dances "Old Man," "Kangaroo" and one unnamed dance, which were performed by Aborigines.



Andrew Torning
Scratching Sydney's Surface

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"[Queen's Theatre](#)." *Age* 27 Dec. (1855), 5. Incl. plot synopsis.¹

"[Queen's Theatre](#)." *Argus* 28 Dec. (1855), 5.

"[Victoria Theatre – On Tuesday Evening](#)." *Sydney Morning Herald* 26 Dec. (1854), 1. Advert. Incl. plot synopsis.

RIDDLE ME RIDDLE ME REE; OR, HARLEQUIN AND CONUNDRUM

CASTLE: [pantomime] **Lib.** Nelson Lee; **Mus.** [n/e]

The pantomime opens with the Hall of Riddles, where Puzzle, a demonical kind of personage instigated by Mirth, manufactures three goblin riddles for the special bewilderment of humans in general and to the Princess Riddle-Me-Riddle Me-REE in particular. This is followed by the scene where King Conundrum offers the hand of his daughter to the successful unraveller of the riddles. Three wealthy gentlemen attempt the task and fail, thus being forced to hand over large sums of money as a consequence. A young sentimental youth, in love with the Princess, as she is with him, also fails, and having no money escapes before being punished. With the aid of the good fairy the youth finally works out the puzzles and the lovers are united.

1854: Queen's Theatre, Melbourne; 26 Dec. 1854 - 12 Jan. 1855 [17 pfms]

- **Dir/Prod/M Arr.** George Coppin; **Lse.** Messrs Young and Hyde; **M Dir.** B. Thom; **S Art.** William Pitt.

- **Cast** incl. Mr Rogers (Puzzle), Mr Burford, J. Chambers (Harlequin), T. Barry, W. Nunn, Miss F. Young (Mirth), Mrs Avins (Princess Riddle-Me-Riddle-Me-REE), Harriet Gordon [Hyde], Mrs Young.

"[Christmas Festivities and Amusements](#)." *Argus* 26 Dec. (1854), 5.

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"[Queen's Theatre](#)." *Argus* 27 Dec. (1854), 4.

¹ Pages 4 and 5 in Trove's digitised reproduction of the 27 December 1855 edition of the *Age* have been published in reverse order. To identify the correct page refer to the newspaper not the Trove publication details header.