

INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS: A

ARTHUR ALBERT



[1905-1906] Described by one Australian newspaper as "stalwart and picturesque" and "the owner of a ringing baritone, English descriptive comedian/singer Arthur Albert (1872-1930) came to Australia under contract to [Harry Rickards](#) in late October 1905. He arrived on the S.S. *Mamora* in the company of his employer and American performer [Post Mason](#). Albert made his Australian debut at the [Sydney Tivoli](#) on 11 November, appearing in both halves of the show and scoring success with the character song, "Daddy's on the Engine," which he performed with the assistance of a small girl (who partnered him in the chorus). During his time in the country, Albert appears to have garnered largely, though not overwhelmingly, positive responses from audiences and critics. Writing the day after his debut Sydney's *Sunday Times* theatre critic noted, for example, that he and was received cordially.¹ Later that week the *Referee* suggested that he was a first-class artist who had already become popular,² while *Australian Town and Country* included him among several of the Tivoli performers to contribute star turns.³

After concluding his Sydney engagement in the New Year, Albert opened at Melbourne's [Opera House](#) on Saturday the 6th.⁴ Describing him as a "capable singer," the *Argus* critic records that he was again assisted by a small girl and that his items were extremely popular, leading to several recalls.⁵

In late February Albert travelled to Perth to appear, under lease from Harry Rickards, at Leonard Davis's [Palace Gardens](#). He made his Western Australian debut on 6 March, performing three numbers in a bill that also featured [Maud Fanning](#), [Tom Dawson](#), and [Irving Sayles](#). His stay in Perth was marred by an incident that took place a few nights later, however. In a provocatively titled article, "Cowardly Assault," Perth's *Sunday Times* was the first to report that Albert, incensed by a week's icy reception, had accosted several members of the W.A. Rowing Club in the Cremorne Bar during the interval. The article goes on to note:

'You spoilt me,' [said Albert] to the young fellows, who did not even know who the pretentious bounder was. Singling out the youngest of them he dealt him a crushing blow on the mouth, knocking out several teeth. He then disappeared, for heavy built as he is and an ex-army man as he claims to be, he slunk away when the boy's friends came up. The lad's friends lay in wait for the aggressor, but while they had gone for a drink he made good his escape. Mr. Davis tried to soothe the lad's feelings by promising to telegraph to Mr. Rickards about the unprovoked assault. The value of Albert's assertion that the lad had 'chiaked' him may be judged by the fact that those sitting near the boy had heard nothing spoken, and were only conscious of the stony silence which greeted Alberts and his warblings.⁶

The incident, not surprisingly, received a good deal of attention from the local press, with most papers continuing a similar line of attack. Although the *Sunday Times* took a more even-handed approach to the assault the following weekend, it nevertheless still did not allow Albert much leeway for his behaviour:

Albert's version of the incident is that the person punched was not a boy, that he was an athletic young man, and that he brought the whole trouble on himself by using a disgusting expression in reply to a gentle remonstrance. Alberts adds that he only spoke to the young men because they had rudely interrupted a little girl who was singing. Which, if it is all correct, doesn't justify the action. If Alberts was insulted, as alleged his duty was to complain to the manager and not to take the law into his own hands in the presence of women and children.⁷

¹ "Tivoli: Harry Rickards' Company." *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 12 Nov. 1905, 2.

² "Tivoli: Harry Rickards' Company." *Referee* (Sydney) 15 Nov. 1905, 10.

³ "Sydney Amusements." *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney) 15 Nov. 1905, 43.

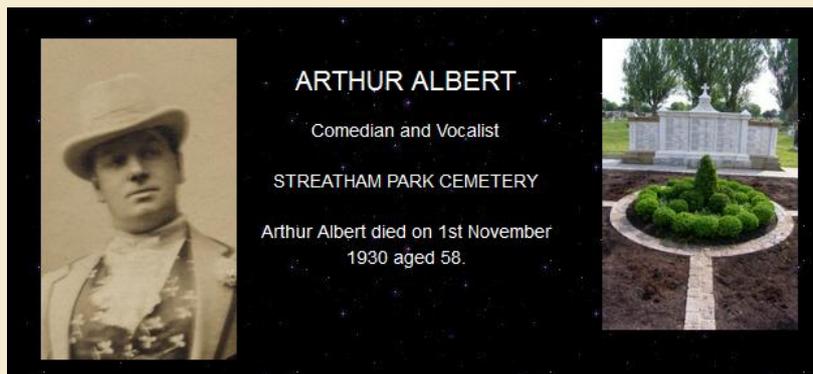
⁴ Following his departure from Sydney, Albert's position on the bill was taken by Post Mason. In its critique of the American's performance the *Newsletter's* "Strutters Page" proposed that it was "a pleasing change after that conceited Cockney creature, Arthur Albert" ("[The Tivoli](#)." 13 Jan. 1906, 11).

⁵ "Theatres and Entertainments." *Argus* (Melbourne) 8 Jan. 1906, 6.

⁶ "Cowardly Assault." *Sunday Times* (Perth) 11 Mar. 1906, 5.

⁷ "The Albert's Case." *Sunday Times* (Perth) 18 Mar. 1906, 1.

Despite the gravity of the incident no police action appears to have been taken and Albert continued performing at the Palace Gardens until the expiry of his contract at the end of the month, at which time he departed for London via Naples on the R.M.S. Orontes.



The Music Hall Guild

NB: Arthur Albert should not be confused with the Australian vaudevillian, stage and film actor, and radio performer Arthur Alberts (often billed as [Arthur Albert](#)) who was associated with the Australasian stage from the late-1890s through until at least the late-1920s.

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ALSACE-LORRAINE



Table Talk (Melbourne) 10 Feb. 1916, 33.

[1915-1916] American specialty musical act. Typically billed as an "expert musical" turn, Louis Alsace and Maxime Lorraine came to Australia in mid-1915 with a large contingent of American variety artists contracted by [Fullers' Theatres](#). The pair presented multi-instrumental performances that included violin, cello, Stroh violin (Louis) and piano, saxophone, harmonium, bagpipes (Maxime), along with quick costume changes, singing, repartee and atmospheric settings. The musical styles ranged from popular to opera. The act appears to have been enthusiastically received by audiences and critics alike. Typical of the reviews are the following, published during the couple's Brisbane (1915) and Melbourne (1916) seasons:

The instrumental and vocal turn of Alsace and Lorraine is quite a gem of its kind; an intermezzo on the 'cello, with organ accompaniment, was harmony indeed; 'Roses,' played on the saxophone and violin; the lady made a gallant Highlander as she plays on the bagpipes; a song, 'Tipperary, Mary,' by the gentleman, was followed by the 'Anvil Chorus' with electric effects on a darkened stage.⁸

⁸ "Empire Theatre." *Telegraph* (Brisbane) 16 Aug. 1915, 5.

The principal item on an attractive programme at the Bijou Theatre on Saturday night was that provided by Alsace and Lorraine, whose musical accomplishments evoked great applause from the large audience. The two artists, whose repertoire contains selections from grand opera to popular ragtime... are equally at home on the bagpipes as they are on the Alsaceophone,⁹ the violin which is claimed to more nearly approach the sound of the human voice than any other musical instrument. The elaborate gowns in which Lorraine appeared, coupled with pleasing scenic and limelight effects, invested the act with a novelty and charm that held the interest of the audience from beginning to end.¹⁰

During their time in Australia Alsace and Lorraine are known to have performed in Sydney ([National Theatre](#)), Brisbane ([Empire Theatre](#)), regional Queensland, Adelaide ([King's Theatre](#)), Perth ([Melrose Theatre](#)), Fremantle ([Princess Theatre](#)), Melbourne ([Bijou Theatre](#)), and Newcastle (Star Pictures), with a return season at the National, Sydney during late Mar and early April 1916, bringing their Australian tour to an end.

- Alsace and Lorriane were presumably stage names which the artists used in order to take advantage of the then international interest in the Imperial Territory of Alsace-Lorraine (created in 1871 by the German Empire following its victory in the Franco-Prussian War).



- Stroh violin (left), or Stroviols, is the trade name for a horn-violin or violinophone, that is, a violin that amplifies its sound through a metal resonator and metal horns rather than a wooden sound box as on a standard violin.
- The 1915 Queensland regional tour was undertaken in association with [Birch and Carroll](#) (and Birch, Carroll and Coyle in Charters Towers and Townsville). The shows for this tour included impersonator Lydia Carne and moving pictures.
- Alsace and Lorraine's movements between mid-September and early December 1915 are currently unknown. They do not appear to have played New Zealand and research using Trove has not yet located any advertisements or reviews for their act.

Further Reference:

"Interviewer: [Louis Alsace and Maxime Lorraine, The.](#)" *Table Talk* (Melbourne) 10 Feb. 1916, 33.
 "Perfectly Presented." *Theatre Magazine* (Sydney) May 1916, 51.

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FRED ALLEN

aka **Freddy James**

[1916] Considered one of the most popular and influential humorists to work in American radio during the medium's "golden age" (ca. 1920-1965), Fred Allen's long career in entertainment saw him initially establish a successful vaudeville act before moving into Broadway and eventually radio. In *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*, John Dunning writes that Allen was radio's most admired comedian and most frequently censored. A master ad libber, whose absurdist and satirical humour led to many heated arguments with his network's executives, Allen would often raise the issues in contention on air later, thus increasing the tension. It was his ability to develop seemingly new and original routines that saw him play a pivotal role in influencing many other comedians, including Groucho Marx, Stan Freberg, Henry Morgan and Johnny Carson.



Freddy James
 Source: [Wikipedia](#).

⁹ Likely the Stroh violin.

¹⁰ "[Bijou Theatre.](#)" *Age* (Melbourne) 7 Feb. 1916, 13.

Allen was born John Florence Sullivan in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 31 May 1894. He started his vaudeville career in his late-teens appearing at amateur night competitions, calling himself Fred St. James, Freddy James and eventually Fred Allen (in 1917). Initially billing himself "the world's worst juggler," he developed routines that combined deliberately clumsy juggling with patter and one-liners, mostly directed at his inability to juggle. Allen worked the US and international vaudeville circuits up until 1922, and during that time transitioned his act into monologue comedy with less emphasis on juggling. He also worked for a time as a ventriloquist.

"The World's Worst Juggler" is already at large in Australia, and will shortly be in this city at the Fuller theatre. His name is Freddie James, and he was captured by Ben J. Fuller in the wilds of Chicago.

Referee (Sydney) 15 Mar. 1916, 15.

Allen toured Australia for the **Fullers** in 1916, described in pre-tour publicity as a character comedian and billed as Freddy James.¹¹ According to his memoirs, *Much Ado About Me* (1956), Allen opened his Australian tour in Brisbane, followed by a week's solo film/vaudeville engagement at Toowoomba's **Elite Theatre** (158-59). Immediately after making his Sydney debut at the **National Theatre** the *Referee's* vaudeville critic wrote: "Freddie James, 'the world's worst juggler'... has a line of character that takes, especially as he 'kids' his audience all the time. He does enough juggling to show that he really has talent along this line, but his chief asset is his talk. What the great Carlton was to conjuring a few years ago, so Freddie James is to juggling."¹² During his stay in the country Allen played Sydney, Newcastle (on loan to **Dix-Baker**), Adelaide (twice), Perth, and Melbourne. Although offered dates in Tasmania and New Zealand by the Fullers, Allen recalls that he had been advised by the US Consul in Sydney that American was likely to enter the war and that all American's would be safer at home (183). He is believed to have left the country in late October or early November 1916.¹³

After returning to the USA Allen went on tour and later, before appearing in New York City, changed his stage name to the one he is now best known by. In his memoir he recall that the change was done so that he would not be offered the same low salary that theatre owners had been accustomed to paying him in his early career (203).¹⁴



In 1922 Allen moved his career away from vaudeville and began appearing in Schubert Brothers productions like *The Passing Show*. It was while he was with that organisation that he met his future wife, Portland Hoffa, (they married in 1927). Allen began his fulltime radio career in 1932 hosted *The Linit Bath Club Revue* on CBS, . When he moved the show to NBC it became *The Salad Bowl Revue* , and later *The Sal Hepatica Revue* (1933–34), *The Hour of Smiles* (1934–35), *Town Hall Tonight* (1935–39) and *The Fred Allen Show* (1939-40). The hour-long show featured segments that would influence radio and, much later, television; news satires such as *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In's* "Laugh-In Looks at the News" and *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update." Allen and his company also satirised popular musical comedies and films of the day, and presented semi-satirical interpretations of well-known lives (including his own).

Source: www.martingrams.blogspot.com.au

In 1940, Allen moved back to CBS Radio with a new sponsor and show name, *Texaco Star Theater*. Some four years later he took more than a year off due to hypertension and returned in 1945 with *The Fred Allen Show* on NBC. He ended his career in 1949. Allen died of a heart attack in New York on 17 March 1956.

Further Reference:

Allen, Fred. *Much Ado About Me*. Portland: Little, Brown, 1956. See "Australian Comedy" (157-183). NB: Extracts from the book, including the chapter on Australia can be accessed via [Google Books](#).

"Fred Allen." *Wikipedia*. [sighted 15/08/2014]

¹¹ "Stage Notes." *Newsletter: An Australian Paper for Australian People* (Sydney) 19 Feb. 1916, 6.

¹² "Gossip of the Theatres and Pictures." *Referee* (Sydney) 29 Mar. 1916, 15.

¹³ In *Much Ado About Me*, Allen devotes an entire chapter to his Australian tour, providing rich detail on travelling conditions, the Fullers' organisation and audiences etc. He also recalls his visit his unhappy time in Toowoomba (as the only American in town during the war - which America had not yet joined) and more pleasant memories of fellow performers, notably Frank Herbert.

¹⁴ The "Allen" surname reportedly came from Edgar Allen, a booker for the Fox theatres.