

PROFESSOR S.S. BALDWIN

(1848-1924) American magician Samuel Spencer Baldwin, later Samri Baldwin (aka The White Mahatma) made four tours of the Antipodes between 1878 and 1890. The first three, 1878-79, 1884 and 1887-88, were co-billed with his wife - as "Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin." Sometime around their 1889/90 Butterfly Company tour, the Baldwins separated. Clara's place in the act was taken by Kate (Kitty) Russell, who later became Baldwin's second wife. After departing Australia the Butterfly Company undertook an international tour lasting some two years. Ada Delroy and James Bell, who joined the troupe in Melbourne in 1898 were also involved with the international tour.

American magician Samuel Spencer Baldwin was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 21 January 1848. He began his professional career as an imitator of the famous Davenport Brothers. Later billing himself as "The White Mahatma" and changing his first name to Samri, Baldwin's performances (now known as a "question and answer" act) involved unspoken audience questions which would be answered by the mystic performer. While this format had long been used in private seance rooms by spiritualists, Baldwin is believed to have been the first magician to build the routine into a stage act. To achieve this, he invented the wax impression method of transferring messages to a clipboard, a method still used by mentalists today. He coined the phrase "sommnency" or trance-talking, to describe his act (aka "Rosicrucian Sommency"). Though Baldwin was careful to declare himself a magician and not a medium, he was nonetheless regarded by many in his audiences as a psychic.

By the late 1870s Baldwin had developed a complete show in which he and his wife, Clara, would present humorous exposure-type demonstrations of magicians' tricks and the methods used by fraudulent spiritualists and other miracle workers. She would prove her own capacities as a "true" medium, by staging a spirits séance and clairvoyance act (magictricks.com). One of the earliest of these was billed as "The Spirit Bride Reception: Materialisation of the Dead."



Source: www.magicpedia.com

The Baldwins made several successful world tours, including four trips to the Australasian region – 1878-79, 1884, 1887-88 and 1888-90 (billed as "Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin"). By 1888 they had engaged Kate (Kitty) Russell, a young vocalist, mimic and lightening change artist. Sometime around their 1889/90 Butterfly Company tour, the couple separated and Russell subsequently took Clara's place as both a feature act and later as Baldwin's wife.

SCHOOL OF ARTS.
POSITIVELY FOR THREE NIGHTS ONLY!!!
GRAND OPENING GALA NIGHT!
NEXT FRIDAY EVENING,
MAY 16th.
PROFESSOR S. S. AND CLARA
BALDWIN.
THOUGHT READERS. SPIRIT EXPOSERS.
WHO recently created such a sensation in England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, and who had the honor of appearing before the Prince of Wales, Members of the Royal Family, the Nobility and Clergy.
The Latest American Society Commotion!
The Funniest Entertainment in the World!!!
It is impossible to fully describe the Marvellous and most Amusing Entertainment of the BALDWINs. It is most laughable. The audience fairly Roar with Merriment.

In 1899 Baldwin abandoned show business to enter the mercantile trade but was eventually forced through bad decisions to return in 1904. He and Kitty divorced two years later. By 1920 he was employed as a technical consultant for the Great Thurston and doing "personal readings" as a clairvoyant. In his last years Baldwin joined the San Francisco Spiritualist Church, having come to believe in Spiritualism as a religion.

Financially, Baldwin was a poor investor. By the time of his death, any money he had earned was long gone. His daughter, Shadow, used some of his stage tricks in her occupation as a professional psychic, but her career was greatly damaged by Harry Houdini's exposure of spirit mediums in the 1920s.

SEE ALSO

- [Baldwin's Butterfly Co](#)

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Clara Baldwin was born Julia Clara Mansfield on 7 July 1852.



2. **Kate "Kitty" Baldwin:** Born Kate Russell in 1853, Kitty Baldwin joined the "Professor S.S. and Clara Baldwin" as show sometime before their 1887/88 tour of Australia. At that time she was known as a vocalist, mimic and lightening change artist. When Clara Baldwin left her husband a year or two later Kitty took over her stage act and later as the professor's second wife. Their marriage eventually began to dissolve in the early 1900s when his financial situation suffered as a result of poor management and decision-making. They divorced in 1906. She subsequently attempted a career as a solo mentalist, performing under various aliases, including Kate Russell "The Clairvoyant Queen," "The Famous Rosicrucian Somnambulist" and "Mrs. Baldwin Slade." Her career was short-lived, however. After failing to form a partnership with world renowned magician Karl Germain, she continued for a year or so before retiring.

Kate Baldwin

Source: www.magicpedia.com

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- The [Baldwins] intend playing here, and have forwarded in advance, neatly printed pamphlets full of favourable Press notices from England, Cape Colony, and India, where they have recently been touring. From these we select extracts from *The Times London*, and Melbourne's *Daily Telegraph*. The former says: "The entertainment was most amusing as well as instructive... Professor Baldwin's wit is of the nature of Mark Twain's and keeps his audience in roars of laughter." The latter remarks: "The Clairvoyant's performance was most extraordinary. Mrs Baldwin answered questions thought of by the audience, unknown to her, and then correctly stated the question... She was in a mesmeric state." In addition to these flattering notices, we may add that he has commendatory letters from over 1,000 clergymen and editors of religious papers... [which] are cited as having recommended his entertainments from their pulpits ("[News and Notes](#)." *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 29 Mar. 1884, 3. NB: The "News and Notes" column carries over from page 2.).

ENGAGEMENT CHRONOLOGY (Australia)

- 1878:** [JOHN E. FULTON](#) Sydney (Guild Hall; 18 Oct. -) • Melbourne (St George's Hall; 18 Nov. -).
- 1879:** [JOHN E. FULTON](#) Melbourne (St George's Hall; 10 Mar. -) ► [HISCOCKS, HAYMAN & Co](#) Adelaide (White's Rooms; 12 Apr. -) • Sydney (Queen's Theatre; 6 Aug. -) ► [GEORGE LINGARD](#) Brisbane (School of Arts; 16 Aug. -).
- 1884:** [GEORGE LINGARD](#) Darwin (ca. Apr.) • Charters Towers, Qld (School of Arts; 16-17, 19 May).

G U I L D H A L L

Lease and Manager Mr. John E. Fulton.

For a short season only,
commencing
SATURDAY EVENING, October 19th, 1878.

THE COMING EVENT
First-appearance in Australia of the
World Famed
Professor S. S. and CLARA
BALDWIN,
EXPOSERS

of
SPIRITUALISM,
In their original and extraordinary
LIGHT SEANCE.

Performing by human agency all the Marvellous Physical
and Mental Tests of the
MOST CELEBRATED SPIRIT MEDIUMS.

Endorsed by upwards of one thousand prominent Divines,
Editors, Literati, and Notables as being the most crushing blow
yet aimed against the performances of mediums, being all the more
overwhelming in that the *BAYNES OF LIGHT*, the Leading
Spiritual paper (U. S. A.) claims that Prof. Baldwin is a medium.

The Repertoire of
THE BALDWIN'S
include

SPIRIT MEDIUMS EXPOSED.

Slade's famous slate writing
All the tricks of the Davenport
The tricks of the Eddy Bros.

The great Katie King and other materializations.

Tricks of Foote and Mansfield.

How to materialize
How the dark seances are given
Sealed letter tests, slate writing
Fay's coat trick (improved)

How the spirits tie the mediums

All the rope-tying tricks

How the rappings are produced

How spirit faces and hands are
shown in the dark

Handcuff ordeal

Transmigration, elongation

Clairvoyancy, spirit music

All the great chain tests

Spirit drum tests

Celebrated bag tests (tied up in
a bag)

**HOW EVERYBODY MAY
BECOME A MEDIUM**

And dozens of other tests, including

**CLARA BALDWIN'S RENOWNED SPIRIT SEANCE,
MATERIALIZATION.**

The world-famed
KATIE KING MYSTERY.

The *Boston Herald* (U.S.A.), February 4, 1877, says:—
"You can ACTUALLY SEE AND RECOGNISE the faces and
forms OF THE DEAD, as they appear in a bright light on the
OPEN SEAGE during CLARA BALDWIN'S SPIRIT BRIDE
RECEPTION."

Also,
ANNIE EVA FAY'S SPIRIT-PHYSICAL SEANCE,
which met with such marked success at the Queen's Concert
Rooms, Hanover-square, London, and Crystal Palace, Sydneyham,
and received the endorsement of Professor William Crookes and
other Fellows of the Royal Society of England, acknowledged by
the Press and the public as the most

THRILLING SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTS
ever attempted by any Spirit Medium.
also CHALLENGE TO MEDIUMS.

I unequivocally and without reservation claim that the so-called
phenomena of Spiritualism are produced entirely by human
agency, and denounce mediums, one and all, tricksters. Notwith-
standing that Spiritualists claim that Clara Baldwin and myself
are mediums, I will wager the sum of \$100 or more, that I
can fully, completely, and satisfactorily perform or expose any
manifestation of so-called spirit power, which I am permitted to
witness three times.

(Signed) **PROF. S. S. BALDWIN,**
Exposer of Spiritualism.

In order to enhance the merits, and to enable
**ONE and ALL TO SEE THIS
WONDERFUL ENTERTAINMENT,**
there will be
NO EXTRA CHARGE IN PRICES.

SCALE OF PRICES:

Reserved seats 2s.
Gallery 1s.
Back seats 1s.

Seats may be reserved at Eddy and Co.'s music store.
Doors open at 7, commence at 8.
Carrington at 10.30.



Source: www.magictricks.com

Sydney Morning Herald 17 Oct. 1878, 2.

Some information in this biography has been sourced from the S.S. Baldwin entry published on the *Magic Tricks* website.

The Kate Baldwin section has also been sourced, in part, from the *All About Magicians* website.

The *Australian Variety Theatre Archive* extends its appreciation to both websites.

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