

JAMES BELL

The career of blackface comedian/singer and dancer James Bell was mostly associated with his adoptive sister, Ada Delroy. The pair toured the world several times, including the Antipodes, before co-founding the Ada Delroy Company in 1895. From 1900 onwards they were based largely in Australia. In 1909 he became Harry Rickards' manager at the Melbourne Opera House.

[For a more extensive insight in to James Bell's career in Australia see the entries for Ada Delroy and the Ada Delroy Company]

Often described as a "Senegambian" comedian (aka blackface comic), James Bell was raised in Lancashire, England, and went on to become a specialist on the Ethiopian castanets ("bones") while being equally adept at singing, dancing, banjo playing and sketch work. He first came to Australia in 1888 with [Harry Rickards](#), accompanied by his sister Ada Delroy.¹ Two years later the pair joined [Baldwin's Butterfly Company](#) for a world tour (1890-92), travelling through the USA, Middle-East, Far East, China, Japan, South Africa and Europe before returning to Australia in February 1895, again under contract to Harry Rickards. This time Bell was accompanied by his wife, Alice, a clairvoyant who like Professor Baldwin styled herself as a "White Mahatma."

In June 1895 Bell and Delroy co-founded the Ada Delroy Co, managing its Australian and New Zealand tours through until late 1897, at which time the troupe undertook a two and a half years world tour. After returning to Australia in 1900, the siblings effectively settled in Australia, touring their company throughout the country (particularly the regional areas) up until 1909. They also toured New Zealand in 1901. The two artists are also known to have appeared on bills for Harry Rickards and [James Brennan](#) at various times.

Bell's last known engagement was at Brennan's [National Amphitheatre](#) (Sydney) in December 1908. The following year he was appointed manager of the Melbourne [Opera House](#) by Harry Rickards. A keen cyclist, as was Delroy, Bell was a member of both the New South Wales and Victorian cycling leagues. Indeed their company reportedly toured with at least nine bikes during the 1890s. James and Ada married in 1908, the year after his Alice Bell died.

SEE ALSO

- [Ada Delroy](#)
- [Ada Delroy Company](#)
- [Madame Bell](#)



"Ada Delroy and Jim Bell on a Bicycle Built for Two: An impression by Walter Hobbs."
Age (Melbourne) 30 Sept. 1939, 6.

Some details have been sourced from "[Something About Alice](#)," an interview with Joy Bell published in the *Northern Herald* 16 Sept. 2011. [sighted 9 May 2012]

¹ Delroy was born Elizabeth Breslin. At age 12 both her parents died and she was subsequently adopted by Bell's parents.