

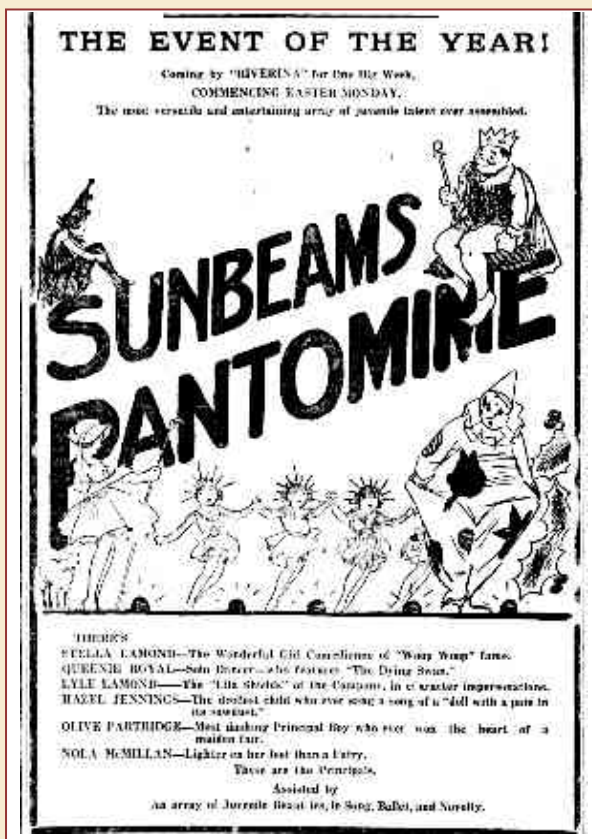
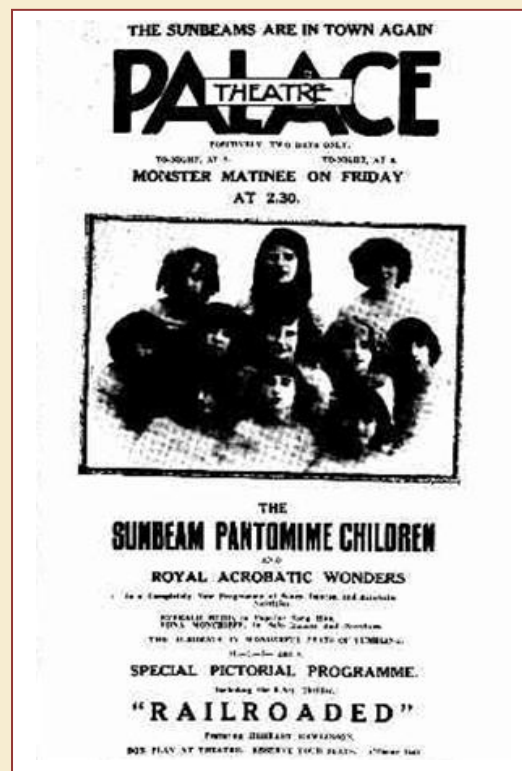
SUNBEAM PANTOMIME CHILDREN

aka **Sunbeam Panto Kiddies**

Formed in Sydney by Haymarket Theatres Ltd in conjunction with dance teacher/ director Frances Scully, the Sunbeam Pantomime Children specialised in song and dance, character sketches and specialty acts (primarily acrobatics, tumbling and contortion). In addition to pantomimes the troupe often presented straight vaudeville or a series of specially invented revues prior to a programme of moving pictures. Known to have still been active in early 1931, two of the troupe's most successful performers were Stella Lamond and Wee Georgie Wallace (aka George Wallace Jnr).

Regarded by most critics of the time as unrivalled in the annals of Australian juvenile vaudeville, the Sunbeam Pantomime Children are formed under the auspices of Haymarket Theatres Ltd in Sydney in late 1921 and continued touring Australia on a regular basis through until at least late 1931. The company, whose members appear to have ranged in age from five to around eighteen, specialised in presenting an all round variety entertainment – dancing, singing, character sketch studies and novelty acts (including acrobatics, contortionism, tumbling etc). Arguably the most prominent Sunbeam member for most of its time together was comedienne **Stella Lamond** (the "woop woop girl"), who joined as a twelve years old in 1921 and remained as one of the feature performers until early 1928. Another performer who joined the company during its later years and who subsequently went on to carve out a high profile career as a variety comedian was **George Wallace Jnr** (aka Wee Georgie Wallace) who joined in 1927. In addition to the individual artistes the Sunbeam company included a novelty combination of around eleven or twelve children known variously as the Royal Acrobatic Wonders. Specialising in acrobatics, tumbling and contortionism etc, the troupe toured with the Sunbeam's under the direction of well-known specialty act teacher Chrissie Royal.

Mercury (Hobart) 25 Oct. 1923, 8.



An article published in the *Brisbane Courier* prior to the opening of its June 1925 season (possibly the sixth or seventh time the Sunbeams had played the Queensland capital since its first visit in early 1922) indicates that much of the company's direction was overseen by Frances Scully, in association with her sister Tessie. The article records in this respect:

Miss Frances Scully is recognised in Australia as one of the principal teachers of dancing. Her pupils in Sydney number over 500 and it is from the ranks of these pupils that the Sunbeam Pantomime Children have been picked year by year. Miss Scully herself will accompany the present children to Brisbane and she will also have with her her sister Miss Tessie Scully, who will act as manager of the company, Miss Frances being the producer. For several years at the Haymarket Theatre Sydney, Miss Frances Scully has produced the various pantomimes, and on the completion and the successful launching of each [production] her sister Miss Tessie Scully has taken up the running.¹

Mercury (Hobart) 31 Mar. 1923, 9.

¹ "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Brisbane Courier* 28 May 1925, 11.

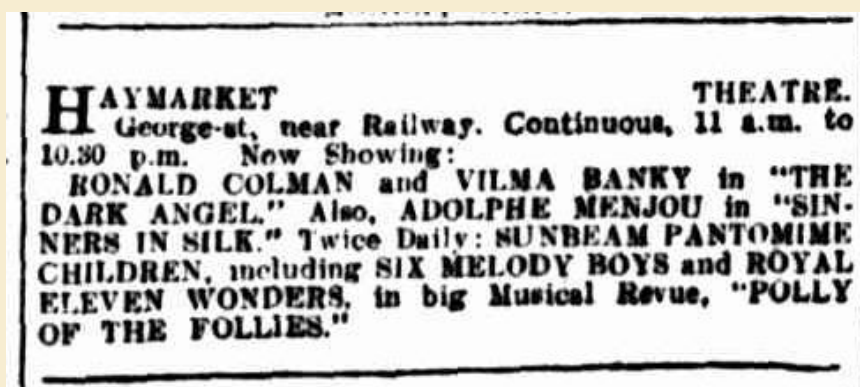
The first troupe to be sent on the road is believed to have comprised around 15-20 children. It was expanded to almost double that number during the 1922 Brisbane season, however² and by 1923 comprised around 40 (for the 1925 production of *The Wedding of Desolie Thomas* the company was reportedly 50 in number). Although there remain several gaps in the history of the troupe, it appears that it toured throughout much of each year. Whenever possible the Sunbeams attempted to spend the Christmas and New Year period in Sydney so that the children could spend time with their families. The work apparently continued, however, with the children usually expected to take place in the Haymarket's pantomimes.

The majority of the Sunbeam shows were essentially presented as a first part variety entertainment that accompanied a selection of short films (or occasionally one feature film). The length of each show was approximately forty minutes. Several productions staged from 1925 onwards were structured along dramatically-organised lines. The first of these was possibly *The Wedding of Desolie Thomas* (the actual name of one of the younger children in the troupe). The *Brisbane Courier* indicates in 1925 that the show was essentially a wedding scene played out by children.

The bride and bridegroom, with their attendant, will be received, with carpet down, at the main entrance of the theatre, from where they will march up the aisle, ascend the stage, receive their guests, partake of the wedding breakfast, and finally be entertained with spirited turns by each of their guests.³

Other semi-narrative shows included *The Garden Party*, first believed to have been staged at the Haymarket Theatre in 1926 as an Easter attraction; and the revue *Polly of the Follies* (described as both a "pantomime" and a pot-pourri of mirth and melody). Its first known staging was at the Brisbane *Tivoli* in December 1925. The troupe also presented its own version of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* at the Haymarket Theatre (Sydney) in April 1926 (beginning the 10th). For its January 1927 Haymarket Theatre season the Sunbeams presented another Frances Scully juvenile extravaganza, the three-act revue *Carnival Time*.⁴ The *Hobart Mercury* indicates that the revues in 1927 also included *The Venetian Carnival* and *The Mystic Cave*,⁵ while advertisements in 1929 record the company as presenting a follies-style show called *Hello 1929*⁶ and *Cinderella*.⁷

Following the end of another Brisbane season in 1926 the Sunbeams travelled to New Zealand (possibly the company's first tour of that country) before returning to Australia in order to undertake another national tour.⁸ The first established engagements for the Australia tour are a season back in Sydney at the Haymarket Theatre, followed by a return to Hobart, this time playing His Majesty's Theatre⁹.



Sydney Morning Herald 13 Jan. 1926, 3.

While it is not yet clear when the Sunbeam Pantomime Children company was finally disbanded, several reports in newspapers around late 1930 indicate that it was still operating then. The children's popularity appears to have diminished very little by that stage, with the *Brisbane Courier* noting that the planned season for early 1920 had been cancelled due to demand in Sydney.¹⁰ An advertisement placed in the *Courier* in December that same year advises the public to "watch out for the Sunbeam Pantomime Children in *Jack and the Beanstalk*."¹¹ Details regarding this production, however, have not yet been located.

² "The Tivoli." *Brisbane Courier* 27 Mar. 1922, 4.

³ "Music and Drama: Vaudeville." *Brisbane Courier* 6 June 1925, 19.

⁴ "Amusements: Haymarket Theatre." *Sydney Morning Herald* 1 Jan. 1927, 6.

⁵ "Pantomime Children: Appearance at His Majesty's." *Mercury* (Hobart) 31 May 1927, 4.

⁶ "Entertainments: Tivoli Theatre." *Brisbane Courier* 17 Jan. 1929, 5.

⁷ "Cinderella: Sunbeam Pantomime Children – Good Reception." *Mercury* (Hobart) 8 Apr. 1929, 3.

⁸ "Entertainments: Tivoli Theatre." *Brisbane Courier* 5 May 1926, 22.

⁹ "Amusements: Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 25 Sept. 1926, 7.

¹⁰ "Entertainments: Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Brisbane Courier* 1 Jan. 1930, 18.

¹¹ *Brisbane Courier* 24 Dec. 1930, 2. Advert.

It remains to be seen what significance the company had in terms of training future/adult variety performers. Although only a few of the children are known to have carved out high profile reputations (notably Stella Lamond, Bertha Beaumont and Georgie Wallace), further research into the industry may very likely identify more careers of significance in the coming years. The fact that the Sunbeams managed to retain such appeal with the Australian public for more than 10 years does, however, suggest that the entertainment they offered and the quality of the performers was something special.



Jackie Clarke
Aged Seven
Mail (Adelaide) 18 Dec. 1926, 16.

SEE ALSO

- [Stella Lamond](#)
- [George Wallace Jnr](#)

PERSONNEL

1. **Known performers included:** Bruce Aim, Joy Alexander, Nellie Barnes, Bertha Beaumont, Baby Blundell, Everald Budd, Gladys Cave, Jackie Clarke, Iris Crogan, Marie Crowther, Sheila Cruise, Eva Davis, Florence Edwards, Kitty Elliott, Gwen Farmer, Gwen Forsythe, Muriel Flood, Lawrence Foran, George Foster (aka Georgie Foster), Matt Gamble, Sylvia Hansen, Phyllis Jamieson, Hazel Jennings, Baby Kerr, Stella Lamond, Lyle Lamond, Phyllis Lane, Elma Larbist, Linda Lee, Phyllis Mackay, Nola McMillan, Glory Millett, Edna Moncrieff, Olive Partridge, Queenie Royal, Tessie Scully, Ella Shields, Edna Smith, Baby Somerville, Amy Stafford, Enid Stevenson, Joan Swain, Baby Thomas (aka Desolie Thomas), Minnie Thompson, May Toree, Lily Wagner, Sid Willows, Wee Georgie Wallace.
2. **Also associated with the troupe:** The Royal Eleven Wonders (aka Royal Acrobatic Wonders / Royal 12 Wonders), Blanche Sweet (in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1926).

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. Edna Moncrieff was the cousin of [Gladys Moncrieff](#).¹²
2. It is presently unclear what relationship (if any) there was between this Sunbeam Pantomime Children troupe and a similarly-named group of children identified as being run by specialty dancer Louise Larson in Adelaide in 1923.¹³
3. The *Wedding of Desolie Thomas* was renamed *The Wedding of Baby Kerr* by the time of its production in Adelaide in late 1926. As with Desolie Thomas, Baby Kerr was the name of one youngest troupe members. The production is reported as being the invention of the troupe's director and principal choreographer, Frances Scully.¹⁴
4. For the 1925 Boxing Day performance of *Polly of the Follies* (Tivoli, Brisbane), the Nestle company produced a special product called the Sunbeam Chocolate Tablet. This was presented free of charge to each child who attended either the afternoon or evening performance.¹⁵

Brisbane Courier 13 June 1925, 2.



¹² "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 9 Oct. 1923, 8.

¹³ See, for example, an advertisement for *West's Olympia* in the *Register* (Adelaide) 24 Dec. 1923, 2.

¹⁴ "The Wedding of Baby Kerr." *Mail* (Adelaide) 18 Dec. 1926, 16.

¹⁵ "Entertainments: Tivoli." *Brisbane Courier* 24 Dec. 1925, 22.

HAYMARKET THEATRE.
George-street, near Railway.

Continuous, 11 a.m. to 10.30 p.m.

THE GREATEST EASTER ENTERTAINMENT EVER SUBMITTED.

A MAGNIFICENT STAGE PRODUCTION
and
TWO BIG STAR PICTURES OF PLEASING CONTRAST.

First.—
THE SUNBEAM PANTOMIME CHILDREN
Present
"THE WEDDING OF DESOLIE THOMAS."
An Original "Sunbeam" Stage Production, with Desolie Thomas, Georgie Foster, Matt Gamble, Stella Lamond, and 50 other "Sunbeams," including the 11 Wonders.

Second.—
REGINALD DENNY
in
"THE FAST WORKER."
The Hero of "Sporting Youth" in another Auto-racing Drama.

Third.—
TULLY MARSHALL and ELINOR BOARDMAN
in
"THREE WISE FOOLS."



Four little Sunbeams who radiate joy. The Sunbeam Panto. Children are now appearing at the Tivoli in "Cinderella" Pantomime.

NIGHT SESSION.
HAYMARKET ORCHESTRA AND SUNBEAM'S PANTOMIME.

Haymarket Operatic Orchestra, conducted by Mr. Stanley Porter. Also new programme by the Sunbeam's Pantomime, by courtesy of the directors of the Haymarket Theatres and the artists.

7.55.—The chimes of 21°C.

8.0.—Haymarket Operatic Orchestra, selections.
From the studio.

8.15.—Mr. Harold Kent, baritone, "Let Me Love Thee" (Arditi), "What the Red-haired Boun Said" (Oliver).

8.25.—Mr. George Kingsley, comedy artist, "Turned Up" (Hale-Castling), "It's Doing Me Good" (Allen).

8.30.—Popular violin solos, "Cavatina" (Raff), "Serenade" (Irdia).

8.35.—Miss Peggy Alwyn, mezzo, "Thoughts Have Wings" (Lehmen), "La Cloche" (Saint-Saens).

8.40.—Mr. Harold Kent, baritone, "Rose of Allah's Garden."

8.45.—Studio Instrumental Trio, operatic melodies.
From the Haymarket Theatre, The Sunbeam's Pantomime, by courtesy of the artists.

8.55.—Singing chorus, the company.

9.0.—"I Want a Doll," Mar Gamble.

9.05.—"I Thought I'd Die," Desolie Thomas.

9.10.—"Old Grog o' Mine," Stella Lamond.

9.15.—"Bilo Wil," Quoy Sisters.

9.20.—Interval.

9.25.—"The Guards Brigade," Stella Lamond and company.

9.30.—"Bare Foot Days," George Foster.

9.35.—"Russian dance," orchestra.

9.40.—Finale, the company.

9.43.—From the studio.
Miss Peggy Alwyn, "Summer Nights" (Goring Thomas), (with violin obbligato).

9.45.—Mr. George Kingsley, comedian, "Follow Along" (Foley).

9.50.—Haymarket Operatic Orchestra.

10.0.—National Anthem.
Close down.

Clockwise from top left:

Sydney Morning Herald 11 Apr. 1925, 2.

Sydney Morning Herald 8 Jan. 1925, 5.

Telegraph (Brisbane) 7 Jan. (1929), 16.

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

1922: HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 12 Jan. - 15 Apr.).

- The troupe had a break from the Brisbane Tivoli sometime prior to 27 March (at which time it made its re-appearance).

1923: HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 15 Jan. - 23 Mar.) • Hobart (Palace Theatre; 2-7 Apr.) • Launceston, Tas (Majestic Theatre; 9-18 Apr.) • Hobart (Palace Theatre; 19-21 Apr.) • Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 10-26 Dec.) • Hobart (Palace Theatre; 9-13 Oct.) • Launceston, Tas (Majestic Theatre; 15-24 Oct.) • Hobart (Palace Theatre; 25-26 Oct.) • Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 8-26 Dec.).

- The Sunbeams reportedly played a season in Newcastle (NSW) prior to the Tasmania tour¹⁶ and followed the April Tasmanian tour with a season in Sydney. The troupe also reportedly followed the October tour of Tasmania with another Sydney season. The December engagement in Brisbane was followed by another Sydney engagement.

1924: HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd Sydney (Haymarket Theatre; ca. Jan.).

- A *Brisbane Courier* article indicates that the troupe finished their season in Brisbane on 26 December 1923 and travelled to Sydney. This engagements was then to be followed by seasons in Newcastle and then Melbourne ("Music and Drama."¹⁷

1925: HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd Sydney (Haymarket Theatre; 11 Apr. -) • Brisbane (Tivoli Theatre; 25 May - 11 June) • Brisbane (Valley Theatre, Fortitude Valley; 14-19 June) • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 14-31 Dec.).

¹⁶ "Amusements: Majestic Theatre." *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas) 5 Apr. 1923, 6.

¹⁷ "Music and Drama." *Brisbane Courier* 15 Dec. 1923, 19.

- 1926:** HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd **Brisbane** (Tivoli Theatre; 1-2 Jan.) • **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; ca. 9 Jan. - 16 Apr.) • **Brisbane** (Tivoli Theatre; 19 Apr. - 8 May) • **New Zealand** (Dominion tour; ca. May - June) • **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; ca. Sept.) • **Hobart** (His Majesty's Theatre; 27 Sept. - 2 Oct.) • **Launceston, Tas** (Majestic Theatre; 4-13 Oct.) ► TIVOLI CELEBRITY VAUDEVILLE **Adelaide** (Theatre Royal; ca. Nov. - 29 Dec.).
- It is possible that the troupe played one or more seasons elsewhere between late January and early April 1926 (no details have yet been located).
- 1927:** HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; 1 Jan. -) • **Hobart** (His Majesty's Theatre; 30 May - 4 June) • **Launceston, Tas** (Majestic Theatre; 6-16 June) • **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; 17 -31 Dec.).
- 1928:** HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; 1-7 Jan.) • **Brisbane** (Tivoli Theatre; 9-28 Jan.) • **Brisbane** (Valley Theatre, Fortitude Valley; 30 Jan. - 5 Feb.) ► HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; ca. Dec.).
- 1929:** HAYMARKET THEATRES Ltd **Sydney** (Haymarket Theatre; 1-5 Jan.) • **Brisbane** (Tivoli Theatre; 7-26 Jan.) • **Hobart** (His Majesty's Theatre; 6-19 Apr.) • **Launceston, Tas** (Majestic Theatre; 20 Apr-3 May).



Brisbane Courier 7 Jan. 1928, 22.

FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Amusements: Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 4 Apr. 1923, 12.
- "Amusements: Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 25 Sept. 1926, 7.
- "Cinderella: Sunbeam Pantomime Children – Good Reception." *Mercury* (Hobart) 8 Apr. 1929, 3.
- "Entertainments: Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Brisbane Courier* 16 Jan. 1923, 11.
- "Entertainments: Tivoli Theatre." *Brisbane Courier* 4 June 1925, 12.
- "Majestic Theatre." *Examiner* (Launceston, Tas) 5 Apr. 1923, 6.
- "Music and Drama." *Brisbane Courier* 15 Dec. 1923, 19.
- "Pantomime Children: Appearance at His Majesty's." *Mercury* (Hobart) 31 May 1927, 4.
- "Sunbeam Children, The." *Brisbane Courier* 9 Jan. 1928, 11.
- "Sunbeam Children, The." *Mercury* (Hobart) 4 Apr. 1929, 7.
- "Sunbeam Kiddies." *Brisbane Courier* 15 Dec. 1925, 19.
- "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 31 Mar. 1923, 9.
- "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 3 Apr. 1923, 6.
- "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 5 Apr. 1923, 4.
- "Sunbeam Pantomime Children." *Mercury* (Hobart) 9 Oct. 1923, 8.
- "Sunbeams and Good Pictures." *Brisbane Courier* 27 Apr. 1926, 15.
- "Tivoli Theatre." *Brisbane Courier* 4 June 1925, 12.
- "Tivoli – The Sunbeams." *Brisbane Courier* 20 Apr. 1926, 9.
- "Vaudeville." *Brisbane Courier* 6 June 1925, 19.
- "Wedding of Baby Kerr." *Mail* (Adelaide) 18 Dec. 1926, 16.

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