

GEORGE DREW

George Drew performed as a solo coon singer ca. 1910. His early career included an engagement with Frank Smith (Perth) and a partnership with Jim Romaine. The Drew/Romaine act ended, however, when Romaine volunteered for war service. Drew subsequently formed a new act with Jim Harris, and together they played engagements with Fuller's Theatres and Harry Clay's among others. From around 1923, however, Drew toured his own revusical company on a Western NSW circuit. He and Jim Romaine reformed their act for a period beginning in 1927.

George Drew's name first appears on a programme put on by Frank Smith at the Criterion Theatre (Perth) in October 1910, in which he performed coon songs. His early career in variety entertainment was largely associated with Jim Romaine, a singer, patterologist and violin player. Although little is known about Drew and Romaine, it is believed that the pair got together in Melbourne sometime around 1911. By 1912 they were playing engagements in Sydney. The partnership dissolved during the early war years when Romaine joined the army. Although known to have served for some time at the Front, Romaine managed to return home at the end of the war, and picked up where his career in variety had left off, playing engagements for many leading managers, including Harry Clay.

Following Jim Romaine's departure, George Drew teamed up with Jim Harris to form the act, Drew and Harris. Billed as "two boys and a piano," the pair presented a smart act of songs, mostly in the ragtime style, and various patter routines. Drew wrote all their songs, including the lyrics, and later incorporated baton-spinning and ventriloquy into the act. One of his more popular songs from 1917 was "Can't We Have a Rag about Australia?" According to

Australian Variety, Drew had written over eighty songs by 1917, "all of which [had] met with success" (24 Jan. 1917, n. pag.). While the reality of this claim remains unverified to date, it is clear from articles in that magazine that Drew was recognised as being one of the more promising of the country's popular songwriters, even though the team of Drew and Harris were finding it hard to snare engagements with the leading city managers. In commenting on the lack of support given by the recognised managers, *Australian Variety* drew attention to the plight of Drew and Harris. In its 24 May 1917 issue the magazine's critic argued: "Here is an Australian act... doing their own songs who do not seem to get a chance to prove their real ability in a metropolitan theatre... well, managers, they're worth booking" (n. pag.). The same issue included a letter from George Drew, who made it clear that he believed that there was "very little encouragement given" which he saw as a major reason for the current "vaudeville situation" being so acute" (n. pag.).



Source: National Library of Australia

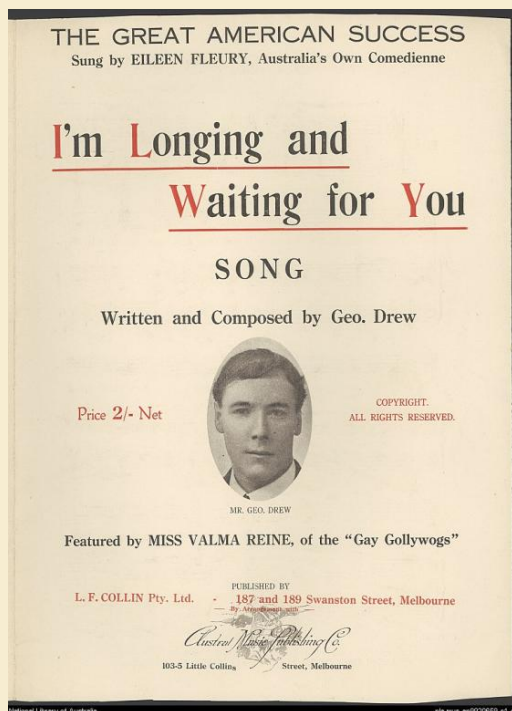


Drew and Harris (1917)

Source: National Library of Australia

The paucity of engagements situation can now be seen as temporary hitch for the industry as the travel restrictions brought on by the war meant saw less foreign artists arriving in the country than ever before, and with many heading home to support their own country's efforts. Indeed, by early 1918 Drew and Harris had found themselves employed

by Harry Clay for his Sydney metropolitan circuit. The duo made their premiere performance for Clay at his Newtown Bridge Theatre on 2 March. The *Australian Variety* reviewer described Jim Harris as "slightly remindful of Leonard Nelson" and George Drew as "not unlike Ted Stanley." The act itself was seen as "crisp, clean and well delivered" (8 Mar. 1918, n. pag.).



Source: National Library of Australia

While the partnership seems to have enjoyed at least modest success during the post-war years, it appears that sometime between 1920 and 1923 the pair split up the act. By 1923 George Drew had put together a company of performers which he took around a circuit that encompassed the western districts of NSW (the circuit included Bathurst). It was during this phase of his career that Drew is believed to have also begun to put together his own revues, no doubt contributing many of the original songs to comic material he co-wrote with other members of the troupe. Two revues he is known to have helped create are *A Matrimonial Mix-Up* (1923) and *The East Enders* (1924). Some of the acts known to have been engaged by Drew during the mid-1920s include the popular duo Corrie and Verne (1924-5), Alma May (1925) and Frank Moran (1925).

Although details of George Drew's career from the mid-1920s onwards are largely incomplete it is known that he and Jim Romaine re-united to play engagements on the Fullers' circuit in 1926. Their appearances included the Hippodrome (Syd) ca. May/June 1926; Bijou Theatre (Melb) ca. December 1926; and Fullers Theatre (Syd) ca. March 1927. He is also known to have toured his own company - the George Drew Musical Comedy Co - around 1932. The line-up at that time included veterans Clara Keating, Les Coney and Will Raynor.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

1923: **A Matrimonial Mix-Up** [revusical]

1924: **The East Enders** [revusical]

ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS (Published)

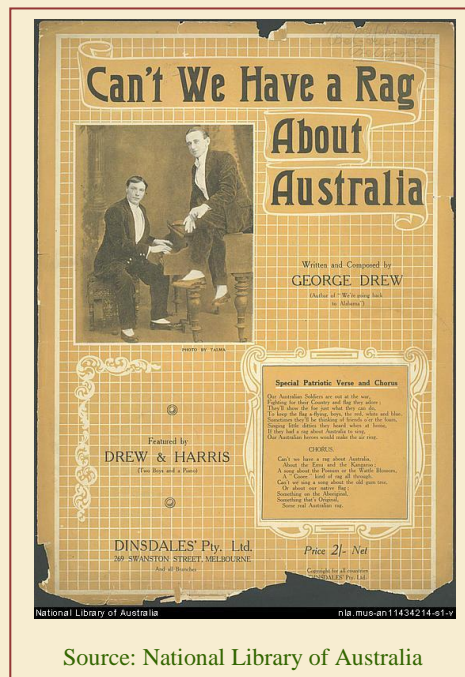
♪ = digital copy of score available online via Australian National Library (ANL) • Other scores held by the ANL.

- 191-: "We're Going Back to Alabama" [Melb: Dinsdales]
- ♪ 191-: "[I'm Longing and Waiting For You](#)"
- ♪ 1917: "[Can't We Have a Rag about Australia](#)"

FURTHER REFERENCE

"[Drew's Musical Comedy Company](#)." SARG: 9 Sept. (1932), 2.

Djubal, Clay. "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930." (1998), v. pags.



Source: National Library of Australia

Last updated: 4/07/2012

Expanded and updated from Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight." Ph D Diss. U of Qld (2005), Appendix D.

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