

## HARRY W. EMMET

Although very little is yet known about Harry W. Emmet, he appears to have been one of the more successful Australian-based theatre practitioners of the early 1880s. While capable of turning his hand to almost any theatrical genre, either as an actor or writer, he also established himself as a stage manager for several well-known dramatic and minstrel companies. During the 1880s he collaborated with writer Lance Lenton, composer David Cope, and was also associated with Alfred Dampier, F. E. Hiscocks Federal Minstrels and Bland Holt. In 1885 he also published a collection of stories, poems and miscellaneous pieces under the title *Harry Emmet's Theatrical Holiday Book* (1885).

One of the more successful Australian-based theatre practitioners of the early 1880s, Harry W. Emmet,<sup>1</sup> as with many of his peers, was capable of turning his hand to almost any theatrical genre, either as an actor or writer. The first record of Emmet's presence on the Australian stage is his appearance in a production of *Hearts of Gold* at the Theatre Royal (Melb) on 15 December 1879. Prior to this however his play with music, *Honest Hearts* received a production at the Queen's Theatre (Syd) beginning 22 November, with a company that included Marion Willis and Lachlan McGowan. While his name is not mentioned in the cast list there is the possibility that it was misspelled as Harry Bennett (SMH: 22 Nov. 1879, n. pag.) The play was revived by the same company the following year in early January.

In 1880 Emmet and Lance Lenton collaborated on the musical play, *Married by Mistake*, which was staged by McLean's Juvenile Troubadours at St George's Hall (Melb) beginning 30 March. On 24 July Emmet's *Our Village*, with music by David Cope, was produced by Mr and Mrs G. B. W Lewis. The production also starred Marion Dunn (aka Mrs Marcus Clarke). His Christmas pantomime *Jack the Giant Killer*, directed by G. R. Greville at the Queen's Theatre (Syd) over December 1880 and January 1881, included among the cast Harry Leston, Lance Lenton (who also contributed at least one song) and the Sherwood sisters.

In early December 1881, Emmet was engaged by Alfred Dampier to appear with his company at the Gaiety Theatre (Sydney) under the auspices of F. M. Bayless. Emmet appeared opposite Dampier in F. R. C. Hopkins *All for Gold; Or, Fifty Millions of Money* and later that same month in *Michael Strogoff* - as Dr Julian, an *Argus* correspondent (it was revived there in February 1882). He appeared with Dampier in a number of productions at the Gaiety during the first few months of 1882. These included *Valjean, Saint or Sinner?* (25 Feb.); *No Mercy* (as Frank Gurney) an adaptation by Julian Thomas (4 March); and the Hopkins' adaptation *£sd* (20 Mar.). He also began to dabble in entrepreneurial activities around this time. One such event was the Ye Fayre of Ye Olden Tyme carnival held on the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, over the Easter weekend (SMH: 1 Apr. 1882, 2). Emmet's involvement was as general manager.

1883 saw the first staging of Emmet's four act sensation drama, *Grasp; Or, A Mother's Love*, written for the actor Gratton Riggs, at the Theatre Royal, Hobart (22 Jan.). Riggs performed it later in the year at Melbourne's Princess's Theatre (Melb) during a season for Williamson, Garner and Musgrove (24 May). A few months later Emmet took up an engagement with E. Majeroni at Melbourne's Bijou Theatre, appearing as Lafayette Moodle (a society fop) in the four act 'modern comedy' *An Arabian Night; or, Harlequin Alrashid and His Mother-in-Law* (21 July) and as Mr Capsicum Pepper in *The Strategist* (11 August). He is also known to have provided an original first part finale, "A *Bourke-Street Coffee-Stall*," for Hiscocks' Federal Minstrels during the final weeks of the troupe's first ever season together (Victoria Hall, 11-17 Aug.). The following month he joined the Federal Minstrels in Sydney as a sketch/farce actor and stage manager. His duties also included writing taking on the MC position (Mr Interlocutor) while also contributing original sketches, farces and burlesques. Several of his works were staged by Hiscocks including *The Woman of the Peep-Hole; Or, The Rainbow Day and Herr-Rabian Knight*, described in advertising as a "temperance-whisky drama" (SMH: 15 Sept. 1883, 2). The farce *Noah's Ark* (20 Oct.), set in a Sydney boarding house, was another. Emmet's time with Hiscocks saw him establish himself as a performer in the same class as some of the Federal Minstrel's biggest stars, notably W. Horace Bent, Alf Lawton and Lou Brahm. Emmet's engagement with Hiscocks was interrupted in early October, however (around the same time that Hiscocks moved from the Masonic Hall to the Gaiety theatre), when he appeared as Lord Reginald Egerton in *Pluck* for the Bland Holt and Alfred Dampier company (Opera House, Syd; 3 Oct.). That production was staged under the auspices of Williamson, Garner and Musgrove.

Another Emmet pantomime, *Sinbad the Sailor* was given an extravagant production by George Rignold in December 1884. One of the highlights of the show was apparently Sir William Robinson's patriotic song "Unfurl the Flag." The

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<sup>1</sup> There is some confusion over the exact spelling of Emmet's name. Many newspaper references in both Australia and the USA (advertisements, for example) spell it with two 't's' (i.e. Emmett). The AVTA uses the spelling from Emmet's 1885 publication – although this may not necessarily be correct.

company included some of the leading local actors of the era, notably Charles H. Taylor and Ella Carrington, Joe Tolano, Amy Horton, Blanche Lewis and Boleno Brown.

The last record of Harry Emmet's Australian career found to date is his engagement with the Helen Vivian Dramatic Company at the Nugget Theatre (Melb) in 1885. The company opened with *Queen's Evidence* on 19 September and he later appeared in a revival of *Neck for Neck*. The engagement also saw him employed as stage manager, and eventually as co-manager with Arthur Vivian. That same year Emmet co-authored and compiled with Vivian a book of poems, stories and sketches titled *Harry Emmet's Theatrical Holiday Book*.

It appears that sometime during the latter half of the decade Emmet travelled to America, and possibly other destinations. His name is recorded on the bill of the Harlem Theatre, New York City for the week beginning 26 May 1890. One of the features of the entertainment was his "American military drama" titled *To the Front*, starring Henrietta Berlaer, Irene Leslie, Beatrice Constance, Harry W. Kendrick, Loudon McCormack, Charles M. Travis and Louis N. Glover (Odell, XIV, 370). The following year he was in a company which presented *A High Roller* at the Bijou Theatre (NYC) beginning 3 August. Other players included Barney Fagen, Barry Maxwell and Leslie Fursman. Emmet apparently left the company on 10 August and was replaced by high profile minstrel performer Billy Rice, who made his debut on the stage in 'white face' (Brown, 292). Emmet's name also appears in the *New York Clipper Annual* of 1891 in connection with *By the Order of the Court* (14 Oct.). Credited to Emmet the *Clipper* notes that it was "originally acted... in New Bedford, Mass" (9).

**NUGGET THEATRE**

Bourke-street east (near Parliament-house).  
 Lessee .. .. . Mr. Frank Weston.  
 Manager .. .. . Mr. Arthur Vivian.  
 Stage Manager .. Mr. Harry W. Emmet.  
 Orchestral Director .. Mr. Owen Conduit.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1885.

First Appearance in Melbourne of the  
**HELEN VIVIAN** .. .. . **HELEN VIVIAN**  
**HELEN VIVIAN** .. .. . **HELEN VIVIAN**  
 DRAMATIC COMBINATION.  
**HELEN VIVIAN PREMIER DRAMATIC COMPANY.**

**HELEN VIVIAN**, supported by Harry W. Emmet,  
 Arthur Vivian, and a brilliant coterie of sterling  
 artists.

The great Sensational, Emotional, and Immensely  
 Humorous Drama, with New Scenery and  
 Mechanical Effects,  
**QUEEN'S EVIDENCE.**  
 Kate Medland (the constant one).. **HELEN VIVIAN**  
 Ada Summers (Sir Frederick Sydney's Niece)  
 Laura Sydney (Sir Frederick's Daughter) .. Miss Marie Wilton  
 .. Agnes Lorraine  
 Gilbert Medland (a clerk, alias Philip Standish,  
 a gentleman from Canada).. Mr. Harry W. Emmet  
 Matthew Thornton (an adventurer) Mr. Philip Stuart  
 Mr. Wynford, J.P. .. .. . Mr. A. L. Inglis  
 Sir Frederick Sydney .. .. . Mr. John Heaford  
 Joe (the lock-keeper) .. .. . Mr. J. H. Haynes  
 James (a poacher) .. .. . Mr. B. Warner  
 Susan .. .. . Miss Kyre  
 Arthur Sydney (Sir Frederick's adopted child)  
 Jonas Isaacs, alias Mr. Levant .. .. . Arthur Vivian  
 "I've Got a Heye Like a Heagle."

**CARDS of ADMISSION.**  
 Orchestra seats, 2s.  
 Middle seats and raised tier, 1s.  
 Back seats and pit, 6d.  
 Seats in private boxes, 3s.  
 H. J. WHITTINGTON, Acting Manager.  
 Mr. C. PETERSEN, Secretary.

*Argus* 19 Sept. (1895), 16.

## MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

- 1879:** **Honest Hearts** [play with music]  
**1880:** **Jack the Giant Killer** [pantomime] • **Married By Mistake** [play with music] • **Our Village** [burlesque]  
**1883:** **A Bourke Street Coffee-Stall** [musical sketch]  
**1884:** **Sinbad the Sailor; Or, The Genii of the Diamond** [pantomime]

## FURTHER REFERENCE

- Brown, T. Allston. *A History of the New York Stage from the First performance in 1732 to 1901* (1903), Vol 3, 292.  
 Djubal, Clay. "[Emmet, Harry W.](#)." *AustLit* (2006)  
 Emmet, Harry. *Harry Emmet's Theatrical Holiday Book*. (1885).  
 Odell, George C. D. *Annals of the New York Stage* (1970), XIV, 370.

### See also:

- SMH:** 17 Sept. (12883), 2 [advert.]  
**NYCA:** (1891), 9.

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

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