

JIM GERALD

Incl. Essie Jennings

Circus clown, acrobat, comedian, pantomime dame, revusical writer/producer, songwriter, film actor/director/screenwriter. Jim Gerald spent his childhood and youth touring the world as a circus performer. He returned to Australia ca. 1907 and continued to work as a circus performer while also appearing in two films directed by his father (S. A. Fitzgerald). Although contracted to the Fullers as a comedian in 1912 he was leased out to Stanley McKay, and for whom he toured Australia and New Zealand until 1916. After returning from the war, Gerald re-joined Fullers with a sketch act that co-starred his wife Essie Jennings. The pair joined Walter George's Sunshine Players in 1921, and the following year put together their own troupe, Jim Gerald's Miniature Musical Comedy Co. The company toured Gerald's one act musical comedy's (revusicals) up until the late 1920s. He also collaborated with actor/director Frank Neil on several Christmas pantomimes between 1926 and 1934, and while in the USA in 1928 wrote and produced at least two short "talkies" which he exhibited in Australia in 1929 while touring his live shows. During the 1930s he turned to radio, while also continuing to appear in revues. After serving as an entertainment officer in World War II, Gerald returned to the stage, touring in revues and working in radio up until the late 1950s.

1891-1911

The seventh and youngest son of eminent Australian actor and film pioneer S. A. (Stephen Australia) Fitzgerald, and his wife Mary Ann, Jim Gerald was born in the Sydney suburb of Darlinghurst on 1 January 1891. His grandfather, Stephen Fitzgerald, who been convicted at Maidstone, Kent for Robbery from Person with Violence and transported to Australia for 15 years (Columb, 18 April 2013, email), later became a Maitland mail contractor and government-appointed metal merchant. Prior to turning to the professional stage Gerald's father had initially pursued a career as a tailor in Maitland, while also involving himself in the local amateur theatre and with various sporting organisations, initially as an athlete and a later as committee member.

From early childhood James Fitzgerald took to the world of professional entertainment, having spent a good deal of his early childhood playing truant from school so that he could go down to the sand hills behind Centennial Park to learn acrobatic skills from professionals and amateurs who regularly practised there. *Australian Variety* records that Gerald made his first professional stage appearance at the age of four and won numerous prizes for dancing before the age of twelve (18 Dec. 1919, 3). Showing enormous talent even at age seven his father allowed him to be apprenticed as a tumbler to German showman and strongman,

Oscar Pagel, who had previously worked for the Fitzgerald Brothers'Circus.¹ Gerald remained with Pagel for some ten years, touring such places as South Africa, Europe, Asia and North America. During his time with the circus he also shortened his surname to Gerald, apparently on the advice of his employer.

By the time he returned to Australia around 1906/07 Jim Gerald was a truly a remarkable circus act. Although only seventeen he could walk the high wire, complete sixty somersaults in sixty seconds, and was reportedly the first man in the world to do the "loop the loop" around a steel cage on a motor bike (Norman 226), a feat he performed under the nom deplume "Diabolo." In 1907, while still involved in the circus industry, he was engaged to play (in blackface) the character of Warrigal in Charles MacMahon's motion picture adaptation of *Robbery under Arms*. According to Pike and Cooper the film was directed by his father (11). Three years later Gerald and two of his brothers, Lance Vane and Max Clifton, appeared in *The Life and Adventures of John Vane, the Notorious Australian Bushranger* (1910). That film, also directed by his father, is now viewed as a significant landmark in Australian cinema history, being the first recorded involvement in narrative film production by Charles Cozens Spencer (a leading figure in the early Australian film industry). Max Clifton is also known to have appeared in at least two other films around this period, these being *The Squatter's Daughter* (1910) and *The Christian* (1911). Gerald continued working as a circus performer for about five years following his return to Australia, but around 1911/12 was apparently forced into taking up another



Source: National Library of Australia

¹ See "Historical Notes and Corrections" section below for details regarding the claims that Gerald was a nephew to brothers Dan and Thomas Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald Bros Circus) and John D. Fitzgerald, a prominent barrister and writer who served as a NSW Labor parliamentarian.

career. As Charles Norman recounts, Gerald was responsible for wrecking a wagon and about £1,000 worth of equipment while en route to a country show with Barton's Circus. Quitting before he could be fired he decided to try out his comedic talents on the theatrical stage (224-5). The decision to quit the circus may not have been entirely due to this event, however, but was also partly in response to Gerald's physical health - he had by then broken numerous bones in circus-related accidents.



Essie Jennings

Source: Frank Van Straten. *Tivoli* (2003), 7.

1912-1915

Jim Gerald's move into variety entertainment is believed to have begun initially on a 1912 tour with his father's "All Stars" drama and vaudeville company. The 'family' troupe, which included S.A. Fitzgerald and Clifton Fitzgerald, saw Gerald work as both a comedian and acrobat. The *Northern Star* (Lismore) records too that "the Flying Gerald's [were] sensational gymnasts and in their thrilling act on the flying rings... fairly brought down the house (30 May 1912, 4). By the end of the year Gerald had been contracted to Fuller's Theatres. Although at least one reference source, the *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, maintains that Jim Gerald began his career in variety with Harry Clay (243), no primary sources supporting such a claim have yet been located. Gerald even states in a 1928 *Everyone's* interview: "I started with the Fullers' and I'll finish with them" (22 Feb. 1928, 46). According to reviews around this period his early turns were comic routines that utilised his circus skills, notably tumbling (often imitating a drunk), back flips and a

wire-walking act. One of his earliest performances was at the Majestic Theatre in Adelaide. It was here that Gerald first met and married Essie Jennings. According to Charles Norman, Gerald had been pestering the young lady for a date for several weeks, but she had refused his advances. It apparently took an on-stage accident to bring them together. Jennings offered to look after him during his recuperation, and they married some two weeks later.

By 1913 Gerald and Jennings were a Fullers double act, performing sketches which included songs, comic routines and Gerald's circus-inspired eccentricities. Jennings had herself been working on the variety stage for some time. It is believed that she began her association with the Fullers around 1905/06, starting out as an illustrated singer² and dancer. The earliest recorded performance for her found to date is a National Amphitheatre (Syd) show in January 1907 [see for example *SMH*: 5 Jan. 1907, 2], although a 1921 article in *Fuller News* indicates that she would be "remembered by playgoers as 'Australia's Gibson Girl,' when [American entertainer] Charles Dana Gibson was the rage" ("Pantomime Souvenir," 20).³ A review of Gerald and Jennings turn at the same theatre in October 1913, which also congratulates Jennings for having lost almost three stone in weight since her last appearance, notes: "the act is now considerably improved, and scores a great number of laughs" (AV: 5 Nov. 1913, 5).

In 1914 Gerald and Jennings were leased by the Fullers to Stanley McKay, going into the entrepreneur's recently formed pantomime company as dame and principal boy respectively. The troupe later became known as Stanley McKay's No 1 Pantomime Company in order to differentiate it from a second company he formed in early 1915 (featuring Bruce Drysdale and Phyllis Faye as dame and principal boy). Gerald and Jennings remained with McKay until 1916, becoming firm favourites with audiences during that period. They did not entirely cut their connection with the Fullers, however, as McKay toured the troupe on the Fullers' Australian circuit for several months (including Adelaide, Western Australia and Sydney) before sending it to New Zealand in late 1914. Although the company's Auckland season was also produced under the auspices of the Fullers the remainder of the Dominion tour was managed by George Stephenson and Alf Linley (in association with Stanley McKay).

Within a short period of time, McKay relinquished day-to-day control of his No 1 Company, leaving the stage direction in Gerald's hands. Although Gerald said in a 1928 *Australian Variety* interview that he 'produced pantomimes for the Fullers three years before anybody else ventured into the same field with them' (p.46), the period he refers to was actually two years. It would be the McKay pantomimes, however - and notably *Mother Goose* (1914), *Old Mother Hubbard* (1912), and *Bo-Peep* (1910) - that allowed Gerald the opportunity to develop his dame character into perhaps the best remembered of his stage roles.

² Illustrated singers specialised in performing to scenes projected on a backcloth and illuminated by limelight projectors.

³ Gibson's iconic illustrations of beautiful and independent American woman were first published in the 1890s. By 1900, his 'Gibson Girls' were seen as the representative ideal of contemporary womanhood in many Western nations, as well as America.

1922-1929

Jim Gerald's Miniature Musical Comedy Company debuted in Newcastle in July 1922 with *A Millionaire for a Night*, opening in Sydney later the next month to rapturous critical acclaim. Along with Gerald, Jennings, Hawthorne and McLaren the initial line-up included Lance Vane (Gerald's brother), Ernest Crawford, Howard Hall and Winnie Trevail. Later troupe members included: Letty Craydon (1923-24, 1928), Harry Burgess (1927), Amy Rochelle (1928). The longest serving members (apart from Essie Jennings) were Lance Vane (8 years), Reg Hawthorne and Ernest Crawford (7 years), Howard Hall (6 years), and Polly McLaren (5 years). In starting up his own revusical company Gerald was required to write (or adapt) his own works - with this by now being a tradition among Australian revusical troupes. Having already been accorded much acclaim for his sketches, this move was not too difficult for him, and indeed from around 1922 Gerald began to emerge as one of Australia's more popular writers of one act musical comedies.

Among his most popular revusicals were: *Bare Backs*, *A Millionaire for a Night*, *The Tennis Club*, *Whips and Quips*, *Don't Tell the Wife* and arguably his greatest success *1914-1918; Or, For the Duration*. Set in three scenes - a military camp, aboard a transport ship, and in the trenches on Armistice Day, the revue's narrative is once again drawn from Gerald's wartime experiences, and in this respect was a fleshed out adaptation of 'The Raw Recruit' sketch with additional musical sequences. *1914-1918* was to be one of the earliest of productions for Gerald's Miniature Musical Comedy Company, and continued to be revived throughout the 1920s.

Jim Gerald's company played throughout Australia and New Zealand on the Fullers circuit over the next few years establishing itself as one of the four leading Australian-based revue troupes - the others being Nat Phillips Stiffy and Mo Company, George Wallace's Revue Company and Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Stars. During that decade his seasons in any particular location rarely ran for less than six months, with some visits lasting upwards of eight months. Gerald's troupe was also the first leading revusical company to regularly utilise its members the first part vaudeville entertainment (rather than engaging specialty acts to fill out the bill). This allowed him the opportunity to specialise in a variety of performance styles, and very likely helped increase his popularity (if not also reducing the production overheads at the same time). One of Gerald's famous solo routines during this period was "Paddy McGinty's Goat" - the text, with accompanying photographs, for this are published in the March 1923 issue of the *Theatre* (21). After gaining experience as the Dame in Fuller's pantomimes like *Bluebeard* (1921), he further established his credentials as a writer and director with *Little Red Riding Hood* (1923) and *Puss in Boots* (1926). Indeed, by 1926 Gerald and members of his revusical company had racked up five consecutive Christmas season for the Fullers.



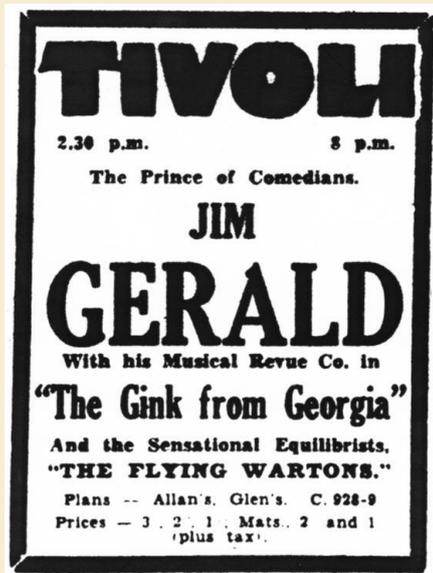
The Dame
Green Room Aug. (1922), 9.

In March 1928 Gerald ventured overseas in an attempt to establish his career outside Australia. While in the United States he co-wrote and produced several two reel films (one of these, *Getting Through*, was exhibited as part of his Australian stage shows in 1929). He also acted as a buyer on behalf of the Fullers, purchasing a number of ballets and revues for the firm. Gerald left America for England, staging a season of revusical on the London stage. When the critics panned the show he cut short his stay, returning to Australia in November 1928. From 1929 Gerald moved away from the narrative-driven revusicals that had made him a household name around Australia and New Zealand. His new style of show, revue, was very much influenced by his observations in America and London the previous year, and several critics notes that he also brought with him a number of new ideas in terms of staging - notably the use of lights as opposed to scenic art.

1930-1939

Many of the pantomimes that Gerald produced during the late 1920s/early 1930s were collaborations with the Fullers' long-time house writer and composer, Frank Neil. The first of these shows was possibly the 1926 production, *Puss in Boots*, with the last likely to have been *Mother Goose* in 1934. By all accounts his most popular revusicals of the late 1920s were: *It's All Yours* (1928), *The Honeymoon Girl* (1928) and *Happy Ideas* (1929), along with frequent revivals of *1914-1918*, *Barebacks* and *The Merry Masquerader*. The troupe also presented on a number of occasions a minstrel revival show (titled either *Old Time Minstrel Show* or *Olde Time Nigger Minstrels*). For these shows Gerald appeared as one of the comic endmen (Mr Tambo), with the Mr Bones role being played at various times by Reg Hawthorne and Max Reddy.⁴

⁴ See for example: Fullers' Theatre, Sydney (30 Jan. - 12 Feb. 1926); Tivoli Theatre, Melbourne (7-13 June 1930); and Tivoli Theatre, Melbourne (7-13 July 1934).



During these years his company included at various times, Essie Jennings, Reg Hawthorne, Lance Vane, Amy Rochelle, Ward Lear Jnr, Letty Craydon and Ron Shand. The troupe left for a six month tour of New Zealand in September 1929 on the Tivoli circuit, the first time since he moved from the circus to variety that he did not tour on "Fullers' time." Upon returning to Australia the company began a season at the Tivoli Theatre in Melbourne beginning 5 April. In addition to *The Honeymoon Girl* Gerald also revived his more popular revusicals (albeit with changes to some titles). These included *Circus Days* (previously *Bare Backs*), *The Naughty Earl* (previously *Not Likely*) and *Sport of Kings* (previously *Whips and Quips*) Some three months later, on July 17, Gerald was one of a stellar cast of performers engaged by the ABC to open its new radio station 2FC.

Argus 14 Apr. (1934), 28.

Jim Gerald's connection with the national broadcaster continued throughout the late 1930s, although it appears that by then Gerald's style of comedy may have become somewhat dated. Sometime around 1938, having temporarily retired from the live stage, Gerald formed his own radio production unit, known as Jim Gerald-Lionel Lunn Radio Presentations. With its headquarters in Sydney, the company employed such actors' as Alec Kellaway and Kath Esler, with Sandra Parkes (daughter of George Edwards) as scriptwriter. His first production, a series called *Private Jitters* was sold to a national sponsor and broadcast on relay out of Melbourne four nights a week. He returned to the variety stage for one night prior to the premiere of *Private Jitters* to present the character as part of the Melbourne Tivoli Theatre's "Radio Roundup" entertainment. He also presented another radio programme, *The After Dinner Show*, broadcast on the ABC on Saturday nights. Whether Gerald's plans to produce other shows, including a series called *Baffles the Crazy Detective*, went ahead is not known at this stage. In March 1939 his contract with the ABC was up for review, but according to correspondence forwarded to Keith Barry (Federal Controller of Music) by W. G. James (Federal Programme Controller), a renewal was not on offer. 'I have heard him on a few occasions,' writes James, 'and was not very impressed with his work. One or two of his "After Dinner" shows have been quite effective, But I would not recommend renewing his contract' (ctd. National Archives of Australia - Jim Gerald; Series SP173/1; No. SP173/1/0).

1940-1971

In 1940, while playing the Dame during the day in the Melbourne Tivoli's Christmas pantomime, *Mother Goose*, Gerald performed at night in the revue *We're in the Army Now*. Within a year he and fellow ABC favourite Jim Davidson had joined the Australian Army, embarking for the Middle East on 1 September. Commissioned as an honorary Lieutenant Colonel, Gerald was given command of the AIF's Entertainment Unit, and based himself out of Tel Aviv. With his vast experience in the variety industry he quickly organised (Captain) Davidson's 40-strong band and several professional artists who specially enlisted from Australia, and was given authority to recruit any soldier already serving in the Middle East who had entertainment skills (but who was not deployed in key military areas). Some personnel had already seen fighting in Libya, Greece and Crete. This all-digger troupe (apart from 20 female refugees, including seven Palestinian chorus girls) numbered over a hundred, and gave shows comprising traditional revue and vaudeville acts - including singing, dancing, juggling, acrobatics, comedy sketches and patterology, and trick cycling. The troupe was also complimented by a backstage production crew of set and costume designers, transport, properties, and lighting and sound technicians. Utilising a three-ton mobile transport vehicle the unit could set up almost anywhere, and often played to upwards of 5,000 soldiers.

Gerald's first production at Gaza was *All in Fun*, which according to reports was met with rapturous applause. A letter from a soldier, published in the *ABC Weekly*, claims that Gerald's shows were "by the far the biggest and best... just like a very good Tivoli show at home" (25 July 1942, 18). Some other shows staged were: *Dad and Dave*, *The Youth Show*, *Amateur Hour*, and *Inspector Scott*. The unit was also able to arrange for the broadcasting of popular radio programmes to all hospitals in the Middle East, and several camps stationed on the coast road in North Africa. Soon after establishing the Entertainment Unit Gerald put together a number of smaller and faster units formed from the main body, and over the next 18 months these troupes presented shows during the Syrian campaign, playing places anywhere between Tobruk and the Turkish front line. They routinely visited frontline troupes under fire, presenting their entertainment in caves, trenches and storehouses. Late in the war the original Entertainment Unit was redeployed to New Guinea.



Members of the A.I.F. Entertainment Unit

L-R: Lt Col. Jim Gerald, Staff Sgt. F. Meredith, Pte J. Coughlin, Sgt. R. Dawe.

Source: State Library of Victoria.

Gerald returned to Australia in October 1942 following a recurrence of malaria which he contracted while in Syria. After having transferred to the retired list in December he once again took to the variety stage, appearing regularly on the Tivoli circuit. One of his first shows was the 1943 revue, *Stripped for Action*. In 1949 Gerald signed with Harry Wren, and went on to star in his firm's Christmas pantomime for that year - *Red Riding Hood* in 1949. He later co-starred with Bob Dyer in the revue *Can You Take It?* and was cast as the roué in *Ladies' Night in a Turkish Bath*. Described by Frank van Straten as an "American farce notable mainly for its nubile, scantily clad girls," Wren was sent to America to see the show. While in San Francisco Gerald took over the role briefly from Skeets Gallagher when the star fell ill. Gerald went on to star in the 1951 Australian production (and 1958 revival). The following year he starred in *No Trees in the Street* (1952, Melbourne Tivoli), playing a cockney bookmaker's tout; and with George Wallace and Gladys Moncrieff in the nostalgic revue, *Gay Fiesta*, which also toured New Zealand. He also took on the Dame role in Wren's 1952 pantomime, *Cinderella*.

In 1954, and undeterred by his age, Gerald wrote directly to Prime Minister, Robert Menzies offering to tour his own concert party through Korea and Japan during the Korean conflict. The offer was later gently turned down by the Minister for the Army, James Francis (ctd. National Archives of Australia - Series MO927/2; No. A12/1/170). He nevertheless continued to work as a variety performer right through until the 1960s, then aged in his seventies. Some of the more notable productions he was associated with during this latter period were: *Thanks for the Memory* (1953); *The Good Old Days*, which co-starred George Wallace, Queenie Paul and Maurice Colleano (Theatre Royal, Sydney, 20 Sept. 1957); and *Many Happy Returns*, which included among others Gladys Moncrieff, Queenie Paul, George Wallace Jnr and the Toppanos (Empire Theatre, Sydney, 28 Jan. 1959).



Many Happy Returns (1959)

Jim Gerald and Vera Derla in "Art for Art's Sake"

Source: National Library of Australia.

After he finally retired from the stage, Gerald and his wife moved into a small house at Rosebud on the Mornington Peninsula. One of his last public outings was to attend the closure of the Melbourne Tivoli in 1966. Essie, who had been in poor health since the mid-1960s, died in 1969. Soon afterwards he moved into a nearby nursing home, where he passed away some two years later on 2 March, 1971.

JIM GERALD'S COMIC STYLE

Regarded as one of the four leading Australian comics of the great vaudeville and revue era, along with Roy Rene, Nat Phillips, Bert Le Blanc and George Wallace, it has been said that Jim Gerald differed from his competitors in that he was much more of an internationalist, preferring not to be too parochial in his settings and stories. While there may be some element of truth in this claim, it was more than likely a result of Gerald having spent his formative years overseas. His perception of what constituted Australianness would therefore have been shaped differently than those who had lived here all their lives (or like who like Nat Phillips had left the country for extended periods later in their life). This criticism that Gerald's shows were insufficiently Australian appears to have been levelled at the comedian by academics and historians writing in latter half of the twentieth century. There is certainly no evidence available in reviews or historical insights from the period that this was an issue of concern for Gerald's popular culture audience base. Indeed, there is no indication that either the audiences or critics considered his revivals as being of an "imported" kind. Although a number of his revues were set in overseas locations (he also found a niche specialising in

the spoofing of foreign names), this was by no means uncommon during the revusical era. Nat Phillips and George Wallace also set several of their works in overseas locations.

What set Gerald apart from many of his peers (aside from George Wallace and Arthur Tauchert) and helped establish him as one of Australia's great comedians and pantomime dames, was his remarkable gift for physical comedy. At the other end of the extreme, however, was his comedic delivery - essentially in the droll style. His performances therefore created a sense of paradox, the heightened physicality of his acrobatics and devil-may-care stage craft juxtaposed with his quaint, laid-back characterisations. As a performer he also refrained from delving into vulgarity, a factor which won him much approval as a wholesome comedian. A Brisbane Courier theatre critic writes of Gerald's style in 1927:

The reason for Mr Gerald's success is not hard to find. His comedy does not depend on knock-about antics, though he can be vastly amusing when he dances or when he comes in conflict with any material object such for instance as when he got entangled with two chairs and a table on Saturday – Jim Gerald's comedy is the outcome of a whimsical humour of his own. He does not stoop to the obvious; rather he does the unexpected... but always that unexpected when considered afterwards, will be seen to have arisen out of a legitimate situation. Such comedy playing is a gift, it is born in a man; the antics of comedy, physical or otherwise may be acquired. Acquired comedy ability, however, stales whereas that which comes by intuition is always fresh (14 Mar. 1927, 17).

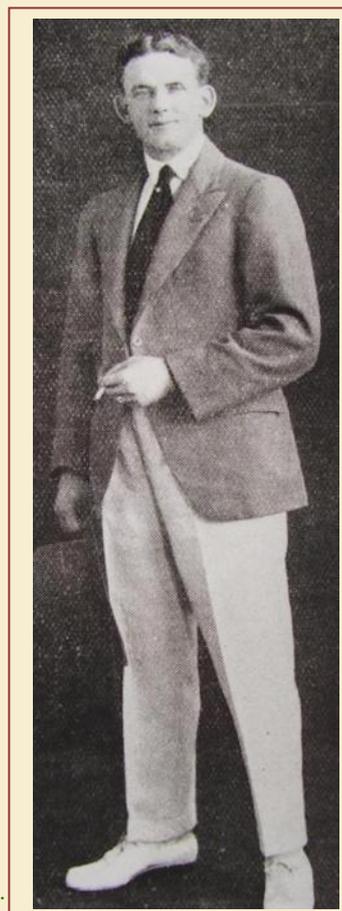
One other factor that helped establish and maintain Gerald's long-term success was his ability to select the right combination of character actors to support his comic material. In this respect he, like Phillips, Le Blanc and Wallace, surrounded himself with the right mix of professionalism, looks and talent, thus making the productions fresh and seemingly spontaneous. Among the key personnel were: his wife Essie Jennings and his brother Lance Vane, along with Ernest Crawford, Howard Hall, Reg Hawthorne (ex-J.C. Williamson musical comedy actor), Polly McLaren, Mona Thomas, and in later years Harry Burgess, Dan Weldon, Tommy Dale (ex-Dale and Barling), Amy Rochelle, Letty Craydon and Ron Shand. Choreographer, dancer and soubrette, Polly McLaren, was another significant factor in the troupe's popularity between 1922 and ca. 1926, with her name given prominence in many of the published reviews during that period.

SEE ALSO

- [S. A. Fitzgerald](#)
- [Lance Vane](#)
- [Essie Jennings](#)
- [Stanley McKay's No 1 Pantomime Co](#)
- [Jim Gerald Revue Co](#)

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS (Jim Gerald)

1. It has been claimed that Gerald did not write his own scripts (Chance 243), which is clearly erroneous. Numerous references to Gerald being the author of his shows can be found through primary sources such as newspapers and industry magazines. Notable, for example, is Gerald's the routinely-mentioned wartime experiences having been the source of inspiration for *1914-1918; Or, For the Duration* and 'The New Recruit'. Other sources *Way*, Published in the *Theatre* in 1926, which reads: "When Jim rests from acting, singing and dancing on the boards he presumably spends his leisure in writing scripts, which in turn gave him ample work as a producer. When he sleeps one can only guess... *Step This Way* is a capital specimen of the Gerald type of revue" (June 1926, 13). As early as 1923 Gerald was also creating original pantomimes for the Fullers. The first was *Little Red Riding Hood*, which the *Sydney Morning Herald* records was 'written and produced by Mr Jim Gerald' (24 Dec. 1923, 6). See also Gerald's advertised bills in *Fuller News* (ca. 1922) which similarly indicate that he was the author of his shows.
2. Jim Gerald's entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Vol 14, 1996, 263) and the *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (243) record that he was born on 2 January. His military records, including Gerald's self-written application forms, indicate, however, that the date was 1 January (ctd. National Archives of Australia, Series - B883; No - NX70922).



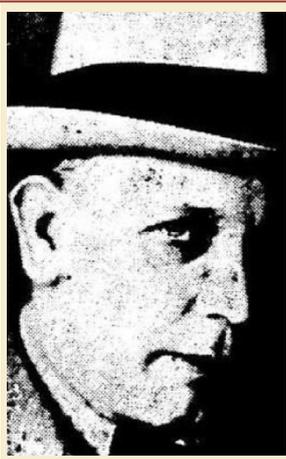
Green Room June(1922), 7.

3. A number of secondary sources have incorrectly claimed that S.A. Fitzgerald was a nephew to Dan and Tom Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald Brother's Circus) and their younger brother John D. 'Jack' Fitzgerald (1862-1922), a prominent Sydney barrister, social reformer and Labor parliamentarian. In her 1996 entry on Jim Gerald for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Martha Rutledge writes, for example, that he was a "nephew of J. D. Fitzgerald," and that he 'haunted his uncle's circus.' In this respect she is possibly referencing and expanding on Charles Norman's comment in *When Vaudeville Was King* (1983). On page 224 Norman writes: 'Jim Gerald came from a circus family. Some of his uncles were the top names of the day.'

Robert Colomb, retired Reader in Information Systems, School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering (University of Queensland) has discovered through extensive historical and genealogical research that the two Fitzgerald families were unrelated.⁵ In correspondence (April 2013) he draws attention to Gerald's grandfather Stephen Fitzgerald having been born in Clifton, Gloucester (England) in 1820. According to Bede Nairn's biography of John 'Jack' Fitzgerald (*Australian Dictionary of Biography*) he and his elder brothers Dan and Tom were the sons of schoolteacher John Daniel Fitzgerald and his wife Mary Ann, née Cullen, both from Limerick, Ireland. Dan and Tom were born in New Zealand in the late 1850s, while "Jack" was born in Shell Harbour, New South Wales in 1862. There is no mention of S. A. Fitzgerald in Nairn's entry because he came from an entirely different Fitzgerald family.

Charles Norman's reference to a nephew/uncle relationship between Gerald and Dan and Tom Fitzgerald seems to be the first time the claim appears in print, and unfortunately his source may never be determined. If Gerald ever indicated a connection no public record of this has yet been identified. Given that Norman published *When Vaudeville was King* some 12 years after Gerald's death, it is feasible that he drew on his memory of the past and simply assumed a connection because the comedian's background was in the circus.

4. The *Companion to Theatre in Australia* claims that Gerald began his career in variety with Harry Clay. However, extensive research into Clay's operations (see Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930) has failed to find any evidence supporting this assertion. Gerald states in a 1928 *Everyone's* interview that he started with the Fullers and planned to finish with them (22 Feb. 1928, 46), which puts further doubt on the claim.
5. For further details pertaining to acrobatic displays in the sandhills behind Centennial Park (Sydney), see Alf 'Redhead' Wilson's article, "In the Sandhill Days," published in *Australian Variety* (17 Jan. 1917, n. pag.).
6. Jim Gerald and Essie Jennings were married on 21 July 1913 at St Peter's Anglican Church, Wellington, New Zealand.
7. M. A. Keup records in the 13 October 1927 issue of *Just It* that Gerald made a number of changes to *The Honeymoon Girl* following its Melbourne season, 'so as to make it quite fresh to Sydney audiences' (28). However, a search through Melbourne newspapers for 1927 has not located any details of a production there, even during the company's 1926-1927 season at the Princess Theatre. It is possible, therefore, that Keup mistakenly referred to Melbourne when it should have been Brisbane, where the musical comedy was staged between 6 and 19 August. The company's Sydney engagement began on 8 October, only four weeks after departing Brisbane.
8. Jim Gerald's siblings were **Lancelot Sherlock Fitzgerald** (aka Lance Vane), well-known as an actor/variety artist and stage manager with Gerald's revusical company; **Clifton Stephen Australia Fitzgerald** (aka Cliff Stevens), a vaudeville comedian; and actor **Richard McGuinness Fitzgerald** (aka Max Clifton). Research conducted by Robert Columb has also identified three brothers who died in infancy. These were Morris (1880-81), Stephen A. (1886) and Samuel (1888).



Family research undertaken by Rita Thorne (UK) indicates that Lance Vane married wardrobe mistress/costume designer Bertha Hillyard in Sydney in 1928. Hillyard's daughter Phyllis du Barry (born Gertrude Phyllis Hillyard) was a stage and screen actress who worked alongside Vane in Jim Gerald's revusical company during 1927-1928 (and later appeared in the George Ward Revue Co). She moved to the USA with her mother in 1932, however, and went on to appear in more than forty Hollywood films.⁶ Lance Vane travelled to Los Angeles in 1932, but returned some time later. He died on 21 October 1942 in Sydney. Clifton Fitzgerald married Ellen A. Lucre in Newcastle in 1916 and died in Sydney in 1946.

Lane Vane: *World's News* 24 Feb. (1923), 5.

⁵ Colomb's wife is a descendant of S.A. Fitzgerald.

⁶ Some details relating to du Barry and the Fitzgerald brothers have been provided by Rita Thorne (correspondence).

9. An article on Jim Gerald published in the February 1919 issue of the *Theatre* reports, 'A brother was killed early in the war' (28). Thorne has confirmed that it was Richard McGuinness Fitzgerald who was killed on 4 August 1916 and that his name is remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial (he died at Pozieres). It is likely Richard was known professionally as Max Clifton. As an actor he was for many years associated with William Anderson's Dramatic Company, playing opposite such actors as Roy Redgrave, Bert Bailey, Edmund Duggan, and J. B. Atholwood.

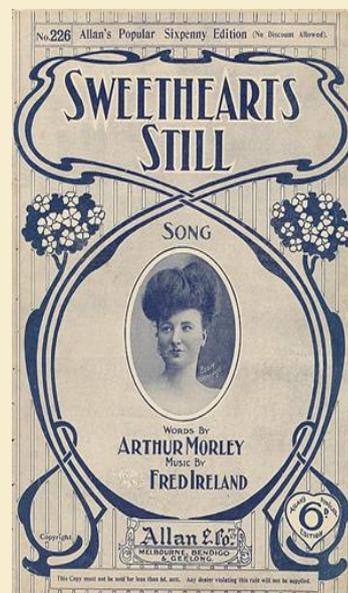
HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS (Essie Jennings)

1. Born Esther Patience Fatcher in Ballarat, Victoria, in 1884, Essie Jennings was the oldest child of Thomas William Fatcher and Susan Patience Porritt. She had at least two siblings, Horace Gordon (1887, also born in Ballarat) and Thomas Frederick (1888, born in Richmond).
2. Jennings' name has first identified with a company playing the St Kilda Town Hall in September 1910. She was billed as a soprano. On 22 October that same year the "popular balladist" re-appeared to the Theatre Royal, Brisbane under Ted Holland's management.

Essie Jennings (1908)

Source: National Library of Australia

3. As an illustrated singer, Jennings would have performed sentimental or patriotic songs in front of background scenery or mood visuals. Prior to the widespread use of film in Australia, these effects were created by heating calcium oxide (lime) to white heat in an oxy-ether lantern, which in turn created enough light to allow slide pictures to be projected onto a screen.



ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY - 1913-1922, 1930-1959*

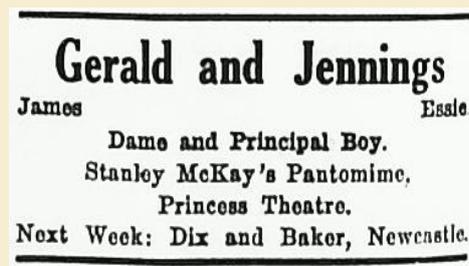
All dates between 1913 and 1916 relate to Jennings and Gerald's engagement with the Stanley McKay Pantomime Co. Dates between 1919 and 1921 are Jennings and Gerald. Dates post-1935 are for Gerald only. For engagements between 1922 and 1929 see Jim Gerald Miniature Musical Comedy Co.

An asterisk (*) beside a date indicates that it is either approximate or has yet to be established.

- 1912:** S.A. FITZGERALD (Northern NSW tour; ca. May-June * > Fitzgerald's All Stars)
NB: The tour itinerary established to date included Lismore (Federal Hall; 29 May -)
- 1913:** FULLERS (National Th, Syd; 21 June - 5 Nov.* > Jennings and Gerald were not at the National for all of this period)
- 1914:** FULLERS (Lyric Th, St Kilda, Melb; ca. Nov.*)
- 1915:** STANLEY MCKAY (Princess Th, Syd; 14 Aug. -Sept.*) • (Victoria Th, Newcastle; 4 Sept. -*) • (Fullers' Dominion circuit, NZ; Nov. - Dec.*).
- NB:** 1916-1918: Gerald was on active duty with the A.I.F. May 1916 and ca. November 1919.
- 1917:** FULLERS (Majestic Th, Syd; 2 June - Aug.* > Essie Jennings with Bert Le Blanc Travesty Stars).
- 1918:** FULLERS (Majestic Th, Syd; 26-31 Dec. > *Bluebeard*).
- 1919:** FULLERS (Majestic Th, Syd; 1-17 Jan. > *Bluebeard*) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; 8 Mar. - 2 Apr. > with Bert Le Blanc's Travesty Stars) • (Empire Th, Bris; 5 Apr. - ca. 30 May*) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; 21 June -*) • (Bijou Th, Melb; ca. Sept/Oct.*) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; Nov.*).
- 1920:** FULLERS (Grand Op House, Syd; 18-31 Dec. > *Bluebeard*).
- 1921:** FULLERS (Grand Op House, Syd; 1 Jan. - * > *Bluebeard*) • (P of Wales Th, Adel; Apr. - June*) • (Bijou Th, Melb; 3 Sept. - 12 Oct. > with Walter George Sunshine Players) • (Fullers' Th, Syd; ca. Nov. - Dec.* > with Walter George Sunshine Players) • (Princess Th, Melb; 24-31 Dec. > *Bluebeard*).
- 1922:** FULLERS (Princess Th, Melb; 1 Jan. - 25. Mar. > *Bluebeard*) • (Empire Th, Bris; ca. May-June*)
- 1930:** (ABC Radio; 17 July > 2 FC opening)
- 1931:** ERNEST C. ROLLS (St James Th, Syd; 2 May -*)
- 1943:** TIVOLI THEATRES (Tivoli circuit; no details*)
- 1957:** (Th Royal, Syd; 20 Sept. - Oct. * > *Good Old Days*)
- 1958:** (Her Majesty's Th, Bris; 8 Sept. - * > *Ladies Night in a Turkish Bath*)
- 1959:** (Empire Th, Syd; 28 Jan. - Feb.* > *Many Happy Returns*)

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

- 1919: **The New Recruit** [comic sketch with music]
 1922: **Bare Backs** (aka Circus Days) [revusical] • **Millionaire for a Night** [revusical] • **1914-1918; Or For the Duration** [revusical] • **Oh Mum** [revusical] • **It's All Yours** [revusical] • **The Tennis Club** [revusical] • **Whips and Quips** (aka Sport of Kings / I Don't Want to be a Jockey) [revusical] • **Right Here** [revusical]
 1923: **The Merry Masquerader** [revusical] • **Step This Way** [revusical] • **Little Red Riding Hood** [pantomime]
 1924: **Don't Tell The Wife** (aka Mum's the Word) [revusical] • **Nights of Joy** (aka (K)Nights of Joy / Joyous Nights) [revusical] • **Your Own Show** (aka Farewell Sydney / Goodbye Sydney / Request Week / So Long Customers) [revue]
 1926: **Troubles of Hector** [revusical] • **Bubble and Squeak** (aka A Whirl of Youth / A Whirl of Joy) [revusical] • **Once Aboard a Lugger** (aka A Way We Have in the Navy) [revusical] • **The Naughty Husband** (aka Honeymoon Troubles) [revusical] • **Not Likely** (aka The Naughty Earl) [revusical] • **Puss in Boots** [pantomime]
 1927: **Pantomime Revels** [revue]
 1929: **Happy Ideals** [revusical]
 1931: **Laughing Eyes** [revue]
 1933: **It Ended in Spain** (aka The Stolen Garter) [revusical] • **He's in Again** [revusical] • **The Gink From Georgia** [revusical] • **A Moorish Maid** [revusical]
 1934: **Joybells** [revue] • **Happy Eyes** [revue] • **Mother Goose** [pantomime] • **The Mixed Brides** [revusical] • **Broadway Nights** [revusical] • **His Lucky Day** [revusical] • **Come Up and See Us** [revusical] • **The Plumber's Dream** [revusical]



Australian Variety 8 Sept. (1915), 4.



Gerald as Sister Mary - the Dame (*Bluebeard*, 1921)
 Princess Theatre, Melbourne
Fuller News Dec/Jan. (1921/22), 8.



Source: Vintage New Zealand Posters



Essie Jennings as principal boy with Stanley McKay's No 1 Pantomime Co.
Theatre Sept. (1915), 33.

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"Gerald Leaves March 31." E: 22 Feb. (1928), 46.

[Jim Gerald Portraits](#). Picture Australia, National Library of Australia. [sighted 18/03/2011]

"Jim Gerald Master of Ceremonies in New Ideas Show at Newcastle. E: 5 Dec. (1928), 41.

"Jim Gerald Returns to the Empire." BC: 5 Mar (1927), 2.

"Jim Gerald: The Popular Comedian at Fullers." GR: Feb. (1923), 14.

"Jimmy Gerald." TT: Feb. (1919), 28.

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Source: Live Performance Australia.

See Also:

ABCW: 16 Dec (1939), 60.

AWW: 26 Nov (1949), n. pag.

B: 5 Aug, (1930), n. pag. • 9 Sept (1926), n. pag. • 28 May (1930), n. pag. • 3 May (1933), n. pag.

DM: 28 Nov (1973), n. pag.

E: 16 Apr. (1930), n. pag.

P: 1 Aug. (1951), n. pag.

SMH: 9 Nov (1928), n. pag. • 31 Oct (1935), n. pag. • 29-30 May (1936), n. pag. • 27 May (1939), n. pag. • 11 Apr (1941), n. pag. • 10 June (1941), n. pag. • 24 Oct (1941), n. pag. • 25 Dec (1941), n. pag. • 13 Oct (1942), n. pag. • 17, 20 Apr (1943), n. pag. • 3 Mar (1971), n. pag.

WW: 17 Feb (1939), n. pag.

IMAGES

The following list comprises bibliographic details of additional published and unpublished photographs, caricatures, and drawings of Jim Gerald, Essie Jennings, and the Fitzgerald family. See also Jim Gerald Revue Company.

AV: 25 Aug. (1915), n. pag. [Jennings with Rosie Coleman] • 9 May (1919), 15 [Jennings]

BC: 5 Mar. (1927), 2 [Gerald] • 19 Mar. (1927), 2 [Gerald caricature for *Don't Tell the Wife* - advertisement].

B: 27 Jan. (1921), 34 [Gerald as Sister Mary in *Bluebeard*].

E: 10 Dec. (1924), 37 [Gerald - caricature] • 22 Feb. (1928), 46 [Gerald - republished 10 July (1929), 39]

FN: 4 Feb. (1922), 7 [Jennings as Queen Felicity in *Bluebeard*] • 15 July (1922), 4 [Jennings].

GR: Dec/Jan. (1921/1922), 20 [Gerald as Sister Mary and Jennings as Queen Felicity in *Bluebeard*] • Apr. (1922), 22 [Gerald as Sister Mary in *Bluebeard*] • June (1922), 7 [Gerald] • Aug. (1922), 9 [Gerald as the dame] • Dec. (1922), 5 [Gerald as the dame in *Puss in Boots*] • Feb. (1923), 14 [Gerald].

NLA: "Jim Gerald" [manuscripts] SP767/1 [Gerald - unidentified newspaper photograph ca. 1930s]

TT: Sept. (1915), 33 [Jennings] • Sept. (1916), 42 [Driver Jim Gerald] • Oct. (1916), 45 [Jennings] • Dec. (1921), n. pag. [Gerald and Jennings with Walter George Sunshine Players] Aug. (1922), 9 • Mar. (1923), 21 [Gerald performing "Paddy McGinty's Goat" - 6 photographs].

TBRs: 20 Feb. (1927), 10 [Gerald caricature]

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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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