

## BERT GILBERT

English-born variety comedian, actor, singer, and lyricist/ songwriter. Best known as a musical comedy comedian during his early career in Australia, Bert Gilbert is first believed to have come to Australia in 1897 under contract with J.C. Williamson and George Musgrove. The two year tour, which he undertook with his wife, Ada Reeve, included a selection of musical comedies, comic operas and pantomimes. When Gilbert returned to Australia about a decade later he was again associated with Williamson. He later toured with James Brennan's Vaudeville Players (1911-12), and in the mid-1920s was associated with Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers (1924-26). Gilbert was also well-known for his comic songs, many of which he wrote himself.

English comedian Bert Gilbert (born Joseph Gilbert Hazlewood) is first believed to have toured Australia in 1897 and 1898 with his wife Ada Reeve, whom he had married in 1894. This engagement with J.C. Williamson and George Musgrove included the 1897 pantomime extravaganza, *The Babes in the Woods; Or, Bold Robin Hood and His Merry Men* – Reeve as the principal boy (Robin Hood) and Gilbert as Baron Bounder. Two of the song hits from this production were Gilbert's own composition, "My Birthday" and "The Nervous Man" (also possibly written by him). Another production the pair starred in was *The Gay Parisienne* (1897). Gilbert and Reeve's marriage eventually broke down in 1900 largely as a result of Gilbert's frequent infidelity, although Reeve also claimed that she had also been the victim of much cruelty. Indeed, her husband's dalliances with a number of gallery girls were even commented upon in several papers during his Australian tour (ctd. CTTA: 484).



Source: National Library of Australia



When Gilbert returned to Australia about a decade later, he was largely associated with J. C. Williamson, and a particular favourite in the "Firm's" pantomimes. These included *Mother Goose* in 1908 (his first appearance); *Humpty Dumpty* (1908, as King Sollum) and *Jack and Jill* (1909, as Baron Bounce). He later undertook comic roles with Williamson's New Comic Opera Company, appearing in such productions as *King of Cadonia* (1910). In this production Gilbert and Lottie Sargent attracted a good deal attention for their performance of the "Apache Dance" - a hugely popular exhibition dance that involves the aggressive treatment of the female partner [see image below].

**Ada Reeve in *Babes in the Woods*, 1897.**

Source: Wikipedia

After completing his Williamson contract in 1911 Gilbert spent the next two years with James Brennan's Vaudeville Players. While much of his career over the next ten years is yet to be located, it is known that he joined Cedric Johnson's New Ideas company for its tour of Tasmania in early 1923. The following year he became a member of Pat Hanna's Famous Diggers and was associated with the troupe during its record-breaking season in Brisbane. As a songwriter, Gilbert either contributed lyrics to the music by other composers or wrote the music and words himself.



Left: As **Baron Bounder** (*Babes in the Woods*, 1897)

Above: As **The Dame** (*Mother Goose*, 1908)

## SONGS COMPOSED BY BERT GILBERT

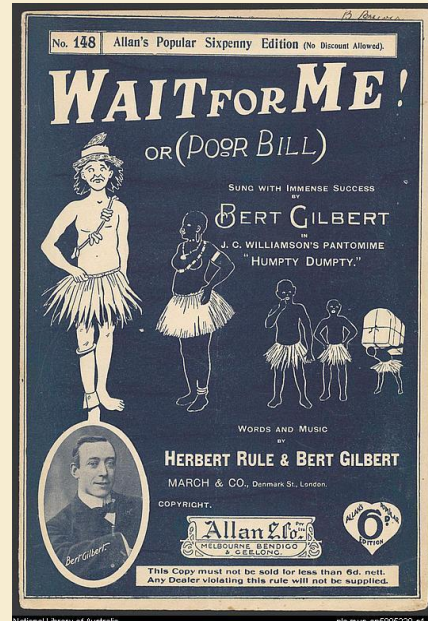
The following are songs attributed to Bert Gilbert as lyricist and/or composer. An asterisk [\*] beside an entry indicates that it was either unpublished or that no published scores has yet been located. All songs are written and composed by Bert Gilbert unless otherwise noted.

♪ = a copy is held by the National Library of Australia

<p>1897:</p> <p>1908:</p> <p>ca. 1910:</p> <p>ca. 1911:</p> <p>n. yr.</p>	<p><b>"My Birthday"</b></p> <p><b>"Susie-Ue"</b></p> <p><b>"My Hansom Girl."</b></p> <p><b>"Isn't it Lovely to be in Love"</b> (Pelham/Rule/Gilbert)</p> <p><b>"I Beg Your Pardon" *</b></p> <p><b>"Wait for Me (Brother Bill)"</b> (Gilbert/Rule)</p> <p><b>"Smile, Smile, Smile."</b> (Gilbert/Titheradge/Duffield)</p>	<p>[Allen and Co; Melb]</p> <p>[Allen and Co; Melb]</p> <p>[Albert and Son, Syd]</p> <p>[Albert and Son, Syd; ctd. SMH: 29 July 1911, 2]</p> <p>[Allen and Co; Melb – also published in London]</p> <p>[Stanley Mullin, Melb]</p>
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### SEE ALSO

- [New Ideas](#)
- [Famous Diggers](#)

## SONGS FEATURED BY BERT GILBERT

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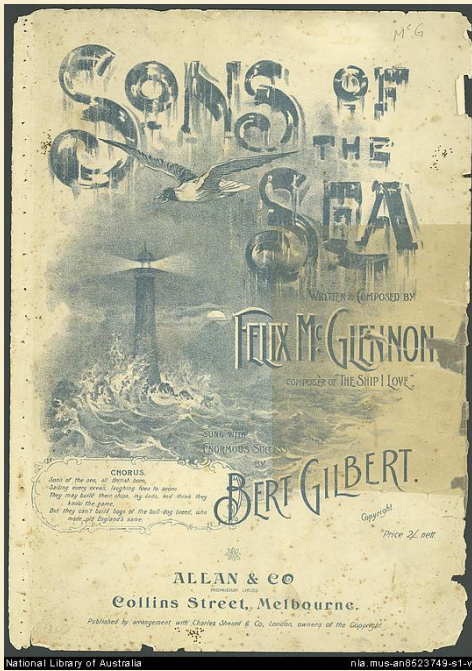
<p>1897:</p> <p>♪ n. yr:</p> <p>♪ 1908:</p>	<p><b>"The Nervous Man."*</b></p> <p><b>"Sons of the Sea"</b> (Felix McGlennon)</p> <p><b>"That Cat"</b> (Harry Castling)</p>	<p>[<i>Babes in the Woods</i>]</p> <p>[Allen and Co, Melb; <i>Humpty Dumpty</i>]</p>
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### FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Ada Reeve." *Wikipedia* – online (sighted 10/03/2011)
- "Bert Gilbert Portraits."** David Elliott Theatrical Postcard Collection, National Library of Australia – online (sighted 10/03/2011). [comprises 6 images]
- Djubal, Clay. **"Gilbert, Bert."** *AustLit* (2008).
- "J.C. Williamson's Posters"** Collection, State Library of NSW – online (sighted 10/03/2011)
- J.W.B. Murphy Collection of Theatrical Posters, National Library of Australia – online (sighted 10/03/2011).
- "Mr Bert Gilbert."** STS: 2 Jan. (1898), 2. [The same page includes an interview with Ada Reeve]
- Tait, Viola. *Dames, Principal Boys... And All That: A History of Pantomime* (2002), 153.



**As King Sollum in *Humpty Dumpty* (1907)**  
Source: Viola Tait (2002), 153.



Source: National Library of Australia



*Humpty Dumpty* (1908) and *Jack and Jill* (1909) posters  
State Library of NSW



**Bert Gilbert and Lottie Sargent**  
Performing the Apache Dance in *The King of Cadonia* (1910)  
Source: National Library of Australia