

HISCOCKS' FEDERAL MINSTRELS

Arguably the most popular and influential Australian-based minstrel troupe of the late nineteenth century, the Federal Minstrels was formed by F. E. Hiscocks in April 1883, following his tour of the Australian colonies with the Great Maccabe. The troupe made its debut at Melbourne's Victoria Hall on 21 April, with the feature artists being Charles Heywood (soprano and bird charmer), Sam Dearin (comedian/musician), and Alf Lawton (comedian), along with several other performers and musicians whose careers are now largely associated with both Australia and the Federal Minstrels, namely Lou Braham, Edward Amery, George Turner, and musicians Owen Conduit (piano) and Nicholas La Feuillade (violin/music director). The most influential and certainly the most popular troupe member, however, was W. Horace Bent, who joined the company five weeks into its first season together. While Bent had already built himself a considerable reputation with the Australian public, his popularity soared as a consequence of his association with Hiscocks, not only in response to his celebrated lectures and songs but also through the many original farces, sketches, and burlesques he contributed. The troupe's four-month-long first run not only garnered a good deal of positive criticism from the Melbourne press, but also allowed the principal comedians and ensemble performers (including chorus) to build a rapport with each other. Thus, when Hiscocks transferred the Federal Minstrels to Sydney, its immediate success resulted in that city becoming the troupe's Australian stronghold.

ACADEMY OF MUSIC.			
Proprietor and Manager		F. E. HISCOCKS.	
TO-NIGHT, BOXING NIGHT, Dec. 26, and until further notice.			
HISCOCKS' FEDERAL MINSTRELS, and Speciality Union.			
Programme for This Evening.			
Bones	{ W. Horace Bent. { Alf. Moynham.	Tambos	{ W. B. Warner. { Sam Keenan.
Interlocutor—W. A. Ball.			
Overture—"Knaastime" Federals			
Song—"First in the Field" J. S. Porter			
Comic—"The Man with the Seal-skin Pants" Sam Keenan			
Ballad—"A Light in the Window" Beaumont Read			
Comic—"Uncle Mick" W. B. Warner			
Song—"I'll Await my Love" E. Amery			
Comic—"The Giddy Old Owl" W. Horace Bent			
Ballad—"Golden Love" E. C. Dunbar.			
Finale—Der Deutscher Jubilee Concert.			
Herr Schultzbach (solo pianist)	W. Horace Bent	
Herr Stomachache (solo trombone)	Sam Keenan	
Herr Teuflesdröck (solo ophicleide)	W. A. Ball	
Herr Leibwurst (solo violin)	Alf. Moynham	
Horn Quartette	... Messrs. Braham, Read, Amery, and Porter		
Madame Swartz (soprano)	G. Turner	
Maestro D'Orchestra	N. La Feuillade.	
"Grand March Campaigne"	N. La Feuillade and Orchestra.	

Sydney Morning Herald 26 Dec. (1885), 2.

The nucleus of the Federal Minstrels began to establish itself in 1884 with the arrival of Beaumont Read, Sam Keenan and Alf Moynham who with Horace Bent were regarded by most commentators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as being unequalled in terms of their popularity with Australian audiences. This quartet was supported for much of the troupe's career, however, by a number of other leading Australian-based performers of that period, including Thomas H. Rainford, Harry W. Emmet, J. S. Porter, Harry Carroll, J. S. Whitworth, Johnny Cowan, and W. A. Ball, along with founding members Lou Braham and Edward Amery. Indeed, one of the keys to the Federal Minstrel's success may well have been its more or less consistent line-up. Certainly, few other troupes, if any, had remained together in Australia for so long with such a large number of stars and with so few personnel changes.

The Federal Minstrels maintained a constant presence in Australia for six years, making short tours to most major centres (particularly in the eastern states) between long seasons in Melbourne and Sydney. However, in 1889, while they were still unchallenged as the leading local variety minstrel company

operating in Australia at the time, Hiscocks disbanded the troupe in order to focus his attention on a higher class of entertainment, initially through the London Pavilion Company. This decision, coming as it did just as the country began to slide more quickly into an economic depression, was very likely the error of judgment (and timing) that hastened his decline as an entrepreneur. Despite the early success of his London Pavilion venture, Hiscocks could not replicate the success he had with the Federals, and soon found himself in financial difficulties when he attempted to try and corner the same small market that Harry Rickards was similarly targeting. Hiscocks attempted to reignite his entrepreneurial career in 1892 and 1894 by putting together at least two new Federal Minstrel troupes (utilising some past performers). However, without the core membership of Bent, Keenan, Read, Moynham, Braham, Amery, Turner, and Porter, the public didn't give its founder the level of support he was hoping for.

PERSONNEL

1. Performers (comedians/singers/actors and specialty acts etc): Edward Amery (1883-1886), W. A. Ball (1884-1886), Walter T. Bates (1883), W. Horace Bent (1883-1889), Thomas Bergin (1883), Louis Braham (1883-1886), Harry Carroll (1884-1885, 1888), Johnny Cowan (1884), Sam Dearin (1883), Johnny Gardner (1883), Joseph Haverly (1883), Charles Heywood (1883), Charles Holly (1883), George Jones (1883), Sam Keenan (1884-1888), E. J. Kennedy (1883), George W. Lawless (1883), Alf Lawton (1883), Charles McCarthy (1883), John Maccohniois (1883), Alf Moynham (1884-1886), J. S. Porter (1884-1886), Beaumont Read ((1884-1886), James E. Richardson (1883), George Turner (1883-1888), J. S. Whitworth (1883, 1885), Edward Williamson (1883).

2. **Musicians (incl. music directors):** Owen Conduit (piano), Nicholas La Feuillade (violin/ music director).

3. **Short term and/or guest artists included:** M. Clune (1884), Harry Crawford (1888), E. C. Dunbar (1885), Harry W. Emmet (1883), Tommy Empson (1893), Mrs T. Empson (1883), T. Gall (1885), J. Harris (1884), W. Jones (1884), Thomas H. Rainford (1883-1884), George Smith (1883), Walter Wiseman (1885).

ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

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

- 1883: (Vic Hall, Melb; 21-24 Aug.) • (Masonic Hall, Syd; 15 Sept. - ca. 12 Oct.*) • (Gaiety Th, Syd; 13 Oct. - *).
- 1884: (A of M, Syd; 5 Apr. - *).
- 1885: (A of M, Syd; 1 Jan. -*) • (Vic Hall, Melb; 31 October - *) • (A of M, Syd; 24-31 Dec).
- 1886: (A of M, Syd; 2 Jan. - *) • (A of M, Bris; 9 May- *) • (A of M, Syd; 5 June - *) • (A of M, Syd; 17 Aug. - * > double company - Hiscocks' Federal Minstrels and Leon and Cushman's Minstrels) • (St Geo's Hall, Melb; 16 Oct. - *) • (A of M, Syd; 20-31 Dec).
- 1887: (A of M, Syd; 1 Jan. - *).
- 1888: (A of M, Syd; 7 Jan. - *) • (Vic Th, Newc; 9 Apr. - *) • (Gaiety Th, Bris; 21 Apr. - *) • (A of M, Syd; 14 July - *).
- 1892: (Polytechnic Hall and Royal Museum, Syd; 26 Mar. - * > Lessee/Mngr. M. Hegarty).
- 1894: (S of Arts, Syd; 12 May - *) • (S of Arts, Syd; 27 Oct. - *).

ACADEMY OF MUSIC.
 THE HOME OF MIRTH AND MUSIC.

Still the leading Attraction of the City.
 Why? Because we give the people value for their money.
 END MEN.

With HISCOCK'S FEDERAL MINSTRELS.

ANOTHER ENTIRE CHANGE OF PROGRAMME.
 Read and judge for yourselves.
 THIS (Saturday) EVENING, MARCH 10.

Bones { W. Horace Bent Joe Ryan C. Lyndon	Tambos { Sam. Keenan W. B. Warner Alf. Moynham.
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Interlocutor: W. A. Ball.

FIRST PART.

Overture—"Hoop La"	Federal Minstrels
Comic Song—"Jilted"	Sam Keenan
Song—"Come where the Violets bloom"	H. Carroll
Comic Song—"Rooney's Band"	J. Ryan
Ballad—"Fond Affection"	L. Braham
Comic Song—"O! Tells it unto You"	W. B. Warner
Song—"There's a Light in the Window"	Peaumont Read
Comic Song—"A Word of Advice"	W. Horace Bent
Song—"The Romany Lass"	T. Bergin.

FINALE—MARKETING—by the full strength of the Company.

OLIO (by request), GRAND SWORD CONTEST.
 Captain J. R-Y-A-N, late of the Ben-Gaul Lancets, and
 Drum-major M-Q-Y-N-HAM, early of the Royal Horse Bazaar.
 N.B.—This is the most laughable contest ever "grasped" in
 Sydney. Special strains from the orchestra every few seconds.

C. LYNDON in his new Song and Dance, "Mr. Kerney
 by the Lakeside."

W. HORACE BENT'S New Sketch entitled CUPIDITY.
 Cupid W. Horace Bent | Charles Tom Howa
 Gracey... .. Harry Carroll | Growler W. A. Ball

J. RYAN, in his newest SPECIALITIES.
 C. LYNDON, in his Champion Skipping Rope Clog Dance.
 The Australian Comique, W. B. WARNER, in his new specialities.

Terminating with Sam Keenan's Musical Farce entitled
 LOVE IN DIXIE.
 Popular Prices: 3s, 2s, and 1s.
 Reserved Seats at Nicholson and Co.'s Music Warehouse,
 King and George streets.

Sydney Morning Herald 10 Mar (1888), 2.