

## ELSIE HOSKING

(1907-1992) The daughter of Perth theatre manager Andy Hosking and his wife Ethel (nee Owens), Elsie Hosking established herself as one of the city's brightest juvenile vaudeville stars during the latter years of the war, and at one stage was also a member of Allan Wilkie's dramatic company (ca. 1918-19). Although largely associated with Western Australia during the early 1920s, Hosking occasionally undertook engagements in the eastern states and South Australia. After her marriage to comedian Keith Connolly in 1926 Hosking's career expanded considerably to include consistent tours throughout Australia, a 1939 New Zealand tour, and radio. Highly-regarded as entertainers the couple continued to perform regularly into the 1950s, with Hosking invariably billed as Sunny Day from ca. 1943.

### 1907 -1925

At the age of 10, Gwendoline Elsie Hosking began singing in Perth charity shows and soon afterwards graduated to the Tivoli Minstrels, appearing at the [Shaftesbury Theatre](#) in 1917. The theatre was managed at the time by her father Andy. The following year she appeared in Allan Wilkie's production of *The Silence of Dean Maitland*. During the last years of war and for a time after the armistice, Little Elsie Hosking – "the Child Wonder" or "Perth's Little Idol" was best known, however, for her performances at concerts to farewell, support and welcome home Australian troops. As Perth's *Daily News* remarked, "Probably no one secured a better reception in the new bill that was introduced last week than the winsome child Elsie Hoskings [sic], whose popularity, which she established during the war in a record number of charitable performances, is being further enhanced. Last night, the dainty serio sang with sweet expressiveness a dreamy melody, 'Alabama Lullaby', and so great was its appeal that the artist had to render an encore number to satisfy the audience."<sup>1</sup>



By the age of 14 Elsie was a regular performer with Brooks Amusement Company at the Shaftesbury. In the early 1920s she mostly appeared in and around Perth, often sharing stages with older artists with whom she would develop lifelong connections - among them Effie Fellowes, [Marshall Crosby](#), [Violet Elliott \[2\]](#), the Paulastos, and the Connolly siblings - Gerald, Keith, and Gladys [aka [Gladys Shaw](#)] - whose family she would join after marrying Keith.

### 1926-1932



**Nat Phillips Whirligigs, 1926.**  
Elsie Hosking is fourth from left, middle row.

Although Elsie likely met Keith Connolly while he was in Perth with his newly-formed Syncopating Jesters vaudeville act, it was her engagement with [Nat Phillips' Whirligigs](#) that provided the opportunity to leave her home town. Phillips opened his season at the Luxor Theatre<sup>2</sup> in early April 1926 remaining there for 26 weeks. Aged just 18 she sang and acted in Phillips' farcical revues. After concluding the Perth season in October the company, including Elsie, transferred to Brisbane. She appears to have remained only briefly in Brisbane with the Whirligigs, however, because in December she and Connolly married in Sydney. The following year she joined [Keith's Syncopating Jesters](#), performing alongside her husband, and Gladys and Gerald.

Keith's Syncopating Jesters had a successful Brisbane season for some months with the Cremorne Follies, in which Elsie also sang, danced and appeared in comic items on the program – which featured [Mike Connors and Queenie Paul](#), Maurice Barling and Cyril James in addition to Keith's band. In August the Jesters took to stages in Queensland's major towns.

<sup>1</sup> "[Shaftesbury Theatre](#)." *Daily News* (Perth) 2 Oct. (1920), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The Luxor Theatre was previously known as the Shaftesbury Theatre. The name changed in 1925

Late in 1928, Elsie gave birth to a son, Keith, named after his father. The following year, while returning to Perth to visit her family, she made a guest appearance with [Ike Delavale's Whizz-Bangs](#). In 1930, she and Keith joined Nat Phillips in Sydney, as members of a company that went on to enjoy a 38 week run at Sydney's Grand Opera House. During the engagement Elsie was sometimes billed as the "chic soubrette." One of the highlights of the Sydney season occurred in December when she premiered Don Bradman and Jack Lumsdaine's song "Every Day is a Rainbow Day For Me" during the pantomime [Beauty and the Beast](#) (1930). In its 7 January edition, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* theatre critic wrote of the performance attended by the cricketing legend:

Mr. Don Bradman, the famous cricketer, was present at the Grand Opera House last night to hear his song "Every Day Is a Rainbow Day for Me"... sung by Miss Elsie Hosking [it] proved pleasantly melodious and sentimental, with a refrain in which saxophones and brasses vigorously supported the vocal theme, ere it was taken up smartly by n. well trained ballet. After the song there was great applause for the composer as he walked on to the stage, accompanied by Mr. George Marlow. Mr. Bradman said he had enjoyed very much the experience of hearing for the first time this composition sung in public.... On his own behalf and that of Mr. Lumsdaine, he presented a box of chocolates to Miss Hosking, and complimented her and the orchestra and ballet upon the performance. "It is a very great pleasure and a very great honour to sing this song," said Miss Hosking, in reply. There was warm applause also for the members of the West Indies team, who were present.<sup>3</sup>



**Elsie and Keith Connolly on their wedding day, December 15, 1926**

Nat Phillips produced many changes of program during the long stay in Sydney, with most of the revues being staged for a week only, and with few revival seasons. Among the prominent artists Elsie and Keith performed with were [Syd Beck](#), [Joe Lawman](#), [Stella Lamond](#), and Hilda Waring. After playing to packed houses for months, the company moved on to Melbourne and Adelaide, before returning to Sydney and the Grand Opera House in early 1932.



**Elsie Hosking circa 1931**

Following Phillips' sudden and unexpected death in June 1932 Elsie and Keith joined Humphrey Bishop's Dandies, playing Newcastle with the company and featuring in radio variety shows produced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC).

<sup>3</sup> "[Bradman's Song: 'Every Day is a Rainbow Day For Me'](#)." *Sydney Morning Herald* 7 Jan. (1931), 14.

## 1933-1943

At the height of the depression, engagements were scarce and there was little work for the couple in early 1933, apart from a short season with Adelaide's Tivoli Follies. Then Richard Shafto gathered together a company for his theatre in Perth, in shows produced by Stan "Stud" Foley and [Elton Black](#). Shafto's Revels appeared at Perth's Luxor and in Kalgoorlie between July and November 1933. It wasn't the first time Elsie and Keith had appeared alongside Stan Foley, but the Perth season cemented a performing relationship between the three which lasted for more than a decade to come.

1934 and 1935 were even leaner years. During that time Keith was occasionally seen on the stage at Sydney's Tivoli, but both artists found engagements increasingly difficult to locate. In 1936, Perth came to the rescue, when Elsie and Keith featured in the Serenaders troupe at the Luxor Theatre. Keith ventured overseas in the middle of that year, but Elsie stayed on in Perth and on stage at the Luxor with Stan Foley and the Mirthmakers. Among her many roles was that of Greta Garbo in a sketch titled *A Scene in a Hollywood Apartment*. Following Keith's return to Perth in September, the couple went with Foley to the Broken Hill Tivoli, where they appeared with [Marshall Crosby](#), [Amy Rochelle](#) and with Keith's sister, Gladys.

Elsie and Keith went on to Adelaide with Foley then later joined [Graham Mitchell's Jesters](#) at Brisbane's [Rex Theatre](#) (Fortitude Valley) in 1937. "Assisting these two male performers in their comedy was Elsie Hoskings [sic], the personality girl of the show," wrote the *Telegraph's* theatre critic. "Always a dainty and attractive figure, she was a favourite of last night's audience. Coupled with Foley she achieved great success in the comedy sketch, 'Eat and Grumble'."<sup>4</sup>

Under [Frank Neil's](#) direction, Elsie and Keith joined international artists on [Tivoli](#) stages in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane for the remainder of 1937. They worked with Neil's Tivoli shows again in 1939, appearing alongside Will Mahoney and Evie Hayes in Melbourne and Brisbane. Later that year they toured New Zealand, appearing in a decidedly multicultural program. In a review published in New Zealand's *Evening Post* newspaper under the title "Chinese Revue: Many Outstanding Acts," the Wellington critic made comment on the programme submitted "before the interval" by the European entertainers, among them Elsie and Keith:

A snappy duo by Latona and Sparks, acrobatic dancers, was the first item of the evening, and this was followed by solos by the baritone, Alexander Cooper. A crisp frock of starched white organdie was worn, by Elsa Hoskins [sic] in her act with Keith Connolly, black appliqués and small black buttons at the waistline giving the gown an unusual finish.<sup>5</sup>

1940 and 1941 saw Elsie and Keith working with Mo once more, in *Vogues of Variety* at Adelaide's Majestic, and in *Black Velvet* at the Sydney and Melbourne Tivoli theatres, and at Brisbane's [Cremorne Theatre](#).

## 1943-1992



In 1943, Elsie began using the stage name "Sunny Day," initially in Adelaide where Keith had become a corporal in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Even so the pair appeared throughout that year in local shows – mostly produced as part of RAAF welfare and recruiting activities. Highlight of these was the Motion Picture Industries Gala at Adelaide Town Hall which featured well known radio personality Jack Davey, and raised a record amount for the Fourth Liberty Loan.

Keith was discharged from the RAAF on medical grounds and early in 1945 Elsie and her husband returned to Perth. At the Luxor they appeared alongside male impersonator [Nellie Kolle](#) in Bruce Carroll's revue *Shoulder, Arms and Legs*. The following year the pair appeared in Carroll's *Greet the Fleet* revue, with Ike Delavale at the Tivoli (formerly the Luxor). Later that year Elsie was at the Majestic with Keith, Kolle, Delavale and Maggie Buckley in the Carroll-Fuller Theatre show *Lucky Stars*.

**Front row from left: Keith Connolly, Jack Davey and "Sunny Day" (Elsie Hosking).  
Top row: Ida Newton and Joe Brennan, Adelaide 1943**

<sup>4</sup> "Keith Connolly and Stan Foley in Fun at the Rex." *Telegraph* (Brisbane) 24 April (1937),15.

<sup>5</sup> "[Chinese Revue: Many Outstanding Acts.](#)" *Evening Post* (Wellington, NZ) 11 Sept. (1939), 12.

*Cinderella*, a Christmas time pantomime in Adelaide was Elsie's last engagement for 1946. She and Keith lived in South Australia for the next three years, occasionally appearing in charity and special event shows. Keith also worked as a salesman in this period. Both Elsie and Keith continued performing in radio variety shows, concerts and drama productions for the ABC. Among the radio plays in which Elsie took roles were *The West Chamber* (translated from a famous Chinese drama of the Yuan dynasty era) and *The Kingdom of God* by early twentieth century Spanish dramatist Gregorio Martinez Sierra. Her later radio parts included those of Vasilevna in Turgenev's *A Provincial Lady*, and Mansueta in the Italian comedy *Uncle Martino*.

Elsie and Keith returned to Perth once more in 1949. Her health was not good and she worked only a little in the ensuing years, mostly in radio drama. Keith died in 1961. Elsie survived him by more than 30 years.



Keith and Elsie Connolly, Adelaide ABC Studios (1940s)

### SEE ALSO

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Keith and Elsie Hosking (as Sunny Day), 1947

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