

# JACK KELLAWAY

After arriving in Australia in the early 1920s Jack Kellaway, as with his brother Alec, established his reputation as a comedian on the Fullers circuit. His early career in the country saw him appear with Gayle Wyer's Bandbox Revue Company and tour with Nat Phillips's Whirligigs. For the later company he was given the onerous job of replacing Roy Rene ("Mo") with his own character 'Erb. Kellaway went on to play the character even after Rene and Phillips reunited in 1927. When the Stiffy and Mo partnership ended late the following year Kellaway continued working with Phillips. During the 1930s he was associated with J. C. Williamson's and is also known to have worked a vaudeville act with his wife Sylvia in London in early 1931.

The cousin of British actors Arthur Chesney and Edmund Gwenn, Jack Kellaway was one of six siblings who carved out careers in the entertainment profession. During the mid-to-late 1920s, he was largely associated with the Nat Phillips's revusical troupes Stiffy and Mo and Stiffy and 'Erb. In the latter troupe, he appeared opposite Phillips as 'Erb. His brother, Alec, was also an occasional member of both troupes during the same period.

Jack Kellaway was possibly born in England, along with another brother, Leon (a dancer who came to Australia with Anna Pavlova's ballet company). At least two other brothers, Alec and Cecil, were born in South Africa, where it is believed the family resided for some years. While little is known of their parents, it is likely that they were also involved in the theatre as it has been said that the Kellaways were South Africa's equivalent to the Barrymores. The most successful member of the family was Cecil, who spent more than two decades in the British and Australian film industries (seventeen years in Australia) as an actor, writer, and director before moving to Hollywood. In 1948, he garnered an Oscar nomination as Best Supporting Actor for *The Luck of the Irish*. One of the last films he appeared in was *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) as Monsignor Mike Ryan.

Jack and Cecil followed Leon to Australia around 1920/1921, with Alec arriving in 1923. In 1925 Jack secured an engagement with F. Gayle Wyer's Bandbox Revue Company during its Sydney season, appearing in revusicals alongside variety veterans such as Billy Bovis and Walter Cornock. The following year he and Alec joined Phillips's Whirligig Revue Company, with Jack taking on the role of Stiffy's onstage partner 'Erb, replacing Roy Rene's 'Mo'. Jack played the character in numerous adaptations of the Stiffy and Mo shows staged by the Whirligigs (ca. 1926-1927). Alec Kellaway later became Roy Rene's producer at the Tivoli.



**In *The White Horse Inn* (1934)**

J.C. Williamson's Ltd



Courtesy of the Fryer Library, University of Queensland.  
Nat Phillips Collection (UQFL9) see Charleston Super Six

Jack Kellaway remained with the Stiffy and Mo troupe after Phillips and Rene reunited in February 1927. Although it was initially announced that the shows would be based around the trio of Stiffy, Mo, and 'Erb, his position slipped back to support status soon afterwards. In early 1929, he returned as Phillips's partner following the disbanding of the Stiffy and Mo company. He was again joined by his brother Alec (who temporarily replaced Dan M. Dunbar while the eminent vaudevillian was struck down by a lengthy illness).

Boxing fans will learn with glee, says the Empire management, that the long promised bout between Jack Kellaway, the Empire Theatre's comedian, and Jack Roberts, who k.o'd De Leon at the Stadium last Friday evening, will take place at the Empire Theatre on Wednesday night. This is the culmination of a challenge issued by Kellaway, otherwise known as "The Basher" and "The Wild Wogg from Woop-Woop," promptly accepted by Roberts, whose soubriquet "Eat-Actors-Alive-Jack" has earned him much fame. Under Rafferty rules, and with a 30 minutes time limit, the fight will be fought to the finish of one contestant or the other. Kellaway is now in training, and takes a regular walk to the nearest hotel with "Stiffy" each morning. Roberts says he doesn't need to train to beat Kellaway. The bad blood between the two is promise of a stirring bout. Ringside seats for Wednesday night can be obtained at Paling's.

**With Nat Phillips' Whirligigs Co (Brisbane, 1929)**

*Brisbane Courier* 24 June (1929), 22.

During the early 1930s Kellaway worked a vaudeville act with his wife Sylvia in London.<sup>1</sup> He was also associated with J. C. Williamson's, appearing in such productions as *The White Horse Inn* (His Majesty's Theatre, Melb; July 1934).

### **SEE ALSO**

- [Alex Kellaway](#)
- [Nat Phillips' Whirligigs Co](#)
- [Sylvia Kellaway](#)
- [Stiffy & 'Erb](#)
- [Nat Phillips' Stiffy & Mo Revue Co](#)
- [F. Gayle Wyer's Bandbox Revue Co](#)

### **TROUPES**

Nat Phillips' Stiffy & Mo Revue Co • Nat Phillips' Whirligigs • F. Gayle Wyer's Bandbox Revue Co

### **FURTHER REFERENCE**

Djubal, Clay. "[Kellaway, Jack](#)." AustLit (2007).



**Clockwise from left: Jack, Sylvia, Cyril and Alec**

Source: National Library of Australia

<sup>1</sup> See for example Coliseum, beginning 3 January 1931.