

TIVOLI THEATRES (1944-1969)

The Tivoli's last phase of operations began in 1944 when the David N. Martin syndicate acquired Tivoli Circuit Australia. During World War II the company relied on local stars and lower production values, but returned to importing international stars and staging lavish spectacles in the late-1940s. Neil Maver, who took control following Martin's death in 1958, was forced to stop producing revues in 1966. A brief return to film exhibition in Melbourne ended when a fire destroyed the building and the Tivoli ceased operations altogether when its Sydney theatre was demolished.

The Tivoli's last phase of operations began in 1944, when a syndicate headed by David N. Martin (1898-1958) bought out the company's major stakeholders, George Dickinson and Wesley Ince. Martin had previously forged his career in various areas of the entertainment industry, including cinema advertising and publicity, theatre management and by the late 1930s as an entrepreneur. Prior to taking over the Tivoli circuit he had opened the Minerva Theatre in Kings Cross (Syd) in 1939, operating it with much success during the war with a stream of largely modern British and American comedies, and in 1942 had become managing director of the Broadway Theatre Company, operating a chain of unpretentious Sydney suburban cinemas.

Upon taking over the Tivoli circuit Martin reduced Wallace Parnell's position from general manager to resident producer (without the power to hire or fire). This move subsequently led to the brilliant but somewhat erratic Parnell departing both the company and Australia shortly afterwards. Alec Kellaway, who had occasionally undertaken co-production duties with Parnell, subsequently became the Tivoli's full-time producer. The first show to be produced by the Martin-led Tivoli Theatres organisation was the Melbourne season of *It's Foolish - But it's Fun* (9 Oct. 1944), with Dick Bentley and Edgley and Dawe (Eric Edgely and Clem Dawe). Roy Rene, originally slated as the star of the Melbourne show, headlined the Sydney revival later that same year (20 Nov.).

With travel during the war years restricted, the Tivoli relied heavily on local stars such as Rene, George Wallace, Charles Norman, Mike Connors and Queenie Paul, Joe Lawman, Buster Fiddes, Joe Brennan, Ida Newton, Ron Shand, John Gilbert, and Val Jellay. After the war, however, Martin returned to the Tivoli tradition of importing acts from the USA and United Kingdom. The company produced a variety of entertainments through until the mid-1950s, including revue, opera, ballet, musical comedy, old-time black-and-white minstrel shows, and even Shakespeare.

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The arrival of television in 1956 put the Tivoli under enormous pressure. Although the company embraced the new medium with live half-hour broadcasts from its Sydney theatre once a week, the competition eventually eroded its patronage. When David N. Martin died unexpectedly in 1958, his business associate Neil Maver took control, with help from the Tivoli's Melbourne manager, Gordon Cooper. Martin's son Lloyd Martin also played a guiding role during the company's final years. Interestingly, the Tivoli's biggest success during this period was *The Black and White Minstrel Show*: a \$50,000 adaptation of the popular British television variety show. By 1966, however, the Tivoli stopped producing revues, with the last Sydney production, *One Dam' Thing After Another* (starring Gwen Plumb), closing in March that year. The final Melbourne show was a four-week season by British comedian Jimmy Edwards.

Following the closure of its live productions, Tivoli Theatres briefly turned to film exhibition in Melbourne before a fire destroyed the building. The Sydney Tivoli was leased out to other managements until 1969, when the theatre was demolished.



David N. Martin

Source: Live Performance Australia

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- [Hugh D. McIntosh](#)
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- [Harry Rickards](#)
- [Harry Rickards' Tivoli Theatres Ltd](#) (1912-29)
- [Tivoli Theatres](#) (1944-66)
- [Tivoli Frolics](#)
- [Con-Paul Theatres](#) (1931-34)

FURTHER REFERENCE

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- "[David N. Martin](#)." *Live Performance Australia: Hall of Fame* [sighted 25/03/2011]



Alec Kellaway
(ca. late 1930s/early 1940s)
Source: National Library of Australia



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