

## DAN TRACEY

An American who was renowned as one of the finest exponents of Irish characterisations and witticisms to tour Australia during the minstrel era, Dan Tracey was also a specialist clog dancer. He first came to Australia with Billy Emerson in 1885, having previously spent some six years with the famous American minstrel entrepreneur (much of it possibly spent in San Francisco). He is also believed to have undertaken a tour of Great Britain with Emerson prior to arriving in Australia. Among the members of Emerson's troupe were Harry and Charles Cogill and Alf Holland who all remained in Australia long after Emerson returned to America in 1886. In 1887 Tracey undertook an engagement with the newly formed Cogill Brothers company, one of the earliest seasons being undertaken at the Gaiety Theatre (Syd). As one of the feature artists Tracey presented his specialty dance act and introduced a new character impersonation "The Irish Gentleman" in sketches with Fanny Saroni, Charles Cogill and George A. Jones (SMH: 30 Apr. 1887, 2). He also appeared in numerous farces, including *Muldoon's Picnic* and *Smoked Out*, and worked briefly in a partnership with Frank Stevens, the pair portraying two sons of Erin's Green Isle and introducing songs like "Four-Leaved Shamrock" (SMH: 28 May 1887, 2).

**HAYMARKET PALACE OF VARIETIES**  
(late Haymarket Theatre)  
Lessee and Proprietor ... .. CHARLES HUGO.  
Business Manager... .. ALF SANTLEY

**TO-NIGHT, TO-NIGHT, TO-NIGHT.**

Grand Opening Night of the Popular Favourites,  
**HUGO'S BUFFALO MINSTRELS,**  
established 1879.

The only Company in Australia with a 10 years'  
unbroken record.

HEADED BY CHARLES HUGO,  
the KING of NEGRO COMEDIANS,  
And Miss PRISCILLA VERNE, the Charming young  
SOUBRETTE and SERIO-COMIC ARTISTE.

Our Original Prices, first introduced into the Australian  
colonies by Mr. Hugo—

Front Seats,	Gallery,	Pit,
2s	1s	6d.

**TO-NIGHT,**  
Our Original First Part ON BOARD THE  
S.S. BUFFALO.  
With New and Elegant Costumes.

**TO-NIGHT,**  
The Marvellous  
**FRED THE LESLIE BROS., WILL**  
(under special engagement to Chas. Hugo).  
Musical Wonders, Comedians, and Tumblers. Can Play  
on anything and everything.

**TO-NIGHT,**  
**TRACEY and ADSON**  
(under special engagement to Chas. Hugo),  
Irish Comedians, Dancers, and Variety Artists.

**TO-NIGHT,**  
**25 ACKNOWLEDGED STARS 25.**  
The finest array of Variety Talent ever staged in Sydney  
To-night, the cheapest and best show on earth.  
Two and a half hours' real genuine fun and amusement.  
A full and efficient Orchestra.  
Come and see and judge for yourselves.

R. T. WATERS,  
Agent.

*Sydney Morning Herald* 15 Mar. 1890, 2.

appeared in the minstrel first half and then presented their specialty in the vaudeville second half, along with burlesques and musical comedies like *McGowan the Millionaire* and *The Irish Inspector* (SMH: 13 Sept. 1890, 2).

While it is not clear when Tracey and Adson parted ways, the fact that Dan Tracey was being promoted as the lessee, and Adson's name was gradually diminishing in importance suggests that the partnership may have been in trouble.<sup>1</sup> The company itself was a strong one, and given the level of expertise this ensured that whoever took control could expect strong public support. Among the most prominent names were Will "the Black Diamond" Wallace, Ida Tauchert (later Mrs Jack Kearns) and Blanche Montague.

With Alf M. Hazlewood (tenor/character actor) engaged as business manager, and ex-Rickards music director, Walter T. Rhodes as band leader, Tracey set about hiring mostly locally-based variety artists, many of whom had begun to establish reputations over the previous five or so years. In January 1891 he co-staged a short season of minstrelsy and burlesque with Charles Fanning's Concert Company. The combined troupe boasted the talents of Frank York (endman), Arthur Farley (basso) and Bertha Fanning. Ida Tauchert was also back the School of Arts, having by then joined the Concert Company. Charles Fanning was also a feature artist with Tracey on other occasions that year.

<sup>1</sup> Adson would later join Tracey's company for a brief season (ca. Feb. 1892).

When Harry Clay joined the company in May 1891, it was in its 23rd week and continuing to maintain a huge following with the Sydney public.

One aspect of Tracey's entrepreneurial style to set him apart from his peers was his brash style of promotion. Although he started out using traditional advertising techniques, albeit with more bravado, he later invented more audacious means of securing interest. In May 1891, for example, he attempted to legitimise his entertainments by claiming that they were constantly patronised by "the clerical, medical and legal professions" (SMH: 30 May 1891, 2). A few months later he offered "Seats by Auction," claiming that it was "the only way of satisfying an over-yearning audience" (SMH: 11 July 1891, 2). Another of his promotional ideas (presented in 1892) was to stage an all-Female Tug of War Contest (SMH: 14 Feb. 1892, 2). By attempting to assert his own stamp of individualism on the local industry, and refusing to tone down his style, Tracey raised the ire of his competitors. His success was, however, a magnet to local performers who were being given not only increased engagement opportunities but were having their profile raised through their association with his operations.

**GAIETY THEATRE.**

Sole Lessee and Proprietor . . . . . **MR. DAN TRACEY**  
 Business Manager . . . . . **MR. ALF M. HAZLEWOOD**  
 Musical Director . . . . . **MR. T. W. RHODES**

**SECOND YEAR OF DAN TRACEY'S  
 VAUDEVILLE  
 MINSTREL AND SPECIALTY COMPANY.**

First Appearance of

**Edwin Shipp** . . . . . Endman and Comedian  
**Minnie Shipp** . . . . . Serio-Comic and Dancer  
 4—**Four Little Nursery Maids**—4  
 and **Fred Garnett**, the Original Dummy Clown.

**PART 1.**

Conversational . . . . . **Alf M. Hazlewood.**      Our Lively Endmen:  
 Our Lively Endmen:      **Willie Warner**  
**Frank Yorke**      **Edwin Shipp**  
**E. Gaudier.**

Overture and Opening Chorus—"Estudiantina" . . . . . Company  
 Bass Solo—"The Old Turnkey" . . . . . **ARTHUR FARLEY**  
 Comic Song—"Another Color Now" . . . . . **WILLIE B. WARNER**

Beautiful Graceful Double Serio-Comic Ladies,  
 Misses **ANNETTA BODIN** and **IDA TAUCHERT.**

Contralto Song—"Village School" . . . . . **MISS AMY ROWE**

First Appearance of the Celebrated Endman and Comedian.  
**EDWIN SHIPP.**      **EDWIN SHIPP.**

Ireland's Patriotic Vocalist, **PAT ROCHFORD.**  
 Queens of Double Song and Dance,  
**ABBOTT SISTERS.**

**Rosie**      **Gertie**

Ballad—"Thou Art So Near" . . . . . **HARRY CLAY**  
 Serio-Comic Song—"Arthur and Martha" . . . . . **MISS FLORRIE PORDE**  
 Local Song—"Is it Likely" . . . . . **FRANK YORKE**  
 Now we Have the Lightning Change Artiste and Soubrette,  
**MISS RUTH WALLACE.**

Introducing "How He Carries On," "The Old Flag," and Grand Tableau,  
 "Australia."

Selection—      **PART II**      **ORCHESTRA**

**IDA TAUCHERT AND ANNETTA BODIN.**  
 Sensational Double Song and Dance Artists.  
 Your Old Favorite, **FRANK YORKE**, in his latest Parodies.  
 First time of the Society Double Sketch Artistes,  
**Edwin—THE SHIPPS.—Minnie.**  
 Lightning Change and Serio-Comic Lady, **MISS RUTH WALLACE.**  
 Australia's Greatest Comique and Character Actor, **WILLIE B. WALLACE.**  
 First Time in Sydney of the  
 4—**MAGNETS.**—4

**ROSIE ABBOTT—GERTIE ABBOTT—ROSIE HOWARD—BELLA HOWARD**  
 As the "Four Little Nursery Maids."  
 Song—(By Universal Request)—"Divorced" . . . . . **MISS AMY ROWE**  
 First Appearance of the Original Dummy Clown.  
**FRED GARNETT**      **FRED GARNETT**  
 Little Scottish Nightingale, **MISS AMY KENNEDY.**  
 Tremendous Hit of **MISS FLORRIE PORDE** in her Original Character  
 Specialty, "Bubbles."  
 Dublin's Great Song and Dance Man, **PAT ROCHFORD.**

Willie B. Warner's Screaming Farce,  
**THE NEW GUINEA CHIEFTIAN.**

**Dr. Bray** . . . . . **ARTHUR FARLEY**  
**Pete Spilm** . . . . . **FRANK YORKE**  
**Harry Emmett** . . . . . **HARRY CLAY**  
**Chew Fat** . . . . . **WILLIE B. WARNER**

*Australian Variety 29 Dec. 1915, n. pag.*

Not content to remain bound to the N.S.W. capital, Tracey let the public of both Sydney and Melbourne know in early February 1892 that he had become the new lessee of the Melbourne's Gaiety Theatre, and that he fully intended his occupation of the venue to be a long one. He opened there on 13 February, while still continuing to operate his Sydney

venture. The Melbourne enterprise was an immediate success, built very much on the quality of the artists engaged - with the debut company including Martyn Hagan and Lucy Fraser, Johnny Matlock, Harry Clay, Frank York, the Leslie Brothers, George A. Jones, the Sherwood Sisters, and music director, Carl Reidle. Describing the audiences as "packed, jammed, crammed and sardined," Tracey's advertising called on "working men, bring your wives; single men bring your sweethearts; [and] old men bring your grandchildren." Melbournians were also encouraged to buy Tracey's latest songster (A: 17 Feb. 1892, 8). By July of that year, in full entrepreneurial fashion, he began displaying his 'style' to the Melbournians, offering patrons in the first two rows coupons for a drink or cigar, while gallery patrons were entitled to a glass of beer. He also began stepping up the quality level by engaging over the next few months, artists of the calibre of Billy Speed, W. B. Warner, Florrie Forde and Edward (Ted) and Minnie Shipp. One advertisement in August even boasted "WITHOUT BUMPTIOUS BLATHER WE ARE BOOMING" (A: 20 Aug. 1892, 12).

Given that advertising is notoriously problematic in terms of accurately reflecting success or quality, perhaps more indicative of the level of success Tracey was achieving by this time was the reaction of his competitors. On 19 February 1892, for example, a deputation of Sydney concert hall managers met with the N.S.W. Premier to discuss Tracey's right to hire the School of Arts, and to ask the Minister to cancel his license. Tracey's response was to take the issue directly to the public. In claiming that this was "one of the greatest compliments yet paid to [his] management," he also levelled a challenge to his detractors, saying "if the public prefer TRACEY'S SHOW at the SCHOOL OF ARTS it is proof that the public, who are the best judges consider it is the BEST VARIETY SHOW in Sydney... WHY NOT HAVE FAIR COMPETITION." Elsewhere in the advertisement he taunted them mercilessly:

Deputations may to the minister go  
To shut up Dan Tracey's vaudeville show  
But the minister will very easily know  
That it's jealousy makes them do it.

(SMH: 20 Feb. 1892, 2)

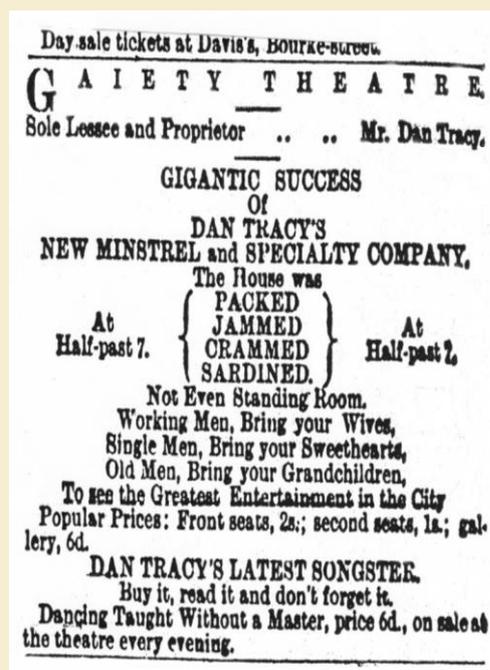
In August of 1892 Tracey moved his Sydney operations to the Gaiety Theatre in Castlereagh Street, located between Bathurst and Park Streets (and not to be confused with the later Gaiety Theatre in Oxford Street). He maintained his activities at that venue until sometime in mid February 1893, at which point his name disappears from advertising. Although minstrel entertainment continued to operate there for a few weeks after Tracey's departure, no manager or management is indicated in advertising until Alf. M. Hazlewood took control of the operations in early March. Dan Tracey returned to management in late June, taking over the lease of the Imperial Opera House. The company then included W. Horace Bent, W. B. Warner, Carlton and Sutton, the Leopolds, Wal Rockley and J. S. Whitworth. One of the burlesques staged was a revised revival of Bent's *Under the Gaspipe* (SMH: 26 June 1893, 4). The season lasted, however, only some four or five weeks before Tracey was once again forced to close down. To a large extent his career downfall, as with F. E. Hiscocks and Frank Smith (Alhambra Theatre, Sydney), was more than likely a consequence of the steadily worsening economic conditions brought on by the depression rather than a result of direct competition from Harry Rickards.

Despite the difficulties he now faced, and which had already seen most of his competitors (apart from Rickards) go out of business, Tracey appears to have been unwilling to go down without a fight. In March 1894 he opened with another company at the Theatre Royal (Syd). Billed as the World's Congress of Nations, the company boasted eight endmen and twenty vocalists, including Bertha Fanning, Edward Shipp, J. S. Porter and Edward Lawler. However, once again Tracey's attempt to reignite his career at the upper levels of the industry could not be sustained and by May he was appearing on the bill of his rival Harry Rickards at the Tivoli Theatre. The company at that stage also included Delohery Craydon and Holland (SMH: 19 May 1894, 2).

Dan Tracey's last recorded engagement in Australia found to date was in 1897 when he appeared with Alf Lawton's All Nations Company at the Gaiety Theatre in Brisbane, along with the Bovis Brothers (BC: 16 Jan. 1897, 2). Of his private life, all that has been identified is that he had a daughter, Stella, who performed as child artist in Australia around the turn of the century. She is believed to have returned to America sometime during the early war years - possibly in response to the Alien Restriction Act of 1916. While Tracey's career in Australia at the upper echelons of the industry was relatively brief, he nevertheless played an influential role in the development of local talent, and pushed entrepreneurship to new levels with his promotional activities. Despite largely targeting city audiences he operated a low pricing structure while still presenting quality entertainment and unlike Harry Rickards he did not see it as bad business to present largely Australian or Australian resident troupes.

## ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY

- 1885:** BILLY EMERSON (Gaiety Th, Syd; 11 Apr. - 6 June) • (NSW tour; ca. 7-12 June. Incl. Parramatta, Goulban and Albury) • (St Geo's Hall, Melb; 13 June)
- 1886:** F. M. CLARK (Vic Hall, Melb; 15 May - \* > Silk Stockings Co)
- 1887:** COGILL BROS (Gaiety Th, Syd; 30 Apr. -1 July)
- 1888:** HUGO'S BUFFALO MINSTRELS (no details, Geelong, Vic; ca. Dec. See PNCH: 28 Dec. 1888, 564)
- 1890:** HARRY RICKARDS (Gaiety Th, Bris; 21 Feb.) ▶ HUGO'S BUFFALO MINSTRELS (Haymarket Palace of Varieties, Syd; 15Mar.) ▶ DAN TRACEY MINSTRELS & HARRY RICKARDS' NEW MUSICAL COMEDY Co (S of A, Syd; 13 Sept.) ▶ TRACEY & ADSON'S COMEDY & SPECIALTY Co (Coogee Palace Aquarium, Syd; 25 Oct. > See also 8 Nov.) • (S of A, Syd; 18 Dec.)
- 1891:** TRACEY'S VAUDEVILLE Co & CHARLES FANNING'S CONCERT Co (S of A, Syd; 3 Jan.) ▶ DAN TRACEY SPECIALTY Co (S of A, Syd; ca. Feb. - Dec.)
- 1892:** DAN TRACEY SPECIALTY Co (S of A, Syd; 1 Jan. - July) • (Gaiety Th, Melb; 13 Feb. to ca. Oct. > See A: 8 Oct. 1892, 10) • (Gaiety Th, Syd; 1 Aug. - Dec.)
- 1893:** DAN TRACEY (Gaiety Th, Syd; 1 Jan. - June) • (Op House, Syd; 24 June - ca. 31 July)
- 1894:** DAN TRACEY (Th Royal, Syd; 3 Mar.) ▶ HARRY RICKARDS (Tivoli Th, Syd; 19 May)
- 1897:** ALF LAWTON'S ALL NATIONS Co (Gaiety Th, Bris; 16 Jan.)



Age 17 Feb. 1892, 8.