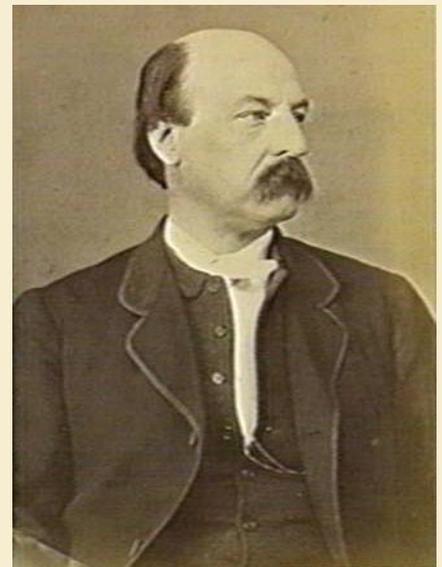


G. B. ALLEN

An organist who established the Belfast Choral Society and whose comic opera *Castle Grim* was staged in London in 1865, G. B. Allen immigrated to Australia around 1869/70. After collaborating on music theatre works with Grosvenor Bunster and Garnet Walch he became W. S. Lyster's music director. He is believed to have returned to the United Kingdom for a period in the 1880s before returning to Australia where he settled in Brisbane in the early 1890s. He was engaged as music director for Emma Wangenheim's comic opera company and collaborated with James Brunton-Stephens on the comic opera *Fayette; Or, Bush Revels* (1892). A number of Allen's compositions were also published during his lifetime.

Born in England in 1822, George Benjamin Allen, Mus. Bac., Oxon., commenced his musical career at the age of eight, when he received six pounds per annum as a chorister at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square. Two years later, he was accepted by Westminster Abbey, and later moved on to Chapel Royal, Whitehall. When his voice broke, Allen entered the choir at St. Paul's Cathedral as a basso, and at age 20 accepted a vicar-chorals berth in Armagh Cathedral, Ireland, where he remained for some ten years. Among his achievements during that period was his role in establishing the first Belfast Choral Society capable of producing the works of Handel and other great masters. He also started the scheme that allowed Ulster Hall to be remodelled, thus providing more space for audiences to hear these works. Allen returned to London in his late twenties to take up a post as organist. It was shortly afterwards, in 1865, that his two-act comic opera *Castle Grim* (libretto by R. Reece) was staged at London's New Royalty Theatre (TL: 4 Sept. 1865, 10).

Sometime around 1869/70 Allen travelled to Australia. Soon afterwards one of his more popular songs "When the Roses Blow," featured in the opening program of Weston and La Feuillade's Minstrels season at Weston's Opera House, Melbourne (18 June 1870). Advertising for the event records that Allen had been expressly engaged to arrange the song in collaboration with Nicholas La Feuillade¹. In 1872 he collaborated with Grosvenor Bunster on *The Belle of Woolloomooloo* and the following year was engaged by Garnet Walch to arrange and write new material for his adaptation of Offenbach's *Genevieve de Brabant*. Initially produced in a burlesque style at Melbourne's Opera House (beginning 11 Sept.) it was turned into a Christmas pantomime at Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre later that year (beginning 26 Dec.). Allen conducted W.S. Lyster's Royal English Opera Company during its Melbourne season in 1875 (beginning 7 June), with advertising also indicating that he had been engaged as Director. The company's repertoire included a production of *Castle Grim* (11 June) and a revival of *Genevieve de Brabant*. An *Argus* music critic wrote of Allen's *Castle Grim* score that "the music has an air of old-fashioned respectability about it. The concerted pieces... are very English and very nice to listen to. All the solos are tuneful, and some of them of a superior kind" (12 June 1875, 7). According to an 1895 *Brisbane Courier* article, one of the stars of the season was his student, Alice May. Her talent had previously caught the attention of Lyster, who pressed Allen to convince her to try opera. Her success in Australia subsequently led her to work in London (1 Apr. 1895, 4). Although Allen's whereabouts over the next decade and a half have not been established, it appears likely that he returned to England for at least several years. His name is once again associated with Australia in the early 1890s, at which time he seems to have settled in Brisbane. One of his earliest known engagements in Brisbane was as music director for Emma Wangenheim's comic opera season at Her Majesty's Theatre. The company opened on Boxing Day with *Chassaigne's Falca*. Two years later he collaborated with James Brunton-Stephens on the comic opera *Fayette; Or, Bush Revels*.



Source: State Library of Victoria.

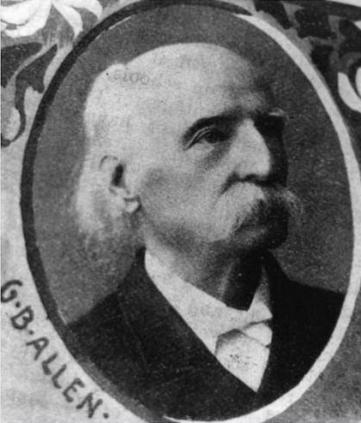
In 1894, Allen's dramatic song "The Crimson Cloak" was reviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as one of the best numbers in the new *Violets Album* (ctd. 15 Dec. 1894, 5). Another of his popular songs from this period was "Softly Fell the Sunshine," published by H. J. Samuel (SMH: 1 May 1895, 2). It was sung with great success in Australia by Alice Esty, and advertised as being taught by several leading Australian-based music teachers, including Miss Montague Turner and Mons T. Riccarul (SMH: 18 May 1895, 2). In 1897, his song "Bygone Days" was performed by Bessie Morgan at the Gaiety Theatre as part of a vaudeville programme being run under the management of Delohery, Bovis, and Deane (15 May). Other known songs include "The Voice of Moonlight," "Loving Voices," "I Love My Love in the Morning," "'T'was Long, Long Since in the Springtime," and "Three Plagues of Life" (BC: 30 May 1895, 1). Allen died in 1907.

¹ *Argus* 18 June (1870), 8.

FURTHER REFERENCE

Dates followed by an asterisk (*) indicate a published program or advertisement.

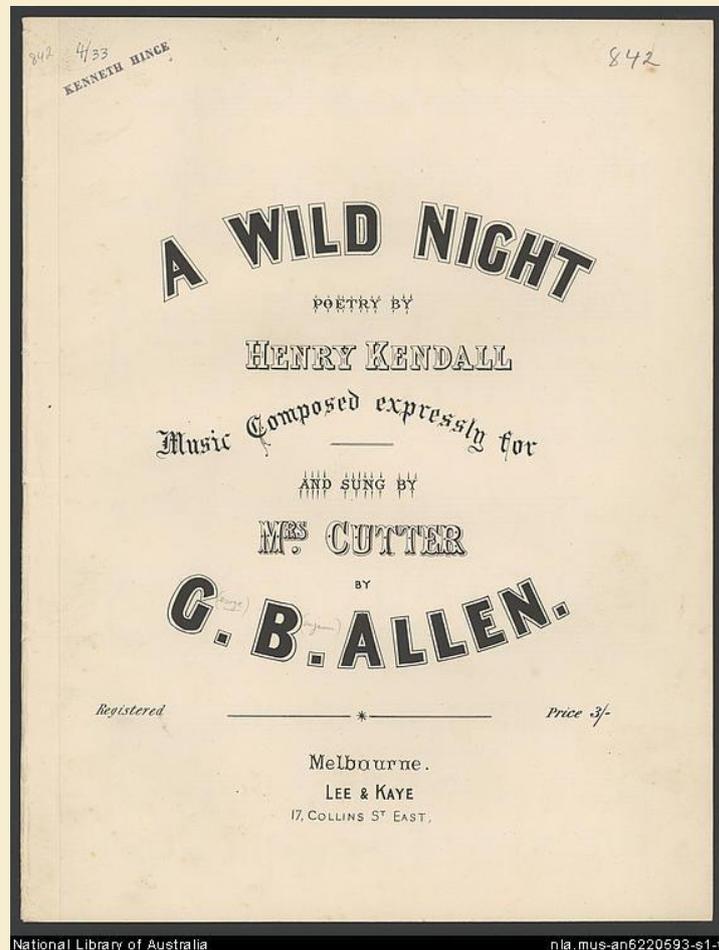
Djubal, Clay "[Allen, G.B.](#)." *AustLit* (2007).



See also:

- A:** 11 June (1875), 3, 4* [re: *Castle Grim*] • A: 12 June (1875), 5, 8* [re: *Castle Grim*]
ARG: 12 June (1875), 7 [re: *Castle Grim*]
BC: 20 Dec. (1890), 2* • 30 May (1895), 1 • 1 Apr. (1895), 4.
LT: 4 Sept. (1865), 10.
SMH: 20 Dec. (1873), 4* • SMH: 24 Jan. (1874), 8* • 15 Dec. (1894), 5 • 1 May (1895), 2* • 18 May (1895), 2* • 1 June (1895), 2.*

Source: John Oxley Library,
State Library of Queensland



Source: National Library of Australia.

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Expanded and updated from the 2007 AustLit entry

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