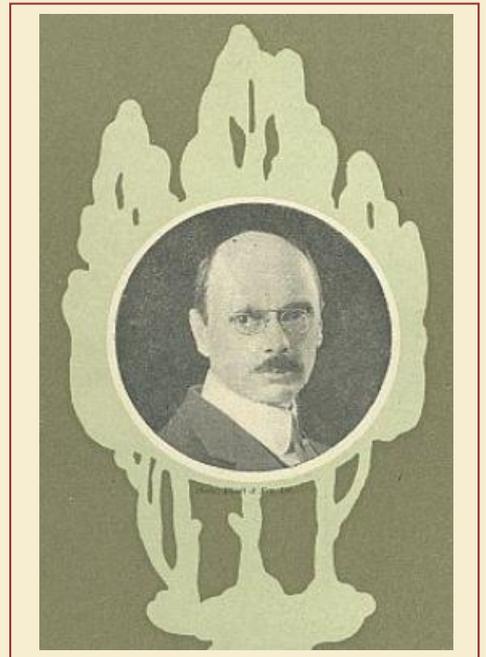


GEORGE H. CLUTSAM

George Clutsam published his first composition at age nine and in his early twenties toured with various minstrel shows through Australasia and the East. After moving to England in 1887 he established himself as an accompanist and composer of both serious and light music. Among his works were several operas and a number of musical comedies, burlesques and plays. His biggest success was the Shubert-inspired 1922 musical play *Lilac Time* (later *Blossom Time*, 1942), for which he arranged Shubert's music and composed additional music.

Described by one London critic as being musically one "of the moderns" and "a close student of Strauss and Debussy [whose] work revealed great mastery of orchestral possibilities and many clever touches of instrumental humour," George Howard Clutsam was born in Sydney on 26 September 1866. His early life saw him exposed to and involved in many different styles of music. He is believed to have moved around with his parents quite often during his early years, spending periods of time in Sydney and Victoria before they moved to New Zealand in the late 1870s. It was in that country that Clutsam developed his passion for music through piano lessons and a desire to compose. An *Australasian* writer records in this respect that "Master G. Clutsam, a native of Victoria, but now of Dunedin... and who is only nine years old, has composed and published a piece for the pianoforte entitled "La Pluie De Printemps" (11 Oct. 1879, 647). Although the writer was incorrect in respect of Clutsam's age (he would have been 13 years old) it is clear that the young pianist/composer was already on the road to a career that would eventually see him accepted as one of the leading popular composers of London around the turn of the century.



Source: National Library of Australia

During the mid-1880s Clutsam was engaged as a pianist with one or more minstrel troupes, and is believed to have toured Australia and the East, with the latter tour possibly undertaken enroute to England. Clutsam's involvement with minstrelsy dates back to his earlier teenage years in New Zealand when, according to the *Theatre*, he "conducted an Amateur nigger minstrel company" (Aug. 1906, 17). He arrived in England in 1887, aged just twenty-one, and within a few years established his reputation in London as a top level accompanist. Several reports published in the *Sydney Morning Herald's* "Musical and Dramatic Notes" record his progress. In 1895, for example, he was one the accompanists supporting Ada Crossley at the Queen's Hall, London (18 May 1895, 4). Later that year he was engaged by Viscount Cantelupe to accompany a grand concert at Bexhill, Sussex, and for which apparently half the artists were Australians - including flautist John Lemmone, contralto Amy Sherwin, and tenor Henry Stockwell (19 Oct. 1895, 4). Two years later the *Herald* reported: "Mr G. H. Clutsam (Australian pianist)" had sometime previously accompanied Sherwin and Ada Crossley (the latter by then having "long ago passed into the quiet haven of cordial acceptance by the English musical world") at a banquet for Sir George Turner at the Hotel Cecil (11 Sept. 1897, 4).



During the mid-late 1890s Clutsam also began to develop his craft as a composer, seemingly intent, at first, on writing serious art music rather than appealing to popular tastes. Two of his more accomplished works from around the turn of the century were the orchestral piece *Carnival Scenes* (1895) and the opera, *The Queen's Jester*, which he began writing sometime around 1902 (it was eventually staged in 1904). An earlier opera *A Love Tangle* is believed to have been produced in 1901. Despite the amount of serious musical composition he undertook, as a composer he could not compete with the financial rewards that successful popular composers of the period gained, and thus during the mid to late 1890s Clutsam began to devote more of his time to writing songs and piano pieces. Around the same time, too, he began to explore a variety of non-traditional music styles, notably the music of the American Deep South. In this respect the melodies and rhythms he heard inspired many of the orchestral compositions and songs he wrote during the remainder of his career. Two of Clutsam's most successful songs from this earlier period include, for example, "My Curly Headed Babby" (1897) and "I Wander the Woods" (1902).

Source: National Library of Australia.

As a composer of both serious and light music Clutsam's reputation and competence was such that by the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century he had already had several of his orchestral works performed by leading London orchestras. *The Queen's Jester*, which is known to have toured the provinces in 1905, was described by the English press as a "romantic comic opera" and "a work of high musical art" (ctd. in BC: 2 Dec. 1905, 12). 1905 also saw Clutsam publish a book of songs dedicated to Madame Melba. The diva is known to have included several of the songs in her repertoire (BC: 23 Dec. 1905, 12). Three further operas were also staged over the next five years or so, these being *The Fool's Cap*, (Leipsiz in 1906); *A Summer Night* (1910) produced during the Thomas Beecham Opera Comique season at His Majesty's, and later at Covent Garden; *After a Thousand Years* (1912); along with a musical masque *King Harlequin* (1912) which premiered in Berlin as *KönigHarlekin*. In 1916 Clutsam collaborated with the composer Hubert Bath and librettist/lyricist Basil Hood to create the patriotic opera *Young England*, the success of which firmly established his reputation a specialist music theatre composer. An extensive selection of songs from this opera appeared on gramophone records at the time, with arguably the biggest hit being "Sweethearts and Wives."

The musical burlesque, *Back to Blighty* (also 1916), for which Clutsam co-wrote the music, was to be the first of a number of successful light musical comedies and musical plays he helped create. The rights for this musical comedy are known to have been purchased by Australian entrepreneur Hugh J. Ward in late 1922 for a possible local production (TT: Dec. 1922, 23). A search of Ward's theatrical activities in Melbourne (1923) and Sydney (1923/1924) has so far failed to locate any such production having occurred, however. The musical comedy, *Gabrielle* (1921), was followed in 1922 by Clutsam's most successful collaboration, *Lilac Time*, which is based on a 1916 German operetta about composer Franz Schubert. Comprising mostly by Schubert's music (with arrangements and incidental music by Clutsam and Heinrich Berté) and a libretto by Adrian Ross, the musical premiered at London's Lyric Theatre in December. It then went on to become one of the big hits of the 1920s, playing 628 performances. *Lilac Time* is reported to have been revived in London at least nine times up to 1942, at which time it was staged at the Stoll Theatre with Frank Titterton as Schubert (LT: 14 Oct. 1942, 6). Twenty years later Clutsam collaborated with several others to create the operetta *Blossom Time* (1942) which they adapted from the 1934 film version. As a film composer Clutsam wrote the scores for at least five British films including *Blossom Time* (known as *April Blossoms* in the USA). For this film he arranged a number of songs and also scored some original music, including its hit "Once There Lived a Lady Fair." The star of the film, Richard Tauber, who went on to compose operettas himself, is co-credited with Clutsam for the finale *Love Lost Forever*. The films he worked on are: *Mimi* (1935), *Heart's Desire* (1935), *Drake of England* (1935) also known as *Drake the Pirate* (USA) and *Elizabeth of England*, and additional numbers for *Big Fella* (1937).

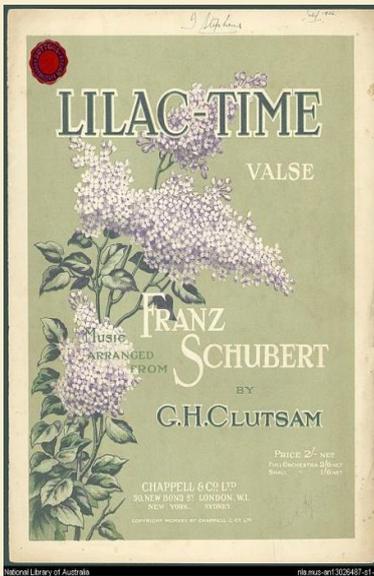
George Clutsam's considerable career achievements remain largely unacknowledged in Australia. His creative output and influence on the development of British music theatre are, however, deserving of greater recognition. His reputation amongst his contemporaries was certainly high. A *Times* critic once wrote of *A Summer Night*, for example: "there was more good music in the hour and a quarter [the opera ran] than in many works at Covent Garden which held the stage from eight to eleven" (qtd. in Irvin 72). The *Brisbane Courier* reports another London critic's opinion: "Mr Clutsam's scoring is pointed, fanciful to a degree, picturesque, even humorous when occasion requires, and above all things, it comes off" (2 Dec. 1905, 12). It is clear that George Clutsam's professional and compositional strengths lay in his ability to collaborate (in the true "musical" tradition). Several of his more successful productions also required that he re-score accompany pre-existing compositions - as with *Lilac Time* (Schubert) and *The Damask Rose* (Chopin) on which he collaborated with Robert and Cicely Courtneidge (1929).



Richard Tauber and Jane Baxter in a still from *Blossom Time* (1934)

Source: Shubert Institute

It is possible that this has led to his creative role been down-played by critics and historians ignorant of this significant factor in the creation of popular culture music theatre entertainment. Evidence of this viewpoint can be seen in a *Times* review of the premiere of *Lilac Time*, which makes no mention his contribution (while congratulating Adrian Ross, on his adaptation of the work into English (23 Dec 1922, 6). Nevertheless as the *Pall Mall Gazette* notes in its review of *Summer Night*, Clutsam at his best displayed a high degree of proficiency in his ability to write "melodious [and] harmonically fanciful [music which was] married throughout by a thorough and complete attention to detail," and that his "scoring [shows] an admirable knowledge of true effect" (25 July 1910, 4).



Source: National Library of Australia

Although mostly remembered for his stage music and light classical works, Clutsam also published more than 150 popular songs. In addition he wrote a large number of compositions for piano, along with vocal and piano arrangements for his stage compositions. Many of his works were published under the pseudonyms Paul Aubrey, Robert Harrington, H. S. Iseledon, Georges Latouyr and C. G. Mustal. Clutsam was also in demand as a composer for silent films, one of which was *Heart's Desire* (1937). Despite his reputation as a composer of stage music he never gave up serious composition entirely, however. A suite, *The Green Lanes of England*, composed in 1920, was another of his more acclaimed art music scores. In retrospect the neglect of Clutsam's contribution to music theatre by his home country is no doubt as a result of his career having been spent almost entirely overseas. Indeed, even the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* refers to him as a "British pianist and composer" (66).

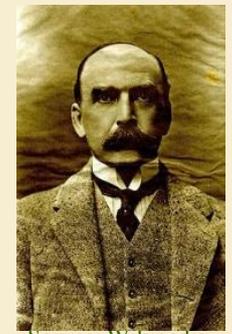
George Clutsam died in London on 17 November 1951, leaving behind his wife Minnie Fischer who was a singer of some regard. She had received her early music education from Frederick Ellard in Adelaide and Madame Chambers in Melbourne before joining the Italian Opera Company at age 16. After touring New Zealand and Australia she undertook further study in Germany and eventually performed concerts in London. She married Clutsam in 1908, and later taught voice production.

* **Robert Courtneidge:** 1859 - 1939 [writer/librettist] A performer-turned successful manager, Robert Courtneidge's career in the theatre began in the early to mid 1880s. By the early 1890s his reputation as an actor, eccentric dancer and singer was such that he toured Australia as a principal member of the London Gaiety Burlesque Company (1892-3). While in Sydney in 1893 Courtneidge's wife, Rosaline (née Adams), gave birth to their daughter, Cicely, later to become the distinguished actress Dame Cicely Courtneidge (1893-1980). Following his return to Britain Courtneidge "jumped from one long engagement to another" (SMH: 19 Oct. 1895, 4) before again touring Australia c 1905/6, this time with his daughter appearing on the stage. Courtneidge then returned to England, eventually moving into theatrical management. As a writer he collaborated with several leading English composers and librettists throughout the 1910s and 1920s, notably the comic opera *Tom Jones* (1907) with A Thompson and E. German. In 1929 he also collaborated with his actress daughter, Cicely Courtneidge, and George Clutsam on the musical play, *The Damask Rose* (1929). [Further Reference: Robert Courtneidge. *I was an Actor Once*. (1930); Cicely Courtneidge. *Cicely*. (1953)]



Source: www.biograpicon.com

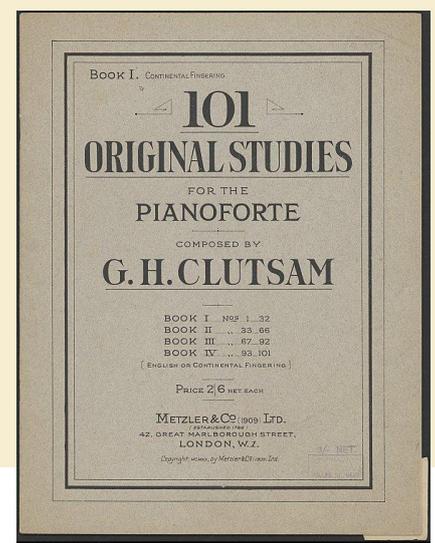
* **Basil Hood:** 1864 - 1917 [librettist/lyricist] One of the more successful English librettists of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, Basil Hood was the youngest son of Sir Charles Hood. He was educated at Wellington and Sandhurst, and at age 19 entered the army, eventually rising to the rank of captain. While still in the army he began writing for the stage, and after producing a couple of short operettas and the lyrics for Lionel Monckton's song, "What Will I Have to Drink?," he wrote his first full-scale musical comedy, *Gentleman Joe* (1895). From around 1899 to 1903 he was associated with the Savoy Theatre, collaborating with Sir Arthur Sullivan on works such as: *The Rose of Persia* (1899) and *Merry England* (1901). Although largely known for his adaptations, Hood did author a reasonably successful musical comedy, *The Pearl Girl* (1913). Among his more notable works are: *The French Maid*, (1896); *The Belle of Mayfair* (1906); *Gypsy Love* (1912) and *The Count of Luxembourg* (a collaboration with composer, Franz Lehár) first produced by George Edwardes at Daly's Theatre, London in Jan 1912. Basil Hood died unexpectedly in 1917, apparently from overwork and a lack of interest in eating.



Source: Wikipedia

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

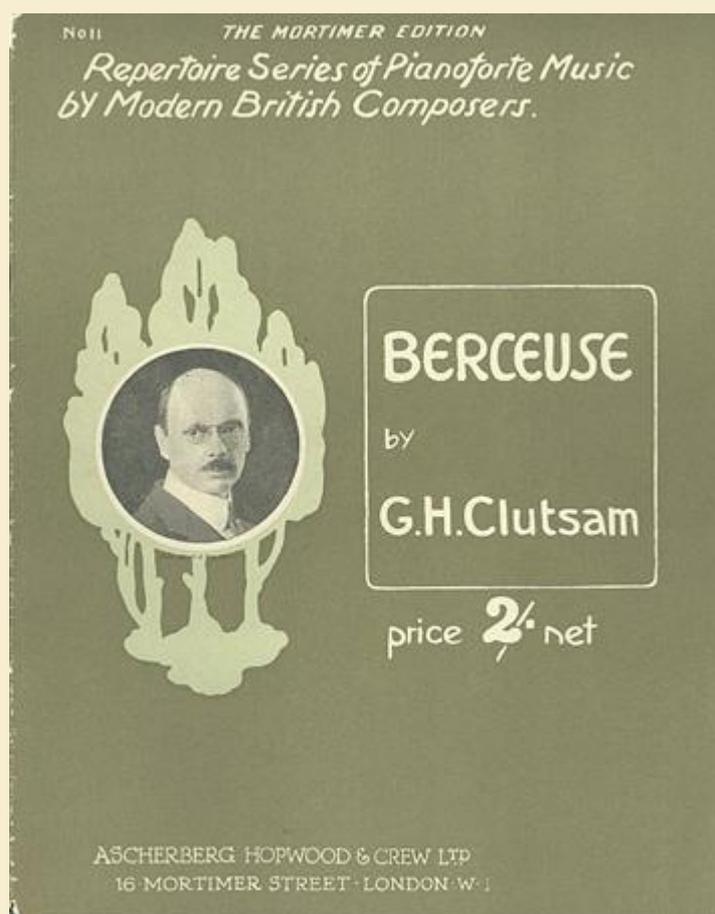
- 1904: **The Queen's Jester**[opera]
- 1906: **The Fool's Cap**[opera]
- 1910: **A Summer Night**[opera]
- 1912: **After a Thousand Years**[opera] • **King Harlequin** (aka König Harlekin) [musical masque]
- 1916: **Young England**[operetta] • **Back to Blighty**[musical burlesque]
- 1921: **Gabrielle**[musical comedy]
- 1922: **The Little Duchess**[play with music] • **Lilac Time**[play with music]
- 1929: **The Damask Rose**[play with music]
- 1930: **Lavender**[musical comedy]
- 1932: **Barbara; Or, The Broken Sixpence**[comic opera]
- 1942: **Blossom Time**[operetta]
- n/e: **The Pool** [melodrama with music]



Source: National Library of Australia

ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS (Published)

For an extensive listing of original compositions and song arrangements by George Clutsam, including digital reproductions, see the [National Library of Australia](#) online catalogue



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Updated and expanded from: Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight" Ph D Diss (2005) U of Qld (Appendix D)

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