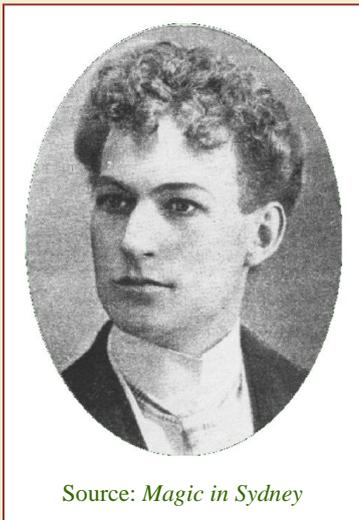


INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS: H

DANTE THE GREAT



Source: *Magic in Sydney*

[1898-1899] The first magician to use the stage name "Dante," Oscar Eliason (1869-1899) was one of nine children born to Swedish immigrants Olaf and Emma Eliason. Having moved to the USA in 1862 under the direction of the Mormon leadership, Olaf set up a jewellery business in Salt Lake City and continued to dabble in his hobby - magic. He passed this interest on to Oscar who was born on 8 July 1869. After making his amateur debut in 1889, Oscar travelled throughout Utah before turning professional four years later. Billed as Dante the Great he and his wife and stage partner Madame Edmunda toured the US, Mexico, Cuba and Canada before arriving in Australasia in 1898.

With his wife and brother, Frank, Dante made his Australasian debut in New Zealand in early August 1898, playing the four major cities - Christchurch, Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland - as well as Invercargill. After sailing for Australia in early October he began a nine weeks season at the Palace Theatre Sydney on the 8th. Thereafter followed a visit to Tasmania where he played engagements in Hobart, Zeehan and Queenstown before returning to New Zealand in the New Year. During this return tour Dante played

Dunedin, Invercargill, Gore, and Wellington among other towns. Back in Australia in early March he returned to the Palace Theatre (11 Mar. - 8 Apr.), and then travelled to Melbourne, stopping in Wagga Wagga (New South Wales), for a two nights on the way south.

Dante's Melbourne season was undertaken at [St George's Hall](#) between 15 April and 10 June. Press reports during the engagement indicate that his popularity in the city was equal to Sydney and elsewhere on his Australasian tour, with audiences flocking to his shows in huge numbers. He then played a number of one-night stands in the suburbs of Prahran, Fitzroy, St Kilda, Hawthorn and Williamstown, followed by a week in Ballarat (Her Majesty's). By 1 July Dante was in Western Australia where he appeared in Albany, Perth ([Cremorne Palace](#)

[of Varieties](#)), Fremantle (Town Hall) and the Eastern Goldfields region (Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie, Boulder, Menzies and Kanowna). Heading back to the eastern states Dante and his troupe stopped over in Adelaide (Theatre Royal), followed by Broken Hill (NSW) before mounting a short South Australia tour in early to mid-September. The itinerary comprised Port Pirie, Wallaroo, Gawler and Port Adelaide.



Madame Edmunda
Sydney Mail 22 Oct.
1898, n. pag.

Following the South Australian dates, Dante travelled through regional Victoria between 16 September and the end of October. This was followed by a return season in Melbourne - once again at St George's Hall. He gave his last show on 17 November, then headed north to undertake tours of regional New South Wales and Queensland. According to several press reports Dante's intention was to then return to the United States via India or South Africa. A tour of England was also muted.

The first leg of the New South Wales tour, managed by Edwin Geach, involved seasons in Albury, Wagga Wagga and Young. He then travelled to Dubbo, opening there on Friday 24 November. Two shows were played the following day. These were to be his last ever performances. For the Sunday rest day a shooting party was organised. Early in the evening as the group began its return to Dubbo a gun accidentally discharged hitting Dante in the stomach. He died three days later.

Highly regarded for his innovative tricks and for exposing fraudulent mediums, Dante's illusions included "The Mahatma Miracles," "Escape From the Gallows" "The Japanese Trunk Mystery" and his most popular act - a bullet-catching feat.



Further Reference:

Blackmore, Kent. "Oscar Eliason - The Original Dante the Great." *Magic in Sydney*. 2013. [sighted 5/01/2015]

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THE DARTOS

[1900-1901] François Chabre (aka Mons. F. Darto) and Madam Aida Darto, both from France (and Vienna as often reported) came to Australia arrived in Melbourne in late December 1900 under contract to [George Musgrove](#), making their debut at the [Princess Theatre](#) as a specialty feature in *Cinderella*. Although they had only been performing together professionally for some four or five years the couple has already established international reputations, having toured Great Britain, Europe and the USA during the 1890s. Among the engagements they are ported as having played to 1900 were the Folies Bergeres, Paris; the Empire, Alhambra and Palace Theatres, London; the Wintergardens, Berlin; and Koster and Brals, New York.

François, a native of Marseilles, who claims to have been the grandson of a Comte Chateaufeuf de Chabre,¹ began dancing professionally at an early age but had his career interrupted by three years active service with the French army in Tonquin. During his time in the army he was wounded in the foot by a bullet and eventually rose to the rank of sergeant. After returning to civilian life and his dancing career Chabre met 17 year old Aida (from Nice) at the Bal Blanc Casino where she was performing as an amateur dancer. Impressed by her extraordinary flexibility and grace he trained her for two years before they put together their Dartos act. The pair eventually married in Nice in 1899.²

In reporting on the Dartos during their debut Australian season in Melbourne the *Bulletin* describes their performance in a somewhat hyperbolic fashion:



Australian Stage Annual 3 Jan. 1902, 23.

There are two Dartos, but the male Darto, though excellent in his way, is most useful as a pivot for the nimble, black-eyed, waspish lady who stirs you and stings you, and scatters ten million sensations as a fountain scatters spray. It is not dancing as we know it, is like nothing we have ever known. The woman is as pliant, as subtle, as versatile as a flame. She rushes at us in a mysterious dress of many colours and a cunning design, the corsage audaciously cut and cut again, and then, to swelling and suggestive music, Darto leaps, swings, floats, flies. Her companion catches her and manipulates her body as one might manipulate flowing gauzes of a hundred hues - high in the air, low enough for her short locks to sweep the boards. She represents the very ecstasy of the poetry of motion, and the flow of the dance is so swift, so subtle, that the spectators are left breathless, thundering applause and wondering what it is they have seen.³

After *Cinderella* ended in February 1901, the Dartos travelled to Sydney where they again created a sensation for George Musgrove, this time appearing as a specialty act in his production of Charles Lecocq's comic opera *The Scarlet Feather*. Produced at the Theatre Royal, the production starred Nellie Stewart and Musgrove's Royal Comic Opera Company. Echoing the *Bulletin's* assessment of their act a critic for Sydney's *Evening News* writes: "The dancing of the Dartos in the Prince's Palace is a performance the like of which has not been seen here before. It is an excellent turn."⁴ They later appeared in the Sydney season of *Cinderella*. The couple's popularity by that time was such that [Carrie Moore](#) and [George Lauri](#) introduced a spoof of their act in [J.C. Williamson's](#) *Floradora* (Her Majesty's Theatre).⁵

¹ The Comte (meaning Count) apparently lost his life in the French revolution and subsequently left his children penniless.

² "Musical and Dramatic Notes." *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 Mar. 1901, 4.

³ Ctd. *Hobart Clipper* 2 Feb. 1901, 8.

⁴ "Amusements" *Evening News* (Sydney) 2 Mar. 1901, 3.

⁵ "Her Majesty's - *Floradora*." *Referee* (Sydney) 10 Apr. 1901, 10.

In May 1901, following the conclusion of their Musgrove contract, the Dertos signed with [Harry Rickards](#) to appear on his Tivoli circuit for 16 weeks. They made their debut in Adelaide on 11 May, and later played Melbourne (from 14 June) and Sydney (6 July -) before travelling to New Zealand where they toured for [Percy Dix](#) (in association with Rickards). The couple returned to Australia briefly in late October, playing final engagements in Melbourne and Adelaide before sailing for England on 23 November.

Although their time in Australasian region was relatively brief a little under 11 months, the Dertos impact was significant. In one respect they reset the bar for dance couples who followed them, and indeed their names were often raised over the next couple of decades in relation to newly-arrived nor newly-emerging dance acts. Within a couple of years of them leaving the country juvenile dance siblings [Eddie and Decima McLean](#) began replicating their act and were subsequently billed for a number of years as "The Australian Dertos." In addition to setting new boundaries for style and showmanship, the Dertos are also believed to have introduced at least one new dance to Australian audiences - the "La Dance Tourbillon," which one critic described as an 'extremely difficult' combination of Polka Mazurka and Valse measures."⁶

Interestingly, prior to their departure from Australia in November 1901 the Dertos were filmed performing several of their feature dances. These "animated pictures" are believed to have been produced during their season at the Opera House, Melbourne, under Harry Rickards management. The [London Bioscope and Variety Company](#) exhibited the film as early as December 1901 during its tour of regional Victoria. Reports from Tasmania in early 1902 indicate that the Dertos' short film remained a major drawcard for the company.

Further Reference:

Bohemian. "Two Famous Dancers: [Interview with the Dertos](#)." *Register* (Adelaide) 16 Nov. 1901, 4.
"Musical and Dramatic Notes." *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 Mar. 1901, 4
[no title] *Hobart Clipper* 2 Feb. 1901, 8.

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THE DE BRUNS

[1913] Believed to be the first dancers to perform the [Tango](#)⁷ live on stage in Australia, Bert and Hanna De Brun made their Australian debut on 26 April 1913 at the Sydney Tivoli, presenting a "drawing room novelty" which involved dancing up and down stairs and in and out of doorways. The pair specialised in traditional dances like the Vienna Waltz, but also included the latest dance crazes from Europe, which apart from the Tango included the Turkey Trot, Bunny Hug and Apache.

Although many newspapers reported that the couple were from Vienna,⁸ Hanna De Brun records in an interview with the *Saturday Referee and Arrow* that they had been calling Berlin home for at least the past five years. She also indicates that she was from an Italian family, and had had no experience as a professional dancer prior to meeting her husband in Germany while he was on tour with an acrobatic troupe. Bert de Brun on the other hand had been actively engaged in various aspects of professional entertainment since the age of 17.

The De Bruns appear to have had a successful tour of Australia, impressing most critics with their act. One early review, however, suggested that they did not have the "dashing style of the Dertos (who had toured in 1901-02), and that in their waltz dancing they were ever so much better than in the grotesque "Tango Argentino" and the ugly "Turkey Trot"⁹ During their time in the country, which included seasons in Sydney, Melbourne (twice) and Adelaide, the couple supplemented their income by teaching locals the new dances. According to Bert De Brun their Adelaide classes comprised more than a hundred students a week.



Hanna De Brun

Sunday Times (Sydney) 4 May (1913), 24

⁶ *Western Mail* (Perth) 13 Apr. 1901, 45.

⁷ See "dance" section.

⁸ An article on the "Turkey Trot" published in *Advertiser* (Adelaide) on 2 June 1913 refers to Hanna De Brun as a "French" dance authority (18); while Adelaide's *Mail* similarly refers to the De Bruns as Parisian dancers (14 June (1913), 18. A week later the same paper more correctly described them as hailing from Berlin (21 June 1913, 12).

⁹ *Sunday Times* (Sydney) 27 Apr. 1913, 2.

The De Bruns left Australia on 1 October 1913 returning to Europe via Colombo, Naples, Toulon and possibly London. An act which performed comedy acrobatics in Australia in 1914 under the name The Two De Bruns were not the same couple.

Further Reference:

"Dancing De Bruns: Berlin's Beauties, The." *Mail* (Adelaide) 21 June 1913, 12.

"Tabooed Tango: Will Become the Craze. Dances' Popularity Depends on Dancers." *Mail* (Adelaide) 5 July (1913), 9.

"Tango Dance Will Be Popular: Says Mon. De Brun." *Mail* (Adelaide) 12 July (1913), 9.

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FRANK DIX

[1912-1914] English theatre writer and Drury Lane pantomime director Frank Dix was brought to Australia in late-1912 by J.C. Williamson's Ltd to oversee the production of the *Puss in Boots*. Although his time in the Australasian region was relatively brief (only 18 months), Dix nevertheless played an important role in influencing and developing the local theatre industry's ability to produce pantomimes and revues.

Surprisingly little information regarding Dix's life and overall career is currently known. In a 1913 interview with New Zealand's *Otago Daily Times* he indicates that he had been involved in the creation of pantomimes for some twenty years, making his debut in his home town of Bristol. During his long career Dix collaborated with many other writers and composers including George R. Sims, Arthur Collins, J. Hickory Wood, Julian H. Wilson, George M. Slater and Fred Clements among others. It was with Sims and Collins that he had one of his biggest hits, *Hop O' My Thumb* (1912). That work went on to be staged on Broadway in 1913. His last known work to be staged was *Babes in the Woods* at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham in 1935.¹⁰

Table Talk (Melbourne) 20 Feb. 1913, 18.



Although *Puss in Boots*, Dix's first Australian production as director, had been written in London with J. Hickory Wood, it had been especially commissioned for Australasian audiences and as such the libretto contained a lot of local material. The collaboration also extended to Williamson's music director/composer, Andrew MacCunn, designer W.R. Coleman and choreographer Minnie Everett. After touring *Puss and Boots* through parts of Australia and New Zealand Dix was engaged by Williamson's to direct a localised adaptation of the hit London revue *Come Over Here* (also marking the first staging of revue in Australia). The production, which became a huge fit for the Firm, included new and localised material, much of it contributed by Dix. At the end of the year his *Forty Thieves* pantomime was produced in Melbourne before going on tour.

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THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT.
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additional scenes by Harry Taylor.

Leader (Melbourne) 30 Dec. 1916, 31.

¹⁰ It is unclear if *Babes in the Wood* was written by Dix especially for the season or if it was a revival.

Although Dix returned home in mid-1914 he retained a close association with the region, and Australian in particular, up until the early 1920s. During that period at least four more of his works were staged by Williamson's. These were all adapted for local audiences and included collaborative input from local practitioners - notably music director/composer Victor Champion, writer Harry Taylor, and choreographer Minnie Everett. These productions included *Cinderella* (1914), *The House That Jack Built* (1916), *Goody Two Shoes* (1918), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1919) and *Humpty Dumpty* (1920).

Further Reference:

- "Frank Dix, Producer: A Chat on the Revue - The Features of *Come Over Here*." *Daily Herald* (Adelaide) 5 June 1914, 3.
- "Modern Pantomime: How it is Written, The." *Daily News* (Perth) 11 Jan. (1912), 8. [Interview]
- "What is a Revue." *Referee* (Sydney) 17 Dec. 1913, 23.



LITTLE AUSTRALIA.

Lyric by Frank Dix. Music by Emil Biermann

Tempo di Valse.

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