HARRY BORRADALE

(1883-1957). Comedian, monologist, elocutionist, singer, dancer, producer, troupe proprietor, pedagogue, sportsman. Former representative Lacrosse player Harry Borradale became a star performer with several of Edward Branscombe's Dandies companies between 1914 and 1919. He later established his own troupes, notably the Who's Who Costume Comedy Co and Harry Borradale's Sparklers, before settling more or less permanently in Brisbane. He was well-known there as a teacher, theatre director, recite and radio personality for more than 30 years.

Born in Melbourne and raised in Burnie, Tasmania, Harry Carr Borradale is believed to have moved to Sydney in the early 1900s, possibly living in or near the inner city suburb of Balmain where he attempted to establish himself as an entertainer, performing at smoke nights, with sporting clubs and in local variety shows. In this respect he has first been identified with a juvenile production of Snow White in Balmain, Sydney in 1903. A report in a July 1904 issue of the Australian Star also identifies him as one of several entertainers who appeared at Oddfellow's Hall in Darling Street as part of the Balmain Football Club's second annual smoke night.

The early 1900s also saw Borradale establish himself as a prominent Lacrosse player with Balmain, and was reportedly with the team during its best years. He also represented New South Wales on a number of occasions. In 1908, however, he left Sydney for New Zealand where quickly cemented his reputation with Aucklanders as one of the country's pioneering Lacrosse players. In lamenting his departure for the other side of the Tasman a Sydney Mail sports journalist wrote:

Mr. H.C. Borrodale [sic], lately one of the interstate players, writes to the association that six teams have been formed in Auckland, and it is thought that the game will go well. Mr. Harry Borrodale's departure from New South Wales was a severe loss to the local game, and it is a pleasure to know that he is again in the thick of it in the land of the Moa.

In 1910 Borradale moved to Wellington where he captained the city's representative team.

During his seven years in New Zealand Harry Borradale's name and reputation was mostly linked to Lacrosse. Indeed it is not until 1909 that he is first identified with local amusements, this being a minor comedy role in the Thomas Humphreys and J. Youlin Birch comic opera Manuella. It is more than likely that Borradale had been involved in theatrical activities before this, however. As an entertainer he largely appeared at amateur concerts, fundraisers and sports nights, presenting humorous monologues and recitations.

One area performance that Borradale excelled in was as an elocutionist, and this respect he entered many of the competitions held around the Dominion between 1909 and 1914 - including those in Auckland and Christchurch. On many occasions he won first place, especially for his character sketches, and was routinely accorded praise by the professional critics. In a 1912 "Mimes and Mummers" column the Star's "The Limelight Man," wrote, for example:

The Competitions have accomplished one thing, if nothing else. They have shown to the public a clever amateur, whose work is always interesting and always artistic. In addition, they have shown two amateurs who, in a comedietta, do not fear to take realism on to the platform and kiss with genuine vigour. The amateur stage kiss is usually a burlesque, and therefore one is glad to be able to congratulate Miss Zoe Bartley and Mr H.C. Borrodale, if only for this.... Mr Borrodale finds it difficult to forget the presence of the audience, but taken generally, his work is good, and the men's championship was his by every right.

The New Zealand Herald also records that Borradale was a prominent member of the Auckland Shakespeare Society.

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1 His surname was often spelled Borrodale in newspapers, especially during the early 1900s
2 "Balmain F.C." Australian Star (Sydney) 12 July 1904, 2. Balmain F.C. was a Rugby club
3 "Centre." "Lacrosse." Arrow (Sydney) 31 July 1909, 6.
4 "Centre." "Lacrosse." Arrow (Sydney) 14 May 1910, 9.
5 "Lacrosse." Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 3 June 1908, 1481.
6 "Centre." "Lacrosse." Arrow (Sydney) 14 May 1910, 9.
8 "LimelightMan." "Mimes and Mummers." Star (Christchurch) 23 May 1912, 2.
In 1914 Borradale left New Zealand to join Edward Branscombe's Red Dandies, making his debut with the company at Hobart's Temperance Hall on 20 June. This engagement also forced him to retire as a professional Lacrosse player, a move which Launceston's *Daily Telegraph* noted a little over a week later:

One of the members of the visiting Dandies' company (Harry Borrodale) is an enthusiastic lacrosseur in enforced retirement owing to his profession. He has seen distinguished service both in New South Wales and New Zealand, and whilst, in New Zealand was a club mate of the latest addition to out playing ranks (J. Pledger). These two have renewed old acquaintance, and the latter organised a small party of lacrosseurs, who visited the show on Tuesday evening, and had a good time. Mr Borrodale's recitations were much enjoyed.\(^{10}\)

The Dandies engagement, and in particular the influence of its leader Claude Dampier, had an enormous impact on Borradale in terms of expanding his stage repertoire. Within a short period of time he had built a reputation for ragtime singing, and developed his ability to stage dance. He also used his skills as an orator to present patriotic pieces to audiences still coming to terms with the outbreak of war:

"Prussian William" took the place of "Kaiser Bill" in Mr. Harry Borrodale's repertoire, and he gave to it all the hatred which every Briton feels for his despicable enemy. "The Squaw Man" was another of Mr. Borrodale's items, and he concluded with a newsboy item, appropriate to the Christmas season.\(^{11}\)

Borradale remained a member of the Red Dandies until joining the newly reconstituted Orange Dandies in 1916. That troupe was largely associated with Brisbane and regional Queensland up until ca. 1918.

After a season with the Scarlet Gaieties in Adelaide in 1919 Borradale formed the Who's Who Costume Comedy Company.\(^{12}\) Early the following year he took the troupe through the southern states before heading north to open at Newcastle's *Victoria Theatre* on 24 July 1920. Interestingly that season was advertised as "Harry Borradale presents Walter Johnston's Costume Comedy Company - The Sparklers." The name was eventually simplified as Harry Borradale's Sparklers during a subsequent Hunter Valley, Northern New South Wales and South-East Queensland tour. The later regional leg was followed by a season at the Palace Theatre, Brisbane, beginning 13 October.

The Sparkler's popularity with Brisbane audiences was such that Borradale kept the company in that city for a season of 50 weeks, although it later relocated to the Elite Theatre in George Street. Among the biggest names to feature with the Sparklers were George Edwards, Con Moreni, Joe Rox, George Sharratt, and Courtney Ford and Ivy Davis. The Sparklers entertainment comprised an array of songs, monologues, comedy sketches, novelty surprises, rollicking ragtime, artistic specialties, and occasional revusicals like *The Toowong Cup* and *The Sultan of Sookemon*. Following the final Sparklers show on 23 September 1921, Borradale, as the theatre's lessee, presented the Humphrey Bishop Comedy and Operatic Company.


From 1922 onwards Borradale turned his career towards the Brisbane community, teaching elocution for three or more decades and becoming actively involved in numerous facets of the Brisbane social and entertainment scenes. This included co-founding the Brisbane Repertory Society in 1922, directing programs for the Brisbane Shakespeare Society, the University of Queensland's Dramatic Society, the Dickens Fellowship among others and serving as an adjudicator for local and regional Queensland eisteddfods. He also performed regular recitals on stage and on radio, as well as for various community groups between the 1920s and early 1950s. One prominent organisation was the Masons, and for which he served as a lodge Grand Master in 1938. Harry Borradale died in Brisbane in 1957.

**SEE ALSO**

- Edward Branscombe's Dandies
- Harry Borradale's Sparklers

\(^{10}\) "Lacrosse Notes." *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston, Tas) 31 July 1914, 7.

\(^{11}\) "The Dandies." *Telegraph* (Brisbane) 19 Dec. 1914, 8.

\(^{12}\) Not to be confused with the company established in Melbourne in 1921 by William Anderson and led by Bert Le Blanc (Who's Who Costume Revue Entertainers).