The son and grandson of comedian entertainers, George Wallace began his theatrical career at the age of three in a family song-and-dance act and went on to become one of Australia's most popular variety and revusical comedians of the 1920s before establishing an equally impressive film and radio career during the 1930s and 1940s. Standing only 5'5" (1.63m) tall, Wallace was renowned both for his for his extraordinary physical abilities (his particular specialities were dancing and falling down - whether as a comic boxer, a drunk, or a Wild West cowboy, for example) and his versatility. He could sing, play several instruments (including piano, guitar, saxophone, and drums), perform lightning sketches, paint stage scenery, write songs and revusical libretti, direct, and act. While his comedic style may have been less sophisticated than his main rivals for the "mob" (Jim Gerald, Nat Phillips, and Roy Rene) his appeal lay in presenting a more innocent type of persona and taking full advantage of his expressive eyes and his country sayings.

George Wallace's decision to undertake a career in the entertainment industry was undoubtedly influenced by his family background. His grandfather was the Irish-born comic Pipeclay Wallace, who appeared on the Australian variety stage during the late-1800s, and while his father, George Stephenson "Broncho" Wallace started out as a painter, he ended up working in minstrel shows as a comic and equilibrist. While little is yet known of Broncho Wallace's career, it has been established that he initially presented a solo act and later worked in partnership with another variety performer, George Scott, around the turn of the century. His first appearance at the Royal Standard Theatre, Sydney, occurred in mid-October 1887, where he presented his "famous equilibrium act." One of his other recorded appearances was with Frank Smith at Queen's Hall, Sydney, ca. November 1905. Ross Thorne, citing the Stage magazine, also draws attention to Broncho Wallace's record six-night season in Wellington, New South Wales, which was staged under a marquee seating 3,500 people, sometime prior to May 1908.

1895-1918

George Stephenson Wallace (II) was born on 4 June 1895 in Aberdeen, a small town situated near Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley district of New South Wales. Although closely aligned with country or "bush" types throughout his forty years as a variety, film, and radio star, Wallace actually spent a good deal of his youth in Sydney, where he often busked on the Pyrmont waterfront. When his mother remarried, he moved to Manly, spending some four years employed at his stepfather's ink factory. He then travelled to North Queensland, working for a period of time as a farm hand and cane-cutter in the Mackay district. This period of his life was to have a significant influence on his later career. Although his repertoire covered a multitude of topics and his most popular sketches and revusicals included stories played out in urban and even foreign settings, it has been said that "the dry wit of the outback nurtured his comic sense of timing." Indeed, his stage appearance (often comprising a checked shirt, an old battered hat, and an equally worn pair of dungarees) was very much an image cultivated from his "bush" experiences.

2 Thorne, 221.
Wallace's first steps towards following his father and grandfather into the entertainment profession also occurred while he still in North Queensland. Isadore Brodsky in *The Streets of Sydney* recalls Wallace telling the story of how, aged about twenty-two and still a cane cutter, he worked his way into a troupe self-described as the "greatest show on earth":

> The company consisted of Happy Harry Salmon, his wife and two others. It was at Walkerston in Queensland. George had a pal named Jock McFarlane who engineered the engagement by this piece of strategy. "Can any of the fellows in your show dance?" he asked Happy Harry, with George discreetly hidden. "My oath," [replied Harry]. "I know a pal here who will dance any of your crowd for a quid", was Jock's rejoinder. "Trot him out. I'll take you", declared Happy Harry. George came out of hiding, clambering onto the boards and thanks to heavy boots and a good sounding stage won the bet for his friend and a job for himself - a pound a week and keep. ⁴

Sometime after finishing up with the Salmon troupe, Wallace decided to try to establish himself in Brisbane, settling there sometime in 1916. It was while in Brisbane that he met Margarita Edith Emma Nicholas, a barmaid who later worked with Wallace on the stage. The pair married on 3 January 1917 at the People's Evangelic Mission. Their only child, George Leonard Wallace, ⁵ was born in Walkerston six months later, possibly while the couple were returning to visit Wallace's friends. Wallace's association with Brisbane, as with North Queensland, saw him accepted as a professional entertainer. Indeed, he would often be billed as "the boy from the Valley" or "the boy from North Queensland" whenever he toured the state. In recording his 1925 "homecoming," a *Brisbane Courier* journalist writes, for example:

> Every young man of spirit, when he fares out into the world, cherishes the ambition that when he returns to the home town his travelling companion will be success. Failure is a gloomy friend to bring back to the family. George Wallace is one of the lucky ones. Accompanied by success, he arrived back in Brisbane the other day and fulfilled the ambition that urged him out into the world years ago. It was to appear in vaudeville [at] the Brisbane Empire... and never has a first appearance aroused such a demonstration of approval. ⁷

After having developed both a solo act and a double act with his wife, Wallace decided in late-1918 to move to Sydney to take advantage of the opportunities that the city's much bigger industry had to offer. Shortly after his arrival, he was given a start on Harry Clay's suburban circuit, having impressed the management with his acrobatic clog-dancing. His initial salary was £4 a week. Brodie Mack, for many years the Fullers' booking agent, recalls the comedian's arrival in Sydney:

> I happened to be at Harry Clay's Newtown Bridge Theatre (it's now The Hub) looking for new acts. It was his trial appearance, and he was appearing for nothing. He stopped the show. His acrobatic dance had them rolling in the aisles. Harry wasn't in the theatre to see it; he asked me afterwards how the new man went. 'Don't let him get away,' I replied. 'You have a real comedian there.' ⁸

Wallace quickly became a crowd favourite as a solo performer. The husband/wife act struggled somewhat during the first few months, however, with several reviews from early 1919 indicating that the act had limited appeal. An Australian Variety critic, for example, simply says, "The Two Wallaces - very inexperienced, bad routine and mixed up turn." ⁹ However, the *Theatre Magazine* found things on the improve a few months later, writing:

> Princess Theatre, 8-15th March: George Wallace is a comedian with a delightfully quiet style. He gets his laughs without any forcing. His wife helps him in the patter. They wind up by introducing their son, a tiny mite, in one clever acrobatic pose. ¹⁰

Although the double act did not last much longer under the close scrutiny of Harry Clay's management, Wee Georgie Wallace continued to made semi-regular appearances on the stage with his dad over the next five or so years, including feature spots with Dinks and Oncus. In late 1919 a *Theatre Magazine* critic wrote of Wallace senior's contribution to one of Harry Clay's minstrel first parts: "Not bad as endmen go. A nimble dancer. The red patch on the seat of his black pants gets a roar - the first time it is seen." ¹¹

---

⁴ Brodsky, 130.  
⁵ aka George Wallace Jnr.  
⁶ Walkerston is situated on the Peak Downs Highway 14 kilometres south-west of Mackay in North Queensland.  
⁸ "Oncus," 57.  
⁹ Australian Variety (Sydney) 24 Jan. 1919, n. pag.  
¹⁰ Australian Variety (Sydney) Apr. 1919, 28.  
¹¹ Theatre Magazine (Sydney) Nov. 1919, 28.
George Wallace's value as a performer during his early days on the Clay circuit was due in part to his versatility, an aspect that factored largely in his success throughout his career. In June 1919, for example, the *Theatre Magazine* described Wallace's "clever clog-dancing as... reminiscent of the days of Dan Tracey." By the end of the year, a critic with the same magazine said of the comedian's act: "His female impersonations have the house in shrieks all the time he's on the stage." Wallace was also beginning to attract the attention of *Australian Variety*, which records in its December issue: "[He] is gaining applause for his smart dancing and good comic songs [and] since his opening... has made rapid strides towards success."

As with many of Clay's other contracted performers from 1915 onwards, Wallace often appeared in revusicals. These one act musical comedies were typically presented as the second half of an entertainment bill at most of his venues. The one-act musical comedy was the most popular of all the variety theatre genres being staged in Australia during that era, and a number of Clay's leading artists were given the task of writing and staging their own productions. This experience provided Wallace with the necessary training to eventually become one of Australia's most popular revusical practitioners. One of the earliest productions he appeared was *A Fireman's Troubles* by Joe Rox. *A Theatre Magazine* critic wrote of Wallace's contribution to the show: "George Wallace is a comedian with a delightfully quiet style. He gets his laughs without any forcing... Chief honours are annexed by Wallace in a clever Johnny study and by Billy Cass and Joe Rox as two impossible firemen."

A little over a year after joining Harry Clay's organisation, George Wallace's career reached new heights when he joined forces with comedian Jack "Dinks" Paterson to form *Dinks and Oncus*, an act that Katherine Brisbane notes had no equal in being so well remembered purely from appearances on Clay's circuit. In an interview conducted shortly after Wallace's death in 1960, Paterson recalls how the partnership started: "It began in the park opposite the old [Grand] Opera House (now the Tivoli). George and I, both of us under contract to Harry Clay's suburban vaudeville circuit, were watching the crowds pack in to see Stiffy and Mo when George said suddenly, 'there's the opportunity for us. Why don't we team up and become a double act, too?' We finally got the old man to give us a try. George and I never looked back.'

*[For details regarding Wallace and Paterson's partnership between 1920 and 1923, see the AVTA's *Dinks and Oncus* entry]*

**Dinks and Oncus**


By 1921 Wallace was contributing material for not only Dinks and Oncus but also for a small number of revusicals. His input included scenarios, dialogue and improvised "business" and musical numbers. The fact that most of these early Wallace revusicals were never revived outside the Clay circuit suggests that the comedian later regarded them as somewhat inferior - likely the result of his inexperience at that time. Among the shows he is has been linked to as a creative are *Mulligan's Mix-up* and *Two Days Out* (1921), and *In a Ballroom* and *Over the Hills, Tally Ho* (1922). One of his revusicals from 1922, *The Pickled Porter*, did show promise, however. Included in the George Wallace Revue Company's repertoire when it toured the Fullers circuit from 1924, *The Pickled Porter* is considered one of the company's classic shows from the 1920s.

*Dinks and Oncus* featured as a double act on Harry Clay's various Sydney and New South Wales circuits up until late-1923, at which time the two men ended their partnership. Paterson's involvement had gradually lessened over the last year or so, however. An announcement in 1921 that they were splitting up was delayed only because the act was

---

14 *Australian Variety* (Sydney) 11 Dec. 1919, n. pag.
16 Brisbane, 179.
simply too successful to abandon at that time.\textsuperscript{18} It no doubt became an even less conducive environment for Paterson from mid-1922, when Clay began squeezing him out of publicity by either singling out Wallace as the star or by advertising “Oncus and his Merry Company.”\textsuperscript{19} This may well have contributed to Paterson's diminishing interest in the act.

George Wallace is thought to have left Harry Clay's management not long after he and Jack Paterson ended their Dinks and Oncus partnership. He was subsequently offered a contract by Fullers’ Theatres in January 1924. Ben A. Fuller, son of Sir Benjamin, recalls the night his father sent him to the Bridge Theatre to ascertain Wallace’s prospects as a possible Fullers’ comedian:

We needed a show in a hurry for Dunedin [New Zealand]. My father told me, "I think that young fellow Wallace out at Newtown would go over for us. Go and have a look at him tonight.” It was a Monday night but the theatre was packed - that's how popular George was. I sat in the centre stalls with Brodie Mack, when suddenly part of the stage went up in flames. One of the cloths caught alight, too. Panic was imminent. The place was wooden. People started to scream and leave their seats. I don't mind admitting I was terrified. But they rang down the act "drop" to block off the flames, and a little man came out in front. - George Wallace. George wasn't a bit concerned. He said it was "only a little fire, somebody was mucking about.” He told jokes, calmed the audience and called the others back to their seats. They put out the fire and the show went on. He was a real trooper.\textsuperscript{20}

According to Fuller, Wallace was duly signed for the Dunedin season but there were concerns over how he would fare in New Zealand, the fear being that he was too much of a dinki-di Aussie to go over with the Kiwis: "But we were wrong," he recalls.

The Dunedin people made him their idol. They wouldn't let him go. He stayed six months and did eight shows three times over. We were amazed... George was also a fine black and white artist. When the Dunedin show went on for so long the company ran out of scenery so we’d ship George the sewn canvas backdrops and he painted the scenery himself. To my knowledge he never cracked a blue joke in his life. He had a thing about smut on the stage. Never in 15 years with us was he reprimanded for saying anything off colour.\textsuperscript{21}

In mid-1924, Wallace and his newly formed revusical company played its first-ever Australian engagement at the Majestic Theatre, Newtown (August - October). The troupe went on to tour the Fullers’ Australian and New Zealand circuits through to the end of the 1920s, establishing a reputation rivalled only by the companies led by Stiffy and Mo and Jim Gerald. Although hugely popular throughout the Australasian region, Wallace's stronghold of support was undoubtedly Queensland. Reporting on the comedian's return to Brisbane in 1925, for example, the Brisbane Courier records that he had given the city its brightest star of recent years. “As clever as Tom Dawson was,” suggested the paper's critic, he "could not provoke more smiles a minute than this Valley-born boy.”\textsuperscript{22} In reviewing the same production the Theatre Magazine went so far as to ask:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Everyone's (Sydney) 30 Nov. 1921, 20.}
  \item \textit{Theatre Magazine (Sydney) June 1922, 17.}
  \item "Oncus Rolled 'em in the Aisles," 57.
  \item ibid, 57.
  \item "Empire Theatre.” Brisbane Courier 12 Oct. 1925, 16.
\end{itemize}
Is it flying in the face of theatrical providence to prophesy that George Wallace will one day be Australia's greatest comedian? In a little revue last month entitled Harmony Row, this Newtown favourite put over one of the best comedy performances Fullers' Theatre has ever seen. And this includes the ever-green favourites Stiffy and Mo, who may well look to their laurels now that George Wallace has come to town. [He] has immense personality... [and] a delicious sense of humour. Although the review notes that Wallace still lacked "sufficiently wide experience," and hence his style of humour was still somewhat nondescript (and thus not distinct enough to be imitated), the critic indicated that it was obviously only a matter of time before he found his own niche: "Remember these words, and watch," concluded the critic.23

It's clear that vaudeville industry critics were in agreement from as early as 1925 that George Wallace was a major Australian comedian in the making. An Everyone's scribe disagreed wholeheartedly with the above assessment that Wallace had yet to find his niche, however, writing: "[He] is decidedly individualistic, for his style is particularly his own.24 In drawing attention to his stature as one of Australia's leading variety entertainers in 1928 the same magazine, pointed out that Wallace had been a consistent favourite for years throughout Australia and New Zealand,25 and that he was continuing to write, produce, and star in his own shows. The magazine was particularly impressed with the fact that in addition to playing the saxophone, cornet, piano and drums on stage he also he sang, danced and could do an accomplished lightning sketch act.26

[For further details of George Wallace's career between 1924 and 1930 see the entry for the George Wallace Revue Company.]

1929-1939

By 1929, Wallace's troupe featured such well-known variety performers as Jim Romaine (ex-Drew27 and Romaine), husband-and-wife comedy sketch artists Bert Dudley and Evelyn Dudley and Keith Connolly and Elsie Hosking. Long-time stalwart, Marshall Crosby was also still with the company. There appears to have been no reduction in interest in the company, despite the rising popularity of film. Reports indicate, for example, that the company's season in Wellington, New Zealand in 1929 was still attracting capacity crowds fifteen weeks after it commenced. During his stay in the Dominion Wallace also premiered a new sketch, a comedy "thriller" called Mystery Manor.28

Upon returning to Australia in late 1929, Wallace ended his association with the Fullers and undertook a fifteen-week engagement at Melbourne's Tivoli Theatre with the J.C. Williamson's-run Tivoli Celebrity Vaudeville (his first non-Fullers' engagement since joining the firm in 1924). In April 1930 he signed with Harry R. Kitching. Under former Australian Variety editor's direction Wallace and his troupe played seasons in Adelaide, Sydney (returning to his old stomping ground the Bridge Theatre, Newtown), Perth, the West Australian goldfields, and finally Newcastle (beginning Boxing Night).29

23 Theatre Magazine (Sydney) Apr. 1925, 15.
24 Everyone's (Sydney) 11 Mar. (1925), 34.
25 Wallace's New Zealand tours in the 1920s were undertaken in 1924, 1927-28 and 1928-29.
26 Everyone's (Sydney) 14 Nov. (1928), 41.
27 George Drew.
29 The Adelaide, Sydney, Western Australian and Newcastle shows were produced under the direction of Harry R. Kitching.
Interestingly, a number of newspapers and magazines around the country reported in the first half of 1930 that Wallace intended travelling to Great Britain in the near future. An item published in *Table Talk's* 23 January issue indicates, for example, that the comedian, who had yet to travel outside Australasia, was planning to take Keith Connolly and Marshall Crosby with him. In April that same year *Everyone's* reported that Wallace was to receive £150 a week in England when he went there. There was talk, too, of a month's holiday first. Although references to the British tour were still being made well into May, a search of Australian newspapers held in *Trove* for the period 1930 to 1933 indicates that Wallace never made the trip.

George Wallace's feature film career began in 1931 when F.W. Thring signed him to Efftee Films. He was given his screen debut via a seven-minute short called *George Wallace – Australia's Premier Comedian*. In it Wallace introduces "The Dance of the Wounded Wombat" ("as recently performed by the famous Russian dancer, Palmolive"). The film, which documents his light-as-a-feather dancing and his bone-cracking pratfalls, was released as part of the *Efftee Entertainers* series. The following year Thring produced the two-reeler, *Oh, What a Night*, which Wallace is said to have also directed unofficially. 1932 is remembered, however, for the hit film *His Royal Highness*. Despite Frank Thring's heavy-handed direction, it became a critical and commercial success around the country. In reviewing the Queensland premiere, the *Brisbane Courier* film critic typified the critical response to Wallace's performance:

> *His Royal Highness* is aptly described as a comedy with music as distinct from a musical comedy. The comedy is there in full measure, and although the few musical numbers introduced are tuneful they are not the essential features. The fun is almost exclusively created by George Wallace... [his] facility of expression and his whimsical drolleries, as well as clever dancing, eminently lend themselves to the screen work.

While agreeing that Wallace dominated the film (and that his comic talent was unquestioned), the *Age*’s film critic suggested that such a dominance was part of the overall weakness of the film, as were the frequent shots in which parts of the performers' heads were lost from view. The second of Wallace's films, *Harmony Row*, was released in 1933, attracting similar plaudits to the first. Costing £11,000 pounds, it also co-starred several members of his old revusical troupe, notably Marshall Crosby and Nell Fleming, along with well-known ex-pantomime dame Dan Thomas.

In between his film commitments, Wallace continued to take on stage work. In December 1931, for example, he wrote and starred in the Harry Kitching-produced pantomime, *Cinderella* (Bijou Theatre, Melbourne). While that show was running Wallace wrote a new revue for his company. Called *Stupid*, it debuted at the same theatre the night after *Cinderella* closed. Later that same year he joined Frank Neil's Musical Comedy Revue Company, appearing in *Pleasure Bound* at Sydney's Criterion Theatre (3 Sept.). A Brisbane season followed in October. The following year he accepted a cameo role Frank Thring's revival of the musical *Collits' Inn.* Wallace also contributed additional material to the libretto (including some lyrics). Although his performance as Dandy Dick was roundly applauded by audiences, at least one critic found his antics inappropriate at times and suggested that he would be more effective if he kept within his part. Wallace's long-time onstage partner, Marshall Crosby, was engaged for the production, too. He played the role of Pierce Collits, owner of the inn and father of the heroine, Mary. Comedian/actor John V. Dobbie, who later starred opposite Wallace in several of his films, was also in the cast.

---

32 This preliminary research into George Wallace's touring schedule was conducted by Sharon Connolly for her biographical article on Keith Connolly. By 1932 Wallace's film commitments meant that overseas travel was put on hold, and indeed he is not believed to have travelled to Britain until 1952.
35 *Harmony Row, His Royal Highness* and the two-reeler *Oh, What a Night* were among a number of films Frank Thring took to Britain in 1932 in the hope of arranging a distribution deal for Efftee Films. See for example "Australian Films for England." *Advertiser* (Adelaide) 12 Aug. 1932, 23.
36 *Collits Inn* was first produced in 1932.
In 1934, Wallace again returned to the stage, appearing as one of the principals in the Dudley Glass musical *The Beloved Vagabond*. Following the Australian debut in Melbourne, an *Argus* critic wrote of Wallace's performance: "[His] Asticot is an amusing fellow - a curious blending of Australia and Montmartre, if such a fusion is comprehensible. He is adapting himself quickly and successfully to the requirements of the musical comedy stage, which is of course very difficult from the variety stage. His best number is 'Napoleon the Oneth'".38 The *Age* critic similarly notes the incongruous nature of Wallace's acting and the brilliance of his burlesque work in the Napoleon scene.39 The Sydney season, staged later in August, saw the *Sydney Morning Herald* report that the comedian had never been funnier, particularly in the Paris roof-tops scene. "[It] introduced some of Mr Wallace's cleverest fooling," wrote the paper's theatre critic. "The incident in which he represented Napoleon, with Mr John Dobbie as Wellington, was densely packed with comic ingenuity. Like Miss [Gladys] Moncrieff, Mr Wallace has achieved greater success by being more reposeful and natural, and giving up a too obvious repertoire of stage tricks and stage inflections."40

Although Wallace continued to appear on the stage throughout the 1930s, his career during that decade is chiefly remembered for the films he starred in. *A Ticket in Tatts* (1934), his final Efftee production, saw him cast as a disaster-prone stable hand whose whistle can make one of the horses run faster. He was slated to appear alongside Frank Harvey, Claude Flemming, and Campbell Copelin in another Thring film, *Sheepmates* (based on the novel by the same name, by William Hatfield), but although a few scenes were shot on a cattle station in central Australia in late 1934, the film was never completed.41

Following Frank Thring's death in 1936, Wallace signed with Cinesound Productions, releasing *Let George Do It*, the first of his two comedies with director Ken G. Hall. Co-starring Letty Craydon, Joe Valli, and Alec Kellaway, the film is memorable not only for a high-speed water chase but also for a vastly improved screen performance by its star, the result of Hall's much tighter direction.42 The comedian's second film with Cinesound, *Gone to the Dogs* (also 1938), saw him again cast as an accident-prone character, this time as a zookeeper. A review of the Brisbane premiere, which screened at the Tivoli Roof Garden, records, "It is probably the most laughable film that Australian studios have produced. The film makes no pretensions to sophistication or depth. It is clowning plus clowning plus clowning, but it is good clowning. In fact if the laughter at the world premiere can be taken as a guide, George Wallace and John Dobbie have succeeded in being more consistently funny from an Australian audience's point of view than Laurel and Hardy, who probably are more famous."43 Both films made a profit for Cinesound and were released in England, with Wallace generally garnering positive reviews for his performances.

Wallace's stage work during the late-1930s included a headline engagement in Brisbane during late October/early November 1938 with Madge Cloherty's Celebrities (Theatre Royal).

---

38 "Mr Thring Scores Again: Gay Romance of Bohemia." *Argus* (Melbourne) 23 Apr. 1934, 12.
41 *Celluloid Heroes*, 1930-1939, 18.
42 *Celluloid Heroes*, 1930-1939, 43.
When not required in a film production George Wallace continued to tour as a solo vaudevillian and revue comedian - often on the Tivoli circuit. During World War II, he teamed up with English singer/comedian Jenny Howard, perhaps the first time he'd regularly partnered a woman in a comic duo since his first wife. Then at the height of her fame, Howard had been brought back to Australia for a ten-week tour by Tivoli director Wallace Parnell (she had first toured the country back in the 1920s). Howard's appeal is said to have been the result of her ability to switch back and forwards from sentimental songs to broad farce, with both performance styles managing to bring tears to eyes of many a patron. Touring under the title The Crazy Show, Wallace and Howard headlined a troupe that also included Bob Dyer and Gloria Dawn (then aged only twelve). It was during the war, too, that Wallace wrote his most famous and best-remembered song, "A Brown Slouch Hat." In Memoirs of an Abominable Showman, Billy Moloney indicates that the song earned the comedian more than £1,500 in royalties "in the days when APRA [Australian Performing Rights Association] were not half so active as they are today". In 1944 Wallace was seen in the role of a barber in Charles Chauvel's classic war film The Rats of Tobruk. That same year he and Charles Norman starred in the Tivoli revue Laughter Invasion. The show played sell-out seasons in Melbourne and Sydney. Two years after the hostilities ended, Wallace left Australia to entertain Allied troops in Japan. It was possibly the first time he had appeared on stage outside the Australasian region.

The late-1940s saw Wallace's third significant career path open up, this time as a radio star. In 1949, he presented the George Wallace Road Show on the Macquarie Network. The programme was based around a character called "Wallaby" Wallace, a local identity in the town of Bullamakanka. However, despite his considerable experience as a variety, film, and theatre actor, the move to radio was not easy for him. Jacqueline Kent cites a 1949 interview with Wallace in which he admits that he found it hard to adapt his comedic techniques to radio. "The hardest thing," said the comedian, "is keeping [my voice] down. After years on the stage where you have to raise your voice to make a point, I found in radio that this only made the mike blast, and it took me a long time to break the habit of wanting to shout at it." Kent goes on to note that Wallace eventually emerged triumphant as a radio star, even though his shows differed from the typical programmes made by the Colgate Unit. Although still performed live in front of a studio audience, Wallace (unlike Roy Rene) didn't have a particular set of catchphrases, and neither did the characters have any immediately recognisable characteristics (funny voices or mannerisms, etc.). "They spoke standard (though stage rural) Australian," writes Kent, "and the humour depended on fast gags rather than vaudeville-style routines. Though the humour of the Wallace shows stands up better [than most of its contemporaries] the characters did not have the same kind of familiarity as did the people living in and around [Rene's] McCackie Mansion."

Wallace's final celluloid appearance saw him again take on a supporting role, this time as the flustered stage manager in Wherever She Goes (1951), a film biography about celebrated Australian pianist Eileen Joyce. In August the following year, aged fifty-seven, Wallace finally left Australia in order to see if he could make a go of it in an overseas entertainment industry. His destination was England.

As noted earlier, reports concerning Wallace's imminent departure for either America or England had been surfacing since at least 1930. That year, for example, it was widely reported that he had received at least three offers from London-based firms specialising in vaudeville, revue and short-talking pictures. According to a 1933 Table Talk article on Australia's potential future film stars, Frank Thring had also received an offer from Universal for Wallace to go to Hollywood to make talkies. Thring reportedly refused the offer because he had much faith in Australia's film future. Billy Moloney also mentions Wallace having been offered a Hollywood contract, but surmises that the comedian probably realised that he was far too Australian to appeal to foreign tastes, leading him to decline any offers. In 1947 it was again announced that he was shortly leaving for England to appear in stage revues and British films. Although Perth's Daily News indicates that the comedian would be fulfilling contractual arrangements that fell through because of the war, Wallace once again failed to leave the region.

---

44 Moloney, 43.
45 The source details for this image have been misplaced.
46 Kent, 24.
48 See for example: "Mr George Wallace." Townsville Daily Bulletin (Qld) 27 Feb. 1930, 3.
50 Moloney, 42.
It's possible that George Wallace's decision to eventually take the leap and try his hand overseas was partly in response to his son's announcement in late-1951 that he would shortly leave for London. In a widely reported statement Wallace Jnr said 'I'm a jump ahead of Dad, who for years and years threatened to storm London but never made it. I feel confident that my style of comedy will be acceptable overseas. Even if I fail I can put the trip down to experience.' In early August 1952, shortly after returning from a twelve weeks tour of New Zealand, Wallace Snr announced that he would leave later that month for Britain with the intention to giving television a go. While the news may have been met with some initial scepticism it eventually soon proved to be the case. Things did not according to plan, however. Shortly after arriving in England Wallace became ill and was hospitalised. The diagnosis was said to have been high blood pressure and congestion of the lungs. Wallace reportedly spent time recovering and then holidaying after being discharged from hospital. At some stage in 1953, however, he set about testing his stage craft on English audiences. Arthur Polkinghorne records in his "Sydney Diary" column in late-July that Wallace was "still packing them in at Clacton-on-Sea in England, where he's leading a revue." Polkinghorne goes on to note that the local critics had praised his "robust Australian humour of the outback type." In all Wallace was out of Australia for almost exactly twelve months. Victoria Chance writes that he was induced to return to Australia by producer Harry Wren in order to star in a series of revues, the first being *Thanks for the Memory* (1953).

Wallace continued to tour as a variety artist throughout the remainder of the 1950s. One of the bigger shows he was associated with was *Pin-up Parade* in 1955. Co-starring Diana Del, Barry Rugless, and Peter Madigan, it had one of its most successful seasons at Brisbane's Theatre Royal. Among his final appearances before retiring was *The Good Old Days*, which toured in 1957. The company comprised fellow variety veterans Jim Gerald and Queenie Paul, and emerging performers such as Maurice Colleano. On Boxing Day 1958 began an engagement at Brisbane's Theatre Royal, following his son's twenty-two-month season at the same venue. Wallace naturally headlined the show. It also included Carmelita, the "Queen of Striptease," and her supporting ensemble "6 Lovely Undraped Nudes." For the first week of 1959, the Tivoli management advertised the programme as "George Wallace... Happy Nude Year." On 19 October the following year, Wallace finally succumbed to the heart trouble that had plagued him for several years, passing away in his sleep at his home at 7 Doncaster Avenue, Kensington (Sydney) aged 66. He was survived by his son.

**SEE ALSO**

- Harry Clay
- Dinks & Oncus
- George Wallace Revue Co
- George Wallace Jnr

**GEORGE WALLACE'S COMIC STYLE**

Though George Wallace's success was due in large part to his innate comedic abilities, the original revusicals he staged also allowed him a great deal of scope to show off his other talents. Among his more popular productions were *Harmony Row* and *His Royal Highness* (both were later adapted to film), *The Pickled Porter, Alpine Antics, The Oojah Bird, Lads of the Village, Off Honolulu, and Dangerous Dan*. An *Everyone's* review of the opening week of his return Sydney season in 1925 (this time at the Fullers' Theatre) was one of the first to draw comparisons with Nat Phillips' shows:

> The popularity of that clever Australian comedian George Wallace is evidenced in the remarkable business being done here since his advent last Saturday week. Wallace is decidedly individualistic, for his style is particularly his own; moreover it is a style that meets with a remarkable amount of appreciation from local audiences... *Harmony Row* is this week's offering by the little comedian and it deals with the life of a policeman. The idea suggests unlimited opportunities for fun making and so it proves to be. Wallace is supported by a very fine cast which included Mr Marshall Crosby, also a ballet of very advanced order. It looks as if these tabloidis will vie with the *Stiffy and Mo* shows in point of popularity.

---

52 "Comedian for U.K." Sunday Mail (Brisbane) 18 Nov. 1951, 6.
56 Chance, Victoria. "George Wallace," 628
57 *Everyone's* (Sydney) 11 Mar. 1925, 34.
Much of Wallace's humour was drawn from the simple things in life. "He often played the hen-pecked husband whose wife berates him for his lack of responsibility', writes Katrina Bard, 58 or the "under the weather" husband returning home at three in the morning. In such scenes, Wallace's ability to exaggerate the falling down-drunk (often by falling down numerous times) kept audiences in stitches for years. While two of his greatest vaudeville creations were Oncus and the terribly refined bus conductress Sophie the Sort, he also invented other memorable characters such as Annie, the pride of the mob; the Drongo from the Congo; Fanny Shovelbottom's friend; Officer Dreadnought (Harmony Row); Dangerous Dan (Dangerous Dan); Prairie Pete (At the Crossroads); Nelson, the pride of the navy (Off Honolulu); and Tommy Dodds (His Royal Highness).

In Memoirs of an Abominable Showman, Billy Moloney writes of Wallace:

His female creations "Sophie the Sort" and "Sophie the Bus Girl" rank with another famous comedian's impersonation - Don Nicols' "Girl Guide". In recent years "Sophie" was George's most successful act, a hilarious interlude built around a passenger's attempt to take his Alsatian dog on the bus. Finally Sophie told him that the only way he could get on the bus would be to do with the dog what she told Sophie to do with the bus. It was George's nearest approach to a blue gag, but he told it with such whimsicality and finesse that it would have gone over well at a church social. Who will forget his famous description of Pavlova's "Dying Swan." "A joker rushed up a lane and shot a drake!” explained George. 59

Charles Norman provides further insights into Wallace, recalling his time with the comedian's revusical company (although he gives no indication of when this occurred):

There was one revue that George put together with a country atmosphere. We were sort of bushwhackers. There were barn dances and celebrations and songs and dances with a hillbilly twang. I think he called this little turkey Split Log Junction. This was the first show in which he put together the "little girl double act" – "Stinker and Sunbeam, Recitin' Singin' and Dancin'. " With the art of wearing comedy clothes his appearance was a riot before he spoke - a wig of long blond curls with an awful bow on top, and the ballet skirt, with one-up and one-down pants. With his mellow style of comedy he did what he wanted to with an audience. He was the most popular of the comedians with the American troops. In this country revue I was the one that had outgrown the town. I was commencing to look beyond the haystacks. At last the time arrived. I'm off! George wrote me a fine little song. I

I'm gonna leave this old home town of mine,  
I'm goin' to where the bright lights shine  
I wanna see a cabaret where they turn night into day  
I wanna see all the girls with their beautiful curls  
I wanna dance and sway and do the shimmy  
I wanna dress myself up like a lord  
I'm gonna buy myself a T-Model Ford  
And when I get back with my fortune made  
All the other fellers will be right in the shade.  
I'm gonna leave this old home town of mine! 60

GEORGE WALLACE - THE MAN AND HIS LEGACY

When George Wallace died in 1960, aged sixty-six, the Sydney Morning Herald described him as "a scallywag (you couldn't print half the stories)" and a "100 percent Australian with a heart of gold." 61 In Billy Moloney's opinion Wallace was the most versatile of all his peers: "He was a wonderful ad lib comic, he could write his own songs, he painted the scenery, did lightning sketches on stage, played piano and saxophone, was an acrobatic dancer (I'll never forget that wonderful ear-slide he did at least once every performance) and his gravel voice could easily be heard in the last row without any of your modern amplification." 62 The following critiques are typical of the views of critics in both Australia and New Zealand during Wallace's early career on the Fullers' circuit:

George Wallace must have made a fine impression throughout New Zealand, as visitors from the dominion, when referring to Fuller shows, never fail to mention the success the little comedian made in their country, where his style of comedy was so much appreciated (Everyone's 12 Nov. 1924, 39).

58 Bard, 75.  
59 Moloney, 38.  
60 Norman, 108-109.  
61 "Oncus Rolled 'em in the Aisles," 57.  
62 Moloney, 38.
Fullers' Theatre: The first appearance of the George ("Onkus") Wallace revue company at this theatre revived memories of the business done by Stiffy and Mo, inasmuch as both houses last Saturday played to capacity... As an entertainer Wallace is of the highly eccentric order, and with his extraordinary dancing and acrobatics, vies with the best revue company at present on the circuit; and this is saying something in view of some exceptionally talented performers (Everyone's 4 Mar. 1925, 30).

George Wallace Jnr, five year old son of the comedian at the Fuller Theatre, was another small-sized riot at the Hippodrome last Saturday. For his years he is a mental and professional marvel. Three generations of Wallaces have now made history in Australian vaudeville, i.e. Bronco, Oncus, and now Wee George (Everyone's 18 Mar. 1925, 36).

George Wallace has immense personality. In addition he is refined and, last but not least, has a delicious sense of humour. Only one thing he lacks; he has not yet, as it were, "found himself." At the present moment his style of humour is nondescript - his fun is spontaneous without being individual. In other words, he has not as yet had a sufficiently wide experience to adopt a brand of humour which is distinct enough to be imitated. That time has yet to come, however, remember these words and watch.... George Wallace is undoubtedly a gold mine for the Fuller firm (Theatre Magazine Apr. 1925, 15).

Numerous tributes to George Wallace's generosity and professionalism have also been published over the years, with the overwhelming consensus being that he was as well liked by his industry peers as he was by his adoring public. Theatrical agent Ted James recalls his time as a second comedian working on stage with Wallace the star:

He was on stage for my act and he could have easily stolen it from me, even the flick of an eyebrow would have been enough. But he didn't. He didn't even move a muscle. He just waited there, deadpan, while I got the applause and the laughs... He was a lovable bloke. Never ruthless. Perhaps he helped more struggling performers than anyone else in show business.

In the same article, Brody Mack confirms this view of Wallace by recalling one of the comedian's many attempts to give "some deadbeat actor a part in his show":

"What can he do? What's his specialty? [I asked]." "Crowd scenes", George replied. "Good heavens", I said, "you only have 20 in your company, what do you want with crowd scenes". George was quick on the comeback. "Put him with me", he winked, "and he can be the idle of the crowd." 64

By all accounts Wallace loved to socialise and party, but was equally comfortable being alone at home, especially with his love of painting. Ted James further recalls one time in Western Australia when the company decided to have a barbecue: "George went out and barbequed statues in the park - he built fires around them." 65 As one of Australia's greatest-ever comedians and vaudeville stars, George Wallace's legacy lies in his versatility, his instinctive (often ad-libbed) style of delivery, his affinity with the audiences of his day, and the amazing levels of physicality he infused into his comedy routines, an ability he shared with fellow revusical star Jim Gerald.

---

63 "Oncus Rolled 'em in the Aisles," 57.
64 ibid, 57.
65 ibid, 57, 82.
1929: Mystery Manor

ORIGINAL MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

1921: Mulligan's Mixup [revusical] • Two Days Out [revusical]
1922: In a Ballroom [revusical] • Over the Hills, Tall Ho: [revusical] • The Pickled Porter [revusical]
1924: A Dancing Delirium [revusical] • Some Night [revusical] • Alpine Antics [revusical] • Off Honolulu (aka S.S. SUNSHINE) [revusical] • Harmony Row [revusical] • The Oojah Bird (aka Harem Scarem) [revusical] • At the Cross Roads [revusical] • Lads of the Village (aka The Village Lads / Boys of the Village / Mr Mulligan, Millionaire) [revusical] • Midnight Revels [revusical]
1925: Dangerous Dan [revusical] • Athletic Frolics [revusical] • Money and Matrimony [revusical] • The Sparklers [revusical]
1926: Rising Tides [revusical] • Night Lights [revusical] • Happy Moments [revusical] • Scrambled Fun [revusical] • His Royal Highness [musical comedy]
1928: Married Bliss-ers [revusical] • Bald Heads [revusical]
1929: Me and My Girl [revusical] • S. S. Sunshine [revusical]
1930: Collits' Inn [musical] • Oh What a Night [revusical]
1931: Cinderella [pantomime]
1932: Stupid [revue]

RECORDINGS

- *Stars of the Australian Stage and Radio: Volume 2*. Larrikin, CD, LRH 430. [Series: Warren Faye Presents Yesterday's Australia] ("Whacko! We've Got a Date")
SONGS WRITTEN BY GEORGE WALLACE

The following list should be considered very incomplete. Although years provided indicate the earliest established performance, it is likely that in many instances these songs were performed earlier.

"The Porter" (The Pickled Porter, 1922)⁶⁶
"I'm Only a Policeman" (Harmony Row, 1924)
"Mabel" (Some Night, 1924)
"Hula Lou" (Lads of the Village (1924)
"Ethel" (The Oojah Bird 1925)
"Maggie" (Midnight Revels, 1925)
"The Trumpeter" (The Pickled Porter, 1925)
"Sally the Slavy" (At the Crossroads, 1926)
"Archie and Bertie" (The Picked Porter, 1928)
"Are They Any Good" (His Royal Highness, 1928)⁶⁷
"A Brown Slouch Hat" (1942)
"There's a Boy of Mine" (1944)
"Big Brother" (ca. 1945)
"Roaming" (ca. 1940s)
"They'll Shine Again" (ca. 1940s)

NB: George Wallace's Music and Song Annual was also published by Joe Slater in the 1940s.

FILM CREDITS

1932: George Wallace: Australia's Premier Comedian (short) • What a Night (short) • His Royal Highness (as Tommy Dodds/King of Betonia)
1933: Harmony Row (as Officer Dreadnought)
1934: A Ticket in Tatts (co-writer)
1938: Let George Do It (co-writer, as Joe Blake)
1939: Gone to the Dogs (co-writer, as George)
1944: The Rats of Tobruk (as the Barber)
1951: Wherever She Goes (as the stage manager)

⁶⁶ Wallace is recorded the Telegraph (Brisbane) in 1927 as saying that he wrote the The Pickled Porter before he was 22 (it was one of his first attempts at writing a song). He later developed a sketch and then a revusical around it (ctd. "George Wallace: Career of Comedian Who Had Visions").

⁶⁷ A tribute to Charles Kingsford-Smith and his companions, "Are They Any Good" is first known to have been performed on stage during Wallace's 1928 season at Fullers' Theatre, Sydney ("They Any Good: Geo Wallace's Song." Evening News 12 June 1928, 8).
1. Although some publications have claimed that the Dinks and Oncus partnership was formed in 1919,\(^{68}\) evidence from several primary sources indicates that the pair did not come together until 1920. Australian Variety records in May 1920, for example: "[George Wallace] has doubled up with Dinks Paterson, and went a riot. As they have only been together a couple of weeks, we hate to think what they will give patrons in, say, a couple of months. No bigger laugh has ever appeared on the Clay time."\(^{69}\) Supporting the latter date, too, are several brief paragraphs published in the two leading industry magazines in early 1920, which appear to indicate that both men were still working solo. The Theatre Magazine reports on Wallace's female impersonation as "Annie the pride of the mob,"\(^{70}\) while a report in Australian Variety the following month notes, "Dinks Paterson, who is one of the tallest members of the vaudeville profession, did a couple of new songs in the first part, and also put on a laughable sketch in the second, and which went over 'good-oh'".\(^{71}\)

The 1919 claim appears to have originally derived from the 1960 interview with Jack Paterson,\(^{72}\) whereby he claims that Wallace would bring his two-year-old son on stage when the act was lagging towards the end (ca. 1923). Born 16 May 1918, George Leonard Wallace was actually aged five (going on six) in 1923.

2. During his twenty-two-month season at Brisbane's Theatre Royal (9 Mar. 1957 - 24 Dec. 1958), George Wallace Jnr staged at least one of his father's revusicals: S.S. Sunshine (23-29 Mar. 1957). Due to very limited details being available through advertising and reviews, it is unclear whether he revived any others. The only George Wallace Jnr revusical/revue productions from 1957-1958 to be identified to date are Honeymoon Hotel (16-22 Mar. 1957); George Wins the Casket (13-19 Apr. 1957), possibly based on his father's film, A Ticket in Tatts (1934); and The Follies of 1958 (4-10 Jan. 1958).

3. **Heenzo**: George Wallace's association with G.W. Hean Pty Ltd, the maker of Hean's Essence (otherwise Heenzo), appears to have begun in late-1932. The earliest known advertisement to feature Wallace was published in Sydney's Sun on 2 November, barely a month after His Royal Highness was given its premiere. This suggests very strongly that G.W. Hean saw much potential in aligning the star of the film with their product. Wallace was still being used as a celebrity endorsement as late as 1946.\(^{73}\)

---

\(^{68}\) See for example Entertaining Australia, 179; Companion to Theatre in Australia, 191; and Australian Dictionary of Biography, 365.

\(^{69}\) Australian Variety (Sydney) 27 May 1920, 8.

\(^{70}\) Theatre Magazine (Sydney) Jan. 1920, 26.

\(^{71}\) Australian Variety (Sydney) 12 Feb. 1920, 12.

\(^{72}\) "Oncus Rolled 'em in the Aisles," 57.

\(^{73}\) See for example: Farmer and Settler (Sydney) 30 Aug. 1946, 8. Advert.
A search of digitised newspapers and magazines available through the National Library of Australia (Trove) indicates that Wallace was used to promote the remedy every year between 1932 and 1946 except for 1937. His actual endorsement appears to have remained the same throughout that period.

4. In *A Man Called Mo* (1973), Fred Parsons writes that Roy Rene was unfavourably compared to George Wallace when he and Sadie Gale scarified their honeymoon to tour North Queensland with Mo's Merrymakers in 1929. "This rankled with Roy, especially as George had been Sadie's first boyfriend," writes Parsons. "At that period George was a very minor comedian, half of a comedy act called, of all things Dinks and Oncus."\(^74\)

This is an example of the type of bias and error that can be absorbed into the historical record if not checked for veracity.\(^75\) As noted above, the Dinks and Oncus partnership was active between early-1920 and late-1923, and during those years Wallace could hardly be described as "a very minor comedian." In this respect the act became an almost instant hit with Clay's patrons, and remained one of the Clay circuit's major drawcards until Wallace and Paterson ended the partnership. Further contradicting Parson's recall is the fact that Wallace was still married during the Dinks and Oncus era. It was not until 1924, possibly around the time he left for New Zealand under the Fullers' management, that he and his wife parted ways. It can now be established that Sadie Gale did not make her debut with Wallace's revue company until 11 April 1925 (while the company was in Sydney). A search of both performers movements during 1924 indicates that it was unlikely that they even crossed paths. This suggests that any relationship would have likely begun after she became a member of the company. Given that Gale was aged around 23 at the time, the claim that Wallace was her "first boyfriend" is also questionable.

5. Wallace's half sister, Bebe Scott, appeared in his revue company around 1929-1930. In the early 1930s, she married British stage, radio, and film actor George Randall. The couple soon afterwards began what was to be a five-year engagement presenting a children's radio program, *The Cap and Bebe Show*, on Brisbane ABC radio station 4QG.

**ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS AND ANECDOTES**

1927: **Wellington, New Zealand:** When we were kids we hailed with delight the news of a visiting circus, didn't we? And when the nomads pitched their tents and marquees, and commenced their good-hearted blather about the fun of the fair, there was an extraordinary variety of amusements to choose from, wasn't there? Well, "Deadhead" had the same sort of satisfied feeling when he went along and saw his fellow-citizens of Wellington hurrying for their seats in the Fuller house, the other night. Having got inside we realised that the reason for haste was easily seen. George Wallace, the merry young Australian was the reason, and on looking back at the show one realises he is both ends and the middle of the whole thing. Naturally, the programme varies merit as week follows week, but has anyone had a "go" at being funny, not for a short while, but for nights and nights on end? A lot of George's drolleries are spontaneous, and that is the tincture which has been applied so aptly in the breezy draught served out by George and his fellows. If you're seeking a tonic just hitch up the old buggy and hit the trail, right away. There's something good at the end of the journey ("Dead Head." "Merry-Go-Round." *Evening Post* 19 May 1927, 2).

\(^74\) Parsons, 7.

\(^75\) See also the Nat Phillips/Stiffy and Mo entries for further evidence of Parsons' numerous errors and inaccuracies.
1927: Wellington, New Zealand: Comedians come and go, but how many of them win such universal favour as that clever artist George Wallace, who is at present causing such a riot of merriment at His Majesty's Theatre, Wellington. His reappearance has been a remarkable success, and adds more honours to this very young and individual comedian. The drollery of this, fun merchant is inimitable, as it is so much part of his own personality. His dancing and jesting indicate genius. George relies upon his personality alone to get his applause. Another tribute to his humour is that he is such a favourite with children, and many a hearty laugh is provided for the youngsters. George has been on the stage but six years, and in that time he has come into the very front rank of comedians. All those who love real comedy should not fail to see this inimitable Australian ("George Wallace." New Zealand Truth 24 Mar. 1927, 2).

1930: Mr George Wallace: Three offers of engagements in London, one of them at £150 a week, have been cabled to Mr. George Wallace the Australian comedian who is appearing at the Tivoli Theatre in Melbourne in revue. He will probably accept one of the offers, which are for vaudeville, revue, and short-talking pictures, within a few days, and will leave Australia at the end of the year, when his present contract with Fullers' Theatres Ltd, has expired ("Mr George Wallace." Townsville Daily Bulletin 27 Feb. 1930, 3).

1960: Radio personality George Foster recalls the Wallace habit of "getting fed up." He had a car that was giving him trouble. The night before he was due to sail for England - he had Freddy MacIntosh aboard - it stopped, out of petrol. George and Freddy got out. George carefully locked the doors and tossed the keys over a fence. "That finishes it," he said. "I've had that car." The police inquired about the derelict vehicle, but there was nothing they could do. The owner was 12,000 miles away. Gradually it was stripped down to the chassis.

George Foster remembers the generous heart during the depression. I first met him when I was a youngster - we had no equity then - and actors hung around Poverty Point, the corner of Pitt and Park streets, near the Criterion, hoping for a call before the police mover them on. George was doing well, but you'd always find him among the mob with a few bob in his pocket for those who were broke.

Lou Dunn called a meeting to start an Actors' Club. Most of us were down and out. George was the first to kick in with £100 ("Onkus Rolled Em," 57).

1960: Fullers' Big Revues: Stiffy and Mo of course were the most famous; but George Wallace and his company were not far behind in popularity or box office. George had dear old Marshall Crosby as straight man and another stalwart was evergreen Frank Haining who is in the Columbia head office printing and accessories department today.

Jim Gerald and Essie Jennings, too, were perpetual drawcards with their revues. Then there were Bert La Blanc [sic] and Jake Mack, who used to do a Dutch-Yiddisher comedy act in year-in, year-out revues; Billy Maloney, the Man with the Silver Stick, also had a touring show; and of course there was genial, rotund Walter George, who had a brilliant little English comedian as his star. Con Moreni, whose brother Harry still adorns the English boards, was another with a popular revue show.

Comparisons are odious, but there is no doubt that George was the most versatile of them all. He was a wonderful ad-lib comic, he could write his own songs and material; he painted the scenery, did lightning sketches on stage, played piano and saxophone, was an acrobatic dancer (I'll never forget that wonderful ear-slide he did at least once in every performance), and his gravel voice could be heard in the last row of pit or circle without any of your modern amplification (Maloney, "Boy from the Valley," 42).

1973: [Wallace] got his laughs from the simple things in life - his ingenious tale of Stanley the bull, his recounting of the story of the Prodigal Son, his sage of aboriginal girl Lily Quilt, and his terribly refined bus conductress, Sophie the Sort. He had a highly confidential style of delivery, allied to a flair for descriptive phrases: "My girl's ex-boyfriend had a head like a sea-going wasp" (Parsons, 7).

1980: Wallace Parnell brought Jenny [Howard and her husband Percy King] back to Australia in 1940 for a ten-week season at the Tivoli. Parnell's brainwave was to pair Jenny with George Wallace, Australia's most popular comedian.

Jenny had heard of Wallace, but had never met him or seen him in action. Their first meeting was an occasion that Jenny has never forgotten. She was called to Parnell's office in Melbourne and Wallace walked through the door. "This strange apparition walked through the door and held me spellbound," Jenny recalls. "He looked very rigged and I don't think he had shaved. His tie had stains on it and his clothes had cigarette ash all over them. But what really fascinated me was I'd never seen anyone keep his trousers up without braces before. He had this enormous stomach and his pants were somewhere beneath his stomach. He croaked in a funny voice, 'I'm Wallace. I'm a natural lair.' Never having heard the word I though he meant he was an Aboriginal. In my best British accent I said, 'How do you do?' He said, 'I'm alright. I'm a bit rough in the morning.' And I thought, 'So he's a bit rough in the morning and he's a lair. I suppose it will work out somehow.'
1997: It worked better than Jenny could possibly have imagined. She and Wallace were pure magic together. Wallace would improvise his lines and Jenny, the thorough professional, would somehow follow him from one comic situation to another. She admired his timing and his earthy style. It was, as they say, the beginning of a beautiful friendship (ctd. Bridges, Curtain Call, 92).

1997: Adorned in a checked shirt and battered felt hat, reputedly from his cane-cutting days, Wallace was for many the rural counterpart of Roy Rene's Mo. His essential humour was no more rural than Mo's was Jewish, however. Far from being confined to country scenes, the themes and settings of his revues were routine vaudeville fare, exploiting the colour places like Spain and Honolulu and his stage characters were not necessarily rural in origin. His most popular creations included "Sophie the Sort," a tough bus conductress, and Drongo from the Congo. He was less deliberately Australian in his language than many other comedians of his era. Wallace energetically projected the image of a well-meaning innocent whose limited comprehension of evil enabled him to survive the onslaught of conmen, nagging wives and the pathetic consequences of falling in love with someone who barely noticed him. In the acrobatic knockabout comedy of Dinks and Oncus he was apparently immune from injury (Chance, "George Wallace," 628).

2003: What a laugh getter! George Wallace was very short, with little arms. He'd say, "You know I narrowly missed being a dwarf!" He used to work well with Bubby Allen. When Bubby was annoyed with him she'd be deliberately late for her cues. George would get her back by saying to the audience, "You should see her first thing in the morning feeding the fowls, with the mud squelching between her toes." George Wallace Jnr could do all his father's tricks, but he was very quiet, very different. As old George used to say, "He's got the face of his mother - and who could be funny with a dial like that" (Jim Hutchings. Ctd Van Straten, 99).

John Dobbie, Ron Phelan, Letty Craydon and George Wallace in *Gone to the Dogs*.

Edwin Brett and George Wallace in *Harmony Row*.

Marshall Crosby and George Wallace in *Harmony Row*.

George Wallace and Willie Kerr in *Harmony Row*.

George Wallace and Joe Valli in *Let George Do It*.
ENGAGEMENTS CHRONOLOGY: 1919-1923, 1932-1959

This chronology, which focuses on George Wallace's career as an individual vaudeville and revue comedian, should be considered very incomplete.

For the years 1924 to 1931 see George Wallace Revue Company.

NB: George Leonard Wallace became active in the industry after World War II ended, and was often referred to as simply "George Wallace" (without Jnr). This creates difficulties for researchers because it isn't almost immediately clear which of the two men is being referred to.

1919:  HARRY CLAY Sydney (suburban circuit; Jan-Dec.).

1920:  HARRY CLAY Sydney (suburban circuit; Jan-Dec.).

1921:  HARRY CLAY Sydney (suburban circuit; Jan-Dec.).

1922:  HARRY CLAY Sydney (suburban circuit; Jan-Dec.).

NB: While still contracted to Harry Clay Wallace works the Ike Beck Hunter Valley circuit during 1922 (ca. May-June).

1923:  HARRY CLAY Sydney (suburban circuit; Jan-Dec.).

1924:  FULLERS' THEATRES New Zealand (Dunedin; ca. Feb-July).


1931:  HARRY R. KITCHING Melbourne (Bijou Theatre; 26-31 Dec. > Cinderella) ▶ n/e Melbourne (State Theatre; 31 Dec. - > New Years Eve Midnight Show)


• Melbourne cinema circuit incl. Richmond (Cinema Richmond; 14-20 Jan.) • Footscray (Barkly; 21-23 Jan.) • Footscray (Trocadero; 24-25 Jan.) • North Fitzroy (Merri; 31 Jan., 1 Feb) • Thornbury (Regent; 31 Jan., 1 Feb) • Williamstown (Williamstown Theatre, 9 Feb.).

• Wallace appears to have played double engagements at the Merri and Regent cinemas in late January and early February.

1938:  MADGE A. CLOHERTY Brisbane (Theatre Royal; ca. Oct-10 Nov.) ▶ n/e Brisbane (suburban cinema circuit; ca. 17-31 Dec. > film and vaudeville)

• Brisbane suburban cinema circuit incl. Wynnum (Imperial; 17 Dec.) • Woolloongabba (Broadway; 20-21 Dec.) • (Paddington Heights Plaza; 24, 30-31 Dec.) • East Brisbane (Triumph; 31 Dec.)

• Wallace appears to have been engaged by both the Paddington Heights Plaza and East Brisbane Triumph for New Year's Eve.

1940:  TIVOLI CIRUCIT AUSTRALIA Melbourne (Tivoli Theatre; 29 Jan. - > The Spice of Life).

1945:  **TIVOLI THEATRES** • Sydney (Tivoli Theatre; 1 Jan. - 10 Feb. > *Laughter Invasion*)

1952:  n/e New Zealand (ca. May-Aug. > 12 week tour) 77

1955:  n/e Brisbane (Theatre Royal; 19 Mar. > *Pin-up Parade Co.)*

1957:  n/e Brisbane (Theatre Royal; 20 Sept-3 Nov. > *The Good Old Days Co.)*

1958:  n/e Brisbane (Theatre Royal; 26 Jan.-26-31 Dec.).

1959:  n/e Brisbane (Theatre Royal; 1 Jan. - 5 Feb.).

---

**FURTHER REFERENCE**


"George Wallace." *Australian Screen.* [sighted 10/06/2011]

"George Wallace at His Best in Fine Film Comedy." *Brisbane Courier* 20 June 1938, 13. [re: *Let George Do It*]


"His Royal Highness." *Brisbane Courier* 30 Sept. 1932, 20. [see also "Regent Theatre" 1 Oct. (1932), 15]


"Wallace to Get £150 in England." *Everyone's* (Sydney) 2 Apr. 1930, 41.


---

77 "George Wallace for UK." *Daily Examiner* (Grafton, NSW) 8 Aug. 1952, 3.