

"CHIC AND JOE"

aka Chic Williams and Joe Mulga

Pat Hanna's early digger sketches (those that date back to the Diggers Concert Party troupe he led while serving with the New Zealand army) comprise a variety of character types. These comic sketches were initially based on experiences of Australian and New Zealand soldiers during World War I. Even not-so-humorous incidents and individuals, notably officers (and very often British officers), English soldiers (Tommys), and pompous civilians were introduced, albeit by being sent up and ridiculed. Although war experiences remained a popular theme throughout the life time of the Diggers troupe, the sketches began to shift their attention towards more pressing issues from the early 1920s onwards, particularly the problems experienced by soldiers as they attempted to return to the 'normality' of civilian life.

As Hanna and his team of writers began to originate new sketches during their first tour of the Antipodes, some characters started to take a more definite shape and personality. The first of these was Chic (later given the full name of Chic Williams), whom Hanna developed as his own alter-ego. Another was Bert, played by Will Crawford. The teaming up of Hanna and Crawford as Chic and Bert is perhaps not surprising, given the long tradition of comic duos in variety entertainment. Such partnerships also allowed the performers and writers greater ability to encapsulate the ideals of mateship and larrikinism within the short narrative time afforded the sketch genre.



Following the departure of Will Crawford from the Famous Diggers in early 1923, Hanna developed a new onstage partnership with Joe Valli, as the character Joe Mulga. The pair continued to present old Chic and Bert sketches (as Chic and Joe) while also working in new material. One of the more popular themes can be described as "what we would have liked to happen and what actually did happen." This format can be seen in some of the Famous Diggers more popular sketches, notably *Demobilisation* and *What We Say and What We Would Like to Say*. The settings and locales for the Chic and Joe sketches covered war situations (often in France), leave (in places such as London and Ireland), and post-war Australia, where they struggled with everyday civilian situations such as coming up with money to pay the rent or visiting friends and relatives. Many of the sketches also included fantasy scenes, in which the diggers dreamed they were in better circumstances (i.e. *Chic and Joe in Hospital*) or in which they met famous people (i.e. *Enter Napoleon*).

In the early 1930s, Valli decided to create another alter ego, Joe McTavish, for Hanna's films *Diggers* (1931) and *Diggers in Blighty* (1932). English comedian and specialty dancer [George Moon](#) subsequently took over the role of Joe Mulga.

SEE ALSO

- [Pat Hanna](#)
- [Chic and Bert](#)
- [Famous Diggers](#)
- [Moon and Morris](#) (re: George Moon Snr)
- [Joe Valli](#)

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

1924: **Brisbane:** ["King Louis XI"] The Diggers have delved into the middle ages in search of inspiration for the chief feature of their 13th programme at the Cremorne, and after a first half acquaintance with the citadel of Peronne, Mr Hanna selected an episode in the life of the notorious Louis XI to bring into vivid contrast the slangy and care-free fighting man from the then undiscovered land of Australia, with the blood-thirsty, callous cut-throats in the king's service in France in the 14th century. The irrepressible Chic and Joe, ahead of their objective, and followed by the shells of the Huns, take shelter in the citadel, and then see re-enacted the king's attempt to rid himself of his court astrologer, Galleotti. Needless to say they do not take either the king or his court functionaries seriously. Joe has his fortune told by the crystal-gazer, while Chic talks with easy familiarity with his new cobbler, Louis XI. How Joe gets his iron cross is another part of the story - and it is full of fun ("[The Famous Diggers](#)." *Brisbane Courier* 8 Feb. 1924, 19).

- 1925: Brisbane:** ["Chic and Joe on Staff Work"] The sketch-in-chief on the famous Digger's current programme is one of ideals. We are given a glimpse of three Aussie in the trenches, two of whom are those inseparable cobbbers, Chic and Joe, and the third is Bluey ([Les Coney](#)). They commence by sniping, and then Chic and Joe settle down to a game of cards, while Bluey writes home - or to Blighty. The dialogue does not tell where his best girl lives. Along comes a young martinet of a staff officer, who makes them sit up, so to speak. They have an unpleasant time. Then comes a black out, after which the scene is re-enacted with the diggers behaving as they like to behave, and saying to Captain Shrapnel what they would like to have said. This makes an excellent and most amusing sketch ("[The Famous Diggers](#)." *Brisbane Courier* 21 Feb. 1925, 16).
- 1927: Townsville, Qld:** The atmosphere of the show is really set by Chic and Joe, the lanky bush man and the little Scotchman, thrown together in the Great War, whose comic adventures form the subject of it in at least one sketch in every programme presented by Mr Pat Hanna ("[Pat Hanna's Diggers](#)." *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 11 July 1927, 3).

SKETCHES

All details/dates indicate first known staging in Australia or New Zealand. Authors (if known) are included in brackets.
All hyperlinks are to the corresponding AustLit record (which may include production and/or publication details).

- 1923:** [The New War](#) (John A. Marks) [Originally performed by Pat Hanna and Will Crawford as "Chic and Bert"] • [Chic and Joe in Hospital](#) (Pat Hanna and Eric Donaldson) [Originally performed by Pat Hanna and Will Crawford as "Chic and Bert"] • [Baksheesh Xmas Leave](#) • [Aeroplanes](#) (Pat Hanna and Eric Donaldson) [aka [Chic and Joe Join the Air Force](#)] • [Enter Napoleon](#) • [Blighty Leave](#) (Pat Hanna and Bert Reid) [possibly aka [Chic and Joe on Leave](#)] • [King Louis XI](#)
- 1924:** [Bombs](#) • [Chic and Joe in the Navy](#) • [Chic and Joe in Ireland](#) • [Chic and Joe on Guard](#) • [The Wet Canteen](#) • [Chic and Joe Visit Mars](#) • [Chic and Joe Change Units](#) • [The Capture of Chic and Joe](#) • [Chic and Joe Visit the Art Gallery](#) • [Chic and Joe Convalescent](#)
- 1925:** [Chic and Joe at the Base](#) • [Chic and Joe Visit an Estaminet](#) • [Chic and Joe in Five Flats](#) • [Chic and Joe on Staff Work](#)
- 1926:** [Joe's Girl](#) ("Orchid" – aka George Breston)
- 1927:** [The New War](#)
- 1928:** [Rum Doings](#) • [Demobilisation](#) • [The Leave Boat](#) • [Chic's Marriage](#) • [Nearly to Blighty](#)
- 193-** [The Bells of St. Clements: Chic and Joe in London](#) (Pat Hanna)
- n/- :** [Armistice](#) (Frank Leen)
[Chic and Bluey in a Spot of Trouble](#) (Pat Hanna and Edmund Warrington)
[The Besieged](#) (Harold Middleton)

NB 1: It is unclear if [Chic and Joe on Leave](#) (staged during the Famous Diggers 1925 Queensland regional tour) and [Blighty Leave](#) (staged in New Zealand in 1926) are the same sketches. It is similarly unclear if one or both are related to (or are even the same sketch with different titles) as [Chic and Joe in Ireland](#), [The Leave Boat](#), [The Leave Train](#) or [Chic and Joe in London](#) (aka [The Bells of St. Clements](#)).

NB 2: See also [Diggers in Blighty](#) (1933 film) re: [Blighty Leave](#).

FURTHER REFERENCE

Djubal, Clay. "[Chic and Joe](#)." *AustLit* (2008).

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