

The Kiwis Revue

“The best Army show I have seen, in this war or the last.” – General Montgomery¹

This ringing endorsement appears in a souvenir booklet about the Kiwi Revue Company. The booklet is part of the Seaborn Broughton and Walford Collection, which also includes several programmes of performances by the Kiwis Revue Company, a New Zealand group of entertainers which toured Australia and New Zealand for eight years from 1946, under the management of J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd.

The Kiwis originated as the Kiwi Concert Party, officially known as the New Zealand Entertainment Unit, which was formed in the Middle East during World War II. Their purpose was to entertain New Zealand and other troops in the field, the members being drawn from the ranks of the Infantry, Engineers and Artillery. After its formation in 1941, the unit travelled through theatres of war in the Middle East and Italy for the next four years, taking a portable stage with lighting and sound equipment, dressing room, wardrobes, cookhouse and all the equipment required for the twelve-piece orchestra and cast of about twenty. The all-male cast included several female impersonators, their glamorous outfits creatively devised from whatever could be scrounged from army supply stores and Cairo market stalls.

At the end of the war, the Kiwis reassembled as civilians to take their revue around New Zealand, before being offered an Australian season by J. C. Williamson Theatres. Their first Australian performance was at His Majesty’s Theatre, Brisbane on April 15, 1946. They subsequently played to record-breaking audiences around the country, with a season in Melbourne’s Comedy Theatre of over two years and their Sydney season at the Empire Theatre lasting twelve months.



Wally Prictor (photo by Broothorn)¹



John Hunter (photo by Athol Shmith Pty Ltd)¹



Phil Jay (photo by Broothorn)¹

Terry Vaughan was a founding member of the Kiwi Concert Party. Initially appointed as pianist, he was soon promoted to lead the Unit and was the producer and musical director of the Kiwis until 1951². Wally Prictor, John Hunter and Phil Jay (and later, others) were stunning “leading ladies”, sharing the stage with actors, singers, dancers, comedians, magicians and the orchestra.

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¹Anonymous, Souvenir of the New Zealand Kiwis Revue, no publisher, 1949

²Downes, Peter. ‘Vaughan, Terence 1915-1996’. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007