



Me at a matinee of *Annie Get Your Gun*, Theatre Royal, Sydney, 1949.

Singing and dancing.
Bert Livermore and his sister Joyce
around 1924.



One Angels

Walking home after dark in 1915, a bloke who worked on the wharves in Woolloomooloo was always sure to keep to the middle of the streets. All the front doors of the pokey old terrace houses along the way opened straight onto the footpaths, and if you took to those you were in real danger of having a brick dropped on your head from an upstairs window, then being done over for whatever was in your pockets. It was known to be a dangerous place, and Albert James Leslie Livermore, my dad, was born there in June that year. When the Livermores upped and left the area, they went to St Peters, later to Bankstown, where they lived in tents until they found accommodation above some warehouse and garage space opposite the railway station; Dad's father, Charlie, who'd done all sorts of jobs in his life to support his family, eventually ran the taxi rank there.

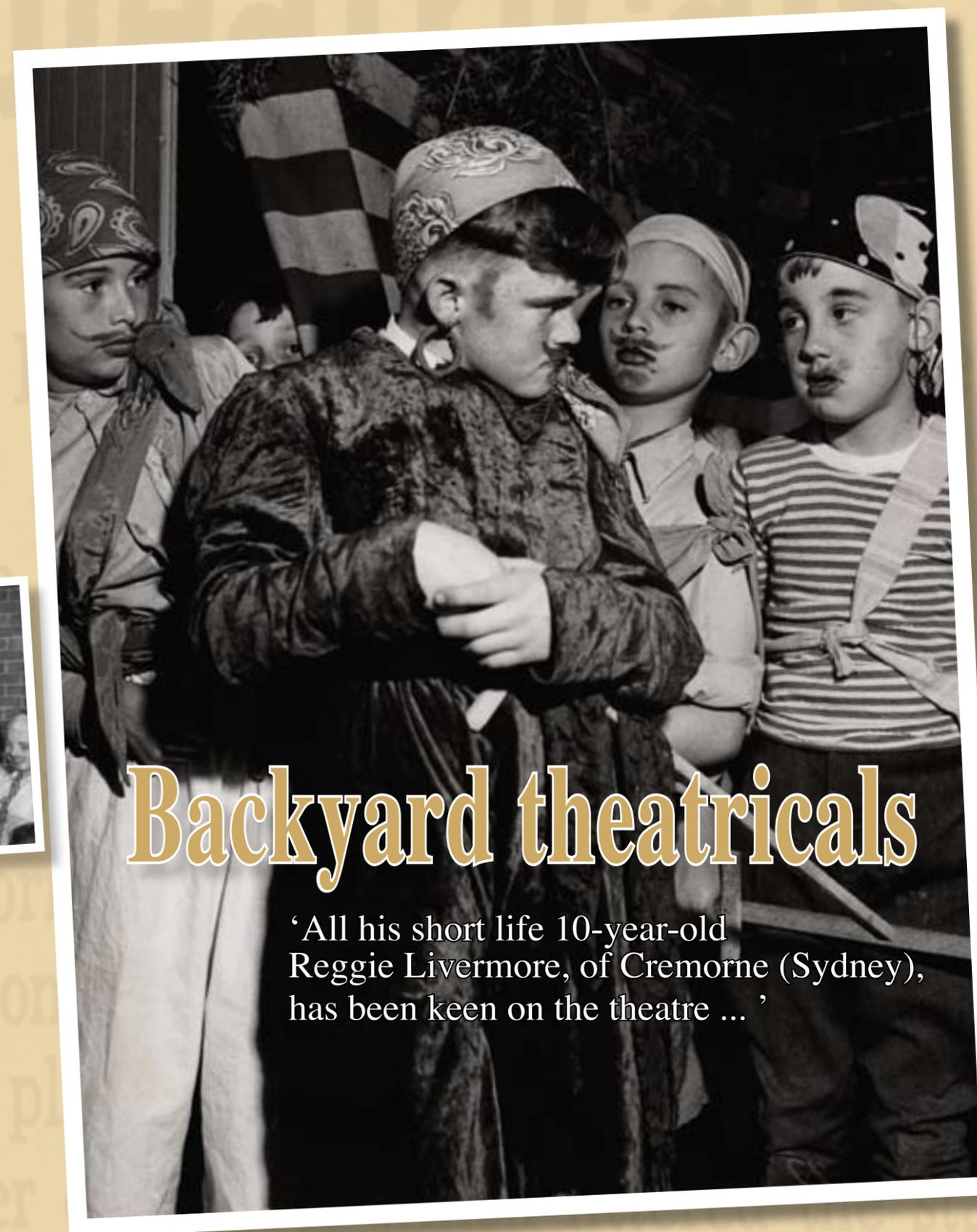


Bert, at the Parramatta Roxy.

Dad had been doing the publicity for the local Mosman Musical Society, and although I know he hankered to be up there singing and dancing with the rest, his extensive experience in theatre management and newspaper advertising was much more useful to them. Once I turned nine, he took me to the Mosman Town Hall to see every production, where I sat for free on a table in a side alcove up near the back, always impatient for the music to start, for the curtain to sweep aside, so I could enter a different world of time and place and characters, and enjoy the Mosman Musical Society's regular stars; they became more like old friends each time I saw them. I had a clear view over the audience, and I was captivated and seduced every time. An unobstructed window into the not too complicated plotlines of fabulous old musicals, each one enough to turn a dreaming boy's head. As were the fabulous leading ladies of this accomplished amateur musical society I must add, the two fabulous Bettys, Misses Parsons and Cheal. I often wondered why I couldn't see them at the Royal or the Empire.

Down from us in Ellalong Road lived my playmates Johnny and Jimmy Rawson, in a house with a basement playroom. I thought I should be living in that house really, the playroom being perfect for my needs; it was like my own theatre, and I certainly came to regard it as such, but would never have openly said so to John and Jimmy's mum or dad. They probably guessed anyway, considering the number of hours I spent in there every day, hanging about like a bad smell, never going home until dark, getting up to God knows what underneath their house, creeping round the basement like a mouse in slippers. It would have given them the jitters had they known. Initially I set up my Punch and Judy shows in there, but later I used it as a stage for plays I was writing and trying out; *Pirates Gold* was big that year, and featured in an issue of *Pix* magazine no less. Leading roles I always wrote for myself, and the smaller parts went to neighbourhood kids who probably spent more time with me mucking around in the playroom than kicking a ball in the park. Mrs Rawson viewed my activities with obvious distaste and suspicion, even a streak of contempt I eventually picked up on. One day in her yard, as I called up the back stairs for her sons to come and rehearse with me, she appeared on the landing. 'Why don't you go out and play like the other boys?' said she icily. I wasn't *like* the other boys, Mrs Rawson. Didn't you know? It must have been pretty obvious.

Pirates Gold. A play by Reginald Livermore.
Sword fight.
Death scene.
Final bows.
Post-performance party.



Backyard theatricals

'All his short life 10-year-old Reggie Livermore, of Cremorne (Sydney), has been keen on the theatre ...'

From *Pix*, 19 November 1949, page 34.