

I was only 9-years-old when my father Freddie decided to retire as a variety artist. The year was 1958 and at the age of 51 his body was telling him that his days as a professional acrobat were coming to an end. It was time to 'call it a day' and the summer season at the Lido, Margate - a thriving holiday resort in those days - was to be his last. Felix Bowness was top of the bill and as usual my annual summer holiday was spent wherever The Dehl Trio were playing. The previous year the family had enjoyed a lovely fortnight in Clacton-on-Sea. The Dehl Trio were appearing at the Ocean Theatre situated on the pier. Felix was again on the bill and I also remember a singing threesome called The Kingpins - 'Harmony in Rhythm' as they were described.

It was a strange existence for my older sisters, Susan and Jennifer and I, growing up without a father at home for much of the year. I never recall him ever encouraging us to follow in his footsteps - I suspect my mother may have had some input here! In later years he explained that he felt life in show business was too uncertain and that we should aim to follow a more stable career path which we did, namely as a dispenser of medicine, a state registered nurse and a bank clerk respectively.

I am however certainly proud of what The Dehl Trio achieved over the years and perhaps it is only now as I have got older and look back through some of the old scrapbooks that I fully appreciate this.

So how did it all begin? Born in 1906 in Camberwell, London my father was always keen on PE at school. However when he left at 14 he drifted from job to job - on his own admission he was not the most reliable employee - and even boxed as an amateur for a while until his mother decided enough was enough. Coming home

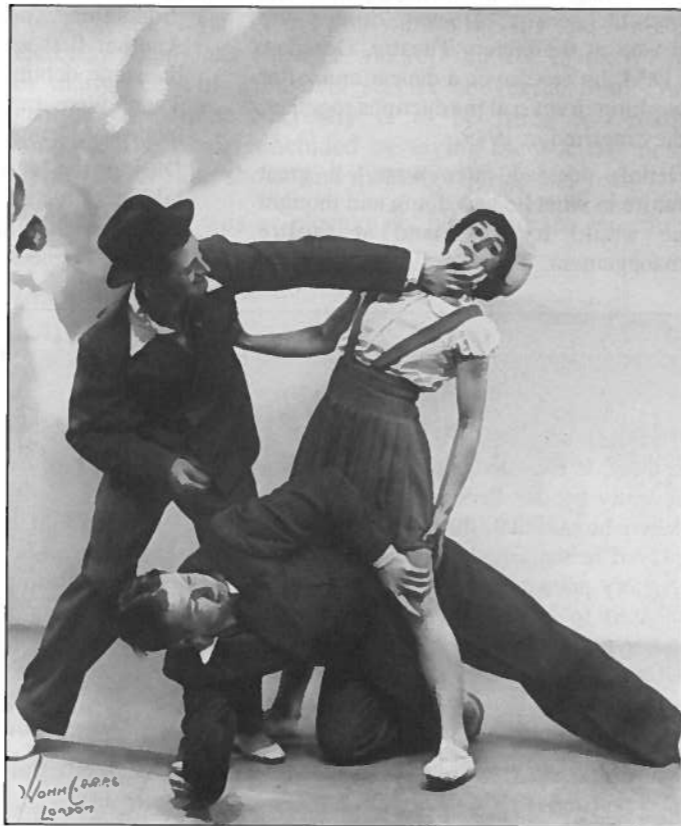
# THE DEHL TRIO

By Chris Dell

battered and bruised was too much for her to bear. National Service followed in 1924 and he found this life more to his liking, not least the sport and physical activities. After an extended spell in the Army where he eventually became a PT instructor he returned to civilian life and joined The Five Maloffs described as an 'artistic dance fantasy'. Already in the group was a 17-year-old Swindon girl, Gladys Jack. She had boarded and studied at the Irving Academy of Dance And Drama in Cheltenham and was making a name for herself as a professional dancer. In fact, at around this time Monty Banks had spotted her and she appeared as a dancer with Gracie Fields in the film called *Piccadilly Circus*.

My parents fell in love and were married in a blaze of local publicity in June 1938 at the Swindon Baptist Tabernacle. By now they had both left The Five Maloffs and, with another male dancer, had previously formed The Dehl Trio in 1936. The act continued until the outbreak of war. One of their earliest performances as The Dehl Trio was in Archie Pitt's production of *We've Arrived* with Nat Mills and Bobbie at the Alhambra, Bradford.

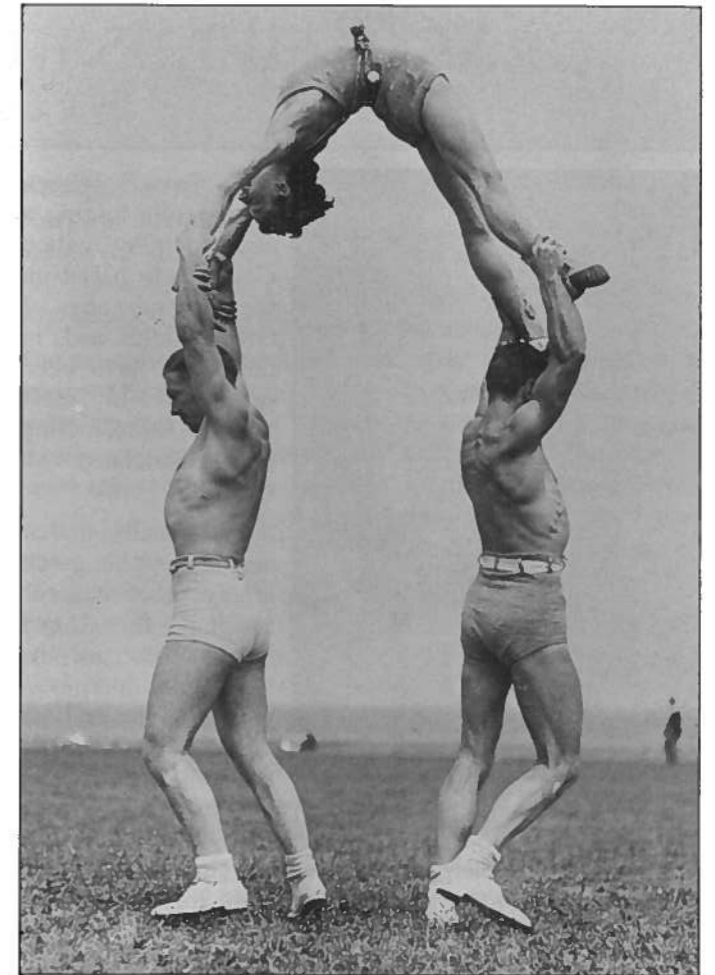
My father joined the Army Physical Training Corp in 1939 and once again was in his element. By the time hostilities ended in 1945 and life started to get back to normal, my mother had two young children and, not surprisingly, never resumed her career as a professional dancer. My father, on the other hand, could not see himself settling down and with a new male dancing partner, old friend Kevin Nolan, they set about finding a replacement for my mother. After looking around they came across the ideal female in 16-year-old attractive brunette Joan Linley, who



was a student at the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts. Under the advice and supervision of her mother, Joan joined the reformed Dehl Trio which was now complete and who would continue to entertain audiences for the next twelve years. In the process they established themselves as a top class adagio dance act. They worked in cabaret, pantomime and summer seasons with many of the stars of that halcyon era, such as Max Bygraves, Charlie Chester, George Formby, Tommy Steele, Frankie Vaughan, The Beverley Sisters and many others. As acrobats all three were extremely fit and they had one



particularly unusual routine whereby rope was erected over the whole stage in the form of a spider's web. Throwing, catching and other choreographed movements then took place much to the amazement of the audience. My father also took his turn in sketches with a walk-on part as a stooge for the comedian. In one show at the finale as he took his bow and as everyone was clapping, I remember pointing out very proudly to a lady sitting next to me, a complete stranger, that Freddie Dell was my dad. Aah, happy memories!



On his retirement from 'the business' in 1958 my father eventually, after a number of other jobs, became a qualified RAC driving instructor and settled down to a more conventional lifestyle - not easy at first and it took some adjustment for both dad and the rest of the family. He continued in that profession until he was into his early seventies. My parents moved from South East London to Bognor Regis in 1967 and my father passed away in 1998 aged 91, after a long and happy retirement. Kevin Nolan lived in Margate for many years until his death in the 1980s. Joan is now in her late seventies and is enjoying retirement in Sutton-on-Sea, Lincs. My mother, Gladys, is 92 and lives happily in a retirement home near Chichester, West Sussex.



(Photographs kindly supplied by Nick Charlesworth)