

= Joseph Grimaldi =

Joseph Grimaldi (18 December 1778 ? 31 May 1837) was an English actor , comedian and dancer , who became the most popular English entertainer of the Regency era . In the early 1800s , he expanded the role of Clown in the harlequinade that formed part of British pantomimes , notably at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane and the Sadler 's Wells and Covent Garden theatres . He became so dominant on the London comic stage that the harlequinade role of Clown became known as " Joey " , and both the nickname and Grimaldi 's whiteface make @-@ up design were , and still are , used by other types of clowns . Grimaldi originated catchphrases such as " Here we are again ! " , which continue to feature in modern pantomimes .

Born in London to an entertainer father , Grimaldi began to perform as a child , making his stage debut at Drury Lane in 1780 . He became successful at the Sadler 's Wells Theatre the following year ; his first major role was as Little Clown in the pantomime The Triumph of Mirth ; or , Harlequin 's Wedding in 1781 , in which he starred alongside his father . After a brief schooling , he appeared in various low @-@ budget productions and became a sought @-@ after child performer . He took leading parts in Valentine and Orson (1794) and The Talisman ; or , Harlequin Made Happy (1796) , the latter of which brought him wider recognition .

Towards the end of the 1790s , Grimaldi starred in a pantomime version of Robinson Crusoe , which confirmed his credentials as a key pantomime performer . Many productions followed , but his career at Drury Lane was becoming turbulent , and he left the theatre in 1806 . In his new association with the Covent Garden theatre , he appeared at the end of the same year in Harlequin or Mother Goose , which included perhaps his best known portrayal of Clown . Grimaldi 's residencies at Covent Garden and Sadler 's Wells ran simultaneously , and he became known as London 's leading Clown and comic entertainer , enjoying many successes at both theatres . His popularity in London led to a demand for him to appear in provincial theatres throughout England , where he commanded large fees .

Grimaldi 's association with Sadler 's Wells came to an end in 1820 , chiefly as a result of his deteriorating relationship with the theatre 's management . After numerous injuries over the years from his energetic clowning , his health was also declining rapidly , and he retired in 1823 . He appeared occasionally on stage for a few years thereafter , but his performances were restricted by his worsening physical disabilities . In his last years , Grimaldi lived in relative obscurity and became a depressed , impoverished alcoholic . He outlived both his wife and his actor son , Joseph Samuel , dying at home in Islington in 1837 , aged 58 .

= = Biography = =

= = = Family background and early years = = =

Grimaldi was born in Clare Market , London , into a family of dancers and comic performers . His great @-@ grandfather , John Baptist Grimaldi , was a dentist by trade and an amateur performer , who in the 1730s moved from Italy to England . There he performed the role of Pantaloon opposite John Rich 's Harlequin . John Baptist 's son , Grimaldi 's paternal grandfather , Giovanni Battista Grimaldi , began performing at an early age and spent much of his career in Italy and France . According to biographer Andrew McConnell Stott , Giovanni was held in the Paris Bastille as the result of a scandalous performance . After his release , Giovanni moved to London in 1742 , where John Baptist introduced him to John Rich ; Giovanni then defrauded Rich and fled to the continent , where he later died .

Grimaldi 's father , Joseph Giuseppe Grimaldi (c . 1713 ? 1788) , an actor and dancer (known professionally as Giuseppe or " the Signor ") , also made his way to London in around 1760 . His first London appearance was at the King 's Theatre . He was later engaged by David Garrick to play Pantaloon in pantomimes at the Theatre Royal , Drury Lane , earning high praise , and eventually became the ballet master there . Grimaldi 's mother , Rebecca Brooker , was born in Holborn in

1764 . She was apprenticed to Giuseppe Grimaldi in 1773 as a dancer and public speaker , and she became his mistress shortly afterwards , even though she was under 14 and he was about 60 .

Grimaldi 's father was a serial philanderer who had at least ten children with three different women . In 1778 , he divided his time between two London addresses occupied by his mistresses , Brooker and Anne Perry . Both women gave birth that year , Perry to a daughter named Henrietta and Brooker to Joseph . Although jubilant at the birth of his first son , Giuseppe Grimaldi spent little time with Brooker , living mostly with Perry , and probably maintaining other mistresses as well . Brooker raised her son alone for the first few years in Clare Market , a slum area of west London . In about 1780 , Brooker gave birth to a second son , John Baptiste . Keen to set up an acting dynasty , Giuseppe left Perry and his daughter and moved with Brooker and his two sons to Little Russell Street , High Holborn . Giuseppe , who often displayed eccentric and obsessive behaviour , was a strict disciplinarian and often beat his children for disobeying his orders . A fascination with death consumed his later life ; he would feign death in front of his children , so as to gauge their reactions , and he insisted on his eldest daughter , Mary , decapitating him after his death because of his fear of being buried alive , a task which earned her £ 5 extra in her inheritance .

= = = Early years at Sadler 's Wells and Drury Lane = = =

From the age of two , Grimaldi was taught to act the characters in the harlequinade by his father . Although he and his younger brother John Baptiste both displayed acting talent , Joseph was groomed for the London stage . He made his stage debut at the Sadler 's Wells Theatre in late 1780 , when Giuseppe took him on stage for his " first bow and first tumble " . On 16 April 1781 , Richard Brinsley Sheridan , the manager of Drury Lane , cast both Giuseppe and Grimaldi in the pantomime The Wizard of the Silver Rocks ; or , Harlequin 's Release . Sheridan employed dozens of children , including Grimaldi , as extras at Drury Lane .

On Boxing Day 1781 , Grimaldi took the part of Little Clown in the pantomime The Triumph of Mirth ; or , Harlequin 's Wedding at Drury Lane . It was a success for him personally , and the pantomime enjoyed an extended run until March 1782 . As a result of his performance , he received further work offers from the management and became an established juvenile performer at Drury Lane . At the same time , he was a prolific performer at Sadler 's Wells where he played a host of minor roles , including monkeys , imps , fairies and demons . The Drury Lane season ran every year from September to late spring , with Sadler 's Wells playing from 15 April to the second week in October . Though the two theatres staged similar productions , they appealed to different audiences : Drury Lane to the wealthy classes of society and Sadler 's Wells to the boisterous working class . Although Grimaldi 's stage career was flourishing , Giuseppe enrolled him at Mr Ford 's Academy , a boarding school in Putney , which educated the children of theatrical performers . Although Grimaldi struggled with reading and writing , he showed a talent for art , as evidenced by some of his drawings that survive in the Harvard Theatre Collection .

Their success on the London stage allowed the Grimaldis to enjoy an affluent lifestyle in contrast to other working @-@ class families living in Clare Market and Holborn . By the age of six , Grimaldi was considered a prominent stage performer by the press , with one critic from the Gazetteer commenting that " the infant son of Grimaldi performs in an astonishing manner " . One evening , Grimaldi was playing the part of a monkey and was led onto the stage by his father , who had attached a chain to Grimaldi 's waist . Giuseppe swung his young son around his head " with the utmost velocity " , when the chain snapped , causing young Grimaldi to land in the orchestra pit . From 1789 Grimaldi would appear alongside his siblings in an act entitled " The Three Young Grimaldis " .

Grimaldi 's father suffered ill health for many years and died of dropsy in 1788 . As a result , at age 9 , Grimaldi became the family 's principal breadwinner . Sheridan paid him an above @-@ average wage of £ 1 a week at Drury Lane , and allowed his mother to work at Drury Lane as a dancer . However , the proprietors of Sadler 's Wells were less supportive , cutting Grimaldi 's pay from 15 shillings to 3 shillings a week , at which level it remained for the next three years . The loss of Giuseppe 's income and Joseph 's reduced summertime earnings meant the Grimaldis could no

longer afford to keep the house in Holborn . They moved to the slum district of St. Giles , where they took lodgings with a furrier in Great Wild Street . Grimaldi 's brother , John Baptiste , illegally signed on as a cabin boy aboard a frigate in 1788 , when he was nine , using a false identity . Grimaldi saw him only once more in his life .

John Philip Kemble took over the producer 's (director 's) duties at Drury Lane later in 1788 when Sheridan was promoted to chief treasurer . Sheridan often employed Grimaldi in minor roles in Kemble 's productions and continued to allow him to work concurrently at Sadler 's Wells . Grimaldi took an interest in the design and construction of stage scenery and would often help to design sets . His stage performances over the next two years did not garner him the kind of success he had experienced under the management of his father , and the role of pre @-@ eminent Clown in London productions soon fell to Jean @-@ Baptiste Dubois , a versatile French acrobat , horseman , singer and strongman , with a formidable repertoire of comic tricks . Grimaldi worked as Dubois ' assistant , although in later life he denied that he had been the Frenchman 's student .

In 1791 the Drury Lane Theatre was demolished , and Grimaldi was loaned to the Haymarket Theatre , where he appeared , briefly , in the opera Cymon , which starred the tenor Michael Kelly . On 21 April 1794 , the new Drury Lane theatre opened , and Grimaldi , now 15 years old , resumed his place as one of the principal juvenile performers . The same year , he played his first major part since his father 's death ; as the dwarf in Valentine and Orson . Two years later , at Sadler 's Wells , he played the role of Hag Morad in the Thomas John Dibdin Christmas pantomime The Talisman ; or , Harlequin Made Happy . The pantomime was a success , and Grimaldi received rave reviews . The Drury Lane management were eager to capitalise on his success , and later that year he was cast in Lodoiska , a Parisian hit adapted for the London stage by Kemble . Grimaldi played Camasin , a role that required the acrobatic and sword @-@ fighting skills that he had learned as a child . He won wider admiration as Pierrot in the 1796 Christmas pantomime of Robinson Crusoe at Drury Lane .

Grimaldi met his future wife , Maria Hughes in 1796 . The eldest daughter of the proprietor of the Sadler 's Wells theatre , Richard Hughes , Maria was introduced to Grimaldi by his mother , Rebecca Brooker , and a romance soon blossomed . They married on 11 May 1799 and moved to 37 Penton Street , Pentonville . Later that year , Grimaldi appeared in a succession of shows including A Trip to Scarborough (as a countryman) and Rule a Wife and Have a Wife (as a maid) . The roles he took in these productions were eccentric and usually reserved for low comedians . Despite this , he was praised for his characterisations and was deemed a player of legitimate adult roles at Drury Lane , which qualified him to become a member of the prestigious Drury Lane Theatrical Fund .

= = = Last years at Drury Lane = = =

In 1798 , Drury Lane suspended its tradition of staging an annual Christmas pantomime , which meant that Grimaldi had to seek work elsewhere during the festive period . The following year , with the help of his father @-@ in @-@ law , he joined the company at Sadler 's Wells , where he played roles in several Charles Dibdin plays . Grimaldi made a big impression , especially in Dibdin 's Easter 1800 pantomime , Peter Wilkins : or Harlequin in the Flying World , based on Robert Paltock 's 1751 novel . For this elaborate production , which featured two Clowns (Dubois and Grimaldi) , Dibdin introduced new costume designs . Clown 's costume was " garishly colourful ... patterned with large diamonds and circles , and fringed with tassels and ruffs , " instead of the tatty servant 's outfit that had been used for a century . The production was a hit , and the new costume design was copied by others in London . Despite Dubois ' " endless bag of tricks [and] vast array of skills " , his performance appeared artificial , in contrast to Grimaldi , who was better able to " draw the audience into believing the essential comedic qualities " of Clown .

At Drury Lane later in 1800 , he starred as an officer in The Wheel of Fortune by Richard Cumberland , a Jewish pedlar in The Indian , as Clown in Robinson Crusoe , and as the Second Gravedigger in Hamlet , alongside John Philip Kemble . Grimaldi 's wife Maria and his unborn child died during childbirth on 18 October 1800 . To cope with his grief , Grimaldi would often perform two

shows a night ; one at Sadler 's Wells and the other at Drury Lane .

With the Christmas season approaching , and the success of Peter Wilkins still a topic of conversation within theatrical circles , Kemble decided to stage the first Drury Lane pantomime in three years , Harlequin Amulet ; or , The Magick of Mona , with Grimaldi as Punch and then as Clown , instead of Dubois . In this production , Harlequin became " romantic and mercurial , instead of mischievous " , leaving Grimaldi 's Clown as the " undisputed agent " of chaos . The pantomime was a great success , running for thirty @-@ three performances and having a second Drury Lane season at Easter 1801 ; as a result , Grimaldi became recognised as one of London 's leading Clowns . Grimaldi originated the catchphrase " Here we are again ! " , which is still used in pantomime . He also was known for the mischievous catchphrase " Shall I ? " , which prompted audience members to respond " Yes ! "

Grimaldi and Dubois appeared together again later that spring at Sadler 's Wells in Dibdin 's Harlequin Alchemist , which set up a mock duel between the two Clowns , with the audience deciding who could pull the most hideous face . Grimaldi consistently won . In the next piece , Harlequin Benedick ; or , The Ghost of Mother Shipton . Dubois was relegated to the role of Pierrot , while Grimaldi played Clown . Grimaldi 's mother was in the cast , appearing as the Butcher 's Wife . He then appeared in another Dibdin play , The Great Devil . During the run , he accidentally injured himself on stage by shooting himself in the foot and was confined to bed for five weeks . His mother became so concerned at her son 's fragile and still grief @-@ stricken state that she employed a dancer at Drury Lane , Mary Bristow , to care for him full @-@ time during those weeks . They formed a close friendship , which resulted in a loving relationship , and they married on 24 December 1801 .

After a falling @-@ out with Kemble at Drury Lane , Grimaldi was dismissed and began appearing at the nearby Covent Garden Theatre . He also took up an engagement at his father @-@ in @-@ law 's theatre in Exeter . There was no Christmas 1801 or Easter 1802 pantomime at Drury Lane , and Kemble noticed a reduction in his theatre 's audiences . Grimaldi began to appear in provincial theatres , with the first appearance being in Rochester , Kent , in 1801 . In March 1802 , he returned to Kent where he performed in pantomime , earning £ 300 for two days work . His dismissal from Drury Lane was short @-@ lived , and he was reinstated within a few months in a revival of Harlequin Amulet .

Sadler 's Wells closed for refurbishment at the end of its 1801 season and re @-@ opened on 19 April 1802 ; Grimaldi returned to take a major role in the Easter pantomime , for which he designed the look of his recurring Clown character " Joey " . He began by painting a white base over his face , neck and chest before adding red triangles on the cheeks , thick eyebrows and large red lips set in a mischievous grin . Grimaldi 's design is used by many modern clowns . According to Grimaldi 's biographer Andrew McConnell Stott , it was one of the most important theatrical designs of the 1800s . Later in 1802 , Dubois left the Sadler 's Wells company , making Grimaldi the sole resident Clown . Grimaldi starred in St. George , Champion of England opposite his friend Jack Bologna . This was followed by Ko and Zoa ; or , the Belle Savage . A critic from The Times remarked that the pair 's death scene together was " truly affecting " [sic] . Bologna and Grimaldi 's on @-@ stage partnership had by now become the most popular on the British stage ; the Morning Chronicle thought they " stood unrivalled " compared to other acts within the harlequinade .

On 21 November 1802 , his wife Mary bore Grimaldi his only child , a son , Joseph Samuel , whom they called " JS " . Grimaldi introduced his young son to the eccentric atmosphere at both Drury Lane and Sadler 's Wells from the age of 18 months . Although eager to have his son follow him onto the stage , Grimaldi felt that it was more important for the boy to have an education and eventually enrolled him at Mr Ford 's Academy .

Grimaldi returned to Drury Lane late in 1802 and starred in a production of Bluebeard , followed by the Christmas pantomime Love and Magic . In 1803 Grimaldi 's contract at Sadler 's Wells was extended for another three years . He starred as Rufo the Robber in Red Riding Hood , as Sir John Bull in New Broom and Aminadab in Susanna Centlivre 's A Bold Stroke for a Wife . The Napoleonic Wars had started , and the new proprietors of Sadler 's Wells and Drury Lane looked to Grimaldi to satisfy audiences eager for comic relief . Cinderella ; or , the Little Glass Slipper was presented at

Drury Lane on 3 January 1804 . Grimaldi played the part of Pedro , a servant to Cinderella 's sisters . The production was a major success for the theatre , enhanced by Michael Kelly 's musical score ; however Grimaldi and the critics grew concerned that the theatre was underusing his talents and that he was miscast in the role .

The Sadler 's Wells season commenced at Easter 1805 , and Grimaldi and Jack Bologna enjoyed a successful period . Drury Lane staged the opera Lodoiska , in which Grimaldi , his mother and his wife all had starring roles . After this he was asked to choreograph John Tobin 's play , The Honey Moon , at Drury Lane on short notice . He accepted on the proviso that his wages be increased for the show 's entire run and not just until a new dancing instructor was found . The Drury Lane management agreed to pay Grimaldi £ 2 more per week . A few weeks into his new assignment , management appointed James D 'Egville as the new ballet master . D 'Egville 's debut production was Terpsichore 's Return , in which Grimaldi played Pan , a role which he considered to be one of his best assignments to date . That October , however , the theatre reduced his wages . The extra £ 2 that he had been promised had been deducted from his salary when Terpsichore closed , and he approached Thomas Dibdin for advice . Dibdin advised him to leave Drury Lane and to take up a residency at the nearby Covent Garden Theatre . Grimaldi wrote to Thomas Harris , the manager of the Covent Garden Theatre , hoping to persuade him to stage Christmas pantomimes . Harris was already a supporter of the shows and had employed the writing talents of both Charles Dibdin and his co -@-@ writer Charles Farley . Grimaldi met with Harris and obtained a contract . Before joining that theatre , however , he had to satisfy prior commitments at Drury Lane , appearing in the poorly received Harlequin 's Fireside .

= = = Covent Garden years = = =

In 1806 , Grimaldi bought a second home , a cottage in Finchley , to which he retired between seasons . He was engaged to appear at Astley 's Theatre in Dublin , in a play by Thomas Dibdin and his brother Charles . The Dibdins leased the theatre , but it was badly in need of repair . As a result audiences were small , and the show 's box @-@ office takings suffered . Grimaldi donated his salary to help pay for the renovation of the theatre . The Dibdin company , with Grimaldi , transferred to the nearby Crow Street Theatre where they performed a benefit concert in aid of Astley 's . After two more plays , the company moved back to London .

Harlequin and the Forty Virgins opened the Easter season at Sadler 's Wells and lasted the entire season . Grimaldi sang " Me and my Neddy " , which proved very successful for both him and the theatre . Amid great expectations , he appeared at the Covent Garden Theatre on 9 October 1806 playing Orson opposite Charles Farley 's Valentine in Thomas Dibdin 's Valentine and Orson . Grimaldi , who considered the role of Orson to be the most physically and mentally demanding of his career , nevertheless performed the part with enthusiasm on tour in the provinces .

Perhaps the best @-@ known of Grimaldi 's pantomimes was Thomas Dibdin 's Harlequin and Mother Goose ; or , The Golden Egg , which opened on 29 December 1806 at the Covent Garden Theatre . As in most pantomimes , he played a dual role , in this case first as " Bugle " , a wealthy but abrasive eccentric womaniser , and after the transformation to the harlequinade , as Clown . Mother Goose was a runaway success with its London audiences and earned an extraordinary profit of £ 20 @,@ 000 . It completed a run of 111 performances over a two @-@ year residency , a record for any London theatre production at the time . Grimaldi , however , considered the performance to be one of the worst of his career and became depressed . Critics thought differently , attributing the pantomime 's success to Grimaldi 's performance . It prompted one critic from European Magazine to write : " We have not for several years witnessed a Pantomime more attractive than this : whether we consider the variety and ingenuity of the mechanical devices [or] the whim , humour , and agility of the Harlequin , Clown and Pantaloon " . Kemble stated that Grimaldi had " proved himself [as] the great master of his art " , while the actress Mrs Jordan called him " a genius ... yet unapproached " . The production regularly played to packed audiences .

In September 1808 , a fire at the Covent Garden theatre destroyed much of the Mother Goose scenery ; the production transferred to the Haymarket Theatre where it completed its run . While

Kemble and Harris raised funds and renovated Covent Garden , Grimaldi made provincial appearances in Manchester and Liverpool . The Covent Garden theatre re @-@ opened in December 1809 with a revival of Mother Goose . In an attempt to recover the costs incurred by the rebuilding , Kemble raised the theatre 's seat prices , causing audiences to protest violently for more than two months , and the management was forced to reinstate the old prices . Grimaldi 's 1809 ? 10 productions included Don Juan , in which he appeared as Scaramouche , and Castles in the Air , as Clown . Later in 1810 , he appeared in Birmingham in a benefit performance in aid of his sister @-@ in @-@ law . The following year , Grimaldi sang " Tippiitywitchet " for the first time at Sadler 's Wells in Charles Dibdin 's pantomime Bang up , or , Harlequin Prime ; it became one of his most popular songs .

By 1812 , despite Grimaldi 's success as a performer , he was close to bankruptcy as a result of his wife 's extravagant spending , a number of thefts by his accountant and the cost of maintaining both an idyllic country lifestyle and his son JS 's private education . The strain on Grimaldi 's finances caused him to accept as many provincial engagements as he could . That year , he travelled to Cheltenham and appeared again as Scaramouche in a revival of Don Juan . In nearby Gloucester he met the poet Lord Byron , on whose poem the play was based , at a dinner party . Byron was in awe at meeting the famous Clown , stating that he felt " great and unbounded satisfaction in becoming acquainted with a man of such rare and profound talents " . Grimaldi returned to London to star as Queen Ronabellyana with much success in the Covent Garden Christmas pantomime , Harlequin and the Red Dwarf ; or , The Adamant Rock . After this , he increasingly played " dame " roles .

Sadler 's Wells opened its season in April 1814 with Grimaldi appearing in , amongst others , Kaloc ; or , The Pirate Slave . That year he played the title role in Robinson Crusoe at Sadler 's Wells , with his young son , JS , making his stage debut as Man Friday . Other pantomimes followed at Sadler 's Wells that year , including The Talking Bird , in which he played Clown , and he also played Clown in productions at the Surrey Theatre and Covent Garden ? a challenging schedule . Later in 1814 , he played the title role in a revival of Don Juan at Sadler 's Wells , with JS in his second role as Scaramouche . The receipts at the box @-@ office were unusually large and confirmed , in Grimaldi 's mind , that his son was capable of sustaining his own career . Grimaldi suffered two setbacks towards the end of the year , becoming housebound for a few months due to illness and learning of the death of his friend , mentor and former father @-@ in @-@ law , Richard Hughes , in December . In early 1815 , Grimaldi and his son played father and son Clowns in Harlequin and Fortunio ; or , Shing @-@ Moo and Thun @-@ Ton .

During 1815 , the relationship between Grimaldi and Thomas Dibdin became strained . Dibdin , as manager at Sadler 's Wells , denied Grimaldi 's request for a month 's leave to tour the provincial theatres . Dibdin was annoyed at the tolerant attitude Grimaldi displayed in his position as the Chief Judge and Treasurer of the Sadler 's Wells Court of Rectitude , a body set up to regulate the behaviour of performers . Grimaldi briefly left Sadler 's Wells in 1815 to conduct a tour of the northern provincial theatres . Alongside Jack Bologna , he staged fifty @-@ six shows during the summer months and earned £ 1 @,@ 743 , a much higher amount than he earned at Sadler 's Wells . Dibdin was struggling , and after the tour Grimaldi used the problems at Sadler 's Wells to negotiate a lucrative contract . Dibdin agreed to a salary increase but bristled at Grimaldi 's other demands and eventually gave the position of resident Clown to the little @-@ known Signor Paulo .

= = = Later career = = =

In 1815 , Grimaldi played Clown in Harlequin and the Sylph of the Oak ; or , The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green at Covent Garden , followed by the Christmas pantomime Robinson Crusoe ; or , The Bold Buccaneer , in which he played Friday to Charles Farley 's title character . Grimaldi conducted a remunerative but gruelling tour to Scotland , Manchester and Liverpool in 1818 . He sustained bruising and strains from two falls , the second of which left him briefly unable to walk . He and Mary moved to 56 Exmouth Market , Islington , where he recovered from his injuries before going on tour with his son .

At Easter 1819 , in *The Talking Bird* , or , *Perizade Columbine* , he introduced perhaps his best known song " *Hot Codlins* " , an audience participation song about a seller of roasted apples who gets drunk on gin while working the streets of London . Songs about trades were popular on the stage in the 1800s . Grimaldi sought inspiration for the character of the apple seller by walking around the streets of London and observing real @-@ life tradespeople .

Despite Signor Paulo 's success at Sadler 's Wells , Richard Hughes 's widow Lucy , who was a majority shareholder at the theatre , pleaded with Grimaldi to return . He agreed on the conditions that he was sold an eighth share in the theatre , remained the resident Clown and received a salary of 12 guineas a week . She agreed to his terms , and he took the part of Grimaldicat in the 1818 Easter pantomime *The Marquis De Carabas* ; or , *Puss in Boots* . The show was a disaster and closed after one night . Grimaldi was booed off the stage after an impromptu joke (eating a prop mouse) upset the audience and caused two female audience members to fight in the auditorium . The audience was also angry at Grimaldi 's weak performance ; later he felt that this marked the beginning of his career 's decline . Dibdin left Sadler 's Wells that year ; his fortunes changed rapidly for the worse , and he spent time in a debtors ' prison . Grimaldi 's debut as a theatre proprietor was also a failure . Although Jack Bologna , Mary , JS and Bologna 's wife Louisa were all cast in Grimaldi 's only commissioned pantomime , *The Fates* ; or , *Harlequin 's Holy Day* , he had underestimated the amount of work required to run a theatre , and the strain of management hastened the already rapid deterioration in his health .

The shares in Sadler 's Wells were sold , with Grimaldi 's going to Daniel Egerton . Egerton wanted to keep Grimaldi on the payroll but proposed loaning him to other theatres . Grimaldi refused a contract on these terms and instead appeared alongside JS in a few engagements in Ireland . During the Easter season of 1820 , Grimaldi appeared at the Royal Opera House , Covent Garden , in *Harlequin and Cinderella* ; or , *the Little Glass Slipper* . Grimaldi played the wife of the lead character Baron Pomposini ; the role was probably an early example of a pantomime dame . In the latter months of 1820 , Grimaldi 's health worsened , and he suffered frequent emotional breakdowns , gastric spasms , breathlessness and severe rheumatoid pain . These ailments did not affect his desire to perform . That September he appeared at Covent Garden , as Kasrac in *Aladdin* followed by the Christmas pantomime *Harlequin and Friar Bacon* ; the pantomime was particularly successful .

In May 1821 , Grimaldi collapsed after a performance of *Undine* ; or , *the Spirit of the Waters* . Doctors diagnosed him as suffering from " premature old age " . JS took over his father 's role and completed the remainder of the show 's run . Now acting as an official understudy , JS filled many of his father 's other theatrical engagements , including a rerun of *Harlequin and Mother Bunch* ; or , *the Yellow Dwarf* , in which he caused a scandal by threatening and verbally abusing a heckler in the audience . In the early 1820s , Grimaldi made a brief recovery and held a six @-@ week engagement at the Coburg Theatre where he appeared as Clown in *Salmagundi* ; or , *the Clown 's Dish of All Sorts* ; a pantomime which ran for a week before being replaced by *Disputes in China* ; or , *Harlequin and the Hong Merchants* . Both productions were successful , but Grimaldi was taken ill half way through the latter 's run .

In 1822 , Grimaldi travelled to Cheltenham , in poor health , to fulfil an engagement as Clown by another actor in *Harlequin and the Ogress* ; or , *the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* . Despite the rehearsals being cut short due to Grimaldi 's rapidly deteriorating health , critics praised his performances .

= = = Last years and death = = =

Grimaldi retired from the stage in 1823 as a result of ill health . The years of extreme physical exertion his clowning had involved had taken a toll on his joints , and he suffered from a respiratory condition that often left him breathless . The Times noted in 1813 :

Grimaldi is the most assiduous of all imaginable buffoons and it is absolutely surprising that any human head or hide can resist the rough trials he volunteers . Serious tumbles from serious heights , innumerable kicks , and incessant beatings come on him as matters of common occurrence , and

leave him every night fresh and free for the next night 's flagellation .

Although officially retired , Grimaldi still received half of his former small salary from Drury Lane until 1824 . Soon after the fee stopped , Grimaldi fell into poverty after a number of ill @-@ conceived business ventures and because he had entrusted management of his provincial earnings to people who cheated him . Despite his disabilities , he offered his services as a cameo performer in Christmas pantomimes . Along with Bologna , he re @-@ appeared briefly at Sadler 's Wells where he gave some acting instruction to the mime artist William Payne , the future father of the Payne Brothers . He also started working for Richard Brinsley Peake , namesake of Richard Brinsley Sheridan , who was the dramaturge at the English Opera House . Peake hired Grimaldi to star in Monkey Island alongside his son JS . However , Grimaldi 's health deteriorated further and he was forced to quit before the show opened ; his scene was cut . The early end to his career , worries about money , and the uncertainty over his son 's future made him increasingly depressed . To make light of it , he would often joke about his condition : " I make you laugh at night but am Grim @-@ all @-@ day " . In 1828 , two " farewell " benefit performances were held for him . In the first , he appeared as Hock the German soldier and a drunken sailor in Thomas Dibdin 's melodrama The Sixes ; or , The Fiends at Sadler 's Wells to an audience of 2 @,@ 000 people . Unable to stand for long periods of time , he sang a duet with JS and finished the evening with a scene from Mother Goose . His last farewell benefit performance on 27 June 1828 was at Drury Lane . Between 1828 and 1836 , Grimaldi relied on charity benefits to replace his lost income .

The relationship between Grimaldi and his son first became strained during the early 1820s . JS , who had made a career of emulating his father 's act , received favourable notices as Clown , but his success was constantly overshadowed by that of his father . He became resentful of his father and publicly shunned any association with him . JS became an alcoholic and was increasingly unreliable . In 1823 , he became estranged from his parents , who saw their son only occasionally over the next four years , as JS went out of his way to avoid them . They communicated only through letters , with Grimaldi often sending his son notes begging for money . JS once replied : " At present I am in difficulties ; but as long as I have a shilling you shall have half " . However , there is no record of him ever sending money to his father . JS finally returned home in 1827 , when the Grimaldis were awakened one night to discover their son standing in the street , feverish , emaciated and dishevelled .

After appearing in a few Christmas pantomimes and benefits for his father , JS fell into unemployment and was incarcerated in a debtors ' prison for a time ; his alcoholism also further worsened . In 1832 , Grimaldi , Mary and their son moved to Woolwich , but JS often abused his parents ' hospitality by bringing home prostitutes and fighting in the house with his alcoholic friends . He moved out later that year and died at his lodgings on 11 December 1832 , aged 30 . With Grimaldi almost crippled , and Mary having suffered a stroke days before JS 's death , they made a suicide pact . They took some poison , but the only result was a long bout of stomach cramps . Dismayed at their failure , they abandoned the idea of suicide .

Mary died in 1834 , and Grimaldi moved to 33 Southampton Street , Islington , where he spent the last few years of his life alone as a depressed alcoholic . On 31 May 1837 he complained of a tightening of the chest but recuperated enough to attend his local public house , The Marquis of Cornwallis , where he spent a convivial evening entertaining fellow patrons and drinking to excess . He returned home that evening and was found dead in bed by his housekeeper the following morning . The coroner recorded that he had " died by the visitation of God " . Grimaldi was buried in St. James 's Churchyard , Pentonville , on 5 June 1837 . The burial site and the area around it was later named Joseph Grimaldi Park .

= = Legacy and reputation = =

After Grimaldi 's death , Charles Dickens was invited by Richard Bentley to edit and improve Thomas Egerton Wilks 's clumsily written life of Grimaldi , which had been based on the clown 's own notes . As a child , Dickens saw Grimaldi perform at the Star Theatre , Rochester , in 1820 . The Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi sold well , to Dickens 's surprise .

Grimaldi 's fame was established primarily by his numerous successes as Clown in pantomimes . His Clown satirised many aspects of contemporary British life , and made comic mockery of absurdities in fashion . Grimaldi quickly became the most famous Clown in London , gradually transforming the Clown character from a pratfalling country bumpkin into the most important character in the harlequinade , more important even than Harlequin . He expanded the role of Clown to include a range of comic impersonations , from the rival suitor , to household cook or nurse . Grimaldi 's popularity changed the balance of the evening 's entertainment , so that the first , relatively serious , section of the pantomime soon dwindled to " little more than a pretext for determining the characters who were to be transformed into those of the harlequinade . " He became so dominant in the harlequinade that later Clowns were known as " Joey " , and the term , as well as his make @-@ up design , were later generalised to other types of clowns .

A contributor to Bentley 's Miscellany wrote in 1846 : " To those who never saw him , description is fruitless ; to those who have , no praise comes up to their appreciation of him . We therefore shake our heads and say ' Ah ! You should have seen Grimaldi ! ' " Another writer commented that his performances elevated his role by " acute observation upon the foibles and absurdities of society He is the finest practical satyrst that ever existed He was so extravagantly natural , that [no one was] ashamed to laugh till tears coursed down their cheeks at Joe and his comicalities . " The British dramatist James Planché worried , in a rhymed couplet , that Grimaldi 's death meant the end of a genre : " Pantomime 's best days are fled ; Grimaldi , Barnes , Bologna dead ! "

Grimaldi became " easily the most popular English entertainer of his day " . The Victoria and Albert Museum and the actor Simon Callow have both concluded that no other Clown achieved Grimaldi 's level of fame . Richard Findlater , author of a 1955 Grimaldi biography , commented : " Here is Joey the Clown , the first of 10 @,@ 000 Joeys who took their name from him ; here is the genius of English fun , in the holiday splendour of his reign at Sadler 's Wells and Covent Garden ... during his lifetime [Grimaldi] was generally acclaimed as the funniest and best @-@ loved man in the British theatre . " A later biographer , Andrew McConnell Stott , wrote that " Joey had been the first great experiment in comic persona , and by shifting the emphasis of clowning from tricks and pratfalls to characterisation , satire and a full sense of personhood , he had established himself as the spiritual father of all those later comedians whose humour stems first and foremost from a strong sense of identity . "

Grimaldi is remembered today in an annual memorial service on the first Sunday in February at Holy Trinity Church in Hackney . The service , which has been held since the 1940s , attracts hundreds of clown performers from all over the world who attend the service in full clown costume . In 2010 a coffin @-@ shaped musical memorial dedicated to Grimaldi , made of musical floor tiles , was installed in Joseph Grimaldi Park . The bronze tiles are tuned so that when danced upon it is possible to play " Hot Codlins " .