



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Bro. RONAL JACKSON. Opera Singer.

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On 2nd May 2002 one of the Australian Opera's leading baritones during the 1950s and 1970s, Ronal Jackson, died.

Ronald Francis Jackson, later to be known professionally as Ronal Jackson, was born in November 1920 at Bathurst in New South Wales into a musical family. His mother played the piano and two of the boys played violin and trombone. Ronal was a boy chorister at the Church of England and apparently his voice did not go through the usual breaking period but simply dropped into a baritone. He was educated at the Canterbury Boys High School with interests in natural science and dramatics. At the age of 16 he had a bout of osteomyelitis in his right arm which was cured after six months in hospital and a long convalescence.

On leaving school he went into the real estate business for a short time before joining the Army Medical Corps on the outbreak of World War 2. He had previously entertained thoughts of becoming a doctor but the illness with osteomyelitis had thwarted this. During the war he sang at Australian and American army concerts with the ABC Military and Dance Bands.

At the end of the war he studied singing at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music under Sir Eugene Goossens. 1948 saw him win the ABC Vocal and Concerto Competition and in 1949 he won the first Mobil Quest and also married Gwenda who was to be his wife for 52 years until his death in 2002. The M.C. at their wedding was Wor. Bro. James Brunton Gibb. In third place in the 1949 Mobil Quest was Joan Sutherland and it is also worth noting that the third Mobil Quest was won by another baritone named Noel Melvin.

With the prize money from the Mobil Quest Ronal and his wife went to London to join the Carla Rosa Opera Company touring the United Kingdom singing many leading operatic baritone roles. During this time he won the Richard Tauber Scholarship enabling him to go to Vienna to study at the Academy of Music for two years. While at the Academy of Music he took a short break to sing with Sir John Babirolli and a Covent Garden Company in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and London. While there he sang the role of Marcello in "La Boheme". In 1953 he joined the Welsh National Opera and the London Opera Company to sing the role of Nabucco. After this he was offered a contract with the Covent Garden Company but instead preferred to return to Vienna to join the Kiel and the Wuppertal Opera Companies. During this time he sang at many major centres including Hamburg, Bremen, Dusseldorf, Cologne and others. During ten years in Europe he increased his repertoire to include such operas as "The Marriage of Figaro", "Don Giovanni", "Rigoletto", "Falstaff", "Tosca", "Faust", "Pagliacci" singing most of the baritone roles. After ten years in Europe and because of a recurrent health problem, Ronal and his family returned to Australia in 1960 and he then joined the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, now Opera Australia, and sang in "La Traviata", "Il Pagliacci", "The Marriage of Figaro", "The Magic Flute", "Don Giovanni" and "Rigoletto".

He had now settled in Sydney and gave many performances in opera, concerts and television in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Perth. The Australian soprano Glenda Raymond particularly remembers his open air performances in Melbourne with her husband, Hector Crawford, in Music for the People and Opera for the People.

