



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

ETHEL LANG. Actress

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Prepared by Jim Ruxton and presented by Shirley Ruxton 22nd July 2002.

Two of the first actors of note on Australian Radio were Ethel Lang and her husband, James Brunton Gibb. In 1924 on 2FC they were broadcasting short dramatic and comedy sketches each lasting about ten minutes. Another well known performer at the time was Wilfred Thomas. These shows were first broadcast from a studio on the roof garden of Farmer and Coy., the elegant Sydney department store. Naturally the station's call-sign was 2FC. In 1927, when Farmer's dissociated its broadcasting activities from its other business activities, a separate company, 2FC limited was formed and worked from premises above Market street next to Her Majesty's Theatre. In time there were two studios, whose walls were packed with seaweed and hung with tapestry drapes to deaden noise from the street below. During broadcasting the windows had to remain shut and their curtains closed providing a rather claustrophobic atmosphere. There was another A class company, Broadcasters (Sydney) Limited, operating at this time and both 2FC and 2BL were incorporated into the New South Wales Broadcasting Company. In 1932 the incorporated company was nationalised and the ABC, more or less as we know it, was formed, still working from the Market Street premises.

Ethel Lang was born on 8th June 1902 at Surry Hills in Sydney. Her father was employed in the building industry as a painter and decorator. Australia was in a depression at the time and as work was very scarce her father went to South Africa on a five year contract. Ethel Lang and her mother then went to live with her grandmother, also in Surry Hills. When she was six weeks old her uncle, a scene shifter with J. C. Williamsons, recommended her for the part of a baby in a new play with Bland Holt called "Flying Colours." Bland Holt was a great believer in reality and a doll would not do. Ethel was on stage for three minutes being carried on wrapped up in a shawl and when unwrapped she kicked her legs and waved her arms, thoroughly captivating the ladies in the audience. The ooh's and the ah's could be clearly heard and Ethel Lang says this is how she earned her first thirty bob.

When Ethel was seven the great San Francisco earthquake occurred and her father went straight from South Africa to America looking for work. Her Uncle Walter again found a part for her as Napoleon's son in a play called "The Royal Divorce" which she played after only 14 days rehearsal. At this time at school in Ashfield she was performing in school plays and recalls when she was playing Snow White, a lady in the audience was heard to remark, "That the little girl is supposed to have a father but no one has ever seen him", a comment on social mores of the time.

When Ethel was 9 she went with her mother to America to meet her father for the first time. After more than two years away her mother became homesick and sailed for Australia with Ethel, arriving here two weeks before the outbreak of World War 1. After the Lusitania was sunk her father advised her mother not to return to America because of the war situation but he became very ill and died during the war period so they never met again.

At the age of 17 Ethel Lang met James Brunton Gibb who had returned from the war and whom she was later to marry, but more of him later. Ethel and Jim worked together in concert and recital work and were married in 1923, their first son Peter being born in 1924. They were later to have three more children, Wendy, Barbara and David.

