



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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NOEL WALTER MELVIN (1924 – 2003)

Born in Sydney on 23 July 1924, Noel Melvin's singing talents began to emerge during the time he was at then Enmore Activity School when he was encouraged to have formal voice training. He did not have an easy childhood and he was helped by outstanding teachers like Bob Staines and Alan Strom. His music teacher at the school quickly realised that his 15 year old pupil had a glorious bass voice. As Noel once said: "I went to bed one night and said 'Good night Mum' and woke in the morning and said 'Good morning Mother'."

Noel's great career was launched when he sang in the school concert to considerable applause. He had some lessons and he began winning prizes in the City of Sydney and Railways Eisteddfods, which were, at that time, the proving ground for young singers and musicians.

Noel then gave his first recital. He was terribly nervous and, lost the words and melody singing 'On the Road to Mandalay'. He was violently ill in the toilet and, when he looked at his pale and haggard face in the mirror, he vowed that he would never be nervous again. He wasn't - and that was the measure of the man.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Noel was too young to join the services and he was recruited into the Department of Aircraft Production where he worked in the Beaufort Bomber factory. This was a reserved occupation and he was able to continue his musical studies. He performed in concert parties to entertain the troops and a lifetime of travel had begun.

He won a prize of 50 pounds on 'Uncle Frank's Amateur Hour' and he was able to marry Jean in May 1945. They had a son Graeme, and daughter Glenys, and they were later blessed with seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

At age 16, Noel sang 'Congo Lullaby' (My Little White Dove) on the ABC Youth Show for a fee of 2 guineas. He nearly ruined his voice by singing incorrectly but Vern Barnett at the Conservatorium of Music, where Noel was a student for two years, helped to correct the problem. He then was accepted as a pupil of the very experienced basso, Stanley Clarkson, who was a Past Master of Lodge Caxton No. 508 and who had performed at Grand Installations and other Masonic functions. Bro. Stanley Clarkson was involved with the establishment of the Masonic Jubilee Choir in 1938. Noel studied with Clarkson for the next ten years and he developed that superb articulation and extensive voice range. You could hear every word he sang and his voice projected with effortless ease to the back of the Sydney Town Hall.

His interpretation of a huge repertoire of songs was always a delight. When asked how he could remember the words for so many songs and yet have trouble with Masonic ritual, Noel replied: 'It would be easy if I could sing it.'

When he was 22 he was invited to sing the bass solo in the St. George Society's 'Messiah' at the Sydney Town Hall. Noel thus began a wonderful career in Oratorio in which, he estimated he had sung bass solos in the 'Messiah' 168 times, often with leading symphony orchestras in all States and New Zealand.

In 1947, Noel won the vocal section of the ABC vocal and concerto competition and made his first appearance with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Joseph Post.

