



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Bro. Alan Light (1916-2009) Operatic Singer

Being an opera bass baritone means giving the singer's life over to evil, because his roles are nearly always the baddies, but Alan Light loved it. He said that his ambition was always to become more evil than he had been before. To this effect, he played opera's nastiest men from Don Pizzaro in *Fidelio* to his many acclaimed performances as Mephistopheles in *Faust*.

Even so, he was probably most heard as the voice of the Roll-A-Door advertisement to the tune of the Toreador song from *Carmen*. Along with this, he worked in musicals, operetta, oratorios and choirs and liked to claim the world record for performances in the *Barber of Seville*, some 1500, in a career that spanned nearly 70 years.

Critics were generally impressed by his nearly three-octave voice, from high baritone down to low bass, and spoke of his "power and purpose" in performance, and his animation that helped to liven up productions. Audiences loved the whole package; he was tall and good looking and his presence was such that he often won a round of applause for just walking on stage.

Alan Light, who has died aged 92, was born in Willoughby, the only son of Allan Light and his wife, Alice Nock. The family moved to Leichhardt when Allan Snr gained a position as an engineer with the local council and Alan grew up there, attending Central Technical School in Ultimo and singing in church choirs.

His father wanted him to be a mathematician, but young Alan was determined to be a singer, although he never learned to read music properly. He had a good speaking voice and started work straight after finishing high school at 15, as a country radio announcer. His looks also secured work as a model.

Light enlisted in the RAAF during World War II and worked with radar stationed in Townsville, he spent some time on Stanley Island, where he organised a wildly popular tinned herring tossing competition to fight boredom. On leave in 1941, he married Cecille Flynn, an artist and designer.

After the war, Light studied with Marianne Mathy and sang oratorios and in concerts with the ABC Orchestra. Then Clarice Lorenz, a one-time opera singer started an opera company in Sydney, following on from Gertrude Johnson's National Theatre in Victoria. The National Opera of NSW had its first season in 1952 with Light in a number of main roles. The company toured as far as New Zealand, although it went broke there and a dud cheque had to be passed to get the players home.

After the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company was formed in Sydney in 1956, Light sang in its first four Mozart operas and toured capital cities. He was also working with his beloved Rockdale Opera and the ABC, and had a sideline with Masonic concerts. He would often do more than one a night, rushing between engagements by foot or on the tram.

In the opera off season, singers would make tours of country towns. One such tour saw Light sing, on successive nights without a break for months, roles in *Il Trovatore*, the *Barber of Seville* and *Faust*, nearly ruining his voice in the process. In 1967, the opera Company employed a permanent nucleus of singers including Light. Another was a young soprano, Judith Hill. Light's marriage to Cecille had broken down but it took Hill another nine years to persuade him to marry her.

Although often offered the chance to sing overseas, Light always turned it down. He wanted to stay in Australia and to support the local industry. In the late 1960s he was one of the organisers for a log of claims for better conditions for opera singers that was eventually adopted and he served for some time as vice-president of Actors Equity.

In 1973 Light was diagnosed with leukaemia and told he had about ten years to live, but he kept on working, taking his chemotherapy tablets as necessary. In 1980 he officially retired from what was called by then the Australian Opera, but was called back for roles until the end of the decade.

He and Janice, his sister, started the Australian Academy of Music Theatre to teach stagecraft to singers. They worked with the Australian Opera and organised seminars and conferences for voice students.

He also supported charities such as World Vision and Amnesty International and spent 15 years organising fund-raising concerts for the Australian Opera Audition Committee. Alan Light is survived by Janice and Cecille and their son, Graeme.

Alan Light was initiated, passed and raised 8th December 1943, 31st January 1944 and 30th April 1944 in Pines Lodge, No 203, Q'land Constitution, and called off on 31st December 1946. He affiliated with Lodge Thespian, No 256, UGL of NSW and ACT on 23 July 1946. He called off Lodge Thespian on 31 January 1953, affiliating with Lodge Thespian Lewis, No 804, on 7 February 1953. He called off that Lodge on 4 July 1959 before affiliating with Lodge Ionic on 19 May 1959 remaining a member until 31 January 1994.

Ref: Harriet Veitch, SMH 2 February 2009.
Records of the UGL of NSW and ACT.