

BETTINE McCAUGHAN

Singer and teacher 13-6-1926 15-8-2016



Bettine Patricia McCaughan was born in Glenhuntly in 1926, the same year as Queen Elizabeth. Her father was a bank manager in the State Savings Bank of Victoria and the family lived in several Victorian country towns as Harry McCaughan's career progressed.

Bettine was an only child. Her interest in music began with the piano, and at the age of 12 she completed Grade Five AMEB piano and music theory exams. Bettine was attending Mentone Girls' Grammar School, and when her father was transferred once again, this time to Nhill, Bettine stayed in Melbourne and lived with her grandparents in Ormond.

The events of the next few years were crucial in the shaping of Bettine's career. Although Bettine had continued to stay in Melbourne when Harry was transferred to Stawell, it was 1940 and the Second World War had begun.

Bettine's mother, concerned for her safety, moved Bettine to Stawell where she attended Stawell High School and, on Sundays, the Anglican Church. The church had its own choir and soon Bettine was a member. It was clear

that she showed promise as a singer and she was in demand to sing at local concerts and parties.

In 1943 Harry was appointed to Hawthorn North and the family returned to Melbourne. Bettine attended the local church with her parents and again joined the church choir. It was providential that the choir conductor was highly-regarded singing teacher Cecil Trowbridge, and Bettine soon began lessons with him.

From this point her singing developed rapidly and her future career was in sight. Trowbridge encouraged Bettine to enter eisteddfods . She agreed to do this as she knew that Nellie Melba had also started competing in eisteddfods at the age of 17! She received many awards over the next few years.

At the age of 21 Bettine was playing the role of Lanzarillo in Maritana at the Middle Park Repertory Theatre and had a job at the English, Scottish and Australian Bank (ES&A) in the Melbourne CBD. She performed well in major competitions and on radio talent shows such as the Mobil Quest.

Bettine was a part of the ABC singers and struck up a friendship with Joan Arnold, which was to become a long and close relationship . She also sang roles for the National Theatre.

In 1952, at the age of 26, Bettine travelled to Britain on the cruise ship Orion to further her singing studies. She was a prolific correspondent during her time in England , and among her legacy of letters was a detailed account of her attendance at Queen Elizabeth's coronation. She studied singing with Australian singer and teacher Arnold Matters and revelled in the concert and music festival culture.

However, in 1956 she received news that her father had died suddenly at the age of 59, and a voyage back to Melbourne to be with her mother was quickly arranged.

On her return Bettine resumed singing lessons with Trowbridge. In 1966 he moved to Hobart and offered Bettine his studio of singing students. Thus began Bettine's career as a teacher of singing.

The studio was located at Suttons Music Store on the corner of Elizabeth and Collins Streets and Bettine taught there and at her home for many years.

In the 1970s Bettine started an opera company, Opera Melbourne, made up entirely of her students. The company presented many performances and the students were given wonderful opportunities to develop their singing and acting skills, and to learn about opera.

Bettine continued to sing professionally with Australian orchestras, including the Melbourne Symphony and the Tasmanian Symphony, both in oratorio and recital performances. However, teaching gradually took over and she quickly became one of the most sought-after teachers of singing in Melbourne and nationally.

Her success was obvious. She trained six Sun Aria winners: Jonathan Summers, Carole McKenzie, John Fulford, Kathleen Connell, Frank Fabris and Rosemary Boyle. A multitude of singers who are singing professionally around the world today, and many others who have begun singing and music teaching careers, regard Bettine McCaughan as their inspiration and mentor.

From 1989 to 1998, Bettine was an invaluable member of the team of some 15 to 20 eminent tutors who made the pilgrimage every year to Bathurst to the Summer School for Singers set up by tenor Ronald Dowd and Maggie Niven. She was in good company: other tutors in the Classical Team, under the direction of Victor Morris, included such luminaries as Geoffrey Chard, Janet Delpratt, Ronald MaConaghie, Werner Baer and Hugh Halliday.

Singers in Bathurst benefited greatly from Bettine's successful teaching style which was warm, hands-on and graphic, focusing on posture. She had a naughty sense of humour which seemed at odds with her hairnet and

conservative attire, but the device put into sharp relief the information she wanted to impart.

Bettine also taught at the Melba Conservatorium and her relationship with its director, Joan Arnold AM, continued to be a life-long friendship. Bettine and Joan were the movers and shakers in establishing the Australian National Association of Teachers of Singing (ANATS) which flourishes today. Bettine became a life member of the Lieder Society of Victoria and adjudicated singing competitions all over Australia. She was a compassionate person and supported many charitable organisations.

When her mother passed away in 1989, Bettine moved into the Cameron Close retirement village in Burwood. She established herself as a prominent and muchloved resident, arranging many concerts in the rather grand auditorium which boasted a stage and grand piano.

In 1999 Bettine received an Order of Australia Medal for her contribution to music, a proud moment celebrated with her students and friends in the auditorium.

As time moved on Bettine experienced a series of health issues and her last two years were spent in an aged care facility.

Although Bettine's passing has marked the end of a fabulous era, her melody continues to linger.

Bettine's successful teaching style was warm, hands-on and graphic.

David Ashton-Smith