

**Jeffrey Black on Richard Bonyngue**  
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"The person in question was born 29<sup>th</sup> September 1930. Through a strange happenstance which curiously occurs in music frequently they studied piano with a lady who had for a time been the accompanist for Dame Nellie Melba. How prescient were those early steps in his musical life. He was a gifted pianist first studying at the Sydney Conservatorium and thence on scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London. Here he studied with Herbert Fryer. However, his fascination for the voice and singers in general led him to accompany singers in lessons. Building as he did so, a vast knowledge of vocal pedagogy and vocal styles.

The rest as they say is history.

As Musical Director he led the famous J. C. Williamson tour to Australia in 1965. It remains the benchmark for great operatic performances. Here was operatic history writ large. Outstanding opera performers from all over the world, including a young unknown Italian tenor – one Luciano Pavarotti - as well as Australian ex-pat talent who were carving careers with distinction in Europe, were unveiled to an unsuspecting Australian public. Opera in Australia was re-born and would within a few short years would be housed in the iconic architectural structure at the end of Bennelong Point. As Music Director for many years for the National Opera Company known in those days as the Australian Opera he was responsible for identifying, supporting and nurturing many fine young singers. He expected for us all to aspire to the highest standards in beauty of tone, musicianship, interpretation, musicality, linguistic and stylistic fidelity. He has always been the most exacting of musicians. Never one to mince his words or couch criticism. No-one was exempt from his laser like perspicacity. He has discovered and nurtured countless generations of young singers who have benefitted enormously from his vast knowledge particularly of the bel canto repertoire and the stylistic considerations

therein. His willingness to share the legacy of really great singing and the sacrifices one must make to achieve them are legendary.

This is a story which could be recounted by literally hundreds of young singers. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the legion of singers whose lives have been utterly altered.

When I sang my first audition for this gentleman I was a few months past my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and yet to complete my undergraduate course. It was the same week I had won this competition. The original intention had been for me to continue my post graduate study in London. However this man convinced me to join the Young artist programme at the Australian Opera. I had received my first opera contract. What a world was revealed whilst working at the Opera House.

My abiding memory of those first years with the company was what I called the “bell weather” table. During the season there was a table in the green room of the Opera House where singers would assemble and chew the fat and gossip. However on those days where you climbed the steps up to the green room and that table was empty you knew that Richard was back in the country and in the house. and the singers were furiously working to ensure that Richard’s exacting standards for the ensemble company were being met. There was a frisson – an electrical energy.

It is fitting I believe that a lifetime achievement should be bestowed upon this gentleman under the auspices of a National Singing Competition. Who better to receive the award than a man whose love of outstanding singing and the nurturing of that same discipline here in Australia. His contribution to the field of Opera and Ballet in this country and internationally will forever stand the test of time.

Ladies and Gentlemen it gives me the greatest honour and privilege to present the inaugural MAA to Maestro Richard Bonyngé.

Will you please rise to acclaim this great Australian who has done so much for singers and Opera in this country."