

Les Andrews QSM

20 October 1917 -- 28 February 2014



Leslie Arthur Andrews was born in Timaru on 20 October 1917 to Olive (b. Sheilds) and foundry worker Adolphus Andrews. Les had two brothers, Doug and Jack. When his father lost his job during the Depression, Les took a part time job delivering milk to help out.

He attended *Timaru High School* where he enjoyed scouting, tennis, swimming, athletics and snow sports. He played rugby in the 1st fifteen and later was a Junior Representative. Les sang in the Presbyterian Boy's Choir in *Trinity Church* and played mouth organ & accordion. He took singing lessons with Marie Campbell, an excellent pianist and singer, and

they performed together at local functions. They became engaged in 1939. In 1943 his Mother died from cancer.

His first job in 1936 was at *Charlie Cameron's Menswear Shop* and in 1937 he became a clerk at Timaru Railway Station. In 1941 Les enlisted in the *NZ Army Engineers*, sailed to Egypt and joined the *16 Railway Company* in the Western Desert and later in Alexandria. He joined a concert Party and entered local talent quests winning a few.

When the *Railway Company* returned to New Zealand in 1943, Les joined the 4th *Armoured Tank Brigade* in Italy with his brother Doug, fighting in Monte Cassino. On the push towards Faenza in Dec 1944, Les and his piano player friend Arthur Rose found a piano in the basement of the Army headquarters and while trying a few tunes they were interrupted by General Freyberg who asked Les if he would be interested in joining the *Kiwi Concert Party*. 'Bloody oath!', replied Les and ten days later he was transferred. In April 1945, while on leave back at Timaru, peace was declared.



Les converted to the Catholic faith and he and Marie married in June then both applied for *Rehabilitation Bursaries* to study for *Diplomas in Performance* at the *NSW Conservatorium of Music* in Sydney. Les joined the *ABC Singers*, did a season at the *State Theatre* with *George Trevaire's Orchestra* and sung on the *Stardusters Variety Show* in Sydney and Melbourne.

In 1948 Les studied at the *Opera School* at the *Royal College of Music* in London. He took part time work as a lecturer for the *NZ Office of Information* and during breaks worked at the *Glyndebourne Opera* including a season at the 1949 *Edinburgh Festival*. On finishing his course in 1950 he received permission to remain in Britain and was able to find work in work in London's West End, The Palladium and Strand Theatres. He found singing work at the *BBC*, the 1951 *Festival of Britain* and performed a summer season at Ramsgate. He toured with *The Opera Players* through provincial town halls and schools, then joined the *George Mitchell Players*. Work at the *BBC* included Radio and Television shows singing Opera, Variety and Musicals. While with the TV Series, *Music for You*, he was included in the 1954 *Royal Command Performance* at the London Palladium.



Their daughter Jennifer was born in 1947, David in 1949 and Robert in 1954. In 1958 the family returned to New Zealand and settled in Auckland. Les found work on the wharves then in the menswear department of *Farmers Department Store*. On April 1st he became an announcer for station *1YA* with a dispensation to sing on radio programs, allowing him to perform with the *Auckland Coral Society* and the *National Orchestra*.

Marie opened the *Auckland School of Singing* in Shortland Street. Mary Throll encouraged Les to develop his talents for comedy and compering and found him bookings through her *Fuller's Talent Agency*. They purchased a house in Glendowie and furnished it using ex- serviceman's loans.

Andrews was the first Television announcer when it went to air in 1959. He was also one of the first singers to perform. He went on to become a local personality compering shows such as *Personality Squares*, *Stars on Sunday*, *Tinker Tailor* and *Music in 3D*.

In the early 1960s he recorded, *Click go the Toll Gates*, a satirical send up of the new *Auckland Harbour Bridge* which sold 15,000 copies. Other parodies followed such as *Mangere*, *Falsies Matilda*, *Crack go the Clip-ons* and *No Parking*. In 1972 he released *Songs of Peace and Comfort*.



In 1962 Les joined the *Remuera Golf Club*. In July of that year he was playing in Rotorua with Marie caddying when he scored a hole in one and won the tournament.

Each Christmas George Tollerton ran carnival shows in holiday resorts with acts such as; Pat McMinn, John Maybury, Rusty Greaves, Malvina Majors, Jon Zealando, Vic Viggers and Les Andrews. When George retired to

Australia, Les took over the organising and presenting; one year he presented Kiri Te Kanawa in her farewell New Zealand performance.

In 1971 Les and Alma Woods produced a *Royal Command Concert* for the *Centenary of the City of Auckland* with over 210 Variety entertainers. Present were Princess Alexander and the Hon Angus Ogilvy. Les argued that Auckland needed a Conservatorium of Music, Dance and Drama and suggested that the vacant *Customhouse* would be perfect. This was the start of a 25 year battle to have the Customhouse saved from demolition and renovated.



When Marie died from cancer in Feb 1973, Les remarried. He had first met Sonia King in 1964 when both were announcers on *Radio 1ZB* and had found that they worked and sang together well. Les and Sonia were great patrons of the arts and in 1992 were awarded *Queen's Service Medals* for their services to entertainment. Together they put on thirty-seven variety concerts for charity in the *Aotea Centre* in the 1990s. With the profits of these shows they established the Les and Sonia Andrews Cultural Foundation.

Les passed away on 28 February 2014. Much of the information in this article is gleaned from his autobiography *What a Laugh* which was published in 1999. He produced a talking book version as well.