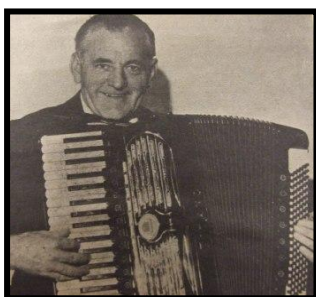


Oswald Cheesman MBE

13 September 1913–29 September 1985

Peter Downes and Michael Colonna



Oswald Astley Cheesman was born in Christchurch on 13 September 1913. His father Astley was a painter and Oswald was taught piano by his mother Ada. He was educated at *Elmwood School* and *Christchurch Boys' High School* later moving to Hamilton. He played cornet in the *Hamilton High School* band but later concentrated on piano and formed a group called the *Rhythm Boys*, which performed at country dances and at the *Regent Ballroom*.

On leaving school in 1929 he worked for the *Prudential Assurance Company* in Auckland but two years later took up music full-time with Alf 'Chips')Healy's *Wintergarden Band* at Auckland's new *Civic Theatre*. He also worked for a time as pianist at two city tearooms. In 1935 Healy's band was invited to perform in Sydney but on their arrival problems with the *Musicians' Union* prevented their playing. Cheesman remained in Sydney however and played in a non-union club and with several radio orchestras before taking work as a pianist and accordionist on Pacific cruise ships. Between assignments at sea he led or played piano in dance bands in Wellington, Hamilton and Auckland.

In 1936 his band broadcast weekly from the *New Majestic Lounge* in Wellington. Two years later he opened a school of music in Auckland, where he taught piano and piano accordion. For a time he also commuted to Hamilton to teach.

It was during one of the Pacific cruises that Cheesman met Elaine Court and on 20 March 1939 they were married in Auckland. They had three sons, one of which researched Leukemia at the *University of California*.



In March 1941 Cheesman was engaged by the *National Broadcasting Service* to lead a 10-piece radio dance band in weekly programs. On 11 April, he joined the army and was posted overseas with the *3rd New Zealand Anti-Aircraft Division* in the Pacific; he was soon transferred to the *Army Education and Welfare Service*, first as bandmaster and then as director of the *Pacific Kiwi Concert Party*

entertaining servicemen around the Pacific.

Resuming civilian life at the end of 1944 he formed, conducted and arranged music for the *New Zealand Broadcasting Service's Auckland Radio Orchestra*. From 1946–47 he was involved with the establishment of the *National Orchestra*, now the *New Zealand Symphony Orchestra*, and for the next 30 years he appeared regularly with it as solo pianist or guest conductor.

He enrolled at *Auckland University College* and was awarded a diploma of music in 1950. That year he undertook further musical studies in London. After this he continued freelance work, composing and teaching, but concentrated on working with radio ensembles and orchestras. For these he arranged and orchestrated the music, played the piano and conducted.

In 1952 he was chosen as leader of a concert party sent to entertain New Zealand troops in Korea and Japan. The troupe included Pat Otway, Alan Matthews, Martin Winiata and Carroll Cummins.



In November 1963 he was asked by the *NZBC* to form a singing group for a series of television programs. *Sing-Along* was so successful that it ran again in 1964 and in 1965 it became the series *Music for You*. The *Cheesman Singers* toured the North Island during Christmas 1965 and an album was released on *Kiwi Records* with all royalties donated to a special prize for the most versatile vocalist at the *Auckland Competitions Society*.

In 1967 they recorded 12 radio programs.

In 1970 he was director of music for New Zealand's large entertainment group at *Expo '70* in Osaka, Japan. He was also highly regarded as an accompanist and made many concert tours throughout New Zealand and Australia with internationally distinguished artists.

Cheesman received the Australasian *Performing Right Association's Certificate of Honour* and the *1970 Benny Award*, the second ever presented. In 1972 he was appointed an *MBE* in recognition of his services to music. Among his other interests were languages, ornithology and golf. He spoke good German and Spanish and had perfect pitch combined with instant recall and a photographic memory. He died in Auckland on 29 September 1985.

March of the Kiwi's.



*We hail from New Zealand, it's a proud land and a free land.
We are far from home, yet where're we roam,
It's a country dear to us.*

*Although we may be parted
Do not think we are down hearted,
For we're waiting for the day,
When we're back there, home to stay!*

*Look to the north and you'll find the boys sallying forth.
Look to the west, there's a Kiwi along with the rest.
Marching along, there's time for a laugh and a song,
And a job to be done. Let's go!*