

# Rob Guest OBE

17 July 1950 – 2 October 2008

I'm not a perfectionist, I just aim to be.

**Robert John Guest** was born in Birmingham, England, on 17 July 1950 to Betty and John Guest. Rob and his younger brother Dave spent their first years on a housing estate in Dudley, not far from Wolverhampton, and went to *Sledmere Primary School* and *Blue Coat Secondary Modern* where Rob joined the school drama group. Their Father had a good voice and often performed the songs of Paul Robson and Al Jolson in character.



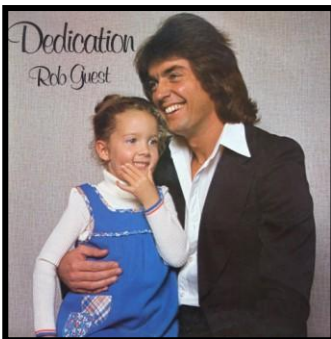
The Guests later leased the *Dudley Pub* and they moved in to live upstairs. John worked as a draftsman in Manchester so Betty would open the bar at 6am and manage it until he came home and took over. In 1962 the family immigrated to New Zealand, living first in Thames then Auckland. Rob started at *Mt Albert Grammar School* but quickly moved to *Avondale College* where he began publicly singing along with records at weekly school dances.

The family travelled to Canada where Betty worked as a cosmetician but John found himself overqualified. Rob started a school band called *The Apparition* but after a year the Guests returned to New Zealand. On the way back, on the *Orsova*, Rob put together another band to entertain the passengers.

Back in Auckland he joined a band called *The Shore Thing* which made it to the semi-finals of the 1969 *Battle of the Bands* contest. They changed their name to *The Apparition* and when Rob joined the *Talent Selection Committee* at *Pye Records*, he arranged for them to make a record, *It Must Be Love*, which made it to number 2 on the Auckland hit parade. They competed again in the 1970 *Battle of the Bands* and came second to the Dunedin band *The In Betweens*. He joined them as vocalist and recorded Cliff Richard's *Summer Holiday*. Part of their prize was an overseas booking and manager Benny Levin arranged work for them in Sydney but after playing long hours for little money the band broke up and Rob returned to New Zealand to be a resident singer on the television series *Happen Inn*. It was here that Guest met his first wife, dancer Lynette Perry.



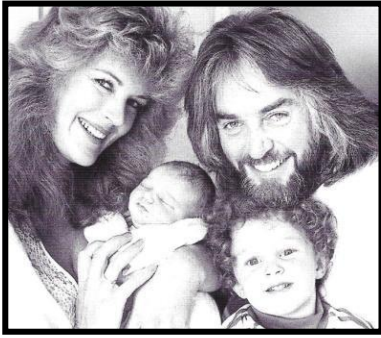
Lew Pryme, who managed Guest for the next 19 years, found him other television work and signed Rob with *Polydor* records in 1972. Lew's *Fuller's Entertainment Bureau* also stabled Derek Metzger, Tina Cross and Mark Williams.



Guest won his first leading role at age 22 as Jesus Christ in the musical *Man of Sorrows* which also starred Max Cryer as Pontius Pilate and had Gary Daverne as Musical Director. Wow! 3 future *Bennys* in one production! This led to other professional work in many New Zealand operatic society productions of *Half a Sixpence*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Grease* and *Barnum*.

In 1976 he starred in *Pippin* at the *Mercury Theatre* in Auckland, won the *VAC Shure Golden Microphone Award* and released *Hangin' On*, which came second as New Zealand's selection in the *Pacific Song Contest*. Guest won the *1978 Korean Song Festival Best Male Vocalist* trophy, recorded a special for the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* and was voted the *1979 NEOA Entertainer of the Year*.

A \$2000 grant from the *NZ Arts Council* enabled Lew and Rob to visit the *West End*, *Broadway* and *Los Vegas* for six weeks to study musicals. He also toured from Honolulu to Vancouver with Howard Morrison, Tina Cross, Derek Metzger and Kim Hart as part of a government tourism promotion called *Come On To New Zealand*. While in the States he auditioned for a place in a long running production called *Casino de Paris* and spent the next 4 years performing and hosting shows throughout America.



Returning to New Zealand Rob was asked to perform at the opening of the *Michael Fowler Centre* in Wellington. In 1985 Guest won the *FIDOF Award* for his performance at the *World Song Festival* with musical director Carl Doy, our 1992 Benny winner.

Rob opened a photographic studio in Auckland while continuing to perform throughout the country. In 1988 he was named *NEOA Male Theatrical Performer of the Year*.

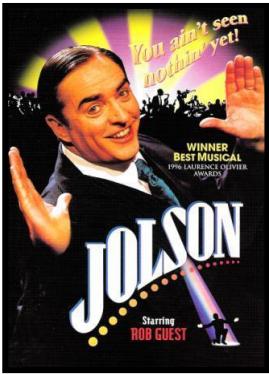
It was while working on *Barnum* in Dunedin in 1987 that he met his second wife, singer Judy Barnes. They married in 1994 and had two children, Christopher and Amy. Judy and Rob separated in 2001. He received the *VAC Benny Award* in 1993 and was granted an *OBE* in 1994 for his services to the New Zealand entertainment industry.

Guest was cast as Jean Valjean in the Australian production of *Les Misérables* and spent three-and-a-half years touring Australia and New Zealand following that up with 7 years in the title role of *The Phantom of the Opera*. He was the world's longest serving Phantom, having played the role a record 2,289 times and later reprised the role of Valjean in 1998–99.



Rob hosted a game show in 1994 called *Man O Man*, the format being a male beauty pageant with an all-female audience voting for the winner via a series of elimination rounds.

He finally received his *OBE* medal at a special function at *Government House* in 1997 while the *Phantom* was being played in Auckland. In 1998 Rob was invited to celebrate the reopening of the *Auckland CBD* after the major power failure there. Instead of a concert he was surprised to find himself in his own program of *This Is Your Life* hosted by Paul Homes.



Following his work in *Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables*, Guest performed in a number of high-profile roles in *Jolson*, *The Sound of Music*, *Footloose*, and *The Music Man*. He released 4 Gold albums; *Dedication* (1979), *Standing Ovation* (1991 Carl Doy: piano, musical director & producer), *Unmasked* (1997) and *The Magic of Christmas*. His autobiography *Star Guest* was published in 2002.

Rob was starring as the *Wizard of Oz* in the Melbourne stage production of *Wicked* when he suffered a stroke and died on 2nd October 2008. A compilation, *Rob Guest 1950-2008*, was released soon after.

**VAC:** 1976 *Shure Golden Microphone Award*, 1985 *Scroll of Honour*, 1991 *Plaque*, 1993 *Benny*, 1994 *VAC Performer of the Year*, 1996 *Life Membership*, 1997 *Top Male Vocalist*.

**NEOA:** 1978 *Entertainer of the Year*, 1988 *Best Theatrical Performance*, 1992 *Best Theatrical Performance*, 1997 *Best Individual Performance*.