

MAURICE CHENOWETH

(1881-1968) A Gold Medal student at Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium, Maurice Chenoweth later toured Australasia for five years with the Westminster Glee Club, followed by a lengthy engagement with West's Pictures circuit in South Australia. He performed with the Leidertafel and Royal Philharmonic Societies, before taking up engagements in vaudeville with James Brennan, Ted Holland, and J.C. Bain. Chenoweth started with Harry Clay in 1914, and later worked with Bert Howard before an engagement on the Fuller circuit around 1916. He later returned to Clay's where he eventually worked as a theatre/circuit manager and revue producer. Upon Harry Clay's death Chenoweth became General Manager of the Bridge Theatre Co, holding that position until 1928, at which time he returned to the Fullers as one of their House Managers. He continued working in the industry until his retirement.

One of Australia's foremost tenors during the first decades of the twentieth century, Maurice Clayton Chenoweth had a sound early musical training which saw him gain concert platform experience. Born on 26 December 1881 at Aldinga, South Australia, to Edwin George Chenoweth, a saddler from Cornwall (UK), and Esther, an organist, he began an apprenticeship as a plumber before being accepted to study at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide, where he graduated as a Gold medal student. Chenoweth's musical training was largely under Myles Seharer [sic] and Frederick Bevan.^o Chenoweth, who was also an accomplished pianist, won several scholarships as well as scoring the highest-ever points in his final examination (145 out of 150) to that date - 1902. He is known to have performed in *The Messiah* at the Exhibition Hall, Brisbane in December 1909 for the Brisbane Musical Union. He also appeared as Arthur Donegal in *Floradora* for the Petersham Choral Society (Jan 1910), and in Elgar's *Caractacus*, presented by the Royal Sydney Philharmonic Society, Town Hall June 1910.

Around 1911 Chenoweth began a career in vaudeville, starting with James Brennan's and his Vaudeville Players. This engagement included seasons in Sydney (National Amphitheatre) and Melbourne (Gaiety Theatre), along with tours that included the Theatre Royal, Brisbane (c Nov. 1911). He appeared with Ted Holland's shows at the Empire Theatre (Bris) in 1913. The following year he undertook engagements with both J. C. Bain and Bert Howard, as well as an initial season with Harry Clay. Following this he worked for a period of time with the Fullers and Jacky Landow. In early 1915 Chenoweth took his own concert party on tour through the NSW Northern Rivers, and around the same time was elected to an executive position with the Australian Variety Artists Federation. Towards the end of 1916 he returned to Clay's. He spent the next ten years with Harry Clay, first as a tenor and occasional straight man to various comics. The longest of these partnerships appears to have been with Ted Tutty (c 1917-18). He later worked opposite Reg Thornton (the Kangaroosta) for a brief time. As a singer Chenoweth also regularly performed in duos and larger ensembles with Harry Clay, Marshall Crosby and Arthur Morley among others.

In 1916 Chenoweth began operating his own training college, offering a scholarship system to successful applicants. He started producing revues for Harry Clay in 1917 and by 1920 was to become one of the company's senior managers, nightly looking after the programmes at Clay's three city venues the Gaiety, Princess and Newtown Bridge Theatres from around 1922-23. After Harry Clay's death in 1925 Chenoweth became Clay's Theatres Ltd's General Manager. He left the company in August 1928, however, to take on the position of House Manager for the Fullers.

Married to Florence Gertrude Quarrell, Maurice Chenoweth had two children Romney and Valmai. He continued on in theatre management well into the 1930s (and was followed in this career by his son Romney, who worked for the Tivoli organisation for many years). He died aged 87 in Sydney in 1968.

Insights from both the *Theatre* and *Australian Variety* suggest that Maurice Chenoweth was extremely popular within the industry. He was certainly highly regarded by Harry Clay, who described him as an extremely versatile and tireless worker. He is known to have written several songs, including the popular "Papa's Troubles" (1917). As a singer he was undoubtedly among the best the country produced during his era, being especially noted for his clear articulation. Indeed he and Marshall Crosby were considered the best singers on the Clay circuit. As the straight man to Ted Tutty, he formed one of the more popular double acts to have performed for Clay's, leading to his reputation for versatility



Courtesy of Valmai Goodlet

^o Frederick Bevan was a Professor of Singing who was educated as a chorister at All-Saints Margaret St, London.

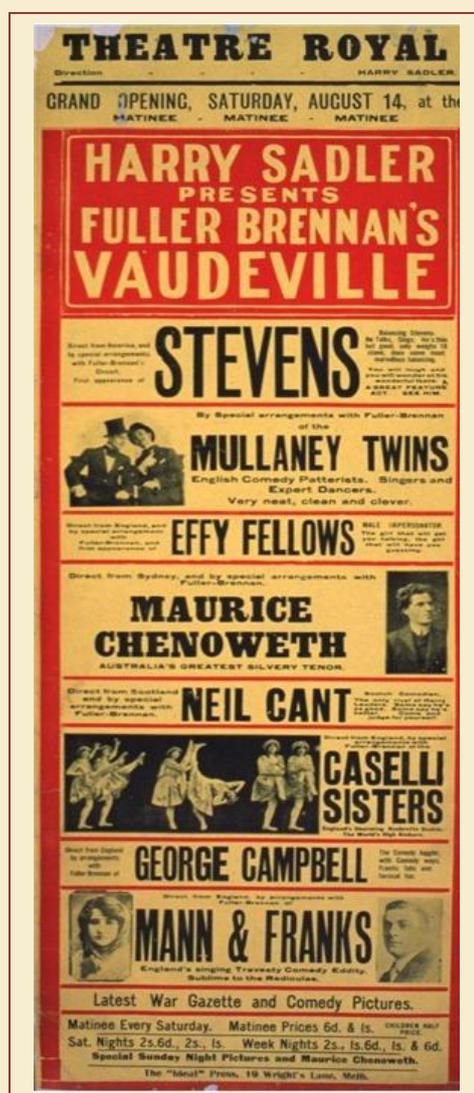
and adaptability. According to the *Theatre* he had, by December 1917 "developed into a particularly fine all-round vaudeville performer, [who] besides being always good for an enthusiastic recall for his well-delivered tenor songs [was also] at home on the stage in a multitude of other directions" (Dec. 1917, 47). Chenoweth was also known to have consistently broken the company's box office records at each of the theatres he was responsible for.

SEE ALSO

- [Ted Tutty](#)

ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS

- Maurice Chenoweth caused quite an outburst in singing "The Death of Nelson" (AV: 19 Aug. 1914, 10).
- Maurice Chenoweth and Harry Clay were at their best in singing "Jack Crawford" and "Annie Laurie" and they went for their good work the best on the bill (AV: 26 Aug. 1914, 6).
- Maurice Chenoweth, who was down the south coast last week in conjunction with Ella Caspers concert company, created quite a sensation with his singing. The fair-haired one was in fine form, and the audience demanded song after song from him, till in the end he had to come forward and make a speech (AV: 13 June 1917, 12).
- Maurice Chenoweth figured as a composer at Harry Clay's Bridge Theatre last week. The opening number of the revue, "Papa's Troubles," was written by him, and if this is a sample of his work, more would like to be seen of it (AV: 27 June 1917, 3).
- The programme at the Newtown Bridge Theatre for the week November 10-16 included an item "Chenoweth and Tutty - White and Black." In this Mr Chenoweth appeared in evening clothes, and Mr Tutty as a black-faced comedian. Such was Mr Chenoweth's work as to merit his being described as the Fred Niblo of vaudeville. Pattering with Mr Tutty he displayed an ease and confidence - to say nothing of the point he gave to every line he uttered - that imparted to the turn a distinction rarely seen in vaudeville (TT: Dec. 1917, 47).



- Maurice Chenoweth is now well into a successful stride, and doing excellent work, producing revues for Harry Clay; in fact the latter claims the good business that is being done by the company to M.C.'s good work. During the past four months more successful revues have been staged at the Bridge Theatre than have ever been witnessed before. Maurice seems to have just what the audience's like. In the new year he has some real winners up his sleeve (AV: 14 Dec. 1917, n. pag.).
- Maurice Chenoweth and Ted Tutty are the hit of the bill. The screams of laughter they get set aside any doubt on that point (TT: Feb. 1918, 41).
- Chenoweth and Tutty held the stage for quite a while with their bright and bidding fair to outdo Caldwell and Crawford routine of patter, and their duets - eh; Caldwell (AV: 1 Mar 1918, n. pag.).
- Maurice Chenoweth has now been producing for Harry Clay for 104 weeks, this in itself is a splendid advertisement for Maurie's ability; he is still Johnny Walker (AV: 14 June 1918, n. pag.).
- Maurice Chenoweth, whose versatility is remarkable, has certainly acquired a wonderful knowledge of the vaudeville game since his association with Harry Clay (AV: 11 Oct. 1918, 15).
- [Maurice Chenoweth] delights the house, first with "The Rivers of Love," and then "My Dear Irish Mother." Temperament and personality are largely contributing elements in Mr Chenoweth's pronounced success as a singer. He has to be accorded the further credit of being an ideal spruiker-in-general (TT: Nov. 1919, 28).

Theatre Royal, Hobart 1914
Source: State Library of Tasmania

- A tenner offered by the [Clay's] management to anybody breaking the record held by Maurice Chenoweth's bunch at this house [Gaiety] (E: 13 Apr. 1921, 15).
- Maurice Chenoweth's company has been drawing capacity since last Saturday (E: 1 June 1921, 15) .

FURTHER REFERENCE

AV: 14 Dec. 1917, n. pag.

Djubal, Clay. "[Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company, 1865 - 1930.](#)" MA Thesis, U of Queensland, 1998.

--- "[What Oh Tonight: The Methodology Factor and Pre-1930s Australian Variety Theatre.](#)" Ph D Diss. U of Queensland, 2005.

X-Ray. "Month in Vaudeville, The." TT: Dec. 1917, 47.

--- "Month in Vaudeville, The." TT: Nov. 1919, 28.

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