OSWALD ANDERSON

(1885-1944) Although best remembered today as one of Australia's radio broadcasting pioneers, Oswald Anderson's career prior to 1925 saw him regarded as one of the country's leading composers of popular and concert songs. He was also involved in repertory theatre in Sydney as a manager, producer and director, co-founded a music college, set up his own publishing company, collaborated with author Conway Drew on the stage adaptation of his hit novel Jinker the Grafter's Mate (1916), and had a long association with the music publisher and instrument importer W. H. Paling. Anderson's radio career began officially in 1925 (although he took part in at least one experimental transmission in 1923). His achievements during the next 19 years included the formation of the Federal Radio Network (later renamed the Commonwealth Broadcasting Network) and overseeing a number of significant Australian radio firsts - initially with Sydney station 2FC and later with 2BL, 2UW and 2UE.

Considered one of the best-known figures in early Australian radio during the 1920s, Oswald Anderson was widely referred to as "A.O." (or Andy to his friends), and often described as "dapper." While few Australian's within the broader public would recognise his name today, he is nevertheless regarded by radio historians as one of the first active leaders of Australian broadcasting, a position his contemporaries also believed he held. While his contribution to the industry is invariably acknowledged in contemporary insights into our early radio history, few even mention his background prior to entering the field in 1925, and indeed his reputation as being among our most successful composers of popular and concert songs during the 1910s and 1920s is rarely mentioned.

1885-1913

Andrew Oswald Anderson was born in Summer Hill, Sydney, the youngest of five children. His parents were London-born Duncan Anderson (1843-1894) and Isabella Brown Anderson (nee Wilson, 1843-1929). After completing his education he entered the insurance industry, working primarily in clerical positions up until at least the late-1910s. Although details regarding his musical education are currently unknown, he appears to have become an accomplished pianist and developed a passion for composition.

Anderson came to prominence as a songwriter in 1912 following the publication of his original composition "Your Dear Eyes" (words by Wilson Bingham). According to Anderson the song paid him £250, enough to get married and sail to England. The song, which had been especially written for emerging concert singer Ludwig Schaeffer, is first known to have been performed by Schaeffer in Grafton on 17 May 1912. The Clarence and Richmond Examiner's music critic saw it as "a somewhat uncommon composition, departing considerably from the beaten track of love songs." The critic goes on to note: "[Mr Schaeffer] furnished special scope for... perhaps better suited to his baritone voice than anything previously attempted."

By November 1912 "Your Dear Eyes' had sold in excess of 3,000 copies, according to its publisher, W. H. Paling. That same month Anderson's songs performed by a select group of local artists and musicians at a recital held in St James Hall, Sydney. The Evening News notes that the concert, comprising all original compositions by a local composer, was "quite unique in our music history."

On 22 March 1913 Anderson married the director of Sydney's Wentworth free kindergarten, Bernice Wessberg. The couple left for an extended overseas trip a few weeks later, travelling to the USA and Britain. While in England he studied at the London School of Music and plugged his compositions around various publishing houses and

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1 "He Bought Cricket to the Hearth," 4. [see "Further Reference" below]
2 "Ludwig Schaeffer Concert." Clarence and Richmond Examiner 18 May (1912), 4.
3 "Crochets and Quavers: Notes of the Week." Sun (Sydney) 10 November (1912), 16.
4 "Mr Oswald Anderson's Recital." Evening News (Sydney) 16 Nov. (1912), 9.
agents. His Australian connections saw singers of the calibre of Ada Crossley, Eileen Boyd, Madame Stralia, Robert Radford, and Peter Dawson agree to perform his songs, while Boosey and Co, Chappell Ltd, Charles Heard and Newman Publishing all accepted manuscripts for publication. During his time in Britain Anderson was also appointed player piano demonstrator at the 1913 British Music Exhibition, held at the Olympia Theatre.

Anderson's biggest songwriting success from this period was "Song of Triumph," which became a huge hit after Dawson included it in his repertoire. The famous Australian baritone went on to perform a number of Anderson's other songs over the coming years, including "Away in the West of Ireland," and they subsequently remained firm friends for many years. Anderson on several occasions organised social events for Dawson during his off-tour periods in Australia between 1916 and 1918, and the singer sometimes reciprocated with appearances at fund-raisers. While overseas a number of Anderson's songs were published in Australia, and became popular with concert and variety artists alike.

1914-1919

Anderson and his wife returned to Australia in late-1914 after almost two years away. Throughout the course of the war years he organised numerous musical concerts and patriotic and fund-raising events, while also continuing to write and publish new music. He started his association with Sydney's Repertory Theatre in 1915 as business manager, later taking over the position of Director. Both roles saw him vested with the responsibility for overseeing theatrical productions and social events. In early 1916 he furthered his interest in music by opening Anderson's Music House in Pitt Street. The business, established legally as Anderson's Ltd, operated as a publisher, teaching academy and importer of musical instruments among other things. His wife Bernice and father-in-law Bernard James Wessberg were among the company directors.

Anderson's connections with both the music and theatrical world of Sydney (he was a member of the Actor's Association) led to him opening the Sydney Academy of Music in early 1917. As Business Manager and Principal he was supported by Professor Roland Woodhouse (music) and Walter Bentley (elocution), with more than a dozen teachers on staff. The Academy offered tuition in singing and various instruments, along with special classes in opera, composition, stage and picture acting, dance, and orchestral and chamber music. Around the same time he was asked by Bert Bailey to assist author Con Drew in adapting his 1916 racing-industry novel, Jinker, the Grafter's Mate into a stage play. Presented during Sydney's 1917 Easter Racing carnival, the play was directed by Bentley and produced by Anderson. It went on to have a two week run at the Repertory Theatre, followed a few weeks later by another 14 night season at the Theatre Royal. Among the cast members were Fred Macdonald, Harry McDonna, Gilbert Emery, and Tal Ordell.

From 1918 Anderson became increasingly active as a director and producer at the Repertory Theatre, overseeing such productions as Dorothy (opera) and The Girl from the U.S.A. (musical comedy). He maintained his interest in musical events and charities however, going on to produce concerts and recitals at the Sydney Town Hall and various theatres around the city. Among the fundraisers he oversaw were those assisting orphanages and the Comfort Fund. In June 1918 he also arranged a series of concerts for Sergeant Peter Dawson, recently released from war service.

The momentum that Anderson had been building over the latter years of the 1910s came to a halt in early 1919 when he was forced to apply for bankruptcy. In a statement given during his examination before creditors on 28 May, Anderson stated that his financial difficulties were a result of the big strike of 1917 and the losses he incurred during the course of the Theatre Royal production of Jinker the Grafter's Mate. He recalled that while the two week season at the Repertory Theatre had paid its way, the Theatre Royal venture had been a disaster. Describing himself as a salesman and domiciled on the Esplanade at Manly, Anderson further stated that he had been forced to sell his interest in Anderson's Ltd and had also resigned from his teaching academy. The Sun newspaper records part of Anderson's evidence during the proceedings:
In 1917 he produced a play for a man named Drew, a journalist. It was called Jinker - an Australian comedy. Witness was to finance the production and get a half-share. It was first produced at the Repertory Theatre, and was an absolute failure. Then it was transferred to the Theatre Royal for two weeks. The first week it paid its way, but the second week it was a failure. It was then taken to the country. The author and witness dramatised the story. His partner was not able to find his share, and he had to find the lot, which necessitated his borrowing £450...he never recovered from the loss, and that was mainly the cause of his bankruptcy. 

1920-1924

In April 1920 Anderson was discharged from bankruptcy, albeit with a 12 month suspension. The following month the Voice of the North (Newcastle) announced the songs that had been chosen for a three day competition to be held during city's Discovery of Port Hunter celebrations. Anderson's newly published number "You Lovely Thing" was selected for the Mezzo Soprano section. Another of his songs, "Dear Heart of Mine," received much publicity around the country through "New Music" columns published in metropolitan and regional newspapers. One Brisbane critic wrote of the song: "A more ambitious ballad [it] offers plenty of scope for dramatic treatment."

Anderson's entrepreneurial activities appear to have remained dormant during the early 1920s, no doubt a response to his bankruptcy. He continued writing and publishing music, and maintained his position with Palings as head of its player pianos department. Reports from newspapers during this period indicate that his duties sometimes involving travel to regional centres in order to provide demonstrations. His songs also continued to be performed at various recitals and concerts, including an "All Australian Concert" given at paling's own concert hall in 1921. At that concert his works were performed along with selections by notable composers like Edith Harrhy, Marsh Little, May Summerbelle, Percy Grainger and Peter Dawson. At some concerts Anderson accompanied the singers on piano.

Anderson had his first contact with radio broadcasting through Palings in mid-1923 when the company organised a series of musical performances for Amalgamated Wireless of Australasia Ltd. Presented under Anderson's direction, the first of these experimental transmissions were broadcast from the company's concert hall on 30 May and continued on an irregular basis until 1 August. Anderson remained with Palings, while also maintaining a close association with the Sydney concert and recital scene, until redirecting his career in new direction in early 1925.

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6 "New Music." Daily Mail (Brisbane) 5 June (1920), 10.
7 "All Australian Concert." Sydney Morning Herald 21 Nov. (1921), 5.
8 "Wireless Music from Palings." Sydney Morning Herald 2 July (1923), 5. For further details relating to the Paling's Musical Society broadcast see Radio and Variety page (1923).
In early February 1925 a number of newspapers announced that Anderson had accepted an appointment with Farmer and Co Ltd as its manager of broadcasting.\(^9\) He demonstrated right from the start much business enterprise and creative ingenuity. One of his first successes was to organise a live broadcast from the Sydney Tivoli, with the stage having been designed as a replica of the 2FC studio. Anderson also continued to dabble in creative aspects of production, especially within the area of music. In November 1925, for example, he wrote the musical score accompanying the Sydney Repertory Society's dramatic reading of the John Drinkwater play, Mary Stuart.\(^10\) His position as manager also allowed him the opportunity to plug Australian compositions, including his own, for broadcast by various singers.\(^11\)

In 1928 Anderson was appointed manager of both 2FC and 2BL for the New South Wales Broadcasting Company. One of his first duties in this position was to arrange programming so that one of other of the A class stations was on the air continuously from 7am until midnight for six days a week.\(^12\)

In April 1930 Anderson resigned from the newly formed Australian Broadcasting Company, which operated 2FC and 2BL, in order to manage Paling and Co's Pitt Street branch, which also operated the B class radio station 2UW. In a public statement of regret in losing Anderson, the head of the ABC, Stuart F. Doyle, said of his former manager:

> He has done so much for broadcasting in New South Wales. For many years he has advanced the interests of broadcasting, and has seen it grow from a very small beginning until today it has reached considerable proportions in this State.\(^13\)

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Anderson's decision to leave the ABC was, to a certain extent, his displeasure with the broadcaster's refusal to implement a ball by ball call of that year's test cricket series (being played in England). His move to 2UW also saw him spearhead the formation of the Federal Radio Network, later renamed the Commonwealth Broadcasting Network. As Harry Criticos notes:

Consisting of 2UW, 3DB, 4BC, 5AD, 6ML and some country stations, it was designed to split copyright and landline charges, and increase the stations' appeal to advertisers hitherto deterred by the limited transmitter power of commercial stations. That year, 2UW and 3DB joined forces to provide a 'ball-by-ball' coverage of the Ashes Test matches in England. Two years later, Anderson presided over the coverage of the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 20 stations.  

Anderson's innovative system of providing cricket commentary helped boost audience numbers, and provided the impetus for Charles Moses to take the idea of broadcasting cricket further through the use of special effects and atmospheric sounds.

Anderson left Australia in 1936, spending the next three years living and working in the USA and Great Britain. During this time he wrote about his impressions of overseas broadcasting and of the latest developments in television for Wireless Weekly. And other magazines like Australian Women's Weekly. While in England he was also involved in the formation of Broadcast Enterprises Ltd of London, a company which developed British broadcast programmes for Australia and New Zealand.

On his return to Australia Anderson became manager of Sydney station 2UE, remaining there until he joined the Colgate Palmolive Radio Unit in 1941 as its manager. He died in a Sydney private hospital on 1 August 1944 after a lengthy illness. His sons, Peter and Bruce, had by this time also become well-known in the radio industry.

In addition to pioneering the broadcasting of cricket, Oswald Anderson oversaw a number of other Australian radio debuts - the first election broadcast (1925), the first programme to be re-broadcast by the BBC (in which a kookaburra laughed heartily all through Strella Wilson's aria from La Boheme), the first underwater conversation between two divers, the first horse-racing description (1925), the first radio serial, and first broadcast from a plane. He also broadcast the joining together of the two halves of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and hired a trawler to meet the ship carrying the Duke and Duchess of York (2FC therefore became the first media organisation to describe the Duchess's clothes to the Australian public).

**HISTORICAL NOTES & CORRECTIONS**

1. In 1919 Anderson was used extensively in celebrity endorsement advertising in 1919 for an asthma cure claimed by Hall of Health proprietor Bernard James Wessberg (also his father-in-law). 


15 "Mr O. Anderson 2UE Manager." *Sun* (Sydney) 20 Apr. (1939), 3.  


17 Wessberg made newspaper headlines in 1927 following his death. To read more, see "Did Bernard Wessberg Die Testing a Theory?" *Mirror* (Perth) 26 Feb. (1927), 12.
2. Singers associated with the variety industry, and who have been established as having performed one or more of Anderson's songs are: Peter Dawson and Rene Maxwell.

3. Anderson's Scottish grandfather, Andrew Anderson, was reportedly a composer of note. One of his works, Church Music," was still extant according to Sydney's Truth newspaper in 1928.  

4. In 1939 Bernice Anderson, identified as Bernice Railton Florence Marie Anderson (formerly Wessberg) applied for a decree nisi in the New South Wales Divorce Court on the grounds of desertion.

**ADDITIONAL QUOTATIONS**

- **2002**: "Network. Oswald Anderson's innovative system of providing a running commentary of the cricket from England on 2UW and its associated stations was taken further by Charles Moses, sporting editor of the ABC. He extended these synthetic broadcasts with additional atmosphere, using a rubber topped pencil hitting a piece of wood to more realistically simulate the balls hitting the willow."  

- **2010**: "Another Australian broadcasting executive - Oswald Anderson, who had formed the Commonwealth Broadcasting Network—lived and worked overseas from 1936. He marvelled at Radio City and the facilities at NBC, and wrote about his impressions of overseas broadcasting for Wireless Weekly. He summarised his views on his return to Sydney in 1939: 'British programmes are the most elevating, American the most exhilarating, and French the most subtle'."
"Awakening" (n. yr.) Lyrics Oswald Anderson.
"Away in the West of Ireland" (1914) Lyrics Oswald Anderson.
"Dear Heart of Mine" (1920) Lyrics by Wilson Bingham.
"God's Gift" (1912) Lyrics by Edward Teschemacher.
"Josie" (1923) Lyrics and music by Madeline Rossiter and Oswald Anderson.
"Kitchener's Horse" (1915) Lyrics by Edward Teschemacher.
"Life's Greatest Gift" (ca. 191-) Lyrics by Oswald Anderson.
"Love's Surrender" (1913) Lyrics n/e.
"Love's Wish" (1912) Lyrics adapted by Anderson from Omar Khayyam.
"One Tender Thought" (1912). Lyrics n/e.
"Pleading" (1913) Lyrics by Wilson Bingham.
"Regret" (1912). Lyrics adapted by Anderson from Omar Khayyam.
"Rustic Romance, A" (1913). Lyrics n/e.
"Song of Life, A. " (1912) Lyrics n/e.
"Song of Triumph, A" (1912) Lyrics adapted by Anderson from Longfellow's "Victor and Vanquished."
"Summer Skies" (1919) Lyrics n/e)
"There Was a Man" (1922) Lyrics by Harold Middleton.
"You Lovely Thing" (ca. 1920) Lyrics by Edward Teschemacher.
"Your Dear Eyes" (1912) Lyrics by Wilson Bingham.

FURTHER REFERENCE

--- "This New Wonder – Television." Australian Women's Weekly 1 Apr. (1939), 14.
"Australian Song Writer: His Songs Sung Abroad." World's News (Sydney) 8 Nov. (1924), 11.
Harte, Bernard. When Radio was the Cat's Whiskers. (2002), 99.
"He Bought Cricket to the Hearth." Sun (Sydney) 20 Feb. (1944), 4.
"Mr O. Anderson Radio Pioneer Dies in Sydney." Newcastle Sun (NSW) 1 Aug. (1944), 2.

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