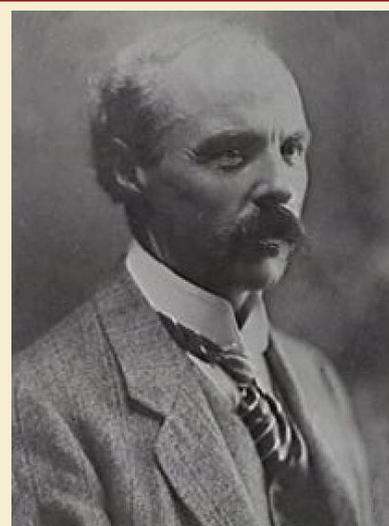


ERNEST TRUMAN

Ernest Truman studied at London's Royal College of Music (London) and after returning to Australia in 1894 became the organist at a number of Sydney churches, while also focusing on composition. Among his works are a dramatic symphony, *The Deities* (Op 30), completed in 1895, and collaborations on the operettas *Club Life* (with A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, 1895) and *The Magic Cloak* (with Bernard Espinasse, 1896). His opera *Mathis* also debuted in 1902. During his 26 years tenure as Sydney City organist (1909-35) Truman organised more than 3,000 concerts and civic events. Among the numerous artists who performed to his accompaniments were: Nellie Melba, Florence Austral, Peter Dawson, Dame Clara Butt, Laurence Tibbett and Richard Crooks.

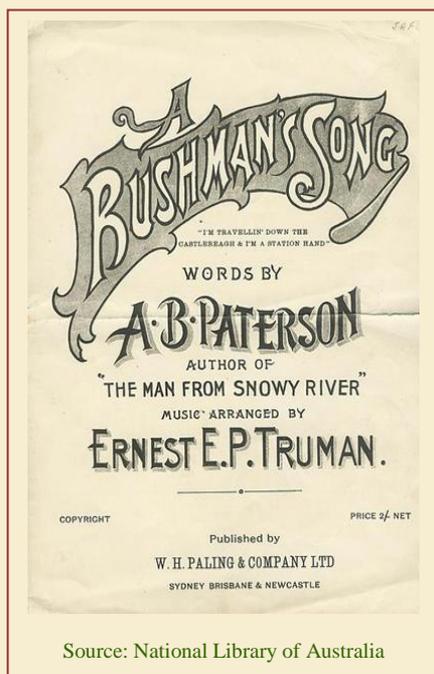
1870-1899

Edwin Philip Truman, a fish, game and poultry dealer, and his wife Elizabeth Robinson Cranford (née Smith) migrated to Australia with their children sometime around 1875. Although they initially settled in Melbourne the Truman's soon afterwards moved to New Zealand. Truman taught his children music, with son Ernest showing particular talent, thus leading to him undertaking formal studies at age 13 with A. J. Bath of Dunedin. Moving to Sydney in 1885, Ernest studied piano with Julius Buddee. One of his earliest established Sydney engagements was on the bill of Herr Francik's Grand Concert, held on 20 February 1888 at the Hunter's Hill Council Chambers (SMH: 11 Feb. 1888, 2). That same year Truman enrolled at the Royal Conservatorium of Music, Leipzig (Germany) where he studied under Salomon Jadassohn and Karl Reinecke (composition), Bruno Zwintscher (piano) and Paul Homeyer (organ). Two of his fellow pupils were Alfred Hill and his brother John, and during his time at Leipzig he had several of his compositions performed by the Ossian Society and Gewandhaus Orchestra. Prior to graduating with a diploma in 1893 he travelled to London and undertook further studies at the Royal College of Music, qualifying as an Associate Organists and R.C.M. licentiate.



Source: City of Sydney Image Library

After returning to Australia he quickly become a popular choice as accompanist for concerts in Sydney, and found also found occasional works as organist at such churches as St Mary's Cathedral, Christ Church St Laurence and St Patrick's, Church Hill. On 30 June 1894 he married a divorcee Nellie Edith Bettye (née Maxey) at the Glebe registrar's office. A more than competent singer she often accompanied him at recitals.



Source: National Library of Australia

Truman's return to Australia also saw marked the beginning of an intensive period of composition. In early 1895 he completed the dramatic symphony, *The Deities* (Op 30), which he dedicated to another locally-based composer/musician, Signor Hazon. Later that same year, while also reportedly working on a new quintet, a quartet and a violin concerto (SMH: 23 Mar. 1895, 4), he undertook a collaboration with A. B. (Banjo) Paterson to create the operetta, *Club Life*. It was produced in December at the Criterion Theatre, Sydney, for two nights. The following year worked with Bernard Espinasee on another operetta, *The Magic Cloak*. Another significant original early work was a Mass performed in St Mary's Cathedral (1899).

1900-1910

Another of Truman's operas, *Mathis* (founded on *The Bells*), was given its premiere at the Criterion Theatre, Sydney, on 26 July 1902. The libretto was by Clarence M. Leumane. In 1904 three of his compositions were performed in each of three recitals given by Ernest Toy (Bechstein Hall, London) during the course of November. According to Toy all three songs were well received, with 'Suite' being accorded the most favourable response (ctd. WA: 24 Dec. 1904, 12). In addition to his concert work and writing, Truman also operated his own school from a studio situated in George Street, near the city centre.

In 1905 Truman distinguished himself by presenting a concert at Sydney's Y.M.C.A. with the repertoire comprising all his own compositions. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reports: "The assured knowledge of Mr Ernest Truman's talent and originality as a composer attracted a fairly large audience to the Y.M.C.A. last night... Much of the music was

really good, all of it demanded the closest attention... [however], the least satisfactory effort was the opening string quartet in C minor, entitled, for not obvious reason, 'Les Saisons Australiennes'... The most applauded number was 'L'Autumne,' at which point the composer was warmly recalled. Other popular pieces included 'Nocturne Australienne' in C sharp minor ; an original musical setting to verses by British poet, Shelley ; and the song 'I Dare to Love Thee,' (performed by Mrs Ernest Truman). Among those who contributed to the evening were well-known violinist G. Rivers Allpress, vocalist Henry Weir (also president of the Amalgamated Professional Musicians' Association) and Miss Eva Truman" (7 June 1905, 10).

Appointed city organist in 1909, a position he held for twenty-six years, Truman's responsibilities also required him to organise concert recitals and other musical programmes at the Sydney Town Hall. In his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, G. D. Rushworth records that Truman presided over 3000 concerts during that period, with most designed to appeal more than to educate, "although he included more genuine organ music than had his predecessors" (266-67). He had also by then established his reputation among Sydney's theatrical and concert artists, appearing frequently at music festivals, benefits and charity events, and as a member of the Sydney College of Music Council (SMH: 12 Feb. 1910, 2).

1911-1920

Truman began displaying his fondness for opera around the beginning of the 1910s, presenting a number of "Grand Operatic Organ Recitals" at the Sydney Town Hall. Among the more popular selections from 1913 were Gounod's *Faust*, Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, Bizet's *Carmen*, Puccini's *La Boheme* and Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*. Among the selections presented as part of the Antarctic Disaster Fund concert (16 Feb. 1913) he included one of his own compositions, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," a fantasia based on the hymn "St Agnes." His "cantata grotesque" (Truman's description) entitled *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* premiered in Adelaide on 25 September 1913 with the Adelaide Philharmonic Orchestra. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reports that the Adelaide critics and audience were united in their praise for the work (4 Oct. 1913, 4). Over the remainder of the decade he continued to perform with other leading musical organisations, including the Royal Sydney Liedertafel and the Austral String Quartet (under the direction of Cyril Monk).

1921-1948

Highlights of Truman's career during the 1920s included performances of his transcriptions of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* and the first Australian performances of Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and *Il Tabarra* (1925). In December 1921 Brisbane's Austral Choir presented Truman's 'Magnificat.' The composer initially attended the performance as guest of the choir, but was persuaded at the last moment to perform two of his own compositions on the city's grand organ (BC: 3 Dec. 1921, 13). On 8 November 1923 Truman married for the second time, his first wife having died in 1917. The second Mrs Truman was 27-year-old musician, (Marie) Millicent Anglés. The following year he presented a special performance of his *Mass in D Minor*. Written in 1898 it had not been heard in public for some nine years. During the same concert his wife sang Truman's 'Ava Maria,' to his accompaniment on the organ.

During the early 1930s Truman devised a series of concerts devoted to transcriptions of music from Gilbert's and Sullivan's operas. His retirement in 1935 not only marked the end of an era of free weekly organ concerts in Sydney, but he was rarely heard performing again. Truman died in St Vincent's Hospital in 1948, survived by his wife. His only child, a son from his first marriage, predeceased him. During his lifetime Truman accompanied many distinguished artists including Melba, Florence Austral, Peter Dawson, Dame Clara Butt, Laurence Tibbett and Richard Crooks. He also published a book of songs. Despite being largely well-received during his lifetime, Truman's works are now mostly forgotten. His legacy, however, might well be the career he carved out in Australia over more than four decades, providing a continuity of professional and quality concerts that provided opportunities for musicians and pleasure for the public which favoured the various art music genres.



Source: City of Sydney Image Library

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* is based on Robert Browning's poem.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

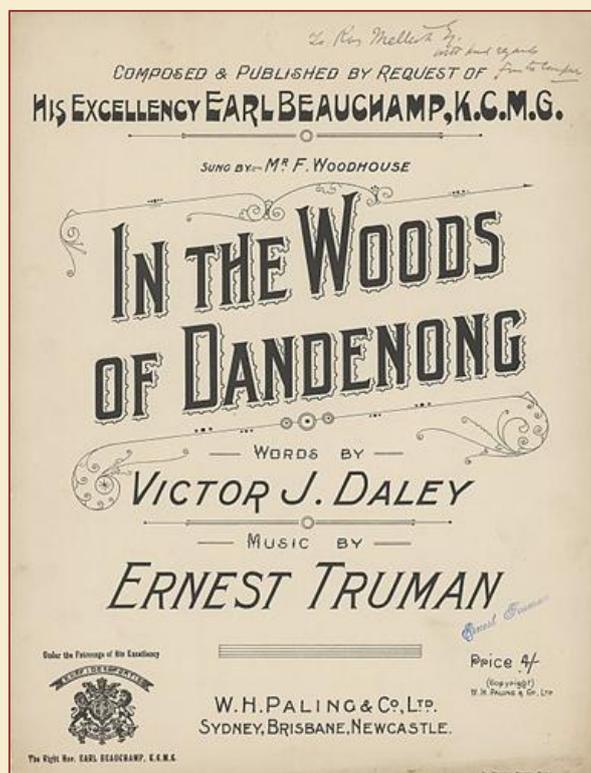
- 1895:** **Club Life** [operetta] (with A.B. Paterson)
1896: **The Magic Cloak** [operetta] (with Bernard Espinasse)
1902: **Mathis** [opera] (with Clarence M. Leumane)

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--- *Music in Australia* (1952);
Rushworth, G. D. "[Ernest Edwin Philip Truman \(1869-1948\)](#)" ABD: 12 (1990), 66-267.
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State Library of New South Wales. Truman Organ Concert Programmes, 1910-25.

See also:

- AA:** 26 Sept. (1913), n. pag.
AAA: 29 May (1901), n. pag.
BC: 3 Dec. (1921), 13.
SMH: 7 Mar. (1891), n. pag. • 29 Aug. (1891), n. pag. • 18 Nov. (1892), n. pag. • 23 Mar. (1895), 4 • 7 June (1905), 10 • 14 Apr. (1913), 4 • 4 Oct. (1913), 4 • 15 Sept. (1924), 6 • 30 Apr. (1932), n. pag. • 23 Mar. (1935), n. pag. • 6 Apr. (1935), n. pag. • 8 Jan. (1942), n. pag. • 9 Oct. (1948), n. pag.
SYM: 14 July (1894), n. pag. • 24 Nov. (1900), n. pag.
T&C: 4 Aug. (1909), n. pag.
WA: 24 Dec. (1904), 12.



Source: National Library of Australia

Last updated: 16/12/2011

Expanded and updated from the 2006 AustLit entry

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