

Visits by Famous People to Bendigo

There is a story in 'Bendigo, the German Chapter', edited by the late Frank Cusack, about a visit to Bendigo of the world renowned composer, Richard Strauss. This event does not get a mention in the 'Annals of Bendigo', but the snippet in the book tells of a welcome he received on his visit to Bendigo, early in the twentieth century, which was described as 'unique'. Like most visitors to the Golden City, the great man expressed a wish to go down a gold-mine. It so happened that James Northcott was not only the conductor of a famous local brass band, but the mine manager of a famous local gold-mine. Northcott arranged the visit and the unique welcome. His bandsmen were dressed in their mining garb and concealed behind the engine-room and just as the composer arrived, they stepped forward and welcomed him musically with a spirited rendition of one of his own compositions, one known to many living followers of music from films, 'Thus Spake Zarathustra'. This piece of music was used brilliantly in the iconic film '2001 Space Odyssey'. Strauss was so enthralled by this welcome that he invited the bandsmen to perform at his concert that evening. This they did – this time in proper bandsmen's uniforms. It is believed Strauss stayed at the 'Shamrock Hotel' while in Bendigo.

There is certainly a note on the world-renowned pianist Paderewski for his visit in 1904, to, as the report indicates, 'take advantage of this city's salubrious winter climate for a couple of days. He was suffering from nervous prostration and had been ordered a complete rest.'

There are many instances of visits by internationally known artists to Bendigo and these are recorded in the 'Annals'. These include those by Nellie, (later Dame Nellie) Melba and Bendigo's own Amy Castles. Both these famous singers performed in Bendigo during 1902. Melba made her first appearance in Bendigo that year since becoming famous. She sang in the William Anderson Company's 'Greed of Gold'. Apart from her glorious voice, Melba is best remembered in the city for stopping the chimes on the Post Office clock, which rang out every fifteen minutes and disturbed her sleep whilst she stayed at the 'Shamrock Hotel'. Her complaints were, no doubt, one of many from the hotel guests. Amy Castles was received with great enthusiasm and her performance was supported by Miss Una Bourne, Miss Maud Dalrymple, Miss Nora McKay, Mr R. Needham, Signor Carlo Dani and Herr Benno Sherek.

As the custodian of much of Bendigo's rich history, the Bendigo Historical Society is fortunate to hold several artefacts from the Austral Competitions in its vast and valuable collection. The 'Annals' note visits by Edmund Barton, Australia's first Prime Minister, in 1903, as well as a future Prime Minister in Alfred Deakin to present prizes in the Austral Competitions.

Jim Evans