

OBITUARY: DON BATTYE (1938-2016)



Australian writer **Don Battye** died at his home in the Philippines, 28th February 2016. During a long career he wore many hats but is best remembered for his television work with **Crawford Productions** and **Grundy Television** on the iconic series ***Homicide***, ***Sons and Daughters***, and ***Neighbours***. He was also a prolific writer of Australian musicals having written sixteen of them over a 36 year period. His most recorded song, penned in collaboration with Peter Pinne, is the theme from ***Sons and Daughters***. He was 77.

Donald Gordon Battye was born in Richmond, Melbourne on 29th September 1938 and at an early age was taught classical piano by his mother Olive, a piano teacher. He later continued his studies with 3UZ accompanist Shirley Radford who taught him to play in a popular style. He began lessons at Crawford School of Broadcasting in the early fifties where his teachers included Barbara Brandon and Moira Carleton. His first acting radio role was for an OK Peanut Bar commercial for which he received an OK Peanut Bar as payment. He later was a regular performer on Jean Lawson's children's radio series ***The Fakamagangees*** with Gwenda Beard [Marsh], and appeared in the radio series, ***Honor Bright*** and ***Respectfully Yours***.

At Melbourne High School Don was active in school plays and in 1954 played Brutus in ***Julius Caesar*** in their Junior Drama Festival. The same year saw him appear as Howie Newsome in University High School Dramatic Society's ***Our Town*** at Brunswick Town Hall. Around this time Don began appearing in plays at Melbourne's small repertory theatres: ***The Guinea Pig (1955)***, ***The Secret Tent (1956)***, ***Escapade (1957)***, ***Under Milk Wood (1957)***, ***Romeo and Juliet (1957)***, and the revues, ***Little by Little (1957)***,

and *A Little More* (1959), all for the Little Theatre, *Heaven and Charing Cross* (1957) for Kew Repertory Players, and *Frenzy* (1960) with Frank Thring, and *Member of the Wedding* (1960) with Bunney Brooke and Mary Hardy, at the National Theatre, Eastern Hill. His last appearance on stage was as Private Whitaker in Willis Hall's *The Long and the Short and the Tall* (1960) for the Little Theatre, whilst his first television acting appearance was in GTV 9's live one-hour drama *The Big Day* (1959) playing Edward Howell's son. He is remembered fondly for his impersonation of Liberace in the Little Theatre revue, *Little by Little* (1957).

Battye met composer and lyricist Peter Pinne in 1960 and formed a professional relationship writing sixteen musicals which lasted until their final musical *Prisoner Cell Block H – The Musical* opened in London's West End in 1996. Their other musicals included; *All Saints' Day* (1960), *Don't Tell Helena* (1962), *A Bunch of Ratbags* (1966), *It Happened in Tanjablanca* (1968) (which in 1973 became *Red, White & Boogie*), *Caroline* (1971), two folk-operas, *The Computer* (1972) and *Love Travelling Salesman* (1972), *Sweet Fanny Adams* (1974), and seven children's musicals: *Rumpelstiltskin* (1974), *The Shoemaker and the Elves* (1975), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1976), *Billabong Bill* (1976), *The Little Tin Soldier* (1977), *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1978) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1980). Their partnership also produced material for intimate revue in the 1960s and 1970s, including work for the *Mavis Bramston Show*, plus two original songs "In Your Arms" and "You're my Friend" for *Neighbours* in the eighties, and the much-recorded theme from *Sons and Daughters* (1982).

Battye first started script writing for television in Melbourne on the ABC's *Bellbird* (1968), before moving to **Crawford Productions** where he wrote for the police drama *Homicide* (1971). He went on to write, script edit, and produce, *Division 4* (1971), *Matlock Police* (1972), and *Bluey* (1976). In 1974 he was at the helm of **Crawford's** first nightly strip serial *The Box*, and when it was axed he moved over to produce *The Sullivans*. He scripted seven episodes of *Homicide: Triple Play* (1969), *An Unwelcome Guest* (1969), *Solitary Duet* (1970), *Sound of Money* (1970), *Death Seat* (1970), *A Place to Live* (1970), *Suffer Little Children* (1970), seven episodes of *Matlock Police: Cross Purposes* (1971), *No Way Out* (1971), *Give a Man a Gun* (1971), *What the Eye Doesn't See* (1972), *Pressure Point* (1972), *It Could Have Been Anyone* (1973), *A Home, A Wife, A Family* (1973), and one of *Division 4: As the Crow Flies* (1971).

In 1977 Battye moved to Sydney to take over production of *Chopper Squad* (1977) for **Grundy Television**. He remained at **Grundy** until 1995 and in that period executive produced, *Bellamy* (1981), *The Restless Years* (1977), *Sons and Daughters* (1982), *Possession* (1985), *Richmond Hill* (1988), and *Neighbours* (1988). He scripted over 100 episodes of *The Restless Years*, over 150 for *Sons and Daughters*, and wrote for *Neighbours* from 1988 until 2000. During his time at **Grundy** he also produced the telemovie *A Special Place* (1983) and the mini-series *Tanamera* (1989). In the nineties Battye worked on *Shortland Street* (1993) in New Zealand, and *Pacific Drive* (1995) on the Gold Coast.

Battye is one of less than a handful of people who have held executive positions with both **Crawford** and with **Grundy**. He was a major creative force in early Australian television drama and a mentor to aspiring actors, writers and production personnel.

In 1968 Battye was musical director for the Australian premiere of *Oh! What a Lovely War (1968)* at St Martins Theatre, Melbourne, and in 1972 he wrote the screenplay for Brian Kavanagh's Award-winning movie *A City's Child (1972)* which won lead actress Monica Maughan the AFI Award for Best Actress. This film reunited him with his former drama teacher Moira Carleton who played Maughan's manipulative bed-ridden mother.

Battye's other writing credits include the one-act play *The Advertisement (1971)* which was given a rehearsed reading at Melbourne's Claremont Theatre Centre, December 4, 1971, and an autobiography (unpublished).

Battye moved to the Philippines in 1998 to live in Puerto Princesa City on the island of Palawan. Although he remained there until his death, he did return to Australia yearly to visit his sister until she passed.

As well as a professional relationship Pinne and Battye also had a personal partnership for 27 years from 1960 until 1987. He is survived by a niece Suzanne Chaundy, a director for Victorian Opera, and a nephew Christopher Chaundy, an IT specialist.

Don Battye was multi-talented and throughout his vast career used all of those talents to bring pleasure to many. He was witty, well-liked, and will be remembered for his generous and warm spirit. Australian entertainment has lost a true original.

Peter Pinne