

David Mann AM – a fantastic evening

While he has had a long and successful career as ‘Mann About Town’ at Radio 3AW (he started there in 1973), it was through his experiences as an MC that David Mann AM regaled and entertained us with personal stories about famous showbiz people with whom he has worked.

The greatest all-round entertainer he has seen is Paul Anka, who then told David the greatest ever was Sammy Davis Jr. The next most thrilling artist highlighted by David was Lovelace Watkins who was performing at Wally Elm’s Dorset Gardens Hotel. He sang for two hours, had the crowd standing and screaming for more, then proceeded to put the microphone away and sang without any amplification for another 45 minutes. *(David’s assessment is spot on. I saw Lovelace at Eastern Suburbs Leagues Club in Sydney and it was the most thrilling and extraordinary performance.)*

The funniest person David has worked with was Victor Borge who, away from appearances at the Arts Centre one afternoon, ended up driving a tram without supervision up Swanston Street, including taking on passengers!

Other stories involved the delightful and gracious Nana Mouskouri, who needed oxygen off-stage between songs; Tom Jones, a highly talented, very down-to-earth gentleman; Dave Allen, who didn’t want an MC even though it was part of his Melbourne contract (so David was paid for each performance without having to do anything); Topol who, throughout his 3,500 performances as Tevye in Fiddler On The Roof, never had an understudy; and the band KISS who arrived at David’s Mt Macedon home for a last-minute, high security barbecue. They unexpectedly for the host turned out to be quiet, non-drinkers and only interested in the kangaroos and other Australian wildlife on David’s property.

The 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, was opened by the Queen. At a special cocktail party held by Her Majesty at the MCG, attended only by Australian Governors-General, Prime Ministers and Governors, present and past, the security was extreme. David was under strict instruction to stay by the Queen’s side all night. PM John Howard was on the other side and, at the end of proceedings, David had the honour to be introduced formally to her. He said that the Queen spoke to him for over two minutes and was totally down to earth, with a clear complexion and not a line on her face.

David told the sad story about Johnny O’Keefe, ravaged by drugs but still a consummate performer on stage. He also told of the small private restaurant dinner with Pavarotti to which he and wife Annie were invited. A big man, Luciano P drank copiously through the evening and then suddenly started to sing. For some minutes he serenaded the women in the restaurant and David said to his wife, ‘Annie, enjoy this, you’ll never see anything like this again.’

Another great night at Rotary North Balwyn

Greg Ross