

Joan Sutherland sang in Albury

Noel Jackling

In 1950, on Sunday evenings, the Jackling family regularly listened on the wireless to the Mobil Quest, a competition for young aria singers.

At the time, Stan Jackling was the conductor of the City of Albury Choral Society, and was on the lookout for singers to come to Albury to enhance the musical quality of the choir's productions.

One Sunday night Stan Jackling was particularly attracted to a female voice, which he adjudged to be 'grand material.' He invited her to sing solo and with the City of Albury Choral Society in Albury in a concert titled 'Prelude to Christmas' on 7 December 1950 at the Plaza Theatre. In Stan Jackling's words: 'She came and sang not always in pitch on a disgustingly hot, steaming night!' for the grand fee of seven



Stan Jackling, pianist Bette Mamouney and Joan Sutherland practise on 6 December 1950 for the 'Prelude to Christmas' concert of the City of Albury Choral Society.

pounds ten shillings plus travelling expenses. The 23-yearold import from Sydney was none other than Joan Sutherland, later Dame Joan Sutherland.

In rehearsal, Stan Jackling, one of a select group to have conducted Joan Sutherland in concert, told her that her pitch was not perfect.

As to Joan Sutherland's performance, the *Border Morning Mail* music critic Vera Chubb said:

"She sang with purity of tone with acceptable style, a bracket of distinctive Christmas songs. In the Messiah airs 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion' and 'I know that my redeemer liveth' Miss Sutherland displayed flexibility, vocal power and floating head notes that were both a delight in themselves and a most adequate medium for the message of the airs."

In July 1951, Joan Sutherland departed for London on the 'Maloja.' Shortly beforehand, she wrote to choral society chorister Isobel Williams: 'I just can't imagine what is in store for me when I reach London. Perhaps it is just as well!' It was not until 1965 that Joan Sutherland eventually returned to Australia as the greatest opera soprano in the world. She came back known as 'La Stupenda.'

Following her visit to Albury in 1950, Stan Jackling and Joan Sutherland became good friends, and in 1971 he visited her at her chalet in Switzerland. They spent time on the floor piecing together a large jig-saw puzzle while chatting about old times. After her retirement, Stan Jackling endeavoured to entice her back to Albury. But unlike Dame Nellie Melba, Dame Joan Sutherland *had* retired!