

## Malcolm McEachern, “Basso Supreme”

*Greg Ryan*

Walter Malcolm McEachern was born in Albury on April 1, 1883, the fourth of thirteen children of Archibald McEachern and his wife Rebecca (née Tubman). His uncle was the well-known Albury blacksmith John McEachern, whose business was located in Dean Street, the site now occupied by the Commercial Club.

Young Malcolm was educated at Albury Public School. Until the age of 21 he worked in local shops while taking singing lessons from Howard Tracy of the *Albury School of Music*. In 1904 the McEachern family moved to Sydney.

In 1908 McEachern joined fellow Albury born singer Ella Caspers at a Sydney Town Hall concert followed by a concert tour of NSW. But singing was not a high priority at the time, and McEachern turned to drink and spent time gambling and playing billiards. He was ‘rescued’ in 1913 when he met Hazel Doyle. They married in 1915 and she became his accompanist on piano.



Malcolm McEachern – “One of this country’s greatest ambassadors.”

During World War I, McEachern performed with the Melba Concert Company, and accompanied Dame Nellie Melba on stage. Melba was impressed and presented McEachern with a diamond tie-pin, a treasured possession, proudly worn throughout his career.

In 1918-20 the McEacherns left Australia to tour Asia, South Africa and North America.

They went to England in 1921 where McEachern made his London debut at Queen's Hall. The London *Morning Post* reported in January 1921 that he “has the finest bass voice that has been heard in England for many years ... he sings with all the grateful nuance and gesture of voice that is so rarely heard.” Later that year he sang at a Royal command performance before the King and Queen in London.

The McEacherns based themselves in London for the next 24 years, Malcolm becoming enormously popular, performing in Shakespearian productions, Gilbert & Sullivan operas and vaudeville. In 1926 he joined Bentley Hilliam as Jetsam in “Flotsam & Jetsam,” a light entertainment act that toured England.

In 1943 ‘Showboat’ opened in London’s Stoll Theatre with McEachern as the old boatman. “The production is fortunate having Malcolm McEachern who can follow Paul Robeson and

survive the comparison,” said *The Times*. *The Telegraph* added “‘Ole Man River’ was gloriously sung by McEachern.”

When he died in London after an operation for throat cancer on January 17, 1945, a colleague described him as “a master of song and one of this country’s greatest ambassadors to Great Britain. He exuded Australia.”

Listen to McEachern at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSmeF-5\\_BUk&t=25s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSmeF-5_BUk&t=25s)