

JAMES DUFF

Little is yet known about Father James Duff, a literary-minded Roman Catholic priest based in Perth around the turn of the nineteenth century. He nevertheless holds an infamous place in Western Australian theatre history as one of the combatants in an odd and bitter legal battle over the musical drama *The Two Worlds* (1900). Indeed, the history of this musical drama is so littered with controversy, legal action and animosity that it saw at least three different versions of the work being produced.

The situation arose after Duff commissioned composer Dr Joseph Summers to write the music for his dramatisation of Milton's two epic poems *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Summers, had recently moved to Western Australia after having established a high profile reputation as a conductor, composer, music director and accompanist in Melbourne. The collaboration between Duff and Summers soured, however, to the point where Duff engaged another composer, Reginald D'Arcy-Irvine, to complete the score. "Complaints, accusations, claims [and] arguments flew back and forth," writes A. H. Kornweibel in *Apollo and the Pioneers* (93). Summers then took out an injunction to try and stop Duff's production going ahead. Although he won the first legal round, a second court case established no clear winner.

Duff eventually produced his version of the drama in Victoria and South Australia, while Summers staged an "acclaimed" version of his work in 1903 at Perth's Government House using the Williamson Royal Opera Company. History seems to agree, however, that neither work's critical success outweighed the interest that the two men created in the courts.

Father Duff is also known to have published *The Sacred Isle* (1901), a drama in five acts.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

1900: **The Two Worlds** [play with music]

1902: **The Two Worlds** [play with music]

FURTHER REFERENCE

Kornweibel, A.H. *Apollo and the Pioneers* (1973), 92-4.

Last updated: 10/05/2011

Expanded and updated from Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight." Ph D Diss. U of Qld (2005), Appendix D.

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:

Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/ozvta.com/practitioners-other-a-l/>