

# DUDLEY GLASS

(1899-1981) Composer, lyricist, musician, author, travel writer, critic, public speaker.

An Australian-born composer who worked in both serious and light forms of music, Dudley Glass spent most of his adult life based in England. Among his better-known works are *The Beloved Vagabond: A Musical Play in Three Acts* (1927) and *The Toymaker of Nuremberg* (1930). He also wrote the scores for two Australian films; several revues and operettas, the musical settings for Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs*, Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*, and Hilaire Belloc's *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1932); as well as numerous songs, some of which contained his own words. In addition to his musical career, Glass established a considerable reputation as a music and travel writer, arts critic, radio presenter, and author, and travelled widely through Europe, North America and Australia on lecture tours.

## 1899-1924

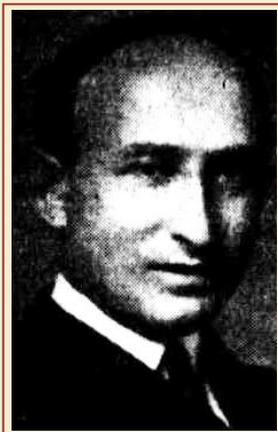
Born in Adelaide, South Australia on 24 September, 1899, Dudley Jack Glass was the only child of Phillip Glass (1872-1955), a waterproof-garment manufacturer, and Jean Augusta Glass (née Barnet, ca. 1878-1937).<sup>1</sup> His maternal grandfather was Australian rubber manufacturer, Barnet Glass (1849-1918). Shortly after his birth, his parents moved from Adelaide to Melbourne, where he was educated at the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School. He later attended the University of Melbourne. In 1918, while studying for his Bachelor of Arts degree, Glass enrolled at the Melba Memorial Conservatorium of Music, where he began studying composition under the tutelage of Fritz Hart. Although he completed the first two terms, Glass failed to finish the third. In "Around the World with Music: The Itinerant Career of Dudley Glass," Eric Irvin postulates that pressure might well have been applied by his parents, who perhaps desired their son to take up a more business-orientated career. Irvin also suggests that Glass's desire to follow a musical career in opposition to his parents explains why he continued his music studies overseas (400).



A few years after his graduation from Melbourne University in 1920, the first of Dudley Glass's compositions began to appear. He had quite notable success in 1925 with his song "Australia, Land of Ours," for which he wrote both music and lyrics. Published by Chappell's and dedicated to "the children, the builders of Australia," the song was appropriated by the Victorian and New South Wales Education Departments and published in school magazines.

## 1925-1935

In 1925, Glass left Australia, travelling first to New York and then to London, where he settled and began furthering both his musical education and professional experience. Two years later, his musical *The Beloved Vagabond* (1927), a collaboration with librettist Adrian Ross, premiered at the Duke of York Theatre in London. Although the *Times* critic was not overly impressed with Glass's treatment, it nevertheless attracted positive criticism from other reviewers and eventually closed its London season at the New Theatre after a commendable run of 107 performances. This first-off success led to Glass working on a string of music-theatre productions, including the revues *This and That* (1929), for which he wrote both music and lyrics, *Colour Blind*, and *Eldorado*. In 1930, he undertook an ambitious attempt to rework Austin Strong's 1910 drama *The Toymaker of Nuremberg* in similar fashion to his treatment for *The Beloved*



*Telegraph (Brisbane)* 12 June 1937, 10.

*Vagabond*. Having persuaded both Strong and Adrian Ross to adapt the play into a libretto, Glass then composed the score. The production opened at London's Kingsway Theatre in late 1930, and, although not achieving the same level of success as his previous musical, it never the less managed to return a profit to its investors, particularly after doing good business touring the English provincial theatres.

In mid-1931, Glass returned to Australia briefly, the first of several visits over the next few decades. Ostensibly a holiday, this trip also effectively marked the beginning of a significant expansion in his creative pursuits, as he began to delve into the areas of literature, film soundtracks, travel writing, and journalism. Eric Irvin suggests that the composer's frequent voyages between Australia, America, Britain, and Europe around this time may well have provided him with the necessary time to concentrate his writing energies (403). Indeed, between 1931 and 1937, Glass published four books: *Round The World With The Red Head Twins* (1933) and *The Spanish Goldfish* (1934), both written for children; *The Book About the British Empire* (1937); and *Australian Fantasy* (1937). During the same period, he also

<sup>1</sup> In "Australian Composer: Mr Dudley Glass Returns" (*Sydney Morning Herald* 22 June 1931, 8), the writer records that Philip Glass had become "Chairman of Barnett Glass Rubber Co."

set music to Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs* (1934) and Hilaire Belloc's *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1934). The 1934 British documentary film, *Song of Australia*, also contained a musical score by Glass.

Glass returned to Australasia in early 1934, primarily to help with the debut Australian season of *The Beloved Vagabond*. With Gladys Moncrieff in the starring role, the musical was well received in Melbourne and Sydney by both audiences and critics. Reporting on the Melbourne production, for example, the *Age* suggests that Glass had "found a truly romantic theme in [this] popular story" and that "his music transformed it."<sup>2</sup> The *Argus* similarly indicates that the "tuneful and varied" songs "fit in gracefully with the story, and are very much better in texture and quality than the songs we expect in the usual musical play."<sup>3</sup> Although describing the music as "charming," the *Sydney Morning Herald's* theatre critic's attention was drawn more towards Moncrieff's "exquisite interpretation" and "delicacy of expression."<sup>4</sup>

While in Australia, Glass also presented a series of radio lectures for the ABC radio Station 3LO. His first broadcast, on 20 October 1934, featured a talk on foreign pageantry. He followed this with several programs comparing various Melbourne suburbs (notably Richmond, Windsor, Kensington, Canterbury, and Brighton) with their namesakes back in England. Other talks were directed more towards the younger listeners and included readings accompanied by musical illustrations of his children's stories. Later in the series, too, he presented selections from his song albums *Nonsense Songs*, *Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, and *The Wicked Chinaman*. The ABC tied into these presentations by broadcasting a special programme of Glass's compositions on 2FC. Performed by the ABC Orchestra, the excerpts included songs from his two musicals, *The Beloved Vagabond* and *The Toymaker of Nuremberg*. Glass returned to Britain in early 1935, where he continued his radio career by presenting similar-styled lectures subjects such as music, art, and travel for the BBC.

### 1936 - 1949

During the war years, Glass spent a great deal of time touring military stations in Britain and Europe, performing over a thousand piano recitals/speaking engagements to allied troops. Travelling in a large self-contained mobile concert theatre van with its own piano and public address system, he entertained groups ranging from small outposts (when his audience would crowd into the van) to crowds of two thousand or more. Despite his hectic and often dangerous schedule, Glass was still able to continue with his creative efforts, writing such popular songs as "The Empire Is Marching" (recorded by the Band of His Majesty's Coldstream Guards) and adapting the lyrics for the English revival of Johann Strauss's 1883 operetta *A Night In Venice*. That production, which premiered on 25 May 1944 at London's Cambridge Theatre, ran for over eighteen months.

*Herald* (Melbourne) 6 Dec. 1930, 5.



Following the end of the war, Glass was initially engaged by the London City Council to present lectures on opera at the City Literary Institute. In 1946, he once again decided to return to Australia. En route via New York, however, he was persuaded by the Government News and Information Service (on behalf of the Chicago-based Redpath Bureau) to undertake a lecture tour of selected states, presenting an updated version of his English Army Education presentations. Titled "Around the World with Music," the lecture tour was an exhausting but successful venture for Glass. Although pressured to make a second tour, he was obliged to continue on to Australia to fulfil his agreement with the ABC. He arrived in the country in May 1947, and over the next three months presented over twenty eight of his own broadcasts (largely about the latest developments in overseas art and music) while also making appearances on such programs as *Armchair Chat* and *Guest of Honour*. The visit also coincided with the first full presentation of *The Toymaker of Nuremberg* in Australia, with the specially adapted production (prepared by Glass himself) being broadcast twice that year. After completing his Australian sojourn, Glass returned to America where he undertook another lecture tour.

### 1950 - 1981

While in England sometime around 1950, Glass was invited by the music publishing firm Frederick Warne and Co to adapt into music and words several of Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit stories. The series of fourteen songs that Glass immediately set about composing (he is said to have written the first song in St James Park a mere half hour after he was given the commission) were published in London and New York, and later recorded on the Decca label by Martin Green. In 1952, the composer made another visit to Australia, again under contract to the ABC. He also brought with

<sup>2</sup> "*The Beloved Vagabond - Colourful, Romantic Musical Play.*" *Age* (Melbourne) 23 Apr. 1934, 12.

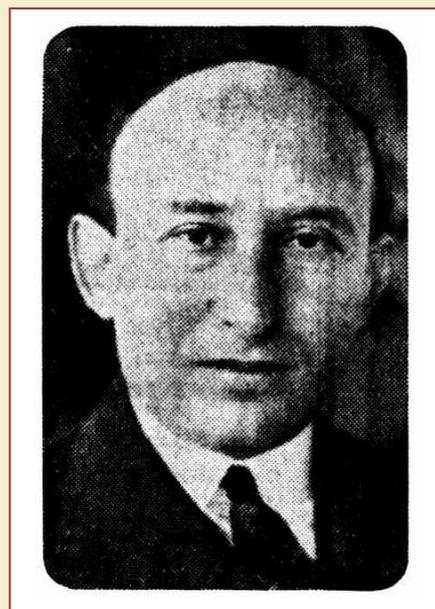
<sup>3</sup> "*Mr Thring Scores Again.*" *Argus* (Melbourne) 23 Apr. 1934, 12.

<sup>4</sup> "*The Beloved Vagabond - Charming Musical Play.*" *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 Aug. 1934, 16.

him his newest music theatre work, the light opera *Drake of England*. Based on the pageant play by Louis Napoleon Parker, it was broadcast on ABC radio twice during 1953 and 1954 and received at least three broadcasts in Britain on the BBC network. Glass's radio lectures this time around saw him trace the history of opera from Monteverdi, Gluck, Mozart, and others through to Britten and Gershwin.

During the final three decades of his life, Dudley Glass remained a bachelor. He continued to fill his mind with those subjects that held fascination for him, and passed this knowledge on through tours of Europe, America (at one stage as a Fulbright lecturer for the American-Scandinavian Foundation), and Australia. For some time, too, he was a music and theatre correspondent for the *Melbourne Herald* and *Adelaide Advertiser*. Eric Irvin notes that, during this time, Glass made regular visits to the British Library, though not as often as in previous years when writing many of his special features for journals and newspapers as diverse as the *London Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Evening News*, *Musical Opinion*, *Irish Times*, *New York Times*, and *Everybody's Weekly* (407). His last remaining years were spent living a solitary life in a London bed-sitting flat. While walking down London's Shaftesbury Avenue in November 1981, Glass was knocked down by a bus. He died three days later at St Thomas' Hospital, aged eighty two.

*Daily News (Perth)* 6 Feb. 1934, 4.



## WORKS: MUSICAL AND LITERARY

This list should be considered very incomplete. It also does not include individual songs or published articles.

- 1927:** *The Beloved Vagabond* (musical): Duke of York's Theatre, London (England); 1 Sept.
- 1929:** *This and That* (revue): Regent Theatre, London, no details. Txt/Mus. Dudley Glass
- 1930:** *Colour Blind* (revue): Txt. Frederick Jackson. Mus. Dudley Glass. Duke of York's Theatre, London (England); 15 Oct.  
*Toymaker of Nuremberg, The* (play with music): Txt. Adrian Ross and Austin Strong. Mus. Dudley Glass.  
 Kingsway Theatre, London (England); 20 Dec.
- 1931:** *Eldorado* (musical play): no details [ctd. "Australian Composer." *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 June 1931, 8]
- 1933:** *Nonsense Songs* (verse with music): London, Warne and Co. Txt. Edward Lear; Mus. Dudley Glass. Drawings by Edward Lear.  
*Round The World With The Red Head Twins* (children's poetry). Methuen, London. Drawings by George Sheringham.
- 1934:** *Songs from the Bad Child's Book of Beasts* ( ): Duckworth, London. Txt. Hilaire Belloc; Mus. Dudley Glass; Drawings by B.T.B. Duckworth  
*Song of Australia* (documentary film): Commonwealth Government, Cinema and Photographic Branch. Mus. Dudley Glass.  
*Spanish Goldfish, The* (children's fantasy): London, England: Frederick Warne. Drawings by A.E. Bestall.
- 1937:** *Australian Fantasy* (travel): London, England: Hutchinson.  
*Book About the British Empire, The* (travel): Frederick Warne, New York (USA).  
*Mr Jinnjinn* (novel): no details [sighted *Telegraph (Brisbane)* 12 June 1937, 10]
- 1944:** *A Night in Venice* (light opera): Cambridge Theatre, London (England); 24 May
- 1951:** *Peter Rabbit: A Musical Play for Children* (play with music): New York (USA), Frederick Warne. Txt. Beatrix Potter; Mus. Dudley Glass.
- 1953:** *Drake of England* (operetta): Lib/Mus. Dudley Glass. Possibly first produced for radio in Australia by the ABC

## FURTHER REFERENCE

- "Author and Composer: Melbourne Man's Success - Seventy Songs Published." *Daily News (Perth)* 6 Feb. 1934, 4.  
 "Australian Composer: Successful Career in England." *West Australian (Perth)* 7 Feb. 1934, 16.  
 "Australian Theatre: Mr Dudley Glass Optimistic - Film Song of Australia." *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld) 24 Feb. 1936, 4.

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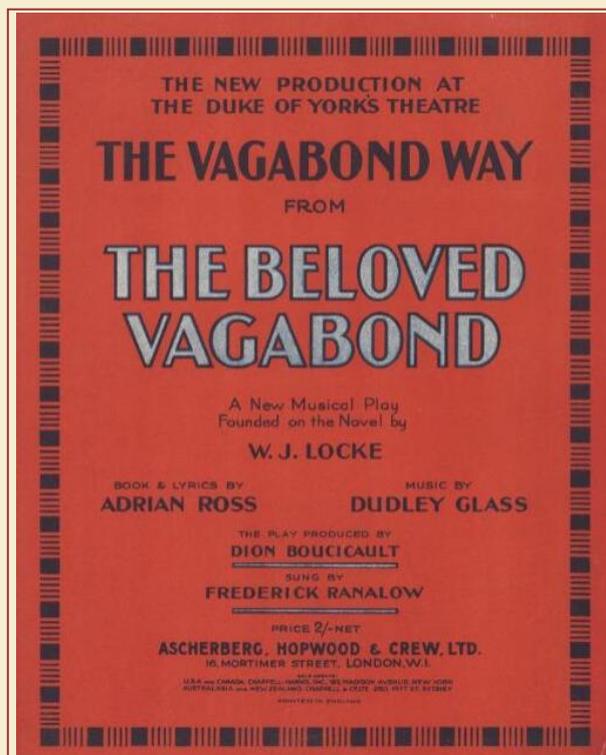
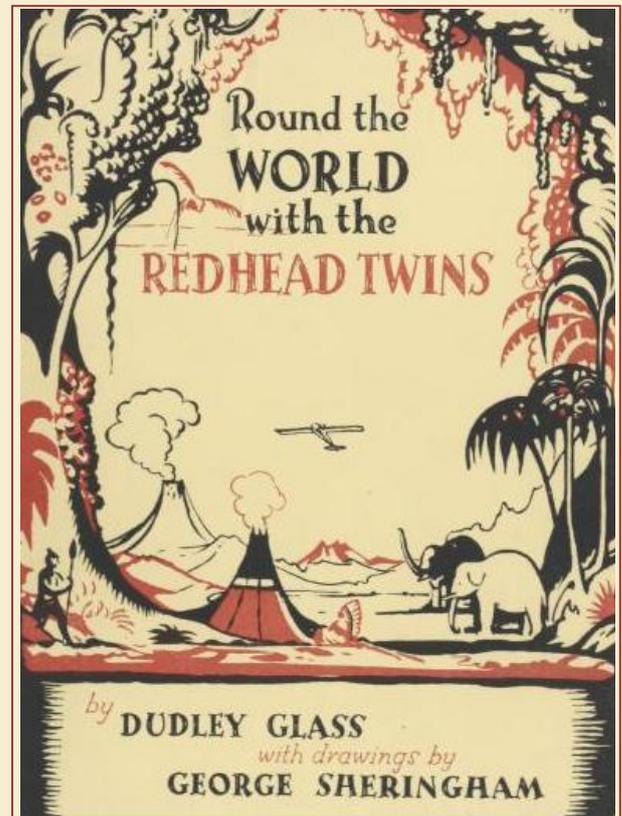
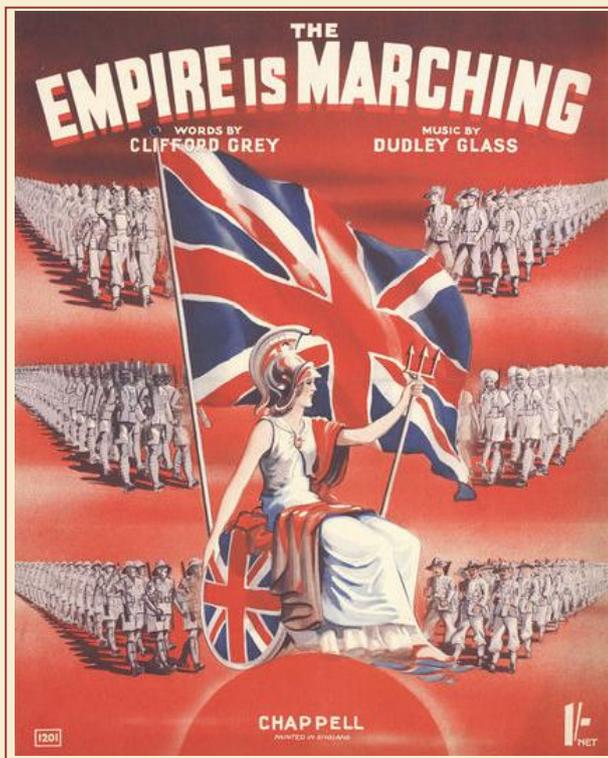
"Composer Must Take New Work to London." *Age* (Melbourne) 9 July 1952, 2. Glass, Dudley.

"London as Literary Market." *Telegraph* (Brisbane) 27 June 1935, 8.

--- "Papers of Dudley Glass." *National Library of Australia* MS 7606; MS ACC06.195 [Finding Aid]

Irvin, Eric. "Around the World with Music: The Itinerant Career of Dudley Glass." *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 10.5 (1989), 399-408.

"Theatre and Its People: Dudley Glass says - 'The Stage is Set for a Return to Romance,' The." Interview. *Table Talk* (Melbourne) 10 May 1934, 18.



Details in this biography have been derived in part from 'Around the World with Music: The Itinerant Career of Dudley Glass, Australian Composer and Author' a paper published in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* in 1989 after first being presented at a meeting of the society in Sydney on 20 July 1987.

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