



## 09 March 1929 – 11 June 2013

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## An Eventful Life

Born in Sydney Australia on March 25th 1929, Kevin was attracted to the world of theatre at a very early age. By the time he was sixteen he was already working backstage and making scenery for the amateur dramatic productions being staged at the YMCA theatre in Sydney. From there, he moved on to the Tivoli Theatre in Sydney where he worked as a stage mechanist on the musical production of 'Charlie's Aunt', entitled 'Where's Charlie?'

As soon as he left school he was on his way to Melbourne; headquarters of Australia's professional theatre production company, JC Williamson. On joining the company, his time was spent building scenery in the workshops during the day and running shows backstage during the evenings: this could often entail two or three shows a day. Over the following years, Kevin toured the length and breadth of Australia with productions for JC Williamson. Many of these were British productions, whetting the appetite of the young Aussie and finally encouraging him to set off for England to seek a place for himself in the elite community of British theatre.

## Royal Shakespeare Company

One of the theatrical companies that toured Australia in those days was the Royal Shakespeare Company from Stratford-on-Avon, which afforded Kevin an invaluable Introduction when he arrived in England seeking employment. The Royal Shakespeare Company was at its zenith at that time, with such renowned actors as Sir Lawrence Olivier, Vivienne Leigh, Sir John Gielgud and the South African born Moira Lister among its cast members.

Kevin joined the company as it was about to embark on a new venture, which was a season of three plays to be

staged the Adelphi Theatre in London. He stayed with the company for a further season when it returned to Stratford then spent a while freelancing on various seasonal productions around England.

Whilst at Stratford he met George Levine who was in the process of forming the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre in London and he invited Kevin to join the company as stage mechanist. He took up the offer and during his time at the Royal Court he worked on original productions of plays such as 'Look Back in Anger' and 'The Entertainer' among others.

## South Africa

Kevin decided it was time to return to Australia and took a holiday in Italy prior to his departure from Europe. On a visit to the Cinecitta film studios in Rome he had a chance meeting with the English theatre producer and director Sandy Wilson, who was on his way to South Africa to direct a production of his musical 'The Boyfriend' and suggested that Kevin should come along with him. The idea of having a look at what South Africa had to offer aroused his curiosity and once here, he became involved with the Children's Theatre Group working on a production of 'The Dragon's Daughter', which opened in Soweto in 1958.

At around that time Moira Lister, with whom he had worked at Stratford, had come home to South Africa and was compiling a one-woman show entitled 'Women in Love'. Kevin came on board and with an assistant in tow and the three embarked on a long and arduous tour, playing one-night-stands throughout South Africa, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and the Belgian Congo (DRC).

Once the year-long African tour was completed, the company of three went on to stage the show in Mauritius and continued on to Australia, giving Kevin the opportunity to visit his family. On his return to South Africa, he spent the next few years working as Production Stage Manager for just about every theatrical management in the country, from Brian Brooke, Taubie Kushlick and Leonard Schacht to the very youthful Pieter Tourien and PACT (Performing Arts Council of Transvaal).

In those days there were no independent companies providing set building facilities for the many productions being staged, so Kevin, together with Steve Collins, who was then running the workshops at PACT in Pretoria, decided to open their own company. In partnership with theatre impresarios Hymie Udwin and Dave Levine of Academy Theatre Productions, they opened Scenic & Styling Specialists in 1973 on the site that now houses the Liberty Life in Braamfontein. Two years later, the partnership was dissolved and the company was re-formed with Kevin and Steve continuing the business under the name of KEVCO Studios.

It was the beginning of a new era, Sun International was emerging and Sol Kersner commissioned the two of them, together with Set Designer Tony Farmer, to create the sets for the Extravaganza shows scheduled for the new Sun City Theatre. Two years later, they were called upon yet again to remodel the Superbowl to stage live events. KEVCO Studios continued to provide set building services and maintenance for these facilities until 1986. During that same period, the company began working with Johann Kruger of the audio-visual production company Multivisio; staging company presentations and car launches in the form of 'Industrial Theatre'. This marked the emergence of the South African Events industry and this collaboration continued until 1986 when KEVCO was bought out by Multivisio, but continued trading under its own name.

By 1989, other companies were beginning to emerge that offered event production as part of their audio-visual production services, one of which was O'mage Productions. Company Director Graham Edmunds asked Kevin to join O'mage as Director of Technical Operations, where he remained until 2003 when he and colleague Morgan Bevan bought the set construction division from O'mage. They renamed the company the Joburg Set Company and began offering their set building services to the entire industry.

(The following year Kevin was honoured for his service to the South African theatre and events industry by the TPSA, when he became the first person to receive a Lifetime Achievement award and was inducted to the TPSA

## Hall of Fame.

Two years ago, Kevin began to disengage himself from running the operations of the company due to his deteriorating health and retired to his hilltop dream home on the summit of the Westdene Ridge in Johannesburg. On a personal note Kevin is survived by his son Andrew, his daughter Kate, who lives in Australia and two grandchildren.)