



Organist could fill a church with thunderous crescendo or quiet solo

*The Sydney Morning Herald
June 21, 2019 — 2.10pm*

If anyone could have embraced the life and the culture of the family he was born into, it would have to be David Parsons. The son of an Anglican clergyman, Parsons went on to become one of Sydney's great organists, playing on one estimate, some 7,000 church services through his life, and spreading his musical brilliance beyond the ecclesiastical climes.

He played organs in theatres, the Sydney Town Hall, the Sydney Opera House, in churches and halls throughout NSW, interstate and on Norfolk Island. So famed was he that in 1979, when he gave a free lunchtime organ concert at the Opera House, 3,000 people turned up. As the Concert Hall had only 2,700 seats, 300 people sat in the aisles and another 1,000 stood in the foyer watching the performance on screens. The Sydney Morning Herald recorded in its Column 8 on 29 June that he attracted the largest record crowd ever at the Sydney Opera House.

David Leland Parsons was born on May 31, 1935, the fifth of seven children of the Rev Leland Parsons and his wife, Olive (nee Reay). From the outset, David Parsons was destined to feel a bit special, because all his siblings were girls.

His father was the rector at All Soul's Church of England, Leichhardt, and young David grew up under a fairly strict home regime. Leland Parsons, who had a Licentiate Degree in music and was also the church choirmaster, taught his son to play the piano from the age of eight. But David Parsons was really attracted to the grand pipe organ in the church and he would creep in to play it from time to time, quite possibly to escape a house full of girls.

In 1949, when he was 14, Parsons was officially appointed organist at All Soul's. Educated at Fort Street Boys' High School, he undertook an electrical apprenticeship at General Electric but retained his fervent interest in music.

(continued overleaf)



www.quintalhomes.com

AT THE ROUNDABOUT

Phone Pip 55099 or Jade 52179

Email: pipreeves@quintalhomes.com

MOUNTAIN GLORY \$210,000 - EXCLUSIVE

This beautiful piece of land is on a lovely side of the island. Stunning mountain and distant sea views. This land already has a cement pad, ready to construct your dream home. Concrete is \$650 per cubic metre – so already one of your major building components is in place.



LAND AND SEA VIEWS \$460,000 – EXCLUSIVE

This stunning piece of freehold land is located at the top of hibiscus drive. This land has exceptional ocean views and a north-easterly aspect and is highly recommended for inspection today!



BEAUTIFUL WATER VIEWS \$495,000

The land on the boundary of this property is commonwealth reserve land so you would never have a house obstructing your view. This property also looks over gorgeous ball bay. Our listed land is 6140m² and has many stunning building site options.



PERFECTLY FLAT LAND 145,000

This wonderful block of absolute flat land is situated close to town, hospital and national parks. Build your dream home here! This property is also planted out with some beautiful native trees along the boundary.



Organist could fill a church with thunderous crescendo or quiet solo - continued

With the organ, Parsons soon became, in the words of the chief executive of Sydney's Good Old Days Concerts, Bernard Walz, "like a kid in a candy store", never losing "the thrill of playing a song and creating an arrangement".

Parson's son, Greg Parsons, said: "He loved the sound the pipe organ could produce, filling the church with a thunderous crescendo, or a quiet solo." At 17, Parsons had his first chance to play a Wurlitzer Theatre organ at Sydney's Plaza Theatre. "Dad was captivated from there on," Greg Parsons said. "He went on to develop his own style, playing popular music on all of the remaining theatre organs around Sydney." Parsons played the opening concert on the restored Wurlitzer Organ at Willoughby Town Hall and he was the inaugural recitalist on the Sydney Opera House's Grand Organ.

In 1956, while on holiday in Bundanoon, in the Southern Highlands, Parsons met Beverley Atkin, whose family had strong ties with St Alban's Anglican Church, Epping, and who was a church chorister. The two fell in love, married at St Albans in January 1958 and went on to have four children: Cheryl, Gregory, Karen and Glenda. In 1965, when Leland Parsons retired, Parsons became the organist at St Philip's Anglican Church, Eastwood, where he would serve for 13 years.

In his career with the Electricity Commission of NSW, Parsons moved to head office in Sydney and worked as an electrical draftsman, rising to become the head draughtsman. In his spare time, Parsons enjoyed working with his hands and created a home workshop for working with timber, creating functional and practical pieces of furniture.

But there was no escaping the lure of playing the organ and in 1969 he was persuaded to enter a music concert sponsored by Yamaha Organs. He was reluctant because he did not think he was good enough, but he won not only the state but the Australian national competitions and went on to represent Australia internationally in Japan, where he scored seventh in the world. It has been argued that, the first six being Japanese, Parsons might have ended up in a higher place had the competition been held elsewhere.

Parsons regularly played the historic organ at the State Theatre and on many occasions played for the Sydney Film Festival. Playing the organ required not just a feeling for music but a mechanical aptitude as well. On one occasion the Herald music critic, Fred Blanks, described him as "a marionet on strings" handling one particular instrument. When the old hoist system in the State Theatre developed a fault and started the organ on a descent from stage level, he had to push the "Up" button every two minutes in the middle of his recital to stop himself and his instrument sinking from view.

In 1978, Parsons left St Philip's Eastwood and moved to St Matthews, West Pennant Hills, where he served as organist and choirmaster for the rest of his life, still playing for services until just a couple of

weeks before he passed away.

In 1980, he was appointed "Assistant City Organist, Theatre", which provided him with many opportunities to play the grand organ at the Sydney Town Hall, the largest pipe organ in the Southern Hemisphere. He would chalk up playing this organ for half a century.

He was involved in restoring the Marrickville Town Hall organ after it was moved from the Prince Edward Theatre, and he was also involved in the restoration of the Capitol Theatre Organ. Intrigued by the tonal quality of the Ahlborn Galanti pipeless pipe organ, Parsons was invited to become the Concert Performing Artist for its manufacturer, and he installed one of these classic instruments in his home auditorium.

During his career, Parsons recorded a total of seven LPs, CDs and cassettes. He toured far and wide, all over the east coast and to Tasmania. On holiday to Norfolk Island he inevitably visited the island's two Anglican churches, one being the historic St Barnabas' Chapel with its Henry Willis organ. The chapel was in disrepair, so he and his wife started a campaign to raise funds for its restoration, staging concerts every second year for 14 years which resulted in tens of thousands of dollars going directly to this purpose.

As regular visitors to the island over the years, Parsons and his wife were always warmly welcomed and he played many concerts there. The couple held concerts for charity and invited people to their home auditorium. They are estimated to have had about 100,000 visitors, with Beverley providing meals for all of them. The popular lunchtime concerts continued until early this year. Parsons received the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his contribution to the community through music.

In February this year, ill health was plaguing him, and he played his last Good Old Days concert at the Sydney Town Hall, where he accompanied tenor David Hobson. He joined the orchestra for a rousing rendition of The Holy City where the audience got to its feet in enthusiastic participation. Parsons died after a short illness on May 26. A thanksgiving service was held at St Matthews Anglican Church, West Pennant Hills, on June 3.

David Parsons is survived by his wife Beverley, four children, 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Malcolm Brown

David Parsons: 1935 - 2019

ISLAND WIDE

**CONCRETE AND
LANDSCAPING**

Contact Cor on
Ph 53583