

Helen Zerefos: a coloratura soprano of rare charm and beauty

Helen Zerefos is a coloratura soprano of rare charm and beauty whose versatility spans the widest gamut of show-business performance. From the stage to television to nightclubs, concerts and recordings, her talents have been applauded and revered.



It is Helen's wide vocal range that makes this all possible with an extraordinary repertoire of music that is evident in her recordings which encompass material from the technical brilliance of Mozart's "Alleluja" to the gentle country song, "When I Dream." She is a unique talent in the world of entertainment, combining the experience and dignity of the great classics through to the better contemporary music, imbuing all this with her sparkling personality.

Helen was born in Scone, New South Wales, Australia, of Greek parents. Both her parents were born in Greece, her father, Paul Zerefos, came from Neapolis Vion, Laconia and her mother, Katina Andronicos Zerefos from Avlemonas, Kythera.

From an early age, Helen studied piano and showed vocal promise for an operatic career. She was Dux of her school and had aspirations towards medicine and architecture. Although proud of her musical ability, her parents were very disappointed when she chose a theatrical career. Her mother insisted she learn something practical to fall back on if necessary, so Helen gained a diploma in fashion and now designs the fabulous gowns which have become legendary for her stage appearances.

At a time when musical extravaganzas were tops on television, she was chosen to be a founding member of the marvellous singing and dancing group the "Revue 20" on the ATN Channel 7 network. The Revue 20 featured weekly on the top national TV variety show, "Revue 61" and then "Revue 62," which swept the ratings and went to air Sunday nights at 8pm. Brilliant Canadian Peter MacFarlane, from MCA (Music Corporation of America) was brought to Australia as producer - director of "Revue 61" and "Revue 62." These shows, under the iron fist and creative genius of Pe-

ter MacFarlane were never equalled for excellence on Australian television and were hosted by the incomparable Digby Wolfe.

Helen was the first person of Greek heritage to be a regular artist on television and was the first person to present Greek songs on television in Australia.

The invaluable experience of singing and dancing on the top show in the country under the watchful eye of this great director was the best possible start to a future career. The Revue 20 became the backbone of all major shows produced by Channel 7. Before Peter MacFarlane left after eighteen months in Australia, he took Helen and tenor John Serge aside and advised them that to further their careers, they must leave Australia and offered to help by getting them onto the US television scene via Canada.

Soon after, Peter MacFarlane drowned in Canada while filming a documentary. John Serge went to England and the continent where he had an illustrious career in opera.

Emerging from three fabulous years at Channel 7, Helen went on to appear in other series including a year with Bobby Limb's "Sound of Music" at TCN Channel 9. During this time, Helen won the prestigious Miller's, BMC (British Motor Corporation), Qantas Search for a Star Quest. The prizes included a first class Qantas trip around the world, a car and singing contracts.

During 1965, Helen and brother Bill Zerefos embarked on the world trip she had won. After almost five months of many wonderful highlights in-

cluding visiting Greece and meeting Elvis Presley at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, they returned home.

There were many appearances on all major TV shows too numerous to name.

Although there were numerous offers, her marriage in 1971 to private investigator, Raymond Millanta and strong family commitments, forced her to dispel any thoughts of working overseas.

After a very successful year of designing and producing special occasion wear accompanied by the excitement of

fashion parades, Helen decided that the rag trade was not worth the temperamental tantrums and hassles of some of those associated with that industry. She decided to devote her talents to the relative sanity of showbusiness and the joy of performing beautiful music.

To summarise:

Helen Zerefos has appeared in over 600 television shows, competed her own television show, performed in a Royal Gala Concert for The Queen and Prince Philip, performed in theatre, performed in thousands of cabaret shows and concerts, recorded a number of CDs, was awarded an O.A.M. (a Medal in the Order of Australia), in 2000 represented Australia in the concert which opened the Shanghai, China, Grand Opera Theatre, ran in the Athens 2004 Olympic World Torch Relay in Sydney and 2007, won a "Mo Award" for best Classical / Opera Performer and in 2009 won another "Mo" Award" - the John Campbell Fellowship Award
 -- Biography by John Love

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