

TWO ARTISTIC ALBERTIANS

In the 1955 *The Albertians* under the heading “News of Old Boys” there was brief mention of Desmond Digby and Tom Kneebone as being involved with theatre.

Many Albertians have been involved with the arts including three Members of the School’s Hall of Distinction: the opera singer Sir Donald McIntyre, the potter Len Castle and the painter Sir Peter Siddell. Digby and Kneebone have also had stellar careers.

Desmond Digby (1946-1950)

On leaving school Desmond Digby went to the Elam School of Fine Art and on graduating joined the New Zealand Players. In 1955 he received a New Zealand Government Scholarship to study theatre at the Slade School of Art, London.

In 1959 he settled in Australia and, among other things, worked at the Australian Opera Company. He produced richly detailed costume and stage designs and perfected scale-model stages so that he could study lighting and other stage-crafts to enhance his ideas.

There was breadth to his work, from world premieres of plays to making head-dresses for Marilyn Munroe in *The Prince and the Showgirl*. He has become one of Australia’s most talented and diverse artists. As well as his work in theatre design he is a sought-after illustrator of children’s books. In 1971 he won the Children’s Picture Book of the Year Award for his illustrations of an edition of AB Peterson’s *Waltzing Matilda*. The paintings for it were bought by Patrick White and presented to the NSW Art Gallery.

There’s more. He is a painter whose works hang in almost all major Australian galleries and many private collections.

Tom Kneebone (1946-1950)

Tom Kneebone left for England to study at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He moved to Canada in 1963 and performed in various revues in Toronto and across Canada. He performed in radio and television and at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario and at the Stratford Festival in Stratford Ontario. Each of these is a major event and brings thousands of people from all over North America.

The cabaret performer became involved with a wonderful non-profit troupe that still brings joy to many. Just before his death in late 2003 he was awarded both the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada. His Citation for the Order of Canada read, in part, “He brings the magic of live theatre to those who can no longer enjoy it in traditional venues. He is artistic director of the Smile Theatre Company, a non-profit organization that brings musicals to senior citizens and retirement homes throughout Ontario. In addition he writes and directs the majority of the company’s productions that often explore Canada’s heritage. A multi-talented performer who has a long and eclectic career”

Desmond Ward Digby and Thomas Selwyn Oscar Kneebone were exact contemporaries at School. Both were in the Dramatic Club and Choir. Both had two years in the Fifth Form (Year 11) and both returned for a year in the Lower Sixth Form (Year 12). Digby played hockey and Kneebone, soccer.

Both developed their crafts in England and each made a name for himself in another Commonwealth country. Digby is known not just in his home state of New South Wales but throughout Australia. Kneebone is known not just in his home province of Ontario but throughout Canada. Neither is well known here.

We learn from Luke 4:24, "Verily I say unto you. No prophet is accepted in his own country."

Brian Murphy
Archivist