

**MR. FRED MERRYWEATHER INTERVIEWED BY LESLEY JACKSON, 29
AUGUST 1983.**

Mr. Merryweather, how long were you in Portland?

Oh, from '49- until 1956

And during that time, you were quite an active member of C.E.M.A.?

Yes. I think, if I remember, I was hijacked into a part in a one-act show the first Monday I was there. That was my first.

And you were in the Drama Group all through that period?

Yes, most of the time- well all the time, really.

And as well as that you were on the Executive.

Yes. I did a stint in various positions. I don't think I was ever a Treasurer, but Vice-President and a period as President, yes.

That was in the early '50s.

Unfortunately, I can't really remember exactly when it was, but I'd say it was between '54 and '56 something like that.

When you first joined C.E.M.A., meetings were held in homes.

Yes, most of the time. I don't think we ever had meetings in anywhere else. Perhaps at the hall. But it was during that time we were offered rooms above the photographers – Allens, I think it is. – and we accepted and I think the whole of the time I was President we used those rooms. We were, I think negotiating with... To ...I don't know whether we were trying to buy, or whether we were just negotiating to rent the property of Keith Anderson. But I'm not quite sure. I can't remember now whether or not the transaction was finalized or not.

When you left in 1956 you moved to Melbourne, and I believe you had a phone-call or "summons"

Yes I think a couple of months after I was settled in Melbourne, I'm not sure if I got a letter or a phone call...Any rate, to go along to a party. And I was very thrilled to receive a couple of pewter mugs as a, well farewell gift, I think. Belated, perhaps, but still appreciated, nevertheless. I've still got them and I value them.

The reason that you got this presentation was you did put an enormous amount of work in to C.E.M.A. , particularly in the Dramatic Group: you were in quite a number of plays and helped build the sets.

Yes, that's true. Whilst I was there, I was quite active. It was, I think, possible one of my main interests at that time, although I must admit that when I was in England I didn't ever do any theatrical work. But I just seemed to become embroiled in a group that were interested in theatre. You know, Eric Thorpe and I think, Bob Stuchbery. Harold Salmon, people like that. I had no thought of ever going into the theatre and as I said there was a part in this show, I was offered it and I took it – with trepidation I must say, but still it went over quite well, I think. And then from there on I just carried on and...I think I was in just about every show during the time I was in Portland

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until...It was a lot of fun. Yes, a lot of fun. But...Oh, well, being a bachelor, I suppose, I had more time than other people, so I put more time into it. But we all worked together on the sets. I'm not quite sure who designed them really. Perhaps there was a ...Just a pooling of ideas, I think, sometimes, but any rate, we managed to build some quite good ones. We didn't have a lot of time to prepare the sets in those days, of course. Quite often you'd have something in the hall and you might have to put the set up, maybe during the day or just before the show started. I don't know what the position is now, I don't know how much time they get to build the set now.

Similar.

Is it?

I think, if it's at the Civic Hall, but if it's in the Arts Centre we usually have a bit more time.

Yes. It's great when you have a theatre of your own, where you can take time, I must admit, but... We seemed to manage to get through it. Some of the things I did enjoy down there. Working in the theatre in Melbourne, it's a bit impersonal, of course. You meet a lot more people, but... [in Portland] I'd probably be walking down the street and somebody would come up and mention a part, or make a remark about something that happened during the show, you know. That made it very friendly and you felt the whole town was behind you. In fact, I used to – in the latter period of my time in Portland – I was a well-drilling contractor, and I remember going out, maybe twenty miles out into the bush and working for somebody, and be sitting having lunch and they'd start talking about the play. Well, that was amazing. You'd travel twenty miles – over some of those roads as they were in those days- in the ramshackle cars, in some cars. But I found that quite a lot of most regular patrons came from those areas, way out in the scrub, and they were always ready to talk about the...We used to go [...] take shows out into these country areas.

Full sets?

Yes. I always remember...Was it Tyrendarra, or somewhere like that. We took a show out there and we were out in the middle of the paddock. That's where the hall was. And we arrived about eight o'clock, I think, or no seven, the show was supposed to start at eight – not a soul in sight. Pitch dark. And we were beginning to think, "Oh, we're at the wrong place," but; however. I think around about half-past eight, quarter to nine, a lantern comes across a paddock (laughs) and they opened the hall up for us. The stage in that particular time was constructed by putting 40-gallon drums on end, you know, and then trestle table tops on the top. And our lights, if I remember, were a couple of...Just storm lanterns, I think, I don't think they were Tilley lamps, or any thin like that. The curtain was just something you dragged across the front. Had a marvelous supper afterwards, I remember. We always used to get tremendous suppers. It was a lot of fun.

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Oh, yes, for you know...The hall was always filled, and then this meant that you probably finished around half-past ten, or something like that. And then you'd have supper, and then there'd be a dance afterwards (Laughs) great

