

# Back Home in Australia with Some New Skills

I came back to Australia in late 1978 with substantial experience and was approached by entrepreneur Michael Edgley<sup>1</sup> of *Edgley International* to put together his orchestral needs in Australia. Michael and his team of directors, including Andrew Guild<sup>2</sup>, had a clear understanding of what would make money and what could fail; they rarely made a bad decision when it came to those issues. They researched the marketplace to see what it would sustain and had very good publicists with effective connections and a network to get things into the press, crucial to the success of a show. I felt comfortable in this environment.

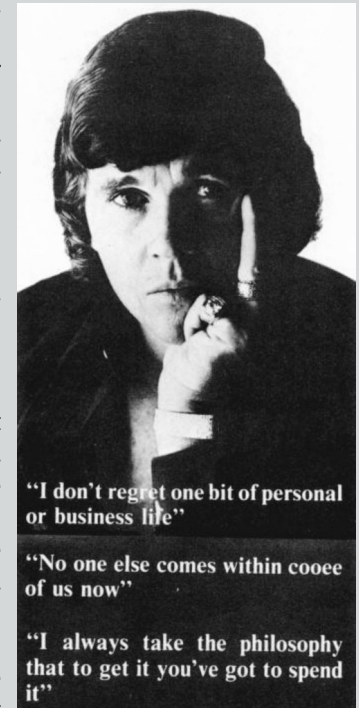
The first show was a combination of the Kirov and Bolshoi Ballet companies, known for this tour as the Tchaikovsky Ballet Company. *Edgleys* had a good relationship with the Russian government, so they could tour companies from Russia not normally given permission to travel. My introduction to the *Edgley* show style was in Perth, greeting the company and two conductors. There was a principal maestro, who conducted opening nights, and a second conductor who did most of the preparation work and some performances. The tour visited capital cities in southern Australia, plus Brisbane and Auckland, New Zealand. We did not take an Australian orchestra but I fixed an orchestra in Auckland. This huge company, forty or fifty *corps de ballet* dancers, arrived in typical, extravagant *Edgley* fashion, which was key to his success. People loved it and he gave them exactly what they wanted to see. He also mixed that with excellence and dazzling technique from dancers.

Andrew Guild and I watched dancers coming off the plane, struggling with bags. They did not queue up at the carousel like other passengers; this was obviously prearranged with Customs. One slim, lithe, tall, attractive dancer struggled with an old-fashioned suitcase bulging at the seams. I thought they must carry their own costumes, but Andrew explained these were personal items, probably potatoes! Apparently they did not believe that potatoes, their staple diet, were available. They were taken to billets and not permitted to go out and meet the general public. Their billets or apartments were well-controlled by Russian authorities.

There was always a senior KGB agent travelling with a company, clearly to look out for potential defections, particularly with ballet since they were high profile people. One never knew who the KGB agent was, it was very covert. The principal conductor was standoffish, polite and did not speak English. An interpreter was available but he was unwilling to enter into a conversation.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Edgley MBE (1943- ), joined his father Eric in the family's theatrical management business at age 19. When his father died in 1967, Michael took over the company. His first show as entrepreneur toured Australia in 1968 and the highly successful and renowned Moscow Circus became synonymous with the *Edgley* brand and style.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Guild (1947- ) was a child actor, playing Artful Dodger in *Oliver!* in 1961. He worked for *Garnet H Carroll Productions* as a Management trainee before joining *Edgleys* in 1967. He learnt to speak Russian and was the Executive Producer for most of the *Edgley* shows from Russia. *Edgley International* brought the Bolshoi Ballet, Marcel Marceau, Folk Dance Ensembles, Torvill and Dean and Fonteyn Ballet tours to Australia for many years. More recently the company has been involved in Australian film projects and international tours outside of Australia.



"I don't regret one bit of personal or business life"

"No one else comes within cooee of us now"

"I always take the philosophy that to get it you've got to spend it"

<sup>3</sup>Michael Edgley: Australia's Greatest Showman', *Theatre Australia*, February 1982

The other was gregarious, very friendly, almost a peasant but well-educated and very sound musically. He wanted to know everything about Australia and Australians and was especially interested in the musicians. He was interested in the lifestyle and I doubt he had ever been out of Russia.

After playing Melbourne, we were at the Regent Theatre, Sydney. There had been an industrial problem between some of the stagehands and *Edgleys*. I do not know what the issues were, but the relevant union was involved as we approached opening night, which is always when industrial matters come to a head. I was called by Alan Nash, the Sydney secretary of the Musicians' Union, advising there was no problem with the conditions under which the musicians were employed, since they were employed by me. Edgley gave me a sum of money quoted to him beforehand and I took the risk if it cost more. I had been used to dealing this way in England. There was no coming back for a second bite of the cherry. You had to be correct with Michael. He gave you the information to make decisions but once these were made, I took the risk. All the industrial negotiations were mine. Alan wanted to be on site in case the stage workers (members of the theatrical union<sup>3</sup>) stopped the show. He wanted to make sure the musicians were paid although he did not want to destroy another union's action on behalf of its members. Negotiations continued right up until after the moment of curtain up. Alan advised the players should go into the pit, tune up and stand by. I thought there would be a strike. The second conductor, who had very little English but could communicate, was obviously excited and was grinning broadly. When I acknowledged there was a dispute between the theatre employees, management and the promoter, he said he wanted to see a strike, obviously not something he had experienced at home. He was very excited to think there was industrial action and workers were going to take control. He wanted to see how it would work out. Grievances were settled and we started half an hour late with apologies to the audience but it made his night, he came beaming from the pit. The performance had been very successful, albeit late.

### **New Zealand**

I had to engage an orchestra in Auckland and get them ready to play. We had little rehearsal time and only two days before the company came in. I was not free, for financial reasons, to conclude booking the players until closer to the performances. I had them holding the date but had no rehearsal venue. This was my responsibility but I could not do that until I got to Auckland. I advised *Edgleys* I would go a week before to make sure it came together. They asked me to take the principal conductor who was conducting the rehearsals there. He had very high artistic and

<sup>3</sup> The Australian Theatrical & Amusement Employees' Association (1910-1993), merged with the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA).

musical standards and no tolerance for people who did not match it. Fortunately the players in Auckland were very good so artistically there were no problems.

We had been through four or five weeks in Australia and the conductor had never spoken to anyone outside the company. He wore a badge indicating he was a KGB major. I was designated to travel with him to New Zealand. He did not say a word because he had no English. Our hotel was near the rehearsal venue. When we arrived he gestured to indicate meeting at 6pm in his room. The score of the ballet was sitting closed on his desk and it seemed there would be no talk of music. From the refrigerator he brought out six rashers of uncooked bacon and cut them into little slivers. He had a bottle of vodka and some cheese onto which he put the bacon. He handed me one with a glass of vodka, did the same for himself and we commenced to drink. Again he said nothing. By the time we had drunk three quarters of that bottle he began to smile. I was not sure I could handle this - I was used to drinking but as the bottle emptied I hoped that would be it. We finished the first bottle and he replaced it with another. He cut more raw bacon and by then I had gotten over the notion that I did not want to eat raw bacon. Anything to soak up the alcohol. We went through the second bottle.

We had a 10am rehearsal the next morning. At 7pm I was barely able to walk or think. He was very friendly and smiling as he patted me on the back and pushed me out the door after shaking my hand. Next morning, at 9 am, he was the same, demure—as if he had never had a drink in his life. I had the worst hangover imaginable; fortunately I did not have to play. I took him to the rehearsal and he functioned perfectly. The orchestra loved it, but from that point on we were old friends although we never spoke in English but at the end of the season he shook my hand. I must have done something right. He certainly did not want to drink on his own, but was prepared to drink because he had brought two bottles of strong, Russian vodka, Stolichnaya; beautiful vodka for the first four or five. After that, who knows!

### **The Edgley Management Style**

That was my first date for *Edgleys*. It worked artistically, everyone got paid, and the company left in good spirits knowing you can buy potatoes in Australia. *Edgleys* had an old fashioned management style; agreements were made on a handshake rather than contracts. I was

**Michael Edgley**  
International Pty Ltd.  
**presents for**  
**1979/80**

---

**THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS SPECTACULAR (NEW ZEALAND/ASIAN TOUR)**  
(in association with Bullen Bros.)

---

**ANNIE**  
(in association with J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd. and  
The Adelaide Festival Theatre Trust)

---

**D'OYLY CARTE OPERA COMPANY**  
(in association with Derek Glynn London and  
J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd.)

---

**RED ARMY CHOIR**  
(in association with Kevin Jacobsen Concert Promotions)

---

**DEATHTRAP**  
(in association with J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd.)

---

**THE TWO RONNIES**  
(in association with J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd.)

---

**RINGLING BROTHERS, BARNUM & BAILEY – THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH**  
(in association with Bullen Bros.)

---

**STARS OF WORLD BALLET 1979**  
(in association with Sir Robert Helpmann, Kevin Jacobsen Concert Promotions and  
J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd.)

---

**NUREYEV & FRIENDS**

---

**ALVIN AILEY DANCE THEATER**

---

**DANCE THEATER OF HARLEM**  
(in association with The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and  
Sir Robert Helpmann)

---

**THE GEORGIAN STATE DANCE COMPANY**  
(in association with Kevin Jacobsen Concert Promotions and  
J. C. Williamson Productions Ltd.)

fixing events in every state with contacts who knew the freelance musicians available. We could put together a good orchestra of forty-five to fifty people in each capital city, without much problem. Occasionally there would be one instrument which was hard to get, but I would tour that from Sydney. We were paying good money; not over the top, but regular and better than the Trust Orchestras were earning. They were paid cash at the end of the season; there were no cheques. There was little documentation required. I kept paperwork for ten years for the benefit of payroll taxes so there would be adequate proof.

The *Edgley* Melbourne office was very busy with three or four shows coming in. I fixed orchestras for the D'Oyly Carte Opera, a co-production involving negotiations with their London manager and the musical director of D'Oyly Carte's Orchestra at Sadler's Wells. I was sent to England to meet them and view the setup for the orchestra, so that everyone was comfortable with arrangements.<sup>4</sup>

*The Two Ronnies*, Ronnie Corbett and Ronnie Barker, were also visiting Australia<sup>5</sup>. I looked after the orchestra for that, so I was busy. My desk was next to Simon Wincer, who was producing the movie *The Man from Snowy River*<sup>6</sup>, another big *Edgley* project. Andrew Guild, very much the hands-on person, was second-in-command.

Michael Edgley was rarely in the office; he was touring the world somewhere, so most conversations were by phone. Andrew's desk always amazed me: there was nothing on it except a small balancing toy. Complex negotiations were done on the telephone and he rarely took notes. He was very thorough and accurate in his agreements, never missed anything and would always spot in advance something that should not be there or an industrial problem likely to arise as a result of agreements. He filed a D'Oyly Carte memorandum of mine in the wastepaper basket after reading it. He did not see the need for paper, it was about trust and responsibility; an amazing style of management. We could do a whole contract in the car between the airport and the theatre. He would agree matters on the basis of a considered costing and make compromises where necessary. It was good for me to see a successful organization making money, and paying everyone properly, operating on the skill of individual people. There were no reams of paper such as when I worked in the public service before returning to the Trust. It showed me there was a way to manage orchestral resources and music efficiently, with great flexibility and still guarantee a successful financial outcome if you did the right things at the right time and you

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1: *Commercial Promotions for Large Orchestras and Jazz Ensembles Booked by Warwick D Ross*

<sup>5</sup> *The Two Ronnies*, with Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett, a BBC TV comedy sketch show created by Bill Cotton in 1971, which ran successfully on television till 1987. It was also screened in Australia on ABC TV. *The Two Ronnies* also toured a stage show based on the television formula, which toured Australia 1979 and 1983.

<sup>6</sup> *The Man from Snowy River* film, 1982, based on Banjo Paterson's poem, directed by George T. Miller. The cast included Kirk Douglas, Jack Thompson, Tom Burlinson, Sigrid Thornton, Terence Donovan and Chris Haywood. Most Popular Film award, Montreal Film Festival 1982. Produced by Geoff Burrowes, Michael Edgley and Simon Wincer.

trusted the people working with you. Edgley picked good people for his team. They included General Manager, Jim Cranfield, who was outstanding. They could handle all industrial problems at court level, if necessary, but at the same time could do the nitty-gritty of negotiating box office sales.

There was a willingness to be hands-on. I remember waiting in a Melbourne theatre with Andrew Guild close to a rehearsal time. The theatre staff had not arrived to set up the pit so Andrew suggested we do it and within ten minutes, under my guidance, we had set up chairs, stands etc. Hands-on. He had employed me to look after the Orchestras and he could see I knew what was required. That went all the way up the track to things like budgets. On another occasion, Michael was in New York, negotiating with artists, and I received a 3am call. Regardless of the time, he wanted a costing for an orchestra, something in the region of \$40,000. I was half asleep but he called back 30 minutes later to confirm the budget we discussed and agreed a fee for the musicians. He expected me to know all of the relevant answers. He did not want detail, just the bottom line. Having been engaged by Michael Edgley to put orchestras together for their touring shows, I had a very busy two or three years from 1979 to 1981 with these shows.

I came back to Australia with a completely different attitude to music and life, and a different understanding of how the music industry works well with players working together. Probably it was only natural I should fall into orchestra management; I was not looking for it. I put my hat in the ring for freelance work, which came from people in Sydney and Melbourne. Then the Sydney Symphony contacted me. They had work for a bassist which kept me going for about eighteen months. I had a job; it was not permanent but it was income. Carole came home and we bought a place in North Sydney, mostly with profit from the Fonteyn entrepreneurial activity. Carole took a publicity job with the Australian Opera and was there for about a year. Soon after, our marriage splintered and we separated in about 1980. She returned to England and subsequently became administrator for what had been the New London Ballet, by then a national ballet company, London Festival Ballet (and subsequently, **English National Ballet**). She was magnificent in her capacity to work and deal with people efficiently. These were great skills. She was a fundraiser with the personality to attract people to help and had a life-long commitment to ballet, so it was a good job for her.

### **Exploring Recording Techniques**

I was working on a casual basis with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and wondering about my future. I wanted involvement in record production, at first as a producer, but then I wanted more control. I enrolled in the School of Audio Engineering, which had opened in Sydney in 1976, and did a diploma in audio engineering for the next year, exploring recording techniques,

how and what microphones to use and what effects can be achieved. With my background as a performer and the little experience I had performing for recordings, I was successful in getting good results. I was interested in remote recording outside of the studio, and began to research and design a mobile recording truck. The only trucks existing were ABC outside broadcast units, as they were called, but these were broadcast facilities. I was more interested in a forty-eight track truck for record production on-site; recording a live concert and mixing it later for vinyl release. I went into incredible depth on the acoustics needed in the monitoring environment: designing the truck, its contents and the acoustics of the room. With all this information, I became fascinated with acoustic outcome, not from a scientific point of view but from a results point of view. I found there were incredible outcomes with the simplest of materials. Some people would spend thousands of dollars in a professional studio to get the same effect as using a simple piece of cardboard or plastic positioned with a microphone in a certain way. I became more interested in the recording process than the mobile recording process and found there was a lot of capital investment for this van; it was commercially nonviable, which is probably why they did not exist. It would be over \$60,000 for the van to start with and you would be lucky to return \$10,000 a year. I set up a recording studio at home, recording small things; a couple of commercial jingles, which paid some of the costs, and things people in Sydney were not getting an opportunity to air. I recorded work of the Ensemble de la Reine, with cellist Catherine Finnis and John Gray, double bass, playing early music, which had not been of interest to others. Things have changed magnificently since then but none of this sort of music was of interest to anyone.



Analogue 8 Track Recording Studio Equipment and control room.

### Zoomerangs at Taronga Zoo, Sydney

In January 1981 I was invited to play in a newly formed orchestra set up by Taronga Zoo in Sydney. The driving force of this orchestra came from one of the curators, Ted Smith, an Englishman, who also conducted and played the bassoon. I was very keen to experiment with the recording medium, especially the recording of animals and the mix down of multiple sounds after my introduction to the Zoo. During the course of rehearsals and performances, I discussed with Ted the concept of recording sounds of animals and performing those sounds as part of a concert involving jazz improvisation. Such concerts could be performed at Taronga Zoo in the early evening and be attended by supporters of the Zoo and jazz lovers. This idea developed to include readings of relevant poetry and at the end of the performance the animal in question would be brought to the audience, by Zoo employees, and the audience could examine the animal at close quarters and ask questions. The musicians involved were extremely experienced jazz players and were very comfortable with improvised music, which in fact was the core of the music concert supplemented by the sounds of animals. This very successful concert concept led to the presentation of several live performances between 1981 and 1983 using recorded sounds of selected species of animals situated at the Zoo. The concerts were presented to an almost full capacity audience.

It was a heady time during which I made contact with Robert Ingram who had been with the Trust Sydney Orchestra in my absence. He was a level-headed and worthwhile adviser on orchestras and a fixer. He fixed most of the recording sessions in Sydney requiring strings and orchestral sounds. We did a lot of work together, both in the studio where I played bass in his recordings and he worked for me as leader of the orchestras we put together. I was doing the same thing as I did in England, finding the key player and then who would sit next to him. If you took the time and effort, you ended up with a very good orchestra.

By 1984 most of my income was from playing in the recording studio, both my own things to a lesser degree, but more importantly from other work in the main Sydney studios. By then the Sydney Symphony Orchestra work had dried up. Bill Motzing<sup>7</sup> was a major film music composer, very good at putting down film tracks and working to a film stage, matching the music to the sound. He had done a lot of Australian films by then. He came from America with connections in

and now  
Taronga Zoo introduces  
yet another attraction to the rich  
entertainment programme that already  
delights thousands

**TARONGA ZOOOMERANG**  
in the  
**SAFARI ROOM**  
**WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY - 7-30 for 8pm**

NOT JUST SUPPER  
AND MUSIC **ZOOONSH** "JILL QUINLAN'S  
SPECIAL  
HOME-BAKING  
MUSIC & POETRY  
featuring  
"BIRDS IN HAND"  
a JAZZ Entertainment  
series by TED SMITH  
and WARWICK ROSS

NOT JUST SUPPER  
AND MUSIC **ZOOOMUSE**

BUT ALSO... **ZOOONOS** "ENCOUNTERS WITH  
ANIMALS, FILMS  
AND TALKS  
THIS MONTH:  
"PENGUINS"  
AND "PARROTS"

MEET YOUR  
FEATHERED AND  
FOUR-FOOTED  
FRIENDS

TICKETS  
**\$10** OBTAINABLE FROM  
**TARONGA  
ZOO**  
PO BOX 20  
MOSMAN NSW  
TEL 969-2777

INCLUSIVE  
FOR FULL EVENING'S  
ENJOYMENT

<sup>7</sup> William Edward Motzing (1937-2014), American born composer, conductor, arranger and trombonist who composed over 30 soundtracks for Australian films and television series, including *Newsfront* (1978) and *Young Einstein* (1988), for which he received an AFI Award for best original score. He arranged and conducted many of Australia's chart topping hits including Peter Allen's *I Still Call Australia Home*. From 1971 to 2011 he was a jazz lecturer then Director of Jazz Studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.



Robert Ingram and Stephen Hague, first violins,  
Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra.

Hollywood; getting scores from the USA to Australia to be recorded for American films and that was where the work was coming from. Very often we were recording the composer, Jerry Goldsmith<sup>8</sup>, and it was lucrative for many Australian musicians. American locals discovered this work was going offshore and placed an embargo on it. Almost overnight all recordings dried up. Any studio sending work to Australia would be blacklisted. The American unions were obeyed. All those sessions went back to Los Angeles, probably where they belonged but they had been in Australia because the quality of the musicians was good, and they were probably not as expensive as the west coast. The session system died instantly and there were people out of work. There was a great body of players and they all turned to people like me for shows.

At the same time *Edgleys* decided to stop bringing shows in. There was an Easter Saturday rehearsal for a stage show at the Capitol Theatre, Sydney. It had a set to be erected with scaffolding, and there was a rigger whose wage bill was \$2,500 for one day's work including all of the penalties he was entitled to. The award for working on Easter Saturday gave him double time and a half plus extra time for doing this and that and safety money. This was the worst kind of labour relationship imaginable: when one person earns that much money on a day when they are not even in charge of a team. Imagine what the senior people were earning. He was one of many, so there would have been at least ten people on that: it was probably a \$20,000 day just to set up for a show. One of the *Edgley* directors announced their decision not to do more shows. Penalty rates like that would kill their business and they were happy to tour the Moscow Circus all over the world rather than mount expensive productions in Australia. There were other reasons, but this was a deciding factor for the directors. You could not negotiate because it was an enforceable union award entitlement.

I returned to London in July 1985 having enrolled in the 12th International Course for Studio Engineers presented by the Associated Professional Recording Studio (APRS) organisation. The course focussed on emerging digital audio engineering technology and was held at the University of Surrey.

<sup>8</sup> Jerry Goldsmith (1929-2004), innovative and influential American composer and conductor of film and television scores, including the *Star Trek* franchise. He received an Academy Award for his original score for the 1976 film, *The Omen*.



Pitched to professional studio personnel, many of the commercial recording studios in England, South Africa, Europe, India, Asia, South America and Australia sent their senior staff. There were 42 attendees with impressive credentials and audio achievements, all of which was most stimulating to me.

The eight day live-in course started with an intensive one day introduction to digital recording in general. The following seven days were devoted to hands on involvement using the latest digital technology techniques and equipment and included signal processing, digital editing and CD production.

The first successful digital recording, (*Brothers in Arms* by *Dire Straits*), was produced on the new *Sony* 24 Track digital recorder and released, in the United Kingdom five months before the APRS course, in the new Compact Disc format. This commercial success had demonstrated to the audio industry the highly impressive capability of digital sound and the production direction most studios should follow for the next twenty years.

The course instructors were sourced from the audio research and manufacturing firms, including *Sony*, *Bruel & Kjaer*, *Neve* and *Calrec*, along with prominent music producers. I considered it to be the best introduction to digital recording I could have had.

Whilst in England, after the APRS course, I took the opportunity to undertake a detailed study of ambisonics surround sound production. This concept had extended the quadrophonic sound experiments of the 1970's and had been developed by *Calrec Audio* of Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire. I was interested to understand the four-dimensional nature of the ambisonic soundfield microphone, its remote control capability and post recording production features. The surround sound production technique was used by *Nimbus Records* in Monmouth U.K. for their production of classical music CDs.

The completion of both these programs put me in a position to create digital recordings of high quality when I returned to Australia.

