



Bondi Surf Bathers' Life Saving Club



100 years of tradition

2000 – today

By ROBBIE LAPPAN
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Melbourne radio has lost one of its most beloved sons with the death of Allan "Lap Lap" Lappan. Lappan was the consummate communicator, with a voice that conveyed joy, life and familiarity. His listening audience felt they knew him. He worked at 3UZ (now Sport 927) from 1962 to 1975, and was the top-rated disc jockey in Melbourne year after year.

A feature of his working style was the way he sent himself up. Lap Lap was at his best in banter with on-air colleagues - crossing to racecaller Bert Bryant, getting the traffic report from Clive Waters in car one, or reporting the golf scores to news reader Neal Thomson. Or when chatting to any of his listeners who rang in during the talk-back session, Phone Fun. Regular callers included Alf the Arm, Margaret the Kookaburra Lady, Bandicoot Bob, and the Chinese ping pong team.

Journalist Noel Harley wrote in 1971 that the secret to his success was in being an ordinary fellow. Born in Wollongong to a working-class family, he developed a life-long love of the beach. His parents, like many who had survived the Depression, disapproved of his career choice in radio because of its instability.

Lappan swam for Bondi Surf Club in four Australian surf championships, as well as being stroke for the Bondi crew. He won many double-ski titles. He represented New South Wales in the Australian swimming championships, and later held the record for the butterfly in Queensland for some years.

He was also a boxer, and had a number of victories as a lightweight amateur. He fought exhibition bouts with Jimmy Carruthers, Vic Patrick and Tommy

Burns.

Lappan began his radio life in 1946 as office boy at 2UW, Sydney, and his first on-air experience was as a rugby union commentator. Before long, he had progressed to announcing, going to 2DU, Dubbo, and 2ZO, Orange. In 1954 he was offered the job of featured disc jockey at Brisbane's 4BK. It was here he began to make his mark as the first announcer to revel in using an Australian accent, incredible as that now seems.

When Lappan entered the industry, announcers were required to have the Australian equivalent of BBC pronunciation. Lappan broke this mould when he dared to use his own accent, along with an innovative flair for phrasing and inflection, perfect timing, and a patois that reflected the creativity of Australian English. He also promoted Australian music, being the first to put Slim Dusty's A Pub with no Beer on his playlist.

While at 4BK he met and married Desley Vale, a musician and program arranger.

In 1959 he moved to 2SM in Sydney, where he also compered the television shows Six o'clock Rock (during Johnny OKeefe's absences) and NBN's Teenbeat and Tempo, in Newcastle.

Lappan interviewed many showbiz greats during his career, including Bing Crosby, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Mel Torme, and the Beatles. The highlight of his career was an interview with Frank Sinatra during the singer's first tour of Australia in 1956.

Lap Lap had travelled to Sydney from 4BK in Brisbane to interview the great man. At the airport, Sinatra's bodyguards looked threateningly at the 200 reporters milling around in the press room. "Mr Sinatra's not doing any interviews," they said. Unfazed, Lap Lap pushed his way through the crowd and asked Sinatra straight out for an interview. Sinatra must have liked him because Lappan scored an exclusive 40-minute interview. He copyrighted the interview, and it was syndicated nationally. His name was made.

In 1962, he was headhunted by Australia's then premier radio station, 3UZ. Within a year he was voted most popular disc jockey in a listeners' poll. The McNair ratings had him consistently at number one, with up to 33 per cent of the total listening audience. Lappan always sounded as though he was having a good time, and he was.

His years on the breakfast session at 3UZ meant rising at 3.30am, and his workday was over by 10am. Fortunately, this was also the time that jockeys

finished their track work, and Lappan made many friends in the racing industry. But the downside to this love of partying was a long battle with alcoholism that resulted in his hospitalisation at the age of 54. He passed away aged 69, and is survived by his wife Desley and their four children. To use his own phrase: Bye Bye for Now Now, Lap Lap.

Robbie Lappan is Allan Lappan's daughter.