

STENNETT, STANLEY LLEWELLYN (Stan) (1925 - 2013), musician, comedian, actor

Name: Stanley Llewellyn Stennett
Date of birth: 1925
Date of death: 2013
Gender: Male
Occupation: musician, comedian, actor
Area of activity: Performing Arts
Author: Robert Hyde

Stan Stennett was born on 30 July 1925 on a farm in Rhiwceiliog, Pencoed, near Bridgend, the eldest of three sons of Doris Stennett. He never knew his father, and his mother died in 1937, so Stan was brought up from the age of twelve by his grandparents, Richard and Annie Stennett. Fairly early on, it became obvious that he was a gifted musician, and by the time he was 15 he could already play the guitar and harmonica. He found his love of entertainment watching Gene Autry cowboy films whilst serving ice creams as a part time job in a local cinema. He then worked for Pickfords by day, and played in bands at night.

During the war he joined the Royal Artillery as a driver, and spent any spare time entertaining the other soldiers, playing the guitar and telling jokes and anecdotes in between. Eventually he found himself in the Combined Services Entertainment Unit, and this was his crucible. After demob, Stennett played in a number of bands, going on the variety circuit full time. He also joined the cast of *Welsh Rarebit*, with other regulars such as Sir Harry Secombe, Wyn Calvin, Eynon Evans, Gladys Morgan and Maudie Edwards.

He married Elizabeth Rogers in 1948, and they had two sons, Roger (b. 1949) and Ceri (b. 1960).

Stennett eventually settled into a band called The Harmaniacs, playing mostly jazz and popular music. They were snapped up to play on radio, and featured very often on *Workers' Playtime*, doing a show every week from a different location all over the country. The band toured extensively, and Stennett also taught himself to play the trumpet and the piano.

After a few years, Stennett struck out on his own, working with the Joe Loss Band and the Ted Heath Band as a featured artist, and featuring high-up on the variety circuit alongside all the star names of the era, including the likes of Ken Dodd, Danny Kaye, Petula Clark, Bob Hope, Tony Bennett, Johnnie Ray and James Cagney.

Having this success allowed Stennett to indulge in a great passion - flying. Ironically, having been turned down for the RAF during the war because of poor eyesight, he learned to fly in the early 1950s, and owned around 20 aeroplanes during his life. He was the Royal Aeronautical Club's Private Flier of the Year for 1955.

Although the variety circuit gradually began to diminish throughout the 1950s, Stennett was never out of work. He transitioned into television, appearing on many shows of the time, such as *Face the Music*, *Variety Parade* and *Show Band Parade*. The ultimate call up for a comedy star was to play the *Palladium*, and he did just that for Val Parnell's *Sunday Night At The London Palladium* - notably, on his second visit of the first series, out-gagging Bob Hope in their segment together in February 1956. He also joined the *Black and White Minstrel Show* as compere, appearing with them for around 5 years. He was a regular performer in both pantomimes and summer seasons all across the country. He was asked to become a member of the Grand Order of the Water Rats in April 1959, and continued to work tirelessly for charity throughout his life.

In the 1960s, Stennett had the chance to demonstrate his acting ability. Alongside all of the personal television appearances, he made several appearances in stories for *A Play For Today* on radio, a very brief few episodes in *Coronation Street* in 1960, and most notably as a regular panellist on Yorkshire Television's *Jokers Wild* in 1973 and 1974.

Soap operas were to feature over the next two decades. In 1971, he was asked to take a small role in the very popular *Crossroads*, playing an American GI who was on the run. *Coronation Street* came calling again in 1976, and he deftly took on the role of Hilda Ogden's brother.

In 1980, Stennett took on another change of direction, becoming Director of The Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury for the next 13 years, where he was able to use his vast collection of contacts to attract performers. The Gala performance in 1984 was tinged with sadness, however. The star of the show was Eric Morecambe, an old friend of Stennett's. After their evening together on stage, and 6 curtain calls, Morecambe collapsed in the wings and passed away in Cheltenham Hospital a few hours after the show.

Stennett returned to *Crossroads* in 1982 and played the role of Sid Hooper for the following seven years. Stennett was such a name that Eamonn Andrews and *This Is Your Life* called in 1983, surprising him at HTV Studios, where the show was then recorded.

Retirement was never on Stennett's mind, and he toured his own shows and pantomimes well into his 80s. He still has the record for hosting the most consecutive pantomimes at the New Theatre in Cardiff - completely sold out for five years in a row. He was also in television shows such as *Heartbeat*, *Doctors*, *Casualty*, *The History of Mr Polly* and most recently *Stella* with Ruth Jones. He once said that his joke book contained 25,000 gags, one for every occasion, but also claimed to be an 'alternative' comedian, since the comic establishment was by then filthy whereas he had stayed clean.

Stennett lived for many years in Rhiwbina, Cardiff. He lost a large proportion of his memorabilia in a house fire in 1998, but was most distressed to lose some of his musical instruments. With all of the work, he still found time to play golf, and was heavily involved with Cardiff City Football Club. He was awarded an MBE in 1979 for services to entertainment and to charities.

Stan Stennett died at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff on 26 November 2013 after complications from a stroke.

Author

Robert Hyde

Sources

Grand Order of Water Rats: [Stan Stennett MBE](#)

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Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Stan Stennett](#)

Sound and Film

British Pathe - Flight: [Stan Stennett](#)

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