

NOVELLO, IVOR (DAVID IVOR DAVIES till 1927; 1893 - 1951), composer, playwright, stage and film actor

Name: Ivor Novello
Date of birth: 1893
Date of death: 1951
Partner: Robert Tobias Andrews
Parent: Clara Novello Davies
Parent: David Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: composer, playwright, stage and film actor
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Music; Performing Arts
Author: Mary Auronwy James

Born at 95 Cowbridge Road, Cardiff, 15 January 1893, of a very musical family who soon moved to Llwyn-yr-eos, 11 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, the only son of David Davies, rates collector, and [Clara Novello Davies](#). He attended Mrs. Soulez' school nearby and received musical tuition from his mother and (Sir) Herbert Brewer, Gloucester. His good soprano voice won him prizes at *estedd fodau*, and a choral scholarship to Magdalen College School, Oxford, when he was 10 years old. He soon became a soloist with the college choir but never sang in public after his voice broke at the age of 16. He returned home as a piano teacher and accompanist at his mother's concerts but left for London a year later where he continued as her accompanist and composed ballads. In 1913 he moved to 11 Aldwych where he lived for the rest of his life, though he had a country home at Downley, Buckinghamshire, and later bought Redroofs, near Maidenhead. He died suddenly 6 March 1951, a bachelor at the height of his fame.

Nearly the whole of his life was spent in a musical atmosphere. He was constantly busy, acting in films or plays - many of which were his own work - sometimes filming during the day, on stage in the evening, and every spare moment writing and composing new works, nearly every one more brilliant than the one before. He was only 15 years old when, as Ivor Novello, his first song, ' Spring of the year ', was published. At the age of 21 he became famous for his war-time song ' Keep the home fires burning ', the lyrics written by Lena Guilbert Ford. He wrote approximately 60 ballads and songs, including ' We'll gather lilacs '. In 1916 he joined the Royal Naval Air Force but failed as a pilot and was transferred to the Air Ministry. During this time he composed his first theatre score, for the show *Theodore & Co*. He was sent on a highly successful mission to Sweden in 1918 as an entertainer to nullify the effects of German propaganda in that country. After his release from the forces in 1919 he took the leading part in the London film *The Call of Blood*, and subsequently starred in about 16 other British and American films. His greatest desire to become a stage actor was realized in 1921 when he took a small part in *Deburaut. The Rat*, his first play (which was later filmed), proved a success for him as author and actor. He wrote and acted in numerous other plays before turning to musical plays, his most popular compositions of all, beginning with *Glamorous night* (1935), whilst his seventh and last, *King's Rhapsody* (1949), was his finest work in this field. There is no doubt that he drew the crowds when he was in the cast. See Sandy Wilson, *Ivor* (1975), for a remarkable list of his songs, plays, films and musical plays, his numerous performances on stage and in films, and his work as a producer and manager; also for references to earlier biographies. His bust was placed in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and commemorative plaques mark both his birthplace and his London home, where he died.

[Editorial note 2019: Ivor Novello was openly gay, and the actor Robert 'Bobbie' Andrews (1895-1976) was his partner for 35 years.]

Author

Dr Mary Auronwy James

Sources

Who was who?

W. Macqueen-Pope, *Ivor the story of an achievement. A biography of Ivor Novello* (Cardiff 1951)

NLW Archives: [D. R. Davies Collection of Drama Scrap Books 52: Dramatists and poets](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 20972C: Letters to Ivor Novello from Sir Edward Marsh](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 20973E: Letters to Sir Edward Marsh from Ivor Novello](#)

James Harding, *Ivor Novello* (Caernarfon 1996)

Paul Webb, *Ivor Novello: a portrait of a star* (London 1999)

Graham Jones, *A portrait of Ivor Novello* (Cardiff 1997)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Ivor Novello](#)

Additional Links

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 23204D: Ivor Novello papers](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW MS 23696E: Ivor Novello letters](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW ex 2404: Papers relating to Ivor Novello](#)

NLW Archives: [NLW ex 2980: Ivor Novello and Madame Clara Novello Davies memorabilia](#)

NLW Archives: [W. Macqueen-Pope \(Ivor Novello\) Papers](#)

VIAF: [56811010](#)

Wikidata: [Q436693](#)

Published date: 2001

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

