

# Vale Victor Emeljanow, Emeritus Professor of Drama, founding editor of *Popular Entertainment Studies*

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Earlier this year Victor Emeljanow, the Editor of *Popular Entertainment Studies*, passed away suddenly. Victor was Emeritus Professor of Drama at the University of Newcastle, a founding academic and an 'elder' of the discipline of Drama in Australian Universities, a highly respected researcher and theatre director, and a generous teacher to several generations of theatre practitioners and scholars working both in Australia and internationally.

After completing his PhD in Classics at Stanford University in California (supported by a Fulbright Scholarship) Victor's career as a Drama academic commenced in 1965 when he was appointed to Australia's first-ever Department of Drama at the University of New South Wales. During his tenure there (1965-1986) he held positions as the artistic director of the Bondi Pavilion Theatre (1974-78) and theatre critic for the *National Times* (1979-80), while also commencing an international career in academic publishing which signalled his intention, from the very beginning of his career, to integrate professional theatre practice with scholarship in the developing field of drama and theatre studies, and to build links between the academy and the professional theatre. This was no easy task at the time, but Victor characteristically stuck to his guns, and consequently in retrospect looks like an unheralded pioneer in the area of practice-led research, which was not recognised within the academy till many years later.

He continued to mix artistic practice and scholarship after his appointment to the Chair of Drama at the University of Newcastle in 1986: he served as the vice-president of the Producers and Directors Guild of Australia (1987-95), worked consistently as a theatre director within the University, for the Hunter Valley Theatre Company, and for numerous outside groups, winning four City of Newcastle Awards (CONDA) for Professional Excellence in theatre direction, introduced his students to theatre professionals via working relationships in many of these productions, and served in an advisory capacity to a number of local

theatre companies, occasionally as a Board member. At the same time, he maintained an international scholarly reputation, particularly as an expert in 19<sup>th</sup> century British melodrama, and late 19<sup>th</sup> century European modernist theatre, and through award-winning research, with Professor Jim Davis, on 19<sup>th</sup> century theatre audiences.

Victor's enjoyment of collaborative work, evident in his theatrical practice, and enthusiasm for encouraging the work of others, were both manifest in his close involvement with international research groups through organisations like the American Society for Theatre Research and the International Federation for Theatre Research (whose working group on popular entertainments he established and convened from 2006 to 2015), as well as locally. These ventures led to edited publications, which were important in establishing the international reputation of the e-journal *Popular Entertainment Studies* of which he was founder and general editor. Victor's internationalist perspective was also evident in his constant encouragement of junior colleagues to involve themselves with international communities of scholars, and some of us owe the connections we made to this encouragement and active support.

While maintaining this internationalist perspective, Victor was committed to a notion of collegiality which made him an energetic member of his university community: he combined his leadership of the Department of Drama for almost all of its life with serving on a wide range of major university committees, as well as serving as Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1987 to 1990, and he contributed to numerous program reviews at tertiary institutions external to the University of Newcastle. He was, though, most fully engaged as a teacher, postgraduate supervisor and mentor, held in high esteem for his wisdom, knowledge, professionalism and generosity by the several generations of graduates, scholars and theatre and performance-makers who he taught or supervised at the University of New South Wales and the University of Newcastle.

Victor's was a very full, rich and busy life, right up to his final years of failing health, when most would be happy to rest on their laurels in quiet retirement. Victor loved his life and work, and all of us who shared some of it are the better for it, and greatly saddened that he has left us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A personal valedictory for Victor has also been written by Julian Meyrick who is the Strategic Professor of Creative Arts, Flinders University, South Australia. Titled "Victor Emeljanow: In Memory of a Professor of Drama," Professor Meyrick's remembrance of Victor can be found here: <https://dailyreview.com.au/victor-emeljanow/74062/>