



Noel Ross

photo: Lois Seigel

noel ross wearing two hats

Noel Ross might be considered to be in a unique position because he has seriously pursued two complementary careers in his lifetime: acting and music.

Born in Southsea, England, Noel relates his first memories: "My mother, I think, was responsible for my acting because she was a rather unhappy woman who sought solace in the cinema, and from the age of two I was taken there three or four times a week where I would sit on her lap to watch the big screen, not understanding anything, although perhaps I understood a lot more than I or anyone else would have realized. I think that we often underestimate how impressed babies are by the images surrounding them. Babies know a lot more than we give them credit for. I watched people acting — and then came home to re-enact what

I saw on the screen. I would go in front of a full-length mirror and pull faces at myself and watch the changing of my expression."

In later years during school theatre productions, Noel often landed the part of a girl because of his fair skin and blond hair, and he recalls these as being very demanding roles.

His music studies began at an early age. He played piano and violin, and at 18 took a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London where he studied the trumpet and conducting.

Later Noel entered The Guildhall School, where he completed his simultaneous studies in music and drama.

He was invited to become a private pupil of the famous conductor Anatole Fistoulari and also played the trumpet with The London Philharmonic Orchestra for several years.

At 28 Noel conducted his first professional orchestra for London's Festival Ballet Company.

"When you are studying to be a conductor, you are learning scores, becoming familiar with the repertoire, and practicing with your teacher. You practice the technique of conducting. The teacher says 'You're not clear. Your arms are moving in the wrong way.' You are conducting in a naked

room — pointing to an armchair in the corner as if it were a timpani. Other musicians can go out and buy their instruments, practice them and learn to play them. The conductor's instrument is an orchestra. You just can't go out and buy orchestras.... although one man did — Sir Thomas Beecham."

The years which followed provided opportunities for the actor and musician and included work as a narrator where an intimacy with both arts was a great advantage. Noel's varied employments included reading for musical performances such as Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf"; advising and managing a music publishing company and conducting for pop and light musical recordings.

One year ago Noel came to live in Canada. His credits here list Sarah for the CBC (the story of Sarah Bernhardt); Eric Till's "The Newcomers"; numerous radio plays and, as he puts it "a lot of lovely dubbing", including Duplessis, Quebec and After.... But his musical career has not been ignored. He now conducts The Island City Singers who will be performing at McGill's Pollack Hall in May.

Noel finds the acting profession in Canada to be very healthy and the standards of performance to be extremely high. Perhaps because he has followed two careers: music and drama, he has been able to maintain a sense of security.

"I have never been unemployed for more than two or three months a year. To function best, I have to be emotionally secure. That's always meant being occupied. I often think of famous film stars who make a film every 5 years and wonder how the time between is spent. I dread having nothing to do."

About acting: I like to be put into the hands of a director who can mold my work. Since film is frequently shot out of a particular time context, an actor must have the flexibility to quickly reproduce whatever mood is required. In theatre you start with the first line and build a performance, but film acting must be spontaneous. I love theatre, but I recognize that my particular talent is at its best when directed in short spurts, as in film.

About music: I feel a knowledge of the performance of music is tremendously helpful in appreciating the performance of words and the reverse is equally true. Our specialized professions tend to segregate people. This narrow concept is rubbish and wasn't true of The Renaissance Man.

Lois Seigel

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