

## *My Cupid - Noel Tovey*

*Janette Heffernan*

Cupid the Roman God of erotic love and beauty, whose arrows can unite the most unlikely protagonists, is an elusive and enchanting creature. Everyone, if they are lucky, will meet the God of Love at sometime in their lives and when you do it is most important to keep on his the right side. A casual word in the wrong direction can mean the difference between wedded bliss or a lonely and impoverished old age.

Cupid can come in many guises. True we think of him today as a chubby cherub with a quiver full of arrows charged to inspire romantic love but that is not how the Romans saw him. To them he was a lively youth who delighted in pranks and spreading love. It is said if Cupid's arrow hits you; you will fall hopelessly in love with the next person you meet.

I first meet my Cupid when I was twenty-one. I had no idea that he was the God of Love.

At first glance it was obvious to me that Cupid was exceptionally good looking, confident and self-assured. I was the Principal Girl in the Windsor Pantomime and Cupid was the premier danseur who picked me up and twirled me around in the final walk down. He was a good dancer too. The panto came to a close and I moved on never giving this man another thought. Ships that pass!

Little did I realize that this short meeting was to have life changing consequences that would effect the rest of my life ten years down the track. I had met my Cupid.

In between jobs I had taken up ice skating as a social hobby. I was hopeless at it but being in the theatre can be very lonely and for a single girl a bit like living in a convent. Not too much available talent around, the opportunities to meet suitable partners are few and far between owing to the unsocial hours worked. Ice rinks, well Queens in Bayswater ,were a wonderful place to meet people. Strangely I found it was a good place to meet members of the medical profession as St Mary's Paddington is nearby and it is a sport one can do alone and at anytime hence lots of doctors. You have to be intelligent to skate. Very challenging.

The first time on the ice after I had said farewell to my Cupid a very special medical specimen literally fell at my feet in the form of a Dr Miles Richard Castelhow Heffernan, General Practitioner of Shepherds Bush, right beside the BBC. He was not good looking, rather old for me at 35 but he had the sexiest voice I had ever heard. I just adore Oxford Accents. I fell head over heels in love with this man and I still am.

I wish I could say the feeling was mutual as unrequited love is truly unbearable but to Dr Heffernan I was just a pair of legs with skates on. It was a friendship of

Convenience, we were both beginners and someone to dance with as nobody else wanted to do so. It soon became obvious that Miles was not interested in me other than for holding him up but he was fun clever and intelligent, loved opera and ballet so he became a good friend and skating partner for the next 8 years! He never took me to the opera because he never bothered to find out my other interests. Got quite a surprise when he found out I knew Benjamin Britten at about six years into our friendship.



I knew Miles was not available which was sad because I knew he was the one for me. I had to look elsewhere and I did. I had lots of boyfriends but I never meet the one who was just right. It was infuriating because I knew that Miles was just right. Miles just did not see ME.

I wondered if Miles might be gay as he ran a boarding house above his surgery and most of his lodgers were single men Bit like 'Rising Damp' in fact a lot like 'Rising Damp' as he had the Nigerian Pathologist, a Norwegian shipping owner's sons and various musicians but the one or two knee tremblers I had received under the table convinced me that Miles was all man but definitely not interested in me. I just gave up on him.

My career had sort of come to a full stop and for two years I spent trying to break into London Theatre with little success so I spent hours down at the rink with my skating girl friend Virginia, she too is worth an epitaph as she really taught me how to live as I was just so innocent. The Theatre is worse than a convent and completely isolated from reality.

Then one day out of the blue Cupid turned up on ice skates. There he was skating like an angel and whisking me off my feet, dancing The Blues and throwing me into fish dives. I could hardly believe my eyes as it takes years to become a good skater and Noel Tovey, for this is what my Cupid was called, was not only a fine ballet dancer but also a more than competent skater.



Noel was an Australian who was just beginning to make himself a name in the West End of London. I knew little about him but he liked me and he made me like him. He was just so nice and enthusiastic about life and clever and talented. I introduced him to Miles and Noel joined our small circle. Again it had not dawned on me that Noel/Cupid was to arrange the rest of my life.

I had absolutely no money during this period. Just enough to go skating and auditions. I had no money for food and would sit and watch the others eat cream caramels with my cup of tea looking as if I did not care for such delights. Miles never bought me a cup of tea although he was on £3,000 a year. I had £104 a year in discretionary income after living and traveling expenses. His salary was a fortune when the average wage was about £15 per week and he used to protest when I pinched his chips.

Noel won a job in the chorus of a new musical 'On the Level' at the Saville Theatre. This was a highly sort after job as these are hard to get and was a great career move up in the right direction. I was so pleased for him and extremely jealous at the same time. Regular money and in the West End! His skating days were over as West End Musicals and Skating do not mix. Considered too dangerous.

Then when I was 24 my career took off. I went from understudy to West End principal virtually overnight. I had to take over the lead in an intimate revue and luckily for me I collected real live fans that sent me flowers, chocolates perfumes and gold necklaces. The management was impressed at my performance. No other cast member was getting such adulation, so I kept the part. It appeared the audiences found me a 'sexy bit of goods', much to my surprise it appeared I had 'IT'.

Miles reluctantly came to see me and was obviously not impressed when I could not leave rehearsals and go and skate with him.

Then as if by magic Cupid was to cross my path again. I got a part in the 'Desert Song' at the Palace Theatre and my Cupid had partnered up with the fabulous leading lady. By this time Noel's career had taken off too into the stratosphere and he was the

choreographer for the Sandy Wilson revival of 'The Boy Friend' at Wyndhams Theatre, which was a huge success. His partner took over the role of 'Polly Browne' when 'The Desert Song' closed. I was so jealous as I knew I could have played 'Polly' too. I liked them both a lot.

Miles was extremely useful to me during this period although he did not know it. 'The Red Shadow' had a wandering eye and I could see I was next on the list. A 45-year-old family man is not my cup of tea so it was necessary to develop a fiancée quick and Miles was the obvious choice. Miles was 'real' and I could lie convincingly and believe me I needed too on this occasion. The only thing odd about my fiancée was he only turned up to see me in the last week of the run and someone stole my fake engagement ring! Serves them right as it came from Woolworth's.

Cupid phoned and asked me to be 'Polly Brown' in his production of 'The Boyfriend' that he was taking to South Africa. I was thrilled as at 26 I had never been outside of England. Could never afford it. The major industrial cities I knew well but my foreign travel had been limited to Cardiff. I was once invited by a college friend Elizabeth Himsworth whose father was at that time I believe, Ambassador to Afghanistan of all places to spend the summer in the Khyber Pass. The fare would cost just £92 but as I only had £104 to live on for a whole year this was out of the question. I wish I had gone now.

I was so naive but on the trip to South Africa I grew up socially and politically and I have never been the same again. Everyone sheltered in the democratic West should see third world conditions and experience dictatorship then the world would change. I know I did, overnight! Loved the country to look at hated the politics!

Noel who was of aboriginal descent and Inia Te Wiate, a famous Maori opera singer from New Zealand where I ended up eventually both were there at that time and made a nonsense of the hateful apartheid system.

One evening after a party in Johannesburg, Noel said 'Janette why don't you marry Miles? I cannot think of anyone more perfect for you!' 'Yes' I replied 'but he does not see me. He thinks I am a stupid undereducated middle class child but I do love him and the person I marry has to be as good as Miles if not better or I shan't bother' and that was it!

Noel left for London and I never saw him again but when I returned to London Miles was a different man. Miles went to Greece and on his return he started to woo me as only an English Upper class Oxford educated male can. I got the lot, the punt on the river, the boxes at the Royal Opera. I enjoyed that bit, the picnics at Glyndebourne, within a year I was Mrs. Heffernan and I remained happily Mrs. Heffernan for thirty years until Miles died. I often wondered what had bought about this change of heart. I thought it was a trip to Athens.

One day, years into our marriage, I said to Miles that I wondered what had happened to Noel Tovey. Twenty years ago you could not Google to find out.

'Oh you mean Cupid' said Miles, 'When he returned from South Africa Noel said to me 'Miles you really should do something about that girl' so I did!'

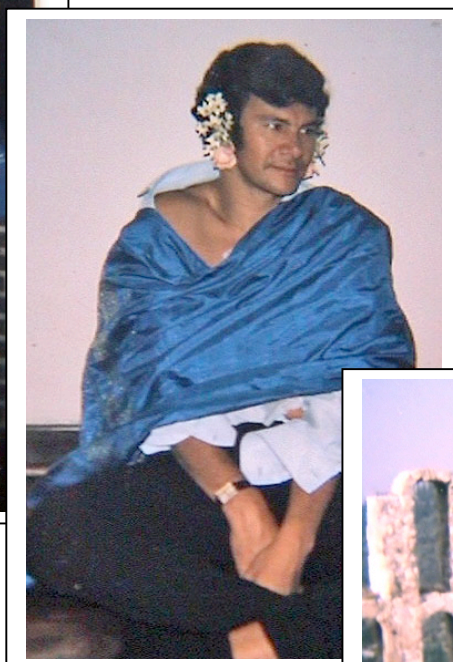
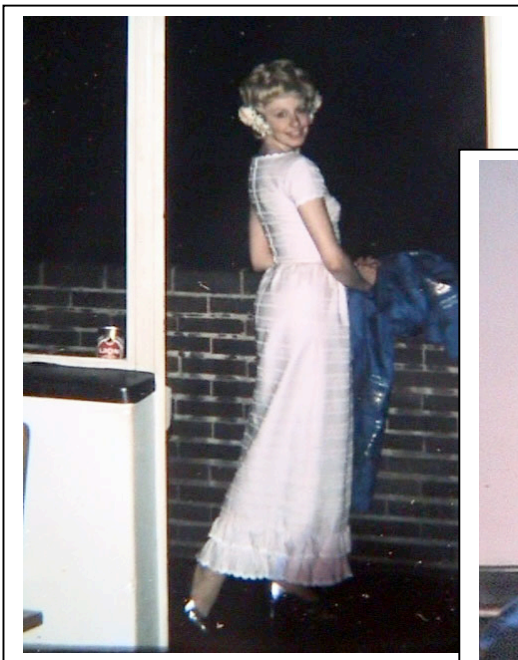
Without Cupid's intervention Miles and I, stuck in our repressed middle class mores, would never have had the courage to speak out to each other. I should have missed out on thirty years of a happy marriage and a beautiful daughter who is every inch her father's child, scarily brilliant at both Arts and Sciences and Miles gave me the education that the nuns should have provided. Miles introduced me to Proust! My life would have been poorer.

My Cupid not only gave me a part to dream for 'Polly Browne', my first trip in an airplane, air travel in the 60's was only for the rich and famous, the chance to work in a foreign country, a political vision of reality I shall never forget, but also a glorious husband in the 'Mr. Darcy' category and his sadly his pension.

Now I am aged 65 and Cupid has turned up again as an Australian National Treasure. You name it Noel Tovey has achieved it and I am not surprised. One highlight was the aboriginal section of the Opening of the Sydney Olympic Games. Wonderful!

I shall always be thankful that I had the good fortune to fall into his path. The Gods have truly smiled on me.

Everyone needs a Cupid. Unlike the other Gods around today this ancient God works!





First night party Johannesburg when Cupid decided to act!



Janette Heffernan &  
Richard Loring