

**Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Steve Ostrow**

Interviewer: Kim Kemmis and Trevor Pritchard

Date: 20 October 2019

Location of interview: Elizabeth Bay

Reason for interview: The Continental Baths New York, Career in Opera, Mature Age Gays Sydney

Restrictions: None

Call no.:



Time	Summary	Keywords
00025	Begins with some life history: Lived all over the world, wonderful marriage of 35 years to Joanne King, died 15 years ago; 2 children, 3 grandchildren, 6 great grandchildren (mostly living in California)	Life history
00105	Proud of what achieved: written 16 books; motion picture based on 'Saturday night at the baths' (whole life story)	
00150	Created the Continental Baths in New York when homosexuality was illegal. He and Joanne got 250 people to walk on City Hall to demand a change to the laws, so that sexual relations between two consenting adults in private was no longer illegal.	The Continental Baths New York Law reform
00240	Discovered Bette Midler, Barry Manilow, Peter Allen, and had great shows that brought many people into the club	
00305	Describes self as not gay, not straight, not bisexual, not asexual. I'm sexual. Why give up half the population.	
00345	Created MAG (Mature Age Gays) 28 years ago. It was very necessary. Had meetings every month – about 100 men attending.	MAG (Mature Age Gays)
00430	[Trevor Pritchard: read an article from 1973 in Time/News Week on the Continental Baths, with a photo of Bette Midler. To young gay men this was a revelation. It was in the heart of NY, near the Sony Building. Steve has not only identified needs but carried them out and brought to fruition.] Steve: heading into his 90s, and very proud of all of these achievements.	
00720	Already a film on the Continental.	
00900	[Trevor Pritchard: reads from the book about bars and how legal reform came about (collected 250,000 signatures, marched, sang).]	
01110	Steve: Discovered and paid Bette Midler to sing at the baths - \$35 a night to sing (she was very grateful for this). Had many straight people who came for the entertainment. A great gym. No other places like this at the time.	Bette Midler
01255	[Trevor: Ability to spot talent, Sarah Vaughan, Patty Labelle, Manhattan Transfer, Bette and Barry, Jerry Herman. Big names of the second half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.] Steve: This format (the bath house ethos) then spread throughout the country and the rest of the world.	Sarah Vaughan, Patty Labelle, Manhattan Transfer, Jerry Herman

01500	[Trevor Pritchard: The Continental allowed people to open up and come out of the closet. High profile people becoming involved.]	
01700	They were raided in the beginning, the cops would surround the building, send in cops as clients, get into a towel, wait for someone to touch them, then the handcuffs would come out, and spread the word and arrest everybody in the place. Taken into the station. Then Steve and his wife would go round and bail everybody out.	Police raids
01820	The raids stopped when the laws changed.	
01900	[Trevor Pritchard: started small but grew very quickly.] Steve: Put entertainment in and dinners, New York Sexual Health service. Had a regular clinic. Very protective of clientele.	
02230	Rudolf Nureyev was a client. Staff were star struck.	
02300	Got a last-minute offer to perform in an opera at the Sydney Opera House – played a difficult role in Otello, 1987, then offered a 20-year contract, so that’s why he’s in Sydney.	Sydney Opera Otello
02550	Started singing opera at age of 18. Did La Boheme, Tosca, Rigoletto.	
02625	Sang with the Met in New York, then throughout the world.	
02710	Leaves this world a whole different place.	
02730	[Trevor Pritchard: Brought Josephine Baker over from Paris and organized a concert for her at the Continental; Sarah Vaughan sang; Eleanor Steber and others]	
02930	Audience was not only gay people; had a great set up to attract these artists. It was something for everybody.	
03025	[Trevor Pritchard reads from Steve’s book]	
03230	Trying to get Hugh Jackman to play him in the film adaptation of his life.	
03330	[Trevor Pritchard reads from Steve’s book – about a drag queen]	
03640	Doing a TV series based on ‘Saturday night at the baths’ as well as the film; Steve comments on Bette Midler’s on-stage persona. Joanne brought Bette Midler to Steve’s attention after she had met Bette at an acting class and Bette was working at a night club waiting tables and would occasionally sing. So Steve went to see her and invited her to sing at the Baths. She asked ‘how much’ - \$35 per night, and she took it. With the Baths for 5 years.	Saturday Night at the Baths, Movie and TV series Bette Midler
04000	Barry Manilow also played at the Baths. [Trevor reads from the book]	Barry Manilow
04110	Peter Allen, when the Australian connected began [Trevor reads from the book about Peter’s time at the Baths]	Peter Allen
04400	After the Continental era; Steve was singing all over the world; opened a Bathhouse in Montreal. Loved it there.	Career in opera singing

04500	Got an audition for Tannhauser at the Met [Trevor reads from the book]	
04730	Also in a Ring Cycle with San Fransisco Symphony Orchestra [Trevor reads from the book]	
04820	Joined the San Fransisco Opera after stint in Montreal, 1979 season, as First Tenor. [Trevor reads from the book]	San Fransisco Opera
05120	In San Fransisco at the time of the shooting of Harvey Milk and George Moscone	
05330	Trevor talks about the documentary in 2013 at the Continental.	
05445	Ida Buttrose presents Steve with an award.	
05520	Golden Boy operation and advertisement [Trevor reads from the book]	
05700	AIDS. During this time Steve was in San Fransisco. [Trevor reads from the book] Trevor talks about a documentary about Ward 5B.	AIDS
10040	Otello in Stuttgart, Germany [Trevor reads from the book]	Otello, Stuttgart Opera
10520	MAG and interactions with ACON and AFAO [Trevor reads from the book]	MAG
10850	First meeting [Trevor reads from the book] MAG formed 28 years ago (1991). Mission was to save lives.	MAG
11145	Giving a social outlet to people can really save lives.	
11300	Description of the first evening – lots of chicken! [Trevor reads from the book]	
11440	How MAG meetings are organized [Trevor]	
12100	Steve: I'm nearly 90. What do I do now? Looking forward to seeing the movie when it comes out.	