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# "Bring me songs" says Burl Ives

Genial, enormous Burl Ives, America's greatest ballad singer, who will arrive in Australia this month, wants people to bring him folk songs or ballads to sing.

An audience of 3000 recently heard him in Britain's Royal Festival Hall, where he began his 18 weeks' world tour. Thousands more fans await his arrival in Australia.

HE will give 26 performances in Australia between May 30 and July 14. His wife, Helen, will go with him, but they have left their three-year-old son, Alexander, in New York.

Burl, who is about six feet tall and weighs close on 20st., is one of those rare people—an unreservedly happy person.

"Why shouldn't I be?" said Burl. "I came from a shanty town— itinerant farmer environment—to being what I always wanted to be, a top ballad singer."

"A fascinatin' thing about ballad singin'," he added, "is that it brings you into touch with ordinary, warm-hearted people wherever you go. And that makes me happy. And when I sing to them that makes me happy, too."

"One of the things I look forward to in Australia is that there will be, I know, a large number of people come and see me with songs for me to sing."

"You can tell Australians I want them to do that. I'm on the look-out for any real indigenous Australian folk songs, adapted aboriginal songs, or any English folk songs that have been kept alive one way or another."

"Experts try to tell you that in new countries folk songs have died out."

"Tain't true, they're there if you only look for them."

"I'm workin' on a real dandy arrangement of 'Waltzin Matilda,' which I consider to be one of the greatest folk songs in the world. I hope Australians like it."

The Ives' live in a beautiful New York apartment overlooking the misty Hudson River, but Burl good-humoredly complains there isn't room to swing a cat in it.

"Man," he said, when I had

settled myself into the largest armchair I have ever sat in, "I've never had enough livin' space at any time in my life. And I don't see how I ever will. Since Helen and I have been married we've been constantly movin' into larger apartments."

"But we no sooner move than we start collectin' things, and next thing you know there ain't enough room."

He lists the reasons for the cramped space of the Ives home as being—himself, his attractive brunette wife, Helen, his three-year-old son, Alexander, two giant 200lb. Great Danes, innumerable cats, a library of 2000 records, walls covered with large-framed firebricks, Matisses, and Picassos, and numerous tables, perilously overlaid with Copenhagen china and precious objets d'art Burl has collected on his global wanderings.

This list covers only the more important things to be found in the Ives home, but it also gives a good pointer to the tastes of Burl and his wife.

Burl, who is 42, started his wanderings and his singing at an early age. Folk songs interested him most because he was continually hearing them. Later he found his melodic, throaty style of singing was ideally suited to ballads.

"Hard as it's been, I enjoyed every bit of it," he said. "My folks were poorer than church mice, but they were happy people. In fact, they were so

**BURL IVES, who will tour Australia for the A.B.C. next month. He will arrive in Sydney on May 25, and his first public concert will be in Melbourne on June 2.**

happy, despite the problems of bringin' up six children on practically no money at all, that they became known as the "Singin' Ives."

"And you've got to be happy to sing when you're never anythin' but down and out."

Ives was born in June, 1909, into a family of Illinois farmers, riverboat gamblers, and preachers.

Now world famous as "The Wayfaring Stranger," Ives recalls singing the haunting song of that name to fellow hoboes in the depressed America of the early '30's.

The hungry, ragged band angrily demanded something more cheerful, and they got "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," which they loved.

"The Wayfaring Stranger" had a long way to wander before he sang at the White House and was warmly congratulated by the late President Roosevelt.

Mr. Roosevelt-told Burl his favorite song was "Home On the Range."

Burl was in Chicago when Roosevelt died. The N.B.C. asked him to sing in the memorial programme for Roosevelt.

He says: "I sang 'Home On the Range.' I choked. It was the toughest job I ever did in my life."

Mrs. Ives, in between running the crowded Ives home, catering for Burl's insatiable appetite, looking after young Alexander, the dogs, and the cats, manages to act as secretary and script-writer.

She is looking forward to her Australian visit.

"I have met some Australian women in the past few years, and they were such grand people I felt that if ever I had



**BIG MAN. BIG DOG.** Twenty-stone Ives romping with one of his two Great Danes. The dog weighs 200 pounds. Ives says the two dogs and innumerable cats help to make his big apartment overcrowded.

the chance to go to Australia I would take it," she said.

The Ives' lead a crowded, busy life. They both pilot their own plane, which they use for hopping between town and town on personal appearance tours.

Burl is constantly recording. His repertoire of songs, which he carries in his head, contains more than 300 folk songs and traditional ballads.

His recordings for children are hit songs all over the U.S. and are now selling in England and other parts of the world. Twice a year he visits Washington, where he makes special recordings of rare folk songs for the Congressional Library files.

Government leaders and anthropologists had to nag him into that, he says, because they didn't trust his fabulous memory and thought he might some day forget them.

Mrs. Ives said that Burl's keenest fan was Alexander, who listened avidly to all of Burl's records.

"Do you ever sing to him?" I asked. Burl shot me a look of horror.

"Man, don't ever suggest such a thing," he answered. "Alexander thinks my records are sung by someone else. If he knew I could sing he'd run me ragged in no time."



**THE IVES FAMILY.** Mr. and Mrs. Ives and their son Alexander in their New York flat. Leaving Alexander behind was the hardest decision the Ives' had to make before leaving for their world tour.