

## JONES, DAVID JOHN ('John David'; 'Dai Tenor') (1906 - 1978), opera singer

**Name:** David John Jones  
**Date of birth:** 1906  
**Date of death:** 1978  
**Spouse:** Mary Jones (née Phillips)  
**Child:** Trevor Jones  
**Parent:** Daniel Rees Jones  
**Parent:** Maria Jones (née Davies)  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** opera singer  
**Area of activity:** Music; Performing Arts  
**Author:** Rhidian Griffiths

David John Jones was born on 29 June 1906 in Pant-teg in the Swansea Valley, the youngest of the five children (three sons and two daughters) of Daniel and Maria Jones. His father, Daniel Jones, spent the years 1910-20 working in the tinplate industry in Russia, before returning to the post of foreman at the Dyffryn tinplate works in Pontardawe. The family moved to Commercial Road, Rhyd-y-fro, near Pontardawe, and at the age of 14 David was employed at the local tinplate works.

The choral conductor W. D. Clee (1884-1946) heard him sing at Saron chapel in Rhyd-y-fro and gave him vocal tuition. When Clee formed the Ystalyfera Choral Society in 1925, Dai Jones joined the choir and further developed his talent, appearing as a soloist at their concerts. He competed at eisteddfodau, and following his victory in the challenge solo competition at an eisteddfod in Ammanford in 1926 he was invited by Kingsley Lark to join the Carl Rosa Opera Company, a travelling company which employed many Welsh singers. He appeared as a soloist in a number of the company's productions.

The Ystalyfera Choir gave an entire concert at the National Eisteddfod in Caernarfon in 1935, in which Dai Jones appeared as a soloist and made a great impression, with some believing him to be an Italian tenor. During the same year he acted as understudy to the celebrated tenor Beniamino Gigli, and it was partly through Gigli's intervention that he received an invitation to sing at La Scala Opera House in Milan in 1936. Though he decided not to accept the invitation because of the growth of fascism and the uncertain international situation, he was able to travel to South Africa with the 'London Follies' company, and was warmly praised by press correspondents there. He also sang with the 'Brighton Follies' on BBC radio broadcasts between 1937 and 1940.

He returned to the tinplate works during the Second World War and was sent to work in Crewe. He resumed his singing career after the war and joined the newly-established Welsh National Opera Company, singing the principal role of Turiddu for the company in Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* in Cardiff in 1948. Then in 1949 he changed his stage name to 'John David' and became a member of the 'London Quartet' managed by the impresario Sandor Alexander Gorlinsky; the other members were Sheila de Haan, Dorea Raye, and his fellow-Welshman Bruce Dargavel (1905-1985). He continued to sing in opera, appearing in the principal role in Verdi's *Don Carlos* in Dublin and Gounod's *Faust* in Cork, for which he received lavish press notices. He would also appear regularly as a soloist in performances of oratorio and on a variety of radio programmes, such as *Welsh Rarebit*, *Silver Chords* and *Grand Hotel*. It is a matter of regret that his voice was not captured on commercial recordings. According to those who heard him it was a sonorous voice, which could fill the largest halls without the aid of a microphone. Bruce Dargavel said that his voice combined the size of the Amazon with the clarity of a Welsh mountain stream. His varied career is a good example of success in the world of singing without the advantage of formal education.

He married in 1934 Mary Phillips (b. 1912), who was herself a successful singer and elocutionist; his best man was his fellow-singer from Swansea, Howell Glynne (1906-1969). Dai and Mary had one son, Trevor, born in 1936. Dai retired from the stage in the late 1950s and became a park-keeper in Pontardawe. He died on 10 December 1978.

### Author

Rhidian Griffiths

### Sources

Information from his son, Mr Trevor Jones

Glyn Williams, 'John David, y tenor o Pontardawe', *Llais: papur bro Cwmtawe*, 376 (Hydref 2015), 18-19

### Additional Links

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**Published date:** 2022-03-17

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