**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** AWE3967

# Blackman, Barbara

(1928 - 2024)

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| **Born** | 19281222, Brisbane Queensland Australia |
| **Died** | 20241004, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia |
| **Occupation** | Patron, Philanthropist, Writer |

## Summary

Barbara Blackman was an author, music-lover, essayist, librettist, letter writer and patron of the Arts. Former wife of Charles Blackman, she worked for many years as an artist's model. She conducted countless interviews for the National Library of Australia's oral history program. In 2006, Blackman was presented with the Australian Contemporary Music 2006 Award for Patronage.

## Details

Barbara Blackman was born one of twin girls on 22 December 1928 – her sister, Coralie Hilda, lived just 16 days. Barbara's father, W.H. (Harry) Patterson, died when she was three years old, leaving her mother, Gertrude Olson Patterson, as sole parent. Mother and daughter lived together in a series of homes and boarding houses in Brisbane while Gertrude worked as an accountant.

Barbara attended Brisbane State High School. She was introduced to the music of Shostakovich by fellow students Donald Munro, Roger Covell and Charles Osborne, and began a love affair with contemporary music that continues today. She frequently attended concerts with her mother and her friends. As a teenager, Barbara was the youngest member of the Barjai group of writers in Brisbane. Suffering from poor eyesight throughout her youth, she was diagnosed in 1950 with optic atrophy. Her vision declined rapidly until she became completely blind.

By 1952 Barbara was married to Charles Blackman, then an aspiring artist. The marriage was to last nearly thirty years. The two lived a meagre but happy existence in Melbourne, their income derived from Barbara's work as an artist's model and her blind pension, and Charles' work as a kitchen hand in the evenings. Much of this income went toward feeding 'the monster who lived with us' – Charles' studio. Charles and Barbara were to have three children: Auguste, Christabel and Barnaby. In 1960 Charles was awarded the prestigious Helen Rubinstein Travelling Scholarship and the family moved to London. The Blackmans lived in ten different homes over the course of their marriage.

In later life, Barbara married Frenchman Marcel Veldhoven. The pair spent twelve years together, living in Indooroopilly, before Veldhoven travelled to India to live and study Tibetan Buddhism. Though Barbara was raised in the Christian tradition, she broke away from the Church in her early twenties and today follows the teachings of Sufism.

Barbara Blackman lived in Canberra. In 2004, she pledged $1 million to music in Australia: funds have since been distributed to Pro Musica, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Australian National University's School of Music and the Stopera Chamber Opera Company among other groups. Barbara had a long-held tradition of anonymous philanthropy supplementing her more public donations. She was the winner of the Australian Contemporary Music 2006 Award for Patronage, and Lead Donor in the Australian Chamber Orchestra's Capital Challenge.

Barbara published an autobiographical work, *Glass After Glass*, in 1997. In 2007, the Miegunyah Press published over fifty years of letters between herself and Judith Wright in *Portrait of a Friendship*.

## Published resources

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

**Edited Book**
Portrait of a Friendship: The Letters of Barbara Blackman and Judith Wright, Cosgrove, Bryony, 2007

Barbara and Charles Blackman Talk About Food, Taylor, John, 1979

**Book**
Glass After Glass: Autobiographical Reflections, Blackman, Barbara, 1997

Certain Chairs, Blackman, Barbara, 1968

**Newspaper Article**
Portraits of a Lady, Harari, Fiona, 1997

Nigel Thomson Wins 1997 Archibald Prize, 1997

**Thesis**
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

**Resource Section**
A Great Form of Love: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Lemon, Barbara, 2008, http://www.abc.net.au/rn/hindsight/

**Site Exhibition**
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013, http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

## Archival resources

**State Library of New South Wales**
Pixie O'Harris papers, 1913-1987

**National Film and Sound Archive**
The Good Looker : [Barbara Blackman Interview : Source Material]

**National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**
Papers of Judith Wright, 1944-2000 [manuscript]

Papers of Barbara Blackman, approximately 1950-1970

Correspondence of Barbara Blackman with Judith Wright, 1950-1998 [manuscript]

**National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection**
Barbara Blackman interviewed by Ros Bandt [sound recording]

Barbara Blackman interviewed by Ann Harrison [sound recording]

Barbara Blackman interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection (1974) [sound recording]

Barbara Blackman interviewed by Suzanne Lunney about the National Library of Australia exhibition "Celebration of Writing" [sound recording]

Sybil Craig interviewed by Barbara Blackman [sound recording]

**National Library of Australia**
[Biographical cuttings on Barbara Blackman, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

**Author Details**
Barbara Lemon

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