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Cameron, Alexandra Esther

(1910 - 2017)

Born	19100208, Allora Queensland Australia
Died	20170907, Australia
Occupation	Lecturer, Music inspector, Music teacher, Musician

Summary

Alexandra Cameron was a music teacher, music educator, administrator and founder of a number of music performance programs in Victoria. As the first Inspector of Music in Victoria and through her publications, she influenced and shaped Victorian music education in the second half of the twentieth century.

Details

Alexandra Cameron was born on 8 February 1910 in Allora Queensland, the eldest of two daughters of Mary Cluitt and her husband John Kenneth Cameron, a policeman.

The family moved to the nearby town of Warwick where her father was promoted to a Sergeant and in 1922 Alexandra was sent to Southport to attend St Hilda's Church of England Grammar School.

Cameron was a product of both examination and academic music training. Although she had no formal musical training prior to attending school, by the age of sixteen she had completed her ATCL (Associate Diploma from Trinity College, London), and the following year had passed the LTCL (the Licentiate of Trinity College London), the qualification which enabled her to teach music. After an initial career as a music teacher at Faith's Church of England Grammar School, in Yeppoon, she turned her attention to academic music training (Brisbane Courier, 9 February 1929, p.25). She enrolled in Adelaide's Elder Conservatorium of Music to undertake a bachelor's in music performance, whilst teaching at Woodland's Church of England School.

With the outbreak of war, she enlisted in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, joining the AIF, where she was posted first to Alice Springs, followed by Katherine and Berrimah in the Northern Territory. A tiny woman, in order to see over the steering wheel, she required a box on her seat (Dumont). With the cessation of hostilities, she was seconded for a time as a rehabilitation officer for the returning troops based both in Lae, New Guinea and in Melbourne. Returning to University on a war service scheme, she supported herself through teaching at private schools, while she enrolled in the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne, completing her degree, before undertaking Post Graduate studies with Harold Craxton at the Royal Academy of Music in London (Comte). She was awarded a Diploma of Education in 1953, after which she travelled to Europe to observe music education practices. Returning to Australia she taught in a number of Melbourne high schools. In 1956 she resumed her studies at the University of Melbourne undertaking a Bachelor of Education, whilst lecturing in the Faculty of Education.

Balancing classroom teaching with academia, she remained a part-time lecturer in music method at the University of Melbourne in 1963-1964, and in 1965-1966 she taught Choral classes at the Conservatorium. Throughout her working life she was also involved with a number of professional associations, including:

the Victorian School Music Association (1954-1964),
the Victorian Music Teachers Association (1963-1967),
the music representative to the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board 1965-,
Chairperson of the Music Advisory Committee for Secondary Schools 1966-,
Chairperson of the Secondary Schools Concert and Music Library Committee 1967-,
Committee Member of the Australian Society for Music Educators (Victorian Chapter) 1968.

Returning to the University of Melbourne, in 1970 she completed a master's degree in education, wining the Harold Cohen Graduate Prize for Research. This passion for music education led to Alexandra Cameron writing and publishing on both the theoretical and practical applications of music in Music Appreciation for Australian Schools (1958), and Singing Together (1965) and The class teaching of music in secondary schools, Victoria, 1905-1955: an investigation into the major influences affecting the development of music as a class subject in Victorian secondary schools (1969).

Her appointment as Inspector of Music in 1966 allowed her to initiate several innovations she had developed through her career and observed in her travels. Particularly important was the teaching of orchestral instruments. In an effort to improve music literacy, in 1967 the State Government introduced free instrumental tuition into government schools throughout Victoria. A number of Victorian schools, including University High and Blackburn High, were selected to develop significant music education programs, a program which was expanded by her successor Bruce Worland to include Melbourne High and MacRoberston's Girls High School amongst others. Cameron was also a driving force in the establishment of the Victorian String Music Library, seconding its inaugural librarian Margaret McCarthy to the role.

Supported by teachers, who at first Cameron convinced to volunteer their time, talented music students were encouraged and supported in developing their musical abilities through extra tuition and performance experience, initially at a program she established on Saturdays at University High School. Subsequently Cameron convinced the Education Department to pay her and the teachers as Emergency Teachers, an arrangement which continued until 1979. This resulted in the founding of the Secondary School Concert Committee and the Secondary Schools Orchestra in 1970, eventually becoming known as the Melbourne Youth Orchestra in 1971. This group of talented students rehearsed and performed across Victoria, as well as participating in international tours to England, Japan, Germany, Austria, Italy and France. These tours not only provided performing opportunities for the students but included opportunities for them to attend concerts by a range of international performers and orchestras, exposing the students to some of the most influential musicians and orchestras of their day. The tours also included music workshops with international orchestras and musicians. The impetus, organisation and at times funds for these ventures, came from the enormous strength and belief in social justice of Alexandra Cameron (Dumont).

With Bruce Worland as conductor of the Orchestra, the group developed thirteen ensembles, including in 1972 the Melbourne Holiday Music Camp and throughout the 1970s the Melbourne Youth Orchestra, the Percy Grainger Strings, the Melbourne Youth Symphonic Band. The Melbourne Youth Choir, the Margaret Sutherland Strings, the John Antill Band and the Junior String School, engaging up to 600 music students (Comte, Worland).

Although Alexandra Cameron 'retired' at 60, she continued to teach and act as honorary administrator of the Saturday Music School and Orchestra, later forming the Chamber Strings of Melbourne (Comte, Worland). Publishing several books on music education as well as a song book in the 1950s and 1960s, her final book A Story Culled from Happy Memories: Thirty Years of Music Making: May 1980-May 2010: the Chamber Strings of Melbourne, was published when she was over 100. In 1979, Alexandra Cameron was awarded an MBE for her service to music education and administration, and in 1996 she was awarded RMIT's first Doctorate of Education Honoris Causa.

For her 100th birthday, Alexandra Cameron arranged a concert at the Melbourne Town Hall to celebrate the Chamber Strings 30th anniversary and her final retirement. She left a bequest to the University of Melbourne to establish a scholarship for string or music education students to pursue further studies.

Events

1979 - 1979
Appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire for services to music

Author Details
Sue Silberberg with Alannah Croom

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