Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0060

Joyce, Eileen Alannah

(1908 - 1991)

Born	19080101, Zeehan Tasmania Australia
Died	19910325, Redhill Hertfordshire England
Occupation	Concert Pianist

Summary

Eileen Joyce was taught the piano at St Joseph's Convent at Boulder where her prodigious talent was first recognised. She went on to establish a career in England where her concert performances in glamorous gowns, and studio recordings, would make her one of the most popular pianists of her time.

The Joyce family moved to Western Australia and settled in Boulder where Eileen had her first music lessons at St Joseph's Convent. Because of her prodigious talent, a fund-raising committee in Kalgoorlie-Boulder assisted her to take up a scholarship at the Loreto Convent in Perth.

Hearing her play the renowned musicians Percy Grainger and Wilhelm Backhaus recommended she should study abroad. In 1926, after a tour of country towns and a farewell concert at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth, Eileen went to Leipzig in Germany, then London to study and where her stellar career was launched.

In 1933 she made the first of many studio recordings in London. She was so successful her record sales during the 1940s are reputed to have rivalled those of Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, amongst others. She returned to Australia in April 1936 for a national tour and a series of concerts for the ABC. On the Easter Saturday she gave a recital at the Kalgoorlie Town Hall, and the following day played for the nuns at St Joseph's.

During the war Eileen played for the troops, and in the bombed out cities of England with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, all helping to endear her to the people. Eileen always dressed the part of the glamorous concert pianist. She commissioned her gowns from leading fashion designers, the most famous being Norman Hartnell who designed the coronation gown for Queen Elizabeth II.

In later life Eileen was awarded many honours for her contribution to music, receiving an Honorary Doctor of Music from the Universities of Cambridge (1971), University of Western Australia (1979), and the University of Melbourne (1982). In 1981 she was made a Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and Saint George at Buckingham Palace.

Details

Internationally acclaimed concert pianist Eileen Alannah Joyce was awarded an honorary doctorate of Music from Cambridge University in 1971. Her talent, commitment and service to music was further recognised in 1981 when she was appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG). Born in Tasmania and educated in Perth, Eileen Joyce lived most of her life in England. But she never forgot her roots, and throughout her life remained a strong and active supporter of young musicians in Western Australia.

An internationally renowned concert pianist, Eileen Joyce's life started a long way away from the world stage. Eileen's rags-to-riches life story, which saw her become Britain's wartime sweetheart, has since been novelised and captured on film.

Daughter of Irish/Spanish parents, Eileen Alannah Joyce was born in a tent in the mining town of Zeehan, Tasmania in 1912. Her father, an itinerant labourer, relocated his family to Kununoppin in Western Australia when Eileen was only two years old.

Although they could barely afford it, Eileen began piano lessons when she was about nine and later studied piano at the Loretto Convent in Perth. Percy Grainger and Wilhelm Backhaus, hearing the young Eileen play, were so impressed by her talent that they encouraged her to further her studies in Europe. In 1927 Eileen left Australia to study at the Leipzig Conservatorium in Germany under Schnabel and Teichmüller, and at the Royal College of Music in London under Tobias Matthay.

In 1930 Eileen made her debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at one of Sir Henry Wood's BBC promenade concerts. Throughout her career Eileen performed with orchestras in Berlin, France, Italy, New York as well as all of the principle orchestras in the UK. Between 1936 and 1962 she made tours to Australia, South Africa, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Finland, South America, New Zealand, Soviet Russia, Yugoslavia and India.

Eileen appeared in a number of films including *Battle for Music, Girl in a Million* and the autobiographical, *Wherever She Goes* (1951). She also contributed to the soundtracks of many films, and is probably most notably remembered for her C minor Rachmaninov performance in David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945).

Eileen married in London in 1937 and had a son. In 1942 her husband died on active service in North Africa. Although she lived most of her life, and died, in England, Eileen maintained a strong interest in young musicians from Western Australia.

In the late 1970s Eileen donated $37,000 to the University of Western Australia as a fund to assist in the development of music in Western Australia and especially to assist students, as Eileen Joyce Music Scholars, to obtain keyboard experience outside Western Australia.

Eileen also gave her personal records to the Callaway Centre, University of Western Australia in 1990. This substantial archive, spanning 1926 to 1989, consists of personal and career related correspondence, concert diaries, programs and newspaper clippings. The Eileen Joyce Archive also contains recordings never before released.

In 1971 Eileen was awarded an honorary doctorate of Music from Cambridge University. Ten years later, in 1981, she was appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) for her service to music.

Events

1971 - 1971
Awarded honorary doctorate of Music, Cambridge University

1981 - 1981
Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG)

1930 - 1930
Debuted with London Philharmonic Orchestra

1927 - 1927
Studied at Leipzig Conservatorium (Germany) under Schnabel and Teichmüller and Royal College for Music (London) under Tobias Matthay

1936 - 1962
Toured Australia, South Africa, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Finland, South America, New Zealand, Soviet Russia, Yugoslavia and India

Published resources

Resource Section
Eileen Joyce (1912-1991), Wood, I W (Bill),
http://www.women.tas.gov.au/significantwomen/search/eileen_joyce.html

Once you stop playing, you're forgotten, Orga, Ates,
http://www.mvdaily.com/articles/1999/12/ppjoyce.htm

Eileen Joyce Music Fund,
http://www.publishing.uwa.edu.au/spe/2000/scholarships/postgraduate/3.html

Records of the Australian Musical Association,
http://www.nla.gov.au/ms/findaids/7996.html

Book
The new Penguin dictionary of music, Jacobs, Arthur, 1982

The Oxford dictionary of music, Kennedy, Michael, 1994

The Macmillan dictionary of women's biography, Uglow, Jennifer (compiler and editor), 1998

The Complete Book of Great Australian Women: Thirty-six women who changed the course of Australia, De Vries, Susanna, 2003

Eileen Joyce: A Portrait, Davis, Richard, 2001

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Records of the Australian Musical Association, 1952-1995 [manuscript]

The University of Western Australia, The Callaway Centre Archive
Eileen Joyce Collection

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Eileen Joyce interviewed by James Murdoch in the Esso Performing Arts collection [sound recording]

State Library of Western Australia
Shirley Daffen papers.

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