Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00406

Overman, Meta

(1907 - 1993)

Born	19071009, Rotterdam Holland
Died	19931023, Perth Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Composer

Summary

Meta Overman was a Dutch-born composer who studied piano and composition with leading figures in Rotterdam before emigrating to Western Australia in 1951. She earned accolades for her works, which included choral, instrumental, chamber pieces, ballets and operas. After lengthy sojourns in both Melbourne and Holland, she returned to Perth in 1978, where she remained until her death in 1993.

Details

Meta Overman was born in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1907. Her father made his living as an accountant but was also a violinist, and her mother was a professional pianist and teacher. It was she who gave Meta piano tuition until the age of nine, after which she was taught by Johan Kievid, who later became Professor of Music at the Hochschule in Berlin. At the age of eleven, Meta Overman played an arrangement for piano and orchestra of the Overture from Mozart's 'Die Entfuhrung aus dem Serail' (The Abduction from the Seraglio) with the Rotterdam Youth Orchestra.

As a teenager, Overman studied piano and composition with Edward Flipse, Chief Conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. She also worked as an accompanist for two children's choirs and began work on what was to be a substantial collection of compositions for children, including four operas. In 1937, Overman was able to devote more time to studying composition, which she did with Willem Pijper, Director of the Rotterdam Conservatorium, who helped develop her compositional talents and became an important mentor.

The occupation of Holland by the Nazis in 1940 resulted in widespread bombing, which destroyed both the Conservatorium and Willem Pijper's house, including many of his manuscripts. Meta Overman continued working and composing, however, and in 1944 married pianist Frank Russcher, and they toured together throughout Holland playing piano duets. Their son, Marius, was born in 1945. During this time, Overman's compositions were being performed with increasing regularity, and were attracting significant accolades in the Dutch press.

Due to a post-war shortage of housing, the family migrated in 1951 to Perth, Western Australia, to live with relatives. A move to Albany on the south coast provided an escape from the summer heat, and allowed Overman to begin a fruitful relationship with the Scots Church Choir, for whom she completed *Saul and David*, and *The Image of the Cross* in 1953. The most significant work completed during this time, however, was *Psyche* (1953), a three act opera. It was performed at the 1955 Festival of Perth; while reviewed favourably, was poorly attended and a financial disaster. Overman's marriage to Russcher also broke down, and in 1957 Overman, Marius, and new partner Robert Hyner settled in Melbourne, where they remained until 1969. Here Overman forged strong friendships with other composers and artists, including Keith Humble, Robert Hughes and Margaret Sutherland.

Overman retuned for Holland in 1969 for a short visit, which, due to poor health, ended up being a nine year stay. She returned to Western Australia in 1978 to be near son Marius, and began writing again, having composed little while back in Holland. She wrote increasingly for flute (Hyner was a flautist), and in *Haiku* (1983), for flute and electric piano, united her philosophical and avant garde interests. Overman also continued her long-standing interest in writing for children, composing and dedicating a number of works to her grandson. Her last work was *Concertino for Five Flutes*, written as her eyesight and health were failing in 1993.

Published resources

Thesis
The Life and Music of Meta Overman, Thorpe, Patricia, 1988

Conference Proceedings
Meta Overman, Her Life and Music: A Feminine Response?, Thorpe, Patricia, 1994

Book Section
Meta Overman, Bebbington, Warren Arthur, 1997

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

University of Western Australia
Meta Overman Manuscripts Collection

Author Details
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Created 22 June 2009
Last modified 18 June 2009