

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00496

Carrard, Alice

(1897 - 2000)

Born	18970410, Budapest Hungary
Died	20000303, PerthPerth Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Concert Pianist, Music teacher

Summary

Carrard was a Hungarian-born virtuoso pianist who came to Perth, Western Australia, in 1941 and remained there until her death in 2000. She had studied in Hungary with Béla Bartók, and toured extensively as a concert pianist. In Australia, she had a long involvement with the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and taught a legion of pupils, most famously pianist David Helfgott. She was awarded an MBE in 1976, and lived to the age of 102.

Details

Alice Carrard was born Blau Alíz to Blau Miksa (also known as Max) and Irma, neé Wieg, in Budapest in 1897. The family Hungarianised their surname to Bálint in 1914, and at the same time Irma's maiden name was also retroactively Hungarianised to Vig. The father, Miksa, was a ne'er-do-well leather salesman, the mother Irma was a genteel piano teacher rejected by her upper middle class family for having run off and got married to Miksa. The family was Jewish and lived in utter poverty in the tenements of Budapest, then very similar to the immigrant tenements of Manhattan. Irma helped to eke out the family finances by teaching piano, as did Alice's older brother, Sándor, who from a very early age worked a full eight hours or more after school.

Aliz began lessons with her mother at the age of six. Realising after three years that there was no more she could teach her daughter, Irma introduced Aliz, aged nine, to István Thomán, a renowned professor of piano at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. He took Aliz under his wing and taught her for the following two years. After that she continued studying at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music until she graduated at 17 as a piano teacher and concert pianist. She then went on to intensive post-graduate work with Béla Bartók and Leo Weiner. In 1916, Aliz lost her mother, who died of cancer, at the age of 54.

Studying with composer Béla Bartók for a year gave her, as she put it, 'a great inspiration about sound and phrasing.' She studied next with Leo Weiner, Professor of Composition and Conducting at the Academy of Music In Budapest. Weiner also taught conductor Eugene Ormandy, concert pianist Louis Kentner and conductor Sir Georg Solti. Balint began performing in 1918, at the age of 21, first in Budapest, then Vienna, eventually embarking on a career as a concert pianist that took her all over Europe. It was when Alíz started on her European concert tours, from around 1920, that she westernized her name to Alice Balint. As the effects of the Depression worsened in the early 1930s, Balint formed a small instrumental ensemble that played mainly light classical music, and began touring throughout Europe and Asia – India, Indonesia and Malaya, as it was then known.

Her brother, Sándor, was absolutely devoted to his sister, and contributed significantly to funding her studies at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. After 1920, when he had become a successful businessman in Budapest, he financed all of Alice's European and Asian concert tours, right until the outbreak of WW2.

On a tour of Malaya in 1937, Balint met and married Louis Carrard, a French-Swiss engineer who was managing a tin mine. She became known henceforth as Mme. Alice Carrard. While living in Malaya, World War II broke out, and their son George Sandor (Sandy) was born.

In the latter part of 1941, Alice and two-year-old Sandy Carrard visited Perth, Western Australia, for a holiday, intending to return to Malaya and join Louis for Christmas. They were prevented from doing this by the Japanese invasion of Malaya on December 7. While attempting to escape, Louis was captured and interned for the remainder of the war in a Japanese prison camp. Alice and Sandy settled in Perth, and Sandy began attending Christ Church school. At some point Louis had managed to send some of their belongings to Perth, including, amazingly, Alice's Hungarian grand piano. Louis travelled to Perth after his release in 1946. Severely affected by his internment and badly malnourished, he was unable to cope in Perth and returned to Malaya. He and Alice remained good friends, and he continued to support his family and visit.

Alice Carrard also supported herself and Sandy by playing recitals, many of which were for the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission). She is credited with introducing Bartok to Western Australian audiences, and was the first to play his Third Piano Concerto in Perth. By 1960 she was famous across Australia on the concert circuit and for radio broadcasts. She began teaching in 1945, and built up a formidable reputation for excellence and exacting standards. Carrard had a number of star pupils, including Japanese prodigy Yasuko Toba, who became a scholar at the Julliard School and has an international career as a concert pianist. Most famously, Carrard taught David Helfgott, who she first encountered as a teenager. Upon his return from London after a severe nervous breakdown in the early 1970s, Carrard made sure he had appropriate psychiatric care and continued to give him lessons while he was institutionalised at Graylands, a psychiatric facility in Perth. His triumphant return to performing brought Carrard immense joy, and she commented on many occasions that he was her favourite pupil. Helfgott's story was dramatised in the Australian movie *Shine* (1996).

Carrard was awarded an MBE in 1976 for her services to music, and gold and silver diplomas from the Franz Liszt Academy for over fifty years of teaching excellence. At a concert in 1992 to celebrate her 95th birthday, Carrard performed Beethoven's last Piano Sonata, Opus 111 in C Minor, a deeply emotional and technically demanding work, written late in life when he was deaf and his health failing. Carrard had played it at her first performance in 1918, and received a standing ovation when she performed it at the Western Australian Conservatorium of Music in 1992. She was named a Living Treasure of the State of Western Australia in 1998, and died in March, 2000, at the age of 102.

Published resources

Newspaper Article

Obituary: Pianist spanned century of music, Cohn, Neville, 2000

At 90, music is still her first love..., Schmitt, Hugh, 1987

Journal Article

Obituary: Alice Carrard, 2000

Alice Carrard – 95 Years Young, Cohn, Neville, 1992

Australian Heritage Series: Alice Carrard, Cohn, Neville, 1995

Book Section

Alice Carrard, Hoffman, Leila, 1987

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Western Australia

Alice Carrard papers, 1988-1999 [manuscript]

[Interview with Alice Carrard, pianist] [sound recording] / [interviewed by Christina Brockman]

Author Details

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