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My Mother's Voice: 'A view from ground level, in the thick of things'[1]

Jane Woollard[2]

In loving memory
Ailsa Woollard nee Sloane (15. 9. 1928 – 1. 4. 2022)

The secret of Lieder: 'Singing is breathing'[3]

When I was ten years old, a girl who lived at the end of our road told me I was 'a dag' because my mother was 'a square' – 'because she sings like this': and she did an impression of my mother's voice – a horrible high shrieking sound which was a stereotypical screaming opera singer. I was beside myself with rage and threw myself on the smirking offender. We rolled around on the cracked concrete footpath under the elm tree outside our house while my sisters and my tormentor's sister, as well as the Dundee girls who lived round the corner, shouted at us to stop or to go harder. Even then I felt the compulsion to defend my mother's singing, and her thoughtful interpretation of Lieder.

In 1946, when she was 18 years old, my mother commenced singing lessons with expert European singing teachers who understood the 'secret of Lieder' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1943a: 7). She learnt how to breathe, and how to 'place' her voice to ensure a refined and pure sound (PURITZ 1956: 37). She maintained her singing practice throughout her long life: in amateur singing groups, in the church choir, and in the frequent soirees she would organise in our home. She practiced – accompanying herself on the piano most days. Marriage to my father in 1961, and the task of raising the four children, meant that the dream of being a professional singer was abandoned.

When I was born, I came into the world already familiar with my mother's voice. Her Papagena, Cherubino, Merry Widow, Lieder and coloratura were the background of my childhood. I have no expertise in the field of Lieder – I do not speak or read German, so despite being a theatre historian, it is challenging if not impossible to track the lineage of my mother's singing technique, and the archive of repertoire and methods

1 From (CONQUERGOOD 2013: 33).

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3 Elisabeth Schumann quoted in (PURITZ 1956: 13).

that her voice embodied.[4] Despite this, I feel a strong connection to the Lieder and operatic tradition. Julia Nafisi observes that '[...] whilst for the German speaker words and music are inseparably intertwined, Lieder also touches people who do not understand a word of what they hear' (NAFISI 2011: 33). My connection to Lieder stems from a love of the melancholic nature of the music, and its association with my mother. Entangled in this are complex feelings about my mother's love of European classical music: her belief in its prestigious status; her joy in her voice; and her regret that the talent she possessed as a young woman did not find fruition in the professional domain.

Now in her nineties, living in aged care with advancing dementia, and after a series of strokes, my mother's capacity for speech has gone. We listen to a recording of Handel's *Messiah*. When she hears 'I know that my redeemer liveth', I see – or do I sense? – how she lifts her cheekbones, and makes her mouth into a 'resonance box' (PURITZ 1956: 31–33), attempting to place her voice and sing the soprano solo. Despite the failings of her mind and body, in this moment 'I know that the archive liveth'.

As a theatre director, actor trainer, and theatre historian, I am very familiar with techniques for breathing and vocal production. The methods which were part of my training at the Victorian College of the Arts (1985–1987), and those I use in my continuing practice, are very different to my mother's understanding of correct vocal technique. I was trained in the methods of Linklater (1976) and Rodenberg (1992) where the focus was to release the belly, and to set the voice free.[5] As a young woman I found it difficult to work against the conditioning of childhood – my mother would often instruct me to 'stand up straight and pull your tummy in', which seemed to be a variation of her classical singing training.

Reflecting on my mother's long practice as an amateur singer of German song and of classical singing technique, and my own experience of how she expressed and performed this legacy, Diana Taylor's reframing of repertoire and performance as embodied archive provides useful insights:

> The repertoire, whether in terms of verbal or nonverbal expression, transmits live, embodied actions. As such, traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted 'live' in the here and now to a live audience. Forms handed down from the past are experienced as present. (TAYLOR 2003: 24)

Taking Taylor's view of how the past is transmitted into the present via embodied practice, I will reflect on how a vocal technique, practiced in Vienna and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, came to be archived and embodied in Sydney, and how my mother embraced this archive as a passionate amateur. I will explore the complicated emotions associated with being an inheritor of this legacy, which exists as a harmonic echo in my ear, and as a jumbled collection of memories, books, and photographs. I will reflect on how my mother came to fall under the spell of German song and

4 All translations are from (GARRAN 1946; HAREWOOD and DUNCAN 1964).

5 See (LINKLATER 1976; RODENBERG 1992).

opera, and how this repertoire was not only an embodied archive, but also a Taylorian scenario (TAYLOR 2003: 28–33). Dwight Conquergood's insights about the competing demands of 'analysis and action' are perhaps also embodied in my reflections on my mother's singing practice. Conquergood identifies that:

> The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: 'knowing that', and 'knowing about'. This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands – on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how', and 'knowing who'. This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things. (CONQUERGOOD 2013: 33)

My practice as a theatre historian guides my exploration of the physical and digitised archives which relate to my mother's early life, but ultimately my experience and embodied memories as a daughter will lead this reflection. While on the one hand I will summarise the facts of my mother's singing practice and her life in a 'view from above', I will also privilege what Conquergood calls 'the nonserious ways of knowing that dominant culture neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize'. In this reflection, I will view 'extralinguistic human action and embodied events' through the lens of memory, grief, and love (CONQUERGOOD 2013: 33–34).

A cultured life

Growing up in the 1930s and 1940s in Sydney's north shore suburbs, my mother lived a cultured life – even though her parents did not buy their own home until they were in their late fifties, never owned a car, grew their own vegetables, and could not afford to send their children to university. When ABC Radio (Australian Broadcasting Commission) programmed a broadcast of Beethoven's fifth, or an opera featuring Austrian tenor Richard Tauber, my mother and her sister would hurry home from work to sit round the wireless. In their teens, my mother and her older sister would sing Gilbert and Sullivan songs round the house. In my mother's copy of *The Victor Book of the Symphony* by Charles O'Connell (1949) she pasted clippings from Concert programmes. On these small clippings are the autographs of renowned classical musicians and singers, including pianists Gerald Moore (1899–1987) and Solomon Cutner (1902–1988); singers Joan Hammond, (1912–1996), Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (1915–2006), and Irmgard Seefried (1919–1988); and conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Rafael Kubelik (1914–1996).[6] These are some of the artists who scrawled their signatures for my mother when she stepped forward to greet them at the stage door of the Sydney

6 Schwarzkopf toured Australia with Otto Klemperer in 1949; Gerald Moore and Irmgard Seefried toured in March 1953; Joan Hammond returned to Australia for concert tours in 1946, 1949, and 1953; Rafael Kubelík toured to Australia in June 1947.

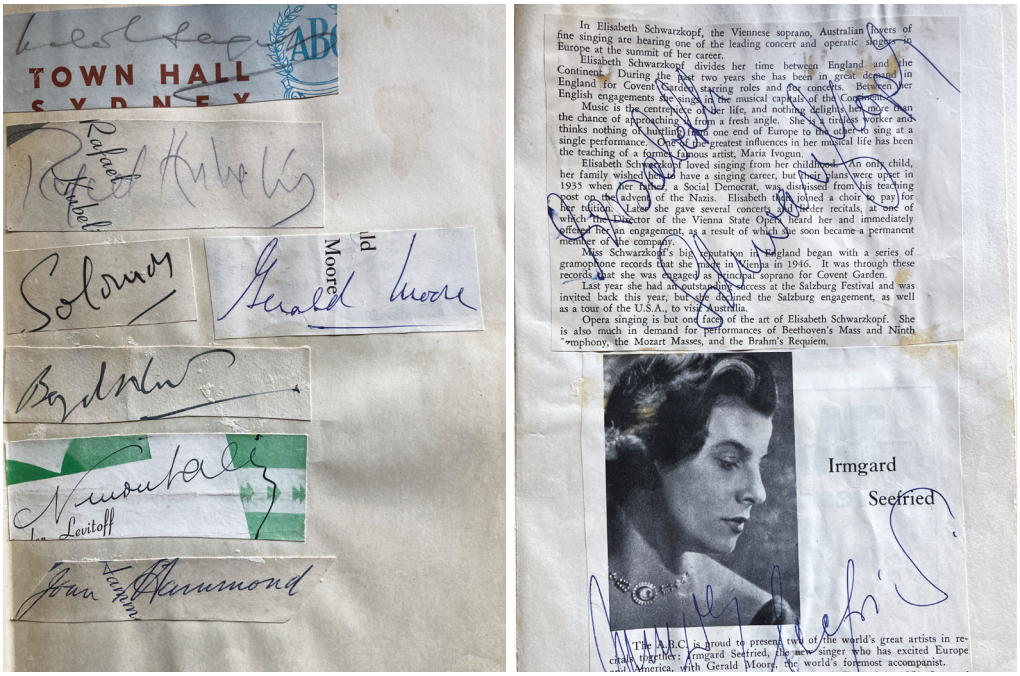

Fig. 1: Autographs of touring musicians collected by Ailsa Woollard. Author's Collection.

Town Hall – brimful of admiration for their artistry. O'Connell's book contains an archive of the musicians my mother admired, and the recitals and concerts she attended in Sydney in the 1940s and 1950s.

My mother's love of Lieder and opera came from my grandmother, who was descended from the Roses, German horse trainers and miners, refugees from the Middle Rhine who had fled invasions by the British and the French in the early 18th century. They settled in Cornwall, England, and supplied horses for the tin mines, and then in the 1850s a branch of the family, lured by the gold rush, ended up in the gold fields of Ballarat, Australia. According to my mother, her grandfather Augustus Rose was a fine singer, *a light baritone*. As a young man he moved from Ballarat to Brisbane, and it was here that he joined the Brisbane Liedertafel, a men's choir and musical society named for the German tradition of men gathering round a table with their beer steins and singing in harmony. Augustus met my great grandmother Maude Isabel Harris at the Brisbane Liedertafel. Together they handed on a love of German song and opera to their daughter, Gladys, who then imparted it to her own daughter.

After finishing school my mother found employment in the library of the Metal Trades Employers Association. Later she was employed by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in a clerical position. Despite this prosaic entry into the world of work, the study and appreciation of classical music continued to be a passion, and she took up the dream of becoming a professional operatic singer. On her eighteenth birthday, a family

friend gave their Lipp upright grand piano to my mother. The neighbours all came to admire the impressively tall instrument, and its elaborate walnut case, which had been shipped from Germany as a wedding gift years before. Throughout this period my mother continued her piano lessons and was able to play Chopin's 'Berceuse' from memory. She began to acquire serious books on the craft of singing and the study of classical music, such as O'Connell's *The Victor Book of the Symphony* (1941), Elisabeth Schumann's *German Song* (1948), and *The Teaching of Elisabeth Schumann* by Elizabeth Puritz (1956). My grandmother saw Emmy Kimmel's advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and encouraged my mother to enrol as a student of opera at 'Studio Emmy Kimmel'.

Emmy Kimmel

Emmy Kimmel, a 'distinguished continental soprano' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1943b: 2), and her husband had arrived in Sydney in 1939, 'refugees from the Hitler regime'. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on the 'interesting visitors' and 'varied array of talent' that was arriving in Sydney because of 'the European situation'. The article provides a summary of Kimmel's career and paints a picture of a hard-working musician and teacher who adapted to the disruptions of war, and who was now declaring her credentials as an expert singing coach.

> Emmy Kimmel is a coloratura soprano. She studied piano and singing at the Vienna Conservatoire, and made her debut with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 16. Since then she has been heard frequently in concert and radio. During the last few years before Hitler, she says she was on the staff of a State evening school, where working people and the unemployed took music lessons. (*THE SYDNEY...* 1939: 10)

Once she had arrived in Sydney, Kimmel established herself in a studio above an art shop at 15 Hunter Street near the corner of George Street, where she taught 'Style, Tradition in Lied and Opera' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1947: 17). She gave many recitals in Sydney throughout the 1940s, and her voice was described as 'not remarkable in volume but it had a warm timbre, which exactly suited the music, and it had been cultivated until it responded like a well-mastered instrument' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1940: 8). Nevertheless, Kimmel understood 'that secret of Lieder' which according to the music critic of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, requires an understanding of 'the subtler matter of feeling, of an instinctive absorption of mood and accent and colour' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1943a: 7). Kimmel trained my mother in the skills of a robust, steady breathing technique, crucial to the production of a refined and complex sound. Kimmel told my mother that her own mother had suffered terribly at the hands of the Nazis. When my mother asked for more detail, Kimmel did not elaborate. Perhaps it was impossible for her to speak about the trauma of the Holocaust, while teaching voice production and theory in a studio above Hunter Street in sunny Sydney.

The view from ground level

In her eighties my mother continued to see herself as the young soprano who once was told that she had *the finest voice in Australia*. In her mind, this was corroborated when someone at her church remarked that her voice reminded her of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Even at this age, my mother's voice still stirs me, despite the stronger vibrato and her difficulty with the higher notes. Nevertheless, I am reminded of her sweet renditions of Cherubino and the 'Queen of the Night' at the old German piano when I was a child. I would lie beside her feet under the keyboard, my fingers tracing the strange carved dragon pedestals of the piano legs. My chest would resonate with the singing chords of the long copper wires, the creak of the brass pedals, the sound of her voice floating over all that sonic richness like light from a shining distant star.

With four children born in rapid succession, and a bourgeois suburban life in Melbourne – revolving around Wednesday morning tennis, dinner parties, and school tuckshop duty – my mother's artistic drive was in a domestic *cul de sac*. Despite this, she kept up her singing practice, joined the church choir, and the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, where she was given a role in the chorus.

We were proud of her voice, and culture was instilled in us – we all had to learn a musical instrument, and she taught us songs at the piano from *Classical Songs for Children*, an edifying collection of music from the classical canon compiled by the Countess of Harewood and Ronald Duncan. We would take turns to stand at the piano and sing, we girls trying to emulate her sweet sound, my own voice ragged with the effort. I have envious memories of my nine-year-old sister, in her black hotpants and striped top – her golden hair in a fashionable dolly cut – sweetly warbling 'Sontag' by Brahms and Papageno's song from *The Magic Flute*. I preferred Schubert's 'Das Wandern' [To Wander]. The low rolling notes on the piano created the sound of the 'The mill wheel turning round and round', while the opening lyrics suggested thrilling risk and possibility: 'To wander off is what I'd like / To wonder' (HAREWOOD and DUNCAN 1964: 153–154). As I sang beside the piano, my mother rocked back and forth in time with Schubert's emphatic rolling groove. I entered a majestic stretch of time, unlocked by musical notes on a page, which my mother could interpret, a magical language she understood. As I sang the lyrics I inhabited the darkness of the time before I existed, the big space that contained all the history I did not know about at eleven years old. The final verse is a reflection on the relentless turning of the millstone, and the entrapment of the miller's boy – who is not permitted to wander, but like the stones grinding the grain into flour, is condemned to ceaseless work. My mother's feet would treadle the shiny brass pedals of the old piano, while her fingers clambered up and down the octaves, a kinaesthetic and sonic evocation of the fascinating horror of the mill wheel grinding on and on, and the impossibility of escape.

Leaving us

Sometimes my mother would explode and threaten to leave us as she served up the fish kedgeree. 'I am going back to Sydney'; she would say, while my father sat with bowed head at the end of the table, unable to speak, waiting for the storm to pass. As if her life in Sydney – the German classes and singing lessons – was continuing without her. As if she could go back there and pick it all up again, leaving us in Melbourne, sitting round the big Laminex table, waiting for her to return. We would all sit quietly, knowing that she just needed to utter it, to vent the possibility of abandoning us for Lieder and opera, and that once spoken, she would be content to remain in the life she had made with us. Artistic ambition, artistic impulses and dreams were dangerous for a family. Something had to be sacrificed.

It was a Melbourne Gilbert & Sullivan Society production of *The Yeomen of the Guard* that led me to fall in love with theatre and its transformational power. In production week the trappings of my mother's past life in Sydney came out – her *My Fair Lady* stage make-up – (surprisingly orange), false eyelashes, and Helena Rubenstein rouge. Then the costume came home – a long gown of lapis lazuli velvet, which she hung up to steam in the bathroom. On opening night my father drove us to the school hall where *The Yeomen* was being staged. When my mother stepped onto stage with the chorus my heart turned over – the thick golden light of the theatre revealed a vivid image of her as a young woman. Under the lights, the orange pancake, insect-leg eyelashes, and Rubenstein rouge had transformed her into a young medieval queen like those I admired in my picture books of folk and fairy tales. The singing voices washed over us. Gilbert's relentless doggerel was incomprehensible, but I was swept away. Despite the sensory overload, I could still pick out my mother's voice in the busy music – the bone in my ear vibrating in response to the sound I had heard since my days in her womb. My father, sitting at the end of the row next to my little brother and younger sisters, kept his mouth clamped in a closed smile. In the light spilling from the stage I could see his eyes were glistening, as he struggled to contain his love and pride.

In the 1980s my aunt was staying with us in Melbourne. One night she sat at the kitchen table and sewed a button on a blouse, while my mother iced a cake at the kitchen bench. They were singing Richard Strauss' 'September'. My aunt's voice was slightly lower, harmonising with my mother's voice. In my twenties, and more interested in krautrock than Lieder, creating alternate theatre and obsessing over my relationship with a moody boyfriend, I had entered the kitchen and stepped into a moment of beauty which has stayed with me these past forty years. I could not understand the lyrics, but I knew it was Lieder. When I asked, they told me 'Four Last Songs'. A scene of suburban feminine domestic labour was set to the tune of Strauss' great melody of mourning for the world after the war, and contemplation of his own death. My angry outsider soon dissolved, and I was dropped back into that big space, where words and music combine to summon emotion which cannot be expressed by words alone.

Margarethe Krauss

In the late 1950s, my mother began lessons with Czech soprano Margarethe Krauss. Margarethe Krauss, born in Prague in 1896, had emigrated to Sydney in 1955, and her connection to the European opera lineage was impressive. She had been a principal soprano at both the Vienna and Munich State Opera in the 1920s and 1930s. In a *carte de visite* from 1928 Krauss is in costume as Papagena in *The Magic Flute* for the Vienna State Opera. In her Bakst-inspired costume she is a petite bird-wife, wearing a very short, bustled skirt, adorned with long fake tail feathers, and her broad forehead encased in a cloche embellished with stylised feathers. With one hand on her hip, and one leg crossed over the other, she looks relaxed and happy. The *carte de visite* could have been produced during the Salzburg Festival of 1928, when Kraus was performing with the Vienna State Opera in a new production of *The Magic Flute* under the baton of Franz Schalk.

When Austria was annexed into Germany by Hitler in 1938, many Jewish musicians and conductors resigned in protest or were forced to flee. Margarethe Krauss made it to London in the early days of World War II and was paid ten pounds a week to perform at wartime concerts organised by the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts. My mother recalled that Krauss told her that 'she was sent to Wales to sing for the miners' (WOOLLARD 2016). In 1947 Krauss performed at the Chelsea Town Hall, London. Roberts writes:

> [...] the concert was in memory of Arnold Rose (1863–1946), who for over 50 years had led the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and had fled to London in 1938. Bruno Walter gave the eulogy and accompanied Margaret Krauss and Paul Schoeffler in songs by Wolf and Mahler. (ROBERTS 2015: 156)

In late August 1955, Krauss advertised that she had 'recently arrived in Sydney' and listed her credentials as a skilled and experienced vocal teacher. Her biography is an incantation of famous Lieder names, dropped like a trail of jewels to lure antipodean lovers of Lieder and opera to her door.

> Former Principal Soprano, Vienna and Munich State Opera. Sang under Furtwangler, Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter, Felix Weingartner, Joseph Krips, Walter Susskind, Opera, Oratorio, Lieder Recitals in all the leading cities of Europe. Took part in Music Festivals, Salzburg, Carmel, California and Barcelona. Leading vocal teacher and coach in interpretation and voice production in London. (*THE SYDNEY...* 1955a: 19)

An advertisement in September 1955 adds further enticement for aspiring singers, with the statement that Krauss would take 'a limited number of talented students for thorough coaching for all roles in opera' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1955b: 21). My Grandmother thought that my mother's singing was not advancing with Emmy Kimmel, so when in 1957 she read that Margaret Krauss had joined the staff of the Sydney Conservatorium

Fig. 2: Margaret Krauss as Papagena. Photographer: Wellington. Author's Collection.

The same *carte de visite* is offered for sale on www.taminoautographs.com with the date 1932. The handwriting on the 1932 image does not appear to be the same as that on the image reproduced here. Therefore, it is uncertain which signature is authentic.

as 'teacher of Singing', she encouraged my mother to begin training with Krauss (*THE SYDNEY...* 1957: 17).[7]

My mother studied with Krauss until 1961, inheriting the vocal technique Krauss had learned in Vienna. Years later, my mother would recall Krauss's instructions as: 'Pull your belly in', 'Stand straight', and 'Sing behind your eyebrows' (WOOLLARD 2016). However, there must have been more that was happening in the studio – more than simple verbal instructions for physical technique. Something was being transmitted through emotion, sensibility, and presence. Krauss once told my mother 'You have the finest voice I have ever heard in Australia' and wept when my mother announced her engagement, because it spelt the end of her singing career. According to my mother, Krauss said: 'Anyhow, you were probably not tough enough for opera' (WOOLLARD 2016). Krauss was attached to her pupils, and often farewelled the very talented students as they left Australia to test and develop their talent in London. In 1966 Krauss followed her gifted pupils to London.[8] In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, she said: 'I suddenly realised it would be much more rewarding to me as a teacher and to the pupils, too, if I could guide them and train them when they were starting their careers here. It's the time they need me most of all' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1966: 28). Krauss knew the worth of her experience as a professional singer, and how her long practice benefitted her students. One of her London students, the tenor Joseph Ward, recalled that Krauss was quick to claim her expertise. Margaret Schindler, interviewing Ward for her PhD research, writes that after Ward's successful performance 'in a major principal role at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden':

> [...] a colleague complimented him on his performance and paid tribute to his voice teacher, Margreta Kraus, (sic) who was also present, saying the money Joseph had paid for his singing lessons with her had clearly been money well spent. The diva replied, 'Darling, he has not paid for his *singing lessons* with me, he has paid for my *30 years' experience at the Vienna State Opera!*' (SCHINDLER 2016: 62–63)

This account suggests that Margaret Krauss was indeed 'tough enough for opera' and possessed the drive and ambition to devote herself to singing practice and craft.

7 Krauss arrived in Australia in 1955, teaching privately before commencing at the N.S.W. Conservatorium of Music in 1957. See *The Argus*. 1955. Home science [online]. *The Argus* (2. 8. 1955): 10. *The Sydney Morning Herald* advertisement of 13 July 1957 states that the Conservatorium of Music 'reopens for tuition Monday July 15, 1957' and that 'Madame Margaret Krauss, formerly of the Vienna and Munich State Opera, and extensive European concert experience, has joined the staff as teacher of Singing.' However, Beth Mary Williams claims Krauss was employed by the Conservatorium 1958–1965. See (WILLIAMS 2002: Appendix D).

8 In this interview with Krauss in July 1966, the London correspondent states: 'It's five months since she left Sydney.'

My Fair Lady

In 1960, at her Thursday evening lesson, Krauss told my mother 'Get out of that office and go round to Her Majesty's Theatre' where auditions were being held for J.C. Williamson's touring production of *My Fair Lady*. The production, starring Bunty Turner and Robin Bailey, had a successful first season in Melbourne in 1959. For the Sydney season at Her Majesty's a new member of the ladies' singing chorus was required. When my mother told Madame Krauss she had nothing prepared for an audition, Krauss told her, 'Sing Cherubino'. At her Friday afternoon audition for music director Gabriel Joffe, my mother sang Cherubino's aria. 'Dear,' said Joffe, 'next time you audition for a production like this, sing something a bit lighter. But it was very lovely.' She was invited to join the production the following week (WOOLLARD 2016).

She gave notice to the Australian Broadcasting Commission and on the following Friday attended her first rehearsal. She watched the performance every night, had four rehearsals, and started a week later. The ballet mistress would also tell the Ladies' Singing Chorus, 'pull your stomach in', a command my mother recognised from her singing lessons. Backstage jokes and merriment were part of this stimulating new world. My mother gave her sapphire engagement ring to the stage manager for safekeeping before each performance. 'One night after the show he handed back a gawdy costume ring – a prank. I didn't realise and when I looked at my finger – aagh!' Her favourite costume was the one she wore for the famous black and white Ascot scene, 'It was a long dress, with long sleeves and a slim skirt. I wore a big black hat with white trim with a wig attached. One night I yanked it off too quickly and got told off by the wardrobe mistress' (WOOLLARD 2016). It was not opera, but the production inducted my mother into the hierarchical world of professional music theatre, with its rigid rules, pranks, and no mingling between the chorus and the lead performers.

After performing in eight shows a week for six months my mother regretfully withdrew when the Sydney season came to an end and the production was going on to Brisbane. She was thirty-three and my father, who she had met the year before, was impatient to be married. She told me: 'I was very sad to leave, but I wanted to get married and start a family; they were happy days, the theatre people were lovely.'

Archive

In 2016 my mother was diagnosed with dementia. My sisters and brother can sense how each week, details are draining away, and other things come to the fore. My mother, now a widow, often hearkens back to her life as a young woman before she was married, and her singing teachers. I ask her about her singing training and make untidy notes. I begin to track her name in digitised newspapers and discover that she was a finalist in the women's section of the Radio Vocal Contest in September 1951. I find her in advertisements for performances and recitals – as Barbarina in *Figaro* at the Stage Club Opera School in Darlinghurst, in 1960; and as Mrs Pinkerton in *Madam Butterfly*,

Fig. 3: The Ladies' Singing Chorus, *My Fair Lady*, comp. Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner. J. C. Williamson and Company at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney, c.1960. Ailsa Woollard second row far right. Location: Roof of Her Majesty's Theatre. Photographer unknown. Author's Collection.

a 'full performance with scenery, costumes and string ensemble' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1961: 25). I wonder about my obsessive archiving, my rummaging in the past to uncover my mother's artistic lineage and the evidence of her voice in performance. Time is running on and I am feverishly pulling together a fragmented archive – family stories, a few undated clippings – in an attempt to capture a rare and particular sound. In a review of *Gems from Opera*, presented by the 'Opera Class from Studio Emmy Kimmel' (*THE SYDNEY...* 1950: 13), the music critic writes: 'The sincerity of Ailsa Sloane's sweet rustic love as Siebel in *Faust* ... sparkled' (Clipping from unidentified newspaper July 1950). Reading this fragment, I become less historian and more daughter, recalling how this sparkling sound threaded through my childhood. Elisabeth Schumann 'spoke of the "chimney" through which the breath flowed and produced tone', but also saw spacious images when she sang. 'Sometimes I see the vault of a great cathedral, or I see an open plain or the still sea' (quoted in PURITZ 1956: 8–9). I did not ever ask my mother about the details of her method, or the images she saw in her mind when she sang. Do my memories of my mother's voice mean that I am now the embodied archive?

In 2014, I accompanied my mother to New Zealand to visit her brother in an aged care facility in Christchurch. He was over ninety and succumbing to dementia. My mother was a sprightly eighty-six-year-old – age was not a concern for her. With the assistance of church friends, my mother had produced a CD called *Ailsa Sings*, so her brother could hear her sing again. The CD consisted of four songs – Schubert's 'The Trout', Dvorak's 'Song to the Moon', Shaw's setting of Shakespeare's 'I Know a Bank Where the Wild Thyme Blows' and 'Oh, in My Dreams' by Liszt. My mother was excited to share the CD with her brother. 'It will make him feel better', she told me, as though the sound of her singing voice will cure my uncle of dementia and bring him back to his senses.

At the aged care residence, the staff could not get the portable CD player to work, so someone took the disc into the communal lounge area to play it through the sound system and my mother followed them. I was sitting with my uncle when I heard her voice emanating from the lounge. My uncle's face lit up for the first time that day. 'It's Ailsa!' he said. I helped him walk slowly into the lounge, where thirty of the residents were seated in a large circle, watching my mother with interest. She was standing in front of the stereo unit singing along to the recording of herself singing. She turned to my uncle as we entered the room, and still singing, held out her hands to him. I helped him to cross the impromptu stage to join her. Like a scene from a light opera, she clasped his hands, singing to him all the while: 'So lang dem Wasser Helle, / So dacht' ich, nicht gebricht' (GARRAN 1946: 240). My uncle was laughing and crying in a bewildered where-am-I sort of way, as though he had been transported back to 1950s Sydney, to the front room in the house at Artarmon, listening to his sister give a recital for their parents and their friends. I helped him to a chair and sat on the floor while my mother continued with her impromptu recital. Here I was, sitting at Conquergood's ground level, surrounded by 30 pairs of slippered feet. I saw how my mother suddenly seemed years younger. All the emotion I was holding in threatened to undo my composure, in contrast to my mother's blithe confidence and assurance. There it was – the archive embodied – the singing technique that came to her via Emmy Kimmel, and Margaret Krauss with her '*30 years' experience at the Vienna State Opera!*', the repertoire, and the archive manifested. I noticed my mother's straight spine and the fixed brightness of her eye, how she pulled her belly in, summoned up the notes, and delivered them from her diaphragm up through her head. I sensed how she directed her voice to the place behind her eyebrows, and felt it resonate in my own head. I saw how her feet were set slightly askance, her hands brought together at her rib cage like gentle doves. Performance lineage in action, lived in the body, the muscles, the sinews, the flesh, the breath, the whole body-mind. Drawing on my own knowledge of performance practice, I centred myself and controlled my breathing, so I did not go to pieces in front of all the old people. My mother, heedless of my powerful emotions, and confident of a positive reception from her surprised elderly audience, sang on, making eye contact with her brother, bringing him back into their shared past as she inhabited the song. I was aware of her purpose, her determination to offer the gift of her voice to cheer up all the poor old people in what she called 'that ghastly place'. I could see

that as she sang, she was no longer anxious or sad about her brother's decline. She was glad that when her recital was finished, she would be leaving the aged care residence and her confused older brother. It was clear to me that she was thankful for her voice. As she stood and filled the room with the last notes of her song, I had a powerful sense of how her voice was a distillation of her past and her inner life. It was her last unreachable refuge, a place where we could not follow – her constant Lieder dream.

Now

In late 2021 my mother's lifelong friend Mary dies. In her eulogy, Mary's daughter recalls her mother's singing voice, and tells us how Mary learnt from a European singing teacher, who once told her she had 'the finest voice she had ever heard in Australia'. My ears prick up. Was this a line these singing teachers trotted out to ensure their students kept attending lessons? Did this loaded compliment keep alive the dream of being good enough to inherit the Viennese lineage, to win The Sun Aria competition, or to train at the London Opera School? I feel a little deflated. Since childhood I have listened with reverence to the stories of Kimmel and Krauss, defending and admiring my mother's voice. Was my mother an antipodean victim of an elaborate Viennese cultural scam?

A month later my mother has another stroke, and I travel in haste from my home in Tasmania, the island state off the coast of Australia, to Victoria, where my mother lives in aged care. My sister and the staff think it is likely mum will die. She is bedridden. We take it in turns to sit in vigil. But she comes back to us – no longer able to walk, with the use of only one arm, and her speech dismantled. When we are alone, she and I listen to Arleen Auger, or Elisabeth Schumann, or Jessye Norman. What does it all mean, this melancholic yearning, this softness in her face and eyes, the lifting of her brow – her wistful smile? I do not understand the German lyrics and must refer to her copy of *Schubert and Schumann: Songs and Translations*, but the thing I do understand is my mother's emotion, and the feelings that well in her when she hears Arleen Auger sing Schumann's 'Widmung'. She lifts her face and mouths the first three words of the last line: 'Mein guter Geist' [My better self] (GARRAN 1946: 266). I want to ask what this line means to her. Is she recalling the past? Is she sorrowful for what might have been? Is she swept away by beauty? Is there, in her fraying brain, a sudden awareness of the gap between who she is now and who she was then? Then I stop wondering, slow my breath, and remain present in this moment with the music, in the ground of our shared past and memories, existing with her in that place where words alone always fail.

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