IFAC AUSTRALIAN SINGING COMPETITION

AUSTRALASIA'S RICHEST COMPETITION FOR OPERA & CLASSICAL SINGING
FEATURING THE MARIANNE MATHY SCHOLARSHIP

Madame Marianne Mathy-Frisdane

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8 April 1982

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Marianne Mathy was a distinguished teacher of opera and classical singing in Sydney, Australia for almost forty years.

Her legacy, the Marianne Mathy Scholarship, has become internationally recognised as one of the most prestigious awards of its kind given to young singers – and enters its third decade in 2011.

Also known as 'The Mathy' after its namesake bronze statuette, the Marianne Mathy Scholarship is the featured award in the IFAC Australian Singing Competition.

MANNHEIM, Southern Germany , a decade before the birth of the new century...

It was in this bustling commercial town, already renowned for its Opera House – where resident conductors of the ilk of Kleiber, Gordinsky and Furtwängler gave life to the old classics and the new works of the moderns, Schiller, Wieland and Lessing — where the greatest lieder singer of them all, Julia Culp, presented splendid recitals and art and theatre breathed out of the very pores of the city that a child was born.

Martha Kahn, nee Fuerth, the daughter of Saly and Mathilde Fuerth, shopkeepers of Mainz, gave birth to a daughter, Marianne Helene Sara, on June 23 in the year 1890.

The proud father, Dr Richard Michael Kahn, son of Emil and Anna, nee Hirsch, also of Mannheim, was already a wealthy and influential lawyer in the town, but his real love was music. His brother Robert, was a well-known chamber and choral music composer of the day, while he himself was president of the local Philharmonic Society and a patron of the arts. He adored opera, soon tucking his young daughter under his musical wing, escorting her to all the opening nights - many of them in other parts of Germany. But first, he would introduce young Marianne to the operas by playing and singing all the parts to her in their music room at home.

In this fashion she attended, with Papa, the world premiere of Der Rosenkavalier in Dresden under the baton of Richard Strauss, the very first Salome, also with Strauss, Tannhäuser, featuring the great Geraldine Farrar in Munich, and Parsifal and The Ring, in Bayreuth.

Richard Kahn was intent on his daughter becoming an accomplished musician. His choice of instrument for her was piano.

In the music room of the house were two Bechstein grands, but allowing for Madame Kahn's own bent for decor, the pianos were of pale birchwood and exquisitely inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory, while the inner lids were of ebony.

It was mama who insisted her daughter, petite and somewhat frail in looks, should take deportment and dancing lessons. She was just seven.

A year later, her father commenced her piano lessons. There were two teachers who guided her patiently through Czerny, Scarlatti, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn... And by the time she had reached her eleventh birthday, Marianne was taking weekly chamber music and sight-reading, which she despised. At this stubborn obstruction to her already apparent musical gift, many young tears and paternal anger evolved but the perseverance on both sides paid off. At fourteen, Fräulein Kahn was performing Mozart and Haydn concerts in public.

In his role as president of the Mannheim Philharmonic Society, Kahn took his daughter to every symphony concert and lieder recital. It would have been sacrilege to miss a single note.

During one Beethoven festival alone - this one under the baton of Felix Weingartner, Marianne sat enthralled through all nine of the composer's symphonies.

And she was constantly fascinated by the operas and classical plays to which her father took her almost weekly. Many of the musicians, including the violinists, Kubelik (father to the conductor), Joachim and the Rose Quartet, also came to the Kahn home, where Marianne heard them practising prior to their recitals.

With Wilhelm Furtwängler, she engaged in the game of marbles as a small girl. It was, ironically, this conductor who indirectly saved her life by introducing her to the man who would one day get her out of Germany, and therefore out of Nazi clutches, Sir Thomas Beecham. Marianne first met Beecham when he gave his one and only concert with the Berliner Philharmonisches Orchester. The date was April, 1933.

While Wagner was Richard Kahn's favourite composer – he loved him with a passion and would listen to his compositions for hours – Martha Kahn, a gentle creature of sensuous countenance, turned her talents to surrounding her family with beautiful things.

It was she who assisted Baillie Scott, the pupil of William Morris, the founder of the English Liberty style of interior decor, with the designs for the furniture, fireplaces and windows of the Kahn home.

And it was Martha Kahn who knew, even in those formative years, that her only child harboured a great longing to sing – and to act. But these were passions little understood, let alone tolerated by Herr Kahn. There was a brief period when she studied basic singing under Anna Rodre-Heindl and then he sent her to grammar school, but the more she struggled with the tedium of her sight-reading and the more Papa bellowed in frustration at her efforts – the deeper Marianne's passion for the instrument of the voice became.

But her teacher then, Professor W. Bopp, was a little more impressed by his wilful young pupil.

In 1911, when Marianne was only 21 but already an accomplished pianist, Julia Culp invited her to her home in Berlin. There, she introduced the wide-eyed girl from Mannheim to the formidable Destinn who was the guest star in Tosca that night.

After the performance, La Culp burst into tears and turned to her young companion saying: "I am nothing compared to this singer!"

This compliment coming from the greatest of the great was one Marianne was never to forget. Nor was the lawyer's daughter ever to forget the lieder recitals Culp gave during those following years. Once she sang an entire evening of Hugo Wolf, another, of Brahms. Marianne missed not one concert.

Then there was the lieder and oratorio singer, Lula Mysz-Gmeiner. It was at one of her recitals that Marianne heard in rapture, her first Frauenliebe und Leben by Schumann. The warmth and emotion of the performance made such an impact on her, Marianne wept for weeks.

During the Great War, in 1916, Mysz-Gmeiner became her first singing teacher. It was a disaster. Mysz-Gmeiner had learned only from a teacher based in England - von Zur-Muhlen, but his method was a catastrophe for the – at the time – small and delicate soprano voice of the young German girl.

She left and found a new teacher, Professor Chs. W. Graeff, (allowing her to venture into oratorio).

Around that same period, Marianne met the young coloratura, Maria Ivogun, a discovery of the maestro conductor, Bruno Walter. Ivogun was in fact a year younger than Marianne.

She was as the Munich Opera , incidentally with Walter, and she agreed to “audition” Marianne. The young Mathy confessed to Ivogun her doubts about her singing ability but the younger woman consoled her, saying she had indeed a lovely voice and that she, Ivogun herself, had had a far lighter voice during her own studies.

In later years when Ivogun had reached her zenith, she convinced Marianne to become a singer of opera and not a pianist. Her father however, thought differently. The stage - as least in this manner – was out.

But Marianne if nothing else, was determined. In her solo hours at home in Mannheim, instead of practising at one of the Bechstein grands, she rose to her full 1.6 metres and armed with Papa’s German Army helmet and wearing Mama’s white dressing gown, she declaimed at the top of her young voice from Schiller’s powerful St. Joan.

It was by sheer good fortune she met Max Friedlander and his wife at a summer resort near Mannheim. Friedlander was a renowned critical adviser to the seven Schubert volumes published by Peters. And it was Friedlander, captivated by the tiny bundle of energy and persistence, who introduced her to the great Schubert songs... not The Trout, not The Hedgerose, but The Arrest of Tauris, Atlas and similar lieder.

In moments of inspiration that golden summer, Friedlander sang them himself, accompanied by his wife. He also sang Die Winterreise for the enthralled Marianne, an experience she was to recall until the end of her life, for the remarkable way in which he fused diction and music in the one epic tale.

At around the same period, Marianne also encountered the Mannheim-born actor, Albert Basserman who took such an interest in the girl's obsession with, and devotion to the theatre, that he read and re-enacted with her all the parts of "Wallenstein, Jungfrau von Orleans" by Schiller and "Minnaet" from Barnhelm. Marianne was usually Minna and yes, sometimes even Wallenstein.

Because Richard Kahn still opposed his child's theatrical passion, she succeeded in being admitted secretly to acting classes at the State Conservatorium. Her teacher was the inimitable actor, Ferdinand Gregory. With him, she learned deportment, to breathing, voice projection , the art of utilising vowels and consonants and at the same time, Gregory awakened in her once and for all her creative abilities.

But Herr Kahn discovered the secret. Her acting classes were curtailed and she was told severely that neither opera nor the stage were to be her career. She was once again desolate.

But as is wont to happen with young girls who go to bed at night in despair and wake next morning to sunshine, Marianne was chosen by Gustav Mahler and his disciple, Arthur Bodansky (later to become resident conductor of the Metropolitan Opera in New York), to take part in the world premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony (Symphony of a Thousand) in Munich, in May of 1911.

The young Marianne Mathy was one of the sixteen selected voices – a great honour and especially for the daughter of the Mannheim lawyer who was determined the girl would have nothing of the world of voice!

In December of 1912, two days before Christmas, Martha Kahn passed away. She was given a Christian burial for she had been baptized from Jew to Protestant, and in fact Richard Kahn had earlier changed his religion from the Jewish to marry her.

Marianne, although descended from the Jewish on both sides of the family, had also been baptized Protestant at St. Trinity Church in Mannheim on June 20, 1896.

Broken hearted, for her and her mother had been kindred spirits and it was from her that Marianne inherited her great delight in things beautiful and delicate, the pianist married. The man was Erich Mathy, Colonel Mathy of Kaiser Wilhelm III's Imperial German Army.

Under Wilhelm, son of Frederick, married to the English Princess Royal, Victoria's eldest daughter, Germany prospered in an age rich in culture. It was a golden era, a glorious era, to be rudely and savagely interrupted by the politicians' folly – war.

Mathy although not as interested in the sounds of music as in the decibels of battle, was nonetheless good-looking and the possessor of a certain commanding air. Marianne found solace – and a second home – with him.

In September 1914 Germany was at war. Mathy received orders to leave immediately for the front. Meanwhile his young wife commenced a nursing course. Within three months, Erich was badly wounded. She was allowed to join him at the field hospital, so crucial were a pair of extra willing hands.

Mathy was eventually transferred to a base hospital in Mannheim where Marianne continued to train as a nurse. But as soon as he had sufficiently recovered the Colonel returned to the war zone while his wife broke her long hours of nursing in Mannheim to sing for the wounded.

Even then, the encouragement for her career in voice was forthcoming. A pianist who accompanied her during those days urged her to take up serious vocal studies. "You will make a far better career singing than of nursing," he said earnestly.

Nevertheless she passed her State examination in the profession and was transferred to a nursing home for wounded soldiers as well as private patients. She and Erich divorced and it was while she was at the home she received news her former husband had been killed in action.

It was then she made the decision to go to Berlin to study under Lula Mysz-Gmeiner, her father meanwhile, having remarried in May 1915 to Maria Starre of Rohrbach near Heidelberg. The marriage was to produce a boy and a girl. Some months later, having changed teachers, Bruno Walter agreed to audition her. She had long looked upon the conductor as her hero. She was extremely nervous and somewhat in awe on the day she went to him to Berlin .

She sang for Walter, Anne's aria from "The Merry Wives of Windsor." She was waiting for him to bend into the music, totally away with the score – and, hopefully, with her performance. But rather he merely played lightly across the very top of the keys, staring at her intently as she sang.

When Marianne had finished the aria, he said: "Tell me, Frau Mathy," (for she had taken her late husband's name) "what do you really want to become?"

She replied enthusiastically: "Why, an opera singer, Maestro!" Walter hesitated then said: "Well, can you sing for me the opening bars of Nobles Seigneurs, the Page from 'Les Huguenots' by Meyerbeer?"

Marianne told the conductor she had never learned the piece but of course she would try. Off she went with gusto and on the second triplet, ending with only a "G", she cracked.

Walter grimaced and said "My dear child, what God has not given to you, you will never achieve. You had better stick to your church singing!" And so he dismissed her.

Marianne fell into a deep fit of depression. She did not sing for two months. Instead, on August 12, 1921, she married a wealthy Jewish Berliner architect, Franz (Francis) Martin Friendenstein, son of Arnold and Clara nee Cohn, factory owners of Breslau; Arnold, it seems being descended from the Poles.

Francis, seven years older than Marianne, was also a very commendable chamber violinist as well as being a friend and colleague of Kaufmann, the architect who designed the extraordinary interior of the Berlin State Opera.

The newly-weds took up residence in a fine apartment in the well-to-do area of Wilmersdorf at Number 17, Jenaerstrasse, in the German capital. The years together promised to be productive and happy ones.

Marianne refound her inspiration for singing. She changed her teacher yet again this time enrolling with Dr K Von Zawilowsy and with some perseverance he discovered she had a lyric coloratura voice and, delight of all delights, could sing opera!

It was in 1918 an agent offered her her first engagement at a provincial opera house. She was to sing Gretel in Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel. There was also a slot in the program to sing musical comedy. From there she was invited to sing the Queen of the Night and Gilda in Rigoletto in Wiesbaden.

But Francis wanted his young wife by his side in Berlin, and after only two seasons she was obliged to concentrate on early music and coloratura arias, accompanied by chamber orchestras.

In those years of the 1920s and early 1930s, she sang under Professor Abendroth in Cologne and in the Rhineland with his famous chamber orchestra. The accompanist who helped Julia Culp and Frieda Hempel to excellence, Coenraad van Bos, worked with her. Later, he was to become the chief instructor at the Julliard School of Music in New York.

She was the first person in Germany to sing early English music accompanied by harpsichord and by strings. The music was at that time unavailable in published form, so Marianne sat for hours in the National Library in Berlin copying pieces suitable for her voice by hand from Purcell's original master-scores. She sang Telemann, Ramenau, Gretry and many others of that period, bringing the scores with her to Australia years later.

There were engagements too, as a soloist with major German orchestras and dozens of lieder recitals. In September of 1929, she passed the elite Berlin State Examination as a teacher. 1931, she was asked to take part in the Mozart Festival with the Radio Orchestra to sing two very testing and seldom heard Mozart arias.

Ironically, Bruno Walter was giving an orchestral concert of his own that very night and each of them was invited to the same supper party following their performances.

Walter sat down beside her, suddenly recognising the young woman he had years earlier advised to stick to her church music. He asked patronisingly: “What are you doing here?” Marianne told him why and what she had sung that night. “Can you sing for me the Blonde from Seraglio?”

He was doing it to her again! She said she had never sung the piece but thought however she knew it.

Impulsively, he jumped up from the supper table, walked purposefully to the grand piano in the next room and began to play the aria without music.

Marianne performed with ease, finding no trouble at all in hitting the top E. “But you’re a born Mozart singer!” he exclaimed. Well, it is no doubt the right of virtuoso conductors to alter their opinions.

Walter immediately gave Marianne an introduction to the major Berlin radio station and advised her to put on some weight as her middle register, he said, appeared a little weak. He urged her to come and see him again four or five months later. This she did, singing for him the same two arias, No non so che pace and Vorrei spiegare, by Mozart, who had composed them for Anfossi with the idea of making his opera more palatable. Walter was impressed. He invited Marianne to sing in Mozart’s Requiem and gave her a glowing letter of recommendation.

“Madame Mathy is a coloratura soprano of irreproachable skill and control of voice, who without any trouble, reaches the high F clef…” he wrote. “Madame Mathy furthermore is of an extraordinary musicality, including not only exceedingly rhythmical correctness and intonation, but what is more the exhaustion of the musical contents of her songs…”

But the nirvana was not to last. Came the year 1933 and a fervent and excitable returned soldier - cum Austrian house painter, Adolf Hitler, swept himself and his Nazi party into power at the polls. The new regime had begun. In the Hitlerian dream of Vaterland über Alles, there was no room for, among other things, “enemy Jews”.

Perhaps half the flame of the talent and inspiration of the musical world of Germany was suddenly extinguished. Marianne was among those who suffered.

She and Francis were made house prisoners in Berlin. She was told she could no longer perform in public and turned instead to teaching in their home. But even that was finally curtailed. The principals she had prepared for the Berlin State Opera were informed they would not be accepted if they continued to take lessons from the Jewess, Mathy.

The Friedensteins were obliged – by the authorities – to employ two servants – of the authorities’ choice . One of those servants, a woman turned out to be anti-Nazi. At nights, when she alone was on duty in the house, Marianne would don a black coat and sneak out into non moon-lit nights hurrying through the streets to visit a woman friend in a street nearby. But these sojourns she would only embark on when all became too much for her – so immense was the risk. Francis, also required to give up his architectural practice, sometimes left the house at night too – to join friends for an evening of chamber music. For almost seven years these night-time excursions were their only taste of freedom.

They determined to get out of the new and cruel Germany.

Wilhelm Furtwängler, dear and loyal friend to the last, tried to protect Marianne from further persecution, while the composer, Hindemith, offered her a professorship at the music school in Ankara. There would be a three-year contract there for her, he promised. The Nazis, however, had different ideas. They refused her permission to quit the country.

Then her father’s brother, Otto H Kahn, who had already been a co-founder of the Metropolitan Opera in New York and underwriter of the wonderful Arthur Bodansky, sent to her an affidavit to allow her to emigrate to the United States as a singer and teacher.

There were, however , so many applications for emigration by then, the authorities told her her number would take two years to come up.

Meanwhile, one of Marianne 's best students, also a Jewess, Jeanette Eisex, whose husband was a cousin of the one-time Viceroy to India, Marquis Reading, managed to escape from Germany to England. She left with much of Marianne's jewellery (an inheritance from her father's personal collection) sewn into her fur coat, but perhaps more importantly, Jeanette managed to get a message of Marianne and Francis' plight to the recently quit British Trade Commissioner to Germany who had had a considerable contact with the couple when he was in their country.

It was Francis, however, who was the first to obtain his exit papers. He arrived in England several months ahead of Marianne, who finally got out early in 1939 - just in time.

In England she stayed with Dr Geismar, the Secretary of Sir Thomas Beecham, whom she had met earlier. The great conductor invited her to go to all his dress rehearsals in London and the first nights of the Covent Garden season, and she watched enraptured as Beecham conducted Parsifal, Tristan, Don Giovanni and The Bartered Bride.

In that same fairy-tale season - for indeed it was after almost seven years of relative internment and separation from her beloved music - Marianne also heard the Scala Ensemble with the singers, Stignani and Cigna among others.

But she and Francis had to find a new home, had to pick up their tattered fragments of their lives.

Through Sir Thomas she met Dr (later Sir) Malcolm Sargent. "My dear", he said, "go to Australia. It's furthest from the war we are about to find ourselves in."

Francis almost immediately left by ship for Australia to pave the way for them while Marianne remained behind waiting for word from him that she too should embark. On his landing in Australia, he had to satisfy the customs authorities he was in possession (at least) of £200.

Beecham commented to her in the interim, “You’d be better off in the wilds that going to Australia, my girl - but that fellow Sargent might still be there when you arrive, so he might help you get some work”.

Just before Sargent left on his second visit to Australia, Marianne sang for him. He said, “If you can teach as you sing and get me a Missa Solemnis quartet in your style in Australia, you might make it in Sydney because there’s just nobody else there!”

It was only a few weeks later - in October 1939 - Marianne arrived in Australia, disembarking from P & O’s SS “Siraimedliv” in Sydney. On that same night she went to the Town Hall where Sargent was conducting his last concert of the tour. “Well, here I am!” she announced triumphantly. “Yes”, he laughed, “But what are we going to do with you now? You ’re an alien!” He did, however, give her a very valuable letter of introduction and some kindly words.

Sargent also sent her to Sydney’s Archbishop Mowll and to His Grace’s assistant, Bishop Dr Charles Pilcher.

Meanwhile, Francis had found for them a small flat in Darling Point Road, near St Mark’s Church in Sydney’s gracious eastern suburbs.

It was on a glorious mild November afternoon that sad year of 1939, that Marianne, accompanied by Dr and Mrs Pilcher and Mrs Pilcher’s cousin, Dr Leon Salter, arrived at the sylvan Strathfield home of Percy and Mary Ann Tinkler and their young son, Hector. The object was to see if the Tinklers could do anything to help Marianne in her new career in the new land.

Hector Tinkler recalls now how pleased and surprised Marianne was to discover Mary Anne Tinkler had been trained by a pupil of the great Marchesi, Madeleine Dawson Edwards. Marianne had herself, learned from a pupil of Marchesi’s in Germany and it was Marchesi, of course, who trained Clara Butt, Nellie Melba and Tetrazzini. It was a warm and comfortable launching pad to the friendship between Mathy and Mrs Tinkler, helped by the fact Mary Ann could speak fluent German.

And then there was on that vernal afternoon - the afternoon tea. It had become the fashion to serve afternoon tea laid out on the dining table, rather than in the lounge-room. It had been so very long since Marianne had seen, let alone partaken, of an afternoon tea of such gloriously rounded and varied proportions! She was exhilarated and tried this, and tried that, and this and that - again and again....

Almost immediately Hector Tinkler, then an accomplished organist and pianist of 35 years of age, began working with Marianne towards a recital arranged by a specially formulated committee which included Dr Slater, Mary Ann Tinkler, Dame Constance Darcy, Lady Earl Page (Ethel) and Miss Bertha Vickery as Treasurer.

The recital was set down for the ballroom at the Australia Hotel in Castlereagh Street, Sydney. None of the committee members, let alone Marianne, were confident about it, but by then Hector, working as a singer's accompanist at practice sessions, had experienced something of the Mathy talent. The young musician instantly recognised a world talent of outstanding voice and technique. Besides, he had a criteria. Lotte Lehman, the German soprano had already performed in Australia, as had a celebrated Italian singer, a former pupils of Marianne's. Hector Tinkler knew of the stuff this tiny, dynamic and courageous German woman was made of.

He was correct. The recital, jam-packed that afternoon, brought long applause and loud "Bravo's" from the five hundred-plus audience in the grand old hotel ballroom. Distance, and now a world at war, had starved Australia of the calibre they heard that day.

Marianne wore a long gown with a broad stripe of cerise, brown and black, running its length. And as though all the centuries of the greatest of the great European artists were hers alone to bring forth in that small room, she sang her finest ever lieder and arias – including the Garotte from Manon (Massenet), aria from Louise (Charpentier) and aria from Il Re pastore (Mozart). The associate artist was Nelson Cooke, later to play first cello with the Sydney Symphony and London Symphony Orchestras. She was accompanied on violin by Donald Blair. Both Cooke and Blair were the students of Jascha Gopinko. The money went in aid of the Polish Relief Fund. The success of the recital was on-going.

The ABC engaged Mathy for a concert tour and, it seems, at least one studio recital.

Bruno Walter had written of her in those earlier years: “I think the voice of Frau Mathy is especially suitable for broadcasting and gramophone records, owing to the special easiness with which it is treated....”

He was right. Her recital (s) was well received, but with the war in full flight, the Australian Government sent out an edict that no German was to be sung or spoken. Marianne’s English was certainly not fluent enough then to allow her to carry on with her professional performances. Besides, the situation became aggravated. Soon she was not permitted even to enter broadcasting stations and she was obliged to seek a weekly permit to attend concerts. Once again she turned to teaching. The ABC meanwhile, were told to cancel her commitments. But nevertheless, in December 1944, she was naturalised.

By this time, Francis and she had moved into a unit in South Street in Sydney’s Double Bay. It was simply not large enough for the couple to maintain a life together and for Marianne to teach as well. They found a rambling, tree-surrounded cottage in Manning Road in the same suburb. It was the last year of the war – 1945 – they moved in. And in February of that same year, they had changed their name by deed poll to Frisdane. It cost them 2/6d.

But life was still difficult to say the least. Marianne had a few students – Gwen Foster, the soprano, Elsie Findlay and Alan Light, but with all the call-up having taken the best of her young men and women, she was obliged to begin what the English called a “Victory Garden”. She and Francis unabashedly grew vegetables in the backyard of Manning Road and sold them to neighbours and friends. Her closest friends, however, were never told. She was too proud.

Hector Tinkler and she commenced for the second time to begin to work together. “You know, Hector,” she once said, with great feeling, “you are the only one with whom I can sing.” It was a rare compliment, considering the earlier stint with Van Bos.

They shared some laughs when Marianne spoke of the days of her touring as a singer in Germany, when her agent would book a hall and suddenly, on the night, she would be confronted with a wonderful 'black and shiny' piano which was nought but 'a tin can!' Yet she would have to persevere with the performance. Years later, in instructing her own pupils, she would entice Hector (as her accompanist) to "fluff" a note or two. Mathy maintained this ploy made for sure-footed artists who would win through a performance in spite of the capabilities of the accompanist or orchestra.

And then how for years after reminding him of the days he had struggled with her English, she teased: "But you taught me to say 'sheepherds' Hector!" There were laughs...and there were her secret fears. For example, how she gave up the piano at recital standard because she had a terrible phobia of forgetting the note. The night before a performance she could not sleep and indeed, even when she sang lieder, she nearly always held her own little lieder book in her hand which survives today.

But of all her work, it was the Charpentier aria Depuis la jour from Louise that remains foremost in Hector Tinkler's memory. He says now: "Nobody could touch her in it. To hear her sing this aria was really something!"

Her list of students grew - June Bronhill, Valerie Hanlon, Malcolm Donnelly, Clifford Grant, Beryl Cheers, Nell Houston, Sergei Baigildin and others.

And then, because the id-ego strain of the sometimes, perhaps necessarily, incestuous world of music, breeds it thus, there were those who came to Mathy, took of her, and left, finding it not within themselves to acknowledge the part she played in their ascendency – or in one or two cases, even merely to acknowledge her. It was at these times she was hurt, not outwardly, for she was essentially a private person, but nevertheless she did bleed.

The woman was an essentially loyal being. Once a friend, she at least could not, would not let you down. If the world was against you and you, just you, were her friend, then she would take on the world on behalf of you. It was a trait that won her strong enemies in the orthodox and often narrow world she loved and fought for – music.

Nevertheless, Mathy did from 1959 to 1972 conform. She taught at the National Institute of Dramatic Art for three years. For almost 13 years following an introduction by Dr. (later Sir) Eugene Goossens, who had come to Australia to head the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, she taught singing at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

It was a rewarding, yet at the same time, difficult period for her. Marianne, although well used to, and respectful of the peculiar rigours of musical discipline, had always been her own woman. Her qualifications were impeccable for the job - fluency in several languages, a State Certificate with Honourable Mention from Berlin and a rare skill in interpreting and translating the more difficult scores from the European masters - but she was also a maverick; a creature of a divine spark who often found it difficult to be patient – or even polite – with the traditional intricacies of the ordered Conservatorium world.

Nevertheless, many of her students prospered, some reaching great heights on the international scene and she was responsible for producing some fifteen winners of the Sydney Sun Aria.

Her musical life did not confine itself to the Conservatorium. The inaugural meeting for the New South Wales National Opera, the parent of the Australian Opera occurred in her Manning Road home. With the aid of Hector Tinkler and a student, Margaret Moore, she translated Poulenc 's "La Voix Humaine".

And in 1963 she was commissioned by the Australian Elizabethan Trust to make a new English translation of Gounod's opera "Faust."

Perhaps the student she most loved and who often described Mathy as "my second mother" was June Bronhill . She was given the role Marianne herself had played all those years before in Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel. The Mathy-organised production which was presented in the Conservatorium, was fabulously successful and raised £700 for the home for incurables, Ryde, later Royal Ryde Hospital.

The copy of the score in Marianne's possession had been given to her personally by Humperdinck. This too survives today.

But it is not merely the treasure house of Marianne Mathy's musical scores, translations, books and letters to and from the masters, which she has left behind her.

Sadly, no matter what the care, papers must eventually gather dust and fade. It is what is in – and behind – those papers which is important, for they, like the musical legacy of Mathy herself, through this liberal scholarship, if accepted in the generous and gifted spirit given, will achieve the one thing she believed so vehemently - that through perfect harmony of body and mind, singing can become a living art.

And art, real art, for those who earnestly aspire to it, truly transcends the fetters and chains of day-to-day pedantry. Such was Marianne's raison d'etre; such is her bequest to the singers of tomorrow.

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, two decades and a little before the birth of the new century...

It was in this bustling antipodean capital, on the mild Sunday morning of October 18, 1978, in the lounge-room of her home in Manning Road, that a most earnest and dedicated teacher, a quiet philanthropist, an artiste, gave her last finale – and closed her eyes.

With special appreciation for their help in compiling this story to Mr Hector Tinkler, friend and colleague and to Mr Neville Grave, friend and student.

The late Beryl Cheers was also involved in providing the writer with information. Sadly, Miss Cheers passed away before this could evolve. But from the writer's personal knowledge, a particular acknowledgement must be given to Miss Cheers for the many moments of laughter and happiness she afforded her special friend and teacher.

Her students in Australia (1940-1978)

Gwen Foster, Elsie Findlay , Alan Light, Heather Kinnaird, Nance Marley, George Marley, Eleanor Houston, Raymond Nilsson, John Cameron, Phyllis Rodgers, Althea Bridges, Serge Baigildin, Marie Gordon , Justine Rettick, Wendy Playfair, Ruth Pierce-Jones, Bessie Booth, Neil Booth, Malcolm Donnelly, Neville Grave, Christopher

Field, Elizabeth Whitehouse, Madge Fox, Clifford Grant, Glyn Paul, Valerie Hanlon, Tony Price, Meg Chilcott, Joan Sutherland, Toni Lamond, Lyndon Terracini, Beryl Cheers, Margaret Moore, Maureen London, Richard Divall , Diane Holmes, June Bronhill, Leonard Lee, Andrew Harwood, John Brady, Joy Izett , Mary Adams, Joy Tasman, Murray Brouse, Jennifer Lindfield, Pamela Marks, Kathleen Moore, Penelope Bruce, Edna Dermody, Eve Medina, Gallia Saunders, S. Martin, Valda Bagnall, Raymond Nielsson, Anita Dunlop, Betty Prentice, Beryl Hardy, Lois Empy, Maureen Howard, Dorothy Hitch, Hazel Phillips, Margaret Horsley, Angelina Arena, Arianthe Galina.

This list was been drawn-up from sources available at the date of publication. Because Madame Mathy's students have scattered the world, some names regrettably, have been omitted. The names included are in no particular order of merit or date.

A pioneer in her field

Marianne Mathy once wrote : "A capable teacher of singing is just as rare as a gifted student". She knew well the import of those words. As a young singer in Berlin her own voice had very nearly been ruined by a teacher who, although well-meaning, applied an instruction style totally unsuited to Mathy's natural vocal direction.

That Mathy was herself a capable teacher, there can be no doubt. The sometime petty politics of the worlds she lived for, and worked in, would perhaps have it differently. Music is by necessity and ego art and must therefore breed strong opinions. This is healthy. This is good. This makes for competition and the striving to meet the constant challenge. But at the end of it all, only one thing counts. Results. Mathy's results were consistently excellent – and very often the best.

And yet she was not so blinded by technical perfection that she forgot the human qualities that make a truly great artist. Her paedeutics were a combination of harmony of body and mind. A mix that gave life to her art. She said: “It is this approach that holds the answer to why one singer becomes the favourite of every audience, while another, whose high C is equally as brilliant, cannot ‘warm up’ his listeners. Almost always this second singer is a worshipper of technique alone and has neglected the cultivation of mind, without which his voice must fail in its true purpose. That is, to become an adequate instrument to serve faithfully the composer’s intentions and to awaken the audience’s receptiveness to be moved by the characteristic inherent in the expressed work.”

What Mathy perceived and taught was a skill of the performer to translate and express, rather than simply to accept at face value and therefore to think exclusively in terms of one’s own emotions … surely a selfish and sadly narrow vicinage in which to nurture and make grow the living art!

But as much as this rare woman loved the world of music, people were of far more importance to her. It was perhaps for this reason she did make mistakes. She was blamed for those students whom she turned away because she knew no matter how much money, time and effort were invested in them, they could never hope to achieve the dreams they harboured. There were other students, however, who came to her with just as great and urgent dreams, but even though she saw they had talent, they often did not have the finances necessary to fulfil that talent. To these she gave of her time and tutelage, yet she would ask no payment. And on many occasions, when a girl student had no money to buy a dress for a first recital or competition final, Marianne gave one from her own wardrobe.

As a teacher, Mathy was incessantly searching for potential. Hence this scholarship. She believed, like most of the world’s great artists, in the eternal student. The more one progressed, the more one discovered that the development of physical and mental assurance necessary to control the voice and to stir the imagination, would become a never-ending task. In calculating that potential, she considered age, background, general knowledge, the aims and the quality of the voice.

If the hopeful pupil showed signs of a vocal quality (even a limited one) a natural sense of pitch and rhythm, alertness of mind, a healthy physique and self-discipline, perhaps a beginning could be made. Perhaps. To the truly experienced eye, not every oyster on the farm contains the pearl.

Mathy's knowledge of music was handed down to her by the great masters of Europe. Her teaching style, a combination of this precious learning and her own inimitable input from years of practical experience on the professional stage was, at the time she arrived in Australia, something very new. She became one of the pioneers of musical education in this country.

She was one of the first here to recognise the importance of physical well-being for the singing student. After the theories and individual exercises put together by the French tenor and teacher, Delsarte (1811-1871), Mathy insisted her pupils train their bodies as well as their voices. She did not consider, however, that sport (apart from fencing) was beneficial to the voice. She maintained the muscles of a singer should be kept flexible and not be forced into hard labour. Diet too, was another vital factor in producing a fine artist and smoking – well, that was taboo!

Mathy did not teach a method. She taught a system which was designed to enable the student to use all his senses through which he would gradually become aware of the independent functioning of various muscles needed to produce voice and diction with total freedom. At the same time the pupil learned to eliminate any activity of those muscles which have no part in the actual process of singing and which should be kept in repose. From this, hopefully the singer would learn that being in a state of taut activity, does not necessarily mean being in a state of rigid tension. Discipline allowed freedom from inhibition thus ultimately producing the artist. Total. Commanding. Memorable.

But perhaps the most priceless ingredient of Marianne Mathy's selfless contribution to the singers of today the artists of tomorrow, was the final all important instruction before they walked out from the wings onto the concert platform.

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An instruction from the heart for that single solitary and so often terrifying moment when the auditorium falls to a hush and the spotlight rises from the blackness to gently crown the lonely perhaps frightened figure on the stage. Then she would say: “Give of your best and after be proud! It is enough. It is everything”.

Indeed it is.