

CHAPTER 6 - THE MUSICAL MINISTRY OF LILIAN FROST, PITT STREET CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ORGANIST, 1895-1949

Lilian Frost, Pitt Street Congregational Church organist from 1895 to 1949, died on 22 December 1953. Just over a year later, the Congregational Union of New South Wales pointed to the difficulty in acquiring quality organists to conduct 'public worship'. It discussed the importance of the role of the organist describing, in non-conformist manner, such instrumentalists as 'Minister[s] of the Gospel'.¹ During the latter half of Lilian Frost's outstanding musical service to the Church repeated references were made to her musical ministry. Both within and without the walls of the church she attracted a following. Conversely, she devoted much time and energy to the respective causes of both the secular and religious musical communities. Simultaneously seeking recognition as both a performer and minister, moving between the sacred and secular, from quiet Edwardian 'lady' to determined professional Lilian Frost's actions reveal a responsiveness to the forces of change that tie her story to those of other female cultural agents.

The work of a variety of writers concerned with religious history, music history, cultural history and general Australian history reveal that a connection existed between women, music and conservative values. An Australian tendency to cling to nineteenth century British views of '[m]usic's social role', implied that through the promotion of 'high-art music' Australian women could act as guardians of both cultural values and national morality. Alternately, because music was linked to notions of cultivation and civilisation, religious observance, and conservative values, it was respectable and consequently suitable as a womanly occupation. Thus women dominated the ranks of music students and teachers, although they did not obtain appointment to permanent

¹ 'Organists', *The Congregationalist*, Jan. 1955, p.3.

institutional posts prior to the 1940s.² Either way, although women musicians enjoyed social acceptance, they were restricted in the level of formal influence available to them.

Religious women musicians encountered a similar situation. As with teachers and philanthropists their existence seemed acceptable and appropriate in a semi-public role, in this case, in the context of church service. Within nineteenth century British nonconformity, however, social acceptance in the 'intermediate sphere' between the public and private offered only limited opportunities for agency; women rarely took on formal roles in the church.³ Accounts of church life in Australia have argued that a chauvinistic masculinity expressive of contemporary nationalist preoccupations prevailed, and that women exerted little influence. Yet others have referred to the feminisation of early twentieth century Australian Christianity, and nonconformity by this stage suffered from a doctrinal crisis and an increasing apathy among its male members that offered new opportunities for religious service to women.⁴ The female slippage between public and private, acceptance and isolation, empowerment and powerlessness, as dictated alternately

² See Monique Geitenbeek, 'The Role of Women in the Australian Music Examinations Board from 1930 to 1950', in Nicholas Brown, Peter Campbell, Robyn Holmes, Peter Read & Larry Sitsky (ed.s), *One Hand on the Manuscript: Music in Australian Cultural History 1930-1960*, (Canberra: The Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, 1995), pp.189-200; Therese Radic, *Australian Music Biography and the Skew of Cultural Context: Changing Viewpoints to Assess Significance*, (Melbourne: Therese Radic, Percy Grainger Lecture, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, 1994), p.5; and Beverley Kingston, *Oxford History of Australian*, volume 3, *Glad, Confident Morning*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.233.

³ Discussing the role of women in nonconformist churches in mid-nineteenth century England, Linda Wilson recently suggested that pious women engaged in church activities such as Bible classes, visiting, and the provision of music in the context of worship stepped into an 'intermediate sphere' between public and private life. To Clyde Binfield Dissent's attraction to the ideal of the woman's right to education and a profession, was tempered by the nonconformist predilection for 'a middle way, socially acceptable, severely practical, religiously sound'. See Linda Wilson, "'Constrained by zeal": Women in Mid-Nineteenth Century Nonconformist Churches', *Journal of Religious History*, vol.23, no.2, June 1999, pp.185-202; and Clyde Binfield, *Belmont's Portias: Victorian Nonconformists and Middle-class Education for Girls*, (Leicester: Friends of Dr Williams's Library, 1981), p.9.

⁴ See Anne O'Brien, 'Sins of Omission? Women in the History of Australian Religion and Religion in the History of Australian Women. A Reply to Roger Thompson', and Roger C. Thompson, 'Women and the Significance of Religion in Australian History', both in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 28, no. 108, April 1997; Anne O'Brien, "'A Church full of men": masculinism and the church in Australian history', in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 25, no. 100, April 1993; Hugh Jackson, 'Religious Ideas and Practice in Australian Congregationalism 1870-1930', Part I in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 12, no.3, June 1983,

by class and national anxieties thus appears to have stretched also between the religious and secular communities.

Acceptance of women musicians also relied on their promotion of particular forms of music. The perception that music could play a civilising role (in the Arnoldian sense) in the evolution of new societies meant that a series of dichotomous terms, originating from America, gained increasing currency in Australia during the interwar period. In the emergent musical hierarchy jazz, crooning, the Wurlitzer and other forms of music-making revealing the 'intrusion of technology' constituted the less desirable end of the scale of cultural worth. It was the other end of the scale, 'high art music', or 'art music', consisting of a range of symphony, instrumental ensemble, or individual vocal or choral work that women were meant to encourage at a personal, neighbourhood or community level. To some historians, the hierarchy, as with the cultural cringe and its alternative, the cultural quarantine, emerged out of a desire to protect not just older musical forms, but conservative, class-related values.⁵ Yet, as with reactions to artistic modernism, such as those countered by Ethel Anderson, the cultural values on which the hierarchy was based, were also associated with twentieth century anxieties concerning modernity, mediocrity and godlessness.

Australian churches, of course, made an additional cultural distinction between the sacred and the secular. But musical distinctions were not clear and in Australia derivative: differences existed between the denominations while boundaries shifted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in time with doctrinal changes and broader cultural movements. Hymn writers in the nineteenth century concentrated on improving the literary quality of their work, and Catholic and high church music emphasised ritualistic

pp. 266-83, and Part II in vol. 12, no. 4, December 1983, pp. 433-44; and Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia: A cultural history of religions*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), Chapter 10.

⁵ John Rickard, 'Music and Cultural Hierarchy 1918-1939', in *One Hand on the Manuscript*, pp.181-

practices while evangelists and dissenters focussed on individual spirituality. Churches had already cast doubt on the appropriateness of compositions by Bach for liturgical use prior to the nineteenth century. The gap appears to have widened when Romantic composers increasingly distinguished between music intended for recital and for liturgical purposes, favouring the potential for expressiveness and virtuosity inherent in the more interesting secular alternative.⁶ Not necessarily so for Dissenters: the English Congregational Church Committee in 1871 acknowledged social change when it added supplements to its twelve year old hymn book, and an English Congregational Church service in 1912 offered an anthem by Mendelssohn, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Brahms Requiem with an Arnoldian recommendation of the music in place of the sermon. In the 1920s Australian Congregationalists, whose interest in sermons along with their attendance was on the decline, demanded less taxing alternatives with a greater emphasis on non-sermon service content. Even the music was not always seriously religious: as with the English example the definition of sacred music was neither singular nor static. Sacredness, according to contemporary theory, derived either from the function music played within a religious community, or the personally emotive power that that music possessed when played with religious or moral purpose.⁷

Despite the uncertainty concerning the role of music in the church, and the role of female musicians within the church and within the wider musical community, Lilian Frost pursued a career as an organist, for which she earned a reputation among musicians and

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⁶ See 'Organ music' and related entries in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 10, (London: MacMillan Publishers Limited, 1980).

⁷ Susan S. Tanke, *Make a Joyful Noise Unto the Lord: Hymns as a reflection of Victorian Social Attitudes*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), pp.8-9; Clyde Binfield, 'Hebrews Hellenized? English Evangelical Nonconformity and Culture, 1840-1940' in Sheridan Gilley and W.J. Shiels (ed.s), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.339; and Jackson, Part II, pp.439-40. Eric J. Sharpe, 'Sacred Music and the Sacredness of Music', in *Australian Religion Studies Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, Sept. 1990, p.23.

church-goers alike. This chapter will examine just how and why Frost acquired this reputation in light of the above continuities and discontinuities.

Playing up a storm: the early career

Born on 4 October 1870 in Launceston, Tasmania, Lilian Frost's musical talents quickly manifest themselves, leading to her parents' decision to take her to London for three years of tuition, the final year at the Guildhall School of Music. A distinct gap in the childbearing patterns of her locally born mother, Amelia Annie (nee Sage), suggests that this occurred between 1879 and 1882. Her father, John Frost, an 'old soldier', was a leading light in Launceston's musical world and arranged and conducted numerous concerts under the auspices of the Launceston Musical Union, and Launceston Christ Church (Congregational).⁸ From Lilian Frost's appearance in a Musical Union concert in March 1886, the young musician held a fixed place in the cultural columns of the local newspapers, and a permanent place in the hearts of the people of Launceston. At one Musical Union event held in July 1886 at Christ Church, Frost presented two marches. According to report, she did so in a 'thoroughly efficient style, which proved her to be a cultured performer and clever pedallist'.⁹ Her official appointment as organist at Christ Church took place either in the latter half of 1886, or early 1887, while still aged just sixteen or seventeen years old. It resulted from the intervention of the previous church organist, W.W. Thornethwaite, who encouraged her to play at Christ Church in his place

⁸ Graeme D. Rushworth, *Historic Organs of New South Wales. The Instruments, Their Makers and Players*. (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988), pp.384-86. See also 'Frost, Lilian', obituary, *SMH*, 30 Dec. 1953.

⁹ Numerous cuttings attesting to the admiration and affection of the town for Lilian Frost are included in her scrapbook held in the Pitt Street Congregational Church (PSCC) Records, ML MSS 2093, vol.57. See 'Launceston Musical Union', *Launceston Examiner*, 30 March 1886, page not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.1; and 'Launceston Musical Union', *Daily Telegraph* (Launceston), 6 July 1886, page not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.2.

and thus fulfil the Congregational ideal of girlhood musical service.¹⁰ In May 1891, Frost played at the opening of the new Albert Hall, demonstrating the 1859 Charles Brindley organ's quality, the hall's acoustics, and her own skills in the presence of the visiting Tasmanian Governor, Sir Robert Hamilton. Frost officiated as organist at most concerts held in the hall during the New South Wales – Launceston Tasmanian Exhibition of 1891-92.¹¹

According to the local press, Lilian Frost, as both soloist and accompanist on piano and organ, exhibited a musical maturity beyond her years and stamina considered unusual for a 'young lady'. She also became known for the moving musical expression inherent in her organ solos. Her style was particularly evident in *The Storm*, a fantasia by the leading composer of the Romantic movement in Germany, Carl Maria von Weber, which epitomised the emphasis placed by Romantic composers on individualised expression and virtuosity. The consistently dramatic nature of Frost's interpretations suited the piece. It quickly became a favourite with her admirers and an almost obligatory inclusion in her recital programs. The energy entailed in pedalling the organ for the lengthy periods of time demanded by pieces such as *The Storm* astounded many an observer, leading one to assert that 'the unceasing attention and effects from beginning to end would have tired many a

¹⁰ Most reports state that Frost was fifteen when she became organist at Christ Church, but she was born on 4 October 1870. No records suggest that she had begun playing the organ in public before 1886. See 'Christ Church Choir Concert, *Examiner*, 7 May 1887, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.3; '1000 Hours at an Organ', no source cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.152; and Rushworth, *Historic Organs*.

¹¹ The organ had three manuals and 29 stops. This offered much more scope for the skilled organist than Christ Church's 1874 'two manual Bevington organ of thirteen stops'. see Rushworth, *Historic Organs*, p.384. Also see Frost, Scrapbook, pp.10-13 for cuttings re the Albert Hall opening and general comments about the good effects of music produced for the Exhibition on the population. Frost's impact on the town's musical taste is suggested by one journalistic report that tradesmen and professionals alike could be heard whistling snatches of symphonies and overtures recently played by her, or discussing the merits of her favourite pieces *Zampa* and *Semiramide*. See 'Music at the Exhibition', *Examiner*, 6 Feb. 1892, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.13.

strong man'.¹² A celebrated English organist, Mr W.H. Jude, who passed through Launceston at the time of the exhibition, commented, on hearing Frost play:

jealous minded organists of the sterner sex are apt to say that ladies cannot play the organ; but the meritorious performance by Miss Frost dispels that illusion; for here is a lady who can play the organ.¹³

For years, in fact decades, proud Tasmanians repeated amongst themselves and to visitors from mainland Australia and abroad variations of Jude's praise, taking it as a compliment to their state as well. It raised Frost to the status of a celebrity. Other church concerts were held with the Mayor's patronage. Whereas previously newspaper reports repeated an established complimentary four lined riff, detailed reviews soon replaced them. Some echoed and added to Jude's observation about Frost's ability to play an instrument believed most suitable for men:

The organ is not an instrument which lends itself readily to a lady's playing, it usually being considered more amenable to the stronger muscles of the sterner sex. Miss Frost, however, has proved that she possessed not simply the necessary power, but the delicacy of touch and sympathy of expression which alone mark the difference between the mechanical player and the true musician.¹⁴

This was high praise indeed, for she had risen above disparaging stereotypes linking both church organists and female musicians with amateurism and without succeeding as an adult performer in Europe first. She had done so by mastering the art of playing an instrument requiring much strength and energy, both traditionally unfeminine characteristics, and by doing so not just in the intermediate sphere of the church, but in public recitals. Frost received praise for rendering her pieces with both power and delicacy, as the music required, and for possessing the ability to discern when and how to do so. Few female musicians, artists and writers of the period earned praise that allowed

¹² No title cited, *Examiner*, 21 June 1888, in Frost, scrapbook, p.5; and 'Concert at Christ Church', *Examiner*, 27 Dec. 1890, in Frost Scrapbook, p.9.

¹³ 'Concert at Christ Church', *Examiner*, 6 April 1892, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.13.

¹⁴ 'Sacred Concert', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Feb. 1893, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.17.

for the possibility of artistic genius. Yet, through it all, the papers continued to use the word 'lady' in reference to Frost, and never imputed a compromise of her femininity. This suggests that despite proving herself equal to men in an activity not usually associated with women she continued to behave in a manner meeting Victorian standards of femininity.

Lilian Frost subsequently attained the rank of a professional musician. She accompanied not just local soloists, but people like Professor Francik, the renowned Prussian violinist favoured by the nobility of Roumania and Austria, when he performed in Hobart.¹⁵ She also participated in a series of entertainments staged by the visiting English elocutionist, Lawrence Campbell, while her own pupils' concerts revealed not just the potential of a new generation of musicians, but according to the papers the careful application of her high musical standards. In 1895, the touring Kowalski-Poussard Company arrived in Launceston. It included in its program a piano duet played by Henri Kowalski and Miss Beatrice Griffiths, of Sydney. While Griffiths rendered most of the accompaniments, Frost did play one, and concluded the program with a selection of organ solos.¹⁶ Perhaps as a result of this contact with Sydney-based entertainers, Frost shortly afterwards received an invitation from a leading concert manager, Charles Huenerbein, to visit Sydney and give a series of recitals at the YMCA Hall. The subsequent Sydney performances attracted positive, though not rave reviews; with a hint of faint praise one paper suggested that her powers excelled that of 'most of her sex'.¹⁷ A final recital at Pitt Street Congregational Church (PSCC) led to her appointment as organist at one of the city's oldest churches in September 1895.

¹⁵ See cuttings, Frost, Scrapbook, pp.18-19.

¹⁶ 'Kowalski-Poussard Company. Sacred Concert at Albert Hall', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Jan. 1895, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.38.

¹⁷ 'Amusements. Miss Frost's Recital Concert' *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 17 July 1895, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.47.

The Congregational Church was first established in Sydney in 1833 at 264 Pitt Street. Prime movers in the church included David Lloyd Jones, as well as succeeding generations of the Fairfax family. John Fairfax, and after him his son Sir James Fairfax, his grandson Sir James Reading Fairfax, and finally his great granddaughter Miss Mary Fairfax all remained integrally linked with the church. Among the extended family Andrew and Emily Fairfax, cousins of Sir James, and the son and daughter of John's brother William, took a particular interest in the church choir. Emily held the position of principal soprano, while William sang tenor, and Andrew sang bass. At the request of his father, Andrew Fairfax conducted the choir from 1861 until forced to resign due to health reasons in 1892. The choir flourished during the period, and attracted many 'young ladies and gentlemen whose parents sat in their pews'.¹⁸ Andrew Fairfax recorded in modest manner the enthusiasm and unity infusing the choir under his leadership, and the devotion of its members to the rendering of 'the service of song'. Following his resignation the choir fell into disarray. A series of musicians took up and resigned from the posts of choirmaster and organist in rapid succession. This state of affairs continued until Lilian Frost was appointed organist in 1895, and Walter T. Colyer was appointed choirmaster in April 1896. The appointments appear to have stabilised the musical affairs of the church, although, as families drifted to suburban churches and their sons and daughters were lured away by other pastimes, common problems for many choral groups, the choir never regained its appeal to young members of the church. Instead, Frost's performance of sacred organ music prior to services became the 'special attraction' at the Pitt Street Church.¹⁹

¹⁸ F.W. Gravely, untitled paper, recollections about the PSCC choir pre-1900, in 'Miscellanea, Extracts from Minutes, Reports, etc, 1837-1969', PSCC Records, vol.54, pp.263.

¹⁹ Andrew Fairfax, 'Pitt Street Choir – A Retrospect', typed transcript, published posthumously in *The Watchman*, 4 April 1896, in PSCC Records, vol.54; and 'Recent Developments – By a present member 4 April 1896', typed transcript for *The Watchman*, in PSCC Records, vol.54, p.273.

The newly found relative stability in the musical affairs of the church lasted until the diaconate, supported by the church, agreed in 1901 on a proposal for the construction and installation of a new organ. The decision saw the onset of a decade of difficulties for Frost, the choir, and the entire church. After a year of organ-related difficulties, Colyer resigned as choirmaster in March 1903. His replacement, a renowned bass singer, W. Reginald Gooud, reported in April 1904 on a disagreement with Lilian Frost over the order of the program for the Good Friday sacred concert. Further disagreements led Gooud to tender his resignation in July 1904. Assuring Gooud of their confidence in him, the diaconate confirmed their recognition of him as ‘head of musical authority’. Yet, preferring to not upset Frost, the diaconate kept her out of the discussions and resolved that they could not authorise Gooud to ‘dictate the details of organ manipulation by Miss Frost’.²⁰ He stayed for another two years, resigning once more in November 1906. The next choirmaster, Samuel Kenny, sought to play down the musical aspect of church services. His views proved unpopular, particularly with Frost’s supporters, leading him to also resign in 1913.²¹

Difficulties with choirmasters did not disturb Lilian Frost as directly as the construction of the new organ. For almost a decade and despite the diaconate’s repeated reminders and threats of legal action, W.G. Rendall, the organ-builder, refused to complete the organ to the diaconate’s satisfaction, or to acknowledge the organ’s faults. According to the diaconate, it used an abnormal amount of water, which made it costly to run.²² The

²⁰ See Minutes of the Deacons’ Meetings (MODM), 29 July 1901, 16 Sept. 1901, 28 Oct. 1901, and 18 Nov. 1901 in ‘Minutes of the Deacons, May 2 1898 – Aug. 31 1903’, PSSC Records, vol.3, pp.104-118; and Minutes of Church Meeting (MOCM), 30 March 1903, ‘Church Book, May 1898- Nov. 1922’, PSSC Records, vol.13, p.125; Mr Roseby to Gooud, 5 Aug. 1904, in PSSC Records, vol.48, p.443. See also MODM, 3 Aug. 1904, in PSSC Records, vol.4, pp.78-82, which includes 5 resolutions concerning the choirmaster’s position of authority, but stipulated that Frost was not to be informed. See also MODM, 31 Aug. 1904, in Minute Book ‘21 September 1903 to 8 Feb. 1911’ in PSSC Records, vol.4, p.92.

²¹ Samuel Kenny to Mr Cuthbertson (secretary of the diaconate), 25 Feb. 1913, in ‘Correspondence, General, 1912-1921’, PSSC Records, vol.43, pp.105-09.

²² MODM, 15 Feb. 1904, PSSC Records, vol.4, p.32.

pneumatic action proved inadequate, and the machinery was noisy, both detracting markedly from the devotional nature of services and causing much embarrassment to the organist. In addition, the installation of three new gongs required structural alterations to the choir gallery.²³ Rendall believed that most of the organ's aberrations resulted from Frost's failures and not his own:

It is with much regret I have to say, notwithstanding the exceptional resources at your command in the instrument, ... the Organ has never yet been shown at its best, nor has it ever received a modicum of that justice, which would have been accorded it by any first class capable Organist possessing a high regard for the interest of the Church in which it is erected.²⁴

It was the diaconate's wont to ignore aspersions cast on Frost's abilities. It countered Rendall's claims by collecting reports from a number of experts. At Rendall's suggestion this list included the visiting English organist Alfred Hollins. Unfortunately for Rendall, Hollins considered the organ 'absolutely unplayable'. He felt that the 'pneumatic action' was 'terribly slow' and that playing 'to a conductor's beat', was 'out of the question'. He also confirmed that he thought Frost a competent organist.²⁵ Frost must have felt vindicated. Other local experts echoed these sentiments, both concerning the instrument and Frost's competency, while Edwin Lemare, another world famous organist, inspected the organ in September 1906. He declared, when told that Frost attempted to play it on a regular basis, '[s]he deserves a leather medal'.²⁶

²³ John White to Rendall, 13 Oct. 1903, in 'Letter Book May 1901 to Dec. 1904', PSCC Records, vol.49, p.73; and R.N. Davies to S.H. Barraclough (Secretary), 27 June 1906, in PSCC Records, vol.49, p.115.

²⁴ Rendall to PSCC Secretary, 16 Aug. 1904, in PSCC Records, vol.49, pp.79-80; Rendall's accusations in fact coincided with Gooud's resignation on the grounds that difficulties had arisen between Frost and himself. It suggests that the organist may have become particularly sensitive about criticisms of her playing at the time. Roseby (PSCC Secretary) to Rendall, 30 Aug. 1904, in PSCC Records, vol.48, p.463.

²⁵ MODM, 29 Aug. 1904, PSCC Records, vol.4, p.88; and Alfred Hollins to PSCC Secretary, 1 Sept. 1904, in PSCC Records, vol.49, p.83.

²⁶ Name not signed, letter to Mr Wallace (PSCC Secretary), 25 Feb. 1958, in 'PSCC Correspondence, General, 1928-1963', PSCC Records, vol.46, p.359.

The disastrous situation culminated in a court case in 1909, with Walter Rendall suing the Reverend Edward Tremayne Dunstan and others of the PSCC for failure to finalise payment on the new organ. Naturally the defence hinged on the incomplete and unsatisfactory state of the organ. The testimony also turned to the subject of the alleged lack of expertise on the part of the church organist. Rendall argued that the awful noises heard during the services resulted from the incorrect manipulation of the water-powered gongs and that he had repeatedly shown Frost how to play the organ without such problems. Although unwilling to say that he thought Frost an ‘incompetent organist’, he prevaricated when informed that for many years she had effectively filled her post at PSCC, that she was reputedly in ‘the front ranks of organists in Sydney’, and that Hollins had considered her capable. Rendall admitted that he heard her play at the Sydney Town Hall, but asserted that her performance had not impressed him.²⁷

Perhaps as a result of the limited scope that the PSCC facilities offered for the full demonstration of Frost’s musical prowess, she had, during her first fifteen years in Sydney, entered into the city’s musical life with much energy. It was through these activities that she established her general reputation as a skilled musician, a reputation that Rendall could not refute in court. Almost immediately after her permanent arrival in Sydney in 1895, she began to participate in the entertainments arranged by Lawrence Campbell, also by then permanently settled in the same city. Only a year later, Frost played the Sydney Town Hall organ for the first time. This massive instrument with five manuals and 126 stops by far excelled in resources anything she had previously played. Its size must have dwarfed Frost’s petite figure. By the conclusion of her 1896 season favourable criticism in the press had caused her audiences to distinctly swell in numbers.²⁸

²⁷²⁷ ‘The State Courts. No. 1 Jury’. 2 July 19[09], source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.144.²⁸²⁸ Rushworth, *Historic Organs*, p.386. See also assorted cuttings, Frost, Scrapbook, pp.68-71.

In April 1898 Frost acted as accompanist in a concert for the touring singing duo, Philip Newbury and Emily Spada, thus launching an association that lasted for four years and included tours to Queensland and Tasmania. Frost also toured with the Lawrence Campbell Concert Company in 1903, and the Sydney Concert Company in 1904. Her career as an accompanist peaked during the first decade of the century. She assisted a series of vocal and instrumental protégés discovered by Melba, Madame Ella Christian of Sydney's successful Garcia School of Singing, Lawrence Campbell and George Rivers Allpress, among others. From this period stemmed her long-term association with such artists as the composer and pianist, Esther Kahn, professional singers Miss Ernestine Louat and Emil Sussmilch, and violinist Henri Staell. When the city organist, Arthur Mason, arranged a dinner for Edwin Lemare in July 1903 he invited fifty Sydney organists, including just two women, Lilian Frost and Manly Presbyterian Church organist Alice Bryant. Another series of Town Hall recitals in 1907 further confirmed Frost's ability to not only adequately handle but use in an expressive and masterly manner, the vast resources of one of the largest organs in the world.²⁹

As this eventful decade neared its conclusion, and at the insistence of Sir James Fairfax, who offered £200 to the cause, the PSCC diaconate ordered a new organ with three manuals and 31 stops from the London-based company, Hill and Son.³⁰ A vigorous campaign to raise funds for the new organ ensued. Concerns over the detrimental effect of the old instrument on church worship ran deep. Over the past decade across Australia Congregational interest in sermons and consequently service attendance had declined and

²⁹ Assorted cuttings, Frost Scrapbook, pp. 68-71, 75-86, 98; and Rushworth, *Historic Organs*, p.385. She also attended a dinner for Alfred Hollins in 1904.

³⁰ Hill and Son were also responsible for building the organs at Sydney Town Hall, St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral, and the Young Men's Christian Association Hall. See MODM, 16 Aug. 1909, and 29 June 1910 in PSCC Records, vol.4, pp.320, & 345; and Rushworth, *Historic Organs*, p.286; and Editorial, PSCC, *The Organ*, vol.1, no.1, 27 Nov. 1909, in 'Printed Material Miscellaneous 1858-1971', PSCC Records, vol.64, item 1, p.2.

the year 1910 seemed to mark a high tide in anxiety over ideas and practice.³¹ Thus the diaconate may have seen the organ as a key to retaining members' interest or even attracting others through their doors. An additional and probably related factor in the church's decision to acquire the new organ was concern for its organist. A tribute to Lilian Frost made in the course of the campaign confirmed that she remained a central factor in the diaconate's decision. 'Amidst accumulated trials', and 'through good report and through ill report', which 'would have long since daunted any spirit less cheerful than hers', Frost had remained faithful to the church. It was her 'never failing kindness of heart and brightness of spirit' that had helped the choir to sustain its 'musical service of the church'. While she would do 'full justice' to the new organ, members of the church more importantly saw its installation as a reward for her patience.³² Over the previous decade, though Lilian Frost had ruffled a few choirmaster feathers, the diaconate had favoured her. They built an organ with her continued performance and pleasure in mind at a time when the Congregational Church itself was undergoing a rigorous re-examination of its ideas and practices. More than simply affection or gratitude, the diaconate's actions suggest that they linked Frost to their hopes for a better future. With such expectations and a 'festival' of services and recitals, the new organ was opened in November 1910.

Playing a part: Lilian Frost and the Sydney musical community, 1895-1930

As John Rickard has reasoned, a growing dichotomy between high and low culture emerged as the twentieth century progressed, particularly in the realm of music.³³ This was most noticeable in Sydney following the Great War. During the course of the war the State Government had established the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. It had

³¹ Hugh Jackson, 'Australian Congregationalism', Part II, pp.441, 443.

³² 'Our Organist', *The Organ*, vol.1, no.1, pp.4-5.

³³ Rickard, 'Music and Cultural Hierarchy'.

became a focal centre of the city's musical activities, and with a charismatic Director in the person of Henri Verbrugghen, succeeded in raising the profile of 'high-art music' in Sydney. It provided formal education for promising students, employment for qualified musicians, fresh blood in terms of teaching staff from abroad, permanent musical ensembles and a new concert hall. In the years after the armistice, the concerts held by the Conservatorium Orchestra with Verbrugghen as conductor became a highlight of the city's cultural life. By 1922, however, the Director and Government had disagreed on funding among other things, and Verbrugghen departed Sydney permanently. Thus, with significant advances made in the cause of high culture, but without its enigmatic leader, and faced with the simultaneous rise in popularity of jazz and other musical and cultural expressions classed as lowbrow, a new urgency invaded the local music scene. Conservatorium personnel, music teachers and professional musicians all contributed to attempts to educate the general public and encourage appreciation of musical forms regarded as ennobling or wholesome such as choral, chamber and symphonic music. This movement, which accelerated towards the end of the 1920s and culminated in the institution of Music Week in 1930, gave scope for women like Lilian Frost and the Australian-born soprano Emily Marks to take on more active roles in the musical community.

On settling in Sydney in 1895 Frost had resumed her work as a teacher. Among her early students, Maud Dalrymple launched a successful career as an entertainer in England.³⁴ From 1918 onwards, Frost held well-received annual pupil's concerts at the PSCC. By December 1921 her clientele had grown in size and quality and included two students, Leonard Bell and Lizzie Brennan, who promised to 'make valuable additions to

³⁴ Cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, Index page 'AB'.

the ranks of the city's organists'. Both 'gave successful recitals' the following year, while Frost's 'advanced students' combined with those of singing instructor and choir conductor, Clement Hoskings, to give a much complimented recital in 1924.³⁵

Over the years these pupils maintained a sentimental connection with their teacher and her church. A few of them followed in her footsteps by seeking positions as church organists. One pupil, Enid Elliott, filled Frost's seat at the PSCC console during her annual leave over the summers of 1926-27 and 1929-30. Constance Smith, one of Frost's 'most brilliant students', at the age of eighteen acquired a position at St Brigid's, Marrickville. Another, Miss V. A. Priestley, applied for the position of organist at PSCC, some time after Frost's death, while a Mr Taylor, also a former pupil, offered his services in a voluntary capacity. Another former pupil, Joyce McMillan, officiated at a memorial service held at PSCC to honour Frost following her death in December 1953. Writing to McMillan after her passing another former pupil recalled the fondness that they had all felt for Frost, 'as, apart from being our teacher and a great musician, she was so very much our friend'.³⁶ Testimonies of this kind abound.

Singers, composers, and numerous other new and established musicians also received the benefit of Frost's kindness and attention. Appointed, at the age of fifty five, as Musical Director in charge of both organ and choir music at PSCC, Frost trained a junior church choir and arranged for their performances outside the usual forum of Sunday services. It was thought exemplary in standard, and some of its members became well-

³⁵ See 'Organ Squad', *Australian Musical News (AMN)*, vol.XI, no.5, Dec. 1921, p.216; Lorna Stirling, 'Sydney Musicians Interviewed. Miss Lilian Frost' *AMN*, vol.XII, no.8, Mar 1923, p.287; and 'Miss Frost and Mr Hosking's Pupils' *SMH*, 8 Dec. 1924, p.6; and 'Pupil's Concert' *SMH*, 10 Dec. 1924, p.12.

³⁶ MODM, 20 Dec. 1926; and 18 Nov. 1929, in Minute Book 13 Nov. 1922 – 21 March 1932, PSCC Records, vol.6, pp.135, 354; 'Revival in Organ Music: Dupre the Master Praises Women Players' in *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1939, p.8; Miss V.A. Priestley to Hon Sec. PSCC, 16 Sept. 1967, and typed note re Taylor's response to an advertisement in *SMH*, 11 July 1970, in 'Secretary's correspondence', PSCC Records, v.7, item 5; 'In Memorium. Lilian Frost' in Congregational Union and Home Mission Board of NSW, *The Congregationalist*, Feb. 1954, p.3 and Max Bonner to Joyce McMillan, 4 Jan. 1953[?54], in Frost, Scrapbook, p.154.

known singers in Sydney. Frost also appears to have participated in arranging a massed junior choir from among the various churches of the denomination, and in October 1925 accompanied the 150-voice ensemble at the first Annual Young People's Festival held in Sydney Town Hall.³⁷ Local composers likewise gained much encouragement from Frost. From the earliest years of the century she had included compositions by Sydney pianist, Esther Kahn, in her Town Hall recital programs. At a farewell concert held in 1927 prior to Frost's departure for Europe, the organist presented a diverse program which included 'The Australian Patrol', a composition by Sydney journalist May Summerbelle.³⁸ Frost played the same piece as an encore in at least one recital held during her subsequent sojourn in England. In 1936 Frost created much interest in the work of a well-known Sydney woman, Adeline Parry of Watson's Bay.³⁹ In addition Frost provided work and experience for hundreds, perhaps thousands of new and established vocalists and instrumentalists. Over the many decades of her career, she rarely performed a whole program herself. Week after week, she engaged soloists to sing or play in programs arranged for either public entertainment or church worship. She thus offered experience in recital work, much-needed publicity and additional earnings to musicians of varying levels of expertise. More will be said about Frost's recital work later. It is evident from this brief discussion, however, that Frost played an important role as a teacher and patron of composers, vocalists and instrumentalists.

Yet Lilian Frost was just one member of an increasingly active community of music educators that emerged in Sydney after the Great War. As mentioned before, the foundation of the Conservatorium of Music provided a focus for the musical community

³⁷ 'Pulpit notice. Congregational Union of New South Wales. Young People's Department', 13 Oct. 1925, in PSCC Records, vol.45, p.13.

³⁸ 'Miss Lilian Frost's Farewell', *SMH*, 28 April 1927, p.12.

³⁹ 'A Charming Composition' *Harmony*, vol.3, no.29, 25 May 1936, p.35.

of Sydney and added much impetus to its development. A large and growing body of music teachers existed outside the parameters of the Conservatorium as well. Many of these congregated in the respective buildings first in George Street and later in Ash Street, Sydney, used by the music supplier and former musician, William Henry Paling.⁴⁰ A ‘little “Latin Quarter” of “Bohemia” flourished’ around the building in ‘central George Street’. There, ‘noted musicians’ taught in their studios, or gathered in the ground floor rooms to ‘converse with the brilliant visiting artists’. Before the war, many would drift between Palings and the ‘little Café Francais opposite with its continental waiters and its air of bonhomie’, to enjoy food, wine and pleasant conversation.⁴¹ No doubt the exotic crowd included Joseph Kretschmann, a violinist native to Bohemia (the mid-European region). Among those with studios at Palings before the turn of the century, Kretschmann’s brilliance as teacher and player won, despite his eccentricities, the affections of many pupils and their parents. Two of his pupils, Valda Kersey and Edith Ford, in fact accorded him the unusual honour of founding a Club in his name with the aim of encouraging a greater appreciation of music and the arts.⁴²

One of Kretschmann’s star pupils, Esther Kahn, taught piano at a later date in a Palings studio. A ‘brilliant Pianiste’, a prolific composer, and childhood protégé Kahn was born in a less than affluent corner of London in 1877 with, it appears, something other than Anglo-Saxon blood in her veins. By the age of five, she was known ‘as a “wonder child”’, and had played before women from the upper ranks of British Society. While Esther was still young, her family moved to Sydney where she commenced lessons with Kretschmann. These lessons proved highly entertaining for the young pianist. At one

⁴⁰ See Andrew McCredie, ‘Paling, William Henry’, *ADB*, vol.5, pp.389-90.

⁴¹ Eve Keanes, *Music for a Hundred Years: The Story of the House of Paling*, (Sydney: Zeigler Publications, 1954), p.53.

⁴² ‘Herr Josef Kretschmann and the Music Club Honouring His Name’, *Harmony*, 17 April 1934, pp.16-18.

stage, the gipsy-trained teacher decided to impress Chevalier Weigand, Sydney's first city organist, with his pupil's ability to read music at sight. While she played a fugue by Bach not previously known to her, the two men drank large 'tankards of ale', and hens, ducks, dogs and a cat wandered through the room. Her natural temptation to laugh at the spectacle brought a remonstrance from Kretschmann, 'Soh! Go on!'⁴³ She became one of the key figures in the Krestchman Club when it was formed years later. Shy by nature, the talented Kahn made few public appearances when young, although when she did play her skill caused 'quite a furore'.⁴⁴ By the age of seventeen, W.J. Banks had published three compositions by her in his *Australian Musical Album*; 'Bereavement' for contralto, and 'Birthday Thoughts' and 'Improvisata' for piano.⁴⁵ Kahn also wrote 'delicious tit-bits for the organ, the tit-bits always composed with the colour resources of Sydney's Town Hall organ' and the 'deft organ craftsmanship – or rather craftwomanship – of her friend, Lilian Frost', in mind.⁴⁶ One such piece popularised by Lilian Frost's repeated rendition of it during her series of Town Hall recitals in 1907, was 'Intermezzo'. The association of these two artists quickly evolved into a life-long friendship. Sometime after the First War World, Kahn also founded the 'International Society of Musical Therapeutics of Australia' which aimed, among other things, to experiment with the influence music exerted on the pulse and blood pressure.⁴⁷

Another of Frost's friends, Lawrence Campbell, also taught at Palings at one stage. Originally from London where he belonged to a 'Radical Association', the young Lawrence Campbell studied at the Polytechnic School of Elocution in Regent Street, and

⁴³ Joseph Kretschmann, 'Autobiographical Sketch', in J. Wren Sutton, 'The Joseph Kretschmann Club', unpublished typescript booklet, (Sydney: 1938), n.p.; Sutton, 'Kretschmann. The Man' in 'The Joseph Kretschmann Club', p.9.

⁴⁴ 'Sanity in Art. Esther Kahn. Her Story and Career', *AMN*, May 1923, p.351.

⁴⁵ Banks, W.J. (compiler), *The Australian Musical Album*, (Sydney: W.J. Banks, 1894).

⁴⁶ 'Sanity in Art. Esther Kahn'.

⁴⁷ Esther Kahn, 'Musical Therapeutics. A Science of Sounds' *AMN*, vol.XVII, no.2, Sept. 1927, p.49; and 'Musical Therapeutics. The International Society' in *AMN*, vol.XXVII, no.7, Feb. 1928, p.29.

joined in succession the Frank Curzon and Alfred Selwyn entertainment companies, the latter as stage manager.⁴⁸ Campbell's performing career reached a crucial point, however, when a bout of diphtheria permanently damaged his throat. As a result he departed for Tasmania in the early 1890s where, aside from meeting Lilian Frost, he met Mr Weigall of Sydney Grammar School. Weigall made Campbell aware of the relative absence of elocutionary teachers in Australia.⁴⁹ Shortly afterwards, Campbell founded a 'School of Public Speaking and Dramatic Art' in Sydney, and obtained a studio at Palings. While teaching there, Campbell joined Victor Daley and Tom Roberts in founding the bohemian Supper Club, which consisted primarily of monthly steak dinners at the previously mentioned Café Francais.⁵⁰ He consistently supported the 'Grand National Eisteddfod of Australia, Ballarat', acting as 'Chief Elocutionary and Dramatic Adjudicator' ten times between 1902 and 1922. Lawrence Campbell was a Freemason, played leading roles in the Speech Association of New South Wales, the Australasian Elocutionary Association, and Henry Lawson Memorial Society, and assisted a plethora of other cultural causes during the first half of the twentieth century.⁵¹ Lilian Frost described Campbell as her 'oldest professional friend in Sydney'.⁵² They appeared regularly in each other's recitals, worked up innovative performances together, and campaigned to assist or farewell numerous Sydney protégés.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Campbell to Mrs Curlewis, 23 Oct. 1914, in Curlewis Family Papers, ML MSS 2159, vol. I, p.185. Information obtained from official letterhead for 'The Lawrence Campbell School of Public Speaking and Dramatic Art' on which the letter is written.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Campbell, 'The Spoken Word – the Art of Speaking Effectively' in Blennerhassett's Commercial Educational Society of Australia, Sydney, 'Business Lectures for Business Men', 1940 Session, Lectures 5 and 6, pp.33, 41.

⁵⁰ George A. Taylor, *Those Were the Days' Being Reminiscences of Australian Artists and Writers*, (Sydney: Tyrrell's Limited, 1918), p.61.

⁵¹ Wor. Bro. Lawrence Campbell, P.M., 'Masonic Ideals in Poetry', *Transactions of the Sydney Lodge of Research*, vol. VII, 1920, pp.1-19; and Lawrence Campbell to Mr Ifould, 24 Feb. 1926, in Henry Lawson Memorial Fund. Records, 1922-1932, ML MSS 3588, vol. I, p.175. Information obtained from letterhead.

⁵² 'One Thousand Recitals. Miss Frost's Fine Record' cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.152.

Combined, the examples of Frost, Kahn, and Campbell suggest the existence of a sub-stratum of as yet almost unknown music and performance teachers whose contributions to the evolution of the city's cultural life was vital. Over the decades, many such figures taught in Palings' studios: the singer Mabel Batchelor; the former PSCC choirmaster and renowned bass singer Reginald Gooud; the second wife of Conservatorium director Roland Foster and voice production teacher, Thelma Houston; and long-time St James' organist, George Faunce Allman. Even renowned and illustrious singers such as Madame Ada Baker and Nellie Stewart taught in studios there, while many musicians with international origins and credentials became permanent fixtures in the Palings community.⁵³ Through Palings music lovers could also buy a range of instruments from the most basic and simple to a piano displayed at the 1880 Paris Exhibition whose 'only replica was acquired by the Czar of Russia', acquire sheet music, old and new, or make reservations for recitals by local soloists or concerts by international celebrities. The influential teachers, Lute Drummond and Emily Marks, leased studios in Bond Street and the Strand Arcade respectively. However, the majority of teachers listed in Sydney in a register collated by the Musical Association gave their address as either the Conservatorium or Palings.⁵⁴

It is evident that women dominated the ranks of the music teaching profession in Sydney. The Music Association's register reveals that particularly in the suburbs and rural towns the proportion of female to male teachers was distinctly biased towards the former. In Sydney the proportion appears more balanced, although women still outweighed men, while male and female teachers were represented in almost equal numbers at the Conservatorium. This strong presence suggests that, individually and collectively, women

⁵³ Keanes, *Palings*, pp.53-55.

⁵⁴ The Musical Association of NSW, *Annual Report of the Association, 1938-39 and Registrar of Teachers Recognised by the Musical Association of NSW*, (Sydney: Musical Association of NSW, 1939).

stood in a position to contribute to the mounting activism within musical circles of the late 1920s and '30s. Yet, according to Monique Geitenbeek, the Australian Musical Education Board resisted the appointment of women as examiners until the 1940s,⁵⁵ and men certainly occupied key Conservatorium positions. Yet, as the examples of Lilian Frost and Emily Marks will demonstrate, women, as music teachers and performers, were concerned with and participated in the campaign to raise musical standards and knowledge in New South Wales.

Emily Marks, as a child prodigy, played in Frost's programs at PSCC from at least as early as 1904.⁵⁶ As a teenager, prior to her departure to conduct further musical studies in England, Marks won acclaim for the 'pure, liquid quality' of her 'sympathetic soprano voice', and made appearances in various Gilbert and Sullivan productions. On making her debut in London prior to the First World War, Marks acquired a touring contract. She continued to tour until the war neared its conclusion at which stage she settled in New York. There, Marks studied the voice production techniques of Professor Henri Zay before returning to Australia in 1923 intent on resuming her career as a soprano soloist and teacher.⁵⁷ The name of Madame Emily Marks subsequently reappeared on Frost's recital programs. Emily Marks made her most crucial contributions to the musical community of Sydney, however, after the emergence of the Music Week movement in 1929. She participated in key organisational committees for each Music Week staged throughout the 1930s, launched the Music Lovers' Club in 1932, founded the journal *Harmony* in 1933, was pivotal in the emergence of the City of Sydney Eisteddfods in 1934 and regularly acted as adjudicator over the ensuing years.

⁵⁵ Geitenbeek, 'The Role of Women in the AMEB'.

⁵⁶ Cuttings, sources not cited, 'Lecture of Haydn', and 'Schubert Lecture-Concert' in Frost, Scrapbook, pp.110, 113. This series of lecture-concerts on famous musicians by Rev. Hennessy, with Lilian Frost arranging the program, occurred during the winter of 1904.

⁵⁷ 'A Chat with Madame Emily Marks' *Society*, vol.2, no.2, Feb. 1923, p.33.

Both Frost and Marks were quick to become involved in the Music Week movement and to lend their names and energy to the cause. *Music in Australia*, a journal first published under the name of the *Australasian Phonograph Monthly* claimed responsibility for initial discussion of the idea of holding a Music Week in Sydney, based on a similar event held in America. The idea entailed an education campaign, directed simultaneously through schools, churches, and musical societies at the public, with the intention of drawing its attention to 'music and associated interests'.⁵⁸ Originally a commercially oriented journal, *Music in Australia* became the 'Official Organ of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music', and, from August 1929, for the newly formed Associated Music Clubs of Australia as well. Unofficially, it also acted as club magazine for another newly formed organisation, the Music Industry Advancement Society, which then became the Music Advancement Guild. Mr E. Lashmar, Managing Director of the music-publishing house of world renown, Chappell and Co, was elected the Guild's first President. Although commercial interests may thus appear responsible for the introduction of Music Week in Australia, its prime movers were old liberals, whose businesses grew on the back of the bourgeois pursuit of cultural validation. The Music Advancement Society believed that it spoke for the whole spectrum of musical interest in New South Wales, and judging by the whole-hearted support that greeted the idea of Music Week, it appears that it did.

That the progressive American idea of Music Week found receptive individuals and a willing community of support in Sydney, that the Associated Music Clubs of Australia, the Fellowship of Australian Writers and a number of serious theatrical endeavours also emerged in Sydney at the turn of the decade, that networks of female practitioners participated enthusiastically in this movement towards cultural consolidation,

⁵⁸ 'Music Industry Advancement Society', *Music in Australia*, vol.IV, no.1, 20 May 1929, p.34.

is surely not coincidental. Music Week was not just about music, it was about national culture; it was not just about resistance to jazz, it was about cultivating a national taste for the good and the beautiful, the pursuit of something better than the mediocre or worse, the morally bad. *Music in Australia* rallied its readers:

what the schoolboy learns and loves to-day is what the nation learns and loves tomorrow. If you do not attempt to cultivate beauty in the child mind you cannot possibly expect to find beauty in the national mind. If you let the child think that there is nothing better for him musically than a sinful string of syncopation, you cannot expect to find adult patronage for concerts of good music.⁵⁹

Over the ensuing months, the idea of holding a Music Week took shape, worsening economic news adding urgency to the discussions. The first meeting of teachers, enthusiasts, and representatives of various musical organisations occurred in December 1929. By July 1930, a formal organising committee had laid in place the format and program for the event, with complementary activities being planned in Tasmania and New Zealand. Both Lilian Frost and Emily Marks were committee members. Their portraits graced a two-page spread on Music Week, positioned prominently on either side of the title 'Music Week - What Are You Doing For It?' along with Roland Foster and George Faunce Allman. The full list of patrons and organisers published the following month was suitably impressive, and comprised the state's highest ranked men and women of vice-regal, political, judicial and musical circles.⁶⁰

An unnamed enthusiast – was it Lilian Frost⁶¹ - suggested in 1929 that special organ recitals should take place in the churches each day during the proposed Music Week. Among the activities eventually planned was 'Music Sunday'. In support of the

⁵⁹ 'School Music' *Music in Australia*, vol.IV, no.12, 20 June 1929, p.3.

⁶⁰ 'Proposed Music Week' *AMN*, vol.19, 2 Dec. 1929, p.23; and 'Where we stand' *Music in Australia*, vol.V, no.7, 20 Jan. 1930, p.3; 'Music Week. What Are You Doing For it?' *Music in Australia*, 25 July 1930, p.6; and 'First Annual Music Week in New South Wales' in *Music in Australia*, 25 Aug. 1930, p.6.

⁶¹ The suggestion is attributed to '[o]ne of the best known musicians in Australia'. See the editorial, *Music in Australia*, vol. 5, no. 2, 20 Aug. 1929, p.3.

occasion preachers of all denominations promised to 'extol the cultural influences of music [o]n the individual and community' and organists and choirmasters agreed to arrange 'musical services of special merit'.⁶² Lilian Frost held both a special service on the Sunday and two recitals during the week. The first of her two Music Week performances took place on Wednesday 3 September. As Frost regularly held recitals in PSCC during the Wednesday lunch hour, she extended its usual length, arranged a special program of music by Bach, and included an address by the acting Pastor Dr F.W. Boreham, on 'The Church's Debt to Music'.⁶³ The second recital took place on Friday 5 September at the Aeolian Hall (situated in Pitt Street next door to the church), together with Esther Kahn on piano. Reviews of the performances of the long-established and well-known artists found little to fault and much to appreciate. Both artists attended the Musician's Revel that evening, along with numerous other musicians and members of Sydney's upper middle class such as Lady (Margaret) Gordon, Lady (Elizabeth) Fuller, and Hannah Jones, the new wife of the department store owner, Charles Lloyd Jones. Descriptions of the clothing worn by Frost, Kahn, and Mrs Lawrence Campbell mingled in newspaper coverage of the event with that of Lady Gordon and her daughter, Anne.⁶⁴

This mixing of musical and social circles acts as a reminder of the context in which Music Week took place, particularly the greater insistence on comparative distinction between cultural elements. A *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial published on the first day of Music Week pointed to 'the majesty, beauty, charm, and spiritual influences of music', while an article by Roland Foster argued that '[m]usic in its higher inspirational forms [was] essentially a thing of the spirit'. It sprung 'from the soul of mankind'.⁶⁵ In 1934

⁶² 'Music Week. What Are You Doing For it?' *Music in Australia*, 25 July 1930, p.6.

⁶³ 'Amusements', *SMH*, 30 Aug. 1930, p.12.

⁶⁴ 'Music Week. Musicians' Revel. Brilliant Costumes', *SMH*, 6 Sept. 1930, p.19.

⁶⁵ 'Music Week' *SMH*, 30 Aug. 1930, p.14; and 'Musical Heritage. Do We Value it Sufficiently?' *SMH*, 30 Aug. 1930, p.11.

Arnold Mote, President of the Music Week Committee, was more insistent; in a world that seemed to have ‘lost its soul’, music held the answer:

“Peace on earth and goodwill to men” was the theme of the first carol ever sung, and it is just this “goodwill” which the world lacks at the present day, and Music can and will do much to restore it, for Music is of God – it is His greatest gift to mankind.

He argued that none could ‘too highly estimate’ the ‘cultural value of Music’. No art possessed a comparable ‘power to uplift’, as it was ‘the language of the heart’ and ‘stir[red] the very depths of our being’. Music, Mote with liberal conviction waxed lyrical, was ‘able to set in vibration as many subtle chords in our emotional and intellectual make-up as there are tints in a gorgeous sunset’.⁶⁶ In less sentimental fashion Lily Juncker claimed that teachers and psychologists repeatedly pointed to the influence music could exercise in the development of a child’s character and ‘insight into life’.⁶⁷

Having argued that music encouraged the ascendancy of the spirit, individually and collectively, commentators asserted the need to make stronger claims for recognition of the role of music in the community. Two chief obstacles were felt to preclude that possibility in the early 1930s: technology and the partly linked prevalence of lower cultural forms; and the economic impact of the Depression on musicians, the artists in whose hands this civilising tool lay. The ‘democratic mind of Australia’ much preferred sports and recreation to the arts. It needed to learn to ‘choose wisely’ in order to free music ‘from influences likely to debase its currency and vitiate the public taste’. To the proponents of ‘high art music’, an urgent need existed to safeguard the careers of trained musicians, and to educate Australians ‘up to an earnest desire for and a sustained

⁶⁶ Arnold Mote, ‘Music Week’ *Harmony*, 25 Sept. 1934, p.4.

⁶⁷ Lily Juncker, ‘Music Week in N.S.W.’, *Harmony*, 26 Oct. 1936, p.11.

appreciation of music in its higher forms'.⁶⁸ It was an inherently contradictory plan: elitist in its standards and outlook, yet democratic in its wide target.

Implicit in such commentary is a feeling that the existence and influence of a barely established cultural community was threatened by the rapid modernisation of Australian life. It was chiefly the cultural community, not a wealthy elite, who vocalised such fears. Members of Sydney Society did not exclusively champion the conservative cultural discipline of music in contrast to the rest of the population. Members of Sydney's self-appointed quasi-aristocracy, with its primarily self-taught cultural standards, also rejoiced at national sporting triumphs, enjoyed light-hearted musicals, talking films, and the latest dance crazes. It took a vice-regal figure of British breeding to speak directly on the matter. Lady Game announced at a 'musical afternoon' that she would 'like to hear more high-class music in Sydney', and never wanted to 'hear jazz again'.⁶⁹

Recalling the acceptability imputed on the musical service of religious women, and considering the contemporaneous description of church musicians as 'the extreme Right Wing in the Musicians' Parliament', it might be assumed that Lilian Frost and other female church musicians were conservative in their musical selection and practice.⁷⁰ The reality, as always, was not so simple. We know of Frost's involvement in the inception of Music Week. Catholic women also made an appearance in the music educational endeavours of this time. Convents, particularly the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta, and Santa Sabina Convent, Strathfield, placed importance on musical study and their students accordingly excelled.⁷¹ The *Catholic Women's Review*, the official organ of the Catholic

⁶⁸ 'Musical Heritage', *SMH*.

⁶⁹ 'Good Music for Sydney. Lady Game's Wish', *SMH*, 22 Oct. 1934, p.5. The *Daily Pictorial*, however, mentioned that wealthy Sydney women 'never bought music other than jazz for a party'. See 'A Woman's Letter', 8 Oct. 1930, p.39.

⁷⁰ 'Church Music', *MinA*, vol.VI, no.9, 20 March 1931, p.5.

⁷¹ W. Arundel Orchard, *Music in Australia: More than 150 Years of Development*, (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1952), p.191.

Women's Association of New South Wales, showed a distinct interest in the musical affairs of New South Wales, as well as pride in the achievements of convent-educated pupils.⁷² Even before the Great War, the Catholic musical education system was sufficiently established to hold the Catholic Schools Musical competition.⁷³ Alternately, Phyllis Campbell and Dorothy Helmrich both applied Theosophical views on the spiritual function of music. Through a variety of activities they sought to contribute to the task of raising musical standards in Sydney during the 1920s, '30s and '40s.⁷⁴ Denominational variation in the cultural function assigned to or undertaken by women within Christian life begs further study. Blanket descriptions of conservatism, based purely on assumptions of femininity and moral conventionalism, however, are clearly inadequate. We thus return to the case of Lilian Frost and resume her story in 1910 when, as the grown-up version of the ideal Congregational girl who had committed herself to the musical service of the church, she appeared to bring hope to a declining religious community.

A Ministry of Music

In 1912, Lilian Frost took extended leave from her position at the church organ console, and travelled to Europe. She studied under Sir Walter Alcock, the sub-organist at Westminster Abbey, London, and later, the Parisian organist and important composer,

⁷² The pianist, Eileen Joyce was the widely known and successful of the convent-protégés. After a successful fund-raising campaign in 1934, she departed to obtain further training and performance experience in Europe. The *Catholic Women's Review* operated as a monthly magazine for decades from 1930, and covered a wide range of topics. It revealed an interesting ambivalence about the woman's role in society, swinging between the distinctly feminist and the traditional and apologetic. The music coverage offered by 'V.A.W', was consistent, detailed and less gossipy in tone than the regular papers' social or cultural pages.

⁷³ See St Mary's Cathedral, *Catholic Schools Musical Competitions for the Year 1915, and Results for Year 1914*, (Sydney: St Mary's Cathedral, 1914).

⁷⁴ Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1986), pp.326-8.

Charles Marie Widor.⁷⁵ Before she left England, she performed a number of recitals including one at the Royal Albert Hall, and created 'quite a sensation' in Liverpool when she played at St George's Hall. A crowd waiting outside cheered her as she left the building.⁷⁶ With an understandably renewed confidence Frost returned to Sydney. She immediately requested a salary increase, and that the church pass on to her fees paid to the church for organ music at weddings conducted therein, a standard practice in most churches. She also proposed to hold weekly mid-day recitals, an idea she claimed the Sydney organist George Faunce Allman had suggested, but one which she first encountered in London where a number of churches held weekly lunchtime recitals.⁷⁷ Agreeing with her on the point concerning fees for weddings, and with the idea of weekly recitals, the PSCC diaconate nominated the time of Wednesday 1:10–1:45pm, stipulating that she could take a collection at the recitals and retain the proceeds remaining after the payment of expenses.⁷⁸ The first four recitals, held in June 1913 were watched with interest and proved successful. No salary increase, however, was forthcoming.

Frost may have had a new organ to play, but her service at PSCC proved no smoother over the ensuing decade and a half. Repeatedly applying to the diaconate for permission to hold incidental recitals, for approval of their programs, for reimbursement of expenses paid towards choir activities, and for anything out of the usual routine proved a tedious business. Requests made by Frost from 1913 for a paid singer to lead the choir, 'I

⁷⁵ Lilian Frost to Mr Cuthbertson (PSCC Hon. Sec.), 10 June 1912, in 'PSCC Correspondence, General, 1912-1921', PSCC Records, vol.43, p.29; Rushworth, *Historic Organs*, p.386; and 'Well-Known Organist Dies', in *Examiner* (Launceston), 23 Dec. 1953, page not cited, cutting from Launceston Reference Library.

⁷⁶ 'Miss Lilian Frost at Wallasey. Memorable Recital on Town Hall Organ', from *Liverpool Daily Post*, quoted in *Pitt Street Congregational News (News)*, no.13, Summer 1927-8, in 'Printed Material', PSCC Records, vol.70, item 4, p.4; 'A Famous Woman Organist', quoted from *London Christian World*, in *Congregationalist*, vol.XX, no.1, 10 Jan. 1928, p.3; and 'Music of the Month' in *Society*, Oct. 1925, p.32.

⁷⁷ 'Sydney Workers like Bach. Nine Hundred Mid-day Recitals', cutting, source not cited [1938], in Frost, *Scrapbook*, p.152; and 'Miss Lilian Frost. Mid-day Recitals, 1913-34' in *Harmony*, vol.1, no.5, 17 March 1934, p.30.

⁷⁸ MODM, 30 April 1913, in PSCC Records, vol.5, p.73.

should be glad to organise a special effort with the choir to help with the financial part',⁷⁹ finally met diaconate approval in 1920. The quality of choral presentation suffered for years as a result of their reluctance. When, during the war, the diaconate could no longer afford to retain W. Reginald Gooud's services as choirmaster Frost took on additional duties, but without an increase in her executive powers, her musical freedom, or her salary. Sometime towards the end of the war, Walter Colyer once more assumed the position of choirmaster, but resigned again in 1924, for reasons deliberately not recorded in the minutes. His successor, the singing teacher Clement Hosking, resigned only a year later, suggesting that an 'older man' with 'greater experience' might prove more appropriate for the position which, 'under existing circumstances', he found 'impossible'.⁸⁰ Frost's requests for a salary increase finally met success in 1921. It constituted her first pay rise since the financially beleaguered PSCC had asked her to accept a cut in 1906. On that occasion, the diaconate had reduced her salary by £20 to £50. Fifteen years later, after repeated entreaties by Frost who explained that amateur organists received the same amount while she had done all that she could 'from a professional point to make [her] work a success', they agreed to raise her salary to the rate of £72.⁸¹

It appears that, though conscious that Frost possessed a talent that exceeded standards set by most church organists, and that she could potentially fill a fundamental need to improve the quality and attractiveness of church services, the diaconate still saw her role as subsidiary. Devout nonconformist women, as Clyde Binfield and Linda Wilson have argued, could not extend their 'spiritual guardian[ship]' into a fully public or authorial role as it contravened the conventional notion of primarily domestic feminine

⁷⁹ Lilian Frost to Mr Cuthbertson, 2 Aug. 1916, in PSCC Records, vol. 43, 'PSCC Correspondence, General, 1912-1921', p.319.

⁸⁰ Clement Hosking to Cuthbertson, 16 Oct. 1925, in 'PSCC Correspondence, General, 1925-1827', PSCC Records, vol.45, p.37; and assorted minutes 1913-25, PSCC Records, vols 5, 6.

⁸¹ Frost to Cuthbertson, 1 June 1921, in 'PSCC Correspondence, General, 1921-25', PSCC Records,

duty.⁸² Lingering assumptions of this kind appear to have affected the PSCC diaconate's approach to the administration of Frost's work. She could enhance church life with her music, and like the proverbial 'angel in the house', cheer, nurture, and cultivate the spirits of her fellow worshippers, patiently enduring her difficulties without complaint, but she could not act with authority or even receive the salary of a professional. Possibly the inflexibility of deacons and choirmasters represented the unconscious masculinism identified by Anne O'Brien. Due to declining male interest in religious worship, the concomitant need to direct their ministrations to Australian men, and their awareness at some level of the dichotomy between the Lone Hand and Domestic Man types of manliness, O'Brien argued, church leaders adopted a more abrasive masculinity.⁸³

Yet the democratic impetus of the nonconformist churches and the particular openness of the Congregational Church to the educational, professional and leadership aspirations of its female members has been noted by a number of religious historians. A Congregationalist from Adelaide, Winifred Kiek, in 1927 became the first woman ordained in Australia, while another, Margaret Holmes, whose prolonged work from 1923 for the Student Christian Movement itself was notable, contributed through it to the ecumenical movement.⁸⁴ Congregational women were educated and aware of their changing role in society. Even the Woollahra Congregational Church Women's Guild held

vol.44, p.15; and MODM, 1 June 1921, in PSCC Records, vol.5, p.249.

⁸² Wilson discusses, for example, women whose earnest commitment to the church aroused a desire to preach or minister to the church, but, due to concern about the woman's responsibility to home and family, were not permitted to occupy governing or ministering positions, 'Constrained by zeal', p.201. See also Binfield, *Belmont's Portias*, p.9.

⁸³ O'Brien, 'A Church full of men'.

⁸⁴ O'Brien, 'A Reply to Roger Thompson', p.131; Janet West, *Daughters of Freedom: A history of women in the Australian church*, (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1997), pp.320-8; Frank Engel, *Australian Christians in Conflict and Unity*, (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1984), p.140; Rosalie McCutcheon, 'Margaret Holmes: Larger than the Roles she Played', in Sabine Willis (ed.), *Women, Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1977), pp.94-116; and Carey, *Believing in Australia*, p.134. Further information on Congregational women obtained from Julia Pitman, Adelaide University, PhD thesis in progress.

a 'women's rally' in 1921 and fielded comments concerning women and public responsibility at its annual meeting in 1922.⁸⁵

Such advances occurred following the war. Prior to the war, Lilian Frost's actions were challenging. It is possible that she experienced resistance on the grounds of both gender and definitions of musical authority. Even if the Pitt Street men exhibited just a mild masculinism, Lilian Frost displayed a potentially unfeminine assertiveness in her fight for a more central role for organ-music in the musical worship conducted by the church. Choirmasters consistently and naturally assumed their authority in the musical affairs of the church and expected Frost's compliance to their direction. Current guides to church music directorships see organ playing as peripheral to the management of the musical affairs of the church.⁸⁶ Earlier in the century it is likely that this expectation was the same. In 1904, 1911, and 1913, Frost's conflicts with choirmasters respectively concerned the organist's physical location during the service, the proportion of the program devoted to organ-music, and attempts to change the order of service to focus more exclusively on congregational singing. On the first count, the secretary of the diaconate recorded in the minutes that he felt Frost 'entirely in the wrong', before being forced to delete the comment.⁸⁷ Strong feeling was expressed in Frost's favour during the 1911 and 1913 disputes with choirmaster Samuel Kenny. Possibly it constituted an endorsement of the emergent new theology, less doctrinal and severe, more humanitarian and personal. Two theories of sacredness current at the time alternately linked sacredness to religious community function and individual responsiveness.⁸⁸ Evidently the latter held

⁸⁵ See 'Women's Department – minutes of the Women's Guild', in Woollahra Congregational Church Papers, ML MSS 2704, vol.s 13-15.

⁸⁶ Kenneth W. Osbeck (1961), *The Ministry of Music*, (Michigan: Knebel Publications, 1985).

⁸⁷ MODM, 28 March 1904, in PSCC Records, vol. 4, p.44. See also minutes for 1911-1913 for details of other ongoing disputes, PSCC Records, vol. 5.

⁸⁸ Sharpe, 'Sacred Music and the Sacredness of Music', p. 23.

some affinity with the new theology. Kenny, however, felt that organ music distracted from the atmosphere of worship⁸⁹, and in insisting on a much-reduced musical program, resisted change.

Following the First World War a re-evaluation of the function of church and organ music took place. In England a committee appointed by the Archbishop was instructed in 1922 to 'consider and report upon the place of Music in the worship of the Church'. By the 1930s, Australian churches and musical journals had joined the heart-searching. Following the English example, the Australian Anglican Church launched an inquiry in 1932 into the 'condition of Church Music', and arranged the 'former Organist and Master of the Choristers of Westminster Abbey', Dr Nicholson, to conduct a series of lectures in Australia.⁹⁰

Secular journals reported these developments. They felt that the churches possessed 'a unique opportunity to second the efforts of secular musicians to raise the banner of real, as opposed to sham, musical culture'.⁹¹ Part of the problem, it seemed, lay in the poor grasp of technique and the staid and unadventurous repertory of most church organists. In 1929 *Music in Australia* published a series on 'Hymn-Playing'. In printing an article on Voluntaries, that portion of church services offering the greatest musical freedom to organists, *Music in Australia* spoke not to the 'gifted city professional' but rather the thousands 'throughout the State who [did] not pretend to any extraordinary knowledge of their art'. It regretted the consistently low standard of organists in suburban churches throughout Sydney, and criticised the alternately 'pathetic' and 'hideous hymnody thrust on [Protestant Churches] in the Victorian era' that they continued to play

⁸⁹ MODM, 29 March 1911, May 1911, and 28 June 1911 in Minute Book 'Feb. 22 1911 – Sept. 18 1922' in PSSC Records, vol.5, pp.16-29.

⁹⁰ H.P. Finnis, letter to the editor, *AMN*, vol.XXIV, no.12, July 1934, p.33.

⁹¹ R.D.S., 'Church Music' [Brisbane], *AMN*, vol.XXIV, no.11, p.25.

well into the twentieth century. One editorial stated that many ministers preferred organists who did not play sophisticated music because they felt that it exceeded the interests and understanding of the congregation, an attitude that denied the role organ-music could play in raising the congregation's musical taste. Children would soon only see the organ as 'an instrument common to picture shows used chiefly to imitate canaries, kettle-drums and blow-flies', one writer remarked with concern, if an effort was not made to improve the organist's offerings.⁹²

Nearly thirty years after Lilian Frost first assumed her post as organist at the Pitt Street Congregational Church she was suddenly freed from the limitations that a cautious and ambivalent diaconate and succession of choirmasters had placed on her. This resulted from the arrival of a new Pastor at Pitt Street Congregational Church in June 1925. Strongly anti-Catholic and anti-conscionist, the British-born Reverend Thomas E. Ruth had served as Minister of the Collins Street Baptist Church, Melbourne, from 1914 to 1923.⁹³ Barely a month into his Sydney ministry, Ruth had overseen the foundation of a church newsletter, the *Pitt Street Church News (News)*, and begun to assess the grave state of repair of the church and its properties. He was a man of faith and vision. Setting remarkable, unrealistic goals for the restoration of the property, he succeeded, through appeal for voluntary donations, in acquiring the funds necessary to accomplish the task. Through the *News*, Ruth reported to his congregation on the progress of the appeal.

The new pastor also remarked on Lilian Frost's abilities. That, of course, was not unusual. However, he acknowledged, for the first time in church record, Frost's 'musical

⁹² See Dr Keith Barry, 'Hymn-Playing', and 'Organ Voluntary', *Music in Australia*, vol.s 4 and 5; 'Gossip of the Month', vol. 5, no.1, 20 July 1929, p.15; 'Topics of the Day', vol. 5, no. 12, 25 June 1930, p.5; and 'Church Music' in *Music in Australia*, vol. 6, no. 9, 20 March 1931, p.5.

⁹³ Rev. T.E. Ruth, 'The Police and the New Guard', text of address at PSCC, 17 April 1932, *To-Day*, 30 April 1932, pp.16-7. Information from small paragraph, p.16. Pamphlets published by Ruth include: *The Real Issue: Pope or King?* (1918); *Responsibility of Empire* (no date), war sermons, no.1; and *Three enemies of democracy: the priest, the profiteer; the agitator* (1919).

ministry'. He also spoke of her skill in terms of its sacredness: her playing conveyed 'spiritual significance'; in her hands the organ was 'an instrument of worship'.⁹⁴ Her music 'freely offer[ed] on the altar of public service' was 'instinct with spiritual genius', but this genius emerged because of Frost's very personal involvement with her music. In growing up with the organ, she had 'made a comrade, a companion, a confidant of it'. 'She knows it intimately', he continued, '[s]he loves it. Sometimes I think the organ knows her and loves her. It will certainly do more for her than for anybody else'.⁹⁵ And again, '[s]he knows how to make the organ, a living, speaking thing – a thing of spirit and life, an actual instrument of One Whose "voice is as the sound of many waters"'.⁹⁶ To Ruth, Frost's music was a tool to spiritual upliftment and inspiration. Much more important than the question of which composer or style of music she played, Frost could make her music an act of worship, one that raised a spiritual reaction in the devout. Her music, because she played it, was sacred. Yet her genius was not a freak of nature in Ruth's eyes. Frost's relationship with the organ was womanly. He later affirmed that she spoke of the organ as a temperamental child.⁹⁷ Whether a child, a lover, or friend, Frost nurtured and trained it to offer up its best and holiest qualities. No longer that almost androgynous and suspect creature, the single woman, Frost gained a new premise for respectability.

When yet another Choirmaster resigned in 1925, an idea mooted but rejected previously took hold. Lilian Frost was named Musical Director, her salary increased accordingly, and a greater degree of musical autonomy was finally realised. An unspoken policy also appears to have evolved, providing for Frost to obtain approval and guidance

⁹⁴ 'The Artist at the Organ', *News*, no.3, Aug. 1925, p.3.

⁹⁵ 'The 500th Organ Recital', *News*, no.10, Aug. 1926, back page.

⁹⁶ 'After Thirty Years' *News*, no.5, Oct.-Nov. 1925, p.3.

⁹⁷ 'Miss Frost's 900th Recital' *News*, Winter Number, July 1938, p.6.

direct from Ruth, rather than through the diaconate. On requesting permission for her annual leave at the end of 1926, Ruth encouraged Frost to take extended leave and return to Europe, a suggestion Frost willingly embraced. The leave was granted with full pay.⁹⁸ In the course of her subsequent travels to Europe, Frost visited Madame Pariongue a soprano soloist who had frequently participated, as Miss Ernestine Louat, in PSCC services and recitals earlier in the century. In Paris, Frost visited the home of the French composer, reputedly 'the greatest living organist' and successor to Widor at St Sulpice, Marcel Dupre. In England, she performed at the City Temple, London, other notable churches, and Wallasley Hall, Liverpool, where memory of her performance there fifteen years earlier attracted a large audience. A much-quoted paragraph in the *Liverpool Daily Post* added at least one original compliment to the usual superlatives; 'her rapid and unerring pedalling recall[ed] the brilliance of the late Mr W.T. Best'. 'Higher praise no organist could covet', the PSCC Choir secretary affectionately affirmed.⁹⁹

Lilian Frost resumed her 'musical ministry' in March 1928. It rapidly expanded in its physical reach.¹⁰⁰ Recognition of Frost's ministry meant that whereas before she acted as an individual participant in the musical life of the city, she now played for the church to the people of Sydney; she preached the Gospel through her music. Over the years, people wandered in off the street, attracted by her musical ministrations. She had held weekly lunchtime recitals for years, drawing the secular world into her sacred one. When the PSCC began to broadcast its Sunday services on 12 July 1925 on 2FC, she reached

⁹⁸ MODM, 26 Oct. 1925, 23 Nov. 1925, 22 Nov. 1926, and 20 Dec. 1926, in PSCC Records, vol.6, pp. 98-102, 134-136.

⁹⁹ 'Revival in Organ Music: Dupre the Master Praises Women Painters' *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 1939, p.8; and Robina Dallen, 'Report of the Pitt Street Congregational Church Choir', 23 Aug. 1928, in PSCC Records, vol.16, item 8, p.33.

¹⁰⁰ The Church and the wider Congregational community happily and busily fussed over her on her return. See MODM, 23 Jan. 1928, 20 Feb. 1928, and 26 March 1928 in PSCC Records, vol.6, pp.177-186; and 'May we have some more?' in *News*, no.17, Feb. 1930, p.4; also annual reports in *News* every Easter from 1926, and choir reports from 1926, in PSCC Records, vol.16, item 8; and 'Lilian Frost' in *Congregationalist*, vol.XIX, no.3, 10 March 1927, p.11.

thousands of listeners who in turn expressed their appreciation of the musical component of the program in writing. In 1932, the philanthropist Frederick Harold Stewart, M.P. (later Sir) founded 2CH, thus providing the Council of Churches with twenty hours of airtime a week. Having accepted its share, PSCC hosted the 'United Opening Service' broadcast on 15 February 1932.¹⁰¹ The venture extended the ministries of both Ruth and Frost far beyond the walls of the church. Sydney Congregationalists living in England reported that on Saturday evening their time, they had heard Frost playing at the Sunday service in Sydney. The broadcasts also blurred the boundaries between sacred and secular music, by airing music accepted as an aid to worship, into otherwise secular contexts.

The remarkable and inspirational Reverend T.E. Ruth was one of Frost's most enthusiastic fans. He had first heard Frost play decades earlier in Hobart, and even then noticed and appreciated the expressive quality of her music. While both ministered at PSCC, a creative partnership evolved, manifest most effectively in a series of anniversary celebrations held during the 1930s. The church marked its centenary in early May 1933 with a series of services and concerts. Subsequent PSCC anniversaries, beginning with its 101st in 1934, featured Lecture-Recitals arranged by Ruth and Frost. These successful and imaginative events centred on the poets and poetry of the quaint West Country of England: the first Lecture-Recital was entitled 'A Great Englishman of 101 Years Ago - Lord Alfred Tennyson, Poet, Philosopher, Patriot'. The next year featured Browning, the following year 'The Sons and Songs of Devon', then 'People and Places of the West Country', and 'The Sons and Songs of Dorset - Who's A-Fear'd?'¹⁰² Ruth spoke

¹⁰¹ 'The Broadcasted Service', *Congregationalist*, vol.XVII, no.4, 10 May 1925, p.1; Robina Dallen, 'PSCC Choir Report', 25 Nov. 1926, in PSCC Records, vol.16, item 8, p.25; 'News and Personal', no.6, 10 July 1925, p.3; Rev. A.E. West, 'Shall we Broadcast Our Message', *Congregationalist*, vol.XXV, no.2, 11 Feb. 1932, p.7; and 'United Opening Service', no.3, 4 March 1932, p.5. See also C.J. Lloyd, 'Stewart, Sir Frederick Harold', *ADB*, vol.12, pp.87-89.

¹⁰² Programs in 'Programmes and Service Sheets of the PSCC, 1858-1971', PSCC records, vol.70, item 3.

imaginatively about the subjects, while Frost arranged vocal and instrumental musical illustrations. Following the first of such events, the *Congregationalist* exclaimed, 'What a night! A veritable literary feast, musical treat, and inspiration to faith plus service'. Souvenir programs picturing the organ and the 'historic pulpit', were available to those who chose to contribute to the church funds. Appropriately, it also pictured both Ruth and Frost, 'the perfect pair of artists in the power of music and literature'.¹⁰³ For its tendency to inspire generous donations and its entertainment value, the idea was repeated year by year until onlookers began to wonder how far the theme could go. For Ruth and Frost, though, it seemed to provide an outlet for their expressive spirits.

Weekly lunchtime recitals constituted another aspect of Lilian Frost's musical service that crossed borders between the sacred and secular communities. From the beginning, the mid-day recitals attracted a regular following, and were believed to not only contribute to the pleasure of already existing lovers of organ music, but to have an effect on the general public. Among the 'many faithful members of her audience' was the District Court Judge Alfred Backhouse, who attended all but the first recital until he passed away.¹⁰⁴ Many others 'gathered' for the weekly recitals and Frost 'rejoice[d] that an age of "swing" [could] still love organ-music'. That the public volunteered enough money to enable her to continue for so long suggests the value of her music to them.¹⁰⁵

The twofold task of acquiring the wide range of music and the large number of soloists required over the years since the first recital in June 1913 itself entailed an enormous amount of energy and commitment. The recitals benefited the PSCC both as a result of the increased attention brought to it through the recitals, and in terms of

¹⁰³ 'Mr Ruth Starts a Second Century', *Congregationalist*, vol.XXVIII, no.5, 10 May 1934, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ 'One Thousand Recitals. Miss Frost's Fine Record', cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.152. See also K.J. Cable, 'Backhouse, Benjamin, and Alfred Paxton', *ADB*, vol.7, pp.127-28.

¹⁰⁵ See various cuttings in Frost, Scrapbook including '1000 Hours at an Organ', p.152; 'Percy Piccolo', 'Gossip of the Month. Lilian Frost', *MinA*, vol.V, no.9, 25 March 1930, p.9; and 'Miss Lilian

arrangements and relationships made with the city's new and established soloists. Conversely, many new talents gained early recital experience through Frost's weekly programs. During July 1934, for example, Frost gave performance opportunities to four relatively unknown young women: Phyllis Rolleston, Jean Morle, Dora Norris, and Josephine Sjeidau. She also arranged for Nita Williamson to sing a solo at the Sunday service on 21 July.¹⁰⁶ For high profile recitals or special church services such as Harvest Festivals and Easter Fridays, and Christmas productions of *The Creation* or *The Messiah*, Frost drew on the services of 'the front ranks of performers'.¹⁰⁷ These occasions featured solos by Elsie Findlay, Virginia Bassetti, Esther Kahn, Henri Staell, Stanley Clarkson, Dorothy Ewbank, Robert Harper, even Madame Emily Marks and Madame Ada Baker, and of course the elocutionist Lawrence Campbell. The reputations of Marks, Kahn and Campbell have already been mentioned. The French-trained Henri Staell taught violin at the Palings building in George Street, while the rest, all singers, frequently appeared with Sydney's various choral societies, or in their own recitals.¹⁰⁸ At Frost's request, Pitt Street Congregational Church engaged the Conservatorium trained lyric soprano Dorothy Ewbank as its choir leader in 1920, a position the singer retained for most of the decade.¹⁰⁹ Frost thus used her relationships with Sydney's musical community to the advantage of the church. Acting as choirmaster during Frost's absence, Walter T. Colyer complained to the diaconate about the difficulty of obtaining soloists of the same calibre as those usually engaged by her 'without cost, or in conjunction with her recitals', when she paid only a

Frost. Mid-day Recitals, 1913-34' *Harmony*, vol.3, no.31, 25 July 1934, p.30.

¹⁰⁶ 'Music in the Churches', *Harmony*, vol.1, no.9, 25 July 1934, p.7.

¹⁰⁷ 'Mid-day Organ Recitals', *Harmony*, vol.3, no.27, 25 March 1936, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ Elsie Findlay for Trip to England', *Australian Musical News*, vol.40, no.1, July 1949, p.7; advertisement re Henri Staell, *Harmony*, 17 May 1934, p.12; and numerous issues of *AMN* throughout the 1920s and 30s.

¹⁰⁹ MODM, 28 April 1920 in 'Feb. 22 1911 – Sept. 18 1922', PSCC Records, vol.5, p.224.

small fee. He was forced to pay large sums for Essie Ackland and Madame Vera Tasma to do the Sunday evening service solos.¹¹⁰

Just as she varied the choice of guest artist, so Frost also played a variety of music, some intended for organ, others transcribed. Bach proved popular, but that partly resulted from her 'particularly valuable' rendering of his work.¹¹¹ In her version of Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A Minor, for example, she 'preserved the dignity and separate entity of the themes, yet surpass[ed] the dry academism which used to be thought proper to Bach's weightier works'.¹¹² Frost confessed to preferring the 'classics' and the work of the Romantic composers Mendelssohn and Rheinberger which, critics agreed, she always played well. Composers such as Hollins, Lemare, Wolstenholme, and modern French works by Dupre and Vierne comprised other favourite inclusions. Frost also played Mozart, Handel, Bonnet, Fletcher, Saint Saens, Guilmant, Schubert, Beethoven and many others. Indeed she provided a 'feast' of classics, but also played 'lighter items for the self-styled "low-brows"'.¹¹³ Frost's choices represented a cross-section of classical, romantic and modern musical periods. The high era of organ music composed for recitals in concert halls occurred long after the passing of Handel and Bach. During the late eighteenth century, the amateurism of church musicians had led French and German composers to direct themselves at professionally trained recitalists and seek to exploit their virtuosity. This process, reaching its height in the mid-nineteenth century, involved many of the composers played by Frost. English writers and players still clung to the Romantic tradition in the early twentieth century, while French composers such as Guilmant, Widor,

¹¹⁰ Walter T. Colyer to R.A. Dallen (PSCC Treasurer), 5 Feb. 1924, in PSCC Records, vol.44, p.221.

¹¹¹ '900 Organ Recitals. Miss Lilian Frost's Record', cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.150.

¹¹² 'Music of Bach. Miss Lilian Frost's Recital', cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.150.

¹¹³ 'Sydney Workers like Bach. Nine Hundred Mid-day Recitals', cutting, source not cited, in Frost Scrapbook, p.152; 'Mid-day Organ Recitals' *Harmony*, vol.3, no.27, 25 March 1936, p.7; and '1000 Hours at an Organ', cutting, no source cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.152.

Dupre and Vierne, whose new work Frost sometimes acquired from the composer directly, began to emphasise liturgical aspects of organ music.¹¹⁴

As the years rolled on, Frost's weekly musical offerings approached marathon proportions. A sign of the significance of the recitals in both musical and Protestant worlds is the scale of congratulation from the public, the press, well-known musicians, politicians and members of the church that accompanied Frost's 1000th recital on 13 November 1940. Telegrams and messages of congratulation were received from the then Premier of NSW Alex Muir; the Director of the Conservatorium Dr Edgar Bainton; the Mayor of Launceston; the Archbishop of Sydney; and Reverend T.E. Ruth who had by that time retired to Adelaide.¹¹⁵ A much-loved singer of international reputation, then resident in New Zealand, Madame Antonia Dolores, also sent a letter of congratulation. Dr Edgar Ford, the English organist, composer, and examiner for Trinity Music College, London, wrote a special fantasia in honour of the occasion. Bouquets and floral gifts arrived in such numbers as to make choosing a posy to wear during the performance particularly difficult. Lilian settled on delphiniums from Madame Ada Baker. On behalf of the PSCC, the Rev C. Bernard Crockett presented a 'Dressing Table set', a suede handbag that included some money, and a 'handsome writing set' from the Church Choir.¹¹⁶

Speaking in honour of Frost's 500th recital, Ruth had prophetically prayed that she might 'inspire increasing crowds of people until she prepares for her 1000th programme - and then some'.¹¹⁷ On the occasion of the 1100th, one person read the program incorrectly as 11000.¹¹⁸ The mistake was reasonable. Frost's mid-day series continued to a grand total

¹¹⁴ See chronological entries under 'Organ Music' in Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians*, vol. 10, pp.20-27.

¹¹⁵ 'Miss Frost's 1000th Recital' *Congregationalist*, vol.XXIX [the volumes are misnumbered, and theoretically this is vol.XXXIII], no.12, 1 Dec. 1940, p.5.

¹¹⁶ '1000 Hours at an Organ', cutting, source not cited: 'Miss Frost's 1000th Recital'; and 'One Thousand Recitals. Miss Frost's Fine Record', cutting, source not cited, in Frost, Scrapbook, p.152.

¹¹⁷ 'The 500th Organ Recital', *PSCN*, no. 10, Aug. 1926, back page.

¹¹⁸ A.L.K. 'Towards Infinity', *AMN*, vol.34, no.4, Nov. 1943, p.10.

of 1300. Counting them, the two services given each Sunday for fifty four years, the various special services, weddings, seasons of Town Hall concerts, and incidental concerts and recitals in which she assisted other musicians, it is quite possible that performances by Lilian Frost in Sydney mounted to the 10000 mark. So numerous were her various performances in both religious and secular spheres, and so wide her reputation a broad cross-section of Sydney-siders eventually had the opportunity to hear her play in person. It should not have caused surprise to discover, for example, that my father and members of his family, formerly of Croydon Congregational Church, had attended special services conducted by Lilian Frost at the PSCC.

The Jubilee anniversary of Lilian Frost's ministry at Pitt Street Congregational Church, which occurred in September 1945, brought further congratulation, as well as commentary on her role in Sydney's cultural life. Students, church members, senior musical figures, musicians of national and international repute, radio listeners and music-lovers in Sydney and Launceston combined in honouring Frost through a 'Festival of Music' initiated by the church.¹¹⁹ Critics thought seriously about her service to sacred music and the longevity of her career. Their experience of sacred music consisted of secular performances at Easter or Christmas time and they assumed that inside the churches music served a purely functional purpose. Most church musicians, it was thought, played as if 'pitted against the high musical standards of concert goers'. Lilian Frost offered a different standard of sacred music. She also offered emotive, even spiritual

¹¹⁹ At a special service on 30 September, featuring a united Rockdale, Cathedral and PSCC choir, the congregation offered Frost a very generous gift of £500. Unfortunately a large proportion of this was lost in tax. MODM, 15 May 1945, in '16 April 1932 – 24 Sept. 1946', PSCC Records, vol.7, p.325; MOCM 27 June 1945; 1 Aug. 1945; 26 Sept. 1945; and 2 Jan. 1946 in 'Church Meetings 29 Nov. 1922 to 21 July 1946', PSCC Records, vol.14, pp.328-333; and 'The Lilian Frost Jubilee Celebration', insert in PSCC Service Sheet, 'Celebration Services for the Lilian Frost Jubilee (organist since 1895)', 30 Sept. 1945, in PSCC Records, vol.70; 'Lilian frost Jubilee Concert', source not cited, cutting in Betty Marie White, 'Scrapbooks of Newspaper Cuttings 1945-1950', ML F780.8/1, vol.2, p.115; 'Pitt Street' *Congregationalist*, vol.XXXIII [XXXVII], no.11, Nov.-Dec. 1945, p.12. See also 'Tribute Paid to Organist', source not cited;

or sacred interpretations of organ music to secular audiences in concert halls. It was thought that she formed a link with a mystical past when high music reigned supreme with little threat from technology, mediocrity or apathy. Lilian Frost was 'of today as well as that half-century ago, when the Philharmonic shone in its glory; when Hazon was Czar of local music and those two giants, Weigand and the Town hall organ, were associated'.¹²⁰ In the immediate wake of the Second World War Frost served as a symbolic, though not the only link between the past and present, religious and secular.

As a woman Frost likewise represented both the evangelical ideal and the new woman. 'Shy and softly spoken', long-suffering and caring, she could be characterised, as testified by Ruth time and again, in respectable feminine terms.¹²¹ In that vein, music served as an adornment to family and public life. The organ was her life, her child, and the Church her home. Her service was not to husband and children, but to Church, denomination, and city. Yet she did not simply adorn each sphere, but interacted with and ministered to them. In addition, though meeting all the behavioural requisites of a 'lady' in person, Frost took on board the modern woman's enlarging expectations of professional achievement. Her extraordinary talent as an organist confounded notions that women could not adequately play the organ. Comments made by W.H. Jude, Edwin Lemare and Marcel Dupre concerning female organists confirmed Frost's own arguments that no reason existed to prevent women from playing the organ. Contemporary descriptions of Lilian Frost as an artist, a genius, and a master of her instrument conveyed an absoluteness of achievement rarely attributed to women engaged in the arts in the late nineteenth and

Invitation, 'An Evening at the Lyceum Club', 4 Sept 1945, RSVP Joyce McMillan; and 'Lilian Frost's 50 Years at the Organ', source not cited, cutting in Frost, Scrapbook, p.153.

¹²⁰ 'Lilian Frost's 50 Years at the Organ', source not cited, cutting in Frost, Scrapbook, p.153; and A.L.K., 'Veteran Organist's Jubilee. Sydney Honours Lilian Frost', *AMN*, vol.XXXVI, no.6, Dec. 1945, p.23.

¹²¹ '50 Years As An Organist' *Daily Mirror*, 28 Sept. 1945, page not cited, from Launceston Reference Library, Whitfeld Collections.

early twentieth century. Her prominence earned her a wide reputation and the respect of not only Australian, but European and American musical experts. Within the church, when only a handful of Congregational women had been ordained, Frost was seen as a minister of the gospel. Across Australia, through broadcasts, she spread the gospel of sacred music. For all her links with the past, therefore, Lilian Frost's example also spoke volumes to her female, musical and religious contemporaries in 1945 when they rose as one to celebrate her achievements.

In 1946 the PSCC diaconate began to worry about the future of its musical ministry. Its importance was fervently acknowledged, and a subcommittee established to secure Lilian Frost's input on the subject before her ministry came to an end. A hip injury in 1947 and the onset of Alzheimer's disease severely and sadly disrupted the remaining years of her service to the church and musical community. She resigned in 1949 and passed away in December 1953 just weeks before her greatest admirer, Reverend Ruth, died. Over the half-century or so that she lived in Sydney, Frost had taught, encouraged and acted as a patron to numerous musical students and composers. She represented, on the one hand, a ground-swell of women teachers and musicians who likewise acted as patrons of a new generation of music-lovers, and on the other, an outstanding example of feminine musical accomplishment particularly given the masculinity originally assumed necessary for her instrument of choice. By offering music that uplifted and inspired her listeners Lilian Frost had met the hopes expressed by the city's musicians and upper middle class in the early 1930s, when technology, jazz and social change threatened the spread and consolidation of cultural appreciation in Sydney. Frost extended this project into the context of the church through recitals and an increased emphasis on musical worship. Her actions fell in line with liberal theology, but it also expressed the aspirations and fears of a wider culture-conscious community.

Lilian Frost's interest in the development and welfare of Sydney's musical community thus united her not only with fellow musicians, but also with women of Sydney's upper social circles. Such women, as individual patrons, as daughters, wives, mothers, and fashionable exemplars, or working in informal networks had contributed to particular aspects of the cultural life of the city. Some women, including Lady Game and Lady Gordon, acted as patrons to the same musical campaigns that had attracted Frost's immediate support. That their patronage was not exclusively musical but rather expressive of broader interests that gained currency in the early 1930s is confirmed by their participation in schemes to assist theatrical and artistic causes during the same period. Lady Game supported the artistic campaigns of Ethel Anderson while Gordon devoted her energies to the needs of the city's fledgling repertory theatres. Lady Gordon's patronage of the theatre, like Lilian Frost's musical ministry, though remarkable has not to date been noted. Her story thus follows.



This Page: Lilian Frost at the console at the Hill and Son organ, Pitt Street Congregational Church, Sydney, c.1912, Pitt Street Congregational Church records, PIC. ACC. 2155.

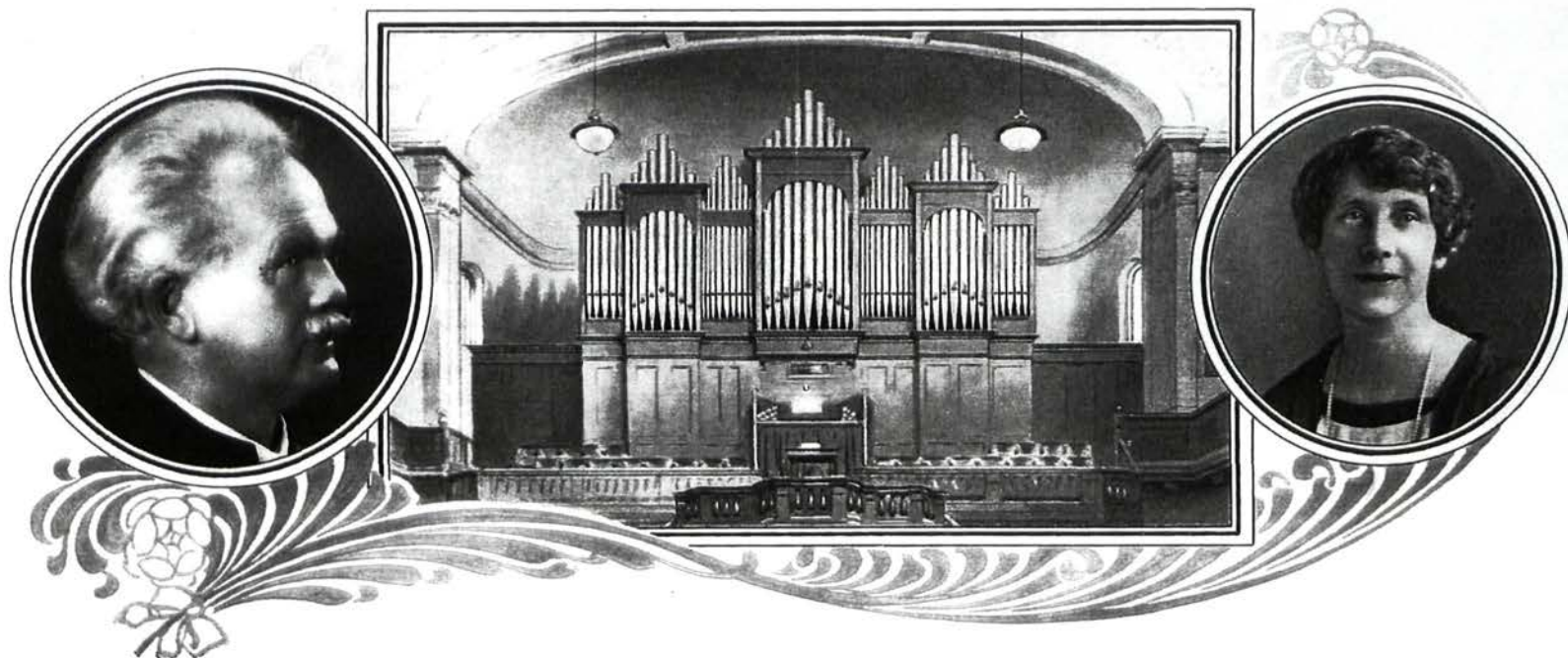
PITT STREET CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Miss Lilian Frost's
1000th
Mid-day Organ Recital

Wednesday, November 13th, 1940
1.15 p.m.

This Souvenir Programme belongs to



Above left: Pitt Street Congregational Church, Lecture-Recital, 'A Great Englishman 101 Years Ago - Lord Alfred Tennyson', souvenir program, 2 May 1934.

Above right: 'Music Week', *Music in Australia*, 25 July 1930, p.6.

MUSIC WEEK

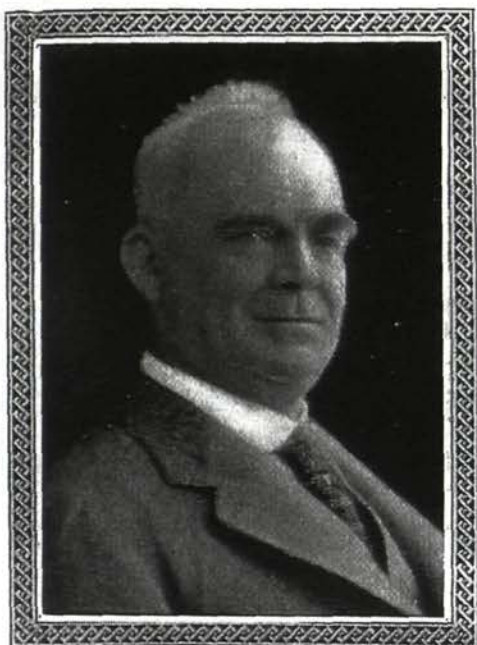
What Are You
Doing For It?



Members of
Committee:
Mr. Roland
Foster and
Miss Lillian
Frost.

Depression or no depression, Sydney means to have its Music Week. The land literally resounds with preparations. Babies are lisping their rhymes, bandsmen trumpeting their parts, clergy polishing their sermons—all joined in the joyful concatenation which, from August 30 to September 6, will merge into the vast and stimulating harmony of Music Week.

Mr. G. Faunce-
Aliman and
Mrs. Emily
Marks.



Richards photo.
Mr. Lawrence Campbell.



May Moore photo.
Dorothy Ewbank,
Lyric Soprano.

Top left: Lawrence Campbell, *Australian Musical News*, Oct. 1927, p.29.

Top right: Dorothy Ewbank, *Australian Musical News*, Sept. 1927, p.37.

Bottom right: Herr Josef Kretschmann, *Harmony*, 17 April 1934, p.16.

Bottom left: *Harmony*, 17 April 1934, p.17.



Miss Esther Kahn.



Herr Josef Kretschmann, 1839-1922.