



## History

### Margaret Murray 1921-2015

#### Early Life and First Encounters with Orff, Keetman and Orff-Schulwerk

*Kate Buchanan*

Margaret Murray was an important figure in the early developments of Orff-Schulwerk in Europe and especially in the UK. She is perhaps best known, outside the UK, for her translations and adaptations of the Music for Children volumes published by Schott (1957-66). She founded the Orff Society UK in 1964 and almost single-handedly introduced Orff-Schulwerk to teachers across the UK.

In the years before Margaret died, Kate set out to write a biography of Margaret for publication, largely based on interviews with her. Sadly, Margaret died before these were completed. Fortunately, Kate has written a considerable amount on Margaret's early life, her first meetings and ongoing friendship with Carl Orff, and her work on the English version of the Orff-Schulwerk Music for Children Volumes as well as establishing Orff-Schulwerk in the UK. What follows is an article based on this work which covers the first phases of Margaret's life and work. A second article will be prepared for a subsequent issue (Editor).

#### Early Years and Tragic Times

Margaret Murray was born on 11 March, 1921 in Lille, France, to father James Robertson Murray (born 1886) and mother Helen Brookes Wilson (born 1888, from Connecticut, USA). In early 1923, her father was promoted to the position of Inspector of Consulates. This involved touring Egypt and Syria. According to Margaret it was not a job he liked at all and necessitated long periods away from his family. When Margaret was three years old the family moved to England.

Margaret had many fond memories of time spent with her father playing games and enjoying music together despite the fact that he was away on business for much of the time. She remembered playing piano duets with him from a very young age which certainly supported her musical progress in ensemble playing and listening, and helped create a strong bond between father and daughter. Her father's fascination with words was shared by his only daughter and would later become extremely important to Margaret in both her personal and professional life.

When Margaret was 9 years old her father died, having become ill while travelling home from South America. *"His cold turned into pneumonia and when the ship docked he was in a coma and he died in the nursing home to which he was transferred the next day. I was waiting excitedly for him at school, standing just outside the front door from time to time. Perhaps those who met his boat at Southampton did not know of his intention to visit me. In any case, I knew nothing, but was only increasingly feeling full of an awful dread that something must be very wrong. It was so unlike him not to send a message to say he couldn't come. I don't know when the school was told of his death but they didn't tell me until the Thursday – 4 days later – I was going about in a sort of trance until that moment...."* Not long after, her mother contracted rheumatic fever and was hospitalised. She died a few

weeks later. Margaret was 10 years old. Later in a diary entry, she remarked on the trauma of losing both her parents: *'You don't have any sort of feeling of belonging anywhere particular. I couldn't claim anything from anybody. I was eternally having to be grateful for everything that everybody did to me or for me.'* For a young girl to be orphaned at such a young age and without the support of siblings around her must have been a truly tragic situation.

Margaret was sent away to school as a boarder and when she was 12 she became a boarder at Wycombe Abbey School, a private school. Here Margaret was able to focus her energies on music and languages, she developed her love of piano playing and took up the cello. She remembered clearly her teachers recognising her musical talent and providing her with practice time on one of the many pianos in the school. We can already see Margaret's abilities to understand the task in hand, make a plan and carry it out efficiently when she described performing the slow movement of Grieg's Piano Concerto with the school orchestra. *'I knew it well and was on top of the technical difficulties'*. This was as far as Margaret was prepared to acknowledge her success in what is a challenging and emotionally demanding work. She was clearly building her inner confidence as a performer and was fortunate to have received a good level of tuition and opportunities to perform in public.

### **The War Years at the Royal College of Music, London 1939-1943**

Margaret studied piano with Herbert Fryer and Phyllis Sellick at the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London taking piano accompaniment and cello as second studies. Despite the difficulties and limitations of studying during the war years in London, Margaret reports working a 51-hour week at College, preparing concertos including Mozart's KV488 and the Schumann Piano Concerto, accompanying fellow students and playing cello in the college orchestras. Music offered her somewhere to excel, work alongside like-minded young people and learn from some of the best musicians in London at the time. By December 1942, Margaret's husband-to-be, Walter Jellinek was her piano duo partner and a year later they married.

### **Early Married Life 1943-51**

In May 1944, Margaret joined Walter in Sussex where they both taught for the following academic year. Margaret did not complete her studies due to the war and was compelled to choose between a teaching job, nursing or joining the armed forces just three months before the end of her studies. This meant that she was unable to receive a diploma which would have enabled her to teach in the state education sector. In 1945, they moved to South London and Margaret started teaching cello at Wycombe Abbey School. Walter established and conducted the Walter Jellinek Orchestra for which Margaret played the cello and provided administrative support. In 1949 Margaret and Walter moved to Richmond. Both continued to be involved in a range of professional work in London and surrounding areas as chamber music performers, accompanists for instrumentalists and singers as well as teaching.

### **Later Married Life and Travel 1952- 1956: 'The Concert That Changed Everything'**

In May 1952, Margaret and Walter attended a concert given by the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by the renowned conductor Herbert von Karajan at the Royal Festival Hall in London. This was to become the start of a new direction in both their lives. It was evident that for Walter to progress further as a conductor, he needed to gain experience at a higher

level. He approached Karajan after the concert to ask if he might have conducting lessons. This was turned down but Walter was invited to attend rehearsals in Vienna and continue to 'shadow' Karajan as he toured with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Thus began a period in Margaret's life which involved a great deal of travel in Austria, Germany and Italy.

Based in Vienna, Walter attended all of Karajan's rehearsals making himself useful by recording all these sessions on reel to reel tape. Margaret and Walter accompanied the orchestra's tour through Germany, in 1952 staying in Rome, and then Milan when Karajan was working at *La Scala* opera house. Walter began by playing piano at all the preliminary vocal rehearsals of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, and as finances were becoming somewhat tight, approached Karajan's secretary who was able to arrange for him to be paid for his work as a repetiteur. In 1953, Margaret and Walter attended the first performance of Carl Orff's trilogy *Trionfi* at *La Scala*, Milan, conducted by Karajan.

### **First encounters with Carl Orff, Gunild Keetman and Orff-Schulwerk**

Margaret attended the recording sessions of the Orff-Schulwerk Volumes 1 & 2 (German edition) in Munich in November 1956 and January 1957. It was here that she got to know Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman, and the pieces selected for the recording provided a useful insight into the Schulwerk. This kind of immersive experience must have given Margaret a deep insight into the philosophy, ethos and overall scope of the Schulwerk as created by Orff and Keetman. It is likely that they involved her: In '*Carl Orff: The Schulwerk*', Orff states that she was part of the recording team (Orff Documentation Vol 3, p. 240). During the days of the recording, Margaret and Walter had lunch together with Orff and Keetman enjoying the traditional dish *Leberknödelsuppe* (liver dumpling soup). Margaret reports in her diary that they talked much and later they visited Orff in Diessen am Ammersee.

For Margaret the recording sessions provided opportunities to hear the Schulwerk and understand what both creators were looking for in terms of the quality of musical understanding and performance. Keetman by this time had many years' experience developing the Schulwerk material with young people as performers, improvisers and composers as well as preparing the regular schools' programmes for the Bavarian Radio. Where Margaret lacked experience was in how to introduce the material and then develop it in a way that did not rely on a theoretical and technical understanding of music. This was to come later.

In January 1957, Walter Legge proposed that it would be a good idea to create English recordings and that all that was needed was someone to find equivalent English texts for the speech exercises and songs. The 'other' Walter (Margaret's husband), immediately said 'My wife will do that'. This statement is perhaps not that strange given Margaret's musical background and her intense interest in poetry, but as she herself remarks, it was perhaps an indicator of the relationship between husband and wife as he (that is, Walter Jellineck) did not consult her. Margaret's involvement in this project gradually took up more and more of her time and energy and started her on a journey which would become her life's work.

From these beginnings, Margaret's understanding and experience of the Schulwerk evolved over time – as she states, 'in gradual and subtle ways' with the two creators taking on the

role of mentor in an ongoing exchange of ideas. In Margaret's first attempts to choose and set text it was clear that her classical music training was not always helpful. In an interview with Hermann Regner in 1998, Margaret describes her first attempts as 'totally unsatisfactory', basing her ideas as she did on the harmony and counterpoint learnt at school and continued at the Royal College of Music. As her understanding of the Schulwerk developed, she was able to apply her knowledge and experience of music to the requirements of the task in hand: 'as a means of communication without being dependent on classical forms'. It is clear that Margaret was a quick learner. Her task to find equivalent English songs and rhymes to use in the English recordings was her first priority. In her interview in 1998, Margaret describes her fascination with words and how the Schulwerk came to her as if a light were suddenly turned on. Her fascination with words meant that the task was all encompassing and she would look endlessly through poems for the right one.

On her return to London, Margaret spent many hours in the British Library at the British Museum reading through old collections of folk and children's poetry to find equivalents that were a 'best fit' to the rhymes and songs in the German volumes. Three publications which served as source material were *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951), *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* (1955) and, in relation to the later volumes, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), all by Iona and Peter Opie (OUP).

In some instances, she made a direct translation (e.g. My Little Pony) whilst others were sourced from existing children's rhymes and songs. On occasions where a particular structure, rhythm or message was needed, Margaret used a German poem, translated it into English and created a new melody and accompaniment (e.g. OSW Murray, Vol 1, p.18 'The Baker').

Taking inspiration from the published works created by the Opies, Margaret was acutely aware of the need to delve into the darker side of children's imagination. She was critical of those who sought to 'prettify' songs and rhymes for children. A story she related to me concerned the words of the nursery rhyme 'Little Miss Muffet' which had been changed in a school she subsequently taught in as shown below. She was extremely insistent that children should have the possibility of being 'frightened' or fearful in the context of a rhyme because, as she saw it, being scared is part of learning to be a grown up; as Iona Opie remarked: "You need to be introduced to possible troubles early on from a safe haven, then it's not such a shock later". This approach was very much shared by Margaret who saw children's rhymes in all their richness spanning as they do a gamut of opposing emotions: warmth and comfort, shock and horror, scariness, daring, showmanship and so on.

Margaret had seen a copy of Doreen Hall's adaptation of Vol. 1 of the *Schulwerk* prior to her creating her own version. Orff and Keetman had voiced a number of criticisms about the Hall adaptation particularly in relation to her choice of texts, re-ordering of the material and the extensive omissions in the later volumes. Margaret was also critical as we shall see later. She considered that Hall had sanitised the language and avoided representing the nasty side of human behaviour in some of the songs and chants. For example, Vol. 1, no. 20 Ladybird, Ladybird:

English original	Doreen Hall version
Ladybird, ladybird, Fly away home, Your house is on fire And your children all gone.	Ladybird, ladybird, Fly away home, Your house is on fire Your children alone.

The task for the English recordings was to mirror the content of the German recordings. Given that Margaret was present throughout the latter process, it would seem logical that she had assimilated the musical qualities and could then base her choices on this experience in addition to consulting the German volumes. As she had no experience at this point of teaching the material, the choices were more than likely made in terms of the musical qualities of the material rather than on a knowledge of the pedagogical challenges.

### **Recordings of English Volumes 1 & 2**

Margaret masterminded the English recordings which took place in June 1957. The situation that Margaret found herself in was not an easy one. Walter Legge, who had initiated the plan to create English recordings, turned against Orff following poor reviews of *Der Mond* in the USA. As a result, he made it as difficult as he could for the recordings to take place and it was only due to Margaret's tenacity and powers of organisation that they took place at all. She remarked in her diaries that Legge's rudeness was very upsetting for everyone. In just two months and against the odds Margaret proved her now legendary organisational skills and put everything in place within this extremely short timeframe. Walter Legge decreed that due to financial constraints the whole project had to be finished by the end of June. Fortunately, the recording engineer who had undertaken the German recordings in Munich of the German volumes was available. Margaret had just over a month to arrange for the Studio 49 instruments to be imported and set in motion the process of finding children, rehearsing them, booking percussionists (with the help of percussion legend James Blades) and ensuring that Gunild Keetman was available to oversee the whole project. With her contacts, Margaret was able to ensure the best quality musicians were found who could be prepared in the minimum of time. These included the Chorus of the Children's Opera Group, director Margaret John, the Chorus of the Bancroft School for Boys, JG Wright 'music master', and the Italia Conti School Speech Ensemble. Walter Jellinek is credited on the recordings and, according to Margaret, he was in charge of the rehearsals, directed the ensembles and ensured the artistic quality. As ever, Margaret would not wish to be in the limelight and deferred to others, but it is certain that the project was undertaken as a joint enterprise. Walter clearly had experience in what was involved in preparing the music to a good standard and was familiar with the technicalities of the recording process. Without Margaret's practical skills, it is unlikely that the project would have been successful. Undeterred by challenges and always willing to learn, Margaret's ability here was to stay calm, provide a guiding hand and ensure that organisationally everything was in place to the best of her ability. Due to her presence at the German recording sessions, she had already absorbed much of the processes involved in a recording setup. This was clearly a steep learning curve and yet her diary entries demonstrate a confidence with the language of the world of recording referring to 'takes', 'patching' and 'cutting and pressing' of the records.

The recordings were completed within two weeks with rehearsals beginning the week before. Margaret's notes in her diary: 'Recordings went quite well' which is a typical understatement from a woman who had single-handedly brought the project to fruition. The challenges of ensuring that everything happened at the right time and with the correct line-up of musicians required Margaret to take on a sometime role as performer. For example, the second vocal line in 'Sleep, baby, sleep' was put in afterwards by Margaret and Gunild Keetman and the final cello pattern in 'Sumer is icumen in' is the sound of Margaret's cello as one of the cellists finished one pattern too early. She relished the re-telling of this story and was secretly rather pleased that she was there on the recording. Margaret's voice can also be heard in Vol II singing an unaccompanied solo where she notes that she was 'trying to sound like a child'. The recordings finished on Sunday 23 June and Gunild returned home.

### References

Hennessy, S. (Ed.) (2013) *Reflections on Orff-Schulwerk. Essays in celebration of Margaret Murray.* Mainz:Schott.

Orff, C. & Keetman, G. (1957-1966) *Orff-Schulwerk. Music for Children Vol.s I – V.* English version adapted by Margaret Murray (Original work published 1950-54). Mainz: Schott.

*Note: In the following years, Margaret Murray published several supplements in the same series.*

CD "Orff-Schulwerk. Music for Children" with a selection from the five volumes of Murray's adaption (1957). London: Schott Music.



**Kate Buchanan** is currently Deputy Chair of Orff UK. Kate was formerly Head of Creative & Professional Practice at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester where she managed a wide-ranging programme of vocational and specialist training. Recent Orff projects include course director for an ongoing London-based CPD Programme: 'Teaching Music with the Orff Approach' and a trip to Croatia to lead workshops for 'The Sound of the Garden' summer course for the Croatian Orff -Schulwerk Association. Her consultancy work has included projects for Channel 4 Learning, the London

Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Foundation for Youth Music. Kate is co-author with Stephen Chadwick of *Music Connections: Practical Music for all Primary Teachers* published by Cramer Music.