

THE LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE J. S. BATTYE LIBRARY OF WEST AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
Oral History Programme

an interview with

MISS FLORA M. BUNNING

July - August 1984

MUSIC IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Sports/Culture Instant Lottery]

conducted by

Ronda Jamieson

Verbatim transcript
(3.20hrs in 4 x 60 tapes)
OH628

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Miss Bunning was born in Perth in 1903, the daughter of Helen and Robert Bunning. She talked of her family life and some aspects of her father's business activity. After attending Miss Annie Webbitt's private school where she learnt piano, Miss Bunning won a two year scholarship to attend the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 1920 and 1921. On her return to Perth she played at private recitals, did accompanying work, and later broadcast for the ABC. During the Second World War she played in Army Education Concerts for servicemen, which led to involvement in Department of Adult Education concerts after the War. Both these activities took her to many country towns as accompanist and soloist. Miss Bunning has had a vital role to play in many of Perth's musical activities and organisations. She was the Founder President of the Chamber Music Society of W.A. She has served as a President of the Music Council of W.A., of the ABC's W.A. Subscribers Orchestral Committee, and of Musica Viva Australia. Miss Bunning has been an executive member of the Festival of Perth Committee and its music sub-committee, of the Friends of the Festival Committee, and the University Music Society. She has also been involved in work for the Art Gallery Society and for the National Trust.

Miss Bunning was interviewed on July 17th and August 29th 1992 by Ross Lawrence. There are four tapes.

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Miss Flora Bunning for the Battye Library Oral History Program, made possible by the grant from the Instant Lotteries Distribution Advisory Committee.

Miss Bunning was born in Perth in 1903, the daughter of Helen and Robert Bunning. She talked of her family life and some aspects of her Father's business activity. After attending Miss Annie Nesbitt's private school where she learnt piano, Miss Bunning won a two year scholarship to attend the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 1920 and 1921. On her return to Perth she played at private recitals, did accompanying work, and later broadcast for the ABC. During the Second World War she played in Army Education Concerts for servicemen, which led to involvement in Department of Adult Education concerts after the War. Both these activities took her to many country towns as accompanist and soloist. Miss Bunning has had a vital role to play in many of Perth's musical activities and organisations. She was the Founder President of the Chamber Music Society of W.A. She has served as a President of the Music Council of W.A., of the ABC's W.A. Subscribers Orchestral Committee, and of Musica Viva Australia. Miss Bunning has been an executive member of the Festival of Perth Committee and its music sub-committee, of the Friends of the Festival Committee, and the University Music Society. She has also been involved in work for the Art Gallery Society and for the National Trust.

Miss Bunning was interviewed on July 30th and August 29th 1984 by Ronda Jamieson. There are four tapes.

FB My full name is Flora MacRae Bunning and I was born in Forrest Street, East Perth (that is below the Roman Catholic Cathedral) in 1903.

RJ And who was your Mother?

FB My mother was a Highland woman, her name was MacRae, and she lived most of her life in the Highlands of Scotland. She was born in Glasgow but she lived in the Highlands for a long time in a place called Kinloch-rannoch and she married my Father in, well, I suppose 1902, and came out here. Her first stay was spent in Forrest Street and then in about 1904 or 1905 we came down to Peppermint Grove, and in about 1906 we bought this house in Mosman Park which is now St. Hilda's School. We had about 3 or 4 acres of land, then we had cows and horses and fig trees and the front was all paddock. Next door was bush where we used to pick wild-flowers and down in front there was a great wheatfield, I think it belonged to the Sampson family, and there was Mosman Bay, but we couldn't walk through the wheatfield to take a short cut to the river because they had a caretaker there who used to walk round with a gun and stopped us trespassing, and the only way was to go down a sandy lane, a black sandy lane to get to the river. before that we used to be in Freshwater Bay and we used to spend our mornings in the holidays just in the river, diving off a sunken boat and diving off the Scotch College boatshed. We had a very easy, very simple youth. We might have gone to Perth perhaps a couple of times a year. A lot of people had tennis courts then, now they've all been built on, but we used to play a lot of tennis, go over to the beach, go down to the river, go out crabbing in the evenings and boil the billy on Freshwater Bay on the sands and just have kerosene tins and a so very simple, beautiful life. We were very lucky. No children could live like that today.

- RJ How many were there in the family?
- FB My Mother was my Father's second wife. He had two by his first wife and five by my Mother.
- RJ What are their names and do you know their date of birth?
- FB Oh, I can't quite. I was the eldest and then my brother Charles. I was 1903, he would have been 1905. My sister Jane would have been 1906 - they had them regularly in those days. Then my sister Angie and my brother Tom. When I was seven there were five of us.
- RJ Well, Gavin, I hoped... Tom as you call him ...
- FB Is Gavin.
- RJ Is Gavin, and he was born in 1910.
- FB Was he? That adds up.
- RJ Right. So within seven years. And what were the names of your stepbrother and sister?
- FB Gena and Joe.
- RJ And who was your Father.
- FB Well, he was Robert Bunning, and his father was a builder in London. I know my niece has done a lot of research on the family and evidently he built quite a lot of the old churches in London. Not St. Paul's, nor any of the more famous ones [Laughter], but he did do a lot of church building, and my Father, he was the builder for the Trinity Church in St. George's Terrace here, and he had, oh, I can't remember all his family, but we didn't have many relatives here; nor have we now. They are scattered round and we haven't kept in touch with them.

RJ What was he like as a father?

FB Oh, very gentle. He was a gentle man always. My mother was the strong one. Well, he was strong, but mother was the one who 'held the whip' as it were, and my father's strongest expression (he never swore) his strongest expression was "Golly!: [Laughs] Golly!

RJ How much did you see of him growing up?

FB Oh, a lot. He used to catch the train. In the early days he'd catch the train up to Perth. Our office and mills were in Wellington Street then, and he would catch the train up there and catch the train back in the evening, and always in summer he would play with us. We had big lawns and things and he'd go chasing us around and just be one of us. There wasn't a great deal of social life then. He was never a society man, ever, because he was a simple man. They'd give dinner parties and things like that, but they'd be home during the day a lot, or my mother would. Of course, in those days we also had servants, but my mother was a good Scot who liked the family to be very capable and do everything in the house. She was never happier than when we were sitting down doing the family darning, or else when she was having a party we would help make the cakes and have the groaning table! [Laughter] So it was a very uncomplicated existence.

RJ What servants did you have?

FB Well, when we were younger we had a nurse, and we would have a cook and housemaid, and a laundress. We had a full time gardener. At one time our cook married the gardener. She became quite a character, and then after a while she came back as our laundress and she used to come and visit us, oh, until she was getting on for 70 or 80 I think. We always helped. We weren't waited on much, well, naturally, with seven then; seven, with mother and father in the house. So, we always made our own beds and helped with the cooking if there were anything special on.

But then, our maids used to be our friends too. There was nothing we liked better. I remember one cook who married one of the old families, Caporn, Sam Caporn she married, and she had a little house in East Fremantle, very narrow, and she had a kangaroo down at the back and we used to love to go down there and see the kangaroo, and to see old Charlotte (which was her name). And then we had two sisters who were house and parlour maid, and they lived in South Perth and we used to love to go with them for picnics at Como on Sunday. In the end one of their brothers became Secretary of Bunning Brothers; he was there for years and years and years. We loved being with them. Also we used to think we treated our servants well. This Nellie and Nettie, I remember, they shared one little bedroom. When we had nurse we had the nursery and we had a all our beds out *on* a verandah *which went* all the way around the house and it was partitioned off a bit, and we always slept out there. There were five of us in the nursery and the nurse shared the nursery, and when I think of it, poor dear, no privacy. But they were happy. Amazing, isn't it? I think they probably got thirty bob a week or something.

RJ Did all the servants live in?

FB Yes. Not the gardener, of course, he lived nearby. But most people had live-in servants. When I say most people.... you see they got, what, thirty bob a week I think they used to be paid. We did have a great big kitchen which was comfortable, but they wouldn't have their own sitting room or anything. Well, see, here we haven't any mansions with terrific servants' quarters as they have in the Eastern States, so they didn't have beautiful sitting rooms of their own or anything.

RJ So the servants would have ate in the kitchen, would they?

FB Oh, yes.

RJ You spoke of cows. Were they cows that were milked?

FB Oh, yes. The gardener used to milk every morning and every evening, but my brothers used to get a bit indignant because in weekends if he were off they would have to milk the cows and they didn't like that, but they had to do it.

RJ Did any separating of cream go on?

FB We had a great big range and great big shallow basins, like that, and we always used to have a basin on the range and get the scalded cream off that. I remember we used to have the old ice cream churn, a wooden churn, and you had to have salt and put it all round it. We had a cook who used to make a lot of ice cream for us in those days. She would make it in the afternoon and then she would sit on it because if we came home from school we tried to steal it you see. [Laughs] So she always used to sit on this wooden churn to save the ice cream. [Laughs] We got very fond of most of our servants, or maids, whatever you called them then.

RJ If we could just cover a few aspects of your Father and his business activities. There has been an article written about him and his life in early days by Jenny Mills, and she refers to "times of acute financial stress as Robert raised money to improve milling methods and introduce new machines." Was this noticeable in your family life?

FB Not to the children because in those days the children weren't told very much, and so I don't remember anything of that. I do remember later on, during the Depression, but

FB that was general, of course, and we didn't have servants then. I can remember people coming round asking for food and, of course, we could always give them that, but we couldn't give them jobs. I do remember that.

RJ And what happened when you didn't have servants?

FB Oh, we all helped. My Mother was very capable and then my step-sister was always a great help, and we were all able to do things for ourselves then. You see, money didn't matter in one way. These days the young have to have so many possessions, expensive possessions. We didn't have anything. Well, I suppose the boys had a cricket bat and we had a tennis racquet. The boys used to make crystal radio sets, that was our most sophisticated radio, so as I said there weren't the demands then. Oh, you were talking about the business worries. I don't know when the Charles Street thing was built, but the business in Wellington Street was burnt down and then we moved over to Charles Street, and then I remember that fire. One day my Father was rung up to be told that the place was on fire and was absolutely gutted. That really was a terrible blow. But I can remember my Father then, as I said he never fussed, because at home we had two family portraits of his grandparents and my Mother always hated them. So in the end he took them up to the office in Charles Street and they were hanging I think in the boardroom there and I went up with him. We watched the place smouldering away and burning to bits, and he just turned to me, he said "Well, Bun, at least the ancestors have gone." [Laughs] And that's all the comment he made.

RJ That was quite a disaster because the company was just recovering from the Depression at the time.¹

FB Yes.

1. Ibid.

RJ Even after that, that didn't make him depressed or difficult to live with for a time, or something?

FB No, no, ever. No, he was very equable.

RJ Right. The company, of course, owned timber yards in many areas, and there were saw mills as well. I wondered if you ever saw much of these operations?

FB Oh, yes, we used to love to go down with my father.

We had one in Argyle. I remember visiting there. In the early days we had one in, it's Mount Helena now, but in Lyons Mill, he bought. That was one of the early ones and we loved to go up there, by train, and spend the day with Mr. and Mrs. Graham. He was the manager. We used to go down to Argyle, and Lyalls Mill, that was the bigger one out of Collie. They were always days we enjoyed.

RJ You then had moves by the Bank of New South Wales to foreclose on your father, and there were several months of the firm being investigated by an auditor who eventually "reported that it was quite sound."¹

FB Yes, yes, that was very bad because we had always dealt with the Bank of New South Wales. They had a very difficult manager then, and he wanted to foreclose, which would have ruined what had been a good business. My brother Charles.... he was in Melbourne at the time, but my brother Tom, who was a very young man, he went and interviewed and got the overdraft taken over by the E. S. & A. Bank, which was something for a young man in those days, and, of course, things have, touch wood, gone well ever since.

RJ Do you remember your father being hurt by that episode?

1. Ibid.

- FB No. At that stage we didn't know about it. This was, what year was that? I can't even remember the year.
- RJ It was the morning after the fire that the Bank of New South Wales first rang. So that would be 1933.
- FB Then, as I say, Tom, went to the E. S. & A. Bank, who took over the overdraft and so saved the firm really. And since then it has grown. I think my Father would have been very proud of his sons because they have been in it ever since, and their sons are there now, and I hope some of the grandsons will carry on.
- RJ Your Father was very active in various bodies such as the Timber Merchants Association, and was one of the founders of the Employers Federation,¹ and I wondered if you have reason to know what his attitude was to unions.
- FB To youths?
- RJ No, to unions. Union activity.
- FB No, I don't remember. He didn't talk about the business much to us, maybe to the boys, but not to us. We were ignorant of these things, which was sad that we weren't taken into more confidence in that way. But that's how it was with parents and children often, then. Yes, we weren't encouraged to do things. I know many of my contemporaries went to University and that sort of thing, and I was at the Conservatorium, but I remember my sister and I once saying to my Father could we go and get a job in the office or something like that but he didn't want us to. He didn't encourage us to have our own career or anything, so we weren't amongst the more forthcoming young who insisted on a career. I did teach piano for some years after I came back from the Conservatorium, but just in a minor way. I soon gave it up.

1. Ibid. p.82.

RJ Did he give you a reason as to why he didn't want you to do anything?

FB No. I think he just liked us to be at home and have the family all round him.

RJ During the Depression your father leased Garden Island and he had ambitions to turn it into a real holiday resort for, well, ordinary people.
Can you tell me anything about that project?

FB Well, I can remember when he was launching it, and I remember going for a picnic there. I think they must have leased a boat, and we had a lot of our friends and we all boarded this boat to go over to Garden Island. It wasn't a bad day going over, I don't think we had many who were seasick. We always remember that because the man who was managing - we had a restaurant there and he was going to manage it - had been the lessee of the Freemasons Hotel in Bridgetown. He was a friend of my father. We all got there, and there was this beautiful luncheon laid out on trestle tables, and all the salads with white of egg cut up on top of the salads: " B B " for Bunning Brothers he'd put on every salad! [Laughs] That was a lovely day, but it fizzled out, I don't know why. It was just one of those things that didn't come off, which is a pity, I suppose. Oh, of course, it then became Royal Navy, didn't it? The Australian Navy.

RJ Yes. Mills makes the comment that, "Throughout his life Robert Bunning maintained the respect of his workmen and colleagues. He had a keen sense of humour, and whatever the circumstances, dark or depressing, he was ever cheerful." That was a quote from W.C. Thomas.².
Would you agree with those comments?

1. Ibid, p.83.

2. W.C. Thomas in Mills, ibid. p.81.

FB Oh, yes. Certainly. He never seemed to vary. At home he was very equable. As I said, my mother was the stronger one, but she was always trying to urge him on to do more, but we would hear her rather haranguing him I suppose, and he would just carry on and take no notice. [Laughs]

RJ Do more in what way? What did she want to see done?

FB Oh, I think she would have liked him to have been more socially conscious and it was she who was more ambitious in that way. He couldn't have cared a tuppenny damn about who people were, or what, as long as they were good people. My mother.... in those days many trades-people.... Now my father never belonged to the Weld Club. He never wanted to, but he wouldn't have been accepted then because he was in trade. All the graziers, the doctors, any doctor got in, the lawyers, people like that, but many people, if they were in trade, wouldn't have been accepted. Nor would they accept Jews. I know various people who didn't join, who wouldn't have been accepted. Not now, I don't think. [Laughs] Which is a good thing.

RJ There is a most moving tribute quoted by Jenny Mills taken from The Daily News on the occasion of the death of your father, in which the writer pointed out that there was so much more to Robert Bunning than his business achievements, and he writes of his far-sightedness, his understanding, his genial sympathy, his straightforwardness in speech and outlook, and so on, and we will quote that particular extract. It is signed by someone who calls himself "Befriended".¹

1. Ibid. The full quote is attached, this transcript p. 88.

- FB No, I haven't a clue as to whom that would be. I was in London when my father died. I was studying music in London, and my mother came over after his death to be in London for a little while, and we came home together in early 1936. So that I wasn't here, and I wouldn't know who that was. I don't think we ever found out, but at any rate it was a very lovely tribute to him, and very true.
- RJ I was curious as to whether, because he has used the term "Befriended" did your father appear to take particular interests in people, and perhaps help them a little?
- FB Oh, he would certainly help them with advice and if he felt they were worth it he would certainly give them *help*. So many of the people who worked for him were very loyal and were in the firm all their lives, and we have many old, very loyal workers now who have been in the firm all their working lives, and we like to think that there is still that feeling in the firm of loyalty and pride which he certainly instilled.

End Tape 1 Side A

Tape 1 Side B

RJ Just to round off that side of your life, your Uncle Arthur, of course, featured very firmly in your father's activities, particularly early in his life, and I wondered what he was like?

FB He too was a gentle, quiet man, and he had had an accident. He didn't have the ability of my father because I think this accident when he was younger.... I don't know whether his head was injured, but he wasn't quite as bright. Not that I mean he was not bright, but he wasn't such a personality at all. We always laugh about him because his wife - they had no children - and his wife, Aunt Evie, my mother never liked very much because Aunt Evie was a rather smart lady with very fair hair and mother always used to call her "the fair haired one" because she always used to be talking about "my golden hair." She was very vain. Even when she was old she used to say, "But I've still got my golden hair." [Laughs] She was always referred to as "the fair haired one." [Laughs] They are still there, the houses my Uncle Arthur built. One is in Claremont and, of course, they were very well built and beautifully finished. I haven't seen the Claremont one for donkeys years, but I believe there is a carved wooden freize with fruits and vegetables on it. Then another one in McNeill Street, which is still lived in by people called Rigg, and Uncle Arthur built that and the Riggs have had it ever since I think. A lot of lovely timber work, naturally, or should be! [Laughs]

RJ In your family life, to what extent did music feature?

FB My mother was really a brilliant pianist, and she had that wonderful gift of.... she could go to a musical show and remember the *tunes* and come home and play them. When we were young I always remember especially in the winter evenings we used to get into our pyjames and then have a romp round the drawing room as it was called then, because mother could play all the Highland Reels, and Policeman's Holiday; all the popular tunes then. And that was a regular thing with the whole five of us galumphing round the drawing room. She had this wonderful sense of rhythm, and when we used to have small dances in the house, the dining room, or *hall* would be cleared of furniture, and quite often mother would play for us. For slightly bigger dances there was a woman called Mrs. Miller. She lived in Fremantle and she used to play for all the small dances because we often used to have them in homes. About 14, 15 and 16.

RJ Sorry, when you say 14, 15 and 16, are you meaning the years?

FB Age.

RJ Right. This was young people?

FB Yes.

RJ And how many would be invited.

FB Oh, 30 or 40; 20 or 30.

RJ And were you taught the dances beforehand?

FB Well, we used to go to dancing class. I remember when we were very young there was a - oh, she would have only been a girl, I suppose, in Cottesloe called Miss Stella Hooper, and she was a dancing teacher and we used to have lessons from her, and I remember, I suppose, when I was about 8 or so, some of us going down to what

is now the Fremantle Arts Centre. It was then an old woman's home; before that it had been a lunatic asylum, and I remember us going down there.

I was in blue tinsel, a fairy with a wand and star, and we danced to these old women. I can see the place today! It was all painted a nigger brown, and these poor old women, a most dismal place.

Leslie Hooper (that was Stella Hooper's brother), I remember him dancing a minuet: "In a quaint old-fashioned garden stood a statuette of carven stone"... [Hums and Laughs] I still remember the tune! He was dressed in pale blue with lace ruffles, and.... oh, that was the thing. But in Perth the famous dancing teacher was a Mrs. Rolls. Mrs. Rolls and Joy Rolls. They were the classy teachers. They eventually, I think, became very well known in Melbourne. They were very, very, elegant people.

RJ Did you ever have lessons from her?

FB No.

RJ What was the difference? Who went to Mrs. Rolls and who....

FB Oh, Mrs. Rolls was up in West Perth. You see, we couldn't go to West Perth really because in the older days there were no cars or anything. As we got older we had the first car in this district. It was CBRB1 - Cottesloe Beach Road Board 1.

In Peppermint Grove there were about four families who had cars. There was Waldie Forbes, he was an architect here, the firm is still going but not any of his relatives in it now, and the Plaistowes, who were chocolate people. One of their daughters lives over here now. Who else?

The Plaistowes, the Forbes, ourselves: can't remember. At any rate, when we were about 17 - no, I was away then. At any rate, when we got a bit older we used to go up to the Hale School dances and to charity dances in Government House ballroom. St. John of Gods used to have an annual one, and that sort of thing. And we'd go in parties and we'd all go in one car, about seven of us in the one car. No talk of canoodling or going to the sandhills on the way back! [Laughs] We were the furthest away so we used to be the last to be home. We were very pure.

RJ And would you have gone to those with your brothers?

FB Yes. Well, one brother, Tom was too young, but Charles and I and later my sister Jane generally used to go.

But before that people slightly older than I, they would come back in the milk train. They would go up to Perth and I don't know how many miles they would have to walk from the station to get to where they were going and come home in the milk train because there were no cars. And then they would walk from the station to their homes. Of course no worries then about being waylaid.

RJ Well, that's dance in your life. Did you have singsongs around the piano? Did you have singing in the family?

FB Yes, yes, because my mother loved playing. She could play all these things. We often used to have singsongs. Of course later on things were different. People used to have musical afternoons, that was different. But this is when we were younger. We just used to make our own.

RJ When did you go to school, and where?

FB I went to Miss Annie Nisbetts High School for Girls.
(Laughs] From the age of 6 to 16. That was my entire
education then. [Laughs]

RJ And what was that like?

FB Well, Miss Annie was a funny little Scots woman. She
must have been very pretty but, of course, we thought
she was an old hag, but she must have been quite young.
Very petite and with a temper of a fiend. People used
to think what a wonderful education she gave one, but
when I think of it now, it was very, I suppose,
elementary.

We had a blue book that was our English book, called
the Blue Book. I always remember the opening:

"It is strange to think of a very old world when men
knew nothing of the great salt seas that washed their
shores and nothing of the wonderful world that went
beyond." We used to have to recite that, and she always
had her own way of reciting things like, "In his chamber
weak and dying, was the Norman Baron lying, Loud without
the tempest thundered, and the castle turrets shook."

We used to have to say it like that.

We had terrible teachers. When I think of them....

We had one, Miss Gallaway. In one of the schoolrooms,
only one, we used to have a great big fireplace with
a guard round it, and she seemed to have a perpetual
cold. She was always blowing her nose and she had, you
know, a blouse, skirt with a belt round it like this
skirt, and she used to always have a streaming nose, and
she'd wring out her handkerchief and hang it over the
fireguard! [Laughs]

But they used to come out from England. They wouldn't
be paid much, they lived on the smell of an oil rag I
suppose.

RJ Who else do you remember?

FB Who else?

RJ Yes.

FB Well, there was a Miss Lakeman. She wasn't so bad. There was Miss Eldridge and the piano teacher, my piano teacher, was Miss Martin. She was a poor little wizened up little soul. She taught us.... we were taught nothing really. When I was sixteen I won this great scholarship worth six pounds and went to Melbourne, and I didn't know what a symphony was then. Now they are told all about music but she.... Well, I hardly knew anything about music, technically or otherwise, but she was the only piano teacher I had until I was sixteen.

RJ What did she teach you?

FB I don't know.

RJ Well, was it a time of scales, exercises ..

FB Yes. Yes, we used to do little scales and we'd learn a Chopin waltz or a Chopin nocturne. I hardly knew what a sonata was, or a fugue. It was very, very elementary teaching. There were good teacher around, but, of course, she was *resident* in the school we went to, and we just walked to and from school and that was that. We didn't go outside the school for "extras." They were all taught in the school.

RJ And what about theory? What were you taught there?

FB Oh, just the elementary. The major and minor scales and major and minor chords, and a few things like that.

RJ So you didn't do any writing of music or transposing, or....

FB No, no.

RJ Nothing like that?

FB No.

RJ Right. What else did you learn at the school?

FB We had our art teacher, and we used to do plaster casts, you know, old shaded plaster casts, and perhaps a little river scene, but mostly sort of copying things. One teacher we did have for many years, and she is still alive today, was a woman called Anita Fitzgerald, and she taught elocution. Even then I remember she was a marvellous looking woman, most attractive. I think she is still alive today, you hear of her. She was a wonderful person.

Oh, then we had physical culture twice a week. It was taught by a man called Mr. Wells and he was always called Bucketty Wells. I think he taught at Hale School as well, which was the High School then, and he was quite a character. He used to say, "Now girls and boys, 'old your 'eads up" or he said, "'ide your 'ands." [Laughs] And "the eye is the winder of the brain", that's one of the things, his favourite things. But I think, you know, he did tell us how to walk. We used to do brass rods and dumbbells and Indian clubs, all these things. So all that was in the school, you see. We didn't have to go elsewhere for it.

RJ Did you play any actual sport at school?

FB No. There was a tennis court but we were never taught it, we were never taught games. Of course, we always had the swimming.

RJ What, down at the river?

FB

Yes, Freshwater Bay. They had an old yacht club then. All the younger boys of the families all used to go to Miss Annes before going to Hale, which was High School then, or a lot to Scotch College, or a few to Guildford. Oh, that was another funny thing with Miss Annie.

I don't know whether you remember Sir Walter James? He was a K.C. here. Quite a well known family. His son had been to the War, his son Jimmy. Two of his sons are still alive now, but Jimmy had come back from the War, and there was another man called Peter Drummond of the famous, well known Drummond family, and he had become.... no, he wasn't Sir Peter then, but he *was* eventually, but he had joined the Air Force and become quite famous, and so we had his picture up on the schoolroom wall and every morning we had to go and salute Peter. Then, when they were handing out the Peace Medals, which they did at the end of the War (this is the First World War) and Jimmy James was to present us with the Peace Medals and he was to be driven down by his mother, Lady James, and Mrs. Law (her daughter was at school) and they forgot him. [Laughs] So the chauffeur as they had then had to go back to get him.

There were two of us - a girl called Mollie [Hope] who, I think she only died recently, she taught for many years at PLC, - and we were the top class. There were only two of us so every year one of us would be Head Girl. [Laughs] So I was leading in my gym tunic and my black stockings. First of all we had to go and salute Jimmy, and then salute Peter. That was that. That was funny. Another funny thing about Miss Annie. When Scott's expedition.... you know, when there was the tragedy at the South Pole, a man called Ian Hay wrote a book called "Like English Gentlemen" talking about the way they'd died, and for a while that was Miss Annie's bible, and everything we did she'd say, "Now, girls and boys, walk up the stairs like English gentlemen." We had to do everything like English gentlemen. Oh, she was a character.

- RJ What did being Head Girl involve? Anything?
- FB Nothing. [Laughter]
- RJ Just the name?
- FB Yes, oh, yes. We didn't have prefects or anything, it was just that we were the top class that was all. Very simple. Of course, when we went and did the public exams, then we had to walk to Cottesloe Station which was a twenty minute walk from our home, get the train to Subiaco, and walk from Subiaco along to the Drill Hall in Subiaco and, of course, it used to be in November. Novembers must have been hotter then, because I can remember sweltering in that Hall doing the Junior and Leaving examinations.
- RJ What sort of student were you? How well did you do in the exams?
- FB Oh, I was fairly good. Not brilliant by any means, but, you know, reasonably good. I can't remember whether they had Honours or not, but I know I got through them easily. As things were in those days, not as difficult as they are today.
- RJ You spoke of the snobbery that would have kept your father out of the Weld Club if he had wanted to join. Was that obvious to you as children going to school together?
- FB No, no. No, I think it was.... I've heard of it since probably. Not in connection with my father but just as what happened, but no, it never worried us. Money wasn't talked of then. I mean, there were many families.... Nowadays in Peppermint Grove they try to write it up as a place where it was full of wealthy people, but it wasn't.

We were certainly comfortably off, and lived very well, but we weren't luxurious. We didn't live luxuriously, and some families round here were very poor, but we never thought of it. It didn't make any difference. Many of them have done very well since. I won't mention the names now, but.... [Laughs]

RJ What age were you when you started the piano? Were you....

FB I was six years old.

RJ What did you feel about the instrument when you were learning it?

FB I always loved it. It was never a difficulty to practice. I always loved it and, of course, my mother encouraged it, naturally. I wasn't as gifted as she was. As I say, she could play from ear, she had a naturally wonderful technique, she could just sit down and play any old thing. I didn't inherit that, unfortunately. [Laughs]

RJ How much would you have practised? How long each day?

FB Oh, to begin with perhaps an hour or so and at the end I tried to practise two or three hours, and later on more than that.

RJ Were you ever introduced to any other instruments?

FB No, no, we never. We all learnt piano but there was never any thought of playing another instrument. I suppose it wasn't in the house and, you know, Mother was keen on the piano and that was that. Not many.... I can't remember (funnily enough) of all the people who were at school, I can't remember any others who were keen on music. I've just realised that thinking back. Most of them have never played or done anything musical ever since. That's strange.

- RJ Who actually taught you the piano at Miss Annie Nesbitts? You mentioned Miss Martin, was she the same one right through your school?
- FB No, then there was a Miss North. Those were the only two that I remember.
- RJ Were they good teachers?
- FB No, no.
- RJ In what way.
- FB No. They weren't knowledgeable. I don't know how they started off saying they'd teach piano, but I know I did not learn much from them. I do know that.
- RJ Did they make it enjoyable for you?
- FB Not particularly, no. No, there was no interest, nothing interesting. They didn't tell you any history or anything about the composers, or anything. Strange.
- RJ You spoke of winning a scholarship. What was involved? How did you win that scholarship?
- FB We used to go in for the University Examinations I think. They were run through the Universities, and this was Grade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Grade 1, I think, was the highest. At any rate, whatever the grade was, they've put it back to front since, so I don't know whether it's 6 or 1, I won this scholarship for six pounds.
- RJ How did you win it?

- FB Well, through entering the examination and having an examiner. The examiner who came over was a Melbourne man called David Coutts. He was a very well known musician in Melbourne. He awarded me this great scholarship and suggested I go to Melbourne and he was my only teacher there. But he wasn't a great technician either. He was all for expression, you know, playing soulfully, but he never, ever, was a very good technician as a couple of others were at the Melbourne Conservatorium. So, I got three pounds the first year I went to Melbourne, and three pounds the second when he said I was getting on all right. [Laughs]
- RJ So does that mean you would have been the top student in this State at that time, at that exam?
- FB Only the top one who entered for these examinations. At the same time there was the.... what was it called then?
- RJ Trinity College of Music.
- FB Yes, that was the TCL. They had examinations and examiners used to come from London and the Licentiate of the Associated Board, that was LAB, and examiners from London used to come for those examinations, but I didn't enter for those so I wouldn't say that I was the top because there were others who would perhaps win something from them and go to London. But not many.
- RJ Well, how many won scholarships to go to the Conservatorium in Melbourne that year?
- FB I was the only one [from Perth].
- RJ Only one. Right.

RJ What was your family's reaction to that?

FB They were very pleased for me to go. I was only just 16 when I went over. My mother came over with me. Through mutual friends I boarded with a Professor Adams who was the Professor of Divinity at Ormonde College. They had this big house in the Ormonde College grounds, and they had about 5 students there; girls; but they had a big family. There were 4 boys and a daughter of their own, so there were a lot us us there and it was quite enjoyable.

I don't know whether you have ever read a book called "Cold Comfort Farm" and they always used to remind me of that, thinking of them since. They had names like.... the "Cold Comfort Farm" lot had names like Seth and all these old country names, and they were uncouth. How my mother.... because she was a very, very, particular woman, particular about the way everything was done. Mrs. Adams was a strange woman. She was a braw Scots woman and she often.... if she and mother were at home in the afternoon she would stretch out on the drawing room floor and say that she always liked to lie down because it was relaxing. So she would be flat on the floor. [Laughs]

The cooking was pretty terrible. They must have had some sort of maid but I don't remember. She had one little room that had about three funny little boxes in it, and those were fireless cookers, and they were lined with straw and I think the idea was you perhaps started off say a leg of lamb, you'd start it off in an oven and then you'd put it for the rest of the day.... it would sit in this box lined with straw and that was a fireless cooker. It was always sort of pink, there was never nice crackling or anything like that on. She'd have three of these with the roasts in them. I was left there.

At absolutely no stage in our family.... we never talked of sex or anything like that, and I was completely ignorant. It's hard to believe, but I was never warned of anything because I think the word "sex" was anathema to mother.

The following year I moved into other lodgings and I had to walk, a half hour walk, from, it was Carlton, that's north of the University, to practise at the Adams, and men used to expose themselves behind bushes. I was never unduly worried, and I'd be followed off trams, you know.... [Laughs] And I was never warned!

RJ But beside the exposure nothing unfortunate happened?

FB No, no. Well, of course, exposures often mean nothing apart from exposing. [Laughs]

End of Tape 1 Side B

RJ Tell me about the Conservatorium course - how much time was taken up in piano studies, what did you actually learn?

FB I can't remember how often we had piano lessons, probably twice a week, and we used to have lectures on the history of music. We had a funny old boy who taught us harmony (very elementary I might say). We used to have to write song accompaniments and all he liked was to have an arpeggio base with the melody in the right hand.

Another funny man, called Mr. Nixon, who was quite an eminent musicologist I suppose, but he was very uninspiring and he taught us counterpoint, history of music.

We used to have recitals in the Melba Conservatorium, which was connected to the Melbourne University. I think once a week they used to have recitals in the Hall. You could do teaching or performance or do a critics' course. I did the performing course. Yes, we used to have this odd recital and we'd go to concerts if we could. Nothing very notable happened; have our lessons and talk to the other students, but we didn't mix with the rest of the university at all. We were on our own. I can't remember very much about the life there. I suppose we joined in and enjoyed talking about things a bit, but, no, apart from the odd little recital there we weren't very active in musical things.

RJ How far were you taken with your piano development? What composers were you working on, which periods?

FB When I think of the things I did. I remember for the yearly examination I know I did the Brahms D Minor Concerto. Well that, you know, is quite a difficult thing. As I remember for examination we only had to do one movement but that was a bigger work. But I know technically I wasn't very good but I did get first class honours which shows the standard that applied then. [Laughs] Because I don't think I would have got first class honours here, if they have Honours; I don't quite know what they do have. I did make some good friends there.

RJ Well, that's Brahms. Who else? Who else were you studying?

FB Oh, we'd do Chopin, Bach. We studied all the classical composers, no-one more advanced. I can't even remember whether I did any Debussy then.

RJ Liszt?

FB Yes. Oh, yes, all of the recognised ones, you know. Brahms, Schubert, a lot of Schumann, Brahms, Chopin, Bach, but we didn't get enormous repertoires of anything then. I suffered a bit technically, but there were a couple of others. There was a man called Edward Goll who was quite a well known pianist. He taught there and he had some more brilliant students. Another man called Homewood, and some of his students still are well known. One called Vera Bradford, she still teaches in Melbourne. But they were technically better than Mr. Coutts, than my teachers' pupils were.

RJ Were you being taught anything about the art of accompaniment?

FB No.

RJ It was purely solo piano work?

FB Yes. I always loved accompanying and when I came back here I used to do a lot of it, but we were never taught it. I think now they might be given some lead. Of course to be a good accompanist you have to be able to transpose and really play from ear and have a very wide gift, and, of course, sight reading and all that sort of thing.

RJ And have a sympathy for the person you're accompanying?

FB Oh yes, yes, you have to have that. Of course many good pianists don't have it. It is rather a special thing. Gerald Moore became so famous, and a few others. Geoffrey Parsons now. They have that sympathy, that feeling, which is very, very important. On the other hand, if you are accompanying somebody and they are not sympathetic, they are not sensitive enough, it is horrible. You try to drive them on, you try to give them something or other - they don't get it. But, of course, if you have somebody who really is, it is a lovely thing to do. A funny thing, personally I never like to see woman accompanists.

RJ Why?

FB I don't know. [Laughter] Now and again people have.... What was his name, Partridge, a very well known English singer, and his sister was his accompanist and somehow or other I never felt she was quite adequate. He was a very fine artist. All the well known accompanists are men. The Womens Libbers wouldn't like that! [Laughter] Are you a Womens Libber? [Laughter]

- RJ No. [Laughter] I was thinking Hephzibah Menuhin wouldn't like it either.
- FB Well, she never accompanied singers or anything. She was a pianist, and what she did with Yehudi were the piano and violin sonatas. That's different.
- RJ Yes, it is. You are quite right. [Laughter]
- FB You see, Beryl Potter, whom did she accompany, well, play with recently? She is a pianist so they are dual artists. Very different.
- RJ In your studies at the Conservatorium were you getting to play with anyone, other instruments, at all?
- FB No. When I came back I used to play with various [people]. I remember the first. I was giving a radio recital when they had rooms up in the top of Hay Street on the corner of Hay Street and Milligan. I remember there was a violinist here called Jim Drummond, who was quite well known, and he and I gave one of these earlier concerts up there. We played a sonata by a Frenchman called Fauré which is technically quite difficult. We tackled that. It must have been terrible.
- RJ Didn't you hear it?
- FB Oh no, you couldn't.
- RJ It was a direct broadcast.
- FB Oh yes, there were no tapes or anything.
- RJ No, of course not. It would have gone straight to air. This would have been the old 6WF?
- FB Yes.

RJ What had been Wesfarmers?

FB Yes.

RJ How much of that did you do on your return.

FB How much of what?

RJ How much radio broadcasting did you do?

FB I used to do the recital every now and again. One would be given a half hour, I think a half hour recital. I did quite a lot of that.

RJ How often is every now and again? Once a year, twice a year....

FB It might have been once every six weeks, or once every couple of months.

RJ Were you paid?

FB Yes, oh yes. Two guineas or three guineas. When I first came back because you could play or sing you were expected to do it for nothing, everywhere, just to give pleasure to other people. They just took it for granted. People used to be asked to play here or sing there, with never an idea of paying them. Until in the end now they've gone to the other extreme - nobody will do anything for nothing now. Apart from the radio there were no opportunities for playing and these various clubs were formed to give young musicians a chance to perform. They were never paid. We just did it for the experience. There was never any thought of paying.

One of the first I can think of was the Kylie Club which was very well known here. That was started by a woman down here, Mrs. W. H. Vincent. She gathered all the younger performers there and we would arrange programmes. To begin with whether the people paid to join I can't remember. There are people here who would be able to tell you that. We'd meet about once a month and arrange programmes. There was no avant-garde music in those days. To begin with we hadn't heard of Bartok or people which are now accepted although they are anethema still to some people. We used to have very good programmes. And then there was the Wonkana Club. That was another one. The Kylie Club was more in this area. The Wonkana Club was another one. They used to have regular meetings and then later on the younger ones founded the Guild of Young Artists. They used to have regular meetings. They are the only clubs I can think of now, but they kept going for quite a number of years. In the end the Kylie Club.... it had concerts in the Karrakatta Club, and then at the Rose Skinner Galleries, they used to meet there. I think Vaughan Hanly was the last President. He had a lot to do with it, and Steve Dornan, Nora Coalstad, and all those people. It was quite flourishing.

RJ How long were you associated with it?

FB Since its inception.

RJ How long did you continue?

FB Oh, I was a member I think until it.... When did it close up? Have you got that?

- RJ Well, I noted that in 1967 its activities were suspended because they were having difficulties, and it stated, "perhaps the most considerable being failure to obtain voluntary office bearers."¹
- FB Ummm. Well, I probably would have attended it until then, but I wasn't an office bearer then. Forget whether I ever was.² I must have been at some stage. [Laughs] Not that that matters, but I know that Vaughan and Steve³ and Stephanie James, all those people [were]. They were very good.
- RJ Amongst the aims of the Kylie Music Club, as expressed in its constitution was, "In course of time to acquire a musical library or property as the executive may deem advisable."⁴ Did that happen.
- FB No, that never eventuated. People were really not interested enough, and there weren't enough people interested, and so there was certainly no spare money. We might have paid artists sometimes, three guineas or something, but there was no extra money. It's like the idea of Mrs. Korwill who was always interested in music; she thought we should have more chamber music. We formed the Chamber Music Society, and that struggled on for quite a number of years, but in the end we had to disband that because the artists at that stage were wanting higher fees. Our membership would have been about 70, I think, at about, oh, three pounds a year or something, and we just didn't have the money to pay the artists enough. There wasn't that enthusiasm.
1. Music in Western Australia, Review No.3, 1969, p.15.
 2. In the early records of the Kylie Club held in Battye Library reference was found to Miss Bunning being on the Club Committee in 1931 until 1935, in 1947 and 1950. She regularly performed for the Club as a soloist and accompanist and arranged programmes.
 3. Stephen Dornan.
 4. Object (d), Constitution Kylie Music Club. (Copy held by the Battye Library).

Then a few years after that the Musica Viva (its headquarters are in Sydney), they had sent the odd chamber music group over here which the Music Council had, not sponsored, but helped by getting audiences and that sort of thing. They started a subscription series here, which would be 14 years ago (I can easily get that date for you). Of course chamber music has advanced very considerably since then, and[now] we get the world's best. Musica Viva is the world's biggest entrepreneur of chamber music. It is the biggest entrepreneur in Australia after the ABC, so it is a very big organisation.

RJ If we could just deal with these perhaps one at a time. To get back to the Kylie Club: when you first started off, what form did meetings take? Was it a question of someone working out the programme, or a joint effort, what was the idea?

FB Well, we would decide which artists would appear on the next programme, and it would be left to them to say what they would perform. They were held in the music room of 'Minnawarra' (that was Mrs. Vincent's home). She had built this lovely music room and so they were held there. I think it would hold I suppose a hundred seats at least. When we say contemporary and modern music, well, I don't think there would be anything.... There was certainly nothing avant-garde because that wasn't being produced when that started. But we did have good programmes of Ravel, Debussy, early Bartok and things like that. And we had some good artists. Funnily enough for a long time we had some very good singers here, more so than we have today, and they could put on recitals of Brahms, Schumann, Lieder: lovely English songs. Debussy, Ravel. All these people.

They really put on very good programmes, which not many singers here at the moment could do, I'm sure. There was Ethel Ewings, there was Gertrude Hutton.... They've gone from me now, but there were five or six really good singers of art songs, Lieder and that. They weren't operatic because there was nothing they could do operatically, but they did have great taste. Lorna McKean, that was Vaughan Hanly's wife, was a beautiful singer. Later on Molly McGurk. They really were worth listening to.

RJ Were they paid?

FB Yes, but very little. That was one of the aims of the Kylie Club - to give them a chance to get paid a little too. But it was very little.

RJ Were visiting artists used at all?

FB No, oh no, we couldn't afford them. We couldn't have asked them. You wouldn't. They would feel demeaned I suppose.

RJ I noted that one of the aims of that club was to put on benefit occasions for young local musicians. Do you remember that at all and how that person was selected to be supported?

FB Well, I'm sure the Kylie Club didn't, but when Eileen Joyce was first mentioned as being a potential world pianist, I know there were benefit concerts for her. There were several for people who did very well in the examinations and wanted to go abroad and couldn't afford it. I know there were many benefit concerts for them. Pauline O'Connor, that was one; I remember going to a benefit concert for her. And certainly for Eileen Joyce.

RJ Wendy Nash?

FB Yes, I think she had one too. They would be public concerts, they wouldn't be given by the clubs. I don't remember the clubs giving them special concerts.

RJ The membership of the Kylie Club, did it remain fairly static or did new people come into it?

FB Oh, we'd get new people. We tried to get new people in as the younger ones came along because even then it did give them the opportunity of doing serious work and performing publicly.

RJ Was there any bar on membership, could anyone join who wanted to?

FB Oh, yes, anyone who was interested certainly could join.

RJ Right. You didn't have to be proposed by someone or....

FB No, no

RJ Right. Just to sort of put this together, when you came back to Perth after your conservatorium studies which would have been well, as far as I can see you would have been in the Conservatorium in 1920/21, so you would have returned to Perth in '22 or the end of '21?

FB Yes.

RJ When you returned, what was Perth like musically? What was available?

FB Nothing, practically.

RJ Yes.

FB No, there wasn't anything on. I came back and I never talked music to any of my contemporaries. For a boy to be interested in music or the art then was "sissy". As I said, it was never mentioned, and nor were any of my women friends interested. The people who kept us going were some older women like Mrs. Vincent and a Mrs. Frank Davies, and a Mrs. Cecil Mason. They used to have musical afternoons and we used to go and play to them. Mrs. Cecil Mason started what was called then the LAB Club, which was the Licentiates of the Associated Board of Music in London. So anybody who passed their examinations, the top examination, got what they called an LAB. They used to have monthly meetings at the Karrakatta Club, and Mrs. Mason was their President. She used to insist that they'd have Saturday evening meetings and they'd all take part in their programmes. She always insisted on their wearing long frocks and white kid gloves. Whoever would be the office bearer, she would make them greet the people at the door. She taught them how to behave in certain circumstances. Mrs. Frank Davies used to have afternoons in her drawing room and we all used to go along and play. Mrs. W.H. Vincent started the Kylie Club and she was very keen on singing. She had a terrible voice, but she loved music and I used to go and play for her, which I loved because she had wonderful taste in songs. She had all the loveliest songs there, many of which one very rarely hears today although they are well known by the very serious musicians. And every now and again she'd give a musical afternoon to the ladies of Peppermint Grove - none of whom knew the first thing about music. They would go along and she would sing in this very bad voice these songs, and they wouldn't have a clue what they were about or what they were. We often laughed. I used to love it because I had to play all these beautiful accompaniments which I loved. But the audience! [Laughs] Not so good for them! But she battled on you see, she was so keen. She was really. And, as I say, had this taste. And what else?

RJ This LAB Club, actually it was founded in 1926, I found reference to, and I just wondered what form the meetings took. Was it again just a question of performing?

FB Yes, performing. Oh, no, they would have their committee, and I was never involved with them. But I used now and again go to a concert. But they would have had their committee. But these Saturday evening gatherings would just be for them to give a programme, and well, yes, singers or pianists because you could get an LAB in either.

RJ And at these sort of things like the LAB, the afternoons you spoke of that were held, and the Kylie Club later, was there any discussion of the music that was being listened to?

FB No. Not to my memory. They'd just perform. I suppose now and again they might have given a short resume, but there was not discussion. No.

RJ This is the second interview with Miss Flora Bunning held in her home on the 29th August, 1984.

Miss Bunning, we were speaking last time of the musical scene in Perth on your return from the conservatorium in Melbourne in the 1920's. Was there anything else going on that you haven't referred to yet?

FB There were orchestral concerts, of not very high quality but at least they were orchestral concerts. And I can't remember exactly the dates but I know there was a man, Newton, who used to conduct. And then there was Harry Vowles. He, what did they call it.... the Perth Metropolitan Orchestra or something. And he did quite a lot. He eventually went to London and took a Light Programme with the BBC. He was out here, oh, maybe about eight or nine years ago looking as large as life, but I don't know how old he would have been then. And then Newton, I can't exactly remember, but they used to be in His Majesty's Theatre. But the Harry Vowles ones sometimes used to be in the old Perth Town Hall. You know, that funny old place. And before that Mr. Leckie (who was a well known teacher here) used to conduct the orchestra.

Oh, no, that would have been when I was very, very young, hearing him in Government House Ballroom doing the Midsummer Night's Dream music, which must have been frightful, but I thought it was marvellous. [Laughs] Because we didn't have the standards and, of course, no records much. And then, I forget when the ABC started. It must have been just before the War I think, but.... oh, no,.... in the 1930s at any rate and, of course, things improved all the time from then on.

RJ The actual start here was 1932. Yes.

FB Yes, I thought it would be about then.

RJ The orchestras you spoke of, what size were they?

FB Oh, they were probably only about 30 or 40. Again, I couldn't tell you.

RJ No. And what sort of public response was there to any performances?

FB Oh, they used to get quite a good response. I mean, they wouldn't have filled the Concert Hall for instance because before the Concert Hall was built (which isn't so long ago now) the last lot of orchestral concerts were in Winthrop Hall, and that was getting a little small for them. And then, of course, we built up the subscribers a lot when the Concert Hall was opened. Before then we used to have to go round, you know, asking for money and asking people to become subscribers, and sit at the telephone and ring people. We really did quite a bit of hard work then.

RJ And again, the smaller orchestras of Vowles and Leckie and such, were they just orchestral concerts, or were soloists....

FB Oh, yes, they were the precursor of the ABC concerts. Otherwise we wouldn't have had any orchestra at all. But, of course, so many people.... You see, for instance, in those days [for] young people, especially boys, it was 'sissy' to like music or art so they wouldn't have dreamt of going to a concert; whereas today three quarters of the audience often, or more, are young people. Wonderful difference.

ENDS TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE.

TAPE 2 SIDE B

- RJ Do you think the Depression had any noticeable effect on music in Perth?
- FB I couldn't answer that. Only that there were the odd choirs. I know Mr. Leckie had a choir called the Oriana Choir and they used to meet regularly. And then there was a Mrs. Moran, who had a choir which went on for many years for which I used to accompany. And this was before the War and during the War she went on for a while. But I used to walk from our home, (which is now St. Hilda's School) down to Cottesloe Station, catch the train to Perth, walk along Wellington Street to where we met somewhere along there, and come home at 10 and 11 at night by train, and walk home. [Laughs] You'd be frightened to do it now. In any case, there was no other way of doing things. Then later on there were some small buses (I think they held about 20 people) and they used to go regularly. One was called the Bluebird Service and Red [Reo], and they went from the bottom of our drive so that was easier. It took about half an hour to get to Perth.
- RJ And the choir you speak of you accompanied, how large a choir was that?
- FB Oh, 30, between 30 and 40.
- RJ What was it called?
- RJ I'm trying to think. The Oriana was the one Mr. Leckie.... I'd forgotten about the other choir until it came up. Odeon was it? No, I can't remember. I can easily find out, but....
- RJ Don't worry. And what standard did they achieve as a choir do you think?

- FB Oh, good standard. There used to be competitions. People used to come out, mainly from England, from London, from the Royal Academy, quite a lot, and Trinity College, and they would examine people and examine choirs, and I know this choir was always well regarded, *probably the best here.*
- RJ And what was it made up of?
- FB All women, no men. We never did one of the big works because, well, after all, you need a mixed choir for them. But we used to do good programmes.
- RJ For example, what sort of music?
- FB Well, not pop music or jazz, but just pleasing: Parry, Elgar. A lot of Englishmen used to write for ladies' choirs then I think. [Laughs]
- RJ Public performances at all?
- FB Oh, yes, they used to have a concert once a year.
- RJ Right. Where was that held?
- FB Sometimes in the old Town Hall. I think they were mainly there. May have been in Pier Street. There was the old Assembly Hall and that was quite a popular place for smaller things, smaller performances.
- RJ Were you paid for accompanying them?
- FB Yes. Just a.... it was a token payment really. But then, we never expected big payments in those days. [Laughs]

RJ On your return from the conservatorium did you teach at all?

FB Yes. For a couple of years, I think, I taught at Miss Annie's School for Girls, to which I had been all my life. Some of the pupils still living here whom I entertain now instead of teaching. [Laughs] And then also for a couple of years I taught out at Perth College in Mount Lawley. Of course I used to have to get from Mosman Park out there. Buses and trams and walks. [Laughs]

RJ How did you find teaching?

FB I was never a dedicated teacher. I don't think I was a frightfully good teacher.

RJ Why?

FB Well, I didn't have enough knowledge about teaching because we were never taught how to teach. I mean, anybody who played the piano would perhaps go away and teach. Although we had some excellent teachers here, but I never had contact with them. Well, I met them. There was a Miss Hodd and a Miss Pickering (Anita Pickering) and a Miss Carey. And interestingly enough they were all very tall women and quite majestic looking. And at concerts and things they used to come in long frocks and white kid gloves and they were always looking beautiful because they were so dignified. And they were all very good teachers. Another one, Ida Roberts, she dominated here for many years. Yes, they are all dead now I think. I don't know about Anita Pickering, but at any rate she's not in the public eye at all. I think she must have passed on. So that would have been in the 1930s and so on. And then during the War we had this orchestral committee and they gave quite a lot of concerts, the orchestra, in aid of charity, in aid of the Red Cross and things like that. And that went on during the War. And then during the War, I worked in the Red Cross transport.

FB And then, towards the end of the War, a friend of mine who had been a VAD, said the Young Christian Womens Association were looking for people to go abroad to India and places because they thought the War was coming to an end and there would still be all these servicewomen. So we both joined up to go to India and we were all packed up, you know, bought all the uniforms and portable gramophones and electric irons and goodness knows what, and the day before we were to leave they withdrew our passports, said Australia couldn't afford to lose women like us. [Laughs] So we were ignored for about nine months and then I remember Mr. Ford, the Minister for.... would it be Minister for War? At any rate, he came over and we interviewed him and we did get away within the next month. I was in Madras for nearly a year.

RJ What doing?

FB Well, really, running hostels. When I first went to Madras they were building a hostel for servicewomen and I've never worked so hard in my life because it was in the process of being built and we made.... oh, we made covers and curtains and, you know, sorted things out. And then the women started to come in. And, oh, often I'd see them off at two o'clock in the morning and greet others at four o'clock in the morning. They had a separate building which was the dining and living room (which was really very pretty because we could get beautiful handwoven cottons and table mats and everything like that) and I used to have to go over and interview the chef and decide what we were having for lunch and dinner. And then we would have to go shopping. Really I enjoyed it, but it was hard work. We had Queen Alexandra nurses and the Fannies who were.... they were supposed to be the "creme de la creme" weren't they? I wonder what Fannies stood for? At any rate they were for 'special duties'. They weren't so much nurses but they used to have 'special duties'.

Then, of course, from New Zealand, all over the place, the servicewomen came. Madras was a lovely old city then. Always this awful poverty even then, which was 1945. Even then one would wonder how India would ever sort itself out with this terrific population and poverty. But, you know, they have all these violent eruptions from the crowds but just to meet and employ the ones we had, [they] were such gentle people. But, of course, then they could suddenly erupt into this terrible violence. I don't know what their religion would have been down there. I think the Moslems are more further North I think, aren't they?

RJ I can't answer you that I'm afraid.

FB No, no. I know Pakistan is a Moslem state, but that is a bit.... of course it spreads out a bit. But we had nice little people. Very loyal. Now and again they would do a bit of stealing, but you couldn't blame them for that when you saw the poverty.

RJ Before you went to India you became involved in Army Education concerts. Tell me about it.

FB Oh, yes, Professor Alexander was Major then, and he was in charge of what they called Army Education, and John Birman was 2IC I think. And we used to go into the bush out of Dandaragan, we went down to the bush in Pinjarra, and we went round any of the camps out of Perth. And we had this priceless vehicle which we always thought looked like a giraffe. It was very high and they used to have the grand piano which they shoved on one level and then higher up two of us could sit with the driver. If anyone else were there I don't know where they sat. It was a funny looking vehicle. And the grand piano! When we got to the camps it would be hauled out and the driver had a course in piano tuning before. [Laughs] You can imagine how a truck driver [Laughs] or a lorry driver.... [Laughs]. It used to be shoved out on stage and often at the camps they would arrange gum leaves and branches and make it look a bit attractive [laughs].

Oh, the first one we did down in the Drill Hall out of Fremantle, and I know.... A woman called Elsie Kersey who, in England, had been a Gilbert and Sullivan.... big voice one, not.... what do you call them? She was a contralto I think and she had a very good voice. She and I gave the first I think, the first Army Education concert. We went down to this Drill Hall and Prof. Alexander (at least - yes, he was still Prof. then) came along and introduced us and there were about 900 men there in this great, enormous hall. And although we did fairly popular things, half of them had never heard piano solos or anything before and after every item we'd hear the stamp of feet in army boots as after every item about a couple of hundred more would leave. [Laughs] We finished up, I think, with about 300, but there were easily 900 there. [Laughs] Then, of course, Vaughan Hanly and all the musicians here used to go. He'd have a lot of funny stories to tell. Have you seen him?

RJ Well, I hope to, yes, but not yet.

FB Well, I won't steal his thunder.

RJ No, you go ahead and tell your side. [Laughter]

FB Oh, a quite rude one. Oh, Vaughan told us. There was another very well known music teacher called Edward Black (his son's in the orchestra today) and so they were introducing something and Edward Black, who's a little man.... in any case he got up and he said, "I've got a little thing here". Roars of laughter and he didn't get the joke for a while. [Laughs] Then he went, "I have a little thing here". [Laughs] Everybody roared with laughter because.... this little man.... you know. [Laughs]

- FB Oh, we used to go to the V.D. hospital down there. That was another place we used to go. Oh, yes.... And then later on that became the Adult Education.
- RJ Well, before you get on to that, with these concerts what sort of works were you performing?
- FB Oh, Chopin, Schumann, spanish dances, that sort of thing. But nothing very deep.
- RJ And after that first walk out on your first concert what reception did you get as you went around?
- FB Oh, it improved because they knew what to expect. And especially up in the bush they were, I think, glad of anything, that was it, out in the bush camps. Oh, they were enjoyable.
- RJ Can you remember who else was involved with you?
- FB Oh, yes. There was a girl called Elise Longwell - she was a singer. Marian Mendelssohn, Marian Masel that was. Vaughan, Edward Black. I think... no, Jackie Harrison, he was more Adult Education. Oh, another - Ethel Ewings who was a very good contralto singer here. She then became a Moral Rearmament woman. I think she more or less gave up her music but she had a lovely voice. They are the main ones I remember. Oh, Margaret Sharpe, Margaret Poole-Johnson: she and I were quite often together. But they were mostly pianists and singers and violin, because she was a violinist.
- RJ Were you accompanying and performing yourself?
- FB Yes.
- RJ Right.

FB Oh, I remember. I think I'll tell you - a funny poem. Oh, no, this was later on, this was Adult Education when we'd given a concert in Dalwallinu. John Birman got this letter. By then we were getting quite good audiences, but this old man he'd come 40 miles in for the concert and he said, "The success of the night you will agree was due to Miss Flora Bunning, because while everyone else came on in turn, she had to play three times running." And then he said, "Her hands glide over the ivory keys, moving from left to right, the audience sat in silence and gazed into the night." [Laughs] I kept that, that's why I can remember it. [Laughter] I think he had 40 verses. [Laughter]

RJ And in the Army days where would you have stayed as you went into....

FB In the local hotels. In Dandaragan.... we must have stayed there because that's quite a way from Moora, although I remember staying in Moora and Donnybrook. All the local hotels we would stay at, which weren't very good to stay at. But still.... Not as good as they are today, but there was nothing better.

RJ How often would you have been performing?

FB Oh, sometimes we'd go away for three or four days and then perhaps wouldn't have another for a week or a few weeks because we had two or three teams as it were. But I suppose they.... oh, I made some very good friends. I remember I had a Brigadier and a General. [Laughs]

RJ And what sort of audiences were turning up, in numbers?

FB Well, it would depend on the size of the camp but we would have 100 or 70; it was always a worthwhile audience. As I say, they weren't very knowledgeable but now and again you'd meet some of the more senior officers (although not necessarily) who would be keen to hear things.

RJ And what would you wear to concerts like that?

FB Oh, we'd always bring an evening dress, or in those days we didn't have the short evening dresses, but we would certainly dress up a bit for them. Well, naturally really because you wanted them to feel that it was something a bit special.

RJ You were also involved with Red Cross transport in the War.

FB Ah, yes. I just drove buses, small buses or cars and, oh, we had a lot to do with the blood transfusion service. We would drive the blood everywhere. The premises were on the top of Malcolm Street and we used to have to go down to collect these things of blood and deliver them and drive officers and people here and there. It wasn't terribly arduous, but we were on call. And then we'd go to evenings for - what do you call it when you practice bandaging and....

RJ First Aid.

FB Yes. We'd have those evenings and we were always on call.

RJ How did the Red Cross go for getting volunteers in those days?

FB Oh, very well. Yes, we'd have a meeting what, once a week I think, for drill and things and they had plenty of people. Of course that was all voluntary as so many things were then. But anybody who.... well, I didn't join up with the VADs because I was home with mother and although we had plenty of help.... but that is one of the reasons I didn't join up earlier. And then, doing the music, you did as much as you could in any sort of voluntary work then. And I say, we always had help in the home.

RJ After the War you said the concerts continued in Adult Education?

FB Yes.

RJ What exactly happened?

FB Well the same sort of thing. I mean, we'd go round to the towns and by then some of them had pianos of their own. You never knew what sort of piano you were getting. Our funny piano was what we took to the bush. I don't know what happened to that. But otherwise we'd just play on the pianos in the local hall, some of which were pretty frightful. But in some towns.... Kojonup I remember we went to. Several towns and Bunbury and Geraldton, Morawa, Dalwallinu, Kojonup, and all those places we went to. We'd go away for a week at a time then. And John Birman generally was with us, or he was with us a lot I remember. *Lots* of people think John's a gruff [man]. *They are* a bit anti him because of his manner but we all got on. We never found him anything but pleasant and easy.

RJ What sort of works were then being performed?

FB The same. Chopin, Schumann: the popular Chopin waltzes, nocturnes. Not many big, really big works because a lot of people - they didn't have the concentration or the habit of listening to longer works.

RJ What sort of audiences were you getting?

FB Reasonable. Sometimes we'd have 100 or so, at other times there might be only 30. But they were gradually building up as people got to know about them. And then, of course, I mean more people were knowing about music then.

RJ Were you still using the truck to transport you?

FB No, no. We had.... she's working in the Festival office now.... Phyllis (I always forget her surname because I have always called her Phyllis), but she was the treasurer, I think, for the Adult Education, and she stayed on. She was with John Birman for a long, long time and now she's one of the head girls down at the Festival office. She had just got her licence and she drove us down, probably in an Adult Education car. And I remember being petrified because there were a lot of gravel edgings then and she didn't.... it was very dicey getting along those country roads. She said to me afterwards she was horrified now when she thinks of it. Luckily there wasn't so much traffic either.

RJ How long did those tours go on for? Can you remember?

FB I would think, maybe, when was this in, 1939/40.... I would think at least seven or eight years but I couldn't swear to it.

RJ And in that time were audiences building up or diminishing?

FB No, they were building up. Ummm. Yes. You see, it was the same when the orchestra started going to the country. They'd go to Bunbury which, after all, was one of the bigger towns, and they would have very poor audiences, and then gradually they improved. And the same now at.... Geraldton was a very slow starter although the orchestra would go up there quite often. And Albany. But they are all clamouring for music groups now. The Arts Council sends groups right up to Exmouth and everywhere now.

In the concerts that you gave for the Army and for Adult Education does any performer stand out in your mind who you enjoyed accompanying more than perhaps another?

FB Oh, yes, because there are always the intelligent singers and the people perhaps just with a voice and not much intelligence. But I always remember Marian Mendelssohn as she was then. She was an intelligent singer. Another friend of mine, Marcia Hodges, and many of them. I think there were more good singers around well (how many years ago would that be) yes, 20 and 30 years ago than there are now in that they used to do these beautiful programmes of Lieder and the best English songs. Today they are sort of all trying to do opera.

I think Megan Sutton today is one who'd give that sort of programme. But none of the others do. Of course that's my favourite form of singing. I love some opera, but to me an art song like Janet Baker gives, and Sarah Walker who came a couple of years ago, and some of the English, these songs are so beautiful and the accompaniment is so beautiful that it is really satisfying whereas opera I think you need to see the whole opera. I hate operatic arias just as such.

END TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO.

TAPE 3 SIDE A

RJ If we could look now in greater depth at the Chamber Music Society. As we have identified it started in 1952. Were you involved with it from its inception?

FB Yes. The idea came from a woman here from Vienna, Marianne Korwill. She didn't want to take on the presidency because she felt she didn't know people, hadn't been [here long enough] although she came in 1939. But very keen on music, especially, of course, German music, Austrian music. It was her idea and she was our first secretary and I became president for a few years. And then we had Alice Palmer and Eileen Hayes and latterly I went back. We used the local groups but, of course, they weren't as good as they are now and our membership wasn't enormous. We used to have concerts here [in the back garden] in the summer and take the piano out there if it were being used. We'd seat about 100 because it was all lawn then. We had some lovely concerts there. Then the fees went up and it became impracticable and gradually fizzled out. And then there was nothing much for a year until Musica Viva decided to have a subscription series here.

RJ Just how exactly did it start though?

FB Well, before.... now, of course, this is then getting on to something different again, it's getting on to the Music Council which Frank Callaway started in 1955. He was the first president and then I took over and we had Peter Howard and Professor Alexander on that. At that stage the only visiting chamber music we had would come once in a blue moon, and the Music Council was the first to encourage these groups to come. We would get, you know, patrons, not patrons but make up.... ensure a good audience for them. And then later Musica Viva used to bring them out to Australia and we would get them to come here from Musica Viva Sydney. But then when they started this subscription series about, how many years ago did I say, 1955 about, 14 years ago, and it's never

locked back. John Birman was the first President of this Musica Viva, Western Australia, and we had the most wonderful secretary called Norma Patterson who was secretary of the original Chamber Music Society. But she is just a dedicated Secretary and the work she does is absolutely fantastic, especially as she's a very delicate woman. Of course it is a tremendous lot of work, and it's a purely honorary position. I don't know if Musica Viva realised - or many of them did realise, how lucky we were to have her.

RJ But the Chamber Music Society itself, how did it get started?

FB Well, we met at this Marianne Korwill's house and decided to start this little society and I think, say it was a guinea a year subscription whereas.... you can imagine we couldn't get far on that. We worked up - I think we had 70 or 80 members.

RJ What was its main purpose though?

FB For us to hear chamber music, which we never had. It might be a piano and violin sonata, or something or other like that, but we had no proper chamber music. Then when Musica Viva started up as I say about twice a year we might get a group and guarantee an audience for them. And I think the Adult Education helped a bit too, but it was through Frank Callaway who started the Musica Viva here, and then Norma carried on. As having been Secretary of the old society, when we formed the other she became Secretary again and has done it ever since.

RJ When the Chamber Music Society started, was it a question of music being performed for members or was it public concerts?

FB For members. Now Marshall Sumner, he had a lot to do with getting people more interested in chamber music because he was a piano teacher - very good. And he arranged some concerts, evening concerts, at the old Esplanade Hotel and he would be the pianist or he would get various players, and they were quite good concerts. And then they went on to the Adelphi Hotel and in that upper place there we used to have these concerts. And then Marshall unfortunately had to leave the State and so they fizzled out.

Now and again we would have the odd performance at the Kylie Club. That was only for local musicians and, as I say, although the standard of chamber music wasn't terribly high but it was the best we had and it was a start. Now, of course, it's flourishing.

Norma Patterson really on.... she has sometimes done two and three hundred phone calls at the beginning of the season persuading people to join up or rejoin and things, and we now have a membership of nearly 1100, which is very good.

RJ Yes. Excellent. That society, the Chamber Music Society, introduced a workshop scheme, I noticed, in 1964 which was intended to encourage the playing of chamber music by amateurs. Do you remember it at all?

FB No. It can't have got far. [Laughter]

RJ Well, there's no point in asking you to comment, is there! [Laughter] I notice there were also gramophone evenings in private homes.

FB Oh, yes, that was quite a thing. That was to do with the old chamber music society and a Mrs. Percy White (who lives up in Darlington now). She was one who was very keen on that and

did a lot of work for it, and they did, they met regularly at people's houses and various people would bring records or else Mrs. White (or whoever) would buy new records and that went very well for some years.

RJ And was discussion going on at those evenings?

FB No, not really. I mean people would give their thoughts but there wasn't proper discussion because they wanted to hear the music more than the talk. [Laughter]

RJ So just to get this clear: the Chamber Music Society was helping to sponsor visiting chamber groups?

FB Yes, latterly, because with the Adult Education Department and the Music Council we asked Musica Viva to send the odd group here, maybe a couple of times a year. I think one of the first to come was the Amadeus Quartet, a very famous quartet, and we guaranteed an audience for them and that was the first build up in the interest in good chamber music because of these first class groups that came here. For three years maybe we would, well, I suppose you'd say, sponsor these groups and then, in 1974, Musica Viva suggested we start a subscription series here and we built up from about.... in a couple of years, through our Secretary's work, we built up from about 500 to 1100. Our highest was, let me see here, 1159. It is not quite that now, but considering the amount of music there is now it's marvellous - it's good that we have that number.

RJ And in the days when you were guaranteeing an audience did you have any problems with fulfilling that guarantee?

FB Not particularly I don't think because I know we felt that we had done a good job getting audiences for them, because chamber music was not as widely known then. Well, here we hadn't had a chance because there was just.... Graham Wood ran

a quartet for quite a while but everybody thought of chamber music as the awful squeaking violins and things, so it took a while to battle. However, we've achieved it now. Many people would prefer to go to the Musica Viva concerts than the ABC because of the quality of the music. Not the quality of performers. I'm not saying anything about that. The ABC *has* to cater for a big public and have slightly more popular programmes. Although they've done many marvellous things, when the orchestra was smaller it was a bit limited in the works it could perform.

RJ As you have already said, the Music Council was formed in 1955 through Sir Frank Callaway. Why did you become involved in that; what did you see as its purpose?

FB Well, I think one purpose was to gather together all the private music-making people, like choirs and all that sort of thing, so that they could discuss things together. We had 21 different societies joined [the] Music [Council]. They paid so much a year and we published a magazine for a while. Peter Howard (whose father was Lord Mayor at one stage), he published that for a while or, you know, managed to get it around. We'd send that to the members and we'd have once a year meetings and they would just put forward their ideas. And also we raised money for scholarships. We raised quite a bit of money. And then when.... I think I became President and then Prof. Alexander again. He was President for a couple of years and he managed to get a grant from the government to help us run - for *postage* and all that sort of thing. Then we asked various people for donations and we worked up quite a good fund, from which we helped musicians. David Helfgott we helped. Bruce Martin (who is now one of the leads in the Australian Opera) we helped him. One of the first things we did was to buy a grand piano for Bunbury. I see it must have worn out because they were asking for another one the other day in the paper. Quite a number of people we gave small scholarships. We couldn't give [much], *only* a thousand or two. Of course now they want so much more - well, they *need* to have more [because of rising expenses].

RJ How were you raising those funds initially?

FB I can't remember but I know.... oh, we did get something from the government because I remember going *to see* Mr. Brand [when he] was Premier. [We were granted \$3000].

RJ But I think that came later, didn't it? I think you started off with the bursaries yourself.

FB Yes. I'm wondering how we got them. We must have asked for donations but I know we did give quite a few scholarships. Up to.... oh, we had seven or eight thousand. No, that's funny isn't it? I don't remember that, except that we must have got the money to be able to give it away. It might come to me.

RJ And how would you go about deciding who was to get support?

FB Oh, we'd have a meeting of.... In the end we'd have a meeting and suggest people and then we picked three: not necessarily a member of the Music Council but an outsider to come in and make the final decision. At one stage (I think it was when Farnsworth-Hall was conductor of the orchestra) there would be he, and the President of the committee, and one other person who was not necessarily a member of [the] *Music Council*. They would *be given* the recommendations from the committee. I know, the other one would be the head of the Music Teachers' Association *and they would make the final recommendation.*

RJ And would someone apply for consideration?

FB Yes, they always applied. We gave them a month or two's notice in the paper and they would then apply.

RJ I noted reference in October 1964 for a Music Week being planned, to have a whole week of music making. What happened about that?

FB Well, that fizzled out. That was Peter Howard and Harry Bluck. They were on the committee then and it was their suggestion. There was a lot of discussion and we in the end gave it away, said it would be too complicated. It was beyond our powers really. So after quite a lot of discussion that was shelved. Because after all, every year they have eisteddfods and things like that and they still go on. But we felt it was just a bit too much to tackle.

RJ The publications side of the Music Council. The first Music News I noted started in 1955. Then in 1957 there was a music supplement in the National Theatre News.

FB Yes. Well, the little publication.... Mr. Peter Howard was responsible for that for quite a while and then it was he, when it started to weaken a bit, who had the idea of getting it into the National Theatre News which was quite good with *information*. But then gradually all our subsidiaries seemed to fizzle out. They didn't come to meetings and interest was lost and in the end.... Well, it's never been properly wound up I might say. But Frank Callaway (I had a talk to him the other day) is looking into that. Because Harry Bluck was also on what was the Executive years ago and, after all, he's in a position now he can chuck his weight about; find out what is happening to the funds. We still have funds in the bank, of which the government gave us some. It's a wonder they haven't enquired ages ago about that.

RJ So you say it's fizzled out. Do you mean the bursary award side of it and everything has just ceased to function?

FB Well, we had various meetings - not for a long time now - and people's names have been brought forward and perhaps they've been given a little. But we haven't given away any biggish amount - I mean in the range of two to three thousand - for a long time and we are all worried because it is very wrong. So we are making more enquiries now.

RJ Do you think there is still a role for the Music Council today?

FB No. I don't think so. Because you see there is the Theatre Trust. Well, that has a lot to do with putting on concerts and I don't really see that there could be one committee now to run all the various music activities. I think it would just be beyond anything because there are so many. And so many new entrepreneurs coming along like this Michael Parry who is putting on all these - he calls them chamber music - concerts. Thirteen concerts this year and mostly in the Octagon Theatre, of different groups, singers and chamber music: chamber orchestras he's.... well, the chamber orchestras here stem from the ABC orchestra and there's a group there who've been giving concerts. And there are all kinds of other groups. And then he gave them David Helfgott, the pianist. He's given *David* a couple of solo concerts. I believe they're well attended but I feel he is rather exploiting David Helfgott these days because he is still in many ways a brilliant pianist, but a bit wayward in his playing to say the least. But because he's not all there really, people go along thinking they might see him act the fool a bit, which is really sad.

About a central body like the Music Council. Personally I don't think so because all these interests are so wide spread today that it would be a mighty job co-ordinating them all. Because there's the University Music Department giving its numerous concerts a year: every year they put on more. This year they seem to be every second day almost! And then there is the Council of Performing Arts, there is the Youth Orchestra, there is the Nedlands Orchestra, and the things in Fremantle. I don't see how. You'd need to get one full time

RJ To try and co-ordinate all these?

FB Yes. However, others might think differently, but....

FB Yes. No, that makes sense. I noted another role of the Music Council was that it was the West Australian Associate of the Australian National Council for Metropolitan Opera Auditions, with the aim of assisting to promote auditions and to raise modest funds for this purpose.¹ Do you remember that aspect?

FB No, I don't remember doing anything about that. Did Frank?

RJ I didn't ask him about that. I just noted this in the Review of 1969 and at that time the successful candidate was Glenys Fowles.

FB Ummm. I don't remember that coming under the Music Council's jurisdiction. I don't.

RJ Another thing the Council became involved with was the support of a plan to have a cultural centre on Heirisson Island.

FB Oh, yes, yes. Well, that didn't stem from the Council. I've got that here because that was.... Well, the Heirisson Island Committee.... early in 1965 and that was a mighty scheme.

1. Music Review, No. 3, 1969, p. 9.

FB Julius Elischer (the architect in Nedlands) and John White were on the Board. "A proposal has been put forwarded by a citizen's [sic] representative committee to develop Heirisson Island as the site for the principal facilities for arts and entertainment needed by Western Australia."¹ So this committee of a couple of architects and others met and drew up plans for this cultural centre and all the different societies were asked what they thought of it. I know the Music Council was very keen because there were 72 acres of land and they had plans for a Concert Hall, for a botanical garden, and facilities for yachts to come in and restaurants and really a terrific plan. And everybody was very interested in it, but it fizzled out. The government in the end said that the toilet facilities and all that sort of thing, the plumbing, would be too difficult. So, it fizzled out but we had quite a number of meetings on that.

Oh, this is the original committee. Joan Pope was on it. You know Joan? And Mrs Foulkes-Taylor who was one of the Girl Guide people - you would know of her. Judy Hamersley, Bill Warnock (he was acting chairman), Elischer, Channell (he was Adult Education), Vic Garland, Ernest Lee Steere, Channell (who was ABC manager at that time), a man called Pat Hutchings (who was at the University), John Farnsworth-Hall, Geoff Summerhayes, Harry Bluck, Howard Smith (who is since dead), Monsignor Bourke (who is dead), Martyn Webb, Professor Frank Callaway, and Braybrook; I think he's a professor. But that was the original committee and we had many, many meetings.

RJ And yourself?

FB Hmmn. All the funny things one's belonged to! Yes, we had many meetings of that, and eventually it fizzled out.

¹ "Heirisson Island: A proposal for the Development of Comprehensive Facilities for Arts and Entertainment", p. 1.

FB There was the Art Gallery Society, all kinds of people, and they all thought it was a marvellous idea. It would have been because they.... now when they are going to.... you see, when they are going to have a casino and all that they don't talk about toilet facilities or anything do they? I think that is an awful idea.

RJ To move now to the WA Symphony Orchestral Subscribers' Committee. When did you become involved with that?

FB Well, I would say from its inception.

RJ Why did you become involved with it?

FB There were so many of the music people who knew one another and because of doing the odd performance on radio they would know about it. And then we would meet. Mrs. Conrad Charlton was the first president and through her - she was so enthusiastic - and that's when the visiting artists started coming. The really important artists which we hadn't had before. And so they wanted perhaps entertainment for them, and you know, for the growth in the audience. And so we were asked to have this committee. It was a big committee. I think it is limited to 40 now but we did have 40 or 50 people on it. Mrs. Charlton was a very interesting woman. She is Charlton's mother: Michael Charlton's mother. She was a bit overwhelmed with all these famous names coming out and she got very excited about meeting all these people. We would arrange receptions for them, as we still do; that's gone on ever since we started. And we had morning receptions for the artists and provide morning tea and everything. And then you'd have to make the little speech and the artist would often speak, very interestingly. Bernard Heinze, Eugene Goossens, all these people. They were very good speakers and gave you the background of the music and everything.

FB Mrs. Charlton used to ask different people to have supper parties after the concerts and she used to invite *many* guests to the opening night. And everybody used to be agog to see who was included in the manager's party.... and quite often you'd have to arrange the great supper parties. I remember one - he was a very well known English singer. He was really Lord Logan and Mrs. Charlton used to go round saying, "The Lord is coming!" [Laughs]

END TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE

TAPE THREE SIDE B

RJ What other function did the committee have, besides entertaining?

FB Oh, as I was saying they did quite a bit because in those days we had to, still, to try and get subscribers to the concerts. At one stage we wrote to all the Shire Councils asking for donations towards the orchestra and some of them would only send five pounds. Many of them didn't send anything. So that helped, in a way, but it didn't really go far towards paying for the orchestra which, as you know, is a very expensive undertaking. But still, we did that and then we went round visiting different business houses asking if they would take subscriptions, perhaps two or three, and give them to the staff. And asking for money. And often we would ring up people to ask them to be subscribers or, if they hadn't re-subscribed we would ask them why not. We had to do quite a bit of work in that regard. But latterly, of course, we haven't had to do it, but there's been a bit of a falling off lately. Understandably so because there is so much on. With the best will in the world you haven't time to go to everything. But still, we have up to 1700 and 1800 a night.

Well, after all, the capacity is what, 1780 I think, the capacity of the Concert Hall. That's without the choir stalls which.... But the time might come when we have to make another bit of a drive. [Laughs] Because with a lot of people.... of course there's always criticism. Some people say that the programmes are too stuffy. Others, if there is a modern work put on, go out before the work is performed. And that makes you hopping mad! But they have to please a very mixed audience. Many people we know who have been subscribers for years and years and years, they like, well, as everybody does, like the Tchaikovsky symphonies and Beethoven, but still resent Bartok a lot.

FB And as for the avant-garde! Well, now and again they try it but people all say "how frightful". But that's why with all these young people coming on they'll be a different audience because they know more about the avant-garde music and know what people are trying so say; or I suppose they do. [Laughs]

RJ Did the committee have any role to be consulted about the orchestra's activities?

FB Oh, we have regular meetings but, of course, we have nothing to do with the running of the concerts. But we do voice our criticism of things. Whether it is taken any notice of.... But we do try to say something constructive if we think it necessary. But, as I say, we have nothing whatever to do with the running of anything. Not with the choosing of artists or anything. But now and again we have said if we didn't like an artist. We've said so.

RJ That's you passing on your views, are you ever asked for your views?

FB No, no. But we send over the minutes of our meetings all the time. We don't have so many a year. I think we are supposed to have at least four. And so they get the minutes in which we would voice anything we wanted to. And always, at our meetings, generally the manager is there and the programme manager, Neil Wilde, and so we can voice criticism to them and they reply to the best of their ability. But again, they haven't an overall say in things. That's the bad thing about so many of these things which are run from Sydney. And so many people.... so many of those people don't realise the conditions here. They don't realise the difference in conditions and with cities like Melbourne and Sydney with their easy access to everything, to over here. We are, as I say, like an island really in many ways. And we get cross about that and I think some of the staff does too, because

they might suggest this and that but then it is all dictated to from Sydney. And not always with regard to different conditions, which the local people do know. A lot of the people who dictate to them perhaps haven't even been here, and so.... However that's that.

RJ Over all how important do you think the ABC has been in the State as far as music is concerned?

FB Oh, very important. Very. Well, having the orchestra for one thing is absolutely marvellous. And then bringing out these musicians!

When I think now, one of my life's regrets is that, down there, I've got a book called the "musicians' birthday book" which I won when I was *nine* years old for *art needlework* and with all these people: Malcolm Sargent, Eugene Goossens, all these people have been here to supper and we got to know some of them quite well, and I never ever thought to ask them to sign the book. The first.... now he was a Swedish conductor called Schneevogt; he was the first conductor I remember here. And since then there was, as I say, Malcolm Sargent, Sir Thomas Beecham, Eugene Goossens. All of these famous names we've had, we've had in this funny little room. One would never have done so in a bigger city. And, as I say, bringing out these marvellous people.... George Szell was one and he was a very uncompromising man. Because the orchestra wasn't very good. But he would come in.... You could tell that he almost couldn't be bothered conducting it. He was very, as I say, uncompromising. But he's the man who for years.... He put the Cleveland Orchestra on the map. Oh, and all kinds. I can't remember all their names, there were so many. With this funny little orchestra as it was then, we got these wonderful people.

FB I always remember one time - Goossens, he was here several times. I always remember when having a supper party I'd made a crayfish mornay (some of them were more elaborate but we always had to have the hot dishes) and when I got home to bang things into the oven after the concert and before they arrived, it had got flyblown [Laughs] all across the top! So I scooped them off [Laughs] and put more breadcrumbs and things on. And he said he'd never tasted a better fish mornay! [Laughter] Oh, and other funny things.

Oh, what's his name - the British pianist.... At any rate he was a little bit strange (he'd had a nervous breakdown) but he came here and he sat (he was a big man), sat down there and started to play that lovely Ravel suite. I'd been away (I think on the Continent somewhere) and I'd shoved some mothballs in the piano before I went away (just found them somewhere and chucked them in) and while he was playing they kept rolling about. [Laughs] And there he was, playing.... John Ogden, that was his name, John Ogden and we kept on going up and picking out another mothball! [Laughs] Didn't put him off! [Laughs] They didn't always perform but he was the type. He just sat down and would have played for ages and ages. It is marvellous when you get them like that. Oh, well.

RJ Where did the funds for entertaining and phone calls etcetera come from?

FB Oh, the phone calls we went to the ABC. Had a room there from which we.... or perhaps go to the Programme Department or something and we did it from there.

RH And entertainment?

FB Oh, the entertainment was up to everybody. Oh yes, always a private thing - still is. We've got some very nice younger members on the orchestra committee now (there's still the old diehards like me!) and we realise some of them have put on very elaborate parties; almost a dinner party, which is a little unnecessary. However, that's what they want to do. We were saying the other day that it is a terrific expense nowadays because what with drinks and, as I say, when they put on elaborate sweets and things. So now, for several of the concerts now, we have had them in the Green Room at the Concert Hall. Do you know it - right at the back? Ridiculous place! You have to go right outside and walk right round there and down there, or else up the other way. And we have them there and that's very much easier because they don't have to have a 20 minute drive to get to whatever home they're going to, and *afterwards* they can go straight back to their hotel. It's when they have parties in private houses sometimes the artist might be a little loath to come. Although we say to them, "If you don't want to, say so." We don't want to have any unwilling person, but once they get into it sometimes they go on to 3 o'clock in the morning! But I think we would have had three this year in the Green Room and, oh, a couple of people still want to have them in their homes so.... More and more because of the cost for younger people - although the younger ones seem to be the wealthy ones today. [Laughs]

RJ Those in the Green Room, are they catered for?

FB Yes. Dulcie, who runs the restaurant. Or at least the man who runs the restaurant with Dulcie his righthand woman. They are really very generous to us. We have a couple of hot dishes, perhaps a fish one and a meat one, and fried rice and bread and butter, salad and wine, and she does it very nicely for us.

RJ Do you mean without charge?

FB Oh, no. We give it to the artists, of course, and often there might be a special guest, but we all pay so much.

RJ Ah. So anyone attending pays, sort of thing?

FB Yes. And then the committee - see there are 40 on the committee and we have so many of them each time. It is too much to have the whole 40 in that room I think. Thirty-five or so is a fairly comfortable number so that's what we do now. And then other times.... Now tomorrow evening we have an evening drink just with [committee and subscribers]. We used to have sandwiches but now we have a bit of cheese and.... Some of the committee who do that, they get paid for the ingredients but they put on very attractive looking bits of vegetables and things like that. We just have red and white wine and orange juice. And that lasts from about 5.30 and sometimes goes on until 7.30, depending on the artist. [These take place on the evening of the day before the concerts].

Every year we give a Christmas party to the orchestra and that's very successful. And all the committee brings something along to that. We bring cut up chicken or sandwiches and we give them a beautiful spread, and the ABC, I think provides money for the drink. Well, just wine and orange juice. But they are good parties those.

RJ

Where are they usually held?

FB

At the ABC. Well, latterly we've been having the evening ones in what they call a canteen, which is a lovely long room. Have you been there? Overlooking the river. Well, that's very nice. Before that we used to be in one of the big studios - well, sometimes in the orchestral studio but, of course, they are all closed in; not quite as good.

RJ

Has the committee had any role with the Orchestra's Benevolent Fund?

FB Yes, we used to help on that but that seems to have fizzled out. We haven't heard much about it recently but we always used to be asked to attend and to help get people to attend. But the last couple of years I don't seem to have heard much about that.

One of the things that brings to mind is that some years ago we instituted, when there were no orchestral seats available for subscribers any more, that we started selling tickets. People who weren't using their tickets on that particular night would ring up and say they were available and the sale of those went into a special fund. It grew up to be about \$5,000 and nobody could quite decide who should get it. A lot of us said, "Of course the orchestra should get it." So it was used to help them on their visit to Singapore last year, which was very successful.

RJ Have any other fund raising activities occurred?

FB No, no.

RJ I noted the committee was also involved in agitation for a new concert hall.

FB Yes, because we were very keen on getting something because we had been at the Capitol, very comfortably there, and then, of course, when that was sold and we had to find elsewhere well, there was nowhere but the Winthrop Hall. Luckily there were not so many subscribers then, but in the end there were too many for Winthrop Hall. At any rate by that time the Concert Hall had been started. But it was absolutely essential that we had somewhere else to go. And although we were thrilled to bits to get that Concert Hall it's disappointing in many ways. Luckily acoustically all the artists praise it. They all love performing there. And the foyer is, it is very fine in many ways but it has a lot of faults.

RJ Such as?

FB Well, the egress for one thing. When you are trying to get out of your seats. They've told us often that they could empty the place in five minutes. Well, I can't.... because it takes ten minutes to get up the aisle. You are pretty stationary, aren't you, for minutes. And, as I say, this Green Room business and the facilities are silly. For instance, the conductors. They have special rooms: they're miles away. They have to go from there, right round the back of the stage, downstairs to their little rooms where they can have a shower or anything. Very inconvenient. And, as I say, all those stairs and things.... That lift - it's just a bottleneck. It's a funny, funny place.

I think he was damned lucky to.... Well, he got the job of designing the Concert Hall because - what's his name, I always forget his name.... At any rate, he had won the original competition for Council House and the concert hall was to be a circular one, more towards, down towards the Law Courts. And then they didn't go along with the concert hall because it was round and there were various *objections*. So when it came to building it again they gave that same architect the job. Well, he went round the world looking at concert halls but, as I say, there are a lot of faults excepting accoustically; it's bad. For lots of people it's very comfortable, for others it's hideous at the side and.... However, we got it at the cost of \$4 million which was rather marvellous really when you think what they've spent elsewhere.

RJ One thing we should have identified when we were talking about Musica Viva, you have remained President of that society.

FB Yes, I have. John Birman was the first President and then he resigned and I have been ever since. I would like to be able to, well, give somebody else a chance if they want it and retire, but we have this wonderful secretary and I think she wouldn't work for anybody else. So for the sake of keeping her I have to keep on as long as I feel I can do it. As far as I'm concerned it's not a very onerous job because Norma does all the work. For instance she has to book hotel rooms and often they muck those up - not the hotel but from Sydney - and arrange for rehearsals for the artists, arrange for piano tuning, often arrange for the hire of a harpsichord, for the hire of music stands: to meet them at the airport, get their luggage through, see them off at the airport often, and deal [with any difficulties]. For instance the other day the 'cellist, his 'cello is worth \$136,000 so they won't be parted from them for a moment and, of course, they have to have a special seat for them. One time they were going away and they made an awful fuss about it because they had no passenger whose name was Mr. Cello. [Laughs]

Oh, I must tell you a lovely story while we are on that sort of thing. One of the groups who came this year talked about travelling with [James Levine]. He's a very eminent.... did I tell you this?

RJ No.

FB A very eminent American musician James Levine, and he somehow had his double bass with him. So, whenever he travelled with the double bass he had to have a special seat for it and he would bring it in and sit it up on the seat; well, he had to, this great thing. And then he'd get a bib and tie the bib round its neck and when drinks came along he'd take one for the 'cello or double bass (whatever it was) and one for himself. [Laughs] And when the meals came he'd take.... but he always had a drink for each of them! [Laughter] To sit it up and put the bib round it.... lovely. [Laughs]

RJ It's called getting your money's worth, isn't it!

FB Yes. Yes. [Laughter] But that's often the trouble with them, they all have such valuable instruments and they only need to be bashed a bit and you never know how things are treated. And so, especially the 'cellist, the 'cello which is more vulnerable because they can have smaller.... well, no, they nearly always hang on to their violins worth \$100,000 or \$200,000 or....

RJ But you were describing Miss Patterson's role too?

FB Yes, well, again she has masses of correspondence. When at the end of the year we get the new subscriptions in she has masses of forms to fill in stating this, that and the next. You know, A, B, C bookings - how many A's, how many B's, how many pensioners; and all in different little forms. That is a mighty job. And, as I say, although she's so energetic and not a strong woman (she's quite a sick woman) but she'll with a quartet or whoever's playing in the morning, go up early in the evening of the concert, half the time in between times make a cake to take for them to have a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. She is quite an extraordinary woman. As we often laugh and say, we have 1100 subscribers and I guarantee she knows the name of every one of them and where they sit. And people will come in to her and say, perhaps they've lost their seat, and she will immediately say, "Oh, yes, Mrs. So and So, your seats were such and such and such...." and fix them up. [Laughs] So she is Musica Viva here really. What we will do without her (because after all she can't last for ever) goodness knows. It is a voluntary job and nobody else would do it. Well, she had a sick husband for many years and now she lives alone so her time is her own, but not many people would give.... Because so often it's 2 o'clock in the morning they have to be met, or leave at 9 o'clock and come in sometimes early in the morning, sometimes late, so that there is no timetable about it. And that's the thing so we just keep our fingers crossed....

They say that nobody is not expendable, don't they, yes, but goodness knows what we'll do if Norma can't go on. We'd have to have somebody of course, but they'd have to pay them. They would never get that voluntary service again. Because, as I say, you'd need to be a fairly independent person to give all that time.

RJ Another of your interests has been the Festival of Perth Committee.

FB Oh, yes, I've been on that for many years. I said to David Blenkinsopp the other day, "Oh, you'll have to kick me off. I'm getting too old." But I think I will have to resign. But I like to know what's going on. [Laughs] We had two meetings last week. I'm on the board of management, well, they do have a special few people who deal with the finance and then the board of management - somebody from music, arts, theatre, business and everything, and that, well, we just accept the budgets and everything like that because we leave that to the business heads. And then we have a programme committee and I like being on that. That's when the programmes are discussed and generally accepted because David Blenkinsopp's been away and he's so knowledgeable and sees all kinds of interesting things when he's away. And so we have to rely on his word for the lesser things. Which doesn't mean that they're not brilliant, but they're not the big crowd drawers. You see, last year he'd seen this Macunaima thing which was so wonderful and was something quite different. It was in a foreign language but all the foreign language things he's brought have been a success. Remember the one from.... was it Macedonia.... a few years ago? And then last year they had the Japanese play as well. And that, although it was at the Dolphin, it had packed houses all the time. And next year there's a few.... well, more sort of in the field of entertainment, but special entertainment, which sound fascinating. And they are the sort of things that make a Festival in a way, because they are not run of the mill. He is very experienced.

RJ You've seen different directors over the years and different emphasis. How have you felt about the Festival and the way it's run?

FB Well, we've had so few. We've had John Birman, *with Chairman* Prof. Alexander. He was one of the [first]. Oh, no, there was another man, [Sir Alex Reid]. I get muddled up with presidents and chairmen and everything, but he was to do with the University and he was the Chairman, I think, for quite a while. Well, now Prof. Alexander is *President* again and Professor Street is the *Chairman*. So that there was Prof. Alexander with John Birman, and then I think David Blenkinsopp [and Professor Street]. That's all.

RJ Well, between Birman and Blenkinsopp how have you felt about the committee and the way it has.... the directions in which it has gone?

FB Well you see that's interesting because when John Birman - I give full marks to John Birman because he was director of Adult Education at the same time as he was head of the Festival. He did travel in Australia but he didn't go abroad a great deal. And he only had a very small staff and he coped with an ever growing Festival. But now David Blenkinsopp - it's a full time job with him and he has done marvels, but he has a bigger staff (not a very big staff) who just work on the Festival. And now the Festival is bringing out the *Brazilian Theatre* and selling it to other States and sharing things with the other States. David goes away every year and hears or sees all these things and he is very much on the ball. But with John Birman you see, nearly always our Festival, which is not like other festivals, has always finished up in the red. Always. And this year has been the best ever, this last year.

RJ You mean in the black?

FB In the black, yes. [Laughs]

TAPE 4 SIDE A

FB David's right hand man is Will Quackett and he goes away sometimes and he does a big job. And then another one who was with John Birman for some years was Shirley Hopkins who is now their film expert and she goes away over to Sydney every year. At the moment they've got a list of about 40 films the film committee sits through to choose the ones they would like for the Festival and, of course, the films have always been a money spinner. They've always made money and they say we've got some excellent ones coming this year. So it is a very busy concern with quite a number of people involved now and interested. Because they have the theatre representatives, their art representatives, their music representatives and Joan Pope, of course, is always to the fore with all her ideas, Meg Sheen who has a lot to do with the Northbridge Festival. They are very full of ideas and very active. So, as I say, it's a committee I like to be on. [Laughs]

RJ What does your committee do beside approve the programmes?

FB Nothing.

RJ Right. That's its main function?

FB Yes. And as a rule we haven't really had cause to argue with many of the *decisions*.

RJ In retrospect is there anything that should have been done differently do you think?

FB No, I can't think of anything because the audiences are growing all the time for music and for theatre and for these interesting little smaller companies whom we can get now. And of course the big companies are so costly - a big theatre company is hundreds and thousands by the time you get them here, and also an orchestra.

RJ You've also been an executive member of the Friends of the Festival?

FB Oh well I'm off that now. I enjoyed that. We're largely responsible for entertaining the artists. But now I think, yes, it's the Friends who've taken over [other activities]. They have special artcards for young people which are very, very cheap and these young people - excepting for things they know will be an absolute sell-out - they get, I think, for about four dollars a ticket or something like that. And I know a couple of the Friends of the Festival younger committee, are involving themselves with this sort of thing which is good and which brings them into contact with the younger people whom they hope they are training into being future audiences.

Every now and then we've had film shows in aid of funds for the Friends of the Festival, and they've collected quite a lot of money. With that money we've helped to sponsor some of the shows that come out. We're always given recognition in the programme. I say 'we' - I'm not on the committee now, but will always be a Friend! They've got a lot of bright and very keen younger people on that.

RJ Another society you belong to, or have belonged to, I understand, is the University Music Society?

FB Yes. Well, as you know Frank Callaway.... We would always tell Frank this himself, that we're really a rubber stamp for what Frank has decided! [Laughs] But Frank retires this year and I think they'll try to make the Music Society committee perhaps more responsible. We can't be very active. We support the concerts but we don't give much advice. We did try to make Frank have a few less concerts a year but every year they get more - so that's as effective as we've been! [Laughs]

RJ Why did you want less?

FB Because there was so much on. We felt there was. And this year they're having concerts on Sunday afternoons, on.... all the time. Lunch hours and... lunch hour was Thursday but now they seem to be having them on different days as well.

RJ When did you first join that society?

FB Oh, about five years ago I think. I think that's when.... I couldn't tell you exactly.

But Frank Callaway.... it's marvellous the interest he has engendered in the Music Department through his enthusiasm and his ability to get people interested. David Tunley is another very enthusiastic person but, of course, he has his composing and he likes conducting. Also he hasn't the time for public relations. I suppose you'd say that of Frank as well: that he's interested and enthused so many people so he'll be.... I'm sure he'll be around. He won't be fizzling out of the music scene. But it will be interesting to see who comes.

RJ In all these years of involvement with committees and so on how much have you been able to do of your own music?

FB Oh, I used to do quite a lot once with small recitals and the odd recital at the ABC but latterly I haven't done much because.... Well, we hear so many brilliant ones and the standard of teaching today is so much higher that at a very early age you have all these students with brilliant techniques even if they haven't got very much more. I hear all these brilliant people [and] I think - I get fed up and I try to hear myself play and I think, well, that's no good, because we do get so much over the air and even with the students. I often think of myself at the age I hear them and think of the way I sort of floundered round [Laughs] when they've got such good equipment.

RJ Do you still play for yourself?

FB No, it doesn't please me. [Laughs] Some people have the sort of technique that doesn't leave them. Mine, if I don't practice - I need to practice to be able to play - and so I don't practice much now and so I play worse and worse. [Laughs]

RJ You're inclined to play down your own work, but I do understand that you performed in many recitals to aid charities over the years?

FB Oh, yes, I did. When you talk about playing down - I'm realistic, and I just, whatever people said, I knew that I wasn't as good as some people said. [Laughs] I knew my faults and that's what I was saying, today the training is so much better. Although I had everything in my favour - I had good hands and all that sort of thing - but I had bad teachers when I was studying.

RJ Do you ever wish you had gone further with your music and studied later?

FB When I read now about the background of some of these brilliant musicians today I realise I didn't have what it takes to make a great career. I used to work quite hard, I'd practice a lot, but I didn't have the background, enough general background which is what they have to have today to be top-notchers.

RJ Before we move off the musical side of your life what do you feel looking back over the years about music in Perth?

FB One of the main things, I think, is the growth in the interest in music due, of course, to that interest engendering people wanting to play or wanting to perform more. And then with music education in the schools and university and everywhere they have so many opportunities of hearing people. At the University they get umpteen a year, say ten or twelve or less, of famous musicians as Musicians in Residence and they can be taught by them, they can make friends of them. They have this wonderful contact which, of course, didn't happen before. And then all the music education and the improvement in techniques and teaching has had a tremendous effect. When you think we can raise enough players for several reasonably good orchestras here it's something, especially with.... Well, the Nedlands Orchestra, that's young people as well as the Youth Orchestra. And then the various other little groups like the chamber music they have. So that is certainly very noticeable and we all talk with envy of what the young people get today when we [think] of what we had.

RJ Anything you've noticed about audiences over the years? Have our audiences improved in their knowledge of music, do you think?

FB Oh many of them, many of them must have because this tremendous knowledge of a lot of people who don't go to concerts but they have a tremendous knowledge of music through listening to records. And although those of us who like to go to a live performance say you lose a lot if you don't see it live, but nevertheless there are many who wouldn't go to a concert but have an encyclopaedic knowledge of music. They might like music in general or chamber music or opera but they certainly have knowledge.

RJ You've also been an executive member of the Art Gallery Society?

- FB Oh, that was the.... that'd be the old Art Gallery Society.
- RJ Yes. 1959 to 1963 you were an executive member.
- FB Yes, well, we raised money. Again, I can't remember how. We had quite a few members and we did buy a couple of pictures for the Art Gallery and that fizzled out. I think when the Art Gallery was rather in the doldrums people were trying to build it up but, of course, the Gallery was incapable of coping with lots of things. But I'm still very interested in the Gallery of course but I don't take any part in it.
- RJ You've also been associated with the National Trust? I notice you were Chairperson of the Woodbridge Appeal Committee in 1968 to 1975, and a member of the Tranby Management Committee in 1976.
- FB Yes, well, that was when they were repairing those buildings and we had a small committee which was to do with raising money and help them and we.... With Woodbridge when we made quite a lot of money with the help of people like Rod Kelly and people who showed us their galleries and that sort of thing, and then there was a furnishing committee of the National Trust. They were to do with furnishing all the rooms - we just helped to provide money and to see what was going on. So Woodbridge became well established as it is now and so we thought we'd like to take on something else so we took on Tranby and did the same thing until we felt there wasn't much more we could do because certain things we wanted done were not being done. But that's pretty well established now except it wants more money. So that was all.
- RJ Do you care to comment on the things that you wanted done that were not done?

FB Not at Woodbridge but at Tranby, it was to do with shingling on the roof. We had an architect who would only shingle with old shingles, or hand cut shingles, which were hard to get and would cost the earth and we said that was ridiculous. And then there was something else that we wanted done and time, a couple of years, went on and nothing was done, so my secretary and I and a couple said "Well, that's that. They can carry on without us." Which they have.

RJ You have been an executive member of the Karrakatta Club?

FB Oh, that's just from minor days.

RJ Have you enjoyed that?

FB Oh, yes. Well I'm one of the oldest living members of the Karrakatta Club because my mother joined me up - she had been a member for years - when I was quite young. I think daughters got in cheaply or something like that. They sent me out a thing the other day saying when all the living members had joined and a friend of mine who's much older than I, Lucy Cameron, she joined in 1925 and I was joined in 1926. [Laughs] So I don't think Lucy'll last much longer so then I'll be the oldest living member if I'm still alive. [Laughs] And another friend of mine was in 1929, and we're the oldest living.

RJ That's a very long time. Has that stayed a vital club in all those years?

FB Yes. Yes. Oh, they've had some very vital presidents. Well, Mrs. W. H. Vincent of the Kylie Club, she was president for quite a while and a Mrs. [Leslie] Craig from Dardanup June Craig was their daughter - the one who became Minister. She was a very vital person and of course the earlier ones were too, the ones who founded it. Who else have we had? Oh, Althea McTaggart, you know, the Liberal Party, she's president at the moment.

FB But just about all of them have been very strong women and now they've got a lot of [younger members]. By virtue of a bit of culture on Tuesday afternoons the Karrakatta Club was affiliated to all the Lyceum Clubs in Australia and, I think, London and places. And we'd have about an hour's culture on Tuesday afternoon [Laughs] when they get all kinds of university people to give talks, and then a number of the young musicians. Oh, they have had Vaughan Hanly and Steve Dornan this year I think give an hour's recital on a Tuesday afternoon. They have all kinds of other activities now, needlework and discussing books and all, so they are really trying to revitalize it because for a while we had a lot of old members who used to sit in the front rows and go to sleep. [Laughs]

RJ What has been the main philosophy behind the Club?

FB Well, I think the role of women because they've had a lot of highly intelligent women. Edith Cowan - well, she would certainly have been a member, but who's the woman who started it? Onslow, Lady Onslow, I think she was the Governor's wife, she started it. I think it was to get women together socially but not light socially: seriously. They were serious people. I don't know that they ever did anything really practical. I think it was probable they got together and talked, but I don't know whether they did any sort of charitable things. But it certainly has been quite a thing in the community.

BUNNING

I've talked enough, but looking back I think one of the things one notices today is that when we were younger a lot of us didn't have jobs. We didn't feel the necessity and a lot of us weren't brought up in that atmosphere. But we did feel we had to do as much as we could for charities or works like that, so it was always easy in a way to get people to work on those committees, whereas now there are so many younger people who have jobs and feel they have to work for the sake of their family and it's harder and harder to get people to do voluntary work or charitable work I think. Although it's amazing the number who do when you read about the Friends of Perth Hospital, the Friends of this and that, and the wonderful people who help with handicapped children and everything. But that is one thing that it is harder to get the leaders for; a lot of those things.

RJ And has that been a satisfying life for you, the role that you've had on so many committees? Have you enjoyed that?

FB Oh, yes, I have. I must say that I've had more out of it than I've put into it.

RJ Your life over, with the way society has changed, would you choose now to work or would you prefer to do what you did?

FB Oh, no, I would have liked to have worked harder at things, to have had more proper qualifications. I feel very ignorant now when you think of all the qualifications so many people have, and of their dedication to work and study which I.... I suppose I was never really a proper student in the proper sense of the word. A friend of mine who has all kinds of degrees and is quite brilliant, she didn't start studying until oh, she must have been in her late twenties, but she said that about thirty or so she realised that she was a student, that she wanted to study. Well, I never had that.

FB I worked hard when I had to practice and that sort of thing. I never just had the dedication I suppose. Must have been a bit superficial I think. Liked going to dances and playing tennis and all that sort of thing. Although I used to practice. Nowadays so many people in their late seventies and that go and do degrees and things. I think I never felt that I had quite the intelligence somehow. I never had much confidence in myself which is a sad thing to grow up with but plenty of people say they're the same.

RJ Of all the very many things you've been associated with, what have you enjoyed most in life?

FB Oh, the music certainly. I've travelled a lot. I've been very lucky. I've loved travelling. And I've always been interested in different, strange places. I always remember when I was very young we used to get the Boys Own Annual from my brothers and I used to devour those books. "With orchid hunters in Borneo" - that's one of my earliest ambitions: to have been an orchid hunter in Borneo! [Laughs]. And I've adored reading. I've loved reading travel books and all that. But I like my comforts too - I wouldn't suffer the discomforts of those people [Laughs] when climbing Everest and all this sort of thing.

RJ And what part of your musical life has been the most enjoyable?

FB Well, I always enjoyed playing and working for these recitals but I was frightfully nervous and I always used to say, "Why the hell do I do it?" and yet you'd feel you had to, that it was a challenge. And then the challenge, to me it was always disappointing - the result. But certainly the music and the association with music people. That has been a great enjoyment. You talk the same language.

RJ It should be recorded that in June 1978 you were awarded the OBE and on that occasion it was because you were considered to have made, "A big contribution to Western Australia's cultural life through activities associated with the arts, mainly in the field of music."¹ How did you feel about that honour?

FB Oh, I suppose it's fair enough. I suppose I was a great believer to committees obviously, but how much I've contributed I think that's perhaps exaggerating a bit. But I've certainly always been interested and supported things. But apart from that what practical things I've done I wouldn't know.

END TAPE FOUR SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

¹ "Queen's honours; State", West, June 3, 1978, p. 7.

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