

A somewhat atypical Kalgoorlie story.

Kalgoorlie people may not be aware any more of the following story.

There was once a nun in the Boulder Convent by the name of Sr. Ita. She had apparently studied piano in Germany and had returned to Australia to become a nun. Owing to a serious heart condition, she was only able to teach two piano students. Their names were: Eileen Joyce and Olive Ruane.

Eileen Joyce went on to have an international career as a concert pianist and Olive Ruane set up a piano teaching studio in the centre of the town of Kalgoorlie. I was fortunate enough to have had her as a teacher and it was there I learnt a method which she called "shadowing" and which originated from Sr Ita. I have to say that I have used this method all my performing life and wouldn't have been able to survive without it.

Recently, I received a phone call at 5pm on a Friday evening asking me to give a concert between 9 and 10pm that same night. I had to return to the city and grabbed some music for this purpose. Admittedly I also did two improvisations but the rest was real organ literature. This was what is known here as "the long night of the Church". The church was full and the level of interest was enormous. A lot of young people came up as the concert was finishing and showed a great deal of fascination for the organ as an instrument. It was a very positive experience for me as an organist.

But I have to say that it was by virtue of having practiced these pieces using the "shadowing" technique over the course of the years that enabled me to give a concert at such short notice. And I have to thank Sr Ita from the Boulder Convent for that!

I now teach this method to my students at the Conservatorium in Teplice, Czech Republic, the only difference being that I have adapted it to the organ, which is of course now my main instrument.

I went to Vienna after finishing my studies at UWA and studied the organ there, to become the chief organist at St. Peter's Church for 9 years. But when looking back, it was Miss Ruane who really stands out as perhaps my star teacher! And now the students in this country are also benefiting

from her teaching as well as that from Sr Ita of the Boulder Convent , if only indirectly!