

Two Organs

by Elizabeth Brinsden

Chapter 1 - Departure from Australia

As the gracious P&O ship Arcadia pulled slowly out of Fremantle Harbour accompanied by the traditional band music and streamers, I stood on deck wondering what on earth I was doing there. Oh, yes!, there was some vague plan to go to Vienna in order to study organ in existence, but as romantic as it may have seemed at the time, it was quite far removed from reality. I was actually unable to play the organ at all, having been a pianist up until this point. In addition to this, the booked destination was not Vienna but London! How could it have been otherwise for an Australian? This journey of March 1970 was to become one of the last to be made by a passenger ship travelling to England, ending a tradition of 200 years.

Such a departure was always a spectacle worth seeing and accordingly a very good opportunity to become absorbed in a day-dream. Even without such an excuse I probably would have been lost in one anyway. Some people used to say I possessed beauty: this was completely incomprehensible to me. At each glance in the mirror half the nose would be wished away. One could have done well without this entirely cumbersome "aristocratic stamp" as it was compensatorily referred to by other members of the family, blessed or otherwise, with the same trait. There was also the extremely fair complexion which had been unmercifully exposed to the penetrating rays of the west Australian sun for the first seventeen years of existence. My childhood had been spent in probably the most notoriously wild mining city in

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Australia, Kalgoorlie, located in a semi-desert region of central West Australia.

At this point I was 23 years old and had just completed an anything but brilliant Law Degree having excelled in only one capacity ... as jazz pianist at the beer-swirling predominantly-male Law parties. Most enjoyable occasions! One thing was certain, I did possess advantageous prerequisites for the pursuit of a musical career, such as perfect pitch and improvisational ability. However, my only dream in life was love, marriage and happiness thereafter - a most original and intellectual ambition. Professionally I had no serious goals whatever, being anything but a career girl. Probably the entire motivation for travelling to Europe was to enjoy myself and the Arcadia was nothing but a floating matrimonial society of girls with the same idea. The "studying music" bit was just a camouflage label to give the whole thing an elevated title of social respectability.

For Australians the generally accepted target of an overseas trip was London as the first port of call. This had its roots in the colonization, one would be constantly told, "Everything is happening in the Northern Hemisphere". Eventually one comes to believe it, resulting in the inferiority complex most Australians carry around with them forever. Conforming entirely to this, I had paid two weeks accommodation in advance in London intending somehow or better still not at all, to go on afterwards to Vienna.

It is perhaps inaccurate to say the organ was completely unknown to me, I had as a child been organist at the Anglican Church in Kalgoorlie, playing it purely as a piano. At the ripe old age of eleven and possessing far more self-confidence than when I was double

the age, I had boldly offered to play for a monthly children's service one Sunday. To my amazement, the Minister agreed only reluctantly. I rather expected him to break out in enthusiasm! When Sunday came around it went off without a hitch; the whole thing was played by ear, the reading of music would have been possible but far too much inconvenience. It was now the Minister's turn to be amazed, but like all sensations, it died as repetition set in. Therefore, the pursuit of studying the organ was not completely without fundament, it was just a little on the shaky side, that is all.

Now the journey was underway to Europe. Apart from the six cases I had in my cabin, the Arcadia's vault had been blessed with an enormous trunk containing household goods ranging from knives and forks to a completely, for European frequency, completely unusable electric blanket. "It is cold in Vienna you know", I had been told by a concerned helper at packing, insisting on it going. After the 1968 Flash war between Egypt and Israel the Suez Canal had been closed forcing shipping to take the South Africa route. This added one week to the otherwise three and was anything but an eventful journey. There was not even a juicy storm to alleviate monotony. Day in day out, all one could see was water, water and more water.

Eventually a port of call was reached, the island of Madeira. It was a wonderful feeling to see something other than the sea. Foggy and cool was the weather as I stepped off the Arcadia onto the wharf this early afternoon. I was completely absorbed in my own little world as a taxi driver approached me offering his services for a drive into the city, apparently only five minutes away. His English was heavily accented but clearly understandable. I nodded and was led to the

nearby taxi. After about 30 minutes of travelling, I did begin to wonder where the "five minute away" city was. Houses were becoming more infrequent, travelling direction was constantly upwards and visibility by virtue of the fog or cloud was worsening every minute. This was enough to stir me out of the day-dream temporarily. I found myself leaning over to ask as politely as possible, "Excuse me, but I thought we were going to the city."

The taxi driver answered, "We are but first I take you show you island."

The whole thing was starting to become indeed questionable as visibility was non-existent, the cloud being too thick especially at this height. However, I decided not to let it disturb me until eventually in the midst of absolutely nothing except cloud and mountain-top, he stopped the car with the exclamation, "We cannot drive, no see, too much danger."

Here I experienced full realization that something was wrong only to find the presumption confirmed as he got out of the front seat to slide in beside me. This was obviously an exactly-planned, very likely often exercised undertaking. I as well and truly in his hands.

The hopelessness of the situation was only too obvious, so I resorted to prayer at least to ensure the nerves stay in tact. When he actually came out with his desire for sex, my answer was "no". The abstinence here was greatly assisted by the fact that the man was exceptionally hideous. At my refusal he became furious pulling out a very short, stumpy knife accompanied by a most appetizing and vivid description of what would be in store for me as a result of failing to comply.

"I kill you with knife, tomorrow you lie on mountain, lots of stabs and I have you after you dead anyway."

This was all very encouraging of course and I wouldn't even have known such a thing were possible if it hadn't have been for my legal training. I was aware that it was to be taken seriously.

He added gleefully, "I have a revolver in front too."

After another careful glance at the short stumpy knife, I swallowed hard and said as quietly and sweetly as possible, "Would you mind using the gun please?"

Fro some inexplicable reason the man put his knife away and decided to revert to the charm weapon again. My thoughts were operating at a feverish rate and I made certain my voice stayed soft and low. Every argument that came to mind was thrown in.

There was the lie about being married but alas to no avail because potential murderers don't seem to care. In sheer desperation I came up with, "You can't do this to me I am a Lawyer."

His answer was super prompt, "Then you bigger crook than me."

This I had to concede was not a bad argument. He had an answer for absolutely everything. When I said I would run for it he said, "You think I not think of that? - you meet someone more bad!"

Better the Devil you know than the one you don't!

After four hours or more in such debate, one idea came to me which I almost discarded before application, because it seemed so feeble and certainly old-fashioned. I said even more quietly and calmly, "If we do what you want us to do then we are nothing better than animals, both of us. We don't know one another and therefore can't possibly love one another."

For reasons that will always remain a mystery, this triggered off signals stirring in his otherwise dormant conscience, he said, " I not an animal. I take you back to ship and SHUTUP!" A command I was only too willing to obey. Oh for the good old days of murderers with decency!

He then got out returning to the drivers seat and started up again. After a short time of travel he turned around once more to announce triumphantly, "I take you somewhere worse!"

Just as I had given up hope altogether, the sky cleared and the Arcadia appeared in all its glory. Never had I been so glad to see the ship as at that moment. He actually halted and let me get out whereupon the ordeal being safely behind me, I heroically started to shake all over. There were only two hours left before the ship's departure ... I had spent five hours with a potential murderer on a mountain-top. Have a Madeira, my dear! This even made me decide to leave the ship as soon as it hit Europe in Rotterdam and not to go to London as planned. From there I would go on to Vienna by train.

Chapter 2 - Europe

A feeling of extreme loneliness overcame me as I stood on the wharf at Rotterdam (surrounded by six cases and a trunk full of knives and forks) to watch the Arcadia pullout without me. I then took a taxi to the station (this time without incident) only to find that I was just in time to watch the train on which I had been so efficiently booked, also depart without me. This caused a flood of tears. One Dutchman quite unable to comprehend the problem said in a very matter-of-fact tone, "If you miss one train you catch another."

However to try to explain this to an Australian familiar only with the sensational importance of one connection daily (if at all) between the vast Australian cities, was as good as impossible. When eventually a few hours later I did get into another train saddles with the six-cases-plus-trunk-full-of-knives-and-forks, my sense of humour officially took leave of absence! Especially disturbing was the fact that a train change would be necessary twice and I was unaware of either where or when this would be.

Shortly after departure an American soldier passed by the compartment and noticing I was alone asked permission to join me which I granted. He was a pleasant person in his twenties, there followed the usually introductory questions. When as always in the travelling situation the one concerning destination arose, the soldier said to my relief he had the same route and would be glad to assist with the transferral of baggage at each train change. He even knew when and where it would be, that was quite something. Thanks to the soldier I found myself at long last really inside the train presumably

bound for Vienna. He got out somewhere along the line leaving me to my fate. The entire corridor was lined with the six-cases-plus-trunk, all unlocked except the trunk containing the knives and forks of the cheapest quality. Being somewhat weary as a direct result of all the efficiency, I decided to take a sleeping compartment. As morning drew near and the train appeared to really be arriving in Vienna, I decided to check my baggage only to find that the suit-cases had become sources of refuge in the form of seating for numerous otherwise would-be-standing passengers. Their utility as seating accommodation was probably to outweigh any other purpose they were ever to fulfill.

The train actually did arrive at Westbahnhof Wien, I gathered all six cases and trunk and disembarked. Once on the platform there was nothing I could do but stand there surrounded by my belongings and assess the hopelessness of the situation. Here I was able to speak one word of German, without even any addresses for well-meaning acquaintances, in Vienna, a city which couldn't have been further removed from anything I had ever known! The most sensible and useful thing to do in this situation is to burst into tears which is exactly what happened. Once again a polite young man came to the rescue and found for me a hotel room in Hietzing, a very pleasant suburb of Vienna. After just one week it was possible to move into the third district as "Untermieterin" or lodger in an apartment belonging to a very fine lady, a relic of the jet-set society in the 1930's Vienna. This relationship turned into a life-long friendship.

Inconceivable loneliness was what characterized the year spent here. My only real contact with another human being was with a very

old lady who lived on the top floor of the same building. However it was far from providing the necessary amount of normal relationship, I was hampered by poor command of the language. After six months the old family cook died making the somewhat enormous apartment superfluous to the lady who was a commercial artist. She decided to sell it and move into her studio in the first district forcing me to look for alternative accommodation. All this time I had been attending halfheartedly the Conservatorium studying organ and piano but was what one can justifiably call mixed-up. The decision was made to undertake something to counteract this self-imposed state and I did so by consciously seeking out people in great need in order to make myself aware of my own good fortune.

Chapter 3 - Haus der Barmherzigkeit (House of Mercy)

It was my intention to stay in Haus der Barmherzigkeit, a hospital for the incurably ill, for three months to get myself back into shape psychologically. Those three months turned into 14 wonderful years! It wasn't long before the desired effect became reality. When people would ask me as a newcomer, "Who are you?", I would answer, "I am a complete failure!" This resulted inevitably in laughter. Back came the sense of humour from its long leave of absence. Pretty soon I was enlisted to play for masses held at the ungodly hour of 5:45 a.m. After having survived six months creating nothing but a good impression I decided to go with a Japanese colleague from the conservatorium, to a restaurant. Neither of us had had any experience with alcohol at all although we were both 24 years old. We decided to demonstrate at once and for all our worldliness by ordering a glass of wine, knowing nothing about the world whatsoever, not even of the necessity of consuming food with alcohol.

The Japanese girl as in no time at the end of her tether with the terrible tasting conglomeration called white wine and I not finding mine one little bit better, but unable to see it got to waste, heroically finished off hers as well. When we got up to leave, the room swayed drastically. The two of us staggered out to the tram hiccuping alternatively as well as simultaneously, whichever way it fell. I had notions of absolute horror. If anyone were to see me in this state, gone would be the hard-earned reputation for ever in that Catholic convent. My thoughts revolved around how to get past the reception desk (being unfortunately the only possible entrance), through the

hospital area to my room without being caught red-breathed. Apart from the cacophony of the uncontrollable hiccuping, I was unable to walk straight and the smell of wine would be within a radius of at least 10 feet around me. I was doomed to disaster anyway because in a few hours at 5:45 a.m. there was mass to be played and the very strict Reverend Mother had the habit of coming up to the choir pit to personally supervise the organist throughout the entire mass.

How lucky was the Japanese girl! She could return to her flat as drunk as she liked without having to worry about causing a sensation. As the dreaded reception desk harbouring the porter came within sight, my chief concern was how to place one foot strategically in front of the other, keeping everything above it as straight as possible. To his dignified "Guten Abend", I reiterated as soberly as the situation would allow, "Grüss Gott". It seemed to take an age to pass him but I was successful. The next hurdle was perhaps far worse than that with the porter, at least there had been a glass window between him and the alcohol fumes. On the journey through the hospital itself there would be the well meaning nuns and the prim and proper night duty staff without the protection of the glass partition. Luck was on my side this evening -- I reached my room without encountering a single soul. As I fell into bed, it swayed as the P&O ship would have done had there been a storm on the way to Australia.

In no time 5:30 was on the clock. It struggled out of bed feeling absolutely dreadful not helped at all by the feeling of certain damnation on appearance of the Reverend Mother. I grabbed a plastic bag because my stomach signaled it to be advisable. Still reeking of alcohol, I staggered to the end of the corridor only to find that the

stomach made it known it couldn't stand the rubbish that was in it for one second longer. Out came the contents into the plastic bag, but alas, time did not permit it to be emptied. So off I went still clutching unfortunately absolutely everything that was there that really shouldn't have been. Having subsequently reached the chapel and organ, I was forced to place the already almost full bag at the foot of the organ. The smell of everything together must have been insufferable but the nuns always sat well out of harm's way downstairs with the exception of the the Reverend Mother, this being a situation more than bad enough for me in this condition. Through some sheer miracle, she did not appear upstairs for this particular mass - the first time that had ever happened. Not one person noticed anything was wrong. If they only knew what they missed out on! My reputation remained untarnished.

Whereas it may seem that occasions such as the one mentioned were the main substance of my Viennese existence, of course they weren't. To the contrary, I was attending the Conservatorium studying in a very straight-laced manner the piano and organ. My personal life at this stage revolving around matters concerning the convent and hospital. It just so happened that one month after moving into the building a very pretty and vivacious young nun did likewise for the purpose of attending the Vienna University for an agricultural science degree. St. Dominika was her name and she was to become my closest friend.

From the word "go" my impression of the place was an excellent one, the nuns being a group of exceptionally fine people. However, it was on the threshold between the old world of charitably high ideals and the new one dominated by materialism. The old ideals were what

I found so fascinating and unique about the institution. People otherwise rejected by their family and society because of their severe illnesses were taken in regardless of faith and wealth and subsequently made to feel like worth-while human beings. The director of his highly-respected institution was a man of 60 years of age possessing all the qualities one would expect of someone in this position. Out of the blue he became a widower and not at all an unattractive one. The nursing staff was run by a 54 year old very sophisticated nun who did not seem to have chosen the right vocation. Pretty soon the two of them found it necessary to have long important consultations in matters supposedly concerning management. One of these top-level discussions was interrupted by a fellow nun who discovered that the main method employed by them in such an exchange of ideas was to kiss each other behind the door. However essential the persons concerned may have found communications of this nature to be for management, in the eyes of the prelate and rector of the building, it was nothing but an unforgivable crime. The director was forcibly retired upon which wedding bells could be heard.

Of course the question of replacement was thrown aside, first and foremost the evil-doer had to be dealt with accordingly. Now, the prelate was a good man, but had absolutely no knowledge of human nature. He reached out for the first available person virtually from the street and blessed him with the directorship, accepting as sufficient qualification the man concerned's lay deaconship of the Catholic church. The fact that he banged his fists on the table, used very unsuitable language for a convent (like frequent shits and others even lovelier) and told everyone in all seriousness that he was a genius

didn't seem to perturb the prelate. One could go as far as to say, he was very reminiscent of an unfortunate era not too long ago and was so obviously mentally unbalanced that everyone knew about it except the one who really mattered, namely the prelate himself. With this erroneous move the entire nature of the place was to change - probably for ever.

Chapter 4 - Conquests

At this point one could justifiably ask after the old dream of love, marriage and happiness-ever-after. Not one bit was it forgotten, in fact, it was more strongly sought after than ever. Admittedly the big chance had been missed on the island of Madeira, but hope had not been discarded. One carnaval season a potential admirer telephoned with an invitation to the "Marriage of Figaro", a performance at the Volksooper. Not being the least bit interested in the man himself, I accepted readily solely motivated by the prospect of being able to attend some further carnaval functions. I was determined to be scintillating company all evening to assist attaining this goal. The overture began and with it a terrible drowsiness overcame me which as the opera continued became so intense it dominated my entire being. At appropriate or otherwise moments my admirer would turn to me uttering with great enthusiasm, "Isn't it absolutely marvelous?"

All I could do was to pull myself together desperately for a second in order to give a coherent answer, "Oh yes indeed", being able to think about nothing at all except for my tiredness. However these constant exclamations of praise were the only thing which forced me to keep my eyes open at any price. As it became increasingly difficult I suddenly had an inspiration. If I were to shut my eyes he would probably mistake it for a Karajan state of ecstasy. No nodding though, I warned myself from the instant I went into the state of ecstasy, I knew nothing about anything anymore - let alone the magnificent opera. My only recollection is being woken up by my would-be-admirer when it was all over. Not only did I have to go without visiting

any further carneval functions but I never saw the gentleman again. Once again, there was nothing doing with love, marriage and happiness ever after.

One Sunday there was to be a radio broadcast of a mass to be held in our chapel for which the well-known St. Peter's Choir from the city center had been invited to sing. As a result of this performance I became organist of the said choir. It was quite a contrast to have gone from wild old Kalgoorlie to sitting in a church oozing Roccoco splendour in the heart of Vienna performing the Viennese classics. Sometimes, especially at the beginning, I wished I had stayed in Kalgoorlie.

It was my main hobby at the hospital to take a personal interest in the patients especially those who could somehow manage to get around the building. The chapel was generally a place of encounter; for such people, church is either a real refuge or a distraction from an otherwise very monotonous daily routine. The organist was a figure of enormous interest for almost all patients. Adding greatly to the attraction was that the organ, an electronic one was placed strategically in the middle of the upstairs choir pit enabling all who were nearby to observe the footwork on the pedals. Some of them would spend the entire mass just watching the organist at work. For one of the patients, a man of my age confined to a wheelchair and slightly retarded, the organist was definitely the most important feature of the entire building. His name was Hansi and it was his pet hobby to enter the choir pit, sit by the organ and just watch me practise for hours on end. Being in possession of perfect pitch I was able to practise without turning on the instrument, all the motions of

organ playing were there but no sound. One day while practising the c minor Passacaglia from J.S. Bach both from memory and without sound, Hansi should had been watching for some time asked thoughtfully stuttering as always, "Wwwwhat is th th th the nnnname of th th th the pppppiece yyou are ppplaying?"

I answered, "It is the c minor Passacaglia from Bach."

Hansi said thereupon, "It is jllljust bbbeautiful."

Which of course it is, but under these circumstances nothing whatsoever could be heard, even with the best imagination. After finishing the fugue in this manner, Hansi came out with the following piece of wisdom: "Bbbbut Eeeelizabeth, dddo yyou knknknow wh wh what I lllike bbbbest of aaaaaaall abbbbout it?"

Here one usually expects a dissertational analysis of a particular passage, this was Hansi's: "Yyyyyyyour lllllegs."

One of the most exotic inmates and conquests of mine was Herberth, an indescribable man of 50 years old who had fallen on his head at the age of seven causing the intellectual and emotional development to halt at this level for ever. The body, however, did age, - becoming fatter and fatter until at our stage of this story his weight was so substantial his irregular footsteps could be heard all over the immediate surroundings whenever he put it into his head to undertake something. He too used to find it imperative to visit the organ at least once daily. It was a ceremony all of it's own. First, it would be announced by a crash into the door with all his might, resulting in a tremendous thump. That was his way of searching for the door knob. Then after opening it with even more thumps he

would find it easier being short sighted to call out from the open door, "Are you there?"

To which I would reply, "No."

This would be followed by another series of thumps coming from the re-closing of the door. Obviously in the process of this noisy closing something would register in his mind that I must be there in order to have been able to answer. So with a repetition of all the previous thumps plus several more for good measure, the door would re-open. Herberth would then conduct his massive weight noisily towards the organ. Upon reaching his goal he would lean over as close as possible and out of his mouth would come, apart from excessive amounts of saliva, the following question, "Two organs?"

My reply would be, "No, just one."

Pointing to the cupboard-like object next to the organ he would ask, "What's that?"

My reply would be, "That is the loudspeaker."

This explanation seemed to be to his satisfaction. Off he would plod accompanied by the cacophony of bangs and thumps. The next day there would be an identical recurrence of exactly the same procedure, followed by a seeming essential repetition of the same questions, "Two organs?", "No, just one", "What's that?", "That is the loudspeaker". This took place daily with no course deviations at all, not even a modification or wording to create variety, from August through December!

In December something happened to save the day. A second organ really did arrive and was recognizable as such even on the first day. It was down beside the altar, the chapel not being very large in

size. There was the usual earthquake at the door announcing Herberth's arrival. Everything was running according to habit.

"Are you there?", "No". The door was closed, re-opened and his mountainous stature staggered clumsily to the organ. My only thought was, thank goodness we really do have two organs now. Herberth with the usual amount of saliva dribbling from his mouth, leaned over to ask in all innocence, "THREE ORGANS?"

Apart from my position at St. Peter's I was also assistant organist to my teacher Hans Haselböck, who within Austria at least was a famous musician. In fact he was so famous even Herberth knew of him. One day he appeared after having read a poster on the notice board with the following piece of sensational news, "There is to be an organ concert. Both Franz Liszt and Brahms are taking part but Hans Haselböck isn't (being the only one who could in 1983).

Basically it was contact with people such as Hansi and Herberth that made life at the convent so appealing to me. They played the role a court jester must have assumed once upon a time.

Chapter 5 - Frau Summerer

As already mentioned, during my first year in Vienna my only real contact with other people was limited to that with a lady who lived on the top floor of the same building. Time had stopped completely for her except that when I first got to know her it was restricted to lamentations about the good old times under Kaiser Franz Joseph and the old aristocracy. She gave the impression of being at least 100 years old then but apparently she wasn't. After moving to the hospital, I still visited her regularly out of gratefulness for the role she had played when I had known no-one, a situation long since remedied. Physically, Frau Summerer was the personification of stoicism, but her mind was to wobble first. She had neither friends nor relatives, I used to bring her her food once a week, things given for her by the nuns. Unfortunately she started to develop the habit of sleeping in her clothes, including her coat for fear of not being dressed for the air-raid shelter when the siren went off. In other words a skip had been made in her mind from pre World War I to the end of World War II, but there it had halted and was not to be budged. After several months of neither changing clothes nor bathing, the smell was indescribable. Each time I would visit her she would tell me,

"The Russian soldiers marched down the Sechskrügelgasse today, to the Magistrate's building". The did indeed, but 30 years before! Frau Summerer was blessed with very understanding neighbors who would wait for me and threaten every time,

"If you don't do something about Frau Summerer we will have her taken away forcibly by the police surgeon to an asylum!"

I waited for her to have a clear moment and gently put forward the proposition that she come to live with us, making quite clear that we would not allow one single Russian soldier to pass our reception desk. The idea appealed to her at least in a good phase, so I set about to hand in all the necessary data, only to discover a medical certificate would be required from the general practitioner. People who are never ill don't have doctors, causing me to have to make inquiries as to where to go. I was advised to go to a doctor said to be for the economically disadvantaged. When we arrived at the waiting room, sitting around the walls were a lot of hard-faced, fat women and one man. For about half an hour she was very good but the restlessness started to set in. Suddenly digging emphatically into the floor with her walking stick, she turned to the only man in the room who happened to be beside her,

"Have you the Russians in your district too?"

The kindly man was thinking she was referring to the past answered, "But of course we had the Russians, and how we had them."

Nothing more was needed for the hard-faced women. There was an outburst of things like, "She's mad, she should be in an Asylum". A most discreet and charming reaction, but it didn't worry Frau Summerer one bit, she was completely unaware of it. The gentleman continued to offer reminiscences in exchange for her actualities. The entire conversation was based on a misconception of time, he thinking she was referring to the past, and she mistaking his contribution for the present.

By the time we were to enter the doctor's office, the waiting-room was in a turmoll. Everyone was speaking in a raised voice in order to be heard, the atmosphere was loaded with emotion; Frau Summerer because of the Russians of the present, the gentleman because of the Russians of once upon a time and last but not least, the fat women because their diagnosis was "insanity", a matter they found essential to pronounce at the tops of their voices. Our actual entrance was accompanied by proclamations about the Russians. Upon hearing my request for the certificate the doctor said in a raised voice also (being made necessary by the unrelenting Russians monologue) "I will not sign her up for your hospital because she belongs in the psychiatric clinic."

I answered loudly, "We have people who are much worse than she is."

The doctor retaliated, "That is your affair, I refuse to sign the document."

Frau Summerer, still raving about the Russians and I, were virtually thrown out and as we stood on the street outside she said very softly just for a change, "You see, the doctor has the Russians in his district too."

Months passed by until the neighbors spoke to me again in even less uncertain terms. I was able to dig up a doctor in the third district, so off we went to try our luck again. This time, even getting there was a traumatic experience. Apart from being several months smellier than the last attempt, she had in order to accommodate the various corns and bunions, cut out her elegant sandshoes from one side to the other all the way around the front of the shoe. This

ensured that every few steps taken the sole would roll under causing her to trip over her own shoes. Having to intercept the various falls by holding her up, we managed to arrive at the second doctor's office without an actual disaster. I said little prayers that she keep quiet about the Russians for at least one half an hour. My prayers were answered, not one dangerous thing was uttered and we left triumphantly in possession of the hard-earned document. No sooner had we left the office, Frau Summerer turned to me and said, "You know, everything would be different if the Russians were not here".

With the procurement of the certificate our problems were far from being over. The next thing to happen was, a bed became available and I was told she was to come in one that day or forfeit the opportunity. Suspecting that it would be a rather troublesome undertaking, I requested Sr. Dominika to accompany me. Frau Summerer received us cordially but immediately the prospect became reality, she turned on us, throwing us out with all sorts of lovely accusations like wanting her money, of which there was none anyway. We left feeling dejected knowing only too well that the fate in store for her if she didn't come with us, was a far worse one. One hour later we decided to try again. Upon ringing the doorbell she greeted us as though nothing had happened, we in turn suggested she come to have dinner at our place, something she readily accepted. the minute we got into the door of the building, we led her straight to the ward. She never saw her home again but died quite happy and well-cared-for in Haus der Barmherzigkeit. It was a battle was was worth all the effort. Ours was the lesser evil than the asylum would have been.

Chapter 6 - Pope John Paul II's visit to Vienna

Events were to become very dramatic indeed and no-one but the lay deacon director was to influence the course of them. especially for me personally. It so happened, his pet hobby was to purchase objects for the hospital even if the said objects were unnecessary or a duplication of an unusable item. He decided during one of his buying sprees to invest in a new piano. Possessing a self-acclaimed genius, thereby knowing everything better than anyone-else, he consulted only himself. Understanding in reality nothing whatsoever about it, what he actually purchased for the hospital and convent was not the conventional Beethoven-Brahms type instrument one would expect to find in such a venerable institution, but the most perfect sounding piano for jazz. As already mentioned, jazz was nothing new to me and I seized the opportunity in sheer delight.

At the age of 21, I was performing at a jazz club in the in those days very "green" city of Perth, Western Australia. During my performance a man in the packed audience was staring incessantly through the sea of faces at me. For some unknown reason I decided to run for it, doing exactly the opposite to what one ought to and without even knowing to where. He too ran but I had a start on him and found myself out in the corridor in front of a door leading to goodness knows where. I opened it only to be confronted with a urinating man, who took no notice of me whatsoever. Oh yes, I had lost the other one but had received this in exchange!

I vowed and declared that was to be the end of jazz and it was, until the lay deacon so kindly purchased by error a jazz piano for the

convent. From this day onwards the oath being well and truly overruled, jazz music could be heard pouring out of the walls of the hall just down the corridor from the hospital morgue.

Strangely enough, no-one objected, those in the morgue couldn't anymore. Several times however, complete strangers to the building could be heard to say, "What extraordinary music to be heard coming out of a building like this.!"

All this wouldn't have mattered, what really stirred things up was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Vienna. In the course of this visit he was to hold a service at our hospital and I had been assigned to play the organ for the occasion. Between the announcement of the visit and when it actually took place, saw an all-out of fights squabbles, frustrations and anger caused mainly by the peace-loving deacon and mostly about the presentation of the music. As far as I know my position as organist was never attested although I never actually volunteered. My rights in this purely Austrian affair would have been non-existent.

Eventually, without actual loss of life the big week arrived. The whole event was to be broadcast over entire Europe on Eurovision. This caused an influx of T.V. men erecting their equipment, accompanied by a flood of the choicest swear-words until they were told to clean up their language in anticipation of the coming event. Also a part of the preparation scenery were the lovely security "heavies" having the unthankful task of protecting the Pope from further assassination attempts. On the day itself just before everyone was about to enter the chapel to await the arrival of the Pope I was told some background music would be required for approximately three

minutes during which the Pope would be shaking hands with four or five people from the congregation. There was not time to even look for something respectable to play, I was to rely on artistic inspiration amidst police, hidden guns, and T.V. cameras, the latter of which being by far the least formidable. Eventually, John Paul II arrived accompanied by the sound of police sirens and helicopters. It was a dramatic moment as he entered the room and as the service progressed you could have heard a pin drop - quite something for such an exotic and unpredictable audience.

Of course Herberth had been kept well out of harm's way, he would have been far too likely to have screamed out to the Pope, "Three organs," something hardly appropriate on Eurovision. After the service had ended and the Pope was already mingling amongst the congregation, I started my improvisation in f major, being the key of the last hymn. From here I moved easily into b flat, doing something there, returning to f major establishing to my absolute horror the classic chord progression for the Blues. Sweat broke out as the realization hit me as to what I had done, but there was no turning back out of the disastrous direction things had taken. Instead of the planned four minutes maximum, it went on for well over twenty because he blessed everyone in the room. As time progressed, so did the inhibitions disappear making the "jam session" more and more apparent even to the lay person listening carefully enough. All those hours spent on the jazz piano down near the morgue burst through to uncontrollably take over the show!

The conservative city of Vienna, reacted to this as somewhat of a scandal. The last Pope to have visited the city was 200 years before

when Mozart was stilling running around the place. Remorseful tears were shed afterwards, one year later upon meeting someone who seemed to be quite alone in his appreciation of the disaster (describing it even as the absolute artistic highlight of the Pope's visit to Vienna), tears of laughter were shed about the same event. It was a sheer accident, the courage to do something like that intentionally would have been out of the question. Another result of this event was that someone advised me to go to Berklee College of Music if I was intent upon doing things like that, at least I should find out how to do it optimally.

Chapter 7 - Life behind the Stage with a Skeleton

A vague decision was reached in my mind that I should do exactly what I had been advised to and go to Berklee School of Music. However, as to be expected, the effective desire to really do so was completely lacking. In the first place I had grown to love Vienna and also I felt I was too old for such new adventures. Professionally speaking Vienna had become an absolute rut particularly with the jazz, the shoe just didn't seem to fit any more. It was this factor more than anything that eventually prompted me to apply. When to my amazement the scholarship offer came back, at least the sensible part of my mind decided to make the move. Sheer laziness and fear of the unknown would have overthrown all the intelligent decisions in the world had the lay deacon not once again come unwittingly to my assistance. This time his good deed outdid even the purchase of the jazz piano because if he hadn't have acted the way he did, I would still be there today, fastened to a complete dead-end even if a nice one.

Another of his pet occupations, apart from his buying sprees, was to make people's lives as miserable as he could within his powers. The only possibility he had to achieve this in my case was a periodical eviction from my room. Over a span of eight years of his regime, my room got progressively worse in the standard with each eviction. Finally he announced gleefully to Sr. Dominika, I would be moved to another building entirely, several streets away. Now this was a real disaster for me because I had slipped in the snow as clumsy people from Kalgoorlie do and had broken my wrist already a few years before ... quite the thing for a musician of course.

It would have meant my being on the street at 5:45 a.m. in the dark, being so wonderfully skilled in the snow anyway. A plan was evolved (without his knowledge naturally) whereby I would sleep on a folding bed behind the stage of the performing theater. During the day everything would be cleared away. The first week of existence like this was cumbersome. Another factor designed for comfort was that there were classes in progress for nursing aids and obviously there was need for a skeleton for this purpose. He became my roommate. Around his neck hung a green sign saying, "Please do not disturb." Actually he had a lot to put up with from me, being constantly bombarded with jazz piano but he was very gracious about it, grinning from one "would be ear" to the other. He was also a most effective guard at night.

The only time I could relax was over the weekends. The opportunity would be taken to dry my washing dramatically on the stage. Two months passed by like this and it had almost become a standard joke in the whole building, one of the few people unaware of it was the lay deacon himself.

One Sunday morning, after assisting at the 6:00 a.m. mass the man himself put it into his head to check the performance theater. Upon drawing the curtains he was confronted with the drama of my drying washing as well as a lively boiling kettle, the state-setting for the Sunday morning act I. Needless to say, I was evicted from there too. Even my palatial existence behind the stage with a skeleton was begrudged me! At this point, my dearly beloved Haus der Barmherzigkeit was exchanged for Boston.