

## **The Earliest Days of The Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composers' House**

For thirty years, longer than Peggy was married to Stanley Bate, longer than she worked at the New York Herald Tribune, I have been working for a woman that I barely knew. I was introduced to Peggy by James Murdoch, our mutual friend. James was a friend of Australian composers and a friend and he was Peggy's saviour in her later years.

### ***A first meeting***

Our first meeting was one of those lovely moments of serendipity, when you enjoy what seems to be a casual and momentary meeting that later, affects your life.

When travelling from Sydney to Melbourne for business I often took the overnight train: it gave me time to prepare, review, relax, sleep and get delivered into the centre of Melbourne in perfect time for a day's work. In 1986 on one of these trips, I was in the dining car having breakfast. I had the table to myself, but the dining car was quite full. Down the corridor towards me came an elderly woman, accompanied by a younger one. The older one was remarkable because at 7 in the morning she was wearing, a multi-coloured kaftan, a turban with large paste brooch and in one hand-held a black walking stick with a brass duck head handle. Not an every-morning-sight on the Southern Aurora express. The younger woman asked if they could join me at my table and when they had nestled in, I introduced myself. Peggy's response was unforgettable: "I'm Peggy Glanville-Hicks. I'm a composer!" Such pride, self-assurance and dignity.

I was able to say, that I had recognised her because I had been sitting behind her in the Sydney Town Hall just a few months ago when one of her works (I forget now which), was being performed. She warmed to me. (She and her friend Val Orchalski were returning from the Adelaide Festival where she had watched the performance of two of her operas, "The Transposed Heads" and "The Glittering Gate" and been feted by the Festival.)

### ***Instructions***

Three years later, in 1989 James brought Peggy to my offices in Kellett Street, Potts Point and she instructed me to draw up her will. I remember a short, stout woman, made taller by, yes, a turban with a large paste jewellery brooch, using a walking stick with a duck's head handle. When James introduced us, her manner was quite intense and cool. She certainly didn't remember that we had already met but she warmed when I reminded her of the circumstances.

She wanted to leave her home at 45 Ormond Street Paddington to be a residence for composers. As she said, "I could always find food by grazing at gallery openings, but the rent was often difficult to meet." She added, "Composers need a haven in which to work." She was to repeat that mantra, in various forms, over the next few months.

A couple of weeks and two or three drafts later, she signed her will. It appointed James Murdoch and I as her co-executors and provided that:

“3. AFTER PAYMENT of my just debts funeral and testamentary expenses and the costs of and incidental to the execution of the trusts of this my will I DIRECT my Executors to apply the whole residue of my estate (including, without limiting the foregoing, my house at 45 Ormond Street Paddington, its contents, papers, manuscripts, photographs, memorabilia and all royalties, fees and all other income from my copyrights), to deal with as they see fit to establish and maintain a trust for the purpose of making my house situated at 45 Ormond Street Paddington available for occupation by Music Composers for periodic residencies. The trust is to be known as the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composers' Trust (“hereinafter referred to as the Trust”).

4. THE FIRST trustees of the Trust shall be Peter Sculthorpe, James Murdoch and Shane Simpson. They may establish the Trust on such terms as they see fit PROVIDED THAT the primary purpose of the Trust shall be to provide a dwelling for use by composers. The criteria for and manner of selection of the resident composers is for the Trustees to determine from time to time.

5. IT IS hoped that the residency in the Trust house will create a haven and peace of mind which will enable the composer in residence to further his or her creative work.”

In so doing she left the copyright in her works to be administered by her executors and the balance of the estate (including the house and the royalties from her catalogue) to the testamentary trust. She believed that the royalties would be sufficient to fund the House and its program although even a quick glance at her royalty statements should have told her that this was, to put it kindly, unlikely.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Peggy dies***

Peggy died in June 1990. The terms of her last will and testament came as a considerable shock to her family as both her brother Beric and nephew Roger had expected that Roger would inherit the house. Naughty Peggy had not told the family of her intention and I suspect that she may well have led Roger to believe that he would inherit so as to ensure his continuing attention. The day after she died, Roger took up residence in the House, in the belief that it would be his.

The reading of the will in front of James, Beric, Roger, Peter Sculthorpe and Nadine Amadio turned into one of the more dramatic experiences of my professional life. When Peggy’s intentions were revealed, Roger cried, swore and ran up and down the stairs screaming. In the end, Roger had to be forced to leave the house. It took some days.

The confrontation with the family was extended and vitriolic but although the family sought to challenge it, the will withstood the scrutiny of the family’s lawyers. (For many years after,

---

<sup>1</sup> In April 2011, as executor, I assigned all of the PGH copyrights to the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Composers’ Trust. The Trust is now the owner of all PGH copyrights not assigned by Peggy to publishers during her lifetime. In March 2012 the Trust signed a world-wide administration agreement with G.Schirmer (Australia) for all of the PGH works owned by the Trust.

Roger accused me of wrongfully causing his disinheritance and even stealing from the trust itself.)

### ***The assets***

It was then for James and I to spend many hours at Ormond Street, going through her possessions, organising and cataloguing them so that I could prepare the application for Probate. Most of the furniture was broken and mended in the Peggy style, glassware and crockery was cracked and chipped and really only suitable for the bin; the rugs were taken to be professionally cleaned (although the one that Peggy had said was valuable was judged by Cadrys to be broken and valueless (another Peggysque tale), the sheets and towels were only fit for the tip, and so it went. Even her small grand piano was irremediably damaged – the soundboard was cracked – but we decided to keep the lid as a memento (intending at a later date to perhaps use it to record the names of the composer residents.)

Notwithstanding that Peggy had left everything to the trust, we made the decision to give Roger and the family some of Peggy's family heirlooms, partly in an attempt to appease Roger's relentless demands and partly because they had no realisable value to the trust. Her jewellery we gave to her nieces. We kept what we thought would be useful for a composer's house: the paintings, the rugs and some furniture. Now, all that remains of Peggy's furnishings is the bookcase in the lounge and the paintings.

The inventory of the House revealed a treasure. Peggy had long told James that she had destroyed all her letters but first in the bookcase, and then in various drawers, behind books, stuffed in the back of wardrobes, we found hundreds of letters from many of the great musical names of her time: Vaughan Williams, Yehudi Menuhin, Virgil Thompson, Paul Bowles, John Cage, Thomas Mann, Robert Graves, Carlos Busotti, John Butler, Colin McPhee and so on. We carefully packed them into boxes and took them to my office for safekeeping. These boxes were to become the saviour of Peggy's dream.

The condition of the house was dire. One corner of the floor in the lounge was rotten and dangerous to walk on. Peggy had covered it with a rug. The rosettes on the ceilings of the lounge and dining room had started to grow mould and when I explored more closely, realised that they had in part fallen away because of the damp emanating from the leak in the toilet: Peggy had repaired the rosettes by getting up on a ladder, rolling white bread in her fingers and applying as a putty. Everywhere there were examples of her handiwork: not repair, more disguise.

James Murdoch described it aptly in 'Gold Paint and String', his little piece on Peggy and the House:

"Following her death, her Executors found that House was in a terrible state of repair: furniture that was dangerous to trust, rotting floorboards, mould growing up the walls and across ceilings, rising damp, dangerous wiring, threadbare carpet and dysfunctional utilities. It was no more than one might expect of a poor, sick and elderly person who, during her later life had managed to maintain her home in a state of elegant decrepitude, but cleverly disguised by a patina of style and an artist's eye."

For as long as it had been occupied, Peggy (and her companion at the last, Val Orchalski) had managed to keep the House looking reasonably handsome but when it had been vacant for a few months, the mould and damp laid siege. It was obvious that it had to be renovated if it were to be liveable for composers. The difficulty was that Peggy had left the estate no money.

While this was going on, I drafted the deed of trust in accordance with the will and my understanding of Peggy's wishes. Peter, James and I had been named in the will but the three of us agreed that Anne Boyd and Nadine Amadio should be invited to join us as the first trustees. And so it was. The trust came into being on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1991.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The money-search***

In order to make the house habitable we needed to find money. Byron Harford, then a partner in Tonkin Zulhaika Harford, pro bono, did some preliminary plans and estimated that the work would cost \$100,000. This wasn't to be a deluxe renovation – it was just the cost of making the place safe and habitable.

On reflection, it should have been obvious that James, Peter, Nadine and Anne did not count money-raising amongst their many talents. We should have expanded the group of trustees there and then, but the group had a loyalty to Peggy that was perhaps overly protective of her intentions and wanted to keep the group contained.

In June 1992, to help with the workload, I applied to both the Australia Council and the NSW Ministry of the Arts for a grant to employ a director of the Trust House for one day a week. The Ministry made a one-off grant which allowed us to hire a part-time person (David Ward) for two days a week for three months. He helped with the letter writing to innumerable potential sponsors (none of which resulted in money).

APRA wasn't an option. Peggy was a BMI writer and although Brett Cottle (CEO) and Nick Hampden (Company Secretary) were supportive of the concept, they couldn't assist as Peggy (and now her estate) wasn't a member.

Our only small ray of sunshine was my application to the Stradivarius Foundation through Musica Viva. Jenny Bott and Tony Berg were very supportive and the Foundation made a grant of \$5,000 – not enough to dent the budget but enough to provide some much needed emergency cash flow.

### ***Ministry of the Arts***

Through this period, I had many conversations with officers at the NSW Ministry of the Arts, in particular Michael Goss and Peta Williams, and had taken them on a tour of the House.

---

<sup>2</sup> This was important for the will stipulated that if the trust was not formed within five years of Peggy's death, the assets would revert to nephew Roger.

However, the Ministry's funding program required that we could show that we had the "matching funds or letter of credit or other guarantee". Given that the Australia Council didn't make grants for capital works, I couldn't see how we could reach the bar. Rather in desperation, in June 1992, I provided the Ministry with a letter of personal guarantee promising,

"to make up the shortfall between the sum that the Trust is able to raise from sponsorships, donations, sales and other funding sources and the required matching funds. The maximum liability that I am prepared to incur pursuant to this guarantee would be fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)."

This was, at best, rash as I had few savings and would have had to borrow the whole amount. Nevertheless, the Ministry accepted my letter (with something between a wry smile and a grimace) and the trust was then in a position to make the application.

Although there was no obvious grant category available, after many discussions and considerable negotiation, in October 1992, the Ministry for the Arts agreed to make a one-off grant of \$50,000 provided that it was spent in the current financial year. This would never have happened without the support of Michael Goss, Peta Williams and Gianfranco Cresciani, all officers of the Ministry. They embraced the project and steered it through the funding bureaucracy. One of the conditions of the grant was that the archive of letters be first offered to the State Library of NSW and then to the National Library.

Of itself, this success was pyrrhic. Until we found matching funds, we weren't really in a position to accept the money and start work: \$50,000 wasn't, of itself, enough to do the renovation and anyway, accepting it would have meant the triggering of my personal guarantee. The only hope was that the Australia Council would step up.

### ***God bless the Australia Council***

All through this time I had been in regular communication with Victoria Owens, the Assistant Director (Music) at the Australia Council. She was supportive but again, we didn't fit into any existing grant category. Worse, the rules of the Council forbade capital grants of this nature. After many informal discussions the General Manager, James Murdoch and I persuaded Max Bourke that the greater good was more important than guideline purity. At Max's suggestion, in April 1993, I wrote a formal request to the Council for assistance. I concluded that letter:

"I am grateful for the interest that you have already shown and would appreciate any your continuing interest and assistance. I am sure that we will get this project up this year. It's too important (and I am too determined) to permit of any other result."

In the end, and thanks to Max's internal advocacy, the Council agreed to make the Trust a loan of \$50,000, not a grant. The documentation included a first mortgage over the property a requirement that the loan be repaid on or before December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1993.

It was a brave move on the part of the Australia Council for the loan was a first of its kind (and perhaps the last). However, without it, Peggy's intentions would likely have been still-born. We would have just six months to sell the papers and repay the loan - but we had our budget. (Not only that, I was off the hook for the guarantee to the Ministry for the Arts!)

### ***Work commences***

I found a builder who was prepared to do the work for cost plus a very small profit margin and we started the basic renovations necessary to make the house habitable for composers.

In January 1993 I wrote to the Mayor of Woollahra Council, Alderman Andrew Briger asking him to support my request that the House be granted relief from council rates and charges. At our subsequent meeting he told me how his son Alexander was training to be a conductor and indeed we probably spent more time discussing him than the application. In any event, since that time, the Woollahra Council has continued to exempt the House from Council charges. (Peggy would have met this news with a great harrumph as she had long been at war with the Council over the tree on the pavement in front of her house. Its roots were vicious and were causing structural damage to the fence and front wall of the house. It became her mission in life to have it removed – a mission that would remain unfulfilled.)

By September 1993, I could report to the meeting of trustees that the renovation was virtually complete. We still needed the furnishings, but the garden was now looking charming again. The wonderful Fleur Kreel ('Gardens By Design') attacked the little jungle, removed the noxious weeds and replanted it, pro bono. It cost just \$200 for the plants.

I wrote to several retailers and wholesalers asking for furniture. At one stage it looked as though David Jones might come through but, again, it led to nothing. And so, it was a day filled with sunlight when I thought to ask one of my music clients whose day job was marketing manager for IKEA. After considerable persuasion, he agreed that IKEA would furnish the house and provide the sheets, towels, plates, and cutlery – provided that he could photograph the final results for use in the IKEA catalogue. And so it was. I'm not sure what Peggy would have thought about her house featuring in the IKEA catalogue or indeed the choice of red armchairs, but I think she might have appreciated the stubborn effort that led to the outcome.

During this time the trustees had hardly met for, until we had a functioning house, there was little that Peter, Anne and Nadine could do. We had however been discussing who would be suitable to invite to be the first composer resident. The names of three young promising composers kept coming up: Gordon Kerry, Lisa Lim and Julian Yu. Nadine contacted them all, seeking an expression of interest and all were thrilled. The trustees decided that the first composer-in-residence would be Gordon Kerry.

The House was officially opened by the Minister for the Arts Peter Collins at midday on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1993. The Minister spoke, as did James. Friends of Peggy's, builders, funders, sponsors and composers were all there to celebrate. As James would have said, "It was bonza!"

## ***The letters***

The sale of the letters was a priority, for without this we had no money to repay the Australia Council or pay for any of the running costs. Throughout the year, James and I had had long discussions as to where best to sell the letters: America or Australia. In the end the decision was taken out of our hands because the Minister had required the SLNSW to get first right of negotiation. In the end, we offered them for sale to both the SLNSW and the Victorian State Library. The Victorian State Library already had a substantial holding of her papers because Peggy's great friend Joyce McGrath worked there and had been building up their collection for some time. It was their most natural home. I think that Joyce McGrath had probably thought that we would donate the letters and when we made it clear that they would have to pay, relations became a bit purse lipped.

The SLNSW was more determined. When they received a valuation from a local valuer the figure was so low that they wouldn't even tell us what it was! It made them realise that it would be impossible to get a defensible valuation in Australia and so they sent the inventory of correspondence to Sotheby's in London. In the end, their offer was much superior to that of the VSL and James and I took the higher price. The papers went to the SLNSW for \$60,000. The Australia Council could be repaid.<sup>3</sup>

## **APRA**

I applied to APRA for support. They were supportive of the concept but, given that Peggy was a BMI writer and not a member of APRA, Brett Cottle (CEO) and Nick Hampden (Company Secretary) advised that the executors would need to resign the BMI membership

---

<sup>3</sup> The repayment of the Australia Council loan had a long tail. Clearly the Council's accounting systems couldn't cope with the concept of a loan and in 2008 the Trust was again asked to repay it. Frankly, after all that time I had forgotten the details and I assumed that I had simply forgotten to repay the loan from the SLNSW purchase of the letters. I met with the Director of the Music Board, Kate Lidbetter and explained that paying \$50,000 would mean the winding up of the Trust and the sale of the House. After many more discussions, submissions and indecorous wailing, the Council agreed to convert the loan into a grant. But that was not to be the end of the matter.

In 2012 (when on holiday in the Shetland Islands) I received a very firm email from the Australia Council again requiring the immediate repayment of the loan. It must have been the salt air that caused me to forget that just four years earlier, the Council had converted the loan to a grant.) Upon my return I delved into the old accounts (as I should have done in the first place) and found that the loan had been repaid back in 1993. There it is was in the accounts! The Trust can perhaps expect another letter of demand in another ten years. Next time, there will be no need for anxiety. The loan can now be proven to have been both repaid and forgiven. Whether it is forgotten is another matter.

and join APRA. In a letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> May 1994, BMI responded to my letter of resignation with an extraordinary piece of passive resistance:

“Regrettably, we are not in a position to comply with your request at this time. In accordance with the writer agreement between Peggy Glanville-Hicks and BMI dated January 15, 1981 the next termination date is December 31, 1994 with not more than six months or less than sixty days notice by registered or certified mail. Therefore your request to terminate the above-mentioned agreement is premature.

Should you wish to terminate this agreement effective December 31, 1994 a termination request must be sent to BMI postmarked between July 1, 1994 and October 31, 1994.

Please let us know if we can assist you in any way.”

I wrote to Brett Cottle at APRA, enclosing the BMI letter saying:

“For your interest I enclose a copy of a letter I have just received from BMI. Do your sister organisations not bring all collecting societies into a certain repute with letters such as this?”<sup>4</sup>

On 14 July 1995, I was elected (on behalf of the estate) to Associate Membership in APRA. Notwithstanding this, APRA turned down my request for funding for the composers’ house. Brett Cottle was very sympathetic to the cause, but the relevant sub-committee of the board was very biased towards music that sold records and got lots of airplay. Notwithstanding a lack of board support, for some years APRA (and in particular Nick Hampden), did assist with the administration of the House. Applications were directed to APRA and APRA arranged things such as maintenance and cleaning – although the costs were all still billed back to the Trust. It would not be for another 14 years, that APRA would give the composers’ house financial support – when it gave the Trust \$20,000 towards the second renovation of the House.

But that is part of another time..

Shane Simpson  
10<sup>th</sup> December 2019

---

<sup>4</sup> Shortly after, my raised eyebrow was given more authority when I was appointed by the Commonwealth Government to review the efficiency and equity of APRA and its sister societies: “Review of Australian Copyright Collecting Societies” (1995).