

Margaret Sutherland: Experiences as a music student, teacher and performer

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Margaret Sutherland (1897-1984) is best remembered as the leading female Australian composer of her era. Her most notable legacy was her compositions. Sutherland's œuvre totals approximately 170 works, 21 of which were written for solo piano. The piano works range from simple pedagogical works to sophisticated concert works and span more than 50 years (1914-1967). Sutherland's significant contribution to Australian music literature tends to overshadow her role as a performer, teacher and student. An examination of primary source material (much of which has not been previously examined) highlights that in addition to her numerous compositions, Sutherland established a performance career, maintained a successful teaching practice and participated in many recordings of her own works, the last of which was made in 1967. The role of the piano was central to her career, which is evidenced in her own compositional output, performances, recordings, and even in her approach to composition, which was often undertaken at the instrument.

Introduction

In this paper, I will outline some examples of Sutherland's experiences as a music student, piano teacher and performer. These accounts will highlight some of her hardships, endeavours and achievements. Through an examination of primary sources, this paper will demonstrate the diversity of Sutherland's role in Australian artistic life.

A number of written, oral and some aural documents are utilised in this paper.¹ Much of this material has not been previously publicly available. The primary sources include letters, a diary scribed by Sutherland, accounts and memoirs of her student, Leonard Fullard, teaching manuscripts and some of Sutherland's personal recollections which span the period 1918-1967. Further to this, some of Sutherland's recordings of her own works are also examined.

An examination of the role of the piano in Sutherland's career provides the material to consider another dimension of her creative endeavours. Her learning experiences provide historical insights into problems which were endemic in Australia in the early twentieth century; her pedagogic approach indicates her passion for teaching and hints at her untiring campaigning to enhance education, and her recordings and performance career illustrate her cooperative ability and networking skills.

¹ I would like to thank the Mr Anthony Bunney, Executor of the Sutherland Estate, Anna Davies, grand-daughter of the late Dr Margaret Sutherland and Jennifer Bellsham-Revell, daughter of the late Leonard Fullard for their generosity in permitting the use of private material which is used in the preparation of this paper. I would like to acknowledge the co-operation of the ABC in permitting the use of audio samples of the composer's recorded performances of her own works.

Sutherland as a piano student (c.1901-1917)

It is widely recognised that Sutherland benefited from an educated and artistic family background, however not all her early experiences were encouraging. Sutherland recalled that she was playing at four years of age, for a woman known as Mrs Fodgins. In a lecture, Sutherland referred to Mrs Fodgins as a synthetic “aunt”, implying that she wasn’t a relative.² She wrote that Mrs Fodgins:

... disapproved completely of my trying to play the piano. Well – I was no Paderowski (sic) I’ll admit at four and a half. But this occupation was a rather routine affair of mine, as indeed of all our family, and it had never been frowned upon by anyone yet. But somehow or other Mrs. Fodgins had the idea that the piano was a contraption for the playing of HYMNS, and this made her unpopular because she never forgot to make her views perfectly clear at all times.

Sutherland’s sister Dorothy, who was eight years older than Margaret, was an important influence on her early development, through her own example of piano playing and particularly in her repertoire selection. Dorothy studied piano with her aunt Julia and became a piano teacher herself. Julia Sutherland (1861-1930) was Margaret’s first piano teacher. Julia Sutherland had been taught by Louis Pabst (1846-1933) who in turn had been taught by Anton Rubenstein. Margaret continued that her aunt was “a gifted and expressive musician: but being very small herself and her limited span made certain works well nigh impossible. An inspiring teacher.”³

Sutherland passed the Junior Public examination and “studied harmony and counterpoint (interspersed with a little composition)” with Mona McBurney (1862-1932)⁴ and on the advice of her aunt, Julia, Sutherland applied for a music scholarship at the end of 1913. Sutherland performed her own *Sonata* for solo piano at the audition. This was providential in that it led to her being “given two scholarships – one to study piano with [Edward] Goll: the other for composition with Fritz Hart.”⁵ It seems that early in Sutherland’s career, the piano was viewed as an avenue through which she could develop as a musician and ultimately as a composer.

In 1914, Sutherland commenced studies with Mr Fritz Hart in the 2nd Year Diploma course at the Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne.⁶ Classes were held

² Dr Sutherland, “Difficulties.” Lecture to the “Catalysts,” August 1973. Records of the Lyceum Club, Melbourne Victoria. 1912- c.1970. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 11270.

³ M. Sutherland, “These things I must Remember,” 9.

⁴ “[McBurney] studied at the University of Melbourne (BMus 1896), becoming the first female graduate in music.” Faye Patton, “McBurney, Mona (Margaret),” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, Accessed 2 May 2007. <http://www.grovemusic.com>

⁵ M. Sutherland, “School.” Lecture to the “Catalysts,” August 1973, Records of the Lyceum Club, Melbourne, Victoria, 1912-c.1970, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 11270, 15.

⁶ This institution was originally known as the Marshall-Hall Conservatorium, and later became known as the Albert Street Conservatorium (reflecting the address). Later it became known as the Melba Conservatorium. In 1913-1915 its legal title was the Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne. Currently, its official title is the Melba Memorial Conservatorium of Music. During Sutherland’s studies there were two conservatoriums of music, one of which was associated with Melbourne

in a group with fourteen to nineteen other female students. Hart urged his students to compose (following his example) and set out “in earnest towards Anglicizing serious music in Melbourne...”⁷

Sutherland also attended the Interpretation Class conducted by Hart in which the students were called upon to perform currently studied works. The “Order of Studies” states that the student’s “renderings of such works are meanwhile criticized more from an artistic than a merely technical standpoint, and suggestions are made as to poetic import, manner of interpretation, phrasing, &c.”⁸

Sutherland commenced her pianoforte studies in Goll’s Master School at the Conservatorium of Music in February 1914. In that year, Sutherland performed Brahms’ *Variations on a Hungarian Song* as a member of Goll’s “Master School of Pianoforte Playing.”

The prospectus of 1915 states that the Master School was divided into two grades, with the pupils of the B Grade attending the ordinary classes of the Conservatorium in addition to piano instruction, whereas A Grade students (a class limited to twelve students) were expected to “devote their entire attention for at least one year to their pianoforte studies.... The standard of the A Grade is one of advanced solo playing, to which only pianists of exceptional merit will be admitted.”⁹ Sutherland was placed in the B Grade in a class of three students for two hours per week, resulting in 40 minutes of individual tuition. The Order of Studies published by the Conservatorium stated: “The advantage of this system lies in the fact that the student hears instruction given to two other students, and probably hears the correction of faults other than his own, or the explanation of difficulties he himself has never encountered. This is of special value to anyone who intends to be a teacher.”¹⁰ Group teaching as a teaching technique was progressive at this time, and Goll’s far-sighted approach to teaching exposed Sutherland to a variety of other students’ techniques and repertoire.

In 1915, Goll was expelled from the Conservatorium of Music as an “enemy alien” but in November of that year he accepted a position at the Melbourne University Conservatorium of Music. Goll was able to bring prestige to the institution as he had been a student of Emil Sauer,¹¹ who in turn, had been a student of Liszt. Goll was a versatile performer, who was “comfortable performing music from John Blow to Prokofiev.”¹² Goll’s new appointment prompted Sutherland to seek another scholarship at the Melbourne University

University, whilst the other was an independent institution. It is the latter institution which is referred to above.

⁷ M. Sutherland as quoted by Stuart Rosewarne, “2nd part of the Sutherland History,” 26. Private papers held by Anthony Bunney, Executor of the Sutherland Estate.

⁸ “Order of Studies.” Publication of The Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne. 1915, 7.

⁹ “Order of Studies.” Publication of The Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne. 1915, 5.

¹⁰ “Order of Studies,” Publication of The Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne. 1915, 6.

¹¹ “Emil George Conrad (von) Sauer, (b. 1862; d.1942), German pianist, teacher and composer. James Methuen-Campbell, “Sauer, Emil (George Conrad) [von],” in *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, Accessed 2 May 2007. <http://www.grovemusic.com>

¹² Peter John Tregear, *The Conservatorium of Music University of Melbourne: An Historical Essay to Mark its Centenary 1895-1995* (Melbourne: Centre for Studies in Australian Music, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, 1997), 58.

Conservatorium of Music. Margaret Sutherland was awarded equal second place with Eileen Mary Byrne.

It appears that neither Hart nor Goll were particularly dogmatic teachers. Sutherland commented on Goll's teaching: "Goll was a strange teacher. He had no idea how to teach, but he just had what he called 'Ideas.'" ¹³ Despite this, Sutherland believed she owed him a great deal as he offered her the "guidance I needed in so many different ways." ¹⁴ The flexible pedagogic approach adopted by these men appealed to Sutherland as she had always spurned dogmatic teachers and curricula. ¹⁵

By coincidence, George Marshall-Hall ¹⁶ also accepted a teaching position at the Melbourne University Conservatorium in 1914. During Sutherland's studies at this institution, and according to her writings, ¹⁷ Marshall-Hall proved to be one of the most influential people in the young student's life and she established a warm regard and respect for him.

Marshall-Hall died in 1915 (aged 53), and Sutherland commented, "His death was a tragic loss to Melbourne" ¹⁸ Sutherland wrote that subsequent to his death, the Interpretation Classes "turned into 'Concert Practice'. There was never any *musical* comment made, but a voice would say 'That took exactly seven minutes' or whatever the time was."

Ultimately, Sutherland lost the direction (through death or relocation) of all these mentors whose advice she had come to cherish and there is no information to suggest that Sutherland sought or obtained further piano tuition after 1917.

Sutherland's teaching career (c.1918-1923, 1925-1939 and c.1961-1962)

In 1918, Sutherland was appointed as a piano teacher to the Presbyterian Ladies' College in East Melbourne. As part of the school's curriculum, every student was expected to learn music. Sutherland complained:

...the relentlessness of those half-hour lessons, one after another, after the other, was, to me, trying beyond all description. Relief came

¹³ M. Sutherland, Scholarship: "Three Universities in One," Private papers held by Anthony Bunney, Executor of the Sutherland Estate, 1973, 5.

¹⁴ M. Sutherland, "Young Days in Music." *Overland* 40 (December 1968), 25.

¹⁵ M. Sutherland, "Some Memories of the Sutherland Family," as appears in "These things I must Remember," 31. Papers in the possession of the Anthony Bunney.

¹⁶ "George William Louis Marshall-Hall, (b. 1862; d. 1915). Australian composer of English birth. ...In 1894-5 with W.A. Laver, he established the Melbourne University Conservatorium, introducing a course unfashionably centred on interpretative sensibility built on technical efficiency..." Thérèse Radic, "Marshall-Hall, George W(illiam) L(ouis)," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 3 May 2007. <http://www.grovemusic.com>

¹⁷ In a lecture in 1959, Sutherland said of him: "Marshall-Hall was a man of unusual vision. - His was a rugged, dynamic personality and he was no glad sufferer of fools... ." M. Sutherland (M Albiston), "One Lap Behind." Lecture to the "Catalysts," 1959, Records of the Lyceum Club, Melbourne, Victoria, 1912- c.1970. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 11270, 8.

¹⁸ M. Sutherland, "School." Lecture to the "Catalysts," August 1973, Records of the Lyceum Club, Melbourne, Victoria, 1912-c.1970, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 11270, 17.

sometimes, when the pupil failed to turn up, and I could spend the time practicing for myself. We gave 26 lessons per term and received £2/10 for it. The school profited by £1/10. Even in those days it was sweated labour. On the credit side, however, there was the occasional interesting and promising student, some of whom have been my valued friends ever since.¹⁹

In order to supplement her income, Sutherland also undertook a number of other paid engagements, of which she wrote in précis:

Work went on at the Presbyterian Ladies' College, East Melbourne as well as in my room in the city. Five and a half days teaching all day also I included a number of country centres. School afternoons for children with added adult music in the evening.²⁰

The University of Melbourne Calendar of 1919 states that Sutherland was "understudy to Mr Goll"²¹ in the piano department: a position which continued until 1923.²² In 1922-23, Goll spent one year overseas, which resulted in Sutherland assuming his practice, in addition to her own. The increased workload added to the young musician's sense of frustration. She stated that she was so desperate for solitude during her teaching commitments, that she occasionally "stretched out on the floor with her feet pressed hard against the door so as not to be disturbed by late students or unsuspecting visitors."²³ Although this larger workload was onerous for Sutherland, the increased income provided her with the funds to pursue compositional studies overseas, as she had realised that, "of course there was nobody in Australia who could teach you composing. No-one at all. So I had to go to London."²⁴

On her return from England (November 1925), Sutherland resumed teaching duties at Melbourne University, with the more prestigious position of teacher of "Pianoforte, Chief Study" whilst retaining the position as "understudy to Mr Goll."²⁵

From 1927, Sutherland was increasingly occupied by domestic pressures: she was married in 1927 and her first child, Mark, was born in December 1928 and her daughter, Jennifer was born in May 1931. Her performance activities decreased from 1930 and her compositional output throughout her children's infancy was severely curtailed. Financial difficulties²⁶ compelled her to continue

¹⁹ M. Sutherland, "These things I must Remember," 42.

²⁰ M. Sutherland, "1920 and so on," Diary, National Library of Australia, MS 2967/Box 2, 3.

²¹ *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1919*. Printed for the University by Ford & Son, Drummond Street, Carlton, Melbourne, 1918, xlvi.

²² *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1920*, (Carlton, Melbourne: Ford & Son, 1919), 44; *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1921*, 44; *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1922*, 46; *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1923*, 47; *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1924*, li.

²³ Stuart Rosewarne, "2nd part of the Sutherland History." Held in private papers by Anthony Bunney.

²⁴ M Sutherland, "Young Days in Music." *Overland* 40 (December 1968): 27.

²⁵ *The Melbourne University Calendar, 1926* (Carlton, Melbourne: Ford & Son, 1925), 59.

²⁶ Sutherland wrote: "For the first 9 years I had paid all household expenses, dressed the children and myself and paid for their schooling. This because I thought it would give him more of a

her work as teacher at the University Conservatorium where she taught from 1918-1923 and 1925-1939.²⁷ During the 1930's, Sutherland's marriage to Melbourne psychiatrist Norman Albiston proved increasingly difficult. One solution offered by her father-in-law was for Sutherland to resign from teaching at the University, which she did in 1939. Despite this, the piano continued to be important throughout Sutherland's musical career: piano teaching provided a measure of financial security throughout her married life, not funds derived from composition.²⁸

Evidence of Sutherland's pedagogical practice and method

Sutherland taught her grand-daughter Anna in 1961. Anna recalled:

Gran gave me lessons for about twelve months when I was six, mostly at my home on an upright piano... I had various printed music books for beginners, but the most memorable (which I still have) was the little plain page, spirex one. Gran would draw short tunes or exercises to learn and practise. I'd then illustrate and decorate them in between playing them. The next time I had a lesson Gran would write a short comment to encourage more practice, lighter fingering, or whatever.

I loved it when Gran stayed with us, or I stayed with her and the house would fill with her playing and all the intensity and emotion of a concert performance. It was slightly intimidating to sit at the piano after she'd been playing, attempting to get through a piece perfectly and there was no mucking around on the instrument; it was all pretty serious. My mum played a bit too, but rarely in front of Gran.²⁹

The spirex music book to which Anna refers shows seven handwritten pieces notated by Sutherland, designed to teach and illustrate some aspect of technique: finger, hand and arm position, notation, transposition, counting, and pulse. In the following "finger exercise," (Figure 1) Sutherland has emphasised the use of: "round fingers, loose wrist (and a) swinging arm."

Sutherland suggests a repetition of six times for the exercise. The piece is rhythmically straight forward, but stresses contrary motion playing. In this sample, it can be seen that Sutherland has enlarged her usual script and it is more legible than her contemporary (non-teaching) manuscripts.³⁰

chance to establish himself." M. Sutherland, letter to D. R. Bunney. "Confidential." Private papers in the possession of Anthony Bunney, 3.

²⁷ Peter John Tregear, *The Conservatorium of Music University of Melbourne: An Historical Essay to Mark its Centenary 1895-1995* (Melbourne: Centre for Studies in Australian Music, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, 1997), 152.

²⁸ Financial difficulties made it necessary for Sutherland to have lodgers at her home. In a diary, she wrote: "We took a rented house in Berkeley St., Hawthorn and NAA [Norman A Albiston] had rooms in Alcaston House. My sister Ruth and her little boy came to live and Elise Steele for another two years." Private papers in the possession of Anthony Bunney.

²⁹ Email correspondence from Anna Davies to the current writer, 17 March 2004. Spirex manuscript book in the possession of Anna Davies, Castlemaine, Victoria.

³⁰ One such work is her *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* written in 1960.

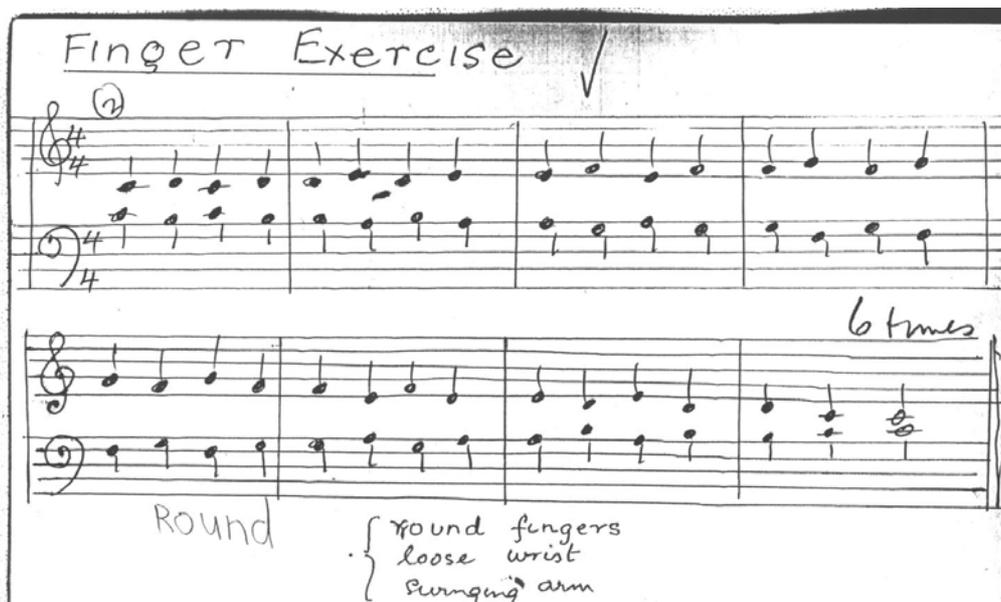


Figure 1:
M. Sutherland, Finger Exercise in Anna Davies' music book.

“This Old Man,” shown in figure 2, indicates fingers to be used in the right hand of the first measure. Surprisingly, Sutherland has not indicated the necessary finger changes required in the second line of the right hand, nor has she included fingering for the relatively difficult part of the left hand in the final measure. Attempts at notational simplification can be seen in the adoption of the B flat sign in both clefs which are required (as opposed to writing the flats in the key signature).

From an early stage, Sutherland introduced harmonic features such as the suspended seventh chord in measure 4. There is also a hint of canonic writing, introduced in the first two measures, which may have been aimed at extending the youngster’s technical skills. Sutherland’s comments of “good, but can get perfect,” indicate that whilst she was nurturing of her grand-daughter’s attempts, she wanted her to achieve more.



Figure 2:
M. Sutherland's transcription of This Old Man in Anna Davies' music book.

In *John, give me a Nana* (Figure 3) Sutherland is concerned with the introduction of transposition and triplets. Triplets with two different rhythmic representations are introduced and include three quavers (as a triplet, seen in measure 2) and a crotchet, followed by a quaver (as a triplet, seen in measure 4).

Sutherland has encouraged the young student to attempt transposition, writing: “See how many different keys you can play this tune in,” the composer herself having written the work first in C major, and secondly in D major. This piece was first given to Anna on 12 June (1961). Despite Anna’s youth and relationship to the composer, Sutherland admonishes her work, approximately three weeks later, stating that her work was “not good enough” (see box A). On another score, bearing the same date Sutherland again rebukes her grand-daughter for disappointing work, writing: “not good.” This suggests that Sutherland as a teacher was demanding, even of her grand-daughter.

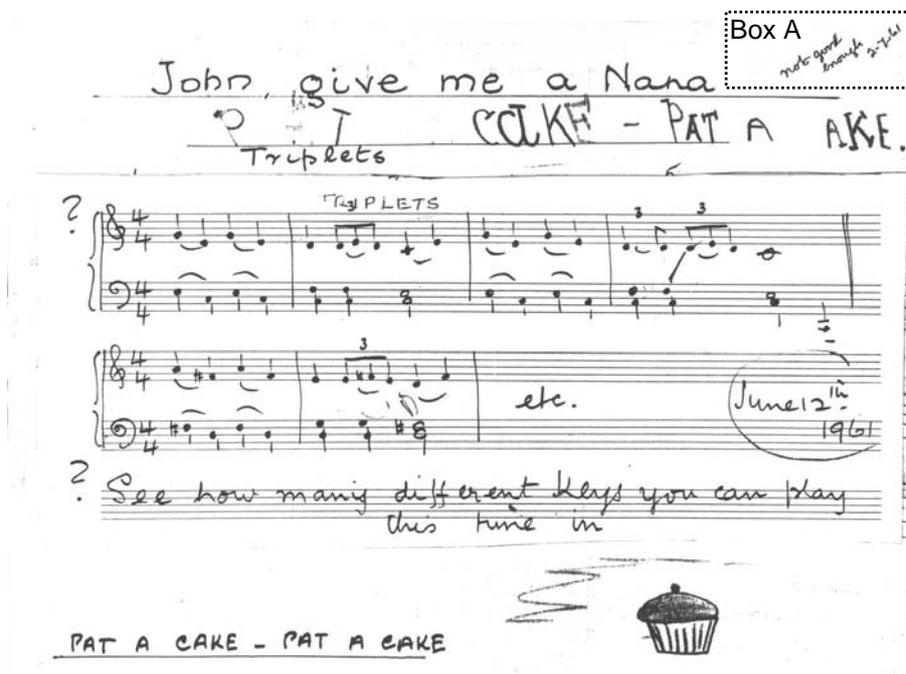


Figure 3:
M. Sutherland, *John, give me a Nana*.

One of the few other sources of documentation recounting Sutherland’s teaching practices are those recorded by Leonard Fullard (1907-1988) who studied with Sutherland from 1927-1934. Fullard commenced piano playing in 1919, when he was twelve years of age. However, according to his daughter, Jennifer Bellsham-Revell, his first two teachers were “rather inadequate.”³¹ In 1926, Fullard attended lessons with Goll, which did not prove successful, considering the shortcomings of his previous teachers: as a result, Fullard transferred to Sutherland on 23 February 1927. Fullard wrote:

³¹ Email correspondence from Mrs Jennifer Bellsham-Revell to the current writer, 20 September 2004. Used with permission.

Went up to the Con. And ... saw Miss Sutherland, and arranged to study under her. As she has learnt from Mr Goll all that he knows, she should be in just as good position as he is to teach, she has also been to Europe.³²

Sutherland gave Fullard a 50 minute lesson weekly and Fullard organised to have one extra lesson per week for a term.³³

Sutherland's role as a teacher also extended to offering advice on suitable pianos for purchase for her students. Fullard recounts that one week, instead of Sutherland giving him a lesson, she tried several pianos (for her student) at a piano shop in Melbourne.³⁴

In August of 1927, Fullard was advised that Mrs Albiston³⁵ had been granted six months leave of absence ("on acc. of ill health"): at this time Sutherland was approximately five months pregnant with her first child, Mark.³⁶ Fullard's lessons with Sutherland resumed on 8 February 1929. In contrast to lessons given before her child's birth,³⁷ these lessons appear to have been erratically scheduled and were generally unsatisfactory from Sutherland's point of view, with her frequently berating the student for sub-standard work. At his first lesson of that year, Fullard played some of the *Symphonic Etudes* for Sutherland and she assigned him "some of Brahms' *Intermezzi* and the *Romances* to practise."³⁸ The teacher's advice to her student was to "think more freely" in regard to the phrases:³⁹ whether Fullard was able to implement his teacher's instructions is unknown, however, he wrote of his next lesson: "went to a piano lesson and had a terrible time. Did everything wrong, particularly the Brahms' *Romance*."⁴⁰ Occasionally, Sutherland's verbal criticisms of Fullard's work were scathing. Following one lesson, which was two days prior to his end of year exam, he wrote: "Went for a piano lesson and got roared up terribly." Sutherland apparently remarked of Fullard's playing that "The Bach was *vile*." Fullard attempted to remedy the situation through a further two hours practice that day.⁴¹ This was Fullard's last lesson of the year, and it is unknown whether his practice redeemed Sutherland's opinion of his performance of the work. At the very least, it could be suggested that Sutherland's criticism of Fullard's playing was poorly timed and inappropriately intense, given that the exam was only two days away!

³² Leonard Fullard, diary entry 23 February 1927.

³³ Fullard, diary entry 20 August 1927.

³⁴ Fullard, diary entry 2 November 1927.

³⁵ Fullard noted on 18 August 1927, that Sutherland's name was now "Mrs Albiston." Sutherland married Norman Albiston on 30 July 1927.

³⁶ Fullard, diary entry 14 August 1928.

³⁷ Mark Albiston was born on 28 December 1928.

³⁸ Fullard, diary entry 8 February 1929.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Fullard, diary entry 14 June 1929. It is assumed that Fullard refers to the "Romance in F," from *Klavierstücke*, Op. 118.

⁴¹ It is assumed that the Bach work referred to was the "Prelude" from the *Suite in C minor* by Bach, as this was the only Bach composition performed at the exam. Fullard, diary entry 11 December 1929. Hardly surprisingly, he wrote of his exam performance of the "Prelude," that it "lacked enthusiasm." Fullard, diary entry 13 December 1929.

Generally, the lessons during 1930 were more successful than the previous year, with Fullard writing in June (1930), “Have done well now for about 4 lessons.”⁴² Finally in November of 1930, Sutherland invited Fullard to perform Schumann’s *Etudes Symphonique* at the Students’ Concert at the Melba Hall. Sutherland herself “seemed satisfied” with his performance,⁴³ despite this, nervousness hampered his performance, of which he wrote: “Couldn’t use the soft pedal as my left foot shook and ... could only be steadied by keeping it under the chair.”

Together with Elise Steele, Sutherland supervised an “ensemble class” in 1932. In 1932, Fullard attended performances by Sutherland and Steele hearing works by Beethoven, Brahms and Reger.⁴⁴ The student wrote that the concerts “went beautifully...”⁴⁵ The participation of Sutherland’s students in these events indicates some ways in which she extended her teaching practice and became involved in the development of her students.

Fullard continued his lessons with Sutherland in 1933 and until April 1934.⁴⁶ In 1934, Fullard travelled to the UK and attended many concerts in order to hear repertoire which was not available in Australia at the time. In November 1935, he wrote of some aspects of Sutherland’s teaching which were less than supportive of the young student. As illustrated previously, Fullard worked on *Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor* with Sutherland: eighteen months later, Fullard heard Edwin Fischer perform the work.⁴⁷ In relation to the piano sonata, he recalled of his last lesson:

This ... was the last thing I ever did with Mrs A. I played it at my last lesson with her and she said it was useless to go on practising it because my outlook was so wrong. So reluctantly I gave it up. She said she could no longer spoon feed me as it was impossible. So I’ve been dying to hear how it should be done for she refused to tell me. At the previous lesson she had impressed upon me the necessity of a fierce rendering of it comparable to a steel drill, drilling a hole in...

So I made it very big and firm. On hearing Fischer play, I at once discovered that a few passages were soft, and instead of being consistently big, it came in waves of bigness interspersed with calm

⁴² Fullard, diary entry 21 June 1930.

⁴³ Fullard, diary entry 5 December 1930.

⁴⁴ It is assumed that the *Suite* by Reger, is *Suite R xx*, written in 1906.

⁴⁵ Fullard, diary entry 1 June 1932.

⁴⁶ Fullard’s last diary entry for piano lessons with Sutherland is 17 April 1934. The only works identified as having been studied through these months are: Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata No. 9 in E* (Op. 14, No. 1)⁴⁶ and *Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor* (Opus 111)⁴⁶ as well as Haydn’s *Variations in F minor* (Hob. XVII:6).

His daughter Jennifer Bellsham-Revell, wrote: “A few days later he became engaged and soon after sailed to the UK. Upon return he was penniless. War service prevented time for lessons. He completed Mus.Bac. degree with organ chief study in 1947. By then he was concentrating on organ. There was probably better financial opportunities being an organist. Piano work pretty well ceased.” Letter to the current writer, 2004. Used with permission.

⁴⁷ Edwin Fischer (1884-1960), Swiss pianist and conductor.

parts. It came to me as a flash. Now if she had only told me this she could have done it as easily as anything. But it was not her policy.⁴⁸

Sutherland's refusal to practically demonstrate her perception of the music is contrary to her method adopted in previous lessons, where she actively illustrated interpretation and the skills required for a successful performance of a work. Despite his disenchantment with Sutherland's refusal to demonstrate works, Fullard intended to return to her, believing that:

Mrs Albiston's technique is as good as anyone's and I intend having some more lessons from her in Brahms, César Franck and Chopin. They are her strong points. I shall never get into trouble with her in doing these composers. It is in Bach and Beethoven that I had a hectic time. I can see now that she is not good or at least great, on these composers.⁴⁹

In a speech celebrating his 60 years as an organist, (1984), Fullard summarised some of the most important features of Sutherland's teaching, relating:

Margaret Sutherland was expert at rhythm and it took over a year of nerve-racking experiences to overcome it. She taught me to listen to the duration of each note, even of rapid semiquavers, and by making them all the same length I did not get faster. The idea was to practise dead slowly, never to play anything up to speed until there had been weeks of slow practice on it. There were other tricks too, such as delaying a note slightly to give it emphasis, playing a group of semiquavers slightly faster than written, and compensating it on the next long note; a great artist never plays the music as it is written, but plays around with the rhythm. This is done so slightly and naturally that the ordinary person in the audience would never know.

Margaret Sutherland and Edward Goll were such great artists that they did all these things and taught me to do the same.⁵⁰

Fullard's diaries indicate that Sutherland was a demanding teacher and his publicly delivered recollections extol Sutherland's performance abilities and teaching skills. Despite the fact that his diaries recount some harrowing experiences, he maintained his devotion to her. Undoubtedly, Fullard's greatest disappointment was Sutherland's refusal to demonstrate works to him, insisting that he become a more independent learner. Whether this was an expression of Sutherland's frustration with an over-reliant student, or in fact, a means of encouraging greater learning autonomy in Fullard, is unknown.

⁴⁸ Fullard, private writings, London, 22 November 1935, in the possession of Mrs Jennifer Bellsham-Revell.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fullard, speech given at dinner at Christ Church, Church of England, South Yarra, 1984, to celebrate his 60 years as an organist. Typescript of speech, in the possession of Mrs Jennifer Bellsham-Revell.

Sutherland as performer (1914-1967)

Sutherland's first public recital was given in 1914.⁵¹ Although a talented pianist herself, Sutherland found the process of practice tedious. She later recalled: "I had always been conscious that ... piano-playing could never satisfy me. The constant repetition of music in practising was a nerve-strain that worried me incessantly. One's ears seem to be battered..."⁵²

In 1916, Sutherland was invited by Henri Verbrugghen to perform as soloist in the *Concerto No. 4 in G* (Op. 58, Beethoven).⁵³ Following this concert, a newspaper reported:

There was an interesting first appearance in Miss Margaret Sutherland, a Melbourne pianist, from the studio of Edward Goll ... [she] showed sound technical equipment, considerable temperament and a fine appreciation of the music.

The article concludes by stating that the concert "was a notably good performance for a young pianist in the outset of her career."⁵⁴

In 1919, she performed as soloist in Mozart's *Concerto in A*,⁵⁵ and in 1923 performed works by Debussy, *Carnaval* by Schumann, (which, according to the critic was played, "with striking spontaneity"), Brahms' *Waltzes* and Chopin's *Scherzo in B minor* Op. 20, which the critic described as having been played with "great charm."⁵⁶ Sutherland's performances established her as a promising, talented musician and allowed her to create important networks.

In 1926, Sutherland presented a number of recitals, appearing as both soloist and associate artist. She performed a varied repertoire ranging from Bach transcriptions to Poulenc's *Mouvements perpetuelles*. A critic described Sutherland's playing as "worthy of admiration" and "perfectly delightful."⁵⁷

Sutherland demonstrated her versatility as a performer when she appeared in March 1927 with Bidy Allen in a two-piano concert at the Assembly Hall, Melbourne. In this concert, Sutherland took the opportunity to present one of her own two-piano compositions. The program included works by Bach, Brahms, Ducas and Sutherland.⁵⁸ In October and November of the same year, she performed at St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne with Dr A. E. Floyd. These programs included *Chorale-Preludes* by Bach, movements from various piano concerti by Beethoven, Mozart and Rachmaninoff and works by Sigfrid Karg-Elert and Franck. In November, she accompanied the "Cecilia Choir" and

⁵¹ "One Hundred and Thirty-first Concert," Town Hall, Melbourne, 30 December 1914. (Melbourne: The Conservatorium of Music, 1915), 17.

⁵² M Sutherland, "Young Days in Music." *Overland* 40 (December 1968): 27.

⁵³ M Sutherland, "Young Days in Music." *Overland* 40 (December 1968): 26.

⁵⁴ "State Orchestra. A New Pianist." Item in Sutherland's scrapbook. Unidentified newspaper article, date: 1919. National Library of Australia, MS 2967.

⁵⁵ *The Australian Musical News*. 1 December 1919.

⁵⁶ Concert review. *The Australian Musical News* 12 (21 March 1923): 413.

⁵⁷ Concert review. *The Argus*. 23 October 1926.

⁵⁸ *The Australasian*. 19 March 1927.

performed Debussy's *Toccata*.⁵⁹ Sutherland continued her association with Bernard Heinze, conductor, in a December performance of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* Op. 80, where she was credited as having played the solo part "with insight and artistic freedom."⁶⁰

In March of 1928, she performed in Franck's *Symphony, Prometheus Overture* Op. 43 by Beethoven and Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasia*.⁶¹ Of the latter work, *The Argus* critic stated "Miss Margaret Sutherland's fluent rendering of Liszt's *Hungarian Fantasia* aroused much enthusiasm."⁶² Later that month Sutherland again appeared as co-performer with Heinze at the Conservatorium and also performed two-piano works by Guy Ropartz and Vincent d'Indy.⁶³

Sutherland's adaptability as a performer was illustrated when she joined with Mary Baillieu in presenting a two-piano concert. This program consisted of works by Bach, Mozart, Franck and Bax.⁶⁴ Sutherland was an advocate of contemporary repertoire and provided the first Melbourne performance of four works, which were; *Pavane and Passepied* by Louis Vuillemin, *Jeux de Pleinair* by Germaine Tailleferre, Ropartz' *Piece in B minor* and *Danse Andalouse* by Manuel Infante.⁶⁵

In 1928, Sutherland was an associate artist with contralto, Ivy Phillips and a soloist in a piano and vocal recital at the Assembly Hall in Melbourne.⁶⁶ The duo presented sets of songs from Italy, Germany, France and England. Sutherland's accompaniments were well received and one critic claimed that they were "musically suggestive ... [and] faultless in taste."⁶⁷ Invariably, her performances are credited as being "well defined in essentials of style, and fashioned by musical intelligence of an original and discerning order."⁶⁸

Mollie Turner Shaw, Mary Baillieu and Sutherland presented a two-piano concert in October 1929. They performed a Brahms *Sonata*, a *Sicilienne* by Bach and *The Poisoned Fountain* by Bax.⁶⁹

In December of the same year, Sutherland performed with Alice Smith, who recited a number of readings which ranged from Shakespeare to James Elroy Flecker (1884-1915). Sutherland herself performed Schumann's *Humoreske*, an *Etude* by Scriabin and Debussy's *Toccata*.⁷⁰

⁵⁹ Concert review. *The Sun*. 30 November 1927. Sutherland also appeared with the Cecilia Choir in June 1929: Concert review. *The Argus*. 7 June 1929.

⁶⁰ Concert review. *The Age*. 1 December 1927.

⁶¹ Concert review. *The Sun*. 8 March 1928.

⁶² Concert review. *The Argus*. 8 March 1928.

⁶³ Concert review. *The Argus*. 24 March 1928.

⁶⁴ Concert review. *The Argus*, *The Age*, *The Sun* and *The Herald*. 1 May 1928.

⁶⁵ Concert review. *The Argus*, *The Age*, *The Sun* and *The Herald*. 1 May 1928.

⁶⁶ "Vocal and Piano Recital," Concert review. *The Argus*. 7 June 1928.

⁶⁷ Concert review. *The Age*. 7 June 1928.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*. The program does not provide any further identification of these compositions.

⁷⁰ Concert Program for Alice Smith and Margaret Sutherland. Assembly Hall, Collins Street, Melbourne, Monday 2 December 1929 at 8pm. The program does not provide any further identification of these compositions.

Elise Steele and Sutherland presented a concert at the Assembly Hall in April, 1930 and performed *Sonata in E flat* Kv. 302 by Mozart, which again confirmed Sutherland's "reputation as an exponent of Mozart."⁷¹ Additionally, they performed Sutherland's own *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, which again met with positive response.⁷²

Following the program of violin and piano sonatas at the Assembly Hall in April, a further series of three concerts were given on 20 June, 4 July and 18 July by Sutherland and Steele with Hermia Barton (a violinist) appearing in the first recital.⁷³ The compositions included were those by Purcell, Bach, Dohnanyi, Brahms and Lekeu.⁷⁴ The writer for *The Argus* commented: "In these recitals complete sincerity and devoted study have reaped their appointed harvest."⁷⁵ The second concert in the series included works by Medtner, Reger, Brahms and Beethoven's *Sonata in F*. Yet again, the educated approach of the performers was underscored, with the writer from *The Age* commenting:

Concert artists who make a profound study of the works they interpret are, strangely enough, somewhat rare. The performers at this recital take an expansive view of their art, playing only what is good after carefully thinking out the implications involved.⁷⁶

Although Sutherland presented a concert with Floyd in September 1930, this concert series appears to have been the last intensive performing period for Sutherland, despite a "tour of the larger country centres"⁷⁷ having been planned. Sutherland's break from performance activities may well have been attributable to the impending birth of her second child, Jennifer Ruth Albiston.

Contemporary reviews of Sutherland's performances indicate she was a secure, artistic performer who pursued performance opportunities. The concert reviews reveal that Sutherland was a versatile pianist who had an interest in diverse repertoire. Her ability to perform as a soloist, accompanist or participant in chamber music illustrates that from an early age, she was willing to work cooperatively with other musicians. It is likely that such well-received performances earned Sutherland the respect of her peers.

Reviews of Sutherland's performances and the evidence provided in surviving programs remain some of the only evidence of Sutherland's performance skills and activities. Her recordings, however, provide a completely different set of resources which enable an assessment of her playing and elucidate her own performance style. Sutherland's recordings reveal a degree of facility which was retained until her failing eyesight and deteriorating health restricted her. Sutherland's recordings demonstrate that her playing was technically secure and

⁷¹ Concert review. *The Herald*. 24 April 1930.

⁷² *The Argus* critic wrote: "Miss Sutherland's own composition is extremely impressive. It should be added that the writing for both instruments is thoroughly and successfully characteristic." Concert review. *The Argus*. 24 April 1930.

⁷³ "Recitals to be given." *The Australian Musical News* 22a (2 June 1930): 22-23.

⁷⁴ "Sonata Recital," concert review. *The Age*. 19 July 1930.

⁷⁵ "Sonata Recital," concert review. *The Argus*. 19 July 1930.

⁷⁶ "Sonata Recital," concert review. *The Age*. 5 July 1930.

⁷⁷ "Recitals to be given." *The Australian Musical News* 22a (2 June 1930): 22-23.

accurate. Sutherland was clearly capable of virtuosic playing, as it has been documented that she often appeared as soloist in various concerti, however, none of the recordings demonstrate overtly virtuosic playing, due to the compositional style of the pieces performed.

From her youth, Sutherland was accustomed to a “large horizontal grand Blüthner piano”⁷⁸ which probably had the “aliquot string”:⁷⁹ this would have strengthened the treble qualities of the instrument. Sutherland’s playing reflects a reserved, romantic quality which extends to a subtle use of *rubato*, discriminate use of the sustaining pedal, which although not marked, is employed in a sophisticated manner.

Sutherland’s own teachers came from a late Romantic European piano tradition, and although she may have been exposed to some early-twentieth century piano music, the repertoire of her youth was primarily that of the standard classical repertoire: music by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin. It was not until she returned from Europe that she began to publicly present pieces which were relatively contemporary, including some première performances.⁸⁰

Critical reviews and concert programs attest to the fact that Sutherland had an extensive repertoire from Scarlatti sonatas to works by Bax and Reger. Additionally, the reviews indicate that Sutherland was equally adept as a solo pianist, duo-pianist, accompanist (for both vocalists and instrumentalists) and as a soloist in concerto settings.

Conclusion

Several primary sources not previously utilised indicate the importance of the piano in Sutherland’s creative life. As a student, the piano provided her entrée into a music institution which ultimately led to a teaching position. Teaching provided her funds for her overseas trips and consolidated in her own awareness that neither teaching nor performance would fulfil her creative desires in music. As a teacher, she was capable of being both nurturing and harsh with her students, irrespective of their age. Sutherland’s performance career was extensive in terms of duration, repertoire and ensemble combinations. Most contemporary critics praised her executive and interpretive abilities. Her performances raised public awareness of her music and enriched her own musical experiences and networks. Not only did her pianistic pursuits provide her with the financial means to study overseas, support her young family, promote her own works and establish networks, but as she often wrote at the piano, it provided her with a tool to assist her in composing.

⁷⁸ M Sutherland, “Young Days in Music.” *Overland* 40 (Summer 1968-69): 23.

⁷⁹ “The *Aliquot* string is tuned an octave higher and runs parallel to the normal strings, but is elevated where the hammer strikes so that it is not struck directly, but vibrates in sympathy with the other strings... Blüthner instruments are distinguished by a round, slightly romantic tone, with a particularly full treble.” Margaret Cranmere “Blüthner,” in *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, Accessed 2 May 2007. <http://www.grovemusic.com>

⁸⁰ Concert reviews. *The Sun* and *The Argus*, 8 March 1928.

About the Author

Chérie Watters-Cowan recently completed her PhD entitled: *Reconstructing the Creative Life of Australian Composer Margaret Sutherland: the evidence of primary source documents* at UNSW. A graduate of the Newcastle Conservatorium with both a Diploma and a Bachelor degree and UNSW with a Masters degree in music, she has conducted a private music practice in Newcastle over the last twenty years.

Chérie is a sessional researcher and lecturer in harmony, compositional practice, aural training and piano pedagogy. Currently, Chérie's research interests include the restoration of some of Sutherland's "lost" scores and she continues to examine aspects of Sutherland's contributions to Australian music.

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