

“... AND SHE PLAYED THE PIANO BEAUTIFULLY.”

STUDENTS AT THE CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC

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One of the most requested queries concerning the Conservatorium of Music records held at the University Archives relates to student records. Invariably researchers have a photograph of a music student in cap and gown and/or a memory of their mother, father, aunt or grandparent studying at the Conservatorium and are keen to ascertain if indeed their relative was a graduate.

Unlike in Melbourne or Adelaide, the Conservatorium was not affiliated with the University but was established as a state-sponsored institution. Although overtures had been made to the University of Sydney the initial proposal received no support from the then Chancellor Sir Norman MacLaurin.¹ Championed by the NSW Labor Minister of Education Campbell Carmichael and the Premier W A Holman, the school was established in May 1915 in the specially refurbished stables of Government House, as a branch of the NSW Department of Public Instruction.²

Teaching, however, only began a year later on 6 March 1916, under the directorship of Henri Verbrugghen, the Belgian-born violinist and music educator.³ He set out employing some 40 staff, almost all on a casual basis, and the school began with an initial intake of 114 piano students, 111 voice students and 84 violin students. Diane Collins quotes figures of almost 800 students for the 1917 teaching year.⁴

However, most students of those early years were not graduates of the Conservatorium. The initial brief for the Conservatorium was wide. The Conservatorium advertised its provision of tuition in all branches of music, elocution, and dramatic art, “from the elementary to the most advanced stages, and for students of all ages”.⁵ The music school and Verbrugghen in particular were committed to professional music education which could produce musicians for the concert stage, but the Conservatorium also sought to offer amateurs a high standard of music tuition. Many of the staff were existing music teachers who moved their studies to the new establishment and paid a percentage of their earnings to the Conservatorium.⁶

In the early years of the Conservatorium the work was divided into two sections, the Music School (to Advanced Grade Certificate) and the Diploma Course. The curriculum included Harmony and Composition, Elementary, Theory and Rhythm, Musical History and Literature, Diction and Elocution, as well as ensemble and choir classes and private tuition. It was noted that all students (beyond Intermediate Grade) were expected to attend the compulsory, but free, special classes in theory-solfeggio and harmony. All ensemble classes and lectures were open to non-students of the Conservatorium. Examinations were held in individual subjects with certificates and diplomas granted to those students who met the required conditions as set out in the *Prospectus*. The only students entitled to be graduates of the State Conservatorium were those who held the Professional Diploma in Performance or Teaching, or both.

The first Diplomas were awarded in 1920 to 6 students (Dorothy Gibbes, Bessie Coleman, Kathleen Short, Muriel Oakeshott, E Ewbank, M Reyburn), and by 1930 only 59 students had graduated (including 21 students who received both the performance and teaching diplomas).⁷ The large number of students who attended the Conservatorium were either private music tuition students, or those who studied selectively the courses on offer.

In addition, although not a formal part of the curriculum, from 1918 the Conservatorium had joined the national scheme of public examinations in music and speech conducted by Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB). The Conservatorium conducted the examinations on behalf of the AMEB and many staff were AMEB examiners. The Conservatorium promoted these examinations as a means of encouraging and supporting teachers of music education and the scheme proved highly successful. In 1918, the first year it was offered in NSW, some 848 students sat examinations. By 1923 there were over 5000 candidates.⁸

It was not until 1963 that curriculum changes were implemented with the Diploma courses, although

3rd Term. W.J. Coad.

1	Atlan. no lessons Spike	550	5	5
2	Bernasconi. do do do.	440	4	4
3	Blair. Scholarship			
4	Bowes. L.	530	3	3
5	Bull. L.	550	5	5
6	Calder. E.	550	5	5
7	Dunn. Spike Ambrosian	550	-	-

Conservatorium of Music.
 Sydney Nov: 22 1920
 Examiner's note on Miss Dorothy Gibbes' performance (with orchestra) of Cesar Franck's "Variations Symphoniques", Town Hall, Nov 20, 1920
 Department = Pleasant, modest & unassuming. No signs of nervousness.
 Memory = Excellent. Could not detect a slip.
 Technique = Clean, and ample for all demands in this particular composition.
 Rhythm. Clear and unmistakable.
 Ensemble. Exceedingly satisfactory. Unity of solo instrument and orchestra quite remarkable.
 J. Donaldson

“from the elementary to the most advanced stages, and for students of all ages”

(Above): Extract from 1917 Professors Roll: Students of W J Coad. Notice the students who could not attend because of the general strike

(Top right): Assessment results of the first recipient of the Diploma of Performance, pianist Dorothy Gibbes, 1920. Candidates were required to sit a theory exam, give a public recital, undergo a chamber music test and to play a concerto with the State Orchestra

(Right) Cash book 1917. Student names and their teachers are listed against the sum paid.

Miss	6107	Miss Dawson (Miss Cummins)	28
Miss	6108	Miss K Ogilvie (Miss Cochean)	44
do	6109	Miss J Dawson (Mr Goostend)	44
do	6110	Miss Fayl Usher (Mr. Hitchcock)	3136
Cash	6111	Miss M Collett (Mr. Nichol)	7
do	6112	Miss G Bromfield (Miss Cochean)	2126
do	6113	Miss F. Strickland (Mr. Bustard)	76
do	6114	Miss Redgley (Mr. Foster)	26

amateur music students were still able to enter the Conservatorium.⁹ The major change in course accreditation only came in the 1970s under the direction of Rex Hobcroft. In 1973 an entry test for single-study students was introduced and the Conservatorium's student body developed into that of a full-time tertiary music school. From the mid-1970s the curriculum expanded from the two diploma courses to thirteen courses ranging from Certificate, Diplomas, Associate Diplomas, Graduate Diplomas, Bachelor and Master's in 1989.¹⁰

A list of graduates of the Conservatorium 1920 – 1989, therefore, does not reflect the nature of study that was possible at the institution for much of its history. Studying at the Conservatorium did not mean graduation for many who attended.

Nor does a photograph of a cap and gown mean graduation status: although those who received a Diploma were entitled to be considered “graduates” of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the requirement for academic gowns for DSCM and DME graduates was only approved by the Board of Governors in July and August 1973. The form of academic dress

chosen was based on that worn by graduates holding the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the University of Cambridge and a hood of black silk edged with maroon and gold, and for the DME the same but with a hood edged with maroon and cream.¹¹ It is unclear if graduates wore the black cap and gown at assemblies prior to 1973, but there was no official academic dress until that time. Many studio photographers provided props for sitters, so a photograph in itself is not evidence of graduate status.

REFERENCES

1. Diane Collins, *Sounds from the Stables: The Story of Sydney's Conservatorium*, Allen & Unwin, 2001, p7.
2. The Conservatorium had no statutory authority or constitution until the introduction of the State Conservatorium of Music Act 1965 (NSW). Ibid, pp18, 156.
3. This is the formal start date, however, the Archives holds the Cash Book for February 1916, which records that matriculation fees were being paid from the start of that month.
4. Ibid, pp 25, 28, 30. An account of the first year in *The Conservatorium Magazine*, No 2, December 1916, pp9–11 suggests figures of 700 to 800 students in total for 1916.
5. *The Conservatorium Magazine*, No 16, 1, April 1920, back page.

6. Collins, op.cit, p27.
7. The NSW Conservatorium of Music, *Prospectus*, 1930.
8. "AMEB Presentation of Certificates", *Musical Australia*, Vol IV, No 7, Dec 1923, p30.
9. Collins, p159, 162.
10. Collins, p191.
11. University of Sydney Archives; G75/5 Minutes of the Board of Governors; 16 July 1973, Item 6.2; 20 August 1973, Item 2 (iii)(g).

SOURCES FOR ASCERTAINING STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED AND GRADUATED FROM THE NSW CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC.

There is a complete list of all Conservatorium Graduates 1920–1993. If a student is not on that list, they may have attended the Conservatorium as a diploma student, but not passed (see Examination Result Sheets and Student Files); received tuition from Conservatorium teachers as a private fee paying student (see Professor's Rolls, Cash Books, Class Fee Ledgers), or undertaken the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) examinations (including Associate in Music, Licentiate in Music), administered in NSW by the Conservatorium, with records held at the University of Adelaide Archives. NOTE: records less than 50 years old are closed to public access.

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY ARCHIVES

Published results

Musical Australia contains the published results of the 1921 examinations (Feb 1922), 1922 examinations (Jan 1923), and possibly those for 1924 are printed in the last volume, Jan 1925 (a copy is held at the State Library of NSW).

The Conservatorium handbook Prospectus lists student results (pass marks and higher only) for diplomas and single subjects.

Diploma students 1920–1921 (G75/23/37 and 38)

The first Diploma students sat for written and practical tests in November 1920 and were required to perform, theory, harmony, history and form. (MA, Nov 1920).

Professor's Rolls 1917–1918 (Series G75/27)

Private tuition and practical tuition students

Cash Books 1916–1954 (Series G75/16)

Useful for ascertaining fee paying students and their teachers.

Class Fee Ledgers 1933–1946 (Series G75/21)

Three registers indicating fee paying students

Examination Registers 1921–1961 (Series G75/25)

Single subject details providing a list of those enrolled in the Conservatorium, not just those who passed subjects.

Student Files 1935–1994 (Series G75/1)

Individual

STATE RECORDS NSW

Series 1724, Student files [Conservatorium of Music] 1927–1933

Series 1735, Class Roll Books 1930–1972

Plus additional staff, administrative, photographic records from 1913. Search on Archives Investigator, Agency 97

AUSTRALIAN MUSIC EXAMINATIONS BOARD

The Conservatorium Magazine and *Musical Australia* published AMEB results between 1920–1925.

The University of Adelaide holds the records of the AMEB and can provide details of candidates. The Australian Music Examinations Board series are listed online at www.adelaide.edu.au/records/archives/guide/UAR0016.htm Includes Register of Music Certificates 1901–1941 (incomplete).

Contact: Reference Archivist, Ph: +61 8 8303 3407; Fax: +61 8 8303 3417

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15. In fact, Roger Thompson in his history of Australian religion argues that, contrary to my findings at STC, there was no religious crisis following the war and that the real cause of secularisation in Australia was the modernisation and consumerism of the 1950s. I am inclined to believe that while his argument may hold true for older Australians, the younger generations were indeed affected religiously by the war and their experiences, even if this meant they simply did not feel the need to answer the College's query about their church connection. See Roger C Thompson, *Religion in Australia: A History* 2nd ed, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2002, pp100-102.