

Gudrun Edwards - Musician - 27/9/38 - 30/9/24

Gudrun died peacefully at home in Kew on 30th September 2024 after a period of declining health due to a heart condition. She was well known, respected and loved in this part of London, having made a long and distinguished contribution to the musical life of our local area, both as a performer and as a teacher.

Gudrun moved to Kew with her late husband, David, in 1965 and lived in the same house for 59 years. During that time, she co-founded and led the Kew Sinfonia for 30 years from their inaugural concert in 1986 to her final concert as leader in 2016, and it was fitting that the most recent Kew Sinfonia concert on 12th October was dedicated to Gudrun's memory. Gudrun also led the Richmond Orchestra from 1989 to 1999, and gave numerous concerts in local venues, either as a piano/violin duo or as part of chamber music ensembles. Of particular note were occasions such as a recital in the Purcell Room, and her performance of Sir Lennox Berkeley's Violin Concerto with Sir Lennox conducting.

As a teacher, Gudrun worked both privately and in schools and colleges, and had a particular gift for working with young people. For decades, she had around 15 pupils coming to her house every week for their weekly lessons, many having been on a waiting list, and many going on to take Grade 8 or higher diplomas. As well as these private pupils, Gudrun taught at Waldegrave School, Mayfield School, Richmond Adult College, Richmond-Upon-Thames College, Kingston Polytechnic and Morley College.

Those who knew Gudrun, however, will, I am sure, remember her as much for her personality as for her musical achievements. Upon meeting Gudrun for the first time, you were very quickly struck not only by her German accent, but also by her warmth, honesty, integrity, and a commitment to high standards.

She had high levels of energy and a 'can-do' attitude which 'made things happen' and which gave meaning and purpose to whatever she was doing. Her passion for music was something which her mother had heroically managed to give her, along with a broader love of literature and the arts, in the most trying of circumstances during the years immediately following the end of the Second World War.

In a small town called Dinkelsbuhl, near Nuremberg, whilst having to go out with her children to beg for eggs, milk and bread, and to forage in the local forests for berries, mushrooms and pinecones (as fuel for the oven), Gudrun's mother somehow procured a piano for the house and a small violin for her seven-year-old Gudrun. Gudrun's independence and strong spirit was already in evidence at the age of eight when, one evening, her mother went out to a rehearsal of the local orchestra, leaving Gudrun and her brother (3 years older) at home with strict instructions to go to bed on time and not to answer to the door to anyone. Unbeknownst to her mother, Gudrun went to the church where her mother was rehearsing and hid behind a pillar listening to the music with her heart thumping out of excitement (and fear of being discovered!). In an age

without radio or TV, the sound was a revelation to Gudrun, and one which she loved, and it was there and then that she resolved to become a great violinist! She got home before her mother, her brother didn't give the game away, and her mother was none the wiser!

How Gudrun came to be at Dinkelsbühl in 1945 is in itself a journey which must have developed the qualities of resilience and empathy which were such a big part of her personality. Born in 1938 in Dambritsch (now called Debrice) in Silesia, Germany (the area is now in Poland), Gudrun only saw her father for one week per year (his annual leave from fighting at the front), and in 1944, the three of them (Gudrun, her mother, and her brother) were given the tragic news that Gudrun's father had been killed on the Russian front.

Whilst grieving, Gudrun's mother was spending her days looking after refugees arriving from the East with Ox-drawn carts (all the horses had been taken for war) and regularly came home with news that a baby had arrived frozen to death, or that a 14 year old had collapsed and died from hunger and cold.

In January 1945, the Russian advance meant that Gudrun, her mother and her brother had to flee on a desperately overcrowded train with blown-out windows in temperatures of minus 16 degrees which took several days/nights to get to Berlin. From there, they had another long journey to Dinkelsbühl with Gudrun's Mother and Gudrun's Aunt in charge of seven children under the age of 12.

At the age of 13, Gudrun won a scholarship to the Junior Music Conservatoire of Nuremberg and then, from the age of 16, became a full-time student at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, studying with Ulrich Koch, Licco Amar (leader of Hindemith's quartet) and Sandor Vegh.

In 1959, Gudrun met her English husband-to-be, David, on a music course at Downe House, an independent girls school in Berkshire. With David playing romantic Schubert songs on the piano, and singing in German, Gudrun had no chance of resisting and, by March 1960, they were married in a church in Surbiton. Life continued to be an exciting one for Gudrun with a year in Riverside (whilst David was working in California) and three children born in 1960 (Martin), 1964 (Andrew) and 1965 (Juliet). David died in 2022 and Gudrun enjoyed an incredibly happy marriage lasting 62 years.

During her last few weeks, Gudrun regularly sat back and said "I have had a wonderful life", recalling, amongst other things, her many trips with David to different parts of the globe (David often attended international conferences for physicists).

Many of the kind letters received by us following Gudrun's death have referred to the fact that, even in later years, it was always clear how much in love they were with each other.

Gudrun was a terrific mother to her children and she is much missed by her eight grandchildren who adored her. She had natural, loving and powerful relationships with each one of us and memories of her will continue to inspire us for the rest of our lives.

Gudrun is survived by 3 children (Martin, Andrew and Juliet) and eight grand-children (Georgia, Laurie, Ellen, Linden, Jade, Vivian, Dan and Ollie).