

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Juanita Simmons, the inaugural Christina Boughen OAM Fellow through the State Library of Queensland. So first, can you tell us about the namesake for this fellowship and her life and her career?

JS: Yes, so Christina was born in 1920 in Scotland, but she came with her family to Australia when she was six years old, so we think of her as a Queensland musician. She passed away in 2014 at the age of 94, having had a music career that spent almost 60 years, and she's remembered for her contributions as teacher, examiner, and primarily as a performer, both solo piano and with others.

When she came to Australia as a young child, she began piano lessons and was soon playing in Eisteddfods in and around Brisbane. She started to win prizes for those and in areas where the skills that you need as a good piano accompanist were becoming evident. So she would do well in things like, well, first of all, solo piano, so you have to have good technique for that, piano duet, and also quick study, which is a section where you get a very short amount of time to learn a piece of music. It might only be a few days sometimes, so you need good sight reading skills when you're a piano accompanist. So that was her early life that was already showing that promise, and then some of her earliest professional music work was actually on ABC radio. So when she was 18, she started broadcasting solo piano music on the radio, which was common at the time, and then she also played for choirs and soloists. She played two piano kinds of repertoire as well, and she also accompanied the Mobil Quest, which was a big vocal competition in the late 1940s and 50s.

She married in 1951 and had a family, but she kept on playing, and actually dialing back to 1942, she'd started playing in the Brisbane City Council concerts in City Hall. So she continued that right through until the 1990s, actually, she was playing in those, and she even produced them. So she was actually auditioning all the artists and putting the concert programs together as well in the later part of her life.

AT: Okay, so she did a lot, is what you're saying.

JS: Yes, yes, she did.

AT: When we're looking at the larger legacy, how would you describe her long-term impact on the history of Queensland? Because she only died in 2014, so relatively recently in the grand scheme of the history of Queensland.

JS: I think having had such a long career as a performer where audiences were familiar with her means that there are many people who actually remember her playing. And the Brisbane City Council concerts as well, they still occur today, but in a slightly different format. But people do remember the '80s and '90s concerts, and Christina's part in those concerts. So that was both live, and then her radio performances as well went through until the 1980s at least, that I can tell from my research. And also, part of her work in the 1980s and '90s, because it was auditioning people and putting the concert programs together and accompanying them in their

performances, that also showed her when she was mentoring young artists. So she would be giving them opportunities, she'd help them with things like stage etiquette and things like that, so that they had the opportunity to develop their music performing careers. Many of those people have gone on to have music careers playing in orchestras and in Australia and abroad, and some of them quite prominent solo careers as well. So I think that's the way that we see her impact today.

AT: Now, you were awarded the Fellowship in 2022. Could you describe the work that the Fellowship has enabled you to do in terms of your research?

JS: I was awarded the Fellowship in 2022, which means that I actually understood the project in 2023, so that was last year. And the Fellowship gave me pretty much direct access to a lot of Christina's materials relating to her career, so things that would otherwise not be available. So primarily, I started with her family scrapbooks, we call them, so her sister Margaret actually collected a lot of those. Margaret was also a musician. These contain a lot of newspaper clippings, so advertisements about all the upcoming concerts where she's playing, some concert programs as well, reviews from the newspaper, that kind of thing, and as well as her certificates, a handful of photographs, not too many, and many concert programs, so some of them from the mid-century, so the 1940s through to the '60s, and then pretty much a complete set of all the concert programs from the 1980s and '90s that she was involved in.

So that was my materials that I was studying, and from those I was able to write some blog articles about those facets of her work, and I gave a public talk as well that kind of drew together everything to do with her career in performance. And then by looking at all those materials, then I was able to approach potential interview subjects to talk to them about what they remember about her influence. The Queensland State Library, their collections are just actually really amazing to get into, so many different facets of Queensland history in the storage area.

AT: Now, apart from the fellowship, you were already studying Christina's life before that, so was there something in particular that drew you to her story?

JS: I'd been looking for a research and writing project and decided to begin with the piano, particularly the piano in ensembles, so chamber music and accompaniment. And in the 1990s, because Christina was well known in Brisbane for her music work, and she was also a life member of the Accompanist Guild of Queensland, I decided to start there. So yes, I did write an article about her career and published it with the centenary of her birth. So in 2020, it went in the Queensland Music Teachers Association journal, which is Bravura. And that was pretty much using mostly publicly available sources on the internet. So it was lovely to be able to go deeper into Christina's career with the State Library Fellowship, because she is so important to Queensland classical music, clearly, so accomplished a musician. I think it's worth acknowledging that and sharing that with people, that part of Queensland's classical music history. I think it's worth remembering and acknowledging that, because she didn't have a formal position at an institution, it wasn't an ongoing ensemble that she was a part of that you could name. So I think it's important to remember that contribution.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.