



Of Exile and Music: A Twentieth Century Life

Eva Mayer Schay

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This fascinating autobiography is set against the backdrop of some of the most dramatic episodes of the twentieth century. It is the story of a stubborn struggle against unjust regimes, sustained by a deep belief in the strength of the human spirit and the transcendental power of music. It is also an account of a rich spiritual life, during which the author has built upon her Jewish roots through the study of Eastern philosophy and meditation. Born in Germany, Eva Mayer Schay's early childhood in Mallorca was an idyllic one. Her parents had emigrated to the island following the Nazi party's rise to power, but in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, the family was repatriated to Germany. Her father was arrested and given the choice of concentration camp or departing for Italy. They managed to leave Mussolini's Italy for South Africa before the race laws were implemented. During World War II, Mayer Schay's parents were classed as "enemy aliens" in South Africa, which led to considerable hardship. Her father died in 1945, after the end of the war. She went through all her schooling and university in Johannesburg, continued her musical studies in London, and after returning to Johannesburg, taught violin, played chamber music, and became a member of the SABC Symphony Orchestra. Defying apartheid, she was fired, later reinstated, but left Johannesburg to play with the Durban Civic Orchestra in 1959. Appalled at the increasing harshness of the nationalist government and by the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, she and her mother finally emigrated to England in 1961. In London, Mayer Schay worked as freelance violinist and was married in 1967. In September 1968, she joined the orchestra of Sadler's Wells Opera at the Coliseum Theatre, later renamed English National Opera, where she remained for almost thirty years.



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