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OREM

# THE SOUND OF MUSIC

2021  
SEASON

MUSICAL

PRODUCTION NUMBER 233

Jun. 18 — THROUGH — Aug. 07

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While *The Sound of Music* has become a musical theatre favorite, the lives that inspired the story have faded for many. Though the musical embellishes and alters the story of the Trapp Family Singers, their tale—and what happened after—is no less fascinating than the story you will see tonight.

Georg von Trapp was born in 1880, and rose to prominence as a highly decorated submarine commander in the Austrian Navy during World War I. He married Agathe Whitehead in 1911, and together they had two sons and five daughters. However, Agathe died in 1922 from scarlet fever she caught while caring for her children.

Four years later, widower Georg hired Maria Augusta Kutschera, a novice from a nearby nunnery, to care for his third oldest child, who was ill and unable to attend school. Maria and Georg married in 1927 and had three children of their own (who are not seen in *The Sound of Music*). After Georg suffered devastating financial setbacks in the early 1930s, Maria began the family singing group to help keep the family afloat. They quickly gained fame in Austria, but that fame was not without its consequences: when the group refused an invitation to sing for Adolf Hitler at his birthday celebration due to their staunch opposition to the Nazi regime, they decided to flee.

When Georg's birthplace, Zadar, became part of Italy in 1920, he and his family became Italian

citizens. It was this Italian citizenship that helped the family escape Nazi Germany. Instead of a perilous mountaintop getaway, the family publicly boarded a train for Italy and left from there on an announced concert tour of the United States.

Once safely in America, the family settled in Stowe, Vermont. There they ran a music camp when they were not touring. Most of the family quickly became U.S. citizens either through application, or in Rupert and Werner's case through serving with the U.S. Army. Georg, however, never became a U.S. citizen and passed away in 1947 from lung cancer.

Due to the urging of a persistent friend, Maria was convinced to set her and her family's story down on paper. Her first book, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, became a best-seller when published in 1949. Its massive print success birthed two German-language films: *The Trapp Family* (1956) and *The Trapp Family in America* (1958). It was after seeing these that Broadway director



*The von Trapp family*

Vincent J. Donehue decided the story could make an excellent starring vehicle for his close friend, Mary Martin.

Though the musical and film made many changes to the von Trapps' story, the family was particularly upset by the portrayal of their father, Georg. Instead of the emotionally detached and stern father we see on stage, by all accounts he was a kind and warm father who taught the children music well before Maria arrived. She taught them the madrigal singing which would bring them to fame, but that musical affinity was from Georg.

Maria lived a long and full life after Georg's passing, touring with the musical group until it disbanded in 1957, publishing more books, and serving with her stepdaughters as missionaries in New Guinea. She died in 1987 and was buried in the family cemetery next to Georg and five of her stepchildren.

Of the seven von Trapp children we meet in *The Sound of Music*:

**Agathe** (Liesl) sang both with the family and as a solo performer, founded two kindergartens, and wrote a memoir about her life before and after *The Sound of Music*. Just as her stepmother's book inspired films and musicals, Agathe's book inspired the 2015 film *The von Trapp Family: A Life of Music*. She passed away in 2010 at the age of 97.

**Rupert** (Friedrich) was a doctor, but in 1938 passed up a job offer when he learned the position was only open because the Nazi government had removed a Jewish physician from the post. He later fought with the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division in Italy during World War II, enjoyed a successful career as a family practitioner, and passed away in 1992 at the age of 80, survived by his wife and six children.

**Maria** (Louisa) became a missionary in New Guinea alongside her stepmother, adopted a son there, and was the last surviving member of the original family, passing away in 2014 at the age of 99.



*Maria and Georg von Trapp*

**Werner** (Kurt) served with his brother in the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division during World War II, then became a dairy farmer. He passed away in 2007, leaving behind a wife and six children. His grandchildren became a performing group themselves, carrying on the family name as "The von Trapps".

**Hedwig** (Brigitta) became a United States citizen in 1948. She enjoyed a career teaching in Hawaii before she died on a visit to Austria in 1972 at the age of 55 due to complications from asthma.

**Johanna** (Marta) married in 1948 and raised seven children. She was a painter and enjoyed an exhibition of her paintings in Salzburg a year before she passed in 1994 at the age of 75.

**Martina** (Gretl) married in 1949, but tragically passed away in 1951 due to complications in the birth of her first child (who also did not survive). She was 30 years old.

Sadly, most of the original recordings of the Trapp Family Singers were lost in a 2008 fire at Universal. There is little footage of the original group available, but if you would like to see a short clip you can find "[Es Wollt Ein Jagerlein Jagen](#)" on YouTube.

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA