

Chapter 1

Sources

The chief sources for the biography of Hephzibah Menuhin were publications about her and her family, her own writings and the memories and opinions of those who knew her.

Publications about Hephzibah and her family

Very little has been published about Hephzibah Menuhin, apart from newspaper profiles, interviews and of course reviews of her concerts. In books about the Menuhin family, Yehudi is the focus. His biographies leave Hephzibah very much in the background, as they do her younger sister Yaltah. She is given more prominence in Yehudi Menuhin's autobiography *Unfinished Journey*¹, though almost always in relation to him, as his loyal lieutenant and unfailing supporter. Moshe Menuhin's story of his family *The Menuhin Saga*^{a2} sketches her story lightly; his focus is Yehudi's life and career, and Moshe's view was that 'Hephzibah and Yaltah were [their mother's] department.'³ *Yehudi Menuhin* by Robert Magidoff⁴, the first full-length biography of the violinist, has some fascinating material about the Menuhin family when Yehudi and his sisters were children, evidently gathered from people who knew them at the time. However, Hephzibah is almost always mentioned as a member of the famous family or in relation to Yehudi. (In this book, as in some other Menuhin biographies, a strongly recurring theme is the

¹ Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, Pimlico, London, 2000

² Moshe Menuhin, *The Menuhin Saga*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1987

³ Ibid, page 43

⁴ Robert Magidoff, *Yehudi Menuhin*, Robert Hale, London, 1955

dominating and pernicious influence of Marutha Menuhin.) *Menuhin: A Family Portrait* by Tony Palmer⁵ is more or less a psychological biography of the family, and highly critical of Yehudi's upbringing and that of his sisters. Hephzibah as an adult is mentioned briefly, though only in the context of her family. The most thoroughly researched recent Menuhin biography, *Menuhin* by Humphrey Burton⁶, mentions Hephzibah only occasionally, and again only as Yehudi's sister.

Yaltah's elder son Lionel Rolfe wrote the story of his mother's family in *The Menuhin Odyssey*.⁷ This contains some fanciful speculation about the Menuhins' background and origins, and unlike most other work on the Menuhin family, it offers some glimpses into Hephzibah as an adult. Rolfe asserts that she was intensely interested in helping people, liked to be surrounded by people and was critical of her parents (as indeed was Yaltah): all information useful to a biographer. According to Rolfe, Hephzibah had no time for conventional birth families, believing that people should be able to choose those to whom they wished to be close, and that accidents of biology and genetics were hardly suitable bases for closeness of any kind. Rolfe is not always reliable, with a tendency to give documentary authority to speculation, but this insight into Hephzibah was corroborated by other sources of information about her. Of all the published Menuhin books, this is the one that gives the clearest picture of Hephzibah.

With the exception of Rolfe's family history, then, books published about the Menuhins portray Hephzibah as the golden-haired little girl, second member of the brilliant childhood trio of

⁵ Tony Palmer, *Menuhin: A Family Portrait*, Faber and Faber, London, 1991

⁶ Humphrey Burton, *Menuhin*, Faber and Faber, London, 2000

⁷ Lionel Menuhin Rolfe, *The Menuhin Odyssey*, Panjandrum Press, San Francisco, 1978

Yehudi, Hephzibah and Yaltah. Menuhin biographers mention her only briefly after her marriage and departure for Australia at the age of eighteen, and hardly discuss the work she did in London, which occupied more than one-third of her life, and which often involved Yehudi. Her work as a pianist in her own right is also given little attention: there is almost nothing about her continuing appearances as featured soloist and chamber musician at concerts and music festivals throughout Europe, the United States and Australasia until the end of her life. It is even hinted that she did not fulfil her earlier promise. An impression also given is that the adult Hephzibah was never a particularly important part of her brother's life, and this is not so.

Another account of Hephzibah Menuhin's life needs to be mentioned, though it was not strictly speaking a source for my biography. The Melbourne feminist fiction writer and musician Glen Tomasetti spent twenty years working on Hephzibah Menuhin's life story, beginning shortly after Hephzibah's death in 1981. She interviewed members of Hephzibah's family, both in Australia and in England, including Yehudi, to whom she spoke extensively. After several years she completed a manuscript – apparently not a 'straight' biographical study but a fictionalised, novelised account, written in the first person from Hephzibah's viewpoint – but found difficulty in having it published. On 10 March 1987 she wrote to 'the family friends and associates of Hephzibah Menuhin' withdrawing from the project on the grounds that 'I cannot find a way to publish anything like the reality behind the public image of Hephzibah

Menuhin's life without consciously harming at least twelve living people either in their public self-esteem or their personal feelings.'⁸

I heard about the Tomasetti manuscript in 2003⁹ when I was just beginning my own research. It was a blow to find that somebody was already working on Hephzibah Menuhin, but not, as it happened, a serious one. After checking that Tomasetti had published nothing about Hephzibah since 1981 I decided that if she had been working on the manuscript for twenty years without completing it, she probably would not. Even though Kron Nicholas had showed me the letter in which Tomasetti abandoned her project, I knew she was still proprietorial about Hephzibah – she had been very critical of Curtis Levy and his documentary, for instance. She had not used her research material, it would clearly be useful to me, for she had accessed sources I could not (e.g., interviews with Yehudi and Yaltah Menuhin, both of whom had died before I began work). However, I decided against contacting her. I believed that the book I wanted to write about Hephzibah Menuhin would be very different from Tomasetti's.

Glen Tomasetti died, her manuscript still unpublished, on 25 June 2003¹⁰. In 2005 I asked her daughter Sarah to grant me access to her mother's research notes (I did not want to see her manuscript). Sarah Tomasetti was not especially co-operative and I later learned that the material had been sent to Victoria's La Trobe Library. Upon applying to consult it there, I was told I needed Sarah Tomasetti's permission. Sarah Tomasetti told me that nothing had been catalogued and that as far as she knew there were no interview tapes or transcripts. I was already well advanced with my

⁸ Glen Tomasetti, 10 March 1987. Copy of letter shown to author by recipient Kron Nicholas.

⁹ Email Kron Nicholas to author 12 April 2003

¹⁰ Melbourne *Age* 1 July 2003

own research and writing and decided that I did not need to see Glen Tomasetti's material.

Hephzibah's writing

From the time she was a teenager, Hephzibah Menuhin was a writer. Little of what she wrote was published, except for letters to the editors of various newspapers and short newspaper articles about her work with Richard Hauser. However, she was an indefatigable correspondent, keeping a large range of family members, friends and associates up to date with what was happening in her life and her views on many things. She wrote letters on whatever paper came to hand: old letterhead, the backs of programs, scrap paper. Until she became terminally ill, she probably wrote at least one letter, postcard or note every day. She also kept diaries from time to time, combining matter-of-fact accounts of her activities and more personal comments. Her correspondents treasured her letters and kept them: almost all her letters are in private hands, very few indeed in libraries or archives.

It was naturally pleasing to discover that so much of Hephzibah's original material existed. However, its sheer quantity very soon presented problems.

The most significant of these has been described by the American writer and critic Louis Menand. In a *New Yorker* article he wrote: 'What has been written about [if one is researching history and by extension biography] takes on an importance that may be spurious. A few lines in a memoir, a snatch of recorded conversation, a letter fortuitously preserved, an event noted in a diary: all become luminous with significance – even though they are

merely the bits that have floated to the surface. The historian clings to them while somewhere below the huge submerged wreck of the past sinks silently out of sight.’¹¹

The problem with Hephzibah was not that her letters had been ‘fortuitously preserved’ but that she wrote so many to so many different people. When she described the same events several times, she often changed small details in each account. Some of these alterations were minor, but others were more serious. Hephzibah evidently had an acute awareness of audience and tailored her letters to their recipients.

To give an example of Menand’s observation above, if one did not happen to know by other means that Hephzibah’s marriage to Lindsay Nicholas was a difficult one, and had read only Hephzibah’s letters to her parents between 1951 and 1954, one would be unaware that Lindsay and Hephzibah hardly communicated, and that Richard Hauser existed. (This is, of course, why Moshe Menuhin was so outraged when he discovered who Hauser was and what he meant to Hephzibah.) To Australian friends at the same time, she wrote of ‘most beloved Richard’; to her brother, who had met Hauser, she explained that she was learning about social work with a very good tutor.

Fortunately I was able to speak to Hephzibah’s family and to friends of the family. All had particular views about Richard Hauser (discussed to some extent below) and by means of these other sources it became possible to plot events.

Hephzibah’s letters were often dashed off, immediate snapshots of her life at the time of writing. They were litanies of activity: meetings with various community groups, phone calls from

¹¹ Louis Menand, *New Yorker* magazine 24 March 2005.

peace organisations, speeches that needed writing, conference papers she was helping Richard Hauser put together, dinners to be cooked, practice for a concert to be done. While interesting and often useful material, these letters give little indication of how she and Richard Hauser worked, what they actually did, what efforts were needed. The seriousness of what they attempted was obscured in a mass of day-to-day detail. Compounding the problem was Richard Hauser's reluctance to document aims, objectives and progress in the work they did. I needed to consult a variety of other sources – recollections of colleagues, newspaper articles, papers and books written by Hephzibah and Richard Hauser – to gain some sort of overview of their work.

Perhaps most significantly, Hephzibah rarely wrote about her own sadness, anger or other 'negative' feelings to her correspondents. There is, for instance, nothing in her letters about a miscarriage she suffered a few years after her second son Marston was born and her consequent feelings of sadness and depression: I learned about this in interviews with family and friends. She wrote very little about the constant disagreements and rows she and Lindsay had; almost nothing about the agonising pain and depression she suffered during her last illness.

I believe there are several reasons for this. Hephzibah was a woman with a strong natural sense of her own privacy. As a child she had been brought up by a mother who considered displays of emotion to be weaknesses: one should not burden others with one's feelings.¹² Consequently she usually presented a bright and resolute face to the world. After several years of research I felt that

¹² When Marutha Menuhin's mother died, for instance, Marutha cried and her husband thought her tears significant enough to record in his memoirs. See Moshe Menuhin, *The Menuhin Saga*, page 51

Hephzibah's performances did not take place solely on the concert platform.

However, there were times when she seemed compelled to express her private thoughts with frankness and clarity. She wrote a letter to Lindsay expressing strong feelings of regret and desolation about their marriage. She stated her belief that he did not love her, she was 'most sore and sad' and that she longed for greater intimacy and oneness of spirit with him. It was a letter she never gave him, so was evidently written to express her own feelings. Some years later, when Ruth Llewellyn, the wife of her Australian musical partner Ernest Llewellyn, expressed the view that Hephzibah should be a pianist and concert artist above all, Hephzibah wrote what amounted to her manifesto: a chilly letter to the effect that she and Yehudi were not 'performing seals', that they had great gifts, yes, but also great responsibilities, and that music was not at the centre of her work. Both these letters were discovered in a large quantity of unrelated correspondence: a good example of the serendipity of which Menand writes. They were certainly 'luminous with significance' for my biography.

Hephzibah also wrote a cache of letters to Paul Morawetz during their affair in Melbourne at the end of the 1940s. They form the only sustained emotional diary she ever wrote; the almost two hundred letters to Morawetz over a period of two years express feelings she did not release to anybody else in her life. She was in love with him, and – as often happens with love letters – there is a definite element of display. Hephzibah knew that this relationship was a diversion, though an important one: she had no intention of leaving Lindsay, and Morawetz (who had had other affairs) did not wish to break up his own family. And so Hephzibah could apparently

enjoy being 'in love with love' as well as expressing her feelings about Paul. Her scrawled words often tumble over each other, as if she is finally able to talk to someone who understands; it is not difficult to sense former loneliness. She is by turns funny, thoughtful and informative: the Morawetz letters are also a useful source of information about Hephzibah's daily life and political and social preoccupations. However, they are not erotically charged, and neither are his. Perhaps this is because of the reticence of an earlier generation – Hephzibah was not brought up to consider herself a particularly sexual being. However, the letters do demonstrate another kind of intimacy: shared jokes and catchphrases, snatches of other languages that obviously had particular contextual meanings for them both.

Hephzibah took advantage of the licence she evidently felt the relationship gave her. Her lack of restraint, of ordinary tact, is sometimes obvious. Several times she reported to Paul the unflattering things Lindsay had said about him. She also told Paul about Yehudi's less than charitable view of him and of the affair, and even described Lindsay's anguish at the disintegration of his marriage. Hephzibah's apparent relief in finding someone she considered a soulmate appears to have overcome any reticence, residual marital loyalty or even protection of another's dignity. It also shows a failure of empathy, an inability to enter into Paul's probable feelings upon receiving intimate information to which he was not really entitled.

It is unknown whether Hephzibah returned all Paul's letters to her at the end of their affair: certainly he kept all her letters to him. He outlived Hephzibah by about twenty years, and according to relatives and friends always maintained that Hephzibah had been

the love of his life. (There is no record of his wife Dita's reaction on hearing this.) His biography, which is described in several Web sites as 'the story of 80-year-old Melbourne entrepreneur Paul Morawetz and his love affair with the pianist Hephzibah Menuhin', quotes extensively from the letters.¹³ Upon his death in 2005 Hephzibah's letters to him, carefully preserved, as were his to her, came into the possession of his executor, the Melbourne lawyer Ralph Renard, who allowed me access to them. They were quoted by Curtis Levy for his documentary *Hephzibah*, and Glen Tomasetti was also allowed to see them. The frankness of these letters provided insights into aspects of Hephzibah's character – not always positive aspects either – unexpressed in her more guarded correspondence.

Interviews with those who had known Hephzibah

Research for this biography led me to interview Hephzibah's family and friends in Australia, London, Europe and the USA. Many family members and friends were happy to share their memories of Hephzibah, and almost all were positive towards her.

However, some of Hephzibah's friends, including those who asserted they knew her very well, gave comments that were surprisingly lacking in insight. Several repeated the same stories about her upbringing and the influence of Yehudi, and almost everybody appeared to believe that Hephzibah was thoroughly dominated by the malign Richard Hauser. Few expressed willingness to speculate about Hephzibah's feelings or reasons for taking certain courses of action. Obviously some people are more used to thinking speculatively about human personality and actions than others, but for the sake of at least being told something I had

¹³ Gloria Frydman, *What a Life: The biography of Paul Morawetz*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1995

not heard before, I occasionally resorted to leading questions. ('Do you think Richard Hauser was a very anxious person?' for instance.) This technique had limited usefulness.

Perhaps people were protecting Hephzibah by giving me information that was already on the record, but I also suspected that some were telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. I had to make sure that my questions were as open as possible. I also noticed that several women described themselves as 'dear friends' of Hephzibah's, yet a little probing revealed that they were surprisingly ill-informed about some aspects of her life (how long she had lived in Australia, even in one case how she died). While this probably says something about celebrity, i.e., people being eager to claim a well known and glamorous person as a friend, I came to believe that Hephzibah, as with letters, was often selective in what she said to whom; I came to believe that her warmth of manner and apparent guilelessness sometimes seduced people into thinking they were closer to her than they really were.

A case in point was an interview in October 2003 with the Swiss French novelist Madeleine Santschi who, I had been told, was a long-standing friend of Hephzibah's. Mme Santschi, who lives outside Geneva, said she had known Hephzibah since the 1960s; she met her with a psychologist friend of Richard Hauser's and visited her in London and Gstaad. She and Hephzibah had an easy, undemanding relationship, seeing each other at long intervals, she said. My impression was that they were not the intimate friends I had been led to believe they were.

Mme Santschi spoke of Hephzibah not as a friend, but as a character who needed to be understood. She also insisted on

recounting the major events in Hephzibah's life, all of which were on the public record. When I attempted to encourage her to discuss Hephzibah according to her own observations, she declined. Perhaps her reluctance stemmed from discretion, but she appeared to know relatively little about Hephzibah's life. Mme Santschi showed me some of the letters she had received from Hephzibah, and I found nothing in this correspondence – descriptions of the work she and Richard were doing in London, updates on Clara, a little about concerts, all written of course in French – to encourage a perception that the two women had been intimate friends. Finally Mme Santschi declared: 'Hephzibah was my close friend for many years. I don't know whether she had the same feeling about me.'

The most insightful comments I heard about Hephzibah came from fellow musicians (these are discussed in more detail below). This suggests at least two hypotheses. Firstly that Hephzibah, trained to the piano from an early age and surrounded by musicians all her early life, was more open in talking to them than to other people. Secondly, that she displayed qualities in her preparation for performance and in performance itself that were not so readily apparent in her dealings with non-musicians.

The second of these hypotheses is, I believe, the more interesting and it is supported by photographs taken of Hephzibah at all stages of her life. When she is shown as a little sister of Yehudi, a wife, mother, celebrity, even a social worker, she is smiling, friendly, warm: it is not difficult to speculate that she worked out a persona for herself at an early age, or had it decided for her, and maintained it. However, when Hephzibah is photographed at the keyboard she looks like a totally different person. She is quiet, reserved, utterly

concentrated. This stillness, responsiveness, even modesty is not apparent elsewhere.

Generally speaking my interviews were informal. Several times I tried to put things on a more formal basis, i.e., to record every word spoken, but many participants became uncomfortable with this, saying that they were not accustomed to the interview process and would prefer me to take notes. As many of my interview subjects were in their seventies and eighties and wary of technology, I felt that this was a reasonable request. I soon adopted the habit of taking notes and typing up interviews immediately afterwards, and upon checking back with my interviewees I had no problems.

I was not entirely surprised to find that this method of conducting interviews was as useful for my purposes as doing them by tape recorder. This is probably because my interviewees were usually stating opinions and telling anecdotes, and stories are not difficult to remember and record.

Several interviews with Hephzibah and Richard's London colleagues were conducted by email. Here I had a specific set of questions: How did you come to hear of their work; what did you hear; why did you decide to work for them; what was your experience; how would you evaluate the work that was being done. This yielded very good results, with access to a level of detail I had not previously had. Email is perfect for this sort of work of course: if questions are handled properly, and the interviewee is a practised writer, a good rapport, even a kind of friendship, can result. And there is always scope for later addition or correction of material, not always possible with a face-to-face interview.

