

# THE FRANK BUTLER STORY

Frank Butler is the grandson of the concertina manufacturer, the late George Jones. His mother, <sup>who</sup> was a singer (don't confuse that word with our use of it today) and a passable pianist was George Jones' daughter.

Frank Butler was born in 1904, lost his father while still an infant, was reared by his mother in something like poverty, and received his early musical training from her.

He revived his interest in the piano in his mid-teens, pursuing a catch-as-catch-can self-teaching programme. By nineteen years of age he had achieved fluent score reading and was a reasonable accompanist. He found an interest in semi-professional Concert Party work and ran a dance band for some five years, often arranging his own scores for this work. By 1931, at twenty-one, he was a pianist of some note. While at home with all kinds of music, his interest would seem to have leant towards the more serious compositions.

The concertina came into the picture in 1926 because variety was needed for concert work.

In six weeks Frank Butler mastered the treble English concertina sufficiently to present Dvořák's Humoresque on stage with Beethoven's Minuet in G as encore. Simple stuff, you say? Try to interpret it with meaning next time you have your instrument in your hands. You could be in for a shock.

Music, but not always engagements, continued until post-war years. Frank Butler was now married, a factor which bore directly on his future work as musician and concertinist, for Doris Butler kept her husband's nose to the musicianship grindstone. Both she and her eldest daughter Judith learned to play the concertina.

Lest anyone should be tempted to envy Frank Butler's leisure time to do these things, let it be mentioned now that he was holding down executive posts in the London business world, including a public relations post. Only those who have been involved in the latter can know its demands. One's beautifully ordered 24-hour day, even as an executive, expands to an intense 48-hour a day output programme with the mind working at full pitch...even when asleep! Take it from one who knows.

Where then did Frank Butler find the time from 1953 to become

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involved in the International Concertina Association, accept its secretaryship at one stage, be the conductor of a Concertina band, form and work a Concertina quintette which specialised in classical music principally the Haydn string quartettes, arrange music and write full scores for these combinations, become involved musically with the London Education Authority, and be piano accompanist for the leader/secretary of the English equivalent of our National Fitness Movement? And even there the list doesn't end. At one stage he was conducting two concertina classes concurrently at the opposite ends of London.

Behind and related to Frank Butler's association with the I.C.A. were some folk famous in the concertina world. The Fayre Four sisters (have you ever heard their rendering of 'The Flight of the Bumble Bee'? To quote Malcolm Clapp in another context, "It's out of this world" ), Alf Edwards, Harry Minting, Len Jones.

In 1974, with her husband now seventy, Doris Butler pushed him further into the music picture by buying him a recorder thus creating additional involvement with his grandchildren who would appear to be playing it at school. By 1980 after various experiences, including hospitalisation for cataracts, he was running three graded classes for the recorder and of course, arranging their music. These 1970-1980 years also included music workshop classes for middleaged people with neither knowledge of music nor an instrument on which to produce it. With Doris Butler as secretary and Frank Butler as leader (the pair were always an excellent administration team) the value of this work was assured.

A rich experience after retirement (Who retires? When?) was Frank Butler's playing before and during the church services on the isle of Iona. If you know the background story of Iona you can gauge something of the significance of the experience. If you don't, then it's just another geographical name and you're missing something. Frank Butler wrote: "I choose to regard Iona as my greatest musical and, possibly, spiritual experience."

Any man's story takes a plunge somewhere. In 1982 Frank Butler lost his wife and colleague. The writer was privileged to receive a letter from the musician not long afterwards and can record here the simple and moving tribute the maestro paid to his comrade and inspiration of fortyeight years.

Within three months of this loss, Frank Butler faced what is perhaps the true musician's greatest fear - total deafness.

These things would have stopped most men. Frank Butler called his mental ear into full play and concentrated on writing music.

From that came the production of his "Concertina Two" which has been mentioned in the magazine several times. Additionally he produced the compact "Mini Tunes" and a valuable monograph with the intriguing title of "Arranging Music for the English Concertina (with an Introduction to Harmony)".

And now, just to challenge us all this eighty year old is writing a biography.

A happy final observation is the fact that after twentyseven years service with the City of London Constabulary, Frank Butler was made a Freeman of the City of London...probably the only Concertina player ever to have that honour.

Hurrrumph.

It takes some of us all our time to get out of bed of a morning!

## NEWS

THE BUSH MUSIC FESTIVAL, 1984. Once again the Bush Music Club will be presenting their annual Bush Music Festival which is the highlight of the year for those interested in our Australian traditions. This year the festival will be held at the Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville, from Friday night of 26th October until Sunday night, 28th October.

The concertina played a very important part in our musical tradition and so, naturally, this important festival would not be complete without the concertina workshop and playing session. This year, Richard Evans and Malcolm Clapp ( who has recently returned from his sojourn in England ) will combine to present a workshop on concertinas and this will include a 'play along' following the success of this part of last years workshop. This festival has clearly become a major meeting place for concertina enthusiasts so let's hope as many as possible will be able to attend this year.

Although the concertina section is an exciting part of the festival, there will be numerous other goodies to tempt even the most stay-at-home among you to make the effort to attend. For example, John Meredith, who has been a contributor to Concertina Magazine, will be giving a workshop titled 'Looking Back' in which he will review the results of his 32 years of collecting - hard to imagine what a review of over 3000 items will include. John will also be joined by Shirley