

'Her Kiwi Excellency' Dorothy Davies

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In 1982 Dorothy Davies, pianist and wife of former New Zealand diplomat Dr Reuel A. Lochore, donated her papers to the Turnbull Library's Archive of New Zealand Music.¹ A year previously, the Library commissioned pianist Colleen Rae-Gerrard, who since 1956 had studied with Dorothy, to interview her for the Archive's oral history project.² The collection and interview reflect many aspects of the life of a remarkable woman, described by playwright Bruce Mason, also one of her students, as having been a 'public possession almost all her life'.³ Dorothy's services to music in New Zealand and to the community were recognised in 1975 when she was awarded the M.B.E. and the congratulatory messages in her collection on this and other occasions show the esteem and affection of her many friends and colleagues.

The collection includes Dorothy's diplomas and awards, correspondence with family, friends, colleagues, musical organisations and persons in diplomatic circles. There are notes for articles and broadcasts, concert programmes, some music invoices and receipts, newspaper cuttings (mostly summarising her career and that of her husband), a fine collection of photographs and also a plaster head of Dorothy, sculpted by Ziska Schwimmer in 1957.

Dorothy's taped reminiscences reveal her zest for life, keen sense of humour, warmth and love for music. She was born in Wanganui in 1899, the only daughter in a family of eight. At four years of age she showed musical talent and a year or two later began lessons with a Miss or Mrs Gerse who cycled to her pupils' homes to teach. Within a few years, however, Dorothy announced to her father, who really could not afford to pay for piano lessons, that unless she could study with Sophia Redwood, who taught at Wanganui Girls' College, she would 'do no more housework!'⁴ Lessons with Mrs Redwood ensued, and presumably the housework continued.

After her high school days, which were spent at Wanganui Girls' College, Dorothy taught privately and in 1924 entered the Sydney Conservatorium of Music where she studied piano with New Zealander Frank Hutchens and composition with Alfred Hill, became involved with chamber music, and in 1927 received her Diploma. She then returned to New Zealand and began her career, starting with the New Zealand Broadcasting Service in Christchurch,