

003 Nazwisko DONSKA Imiona Maria lat życia

004 Pseudonim

006 z domu Rodzice

008 Data urodzenia 1912 r. Miejscowość Łódź

010 Data śmierci 20.12.1996 Miejscowość Londyn?

012 Pogrzeb/Spopielenie Adres Cmentarza

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..... Suchecitz

..... Inne

- 029 Wyznanie
- 030 Jednostka wojskowa
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śp. Maria Donska

20 grudnia 1996 roku zmarła Maria Donska, ceniona pianistka, znana szczególnie ze swoich interpretacji utworów Beethovena i Schuberta.

Urodziła się w Łodzi w 1912 r. i już w wieku siedmiu lat występowała publicznie. W 1923 r. zadebiutowała jako pianistka, a trzy lata później wyjechała do Berlina na studia muzyczne pod kierunkiem znanego austriackiego pianisty Artura Schnabela, gdzie pozostawała jego uczennicą do 1933 r. W 1932 r. wzięła udział w Konkursie Chopinowskim w Warszawie i otrzymała Dyplom Honorowy. Do Londynu przyjechała w 1934 r., otrzymała brytyjskie obywatelstwo i zamieszkała z przyjaciółką Leonorą Speyer. Muzyczne studia w Royal College of Music rozpoczęła w 1936 r. pod kierunkiem Artura Alexandra.

II wojna światowa przerwała jej obiecującą karierę. Podczas wojny Maria Donska grywała na koncertach w National Gallery, jeździła z recitalami po Anglii oraz nagry-

wała dla BBC. W 1943 r. rozpoczęła nauczanie muzyki w Royal College of Music. W latach 1950 – 60 koncertowała głównie w South Bank i Wigmore Hall – wykonała m.in. dwa pełne cykle 32 sonat Beethovena. BBC kontynuowało emitowanie jej koncertów, na żywo i z wcześniejszych nagrań; wystąpiła również na dorocznym koncercie The Proms, na którym olśniła publiczność swoją interpretacją drugiego koncertu Brahmsa. W roku 1960 powróciła do Royal College of Music i uczyła tam do 1980 r. Ostatnimi koncertami Marii Donskiej były cztery recitale w Operze Kentu.

Silna osobowość i charakter M. Donskiej widoczne były w każdej jej interpretacji muzycznej, chociaż od czasu do czasu pojawiały się w nich również wpływy A. Schnabela. Zostawiła sporo nagrań, dokonanych głównie w latach 60. – wśród nich szczególnie ciekawe interpretacje drugiej i trzeciej sonaty Chopina.

b.d.

OBITUARIES

MARIA DONSKA

**Maria Donska, pianist,
died on December 20
aged 84. She was born in
Poland on September 3,
1912.**

AN ACCOMPLISHED interpreter of the music of Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin, Maria Donska will be particularly remembered for her fine performances at the National Gallery's memorable lunch-time concerts during the Second World War. These, initiated by Myra Hess after the gallery's collection had been removed to a safe place, and supported by Denis Matthews, Cyril Smith, Kathleen Ferrier and many others, became musical events of immense importance for those in search of an interlude of peace and reflection in bomb-battered London. Hundreds came to enjoy exquisite works each day.

As a pianist, it was said by one of her pupils, she never came between her listeners and their enjoyment of the work. It was vital to understand how a composer wished a piece to be played, Donska said, and for interpreters never to impose their own personalities upon it. She liked to cite Chopin's work as an example: so often, she said, played unrhythmically and sentimentally when Chopin intended it to be rhythmical. It was characteristic of her that she should express her strong views on music fearlessly.

Maria Donska was born in Lodz, the daughter of a distinguished philologist and engineer. As a pianist she was a prodigy, beginning to play when she was four. By the age of seven, by which time her family had moved to Gdansk where her father was organising a shipbuilding contract, she was giving professional concerts, playing the works of Schubert and Schumann for British diplomats.

She made her first appearance with an orchestra when she was 11, flawlessly carrying off a quick and complex piece by Weber. A year later, she left school to study music full-time at a conservatoire, doing so well there that she was sent on to Berlin to work under Schnabel. She was now 14, and it was there that she met Beethoven.



Bust of Donska sculpted by Jacob Epstein

bringing the work of these two composers to the attention of the British public.

In 1933, horrified at the emergence of Hitler and the stirrings of anti-Semitism — benches for Jews, for example, were painted yellow — Donska returned to Poland to work for Warsaw Radio before in 1934, clutching in her hand a £5 ticket, she found herself on a boat embarking for London. Ever since she had visited London with Schnabel, she had longed to see the city again.

From then on her life became increasingly active. When the BBC heard that she had experience in radio, she was at once asked to make recordings for it. She went to live in St John's Wood with her friend Speyer, applied for British citizenship, helped the poet Walter Thomas with his book of Mozart's letters and, in 1936, enrolled at the Royal College of Music. When asked by one senior pianist why she, so evidently gifted, should

mental breakdown, exacerbated by fearful anxiety for the wellbeing of her family in occupied Poland. This kept her from playing in public.

In 1943 she returned to recording for the BBC, played at the National Gallery and at the Wigmore Hall and, to replace those who had been called up, began to teach at the RCM and continued to do so until 1946. She joined the Bryanston Summer School in 1948, playing each year until 1951 when the summer school was transferred to Dartington where she continued throughout the 1950s.

In 1955 she gave recitals of the complete Beethoven sonatas at the Festival Hall and it was during one of these that she met Jacob Epstein. He was so struck by her performance and beauty that he asked her to sit for him. The 12 sittings she gave him proved, she said, "the experience of a lifetime". They would discuss their shared love of music, Shakespeare, poetry and especially

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Her time spent studying under Schnabel proved an unforgettable experience. Besides his greatness as a pianist and the influence this inevitably had on her work, he, she told friends, a brilliant intellect and wit, although he looked like a bank manager. Schnabel, in his turn, thought so highly of his student that he took her to London in 1929 when invited by Samuel Cortauld to give a series of Mozart and Schubert recitals. Indeed, it was Schnabel, Donska argued, who was in large part responsible for

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She remained at the RCM until 1940, winning the Hopkinson Gold Medal in 1936, the Chappell Gold Medal (the college's highest award for excellence) in 1937 and the Clement Exhibition in 1938. She had a tragic love affair with the painter Mark Gertler and it was she who found his body when he committed suicide in 1939.

With the outbreak of war, Donska toured the country for the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts — the precursor of the Arts Council. Meanwhile, she moved to Windsor to avoid the Blitz. But it was at this point that she suffered a severe

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She continued to give concerts until the 1970s, playing at the Wigmore Hall and recording for the BBC. She also taught at the RCM from 1960 to 1980. When in 1989 illness ended her career as a pianist she buried herself in reading Shakespeare. Until the end of her life she enjoyed discussing anything to do with music, literature or art with the many admirers who came to see her.

Maria Donska remained unmarried. Her lifelong friend and companion Barbara Speyer died in 1987 and all her Jewish relatives, including her brother, were killed by the Nazis during the war.