

“The Sound of Music”: Fact or Fiction

Real Story of the von Trapp Family

The von Trapps: The Real Family That Inspired “The Sound of Music”

Hollywood took some liberties while bringing the story of this musical Austrian family to the big screen.

When *The Sound of Music* debuted on cinema screens in April 1965, audiences fell hard and in huge numbers for the joyous celebration of music, dance, patriotism and familial and romantic love, propelling it to become one of the world’s most beloved movie musicals and turning the story of the von Trapp family into lore.

Like many true stories filtered through Hollywood’s often overly sentimental lens, *The Sound of Music* on-screen differs significantly from the true tale of [Maria](#), the novice nun who takes a job as a governess in the Austrian household of the von Trapps, only to find herself falling in love with widower and retired naval captain Georg von Trapp and his seven children.

The film stars [Julie Andrews](#) and [Christopher Plummer](#) as Maria and Georg, and features enduring songs such as “Do-Re-Mi,” “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria,” “Climb Ev’ry Mountain” and “Edelweiss.” It received five Academy Awards (including best picture) and is the third highest-grossing movie of all time in the U.S. after its [box office is adjusted for inflation](#).

A cinematic recreation of the 1959 Broadway musical featuring music and lyrics by [Richard Rogers](#) and [Oscar Hammerstein](#), the Robert Wise-directed movie is based on the early chapters of Maria’s 1949 memoir, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, which chronicles Maria and the von Trapp’s beginnings in Salzburg, Austria, through their escape from Nazi-occupied Europe to the family’s eventual relocation to America.

To use lyrics from “Do-Re-Mi,” when it comes to alterations and omissions contained in the movie version of *The Sound of Music*, “let’s start at the very beginning.”

The names of the von Trapp children – and amount – were changed in the movie

In 1926 Maria was sent from the convent to tutor only one of Captain von Trapp’s seven children from his first marriage. Georg’s second eldest daughter, Maria, had contracted scarlet fever – the same disease that took his first wife’s life four years prior – and could no longer travel the distance to and from school.

Most readers by now have questioned the name of Georg’s daughter listed above. It’s no surprise the name is not familiar as one of the children’s, in fact, all the names and sexes of the seven von Trapp children represented in the movie were changed. The real von Trapp children were (in age descending order) Rupert, Agathe, Maria, Werner, Hedwig, Johanna and Martina.

On screen Rupert became Liesl, a 16 going on 17-year-old girl. In real life, by the time the family fled Austria, Rupert was in his late twenties and a practicing physician.