

SOUND OF MUSIC

Maria Augusta Kutschera von Trapp (1905 to 1987)

Biography

Early Musical Career and Departure from Austria

Soprano Lotte Lehmann heard the family sing, and she suggested they perform at concerts. When the Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg heard them over the radio, he invited them to perform in Vienna.^[14]

After performing at a festival in 1935, they became a popular touring act. They experienced life under the Nazis after the annexation of Austria by Germany in March 1938. Life became increasingly difficult as they witnessed hostility toward Jewish children by their classmates, the use of children against their parents, the advocacy of abortion both by Maria's doctor and by her son's school and finally by the induction of Georg into the German Navy. They visited Munich in the summer of 1938 and encountered Hitler at a restaurant. In September, the family left Austria and traveled to Italy, then to England and finally the United States. The Nazis made use of their abandoned home as Heinrich Himmler's headquarters.^[12]

Initially calling themselves the "Trapp Family Choir", the von Trapps began to perform in the United States and Canada. They performed in New York City at The Town Hall on 10 December 1938.^[6]
^{[14][15][16]} The *New York Times* wrote:

There was something unusually lovable and appealing about the modest, serious singers of this little family aggregation as they formed a close semicircle about their self-effacing director for their initial offering, the handsome Mme. von Trapp in simple black, and the youthful sisters garbed in black and white Austrian folk costumes enlivened with red ribbons. It was only natural to expect work of exceeding refinement from them, and one was not disappointed in this.^{[6][16]}

Charles Wagner was their first booking agent, then they signed on with Frederick Christian Schang. Thinking the name "Trapp Family Choir" too churchy, Schang Americanized their repertoire and, following his suggestion, the group changed its name to the "Trapp Family Singers".^[12] The family, which by then included ten children, was soon touring the world giving concert performances.^[6] Alix Williamson served as the group's publicist for over two decades. After the war, they founded the Trapp Family Austrian Relief fund, which sent food and clothing to people impoverished in Austria.

In the 1940s the family moved to Stowe, Vermont, where they ran a music camp when they were not touring. In 1944, Maria and her stepdaughters Johanna, Martina, Maria, Hedwig, and Agathe applied for U.S. citizenship. Georg never applied to become a citizen. Rupert and Werner became citizens by serving during World War II. Rosmarie and Eleonore became citizens by virtue of their mother's citizenship. Johannes was born in the United States.^[1]

Georg von Trapp died in 1947 in Vermont from lung cancer.