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Lotte Klemperer

Lotte Klemperer's life was one of quiet dignity and self-effacement. Thrust into the limelight as the daughter of her famous father, the conductor Otto Klemperer, she sought no part of it for her own advantage, contenting herself with facilitating his often thorny path through the world. For Jon Tolansky, who played under Klemperer in the orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden,

In her almost life-long devotion to her father, both when he was alive and since his death 30 years ago, she was completely concerned with the preservation and protection of the truth about him. In her he had a very remarkable guardian of his spirit.

The conductor and musicologist Antony Beaumont put it more strongly: "My personal conviction is that the miracle of Otto Klemperer's late flowering as an international conductor was largely her achievement".

At the time of Lotte's birth, Klemperer was chief conductor in Cologne, soon to move, via Wiesbaden, to take over the Kroll Oper in Berlin, where his anti-Romantic readings of the standard repertoire and eagerness to perform new music soon marked him out as one of the most important figures in German musical life. Her mother, Johanna, *née* Geissler, wound down a career as an operatic soprano to look after her children.

Both Lotte and her elder brother Werner (later to achieve fame in his own right as the Nazi Colonel Klink in the TV comedy series *Hogan's Heroes*) were shielded from their father's celebrity, as from outside politics: when, after the Nazi take-over in 1933, Klemperer explained to the nine-year-old Lotte that he had to flee the country because he was Jewish, she didn't know what he meant.

Exile took the Klemperers first to Switzerland and then, in 1934, to the USA, where he was to become principal conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Epic arguments between her parents, often provoked by her father's manic-depressive mood-swings, meant that Lotte was forced to grow up fast. One episode in 1941, when her father's unfettered behaviour made the national headlines, thrust her into the public eye as her mother's interpreter for a heaving pack of journalists. The pattern of her life was already set.

Otto Klemperer's illness and the erratic conduct it triggered effectively derailed his career. Work came his way irregularly. Lotte, trying to establish a life of her own in New York, was now being used by both her parents: Otto, hoping to obtain engagements there, relied on her to find accommodation and repeatedly complained that it wasn't suitable; Johanna's letters to her daughter charted the difficulties of her marriage – although, with remarkable foresight, she added: "You will come to love him and will be proud and happy to have this man as a father".

When Klemperer returned to post-War Europe, conducting concerts and opera in Vienna, Stockholm, Strasbourg and elsewhere, Lotte went with him, providing – as far as she could – a diplomatic filter between her fractious father and the outside world. Occasionally, she would try to carve out her own life, living in Paris in the late 1940s, while he took up a position in

Budapest; her visits there stimulated her naturally left-wing sympathies, shared with her father. Her anti-capitalist sympathies endured: four decades later she was delighted when the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev seemed to offer the promise of a less authoritarian socialism.

Klemperer's career was again on the ascendant when, in November 1956, his wife died. Lotte, who had already been acting as secretary, negotiator and administrator, now found even less time for herself – though she insisted it was no sacrifice: she loved working with her father, she said, and would have found any other job much more boring. Recordings and concerts, especially with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, underlined her father's stature as one of the greatest living musicians, but it was Lotte who fielded the phone calls, the journalists, the promoters, the hangers-on. It was she who was backstage after performances and in the studio for recording sessions, she who was a nurse when he needed medication or assistance – and he was frequently ill.

Their interaction was often touching – Lotte was perhaps the only person in the musical world not in awe of her father, and she could be just as quick-witted as he. Gareth Morris, the principal flute and chairman of the Philharmonia during many of the Klemperer years, remembered one nimble rejoinder:

We were making a recording of the Schumann Concerto with [the Hungarian pianist] Annie Fischer [an old friend of Klemperer's]. I went round to listen to it in the listening room at Abbey Road. Klemperer said to Annie Fischer, who was sitting there: "The trouble is, you are too chaste". Lotte ran her fingers down the back of his head and said: "And that's more than we can say for you, father".

When Klemperer died, on 6 July 1973, Lotte became the guardian of his legacy, keeping a discreet but firm eye on anything to do with him. Where she felt the interest was sincerely motivated, she could be extraordinarily helpful. When I contacted her to suggest an anthology of her father's writings, she did everything she could to make *Klemperer on Music* a reality – but insisted on a subtitle to explain that his essays and *obiter scripta* weren't very important: we settled on *Shavings from a Musician's Workbench*. Antony Beaumont, too, discovered this side of her character:

A footnote sparked off our friendship. In my edition of Busoni letters I had written something about her father that wasn't quite right. She wrote to correct me. The tone of her letter betrayed not a hint of irritation; on the contrary, it was polite, helpful, witty. In addition to those qualities I soon learnt to marvel at her generosity, humility and sense of purpose. ... Many children of the famous are brought up, even if they lack all talent, to bask in the family glory. Lotte was quite the opposite: she knew it was her duty to guard the monument, but saw herself as no more than a supporting plinth.

But she didn't feel at all put upon by her duties as custodian and continued to enjoy life enormously. She had, especially, a ready sense of humour and could on occasion laugh until she wept.

Although her father's recordings brought her a comfortable income, she continued to live frugally in a small Zurich flat. She often travelled to hear performances by musician friends. And she also turned her attention to her mother's career, writing *Die Personalakten der*

Johanna Geissler (“The Personal Documents of Johanna Geissler”) in the early 1980s, meticulously retracing her mother’s footsteps in the first decades of the century, and assembling an account of her life in facsimile documentation (an English edition is in preparation). Her researches, she said, opened “a whole new world to me. They took me to several German towns, to registries and public record offices, town archives, municipal and opera libraries”.

Jon Tolansky saw parallels between father and daughter:

Like him, she was disarmingly direct, unfalteringly honest and penetratingly alert. The slightest whiff of pretence or evasion in the air immediately drew bone-dry wit – or bitingly sardonic disdain. She also shared the great conductor’s simple humility. Like him, her close friends were the only persons she addressed by their first names, but to others she was never aloof or grand. She just had no time for the false informality of our present age and firmly kept her methods of professional and personal communications apart. This and her relentless pursuit of the truth gave her a formidable air, but I found her a warm and generous person, capable of true compassion without a trace of sentimentality.

Lotte Klemperer, born Cologne, 1 November 1923; died Zurich, 1 July 2003.