

People Magazine

JUST DO [RE-MI] IT

Elisabeth von Trapp Keeps Her Family Tuned To The Sound Of Music

October 20, 1997, Vol. 48, No. 16

By Kyle Smith

Elisabeth Von Trapp wants to get one thing straight about her famous step-grandmother: Maria von Trapp had no time for any nonsense about raindrops on roses or whiskers on kittens. "She was not Julie Andrews," Elisabeth, 43, says of the woman who inspired Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*. "Julie Andrews was pure and giving and understanding and innocent. My grandmother had a more dynamic personality. She had her expectations, but in the long run they were for excellence."

Yet when Elisabeth sings, you can almost picture Julie Andrews twirling around on that mountaintop in the 1965 film--even when her trills are alive in New York City's Grand Central Terminal, where Elisabeth recently gave a concert of her contemporary folk music. "I have to always dare to be different, rather than the expected *Sound of Music* image," she says. So for every "Edelweiss" she croons (these days, in clubs and small concert halls), she belts out a Kinks number. Though her music may be wide-ranging, Elisabeth still lives in Waitsfield, Vt., not far from the site of the farmhouse Maria and Captain Georg von Trapp bought in Stowe after fleeing the Nazis in 1938. (Georg died in 1947; Maria, originally governess to his seven children and later his wife, in 1987.) Elisabeth learned to sing from her father, Georg's son Werner von Trapp, 81 (his name was changed to Kurt in the film).

After fighting the Nazis in Europe, Werner returned to the States with his siblings and parents as the Trapp Family Singers. The family stopped giving concerts in 1955, but Werner would still take the guitar off the wall every night for Elisabeth and her five siblings. "We had a list of songs we'd sing before we went to bed, every night," remembers Elisabeth, who has sung professionally since age 18 but used to earn her living teaching music and designing dresses, including the Austrian dirndls worn by the staff of the Trapp Family Lodge that today stands where the original farmhouse, later converted to a chalet, burned down in 1980.

Like her early musical education, her management is all in the family, thanks to her husband and business adviser, Edward Hall, 46, a lawyer she met in 1974 when both were studying at Johnson State College in Vermont. "I was totally taken," he remembers of the time on campus when he first saw her saunter by wearing a long braid. "I just thought, 'Wow.'" The two didn't start dating until a decade later when Hall met a von Trapp cousin who told him Elisabeth was still unattached. That was all he needed to hear. "I just drove up to the lodge," he says. They married in 1985, in a chapel her father had built behind the lodge.

Since then her career has taken the couple from Israel to Boston's Fenway Park (where she has sung the national anthem) and produced two self-released albums. She hopes to record for a major label, but for now she enjoys travel- ing and sometimes seeing the influence her family has had on

the world. Elisabeth was touring the Soviet Union in 1985 when a group of children in Smolensk, who had no idea she was also on the program, sang "Do Re Mi." "I just started crying to myself," she says, "because I thought, how unique, I fly to the furthest ends of the earth and they're singing a song that's specifically about my family."

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