

After the music: Maria von Trapp, lay missionary, dies



Maria von Trapp, the last surviving member of the singing family immortalised in the *Sound of Music*, died at the age of 99 last weekend. She was a devout Catholic and former missionary.

The Von Trapp family escaped from Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938, to New York, where they were a hit with concert audiences.

Born in Salzburg in 1914, Maria was the third of seven children by the Austrian naval captain Georg von Trapp, who played the violin, accordion and mandolin, and his first wife, Agathe Whitehead von Trapp, who played the violin and piano. After Agathe died, Georg married his children's governess, who was also called Maria, and the two had three children together.

The family's story was told in the famous 1959 Broadway musical, made into a film which won an Oscar for best picture in 1965.

The character based on Maria is famous for singing in a notably American accent lines such as "So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, goodbye, I flit, I float, I fleetly flee, I fly."

Following her musical career, Maria, who did not have children, served as a lay missionary in Papua New Guinea.

The original *Sound of Music* hit was based on a 1949 book by Mr von Trapp's second wife, also called Maria, which tells how an Austrian woman who married a widower with seven children taught the family music.

The family settled in 1950 into a 27-room lodge in Vermont, where Maria died peacefully.

"She was a lovely woman who was one of the few truly good people," said Maria's half-brother Johannes.