

Musical Treasure Chest #58

I do not usually share deeply personal matters, but this week, on June 10th, my mother Patricia Barker passed away. While her death was not entirely unexpected, it came more quickly than I thought it would, and the sense of suspended time and unreality still drapes over me. She is the first parent I have lost, and though I am lucky to have had my parents in my life so long, one is never ready to lose them. Because she helped shape me as a musician and was a supporter of my musical endeavors throughout the years, I want to tell you about her life and the music that I associate with her.

My mother grew up in a tiny rural town in central Alabama named Castleberry. Her father ran a general store and a Sinclair gas station; her mother taught in the one-room school house and eventually put herself through college and went on to become a dean at a college in Brewton, Alabama. The youngest of three girls, my mother had a speech impediment and had to attend what was then called a "Deaf and Dumb" School in Tuskegee. She learned sign language there and, after a small surgical procedure, was retrained how to speak.

My grandmother believed that learning how to play the piano was important and all three girls studied piano quite seriously, my mother enough so that she pursued music as her major initially at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. During her freshman year, she contracted tuberculosis, and spent nearly a year isolated in a TB ward with a periodically collapsed lung and a regimen of strong antibiotics. When she finally was "cured" she had lost a year of studies and returned to college as a psychology major, a course she followed through undergraduate and graduate school.

My father was also a graduate of University of Alabama, a physics major. My parents met in college, married and after my dad finished his PhD, he was hired by GE R & D in Schenectady. My parents moved up here in 1960, the same year I was born. My dad bought an upright piano for my mom, and some of my earliest memories are of my mother playing and of me dancing around the living room. (We

have movies that confirm this!!). My mother had a certain repertory that she played, and it is those pieces that I share with you today. I know every note of each piece, and now when I look back, I realize it was incredible that this woman from a small Alabama town, from a family with very few financial resources, and little access to musical tutelage achieved this level of musical proficiency.

Her repertory included Schubert (Moments Musicaux and Marche Militaire), Chopin Nocturnes and Etudes, the Rachmaninov C# minor prelude, Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody No 2, and the **Richard Addinsell *Warsaw Concerto***. I am struck again as I write this list by her level of accomplishment, this is serious repertory! The piece I want to focus on is the Addinsell, which was written in 1941 and is part of that canon of film music by composers such as Bernard Hermann, Franz Waxman, and Erich Korngold that crosses the line between a movie score and a concert piece. Written as part of the musical score for the British film *Dangerous Moonlight*, the *Warsaw Concerto* is never played in its entirety in the film, but serves as the development of the love story. The music was so popular after the movie's release, the concerto was recorded as a complete single-movement work by the pianist who had played for the film, Louis Kentner.

My mother enjoyed this piece and often played it when I was young. I have given you the original single movement version with Kentner. He truly is a fine player and this is probably the version she first heard. And to my mother, thank you for all the times you played for me to dance around the living room and nurturing the seed that became my life's passion.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9froGM4sT8>