

# Crossing a Divide? Maud Fitz-Stubbs as Amateur then Professional Musician in Late Nineteenth-Century Sydney

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This article draws on the career of Sydney pianist and composer of popular piano pieces and songs, Maud Fitz-Stubbs, to explore issues of amateurism and professionalism in music in the late nineteenth century. Fitz-Stubbs is unusual in that she changed her status to professional in mid-career, after around twenty-five years as an amateur. In her own case the change coincided with the early 1890s economic depression. As she explains:

... when all Australia was in the depth of financial embarrassment, that grim spectre came my way, and made me tremble as I looked at my five dear children, whose care and education are at once my greatest delight and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in January 1892, Fitz-Stubbs gave and took part in concerts as a professional, composed and published—initially self-published—piano pieces and songs, and rather later, took pupils. Despite the economic downturn, which impeded her performing career in the short term, the change in status had clear rewards. An article about her dating from 1895 begins:

Who will say that women are not coming to the front, when one in our midst, solely by her brilliant talents and business faculty, has successfully turned the tide of ill fortune, that threatened so many colonists two years ago, and placed herself on the high road to fame and fortune.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I shall explore perceived differences and similarities in activities, repertoire and standards of amateur and professional musicians at the time, using Fitz-Stubbs, where appropriate, as a reference point. I will not, as does Marcia Citron, for example, in *Gender and the Musical Canon*, be looking at broader conceptions of professionalism.<sup>3</sup> I define professional

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<sup>1</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs: A Celebrated Australian Musician,' *Cosmos Magazine* 28 Feb. 1895: 345.

<sup>2</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 344.

<sup>3</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge, UK: CUP, 1993), especially Chapter 3, 'Professionalism.'

and amateur here prosaically, as binary opposites: those who receive a fee for their musical services, and those who do not. In what follows I look, in turn, at professional versus amateur composers, performers, and then, very briefly, at the teaching profession. For Fitz-Stubbs, I seek to determine whether the change from amateur to professional was a quantum leap—the 'divide' of this article's title—or of no great magnitude.

But first, a condensed version of her early life.<sup>4</sup> According to her birth notice she was born Ada Maud Fitz Stubbs in Melbourne in 1861 to Robert and Rosina Fitz Stubbs. Her grandfather Thomas Stubbs was a prominent auctioneer, and an amateur flautist and published composer.<sup>5</sup> The family moved to Sydney when she was four where her father was also in business as an auctioneer. Reports of her life outline her early career as one of prominent teachers and precocity. She 'learned her notes' from Charles Edward Horsley from the age of four onwards and made her public debut at one of Horsley's concerts as a juvenile amateur pianist on 21 December 1867, aged six.<sup>6</sup> She also learned from Henry Marsh for two years; Marsh apparently took such pleasure in his 'clever pupil's genius' that he 'absolutely refused payment.' She received lessons from visitors Madeline Schiller and English pianist Arabella Goddard (in Australia 1873–4) and she gained 'valuable training' under Charles Packer. She also learned from Paolo Giorza for six years.<sup>7</sup> As a child, then, she moved in prominent colonial musical circles; there was, however, significantly, no overseas study for Maud.

In 1880, Fitz-Stubbs married Henry Robert Woods at St George outside Sydney. The Woods were based in the far-flung, seaside suburb of Manly until the year after Maud turned professional, when they moved to the very much more convenient Paddington. Harry Woods was himself a musical amateur, and took part in at least two of his wife's concerts during 1893 and 1894. He is hard to pin down occupationally and thus socially; his listing in Sydney directories gives no profession until 1887–1890 when he is given as Secretary, presumably company secretary, of the City Carrying Co., Ltd, in business as 'contracting, shipping & general carriers and forwarding agents.' In 1891, and beyond, Woods is no longer secretary—someone else is—and after 1897 he disappears completely from view with Maud appearing in directories on her own as Mrs H.R. Woods. Whether his loss of the position of Secretary was directly attributable to the 1890s Depression is unknown.

Maud Fitz-Stubbs was thirty-one when she turned professional, and thirty-four in 1895 when the photo reproduced as Figure 1 was taken, and described by an interviewer as having 'all the energy and vigour of a girl in her teens.'<sup>8</sup>

### Composition

The composition and publication of music was not at all the preserve of professional musicians. Governor Sir W.C.F. Robinson and physician Dr Charles MacCarthy, both of whom wrote

<sup>4</sup> The richest source of this information is A.B. 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 344–46, but it must be used with caution as the dates, given and implied, are generally inaccurate: Fitz-Stubbs' age is understated throughout by around two years. Other sources consulted include birth extracts and, for the locations and professions of family members, *Sands' Sydney and Suburban Directories* for the 1880s and 1890s.

<sup>5</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 344. See also Prue Neidorf, 'A Guide to Dating Music Published in Sydney and Melbourne 1800–1899,' MA diss., University of Wollongong, 1999: 237–38; 325.

<sup>6</sup> John Henniker Heaton, *The Bedside Book of Colonial Doings: A Marvellous Australian Miscellany of Fascinating Events, Facts and Figures* (1879; Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984) 158.

<sup>7</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 344.

<sup>8</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 344.

Figure 1. Maud Fitz-Stubbs (reproduced from *Cosmos Magazine* 28 Feb. 1895: 345)



operettas as well as smaller works and had them performed, are two prominent examples of those for whom music was a passion rather than a profession. And composition, particularly of songs, was a pleasant recreational pastime for many; author Ethel Turner (best known for the children's novel *Seven Little Australians*), records in her diary in October 1898 a pleasant evening spent song-writing in gentle competition with her husband. In her words, 'At night we challenged each other to write a Child Song ... H. wrote 'As Baby Sees,' I, 'A Trembling Star.' I liked his best.'<sup>9</sup>

Those more literary than musical would commonly seek the help of a trained musician to polish their efforts<sup>10</sup> and publication—self-publication—was often then the result, presumably partly for the pleasure of seeing one's name in print: vanity if you will.

Professionals, where the sale of their copyright was not achieved and profit not a driving motive, would often, like amateurs, self-publish, and here a number of reasons could be mooted. For a teacher not yet well-known, a published *oeuvre* bestows professional validation, it could lift a public profile or even justify an increase in fees. It also afforded the opportunity, almost universally taken, to seek favour through the dedication. The socially prominent (especially the vice-regal), the performer, and the valued (or valuable) student were typical dedicatees of published music at this time. Through the negotiation of these dedications, advantageous networks were presumably forged. The majority of published compositions by amateurs and professionals were within the technical reach of the home pianist and/or singer, with the

<sup>9</sup> 'H.' was Herbert Curlewis. Diary entry is for 15 Oct. 1898. Philippa Poole (ed.), *The Diaries of Ethel Turner: 1872-1958* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1979) 177.

<sup>10</sup> G. de Cairos Rego for example includes the words: 'Compositions revised' in his press advertisements of 1893. See, for example, *Sydney Mail* 9 Dec. 1893: 1199 [front cover].

most common genres 'refined' songs, suitable for home entertainment, and ballroom piano music—waltzes, polkas—for dancing to and playing at home.

Certain professionals went about composing principally with a view to a profitable return. Aug. W. Juncker, for instance, with carefully thought-out budget for publication and promotion, composed songs which he worked hard at ensuring would sell in copious numbers and return a profit.<sup>11</sup> Maud Fitz-Stubbs, too, entered composition after turning professional with a view, purely, to the bottom line. As she tells it:

For many years I had improvised on the piano in the evenings, my prettiest pieces being sometimes, as I assured my husband, entirely my own. Why, then, should I not turn my talent to account in this time of financial difficulty?<sup>12</sup>

Her first compositional effort after turning professional was the *Heather Waltz* which she 'hawked ... around all the big Sydney music shops, and not one of them would touch it.'<sup>13</sup> Not only would they not give her the £10 outright she sought, they also counselled her not to self-publish because she would inevitably lose by it. Finally she found a printer who would give her three months to pay the £15 expenses. In fairy-tale style it took only five days before the debt could be discharged, and new editions followed quickly, soon arriving at sales of ten thousand. Fitz-Stubbs sold the British rights to Chappell and Co., and claimed widely in the press to have made £500 clear,<sup>14</sup> equivalent to well over three year's income for a skilled (male) tradesperson, or enough to buy a rather nice house. Her frank confession of profit led a small stampede of other composers to harass W.C. Penfold, her friendly printer, seeking similar terms.<sup>15</sup>

In a country where 'serious' genres were composed but only very seldom published locally (with the exception of ceremonial works), there was no real stigma attached to publishing the ubiquitous piano dances and popular songs, as long as they were competently written. Standards, as far as the press were concerned, seem to have been virtually absolute, without the two-tiered system for amateur and professional operating for performers, as we will hear. Musically-knowledgeable critics were weary, resigned, sometimes even apologetic about the sheet music, beloved of the public, that they received in profusion for review, but were only dismissive if pieces contained technical errors or were utterly undistinguished. For example in one review, a polka-mazurka 'Under the Rose' by one West Maitland composer, E.M.B. King, is described as exhibiting a 'manufactured-by-the-mile-and cut-off (retail)-by-the-yard' style, devoid of a 'single phrase that is original in any sense.'<sup>16</sup> Fitz-Stubbs' *Heather Waltz*, chided only for two tiny notational imperfections, was pronounced 'throughout above the average of this large class of musical composition.'<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, in this musical climate, years of study at Leipzig, Berlin or one of the London colleges were not necessary to acquire the skills to function as a professional, published

<sup>11</sup> See Jennifer Hill, 'From Drawing Room to Diva: The Australian Popular Song "I Was Dreaming" by Augustus W. Juncker,' *Australasian Music Research* 4 (1999): 59–76.

<sup>12</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 345.

<sup>13</sup> 'At Poverty Point,' *Bulletin* 9 Mar. 1895: 8.

<sup>14</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 346; 'At Poverty Point' 8.

<sup>15</sup> A.B., 'Some Juvenile Musicians,' *Cosmos Magazine* 29 June 1895: 524–25.

<sup>16</sup> *Sydney Mail* 19 Jan. 1889: 124.

<sup>17</sup> *Sydney Mail* 12 Aug. 1893: 327.

composer. Students without such advantages could study theoretical subjects at one of the many private Conservatoria or with one of the musicians in private practice offering tuition in music theory. Fitz-Stubbs most probably received her tuition in some form from one or more of the composers amongst her many teachers: Giorza, Marsh, Charles Packer, or perhaps Horsley.

### Performers

Several pertinent issues relating to musical amateur performers recur in the press. One relates to reception; critics were consciously 'softer' in the notices they gave amateurs than those they gave professionals. A review of a Philharmonic Society Concert in 1893 makes an extended aside on the subject, noting that all the chorus and most of the orchestra are amateur:

The amateur who works for love is on an entirely different plane from that of the professional artist; [from] the latter we look for and have a right to expect the best, and to exercise judgement in selecting those most fitted for the work required from them; whilst from the former, without whom we should frequently be much inconvenienced, a helping hand should ever be ready; but, whilst we encourage, criticism is by custom reserved. We have no sympathy with the singer who accepts the kindly words said as guarantee of efficiency, and from such seeks to take professional rank without the qualifications; whilst on the other hand, the public are largely indebted to ladies and gentlemen of musical ability which entitles them to rank with leading professional executants.<sup>18</sup>

Fitz-Stubbs, whose executive powers seem to have been of the first rank,<sup>19</sup> was not troubled by these 'shifting goalposts' during her own change to professional status.

Another two linked ideas about amateur performers come courtesy of Melbourne musician Alfred Plumpton in a somewhat intemperate essay of 1882 entitled 'Music as an Artistic Study.' He links the shortcomings he perceives in performances by 'fashionable amateurs' with inadequate training—lacking in the 'sustained study of great works.' He writes:

After the usual routine of school-room pieces, a few lessons from what is called 'a finishing master' are generally considered all that is necessary. He, finding it hopeless to effect any reformation within the stipulated number of lessons, is obliged to content himself with imparting a superficial gloss ... That the performance of persons whose studies have been conducted in such a manner should be unsatisfactory to an educated listener is only to be expected.<sup>20</sup>

Now 'Finishing Lessons' were indeed both available in late Colonial Australia and were advertised as such. Sydney organist Auguste Wiegand, for instance, advertises that he gives 'FINISHING LESSONS on the PIANOforte, Harmonium, and organ etc.'<sup>21</sup> What the phrase denotes beyond acting as a magnet to the accomplished and a deterrent to beginners, however, is open to speculation.

<sup>18</sup> *Sydney Mail* 9 Dec. 1893: 1209.

<sup>19</sup> Critic D.J. Quinn, for instance, places her in his own list of thirteen 'first class' Sydney musicians, one of only four 'natives of the colonies.' D.J. Quinn, 'Musicians and Musical Taste in Australasia: Sydney,' *Review of Reviews* (Melbourne, Vic.) 20 Apr. 1895: 396.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Plumpton, 'Music as an Artistic Study,' *Victorian Review* 6 (May 1882): 20–21.

<sup>21</sup> [Auguste Wiegand], *The Largest Organ in the World and the Musical Artists of Sydney* (Sydney: William Maddock, 1892).

Plumpton links amateur pianists trained in such a way, to wholesale bad taste in the selection of repertoire; they perform 'meretricious compositions' or 'clap-trap,' rich in imitation, both extra musical—cannon balls, bells, birds, showers of precious stones—and of the 'peculiarities of other instruments' such as the banjo; pieces which would be shunned by the 'conscientious musical student.' He identifies the desire for individual display as one of the principal failings of the amateur, and makes the point that the taste of players involved in concerted music becomes elevated as they find less opportunity there for individual display. Here it seems Plumpton is using amateur not as defined earlier, but as a term with implications of lower quality. It is interesting, then, that seven years later he was Founding President of the Society of Musicians in Australasia, a body whose membership denoted a 'guarantee of musical qualification' rather than of music undertaken as a profession, and amateurs were included.<sup>22</sup>

In some senses Maud Fitz-Stubbs may have kinship with Plumpton's despised, showy amateur, as would many pianists at the time. Maud had few opportunities for chamber-music performance, unlike Henri Kowalski, Alice Charbonnet-Kellerman and Lottie Hyam, founding members of Sydney chamber-music societies which played works by canonical composers to the great satisfaction of the critics. Fitz-Stubbs played some Mendelssohn, Weber, Liszt and Chopin, and pieces by nineteenth-century composers more or less forgotten today such as the Austrian-Jewish Döhler and the Italian Golinelli (who was apparently something of a classicist). She often played an 'exceedingly difficult' transcription of 'Casta Diva' for the left hand only, by Fumagelli, something of a crowd-pleaser as were her Selections from *Faust*. And she also played local works; of Italian-Australian Guglielmo Lardelli, her composer-brother Percy, and arrangements by Giorza. Later her own *Heather Waltz* would often make its way, in some form, into her concerts, a gesture of self-promotion—though not perhaps of superior taste—that was not unusual at the time. On the other hand, her concert programmes seem never to have been criticized on the grounds of 'taste,' and were broadly typical of those of local, working pianists.

A further circumstance of living as an amateur performer at the time was that of visibility. There was the practice which persisted in part to the end of the century and even beyond, of not naming the amateur, particularly if female, principally, I suppose, for reasons of propriety, left over from when nice women did not go on the stage. Young girls were generally exempt, particularly when they were star pupils, but after marriage even gifted amateur women fade from view, or at least from the historian's gaze, except where there are private papers. Contributing to this loss of public profile is the fact that charity concerts, an appropriate public forum for such women, were not often reviewed in the press except from a social, or fundraising point of view; the many separate acts are seldom named nor is repertoire detailed. Fitz-Stubbs seems to have suffered this decline from highly visible child performer and prize-pupil, to relative obscurity. Frequent, and well-reviewed performances at the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879–1880<sup>23</sup> gave way, for the first twelve years of her marriage, to 'performances in aid of every deserving object' at charity concerts.<sup>24</sup> Given her later acuity and forthrightness in dealing with the press, it is hard to imagine Fitz-Stubbs enjoyed the low musical profile of these years.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Society of Musicians in Australasia,' *Illustrated Australian News and Musical Times* 1 Aug. 1889: 10.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *Sydney Mail* 17 Jan. 1880: 129.

<sup>24</sup> A.B., 'Miss Maud Fitz-Stubbs' 345.

For Fitz-Stubbs the change to professional opened up her own performing horizons. There were still charity concerts, and participation in Philharmonic events which she could have undertaken as an amateur, but she also became part of Gordon Gooch's Promenade Concert company, formed to give concerts in the Exhibition Building and noted as 'one of the best entertainments for a shilling which have been offered to the public.'<sup>25</sup> She was also tendered a benefit concert on 25 February 1893, a concert at which fellow artists (amateur and professional) performed to raise funds for her, presumably in her case because of need, rather than as a tribute.<sup>26</sup> She was amongst four professionals to supplement a Sydney Amateur Banjo and Guitar Society concert.<sup>27</sup> And she was called in for massed piano numbers such as a Christmas night concert in the Town Hall with a four-piano arrangement of Chopin's A flat Polonaise.<sup>28</sup> She did accompanying work as well as solos in mixed programmes. And there was also a concert before a 'select gathering of musical and press critics' purely to promote the again self-published *Fitz-Stubbs Musical Album* of Christmas 1894 which comprised four pieces by Maud and two by her brother Percy.<sup>29</sup>

The social repercussions of a change to professional status are somewhat elusive. While the ways in which women of different classes experienced life in Britain as professional and amateur musicians have been explored and documented,<sup>30</sup> this has not been done for their counterparts in Australia. Undoubtedly, class was differently constructed in this country,<sup>31</sup> and was generally a little less stratified. For Fitz-Stubbs I can only speculate. She was very definitely middle class, possibly downwardly mobile over time as the status of her auctioneer grandfather seems to have been quite high, and her Carrier Company Secretary husband presumably less well-placed, setting aside the 'embarrassment' of the Depression. She would not have belonged to Society in the sense of those invited to Vice-Regal and other fashionable functions. But I do not know if she was able to make the transition from amateur to professional without offending the middle-class decorum of at least some of her social sphere. I have trouble reconciling Fitz-Stubbs' own frank discussion in the press of exact amounts of retail takings, and clear profit in the context of her *Heather Waltz*, with someone overly concerned with the social niceties. It is probably not drawing too long a bow to suggest that as the daughter of an auctioneer, and wife of a husband associated with trade, her background was not one where money was a taboo subject for discussion.

It is interesting that unlike many professional musicians, she does not seem to have done 'at homes,' to have been one of several paid performers integrated with prosperous amateurs at a musical occasion held by a prominent society wife or family. It is tempting to hypothesize that she may not have wished to move in society as a 'paid entertainer' when she was accustomed to a place in society in her own right, though her own social milieu would not have been of the highest rank.

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<sup>25</sup> *Sydney Mail* 1 Apr. 1893: 649.

<sup>26</sup> For a review, see *Sydney Mail* 4 Mar. 1893: 441.

<sup>27</sup> Reported in *Sydney Mail* 22 Oct. 1892: 915.

<sup>28</sup> *Sydney Mail* 30 Dec. 1893: 1373.

<sup>29</sup> 'Musical Notes,' *Cosmos Magazine* 29 Dec. 1894: 248. A copy of the album is held at the National Library of Australia.

<sup>30</sup> See Sophie Fuller, 'Women Composers During the British Musical Renaissance, 1880-1918,' PhD diss., University of London, 1998, especially Chapter 2, 'Women as Musicians,' 43-81.

<sup>31</sup> See for example John Hirst, 'Egalitarianism,' *Australian Cultural History* 5 (1986): 12-31.

Music teaching, by the 1880s and 1890s, was an occupation open to women in large numbers, as the Sydney directories attest. The establishment costs for a woman wishing to teach at home were of course very low. Moreover it seems that music teaching was in some sense a defining activity: the first press reference to Fitz-Stubbs' entry to the music profession notes that she 'has joined the teachers of pianoforte in Sydney.'<sup>32</sup> And after her 'coming out' concert a week later, at which her executive skills were those on display and indeed much lauded, it was remarked that there is 'much to justify the belief that, in joining her lot with the arduous life of a teacher of music, this lady has well chosen.'<sup>33</sup>

The press presumptions were in fact quite wrong; Fitz-Stubbs did not open her doors to private pupils in 1892; this was delayed for five years by which time she had moved from Paddington to Woollahra and her husband was no longer in evidence. To look for financial salvation away from teaching was perhaps wise, as the profession was crowded both at top and bottom. Henri Kowalski, designated the 'prince of the pianoforte in Australia,'<sup>34</sup> was, for instance, highly amenable in offering 'Piano Lessons Every Day 10 [a.m.]-6 p.m.'<sup>35</sup> With his stellar reputation, he seems to have attracted the majority of the highly talented students. Cincinatti-born, Paris-trained Alice Charbonnet-Kellerman had a private Conservatoire de Musique with ten staff and, in 1892, 250 students, with a range of instruments and other subjects offered.<sup>36</sup>

In conclusion, there is no clear-cut answer to whether Maud Fitz-Stubbs crossed a divide when she changed status from amateur to professional. To summarize: as far as composition was concerned there was nothing to distinguish her technically-competent piano pieces and songs from those published by amateurs; but Fitz-Stubbs was extraordinarily resourceful at self promotion—she secured apposite dedicatees in very high places,<sup>37</sup> high profile performances and press coverage, and milked influential contacts here and overseas to a degree inappropriate for an amateur. As a performer she was no longer limited to the rounds of worthwhile charity concerts, but to a variety of other types of paying performances, in some of which she was the main attraction; and she passed muster as a performer of sufficient accomplishment to deserve her new-found professional status. She seems not to have modified her repertoire; while Sydney critics, like Plumpton in Melbourne, may have craved concerts of exclusively 'serious' music, their reviews show they were cognizant of the fact that audiences expected, and heard, music with a strong element of display from those able to execute it. And Fitz-Stubbs, interestingly, defied expectation for at least five years, and did not teach. Of course, in totality her life changed enormously, from one where music was a pleasure, a recreation sometimes put to the service of the community, to one where it became a business, into which she put enormous reserves of energy and ingenuity, as well as talent and ability, to become, in remarkably little time, a well-known and financially-successful, professional Sydney musician.

<sup>32</sup> *Sydney Mail* 23 Jan. 1892: 183.

<sup>33</sup> Recital given 28 Jan. 1892. *Sydney Mail* 6 Feb. 1892: 295

<sup>34</sup> Quinn, 'Musicians and Musical Taste' 391.

<sup>35</sup> [Wiegand, ]*The Largest Organ* n.p.

<sup>36</sup> [Wiegand, ]*The Largest Organ* v.

<sup>37</sup> *The Heather Waltz*, for instance, was dedicated to Lady Duff, wife of the serving Governor of New South Wales.