

Joyce Kennedy, doctor and writer on classical music who collaborated with her husband, a veteran Telegraph critic – obituary

Joyce Kennedy was joint editor with Michael of The Oxford Dictionary of Music, and part of the musical ecosystem of the North West

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Joyce Kennedy with her husband Michael

Joyce Kennedy, who has died aged 88, was a music-loving anaesthetist who billed herself as assistant, researcher and typist for Michael Kennedy, The Daily Telegraph's long-serving music critic; in truth she was far more than that, also producing opera books in her own right.

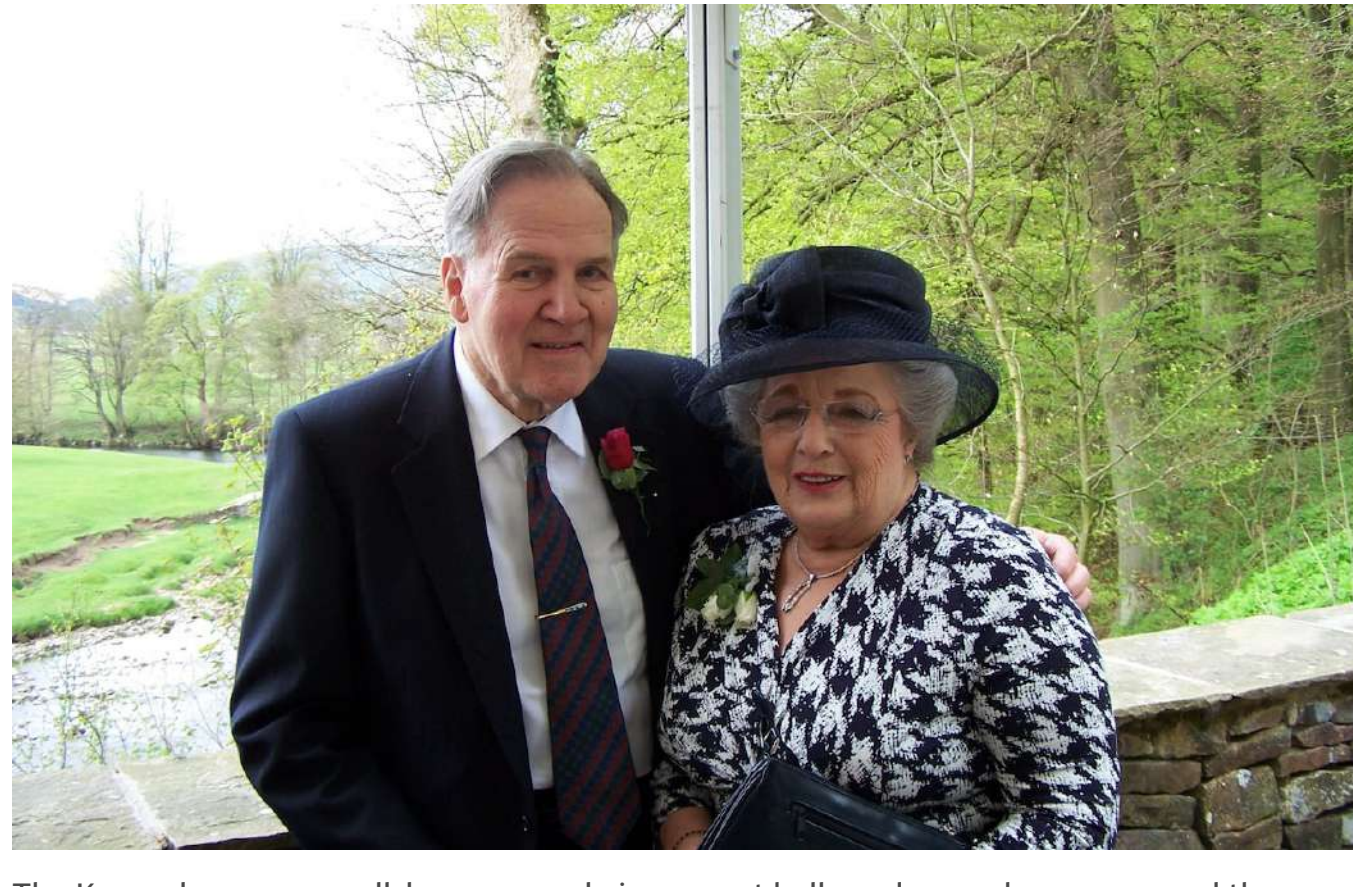
The couple had met in 1976 through their mutual love of music and cricket. Kennedy had been married since 1947 to Eslyn Durdle, who was soon diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "I told Eslyn. She accepted [Joyce], and simply asked that I would go on looking after her," Kennedy said. He did so for 23 years, marrying Joyce only after Eslyn's death in 1999.

By then Joyce and Michael were a well-known couple in concert halls and opera houses around the world, their favourite venues being Glyndebourne and Salzburg. He had already written a history of the Hallé Orchestra and biographies of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Edward Elgar and John Barbirolli.



Now Joyce Kennedy worked with Michael on the lives of Richard Strauss, Benjamin Britten and William Walton, as well as a charming history of the Buxton Festival published in 2004.

Their magnum opus, on which Joyce was joint editor, was The Oxford Dictionary of Music (1980), an authoritative reference work. Despite the serious title it includes delightful snippets of humour such as the description of avant-garde scores as "often pictorially delightful if musically enigmatic".



The Kennedys were a well-known couple in concert halls and opera houses around the world

While working on that book, Michael was also the Telegraph's northern editor, which could mean being in the office until 2am seeing the last edition to press. When he relinquished the editorship to become music critic, there was pressure of a different sort.

"Michael had to dash out of the hall to grab a phone and dictate the review, and I would wait for him in the car," Joyce said. "If he wasn't quick off the mark, a sports journalist would get the copytakers first, and we might have to wait an hour."

Yet this proudly provincial couple (in the days when "provincial" was not used as an insult) did more than write about music: they were a part of the entire musical eco-system. They introduced concerts, sponsored singing awards and, in Michael's case, sat on the board of the Royal Northern College of Music.

The composer Jean Sibelius is reputed to have said that no one ever erected a statue in honour of a music critic. Nevertheless, in 2018 Joyce Kennedy took part in the unveiling of a bust of her husband at the college.



Joyce Kennedy with a bust of her husband in the Royal Northern College of Music; after his death in 2014 she kept his legacy going

She was born Joyce Harris in Hull on January 3 1933, the daughter of Cyril Harris and his wife Ettie (née Bentley). From Malet Lambert High School in Hull she trained as an anaesthetist at the University of Manchester medical school. She chose the city because it is home to the Hallé Orchestra. Later she was also a GP in Salford, before retiring in 1990.

Joyce Kennedy's other books include Who Married Figaro? A Book of Opera Characters (2008), with more than 2,500 lively descriptions of the many fictional characters to be found on the opera stage. As Sir George Christie wrote in the introduction, it answered the prayers of "those who dabble in opera quizzes".

The Kennedys lived on the edge of Manchester in a modest bungalow packed with musical memorabilia. After Michael's death in 2014, Joyce kept his memory alive through the Joyce and Michael Kennedy award for the singing of Richard Strauss.

She enjoyed cross-stitch embroidery and was an excellent proof-reader. In recent years she gave Opera at the Menorah lectures for her synagogue, continuing online during the pandemic.

Joyce Kennedy's first marriage in 1959 to Martin Bourne was dissolved and she is survived by their children, Malcolm, Sue and Debra.

Joyce Kennedy, born January 3 1933, died July 1 2021

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