In writing about her husband, conductor Georg Tintner, Tanya Buchdahl Tintner has avoided a myriad of pitfalls. This is a true biography, not merely a memoir. She has researched meticulously and reported her findings dispassionately, and sometimes wryly: after Georg insisted on having his teeth removed without anaesthetic, she writes, ‘The dentist never recovered’. But she has not flinched from describing the difficulties of their marriage (her first, his third), and the torment and regret she felt after his death, without a trace of self-pity.

Georg believed he was born 50 years late, ‘out of time’. He grew up in Vienna, the first Jew in the Vienna Boys’ Choir. That his family had converted to Lutheranism didn’t prevent the Austria’s endemic anti-Semitism from poisoning his childhood and naturally made no difference when Hitler invaded. He escaped to New Zealand, beginning his career conducting indifferent amateur choirs. Despite prodigious musical gifts, his veganism, inattention to appearances and refusal to ‘play the game’ meant he never secured the appointments his talents deserved. He was marginalised all his life, with his great success arriving too late: incurably ill at 77, he was engaged by Naxos to conduct the recordings of the symphonies of his beloved Bruckner which made his international reputation.

Buchdahl Tintner casts a clear and compassionate eye over Georg’s first two marriages, excusing his continuing infidelities. ‘Wives were muses,’ while his mistresses were merely confidence-boosters. ‘It may not have occurred to Georg that a muse might want something more than just to support and inspire her man,’ she writes of his first wife. But Georg was from Vienna, which ‘was full of artist-supermen … Georg would cling to this frame of reference all his life, even when it failed him time and time again.’ A tragic life, and a wonderful biography.