

CHARLES SEGAL – 1929 – 2021 World renowned SA pianist and composer



Charles Segal was born in 1929 in Joniskis, Lithuania.

His journey began when he was forced to flee from his home country as a small child along with his mother, Riva and brother Louis, to evade the terror of the Russian Bolsheviks.

Riva's sister-in-law lived in **Pretoria**, South Africa, and she opted to

emigrate there with her sons.

Charles's father had already gone ahead. Whilst on the ship Charles received his very first music lesson from a pianist who was also on board. Sitting on the pianist's lap, he sat staring, mesmerized by the black and white keys and the different harmonies they produced. After being exposed once, the toddler was hooked and proceeded to play the piano every day until the ship docked in South Africa.



Finding his obsession early in life, Charles began to nurse his innate musical talent. He began to take the piano more seriously in his teens. At some stage he moved to **Cape Town**. Charles studied classical music, becoming an Associate and a Licentiate of Trinity College London in performance and teaching.

Charles first gained public recognition in 1952 when his first song, the Afrikaans "Miskien" won the Rooi Roos magazine song writing competition. From 1953 to 1986,

Charles performed regularly on live and recorded SABC radio shows in South Africa. He composed, performed and arranged 50 transcription long-playing recordings for the SABC.

Many of Charles Segal's compositions have become part of traditional South African music: songs such as "Africa", "Kwela Kwela", "Sy Kom van Kommetjie", "Kalkoenie" and Ba-Ba-Bariebab. In 1973 his song "My Children, My Wife" (Segal-Roos) was voted by the South African audiences as Song of the Year.



He founded Spin Record Company in 1954 to record and promote his music. He was also recruited by other record labels such as Trutone, Gallo Africa, Trek Music to record on their labels. Segal's Publications was established in 1953 to maintain the copyright of Charles Segal compositions. Segal moved from **Boston** to **Los Angeles** in 2011. He performed on piano regularly at celebrity events.

In the Guinness Book of Records



In June 2017 he was awarded the Guinness Book of World Records title of **Most Recorded Pianist in the world**. He said: 'It took me and my assistants about 5 years to upload, organize and sort my database of some of my songs. We actually still haven't even got to the entire catalogue – for the Guinness World Records title we submitted only 11,721 of my song recordings, but I probably have around 25,000 tracks of different pieces I've recorded – and many are my own compositions.'

Charles Segal died at the age of 92 in Hollywood, California on 4 July 2021. He is buried at the famous Hollywood Forever Cemetery.

Herman Salmenson who wrote to CHOL about Charles Segal said, 'On a personal note he was born in the same shtetl as my maternal grandfather, and they were neighbours in Pretoria when my mother was a young girl. My mother who is 100 and still lives in Pretoria remembers Charles's mother running

after him. He was married three times and does have children, but I do not have the details.'

Read more about Charles Segal and listen to his music:

On his YouTube channel, [Charles Segal Music](#), there are 79 videos of Charles Segal and his great variety of music, such as: Romantic Piano for Valentines Day; Live Piano Improvisation; Songs of Africa, songs for Channukah. There are also documentaries, and SABC performances.

A truly versatile and celebrated South African pianist, composer and record producer.

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Information on Charles Segal sent by Herman Salmenson – edited and illustrated by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, February 2024  
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