ensure that Preshil survived. Made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1989 for her services to education, Lyttle had a “magic with children that is very hard to describe,” says Magid. The Preshil focus on child-centred education was unusual at the time, but has now become part of mainstream education.

“That was her great contribution to the whole community. She revolutionised the way we taught and thought about children,” Magid says. “She empowered children and I think the successes of many children who have moved to adulthood has been that ability to be self-thinking people ... Preshil still stands out with its ability to work with children and give them a feeling of confidence.”

While Preshil’s free thinking has created generations of adults who work in the arts, many students have also gone on to be leaders in fields as diverse as law, sport, music and science. As well as the concert performers, Preshil alumni include philosopher Peter Singer, Olympic gold medallist Lauren Burns, architect and 2003 Young Business Woman of the Year Zahava Elsenberg and Magid’s own son Philippe Magid, who is the deputy executive director of the Australian Ballet.

**Lyttle lived at** Arlington on Preshil’s grounds for most of her life before moving into Hawthorn’s Victoria Gardens aged-care home in 2008. These days Lyttle is frail and suffers from bouts of dementia. Magid, who visits her frequently, along with school children who perform for her, says Lyttle has good days and bad.

“Some days she is in excellent spirits,” he says. “She has good memories of the past but her short term memory is often restricted.”

Fifty years is a long time in education and Lyttle faced many challenges in her fight against rote learning at a time when reciting times tables was the norm. She aimed for academic success in her students but believed children had to be motivated to learn. Forced to make a shift towards conventional education when the school introduced HSC (now VCE) in the 1970s, she never abandoned her values and beliefs, especially in the primary levels.

That said, Magid isn’t sure Lyttle would approve of all the changes that have been made at the school in recent years, especially in regards to the increased use of technology by the younger students.

“I was on the board when computers first started to hit and Margaret formed very strict views about when she was going to introduce children to computers,” he remembers. “Obviously you have to meet the needs of community expectations, but computers weren’t at Preshil primary classes for a number of years when they were in other primary schools because Margaret was much more interested in play-based education ... she would probably be horrified if she really understood what was going on with kids these days with iPads!”

With the concert only a few days away, Magid is still unsure whether he will bring Lyttle along or not, as large events can be overwhelming for her. But whether she’s physically present or not, there’s no doubt Lyttle’s spirit will be felt as members of the Preshil family celebrate her enduring legacy.

The Ode to Margaret fundraising concert is on Sunday, February 24 at 5:30pm at the Melbourne Recital Centre. Details: visit melbournerecital.com.au

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**An enduring legacy – Preshil and Margaret Lyttle**

1931 Margaret (Greta) Lyttle starts Preshil with five students in her living room

1933 Preshil Preparatory School is registered, with 20 students aged from six to 10 years old

1937 Growing numbers lead to the relocation of the junior school to its present site at Arlington, Kew

1944 Greta Lyttle dies suddenly of chronic nephritis and her niece Margaret (Magid) Lyttle becomes headmistress

1960s Preshil experiences unprecedented growth

1973 Preshil establishes a secondary school at Yallambie

1978 Further expansion to Blackhall

1989 Margaret Lyttle is made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM)

1994 Lyttle resigns as headmistress of Preshil but continues to live at Arlington

2001 Lyttle is selected for the People’s Choice Prize as part of the 100 year Federation of Australia celebrations in Canberra

2009 Lyttle moves out of Arlington to Victoria Gardens aged care home

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**MAIN PICTURE:** Margaret Lyttle recently celebrated her 100th birthday

**INSET:** Lyttle with Ray Magid

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Past student Clare Bowditch; Lyttle in her teaching days; more star alumni include Olympian Lauren Burns, philosopher Peter Singer and band Tinaroo Orange

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**Mozart’s Requiem**

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