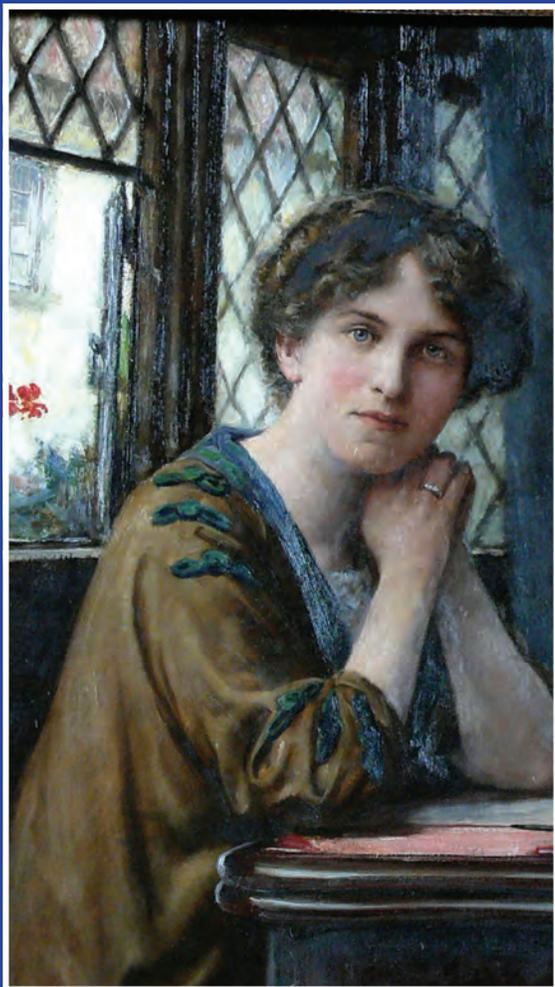


Signature

Women in Music

Summer 2010



Ella Mary Leather



Muriel Herbert



Elizabeth Poston



Jennifer Higdon

**Plus British Women Instrumentalists,
Anna Amalia, Proms Survey, Difficult Choices**

Signature: Women in Music

Summer 2010, Vol. III, No. 1

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Signature, Women in Music is a publication of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education, a United States non-profit, tax-exempt, educational organization.

Publication is online only at www.maudpowell.org/signature. Publication is made possible by donations to The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education.

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Progress?

From all outward appearances, women in music have made slow but steady gains in breaking down the barriers that have kept them from being truly equal with their male counterparts. But if we look closely, we see that women are still traveling along a path cluttered with obstacles, including ingrained prejudices, the general invisibility of women in our society, tokenism and limited opportunities.

The situation remains particularly difficult for women composers who have far fewer opportunities than their male counterparts for performances, recordings and publication of their work. It is clear that in some circles women's work in music is not deemed to be a good investment. Not too long ago, I heard a male musician describe the American composer Amy Beach as no more than "second rate Grieg". With attitudes like that circulating, is it any surprise that music by women enjoys only a small fraction of the market rewards?

Actually I was feeling quite positive about the advances made by women since I began writing and lecturing on them in the mid-1970s, when there was scant material available, only a handful of recordings and no recent performances of their music that I could find. Then I read Jennifer Fowler's revealing survey of The Proms season of concerts in London, the world's largest music festival (see the full survey in this issue). A dark cloud descended when I saw how poorly women are and have been represented in every area – as composers, conductors and performers.

Nowhere in her survey do we see any signs of equality. Take for example the concerts for 2010 as a starting point. Of 146 composers, only seven are women. Of 61 instrumental soloists, only 13 are women while only one woman will be permitted to conduct two pieces out of five in a single concert. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that produces The Proms commissions new works each year. In 2010, they commissioned 14 with three of the commissions going to women. I decided to add up the numbers of male composers represented and compare that number to the women – since 1992, there have been about 1987 works by men and a mere 69 by women, or a disappointing 3.4 percent.

Is it any different in other concert venues? I don't think it is. When was the last time you attended an orchestral concert featuring or even including a composition by a woman? How many works by women have you heard on the radio? How many biographies of women composers (or performers) have you read? How many recordings of music by women do you own? How many recordings of women's compositions are there today? I can't answer that last question but the good news is that there are many more than there were in 1975, when I managed to cobble together a mere two-page discography of mostly unavailable recordings.

The male establishment does not deserve to be blamed or demonized as the sole reason for the shortcomings. Women bear some of the responsibility too. How often do women musicians (singers, instrumentalists, chamber players, even conductors) perform compositions by women? In my experience, not often enough. I have attended a number of performances by women and women's ensembles over the years and am always amazed that so few of them perform music by women. Some are not even aware of the huge body of music by women from which they can draw.

Lest we come to believe that all men are against us, consider what men are doing for women in music. In Britain, Lewis Foreman and the Dutton Epoch label have done an outstanding job of uncovering "lost" music by forgotten or obscure women composers and recording it. They have dared to go where no one has been before with recordings of works by Guirne Creith, Elizabeth Maconchy, contemporary composer Cecilia McDowell (an anthology of her music in four CDs to date), Lilian Elkington, Dorothy Howell, Elinor Remick Warren, Lili Boulanger to name a few. Brian Couzens of Chandos Records, Klaus Heymann of Naxos, Lance Bowling of Cambria have all done well by women composers on their labels while major labels like Deutsche Grammophon, RCA, Decca, EMI, Phillips and others stick to a largely male-dominated repertoire.

Musicologist John France often includes women in his popular *The Land of Lost Content* blog. He has brought forgotten composers like Bluebell Klean back to life and is now searching for her music scores in the hope of one day having it performed and recorded. He is the first person to study and write about the music of Marion Scott and he is exploring the music of Janet Hamilton, rediscovered by Rolf Jordan. His article in this issue focuses on Muriel Herbert who has been brought before the public by her daughter Claire Tomalin. David J. Brown unearthed a handful of compositions by the English composer Lilian Elkington in a used bookshop and worked diligently to have her music performed and recorded while Ian Graham-Jones rescued the music of Alice Mary Smith from cereal boxes in a shed and has seen it through to publication and recording. Andrew Palmer has become an advocate for the music of Doreen Carwithen.

While the numbers of women and men committed to women in music are increasing, there are still far too many members of both sexes who are trapped in old patterns of thinking. We need to work together to change these attitudes. We offer *Signature: Women in Music* as a forum and resource for bringing to light the rich musical heritage created by gifted women, enabling teachers and performers to open these riches to others.

Pamela Blevins

Ella Mary Leather



Preserving the folk tradition

David Tolley

Ella Mary Leather: The making of a tradition

Gypsies, phonographs and dog carts

The Welsh Borders, a sequestered region separated from the rest of England by the River Severn, preserves a remote character that is neither Welsh nor completely English. It remains a largely rural landscape where hop yards and cider-producing apple orchards are still to be found dotting the Herefordshire landscape.

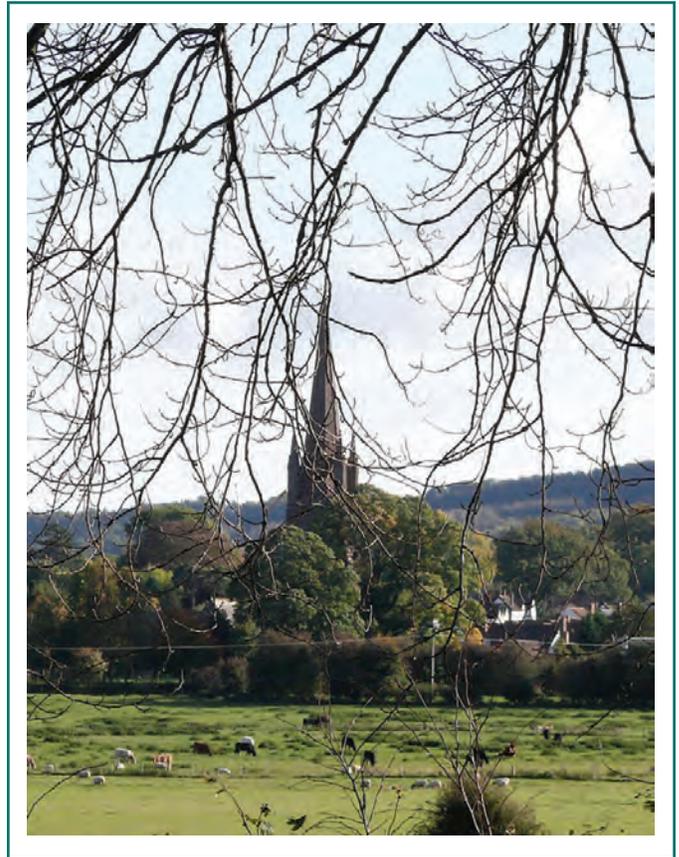
The region possesses elements of mysticism that seize upon the receptive visitor and spark the imagination. To the north lies Shropshire, the inspiration for A.E. Housman's famous, but purely imaginary collection of 63 poems *A Shropshire Lad* that has spawned dozens of musical settings. The writer Mary Webb drew upon her intimate knowledge of her native Shropshire, its mysteries, curiosities and people, for her evocative novels, including *Precious Bane*, as well as for her poems.

To the south the daffodil country of Dymock in Gloucestershire attracted a group of well-known poets who formed a small colony there between 1911 and 1914. The most famous among them was the American Robert Frost, whose first books, *North of Boston* and *A Boy's Will*, were published in England.

Slumbering as it does next to the Welsh Marches and the ridge of Offa's Dyke, what more can such a region offer?¹ Is there any music, for example, west of the Severn other than the somewhat Germanic work of Edward Elgar?

Prior to the twentieth century, a tradition of folk song flourished among the people here, particularly in Shropshire and Herefordshire. While it was not uncommon to find a substantial body of folk song in other parts of Britain, music of distinctively high quality was perhaps more dominant in this area than in other places. The gypsies, who provided the itinerant agricultural labour force for the region, spread much of this heritage in their travels.

But the individual who did the most to preserve this legacy was Ella Mary Leather, who collected not only the songs but folk lore. She was born Ella Mary Smith on a farm at Dilwyn in 1876. Her father James is described as a "gentleman farmer", a hop-grower and breeder of Hereford cattle.² With the exception



Weobley, England has changed little in appearance since Ella Mary Leather's day. (Photo by David Tolley)

of her own account, little is known of her childhood. Of her interest in folk lore, Ella Mary recalled listening to an apple gatherer named Martha who told many stories as she sat by a wood fire in an orchard eating her dinner. "[P]erhaps my folklore collecting was unconsciously begun in childhood with stories told by old Martha," she recalled.³

James Smith was evidently a prosperous man judging from the fact that his young daughter boarded out weekly to attend Hereford High School. One of the boys who came in contact with her years later testified: "She was so kind to me and the other boys that her memory has

CONTINUED

Title page portrait of Ella Mary Leather, courtesy Stan and Ada Simons, Weobley.

Ella Mary Leather

remained with me all my life...she had a beautiful disposition, no wonder she became so charming in later life".⁴ The effect of her magnetic personality was to have far-reaching consequences throughout her life.

Her kindness, character and beauty attracted a young local solicitor Frank Leather who asked the 17-year old Ella Mary to marry him. The newlyweds took up residence in comfortable circumstances in the village of Weobley, a picturesque village of half-timbered buildings in the Herefordshire style, unspoiled even today.

Few Opportunities for Women

In common with most young women of the period Ella Mary had few opportunities open to her, especially given the remote location of Weobley. Thus, like other young women, she made her own career.

Ella Mary Leather's reputation now largely rests on her folklore writings, mainly her prodigious work *The Folklore of Herefordshire*, but her activities and interests ranged more widely. She joined the county branch of the Red Cross in 1910, becoming deputy commandant by 1912 and commandant in 1914. She sat on the executive of the county Women's Institute and was later co-opted onto the Herefordshire Education Committee.⁵ She organised reading classes and Oxford University Extension courses in addition to visiting the sick and aged in her village.

According to Lavender Jones, her biographer, Mrs. Leather was not disposed to suffragist politics but "she sympathised with the newer generation of women who were beginning to resist the shackles which had kept them subservient to men for so long".⁶ Jones recalled that at her first meeting with Mrs. Leather she danced the Broomstick Dance for her.⁷

Despite her premature death from a heart attack at the age of 52 in 1928, Ella Mary Leather's achievements and powerful personality made a lasting impression on those who knew her or came into contact with her. Yet today, the only tangible memorial to her is her grave and a window honouring her memory at Saint Peter's and Saint Paul's Church in Weobley.

As recently as 1996, the Reverend Richard Birt organized an ambitious commemoration of Mrs. Leather's life at Weobley. People who knew her and others who did not but who were somehow influenced by her recounted the impressions made upon them by this woman whom they clearly loved and admired.



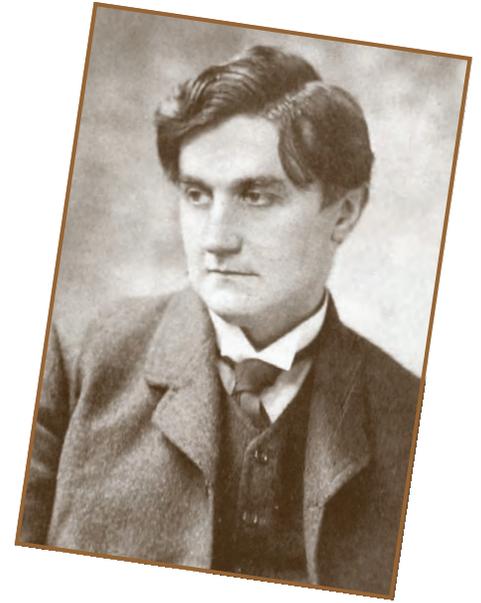
Ella Leather served in her county's branch of the Red Cross, rising to the rank of commandant in 1914. She was a natural leader who organized educational programs ranging from reading to university extension courses. (Painting courtesy Stan and Ada Simons)

"She sympathized with the newer generation of women who were beginning to resist the shackles which had kept them subservient to men for so long."

— Lavender Jones

CONTINUED

David Tolley



Lucy Broadwood, Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams played important roles in preserving folk songs. Mrs. Leather submitted her manuscripts to Broadwood, who helped with the notation. Mrs. Leather was an important influence on Vaughan Williams.

Ella Mary Leather

Though limited, her work in gathering local folk music was of high quality and would have significant consequences. Folk song collecting was not unique among rural middle-class women. In the immediate area of the Welsh Border counties, several other women were actively collecting folk song and lore, among them Charlotte Burne in Shropshire and Miss Winifred Norbury, a friend of Elgar and the W.N. of his *Enigma Variations*. From about 1904 onwards others were collecting songs in the Weobley area: R. Hughes Rowlands, the village schoolmaster and especially Annie Webb, governess to the Leathers, who seems to have been a prodigious worker with musical training and a help to Mrs. Leather whose own musical training “was insufficient for her to be able to take down a tune correctly.”⁸ She relied on Annie Webb and Nona Swire to assist her.

“Ella used to take me round in the dog-cart to visit the old folk where she had heard folk songs,” Swire recalled. “My part was to note down with aid of a tuning fork and my own ear. Later a phonograph was produced.”⁹ When Mrs. Leather submitted her manuscripts to Lucy Broadwood (1858-1929) she always gave full credit to those who helped her with the notation. Miss Broadwood’s uncle, the Reverend John Broadwood, member of the famous family of piano makers (Beethoven owned a “Broadwood” piano), had already made a small collection of local folk songs. His enterprising niece Lucy became even more active in the

field in the early days of folk song collecting and was so successful that she became secretary of the English Folk Song Society in 1904.

Through these contacts, Ella Mary Leather also became involved with Cecil Sharp and Ralph Vaughan Williams, both active folk song collectors. Her own direct collecting seems to have begun seriously in 1907 with the use of a recording phonograph. This valuable resource, much in favour with Béla Bartók in Hungary, came about through Ella Leather’s contacts with Lucy Broadwood.

A Profound Impression

After an encounter in nearby Pembridge in 1908, Ella arranged for Cecil Sharp to visit and to hear the gypsy violinist John Lock in 1909 at Leominster, but the impression she made on Vaughan Williams was more profound and long-lasting. Unfortunately, what should now become a fascinating account is inhibited by a loss of correspondence so a great deal must be assumed from the circumstances that have been only briefly recorded.

Following his visit to Ingrave in Essex in 1903, Vaughan Williams had become increasingly active in the collection of folksong, which he continued for a number of years, mostly in the eastern counties of England. Much later, in 1910 he went to Southwold on the east coast in company with composer and folk dancer George

CONTINUED

Ella Mary Leather

Butterworth, who was an instigator in what was to become Vaughan Williams's second symphony, *A London Symphony*, his first exclusively orchestral symphony.¹⁰ From some time in 1907, Ella was making phonograph records of local singers, sending the cylinders to Vaughan Williams for transcription. Among them were two versions of the famous *Dives and Lazarus*, collected respectively from Mrs. Harris, a gypsy at Eardisley and Mr. Evans of Dilwyn. Authorities on Vaughan Williams consistently cite 'Dives' as being an important influence on the composer, but Ella Leather and her colleagues never receive proper credit for the versions they introduced to Vaughan Williams.

According to Ursula Vaughan Williams, the composer's widow, Ralph was not proficient in the use of the phonograph, but that did not stop him from collecting, particularly when he realized the wealth of material to be found in the Weobley area. He would use his musical skills to note the music directly from the men and women who still recalled and sang the traditional songs for him.

So it was in July 1909 that Vaughan Williams went to Weobley, a place far less accessible than it is today, but quite near Hereford. As it happened Vaughan Williams was participating in the annual Three Choirs Festival being held that year at Hereford. According to Rosemary Dawson, a cousin of the Leathers, Vaughan Williams stayed with the Leather family at Weobley before attending the Festival.¹¹

During that time Lavender Jones records that Rosemary Dawson accompanied Ella Leather and Vaughan Williams on collecting trips. Among the songs Vaughan Williams collected was "This is the Truth Sent from Above", a tune that would prove more useful to him than *Dives and Lazarus*. Ella Leather noted that the tune was taken from a Mr. Jenkins at nearby Kings Pyon in July 1909.

A remarkable carol, the words address themes from the Book of Genesis in a style similar to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It deals with the problems that arise when Man gains Knowledge. This is a subject with great allegorical meaning in reference to the self-inflicted "endless woes" of the modern world as much as in its basic religious context. The carol closes with an obvious Christian redemption verse (see page XX for an analysis). The final verse invokes a visitation blessing on 'the people of the house', confirming its use as a 'good luck' invocation, widely used by Christmas carollers ingratiatingly looking for money or food.

While there are many such 'wassail' carols, this one is singular. According to Lavender Jones "The Truth Sent from Above" is the gem of the collection and so it is in every respect. Cecil Sharp collected a similar version in Shropshire in 1911, indicating that the carol and its variants were circulating through the lonely borders of the Welsh Marches.

CONTINUED

10.—THE TRUTH SENT FROM ABOVE.

Noted by R. Vaughan Williams.
DORIAN.

Sung by W. JENKINS,
at King's Pyon, July, 1909.

This is the truth sent from above, The
truth of God, the God of love; Therefore don't turn me
from your door, But hearken all— both rich and poor.

The opening of *The Truth Sent from Above*, noted by Vaughan Williams who accompanied Mrs. Leather on folk song collecting trips throughout the Weobley area.

Ella Mary Leather

What obviously attracted Vaughan Williams, however, was the tune. It seized upon him to such an extent that he made frequent use of it, firstly in the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (1912) and next in a collection *Eight Traditional English Carols*, (1919). Then it appeared in the *Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928 and subsequent editions.

After a hiatus, it re-emerged in 1951 as commissioned incidental music for a radio dramatisation of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where "The Truth Sent from Above" theme appeared almost unchanged.¹² According to Ursula Vaughan Williams, Ralph earned about ten guineas for this work, but he was still not finished with it.¹³ In 1953, he developed the tune into his *Prelude on an Old Carol Tune*.

This is enough evidence that Vaughan Williams had a particular fascination for the theme but what has been overlooked is a brief but direct quote from it in the first movement of *A London Symphony*, which he was composing in the years leading up to World War I. Vaughan Williams returned to Weobley in 1912 where, at Monkland near Leominster, he and his first wife Adeline and Mrs. Leather sat on upturned buckets "thoughtfully provided by the gypsies". Vaughan Williams wrote down the various tunes they heard while Adeline and Ella recorded alternate lines of the songs.¹⁴

Years later Lavender Jones, a member of the English Folk Dance Society, took the admirable initiative to persuade the BBC Radio regional office at Birmingham

to produce a programme about Ella Leather's life and work to which Vaughan Williams made a contribution. The programme was successful at the time and was recorded for repeat transmission.

The Debt to Ella Leather

Nothing remains from it other than some text by Miss Jones who quotes the following evocative account by Vaughan Williams: "It was a cold, clear September night and we stood by the blazing fire in the open ground of the gypsy encampment, the fire had been specially lighted to enable us to note down tunes and words in the growing darkness. Then out of the half-light came the sounds of a beautiful tenor voice, singing 'The Unquiet Grave'."¹⁵ Asked in 1912 what was his most memorable musical impression of the year, Vaughan Williams replied "...hearing a gypsy sing at Monkland". According to Jones, Vaughan Williams credited Ella Mary with having worked with the gypsies' hop-picking teams in order to gain their trust.

It is incontestable that Vaughan Williams never forgot the wealth of the Weobley collections or his debt to Ella Leather. In 1920, he published *Twelve Traditional Carols from Herefordshire* (Stainer & Bell) jointly crediting E.M. Leather. After the World War I he returned to Weobley in 1922 to collect additional material.

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An excerpt from the first movement of *A London Symphony* by Vaughan Williams reflects Leather's influence.

Ella Leather's Weobley Today



A



B



C



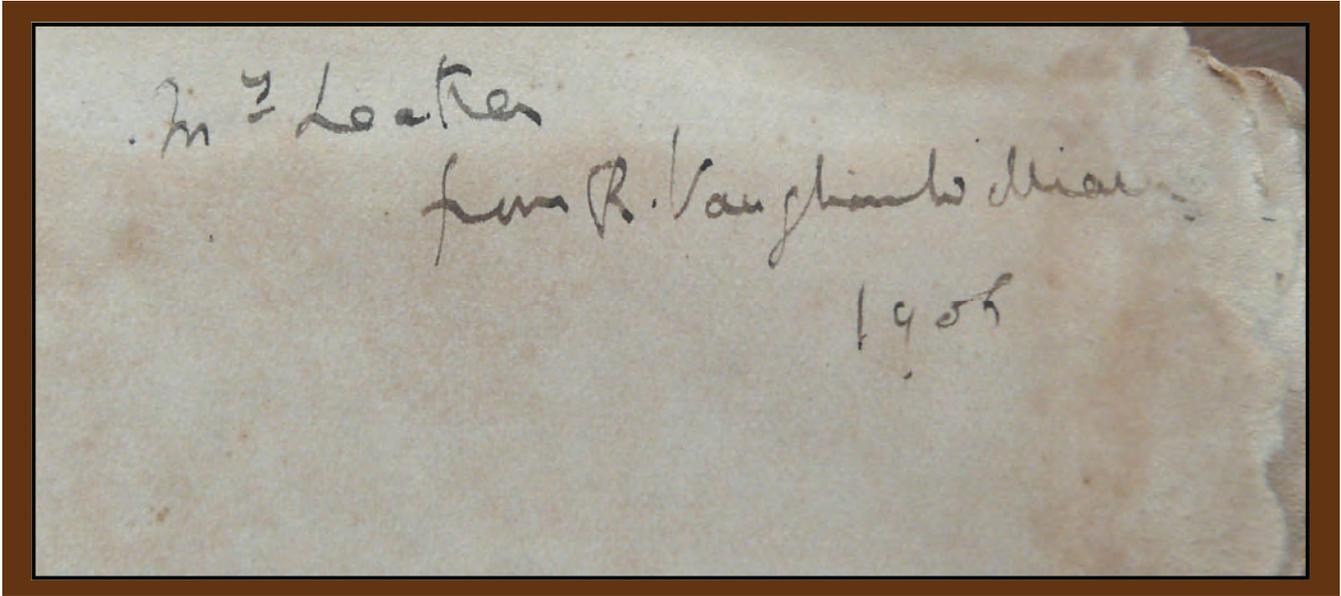
D



E

A. Castle House, the home of Ella Mary Leather. B. St. Peter and St. Paul's Church. C. The same church with a view of the west porch and sundial above. D. The Throne, formerly Throne Farm from about 1838. During World War II, it housed American army officers. E. Commemorative window to Mrs. Leather by her widowed husband Frank Leather at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church.

Photographs by David Tolley



Composer Ralph Vaughan Williams inscribed a copy of the English Hymnal to Mrs. Leather in gratitude for her contributions to his music and to music history as well. (Courtesy Stan and Ada Simons)

Ella Mary Leather

All this has a social as well as cultural dimension. Jones records that one song, “On Christmas Day it happened so”, gleaned from another gypsy, Esther Smith, not only became Number 8 in Vaughan Williams’s *Twelve Traditional Carols* but emerged again in Ludlow in 1966 or 1967 from a Mrs. May Bradley – Esther’s daughter, now a house-dweller.¹⁶

According to Ursula Vaughan Williams, the composer and his first wife Adeline, paid a further visit to Weobley sometime around 1949, over twenty years after Mrs. Leather’s death and forty years after his first visit. This journey must have marked the commemoration of a happy and productive time for the composer.

The Reverend Richard Birt recalled that in 1956, Vaughan Williams returned yet again in company with Ursula and composer Gerald Finzi and his wife Joy. They walked past Ella’s old home, Castle House, an unmistakable act of homage to a woman who was obviously admired and remembered and contributed so much through Vaughan Williams to the national musical life.¹⁷ Mrs. Vaughan Williams returned in the fall of 1996 for the second part of the celebration of the life of Ella Mary Leather, arranged by Richard Birt.

The final proof of Ralph Vaughan Williams’s indebtedness to Ella Leather and his respect for her rests in the inscription he wrote in her copy of the English

Hymnal, a project to which he contributed. This link between the composer and the folk-song collector might not have surfaced were it not for the efforts of Stan and Ada Simons, the present residents of Castle House.

It is well known that there were several influences on the life and work of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst perhaps most of all, but the above provides clear evidence that an unknown woman from the remote Border country ranks very highly among these significant influences. Ella Mary Leather is deserving of remembrance and recognition.



[MORE](#) ↓

Ella Mary Leather

Notes

1. The Welsh Marches is an area along the border of Wales and England while Offa's Dyke is a massive earthwork that roughly follows the current border of the two countries.
2. *A Nest of Singing Birds (NOSB)*, p. 23.
3. *The Folklore of Herefordshire (FOH)*, Preface.
4. George Hone letter to Lavender Jones *NOSB*, p. 24.
5. The Women's Institute was formed in 1915 to revitalize rural communities and encourage women to become more involved in producing food during World War I. Over the years the aims of the volunteer organization have evolved to keep pace with the changing times.
6. *NOSB*, p. 27.
7. According to Mrs. Leather's account in *FOH*, dancers were provided with an ordinary broom, laid on the floor and from that followed a specific number of steps and actions to the tune of "Pop Goes the Weasel".
8. *NOSB*, p. 35.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
10. George Butterworth (1885-1915), a friend and collaborator of Vaughan Williams. Butterworth was a folk dancer and composer of distinguished settings of A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* and orchestral works including *The Banks of Green Willow* and *Two English*

Idylls. He was killed in action World War I in August 1916 at Pozières, France.

11. Confirmed by address given by Rosemary Randerson, Weobley 1996.
12. BBC Radio 1951, dramatized by Desmond Hawkins. In *RVW- a Pictorial Biography* by John E. Lunn and Ursula Vaughan Williams, this is given incorrectly as *The Return of the Native* p. 93.
13. Letter from Ursula Vaughan Williams to the author, 26 April 1995.
14. *NOSB*, p. 52.
15. *NOSB*, p. 53. This is presumed to have been taken from Vaughan Williams's account that was broadcast on 29 August 1954.
16. *NOSB*, p. 50.
17. Richard Birt, *Wise and Fair and Good as She*, *RVW Society Journal*, October 1998.

Bibliography

- Lavender Jones, *A Nest of Singing Birds*, (West Midlands Folk Federation, 1978).
- Ella Mary Leather, *The Folklore of Herefordshire*, (Herefordshire: Jakeman & Carver, High Town and London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1912: Reprinted 1970/1973 and 1991).

There are reputedly 16 verses of "This is the Truth Sent from Above" taken from A Good Christmas Box 1847 which predates the carol's collection by Cecil Sharp in Shropshire and that of Vaughan Williams in Herefordshire. It was probably circulated in other variants.

Vaughan Williams' s interest was primarily the tune not the words of his collections. The words in some folk songs were and remain incomprehensible: "Christ Made A Trance" is one example.

Apart from the social and cultural implications of its words, the tune of "The Truth..." coming as it did from a Herefordshire field developed a distinguished life of its own. Sample verses:

The first thing which I do relate
Is that God did man create,
The next thing which to you I'll tell :
Woman was made with man to dwell.

Then after this was God's own choice,
To place them both in Paradise,
There to remain from evil free,
Except they eat of such a tree.

And they did eat, which was a sin,
And thus their ruin did begin ;
Ruined themselves, both you and me
And all of their posterity.

Thus we were as' (?) to endless woes,
Till God the Lord did interpose,
And so a promise soon did run
That He would redeem us by His Son.

Folk Songs Collected in Weobley

Year	Song Title	Collector	Singer/Location
1904	LORD THOMAS & FAIR ELINOR	A.M. WEBB	F. WHEELER Weobley
	THERE IS A FOUNTAIN (first tune)	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
	YOUNG EDWIN IN THE LOWLANDS LOW	F. GWILLIM	W. BEBB Weobley
1905	BRANGYWELL	R.HUGHES ROWLANDS	Mrs MELLOR Dilwyn
	THE PRETTY PLOUGHBOY	R.HUGHES ROWLANDS	JOHN MORGAN The Pitch, Dilwyn
	YOUNG LAMBKIN	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
	THE MOON SHINES BRIGHT (second tune)	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
?	LORD BATEMAN	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
?	THE BLACK DECREE	A.M. WEBB	no information
?	I'M TOO PROUD TO BEG	A.M. WEBB	(illegible)
	DIVES & LAZARUS (first tune)	ELEANOR ANDREWS	Mrs HARRIS Eardisley
1906	THE FOUR SEASONS OF THE YEAR	R.HUGHES ROWLANDS	JOHN MORGAN The Pitch, Dilwyn
	THE SEEDS OF LOVE	F. GWILLIM	J. PRIDAY Weobley
	MISS BETSY WILSTER	A.M. WEBB	MRS POWELL King's Pyon
	THE MAID AND THE BOX	R. HUGHES ROWLANDS	JOSEPH PREECE Dilwyn Common
1906	THE LIFE OF MAN	A.M. WEBB	W. TAYLOR King's Pyon
	A YOUNG SAILOR	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
?	ROSE IN JUNE	F. GWILLIM	J. PRIDAY Weobley
	THE HEREFORDSHIRE FARMER WILL TAYLOR & SARAH GRAY	A.M. WEBB A.M. WEBB	illegible W. COLCOMBE Weobley
1907	THE MILKMAID'S SONG	RVW phonograph tr.	Mrs. ELLEN POWELL Canon Pyon
	DIVES & LAZARUS (second tune)	RVW phonograph tr.	Mr J. EVANS Dilwyn
	THE MOON SHINES BRIGHT	RVW phonograph tr.	G. VAUGHAN Dilwyn
1908	THE BITTER WITHY (first tune)	A.M. WEBB	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
	THE BITTER WITHY (first tune 2 ND version)	Rev. EDWIN KING	Mrs MARY JONES King's Pyon
	THE BITTER WITHY (second tune)	ELEANOR ANDREWS	G.BRIMFIELD (mason) Winforton
	THERE IS A FOUNTAIN (second tune)	RVW phonograph tr.	W. HANCOCKS Monnington
	THERE IS A FOUNTAIN (second version)	RVW phonograph tr.	ELIZA SMITH Weobley

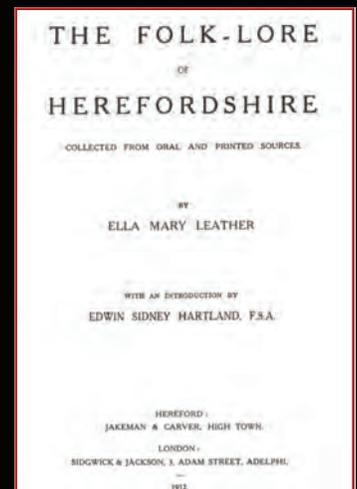
Year	Song Title	Collector	Singer/Location
1908	THERE WAS A LADY IN MERRY SCOTLAND	RVW phonograph tr.	Mrs. LOVERIDGE The Homme, Dilwyn
	THE SEVEN VIRGINS (or UNDER THE LEAVES)	RVW phonograph tr.	ANGELINA WHATTON Weobley
	THE HOLY WELL	RVW phonograph tr.	Mr J, HANCOCKS Monnington
	CHRIST MADE A TRANCE	RVW phonograph tr.	ANGELINA WHATTON The Homme, Dilwyn
1909	THE BITTER WITHY (third tune)	RVW phonograph tr.	Mrs TRISTRAM Withington
	THE BITTER WITHY (fourth tune)	RVW phonograph tr.	Mr W. HOLDER Withington
	THE UNQUIET GRAVE	RVW phonograph tr.	W. HIRONS The Haven, Dilwyn
	DILLY DOVE	RVW phonograph tr.	Mrs E. GOODWIN Weobley
	THE HOLY WELL	RVW phonograph tr.	Mrs E. GOODWIN Weobley
	THE CARNAL AND THE CRANE	noted RVW*	Mr HIRONS The Haven, Dilwyn
	THERE IS A FOUNTAIN (third version)	noted RVW*	G. LEWIS Hardwick
	THE MOON SHINES BRIGHT (second version)	noted RVW*	G. LEWIS Hardwick
	THE BITTER WITHY (previously collected 1908)	noted RVW*	W. COLCOMBE Weobley
	AWAKE, AWAKE	noted RVW*	CAROLINE BRIDGES Pembroke
	THE MAN THAT LIVES (first tune)	noted RVW*	Mrs WHEELER Weobley
	THE TRUTH SENT FROM ABOVE	noted RVW*	W. JENKINS Ledgemoor Kings Pyon
	THE MAN THAT LIVES (second tune)	noted RVW*	W. JENKINS Ledgemoor Kings Pyon
	A BRISK YOUNG SAILOR	noted RVW*	W. COLCOMBE Weobley

*COLLECTED July 1909 Some dates collected by A.M. WEBB uncertain.

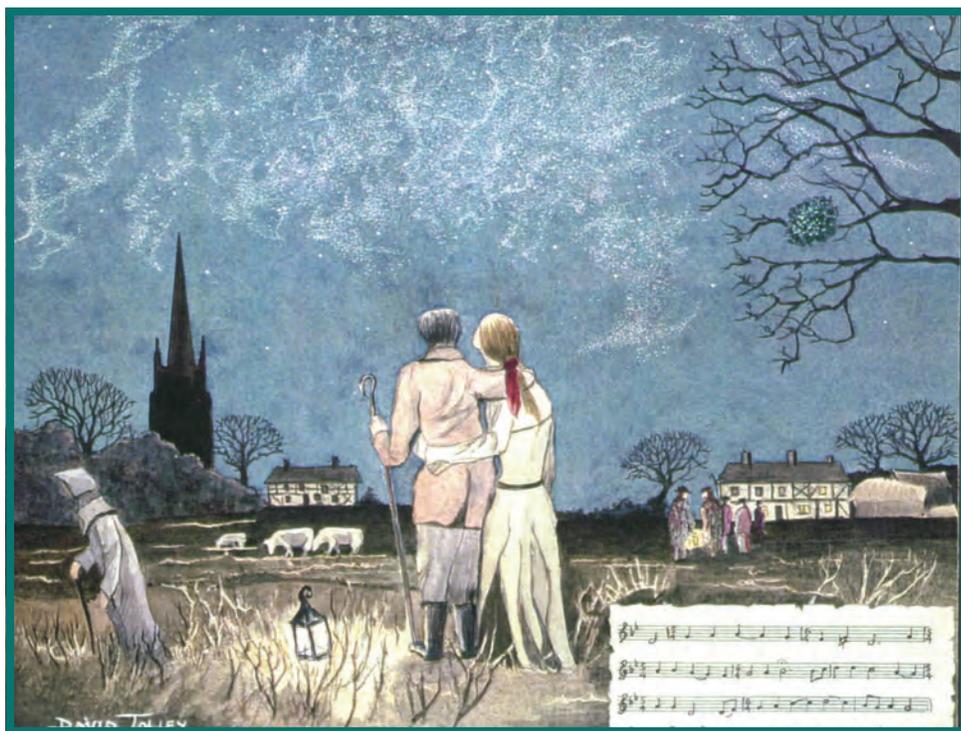
Compiled from The Folklore of Herefordshire/A Singing Nest of Birds



Portrait of Harriet Jones, a Gypsy who was among those contributing to Mrs. Leather's folk songs that appeared in her 1912 book, *The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire*.



David Tolley's heartfelt interest in Ella Mary Leather and respect for her achievements has inspired his own art. This painting represents his interpretation of "The Truth Sent from Above".



Ella Mary Leather—A Personal Note

My awareness of Ella Mary Leather arose from an intriguing reference in Ursula Vaughan Williams' biography of the composer, *RVW* (p.95) in which she describes Mrs. Leather's invitation to him to visit Weobley. A visit from Vaughan Williams in pursuit of folksong was not extraordinary as he had been receiving material from Mrs. Leather for some time. But the fact that this invitation had come from this local solicitor's wife, who worked alongside gypsies in the hop fields to gain their trust, was fascinating to me. Sadly I could discover no more because almost without exception this aspect of Vaughan Williams's life has been largely ignored up to the present day by the main writers and authorities on the composer.

My curiosity remained unsatisfied until 1996, when Pamela Blevins alerted me to an event to commemorate the life and work of Mrs. Leather, organised by the Vicar of Weobley, the Reverend Richard Birt. Although Ursula Vaughan Williams was scheduled to attend, the recently formed RVW Society, to whom this information was relayed, did not take an interest in this important event. .

Ursula Vaughan Williams could not attend due to illness, but for my wife Ann and I it was a truly memorable May weekend blessed with fine weather and wild daffodils, marred only by the fact that I had a bad cold.

We heard and videoed local choir girls sing some of the important locally collected songs, one performed the famous broomstick dance which Ella Mary demonstrated to Lavender Jones at their first meeting. We formed a lasting friendship with the Shropshire folksinger Fred Jordan and observed a Rogation service conducted by Richard Birt on the green behind Mrs. Leather's old home, Castle House. Memorably, Ella Mary herself seemed to be observing this long-deserved commemoration from the mesmerizing portrait painted by F.

W. Bennett, exhibited in the lovely Weobley church.

If all that was not enough, my imagination was seized when the Kings Pyon choir sang "The Truth Sent from Above", although basically a religious piece, the words can, according to the outlook of the hearer, have allegorical reference to the human condition, even to unbelievers like myself.

The haunting tune was used by Vaughan Williams more than any other, significantly as incidental music to Desmond Hawkins' acclaimed radio dramatisation of Thomas Hardy's most classically tragic novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The cycle of association with Weobley and Mrs. Leather extended even further when Desmond later presented us with a copy of the original recording. This gift seemed fateful.

A further outcome has been that our inquiries and visits to Weobley have led to rewarding experiences and friendships: in particular I am greatly indebted to the Reverend Richard Birt, and Stan and Ada Simons of Castle House. By another fateful chance we met Norma and Alan Forrest with whom we had a stimulating discussion by Ella Mary's grave, who is ultimately responsible for all of this interest.

The legacy of Ella Mary Leather, whose work and character captured those who knew and admired her, has extended decades beyond her untimely death, and seems to touch all those who have since become engaged with her.

Finally we owe a great debt to Lavender Jones for her initiative and work in publishing her admirable little book *A Nest of Singing Birds*. The commemorative broadcast she persuaded the BBC to make is not extant, so I am grateful to the editorial board of *Signature* for publishing this account in the hope that it will arouse wider interest in Ella Mary Leather so that she not be allowed to lapse into the undeserved obscurity where she has dwelt for far too long.

David Tolley

Jennifer Higdon



J. D. Scott Photo

**An unlikely rise
to international fame**

“I was starting at the bottom.”

For nearly all of symphonic history, audiences have clamored for “modern music” but with the dawn of the twentieth century the programming of older works has become the standard. The numerous factors and theories explaining this transformation vary from the decline of music education in the schools to the perceived elitism in the arts but many composers and musicians continue to write music that communicates to a broad range of listeners. Jennifer Higdon is one such composer. In the past decade her career has exploded with commissions from the nation’s leading ensembles and performers. Her nontraditional musical background contributes to her ability to communicate effectively to diverse audiences and her success provides encouragement to students facing similar challenges.

Jennifer Higdon was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 31, 1962. Six months later, the family moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Reared by artistic parents, she explored numerous creative outlets in her youth such as writing short stories and poetry. When she was ten her family relocated to Seymour, Tennessee, to be closer to family as well as to reap the benefits of a rural environment. The peaceful natural surroundings in the mountains of eastern Tennessee have provided Higdon with a lasting source of inspiration for her compositions.

This influence can be heard clearly in one of her most recent works, *Concerto 4-3*, a piece infused with elements of bluegrass and mountain music.

Higdon was not introduced to classical music as a child. This unorthodox upbringing for a classical music composer contributes extensively to her creative personality. Higdon states, “My background is completely different than most classical musicians’ backgrounds....my background is much more similar to most people who grow up in this country...very, very little Classical, and a lot more of everything else. But because I listened to the Beatles so much, as well as Simon & Garfunkel, reggae, Rolling Stones, Peter, Paul, and Mary, bluegrass, and country, I believe that I have to have been influenced by that music.”¹

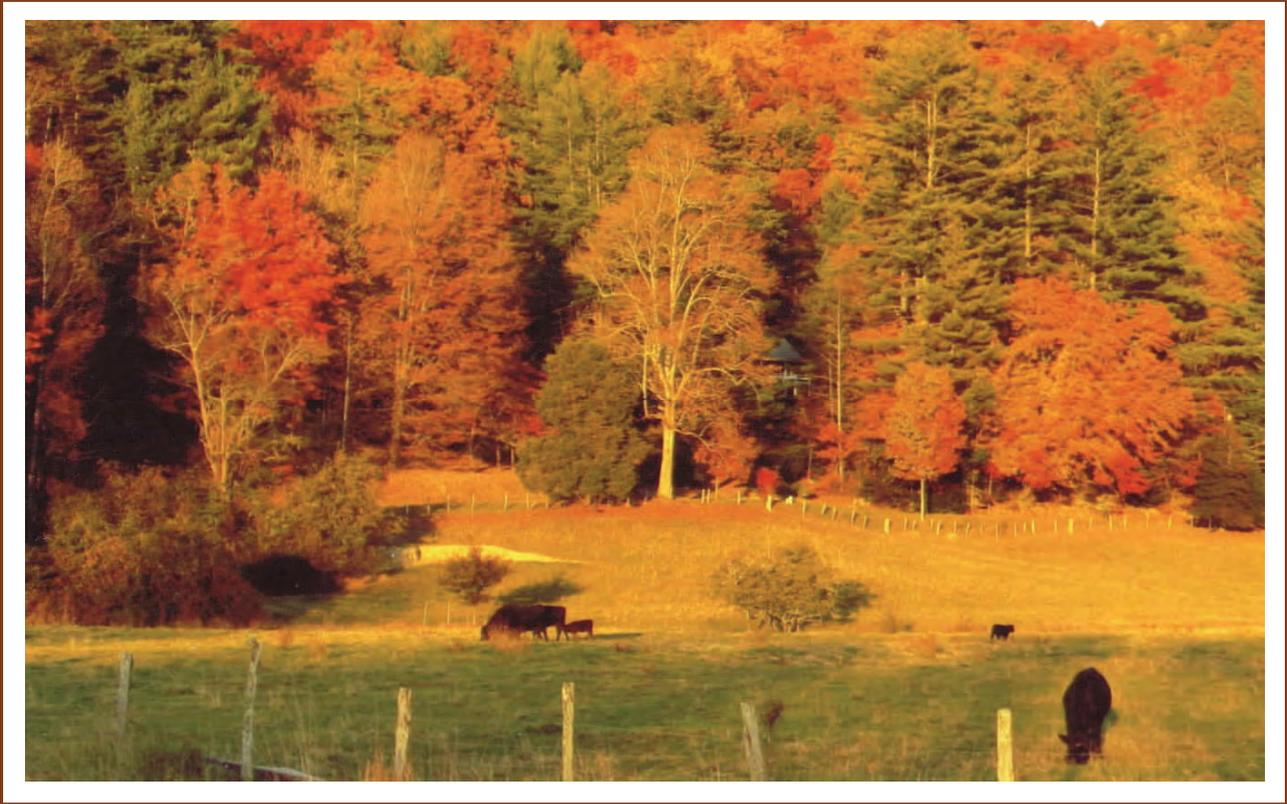
Higdon’s initial encounter with applied music began at the relatively late age of fourteen as a marching band percussionist. Soon afterwards, she discovered a flute in the attic and began self instruction, quickly becoming proficient. The flute remains her primary instrument and she has contributed significantly to the modern flute repertoire. She has recorded her own solo and chamber works for this instrument.

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Candace DiCarlo Photo

Composer Jennifer Higdon and her cat.



The peaceful natural surroundings in the mountains of eastern Tennessee have provided Higdon with a lasting source of inspiration for her compositions.

Jennifer Higdon

The young Higdon entered Bowling Green State University as a flute performance major and while she excelled in lessons, she felt insecure in her foundation of musical knowledge. She recalled, “I had no idea what theory was, I had no idea what an interval was. I didn’t know what a major chord was. I was starting at the bottom. The entire time I was studying, I felt I was catching up. The other kids came in knowing the Beethoven symphonies. I didn’t.”²

Her flute teacher, Judith Bentley proposed that she should write a work for a master class with flutist/composer Harvey Sollberger.³ The result was the two-minute piece for flute and piano *Night Creatures*. The budding composer was immediately fascinated by the prospect of putting sounds together.

Robert Spano became a conductor at Bowling Green State University during Higdon’s final year there. He remains one of her most avid supporters, frequently programming and premiering her works with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra which he now directs. Spano facilitated her transition from performer to composer, urging her to pursue further studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Several other prestigious schools accepted her, including the Juilliard School and the

University of Michigan, but Spano convinced her that an Artist Diploma from the Curtis Institute was the right choice, after he locked her in his office until she agreed.⁴

After graduating from the Curtis Institute, Higdon’s application for graduate studies was rejected twice by the University of Pennsylvania. She gained admission on her third attempt and completed a Master of Arts Degree in composition. Her lack of early training continued to create a significant hurdle during her doctoral qualifying exams. She remarks, “Getting through the doctoral exams for me was a nightmare. I took them a lot.”⁵ Her initial doctoral dissertation was rejected.⁶ Her second effort, a string quartet titled *Voices* gained her the Doctor of Philosophy degree.⁷

At the University of Pennsylvania, Higdon’s principal composition instructor was George Crumb whom she credits with teaching her to listen effectively. She felt a personal connection with him stemming from their similar backgrounds in rural America (Crumb was reared in West Virginia). Like him, she finds great inspiration in nature.

As a woman, Higdon is often consulted regarding the role of gender in the historically male-dominated field

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Jennifer Higdon



Lawdon Press

Jennifer and Robert Spano going over the score of her "Dooryard Bloom" during a recording session.

Spano locked her in his office until she agreed to study at the Curtis Institute.

of composition. Scholars have been captivated by the perceived contrasts between “women’s music” and the rarely termed “men’s music.” Higdon rejects such differences and remembers in graduate school that such discussions often resulted in eye rolls from “all of the composition students to all of the musicology students.”⁸ The role of women in music does remain a concern to Higdon but she considers herself simply a composer rather than a “female composer.”

Currently, Higdon spends between four to six hours a day composing. She has been a member of the Curtis Institute faculty since 1994. Once her compositional career blossomed in 2002, she reduced her teaching responsibilities and at present she teaches only composition at Curtis, where she holds the Milton L. Rock Chair in Composition Studies. Her teaching philosophy is to encourage students to follow their intuition with no restrictions on their musical language. Instead, she provides “them [with] tools to write in the way they want and need to write.”⁹ Communication remains a crucial aspect of Higdon’s philosophy; she feels a personal accountability to her listeners. Her eclectic music background enables her to relate to diverse audiences, who like her, were raised primarily on popular music. These qualities undoubtedly contribute significantly to her professional success.

By virtue of direct commissions and her keen business sense Higdon remains among the few self-supporting composers. The American composer Philip Glass advised her to retain copyright privileges to enable rapid rental processing that is less expensive to performers.¹⁰ The name of her publishing company, Lawdon Press, originated from the amalgamation of her name with that of her life partner Cheryl Lawson.

Despite her unlikely beginnings in composition, Higdon has received commissions from some of the most prestigious ensembles and performers, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Tokyo String Quartet, and the American Guild of Organists. Her *Piano Concerto*, commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra was premiered in December, 2009 in Washington D.C.

Higdon’s music enjoys international success with performances numbering more than a hundred per year. *blue cathedral*, a one-movement symphonic poem, remains her most popular symphonic work and is featured frequently on orchestral programs nationwide. The recording *Higdon: Concerto for Orchestra/City Scape*, was

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Jennifer Higdon

nominated for four Grammy Awards, winning in the category of Best Engineered Album, Classical. Higdon won a 2010 Grammy in the category of *Best Contemporary Classical Composition* for her *Percussion Concerto*, a 25-minute work for solo percussion and orchestra. The recording is performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Marin Alsop, conducting. Colin Currie is the soloist.

Compositional Method

It is often difficult to describe a composer's method of writing music but Higdon defines her style as "intuitive." At times, she is capable of composing at a rapid speed with musical ideas occurring almost spontaneously. She remarked, "I think actually what happens is [when] I start working on a piece, I'll do a lot of sketching, my brain will put these elements together and I don't know they're there. I don't realize it even, it just comes out."¹¹ When embarking on a new work, Higdon begins with the first melodic idea that comes to her. It usually does not become the opening of the piece. In multi-movement works, the interior movements are generally composed first. According to Higdon, anxiety causes her to write the opening movement last because she places so much emphasis on its significance. If it is not composed effectively, it has the potential to spoil the remainder of the piece.

As with many composers, Higdon's orchestral works frequently contain personal elements that connect the music to her life experiences. For example, *Cityscape* served as a musical tribute to Atlanta, where Higdon spent her early childhood; *Concerto for Orchestra* was commissioned and composed specifically for the Philadelphia Orchestra, an ensemble of players with whom Higdon is personally familiar through her graduate schooling, teaching, and current residence in the "City of Brotherly Love." *blue cathedral* is, without question, her most personal work, reflecting her grief in the wake of her brother's death. This work is examined in more detail below.

Compositional Traits in Orchestral Works

Functional harmony in the traditional sense is not present in the works of Higdon. The most prominent feature of her musical language is the consistent use of perfect fifths that evolved from her earlier employment of major chords. These major chords, however, continue to play a considerable role in her harmonic idiom. When utilizing sustained harmonies, the chords appear frequently in root position and in orchestrating these sonorities Higdon frequently divides a single instrumental group into three parts, supplying each with a note of the chord. Due to a

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Lawdon Press

Hilary Hahn and Jennifer after the first rehearsal of Jennifer's "Violin Concerto", premiered by the Indianapolis Symphony with Mario Venzago conducting.



Lawdon Press

Christoph Eschenbach, Jennifer, and Colin Currie after the world premiere of Jennifer's "Percussion Concerto" with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Jennifer Higdon

lack of traditional harmony in Higdon's music, I am hesitant to use the term "harmonic rhythm," but the often slow rate of such chord changes in these passages creates an ambience of warmth and lushness.

An appealing and oft remarked aspect of Higdon's music lies in her colorful orchestration. Her symphonic works utilize an ensemble that is reminiscent of a late nineteenth-century orchestra with the exception of the greatly expanded percussion section. She provides not only the expected significant rhythmic material for the percussionists, but also melodic themes, a fairly novel idea with roots extending only to the early twentieth-century.

Melodically, Higdon utilizes the abundant and varying timbres of orchestral instruments, contributing extensively to their melodic possibilities while simultaneously experimenting with the "joy of sound." Frequently, the composer chooses less standard instruments such as the English horn and the bass clarinet to feature the always lyrical solos. Their melodic lines may be doubled by instruments with contrasting colors that further demonstrate her self-professed fascination with sound. Ensemble passages employ expansive doublings that balance the diminutive chamber-like sound present during the solo passages.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of Higdon's orchestration is evident in her unorthodox scoring for solo strings. Rather than simply notating a violin solo for the concertmaster, she composes individual lines for the assistant concertmaster or other desks in a string section that result in solos emerging from the depths of the ensemble.

In her symphonic works, Higdon would never be described as avant-garde although experimental qualities are present in her orchestration. Prepared piano, water gong, Chinese health reflex bells and water glasses are employed subtly to evoke ethereal atmospheres. Such technical devices reflect her lineage as a pupil of George Crumb. Because this novel orchestration is used sparingly, it is quite effective in creating mystical ambiances.

blue cathedral

Higdon's *blue cathedral* is her most frequently programmed composition. Commissioned for the Curtis Institute's 75th Anniversary, the work was premiered with Robert Spano conducting the Curtis Symphony Orchestra in Philadelphia on May 1, 2000. In less than a decade, *blue cathedral* has become a staple in the symphonic repertoire -- no small achievement for any modern composition.

While initially conceived as a celebration of the Curtis



Lawdon Press

Jennifer and her brother Andrew. Composing *blue cathedral* was a cathartic and therapeutic experience for Higdon after Andrew's death.

Institute, the composition quickly became much more personal, reflecting Higdon's grief after her only sibling, Andrew Blue Higdon, died of a virulent form of cancer at the age of 33 in June 1998. The two words forming the poetic title are singularly representative of the piece. "Blue" was the middle name of her brother while it also refers to the color of the sky. "Cathedral," according to Higdon, is representative of birth, death, marriage, knowledge, and learning. Because the work was commissioned by an institution of learning, the word "cathedral" seemed fitting. Higdon reflected on the name of the work, "I didn't want to say *blue Curtis* that makes no sense, but cathedral... was just a general picture. I was originally going to call it *blue* but one of my friends said, 'That's not very interesting.' I don't know where cathedral came from... though sometimes words will come in my mind when I'm writing and I'll write them on the margins of my sketches and then I'll go back and something looks like it's supposed to be the title."¹² To her,

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Jennifer Higdon



Lawdon Press

Jennifer Higdon, Ranaan Meyer, Christoph Eschenbach, Zachary DePue, Nicolas Kendall during the rehearsal of Higdon's Concerto 4-3 before its premiere with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

the composition represents “a story that commemorates living and passing through places of knowledge and of sharing and of that song called life”¹³ Naturally, Higdon struggled emotionally while simultaneously grieving and composing. She states, “I cried as I wrote the last two-thirds of the piece. I couldn’t sleep, and I worried that I might have written something incoherent. It wasn’t until the first rehearsal that I realized that I had a piece. Writing it was a cathartic and therapeutic experience. I thought about my brother but also about my students. What makes a life? I lost my brother—what can you take from an experience like that?”¹⁴

While not explicitly programmatic, the flute and clarinet function as “characters” portraying the composer and her late brother. Higdon is represented by her instrument, the flute, while Andrew is depicted by the clarinet, his former instrument. In addition, the composer included the birthdates of her brother and herself in various places throughout the work. Andrew’s birthday was July 13 (7-13) while Higdon was born on December 31 (12-31). The initial flute solo appears before the clarinet because “going first is the privilege of being the older sibling.”¹⁵ The clarinet solo follows in measure 13, the day of Andrew’s birth.

When I approached Higdon about this numerical significance, she responded, “That was amazing. I was thinking after you mentioned that. I had some distant recollection of the 13 because his birthday was on the 13th...but because it was the first year after his death, my brain was so foggy. I just can’t remember certain things

but that felt familiar but I have just not been able to put my finger on it.”¹⁶

Measure 131 (a hybrid of Andrew and Jennifer Higdon’s days of birth) features a brief duet between the flute and clarinet. When questioned about this, Higdon replied, “In terms of measure 131 architectural design...I don’t think it was intentional...I hadn’t noticed that...although it is a little amazing.”¹⁷

Although Higdon may not have intentionally composed this measure to be numerically meaningful, she has not dismissed the possibility of a subconscious catalyst in keeping with her intuitive style. She states, “I think there’s probably something to that. I actually have no doubt. I don’t think that was coincidence. It’s a little too much our two birthdays...it makes sense.”¹⁸

Because Andrew died at the age of 33, the composer also assigned meaning to this number.¹⁹ Following the final clarinet solo, a prepared piano enters in measure 147 to “chime” a perfect fifth interval 33 times. The Higdon family originally believed Andrew’s birthday was July 14th (7-14, rearranged in the measure number). The composer states, “We must have celebrated his birthday on the 14th for 6, 7 or 8 years before my mom found his birth certificate and went, ‘Oh, it’s the 13th.’”²⁰

Originally, the composer did not intend to share the programmatic qualities with the audience; however, Higdon remarked that the audience reaction to the music is the same whether or not the storyline is included in the

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Jennifer Higdon

program notes. Higdon finds the piece adequately serves as a memorial in any circumstances. Following the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center, she realized *blue cathedral's* universality in paying homage to people who have died in various situations. "I hadn't realized how appropriate this piece was...it had been three years since Andy passed away but...it really fit the September 11th ordeal. It was eerie how much...it felt like a memorial sort of piece. Not in a bad way."²¹

blue cathedral has attained an elevated status among modern symphonic compositions. Several explanations account for its continuing popularity. Although the work contains dissonant passages, the composition is aurally pleasing and accessible.

All audience members can relate to the underlying programmatic content, reflecting, as it does, our common humanity. Performers, conductors and critics are drawn to the unique timbres and musicianship required in the individual solos that permeate the composition. *blue cathedral* catapulted the composer into widespread recognition and paved the way for subsequent orchestral commissions that have transformed Higdon's career into a modern-day fairy tale.

Editor's Note: In April, 2010, Higdon won the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto composed for Hilary Hahn. She also won a 2010 Grammy Award in the category of *Best Contemporary Classical Composition* for her *Percussion Concerto*, a 25-minute work for solo percussion and orchestra.

Notes

- ¹ Jennifer Higdon, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2006.
- ² Andrew Clark, *The Financial Times*, March 29, 2004, 17.
- ³ Michael Anthony, *Star Tribune*, September 24, 2005, 2F.
- ⁴ Brenda Rossow Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon: A Stylistic analysis of selected flute and orchestral works," DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2005: 5-7.
- ⁵ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, September 19, 2006.
- ⁶ Karen Rile, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, July/August 2005, <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/0705/feature01sidebar.html>.
- ⁷ Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon," 10.
- ⁸ Jennifer Higdon, e-mail message to author, June 4, 2006.
- ⁹ Vivien Schweitzer, *Gramophone*, September 2003, A1.
- ¹⁰ Renate Brosch, *Musikzeitschriften*, 8.
- ¹¹ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, September 19, 2006.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Jennifer Higdon, *Rainbow Body*, Telarc compact disc 80596.
- ¹⁴ Richard Dyer, *The Boston Globe*, July 13, 2003, Sec. Arts/Entertainment.
- ¹⁵ Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon," 65.
- ¹⁶ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, September 19, 2006.

¹⁷ Jennifer Higdon, Pers. Comm. emails, 10 May 2006 to November 2006.

¹⁸ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, 19 September, 2006.

¹⁹ Jennifer Higdon, *Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Blog*, http://www.pittsburghsymphony.blogs.com/composers/2005/10/blue_cathedral_html#more.

²⁰ Jennifer Higdon, interview by author, September 19, 2006. (Readers interested in the complexities of the birthday numeral significance found in the coda can find a detailed explanation in the 2007 University of Florida dissertation *Comprehensive Analysis of Selected Orchestral Works by Jennifer Higdon* by Christina L. Reitz).

²¹ Phillips, "Jennifer Higdon," 92.

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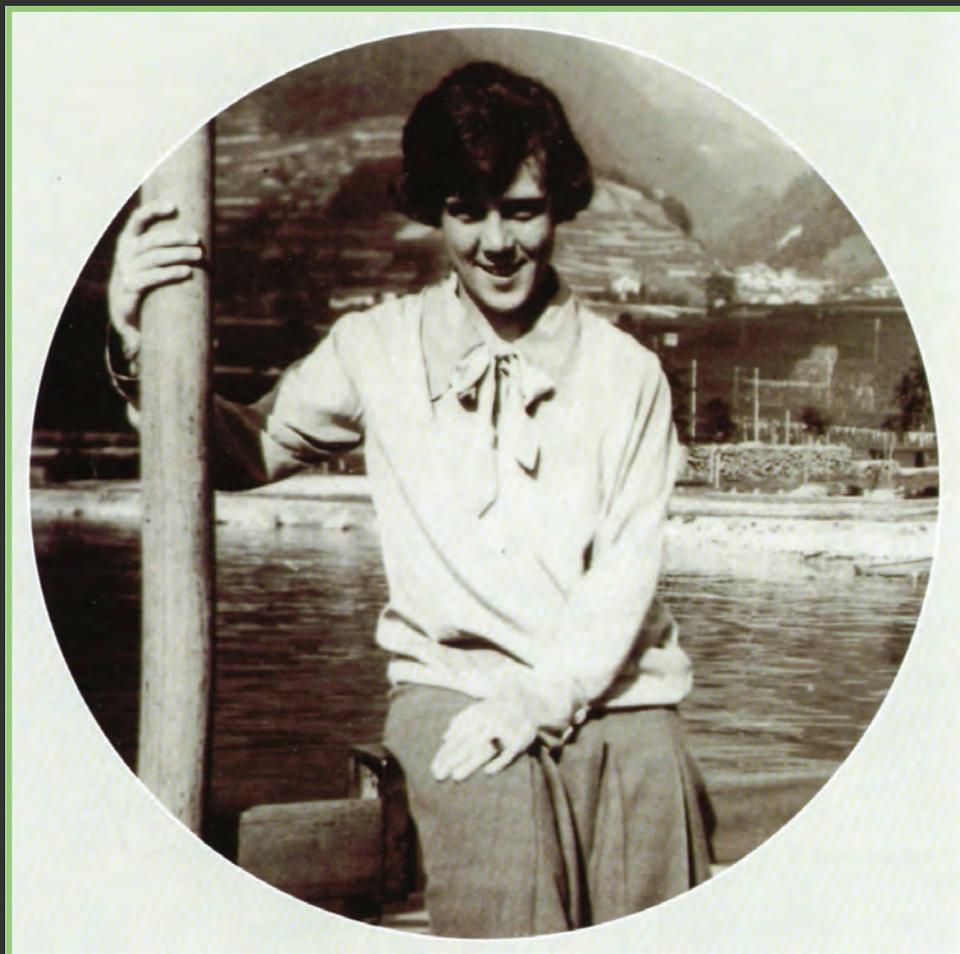
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Pamela Blevins Photo

Restoring the Legacy of



Courtesy Claire Tomalin

Muriel Herbert

The Music of Muriel Herbert

“An important part of the canon of English Song”

I had never heard of Muriel Herbert. Over the years I have always had a soft spot for composers who have been ignored or largely forgotten. I can think of a dozen examples of men and women who have written more or less worthy pieces of music and have disappeared into oblivion. At random, I could mention F. E. Gladstone, Bluebell Klean, H. Holloway and R. H. Walthew. All these composers had symphonies or piano concertos performed during Dan Godfrey’s tenure at Bournemouth.¹ One wonders who has heard of them or their music nowadays. They are the stuff of esoteric investigation. In many cases the scores were in manuscript and have disappeared into oblivion. Very often it is impossible to track down surviving relatives or discover any single thing about their life and work. They are destined to be nothing more than tantalising entries in old concert programmes and reviews in the musical press.

But Muriel Herbert is different. I was browsing in the classical music section of the HMV record store in London’s Oxford Street. I usually check out the “Hs” in case there are any new releases of music by Herbert Howells. There weren’t. However my eye caught a picture of a demure but good-looking lady on the front cover of a CD. I had not noticed it in the browsers before. Something made me imagine that it was an American composer – perhaps I was thinking about Victor Herbert?

I picked up the disc and was amazed to see a track listing comprising some thirty-six songs – settings of a wide variety of mainly British poets. The CD was sealed in a film-wrapping so I could not glance at the liner notes. But what intrigued me most was the first song – a setting of A. E. Housman’s great and well-loved poem *Loveliest of Trees*. That settled it. I did not care who she was, or where she came from. The attractive photograph and the fact that someone had the nerve to set a poem that had been definitively set (for me at any rate) by George Butterworth deserved my attention. I could not resist it and it became my only purchase of that evening.

Reading the liner notes on the Tube yielded yet another surprise. Muriel Herbert’s daughter is the respected author and historian Claire Tomalin. She has been largely responsible for putting her mother’s corpus of music back into the repertoire.

A few weeks later I went to visit Claire Tomalin at her lovely home near Richmond in Surrey. She had extended an invitation to me to come and talk about her mother’s music and to give me an opportunity to examine copies of the original manuscripts and family photographs. It was an invitation I could never have refused. After a welcome cup of

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Courtesy Claire Tomalin



Muriel Herbert, center rear, with her friend Gertrude Newsham, a violinist, and an unidentified woman in Queen Alexandria’s House, the Ladies’ Quarters of the Royal College of Music, between 1918 and 1920.

Muriel Herbert

tea and some cakes and biscuits served in her gorgeous garden, I was able to look through the archive. There were a small number of photographs and a selection of newspaper articles and reviews. However the main bulk of the collection is a complete photocopy of all Muriel Herbert's manuscripts that have been deposited in the British Library. But most important of all was the opportunity to talk to Claire Tomalin about her mother and her music.

This is not the forum to give an extended biography of Muriel Herbert: Her daughter has done this in a major article which appeared in *The Guardian* on May 9, 2009.² However, a few brief notes will prove helpful in situating her musical achievement.

Music in the family

Muriel Emily Herbert was born in Sheffield in 1897 and grew up in Liverpool. The household was a musical one, mainly it seems on the mother's side. Her mother directed a church choir in Liverpool. Yet it was Muriel's brother Percy who had a huge influence on her. He was some ten years older and played the piano. He taught his sister to play from an early age and more importantly to write down any musical ideas that came into her head. At this time Muriel thought that she was destined to become a concert pianist. However, by 1913 she had abandoned this aspiration and had begun to write music – exercises for the piano and song settings of Herrick, Browning, Bridges and Christina Rossetti.

Muriel Herbert entered the Royal College of Music in 1917 and under the auspices of composers and teachers such as Roger Quilter and Charles Villiers Stanford she began to develop her own musical voice. She was well read in poetry and had an especial fascination for W. B. Yeats, Thomas Hardy and James Joyce. For a time, she earned money by teaching before her musical career took off in a somewhat limited way.

Roger Quilter was impressed by her songs and arranged for a number of them to be published. John Barbirolli included her Two Violin Pieces in a concert in the 1920s. During this period she gave broadcasts of her music on the BBC. All this slowly came to an end when she married in 1928 and began to raise a family.

Unfortunately, from the early 1940s Muriel Herbert wrote less and less music, although there were a few recitals and she still taught music and composition. The memory of what had been was largely forgotten. It was rarely discussed with her children. Her confidence as a composer had been lost as new styles of music began to permeate the concert halls and recital rooms.

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Courtesy Claire Tomalin

The young Muriel Emily Herbert ca. 1917 when she first came to London.



Maud Powell Society

Charles Villiers Stanford (1848-1924), was Muriel Herbert's composition teacher at the Royal College of Music.

Muriel Herbert

Claire Tomalin has admitted that she wished she had made a tape recording of her mother's playing and singing. It would have been a fine historical document. However, after her mother's death in 1984 she searched out "every scrap of her music, packed it into folders and took it home to keep." At that time no one appeared to show any interest. She tells the story of how she showed some of this music to a musician who dismissed the works with the statement that "Everyone's mother wrote songs!"

Some fifteen years later, the BBC producer Bill Lloyd rather unexpectedly asked Claire Tomalin to give a talk on radio about Muriel Herbert's music. The programme was called *The Musical Side of the Family*. Five songs, all of which had been published, were recorded by Lloyd, who had been a pupil of Herbert's in the 1960s, and the tenor Richard Lloyd Morgan.

Some six years later, Claire Tomalin was approached by a number of interested musicians and musicologists who encouraged her to explore her mother's manuscripts. It came as a revelation to her and she candidly admitted: "It was an experience like no other in my life, as though I were travelling back in time and looking into the heart and mind of an unknown girl with a creative gift and a touch of genius. I saw that I had failed to understand or appreciate this in her

lifetime. I wondered why she had never sung these songs, or shown them to me. I wanted to ask her about them and the circumstances in which she wrote them. I would understand her better now. Too late. I felt humbled."²

The next step in the rediscovery of Herbert's music happened when Bill Lloyd sent all the songs to the pianist and composer David Owen Norris. Norris showed the songs to the tenor James Gilchrist and the soprano Ailish Tynan who agreed to record a CD devoted to the composer. The CD was released in May 2009 and has received excellent reviews for all the major record magazines and websites.

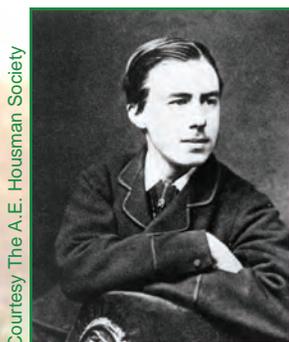
I want to discuss briefly four of Muriel Herbert's songs. I noted above that it was the fact that she chose to set Housman's "Loveliest of Trees" that encouraged me to purchase the CD. Many composers have set this song, but very few have achieved success. One thinks of George Butterworth, Ivor Gurney, Arthur Somervell and E. J. Moeran. Less well known are those by Janet Hamilton, Humphrey Proctor Gregg and Graham Peel. There are many more.

Herbert's setting is superb. It manages to achieve an excellent aural balance between a melody that on face value seems straightforward, and an accompaniment that on paper looks quite involved but in fact is the perfect compliment to

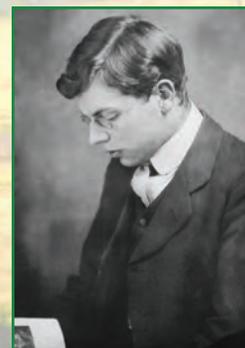
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Courtesy Claire Tomalin



Courtesy The A.E. Housman Society



Poet A. E. Housman's "A Shropshire Lad" has inspired many song settings by composers including Muriel Herbert, George Butterworth, top right, E. J. Moeran, bottom left, and Ivor Gurney.



Both Photographs courtesy Claire Tomalin



Author and historian Claire Tomalin has been largely responsible for ensuring that her mother's music is restored to the repertoire.

Muriel Herbert in the mid-1920s.

Muriel Herbert

the vocal line. This song is largely strophic in its melody, although Herbert cleverly sets the first line of each verse to a different melody. The accompaniment constantly echoes both the singer and itself. The harmonic devices are not complex but do lead to certain instability. Certainly there are some slippery Delius-like progressions here and there. All in all, it is a perfect miniature.

The song that most impressed me on first and subsequent hearings was Herbert's powerful setting of John Masefield's poem "Tewksbury Road" from his collection *Salt Sea Poems and Ballads*. This is a big, masculine piece of music that ideally compliments the outdoor vagabond nature of the words:

*It is good to be out on the road,
and going one knows not where,
Going through meadow and village,
one knows not whither or why,
Through the grey light drift of the dust,
in the keen cool rush of the air,
Under the flying white clouds,
and the broad blue lift of the sky.*

From the very first bar of the long piano introduction to the entry of the voice on a falling third, this song epitomises the freedom of the open road. There have been three or four settings of this poem most notably by Michael Head. However, what is surprising is that Vaughan Williams did not choose to set this song: it would have been a perfect compliment to the mood of "The Vagabond" from *Songs of Travel*. "Tewksbury Road" was recorded as the final number on the CD. It would make an ideal encore to any recital.

Two other songs I wish to note are the very simple but totally effective "Jenny Kissed Me" and the more complex but equally convincing "Faint Heart in a Railway Train."

The first song is barely two pages long yet manages to create not only a convincing song from Leigh Hunt's timeless lyric, but also a concise well-structured entity that balances the sentiment of the two parts of the poem:

*Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in.
Time, you thief! who love to get
Sweets into your list, put that in.*

CONTINUED

Muriel Herbert

*Say I'm weary, say I'm sad;
Say that health and wealth have missed me;
Say I'm growing old, but add –
Jenny kissed me!*

A poignant *meno mosso* passage muses on the poet's concern that he is growing weary or sad, or that he is getting old. This contrasts with the innocence of the opening lines. Yet the song concludes, after a short pause, with an exuberant "Jenny Kissed Me." The piano echoes this mood in the last two bars. It is a near-perfect example of the fusion of words and music.

Thomas Hardy's "Faint Heart in a Railway Train" is a great example of the poetic genre of "What might have been" that haunts the minds of many readers. Yet it is also the creation of an ideal description of a time-stopping moment that makes this poem so memorable:

*At nine in the morning there passed a church,
At ten there passed me by the sea,
At twelve a town of smoke and smirch,
At two a forest of oak and birch,
And then, on a platform, she:*

*A radiant stranger, who saw not me.
I queried, "Get out to her do I dare?"
But I kept my seat in my search for a plea,
And the wheels moved on. O could it but be
That I had alighted there!*

It is strange that Muriel Herbert's setting of this poem appears to be the only one in the standard repertoire. It seems to be ideally suited to the composer's art.

Herbert introduces the song with a definite rhythmic railway sound in the piano accompaniment. Yet the keynote to this song is the way that the piano cunningly echoes the sentiment of the poetic argument. The train motto is followed by something much more impressionistic as the poet spies the "radiant stranger" – yet the "train" is never far away – slowly building up in the left hand the music reflects the fact that the "wheels moved on." The anguish of the last line, "O could it but be/ That I had alighted there!" is heart breaking. The song ends quietly with the train disappearing into the distance – the moment lost for eternity.

Muriel Herbert's major achievement justifiably rests on her corpus of songs. However there are a number of instrumental works among the manuscripts that have been deposited in the British Library. Some of these are impressive and may have a potential for performance, publication and recording.

When I first began to explore Herbert's music I read that there was a Violin Sonata in manuscript. This was exciting news. However the reality is both confusing and disappointing. There are actually two violin sonatas in

existence – one in D minor and the other (possibly) in B flat. Unfortunately neither sonata is complete – only the second and third movements of the first and the slow movement of the second are extant.

I have not heard these sonatas played, but reading through the scores shows works that are both romantic and proficient. Valerie Langfield has played through this music and suggests that "both [the] slow movements are gorgeous." However she judges that the last movement of the D minor sonata may be slightly more problematic although she told me that after the play-through both she and the violinist "found it light; a duet between the two players (all the music is balanced between the players, with melodic fragments dancing back and forth), and it made me wish so much that the piano accompaniment for the first movement had not been lent to a friend of Muriel Herbert's and never returned."

One of the great surprises to emerge from Herbert's works is the Rhapsody for Violin and Piano. This work was composed around 1924 and is perhaps the composer's instrumental masterpiece. It is a big, romantic work with rich harmonies and involved figurations that must surely challenge both players. Reading the score reveals a piece that is self-assured and technically competent. The slow middle section is truly delicious. Finally, two small pieces for violin and piano called *Enchanted April* and *Giboulée* were published by Elkin & Co. in 1921. These pieces are quite

CONTINUED



Muriel Herbert visiting with her friend Lady Douro at Strathfieldsaye, where Herbert gave Lady Douro some music coaching.

Courtesy Claire Tomalin

Muriel Herbert

definitely salon music but are no less worthy for that. They are well described as “charming.” Even a superficial reading of these instrumental works shows that they are written in the same spirit and style as her songs. After playing through these two pieces, Valerie Langfield told me that “there is no difficulty recognising her voice.”

There are two dangers that lie in wait for music critics – two sides of the same coin. First, there can be a tendency to write off any composer’s achievement if it is not generally regarded as being original or contributing a major step change to the art of music. We can think of Sorabji and Schoenberg as examples of this type of “revolutionary” composer. One does not have to delve far into musical history to stumble across composers who have been sidelined and even ridiculed for not being completely innovative or groundbreaking. Three names will suffice: Malcolm Arnold, William Lloyd Webber and York Bowen. Fortunately all three of these have been rehabilitated over recent years.

The other tendency is to hunt the influence. Charles Villiers Stanford is often condemned for writing music in the style of Brahms – often by people that have never heard any of his music. There can be a tendency to suggest that such and such a piece sounds like Debussy or Wagner or whoever springs to mind. Sometimes these can be useful referential markers to allow a listener to make an educated guess as to whether they will enjoy a given composer’s music. But more often than not, the suggestion is that the work in question is less important or vital than the exemplar.

Muriel Herbert is certainly no innovator. None of the music I have seen or heard suggests that she made a major contribution to the *development* of the Western Musical Project. And again there are plenty of opportunities to spot trajectories of musical influence. I wrote in my review of the CD of Herbert’s Songs that “it is difficult to try to suggest the influences that inform Muriel Herbert’s music” and suggested that when this recording had “‘sunk in’ to the repertoire and a deal of her music is republished, it will be possible to tie down allusions and references” in more detail.

Yet some of these trajectories are both obvious and inevitable. The fact that Herbert studied successfully with Charles Villiers Stanford meant that she absorbed a great deal of his facility at song writing alongside his style and mood. But her infatuation with Roger Quilter (until she realised that he was gay) has cast the most significant stylistic marker on her music, yet even this is not universal. Reviewers have noticed other tendencies in her music including echoes of Richard Strauss, Frederick Delius, Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy. It is true to suggest that at the time when Herbert was at the Royal College of Music all these composers would have been part of the regular diet of recitals and concerts.

There is still much to be done in the current reevaluation of Muriel Herbert’s musical career. Whether a full-scale biography would be a viable project is largely for her family to decide. There may be insufficient material available for such a massive undertaking. However, a “small volume” dedicated to her life and achievements in music might well bear fruit. Certainly sufficient music has survived to provide material for an analytical study of her music, possibly a thesis.

The bottom line is that Herbert’s music is brought before the public and generates a permanent presence there. The recently released CD has gone a long way to fulfilling this desideratum.⁴ I understand that it has been selling well and not just to English music aficionados. There might well be sufficient material for a follow-up recording incorporating some of her instrumental music. That is for the future.

Muriel Herbert deserves her place in the history of music. I have suggested above that she is no footnote, but occupied a place similar in stature to composers like C. W. Orr, Graham Peel, Michael Head and Liza Lehmann. This is no mean achievement. She did not compose a mass of music, but what has survived is worthy of performance and deserves to be an important part of the canon of English Song.

Notes:

¹ Conductor Dan Godfrey (1868-1939) founded the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra (now the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra) in 1893 and remained on the podium until 1934. He was a bold programmer who championed British composers and included works by women composers in his concerts.

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/may/09/muriel-herbert-musical-compositions>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Songs of Muriel Herbert, Linn Records #CKD 335, Alish Tynan, soprano, James Gilchrist, tenor, David Owen Norris, piano. Excerpts are available at

<http://www.linnrecords.com/recording-songs-of-muriel-herbert-james-gilchrist-aish-tynan.aspx>

The author thanks Claire Tomalin for her help and encouragement and for her permission to use the excellent photographs of Muriel Herbert. He also thanks Valerie Langfield for her help with evaluating the instrumental pieces.

Please see the next page for a preliminary catalogue of Muriel Herbert’s published works.

Muriel Herbert: A Preliminary Catalogue of Published Works

Stage Music

Candy Floss: an operetta for children
London: Elkin & Co. c.1964

Christmas Eve's Dream: an operetta for children
London: Elkin & Co. c.1963

Come to the Zoo: an operetta for children
London: Elkin & Co. c.1962

Vocal music

Autumn
Words by Walter de la Mare
London: Augener 1926

Beauty
Words by J. Masfield
London: Augener 1923

Can you dance?
Words by Eleanor Farjeon
London: Novello & Company c1962

Carry On: The 'Conway' School Song
Words by Cecil Roberts
Liverpool: James Smith & Son 1917

Contentment
Words by C. L. Lanyon
London: Elkin & Co. 1927

Cradle Song
Words by Algernon Swinburne
London: Augener 1923

The Faithless Shepherdess
c.1938 No details of text or publisher

In Fountain Court
Words Arthur Symons
London: Elkin & Co. 1927

Have you seen but a white Lily grow?
Words by Ben Jonson
London: Augener 1926

I cannot lose thee for a Day.
Words by George Meredith
London: Elkin & Co. 1927

Jock o' Hazeldean.
Words by Sir Walter Scott
Scotch Air arranged for Two Voices and harmonised by the Composer
London: Elkin & Co. 1938

The Lake Isle of Innisfree
Words by W. B. Yeats
London: Elkin & Co. c1928

Loveliest of Trees
Words by A. E. Housman (from
"A Shropshire Lad")
London Augener c. 1923

Merry-go-round and other songs for children
Words by Ada Harrison
London: Elkin & Co. c1961

Most holy Night.
Words by H. Belloc
London: Augener 1926

My Lady
Words by C. Hornby
London: Elkin & Co. 1941

New shoes
Words by Caryl Brahms
London: Novello & Company. c1963

On a time
No details of text or publisher. c1936

Renouncement
Words by A. Meynell
London: Augener 1923

Sing unto the Lord all the earth
Words from Psalm 96
London: Elkin & Co. 1957

The Song of the Bullet
Words by Bret Harte
Glasgow: Paterson Sons & Co. 1921

Stars of the Summer Night
Words by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Glasgow: Paterson Sons & Co. 1921

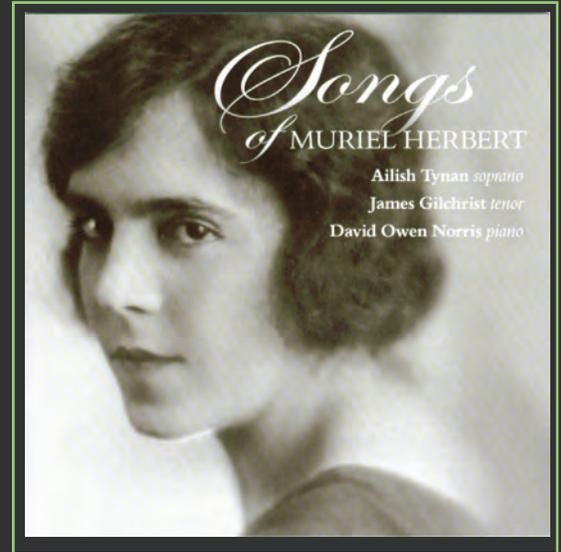
Two Songs: No. 1 *Rose kissed me to-day.*
Words by A. Dobson. No. 2 *Jenny kissed me.*
Words by Leigh Hunt
Glasgow: Paterson Sons & Co. 1921

Violets
Words by G. Meredith
London: Elkin & Co. 1927

When Death to either shall Come
Words by R. Bridges.
London: Augener 1923

Chamber Music

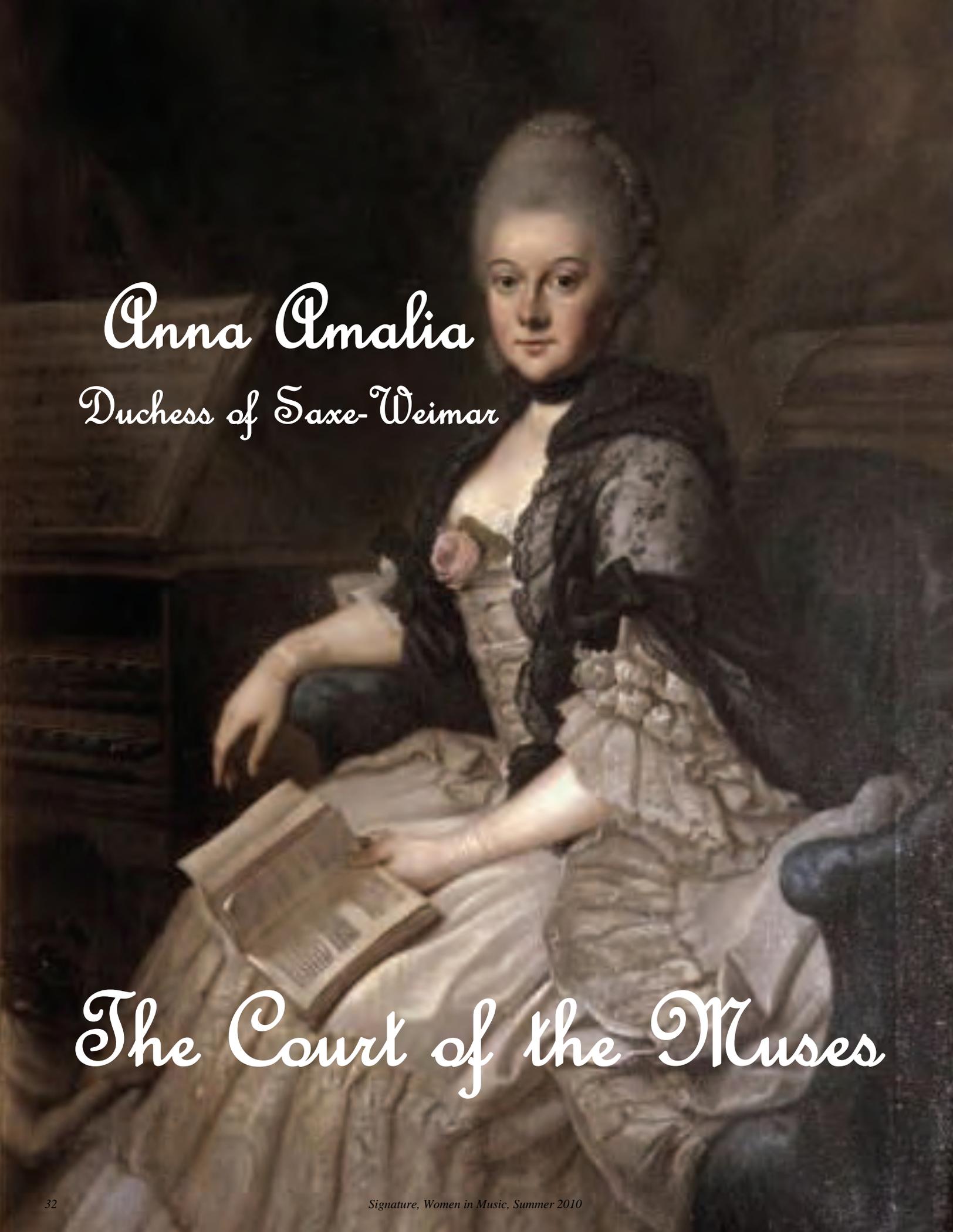
Two Pieces for Violin & Pianoforte. 1.
Enchanted April 2. *Giboulée*
London: Elkin & Co. 1927



Songs of Muriel Herbert. the first recording of her music on the Linn label, features James Gilchrist, tenor, and Ailish Tynan, soprano with David Owen Norris, accompanist.

"Muriel Herbert's music deserves its place alongside the more famous names of the time. Her work has been magnificently served by the artists on this disc. Both Ailish Tynan and James Gilchrist seem to have made a leap forward as interpreters of English song; their diction is beautifully clear, without any recourse to archness or over-emphasis that can so quickly spoil this sort of repertory. David Owen Norris plays all the songs with evident affection and devotion."

Gramophone Magazine
August 2009

A portrait of Anna Amalia, Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, seated and reading a book. She is wearing an elaborate, light-colored dress with ruffles and a dark shawl. Her hair is styled in a high, powdered bun. The background is dark and indistinct.

Anna Amalia
Duchess of Saxe-Weimar

The Court of the Muses

Pamela Blevins

The Poet, Painter and Patron - a Meeting of Great Minds

In the pre-dawn quiet of a September morning in 1786, the poet Johann Goethe, slipped across the Bohemian border carrying only a rucksack and large valise. Tired of his governmental duties at the court of Weimar and wanting to escape the "eternal, gloomy fog" of northern Europe, he set off on an Italian journey that lasted two years.

Goethe's mid-life crisis at 37 would ultimately bring together two of the most celebrated and gifted women in Europe -- the painter Angelica Kauffmann and the composer-patron Anna Amalia, the Grand Duchess of Saxe-Weimar.

Goethe had settled in Weimar in 1775. He soon became the central figure in Anna Amalia's famous Court of the Muses, which glowed with the literary lights of Germany who gathered around the intellectual duchess.

A niece of Frederick the Great, Anna Amalia was born at Wolfenbüttel in 1739. Like her uncle Frederick and his two sisters, she showed musical talent early. She studied the keyboard and musical composition and pursued her passions for art, writing and languages, particularly Greek and Latin.

Early in life, she distanced herself from her parents, convinced that they preferred her brothers and sisters. In 1756, she left their court (Brunswick) when she married 18-year-old Duke Ernst of Saxe-Weimar. Upon arriving at her new home in Weimar, she found Johann Ernst Bach, a nephew of J. S. Bach, serving as music director and she hired a composer, Ernst Wilhelm Wolff, to give her private lessons. The seeds for her Court of the Muses were planted.

Anna had one infant son and was awaiting the arrival of a second child when her 19-year-old husband died. She was unexpectedly thrust into leadership roles as guardian of her two children and Regent at the helm of Saxe-Weimar until her son Karl August would be old enough to take over in 1775.

Able to draw on her own interest in the arts, Anna Amalia found herself in an enviable position. She could easily enliven her court with intellectuals and artists and fulfill the role that contented her most -- as the patron and friend of other artists.

CONTINUED

"Anna Amalia enlivened her court with intellectuals and artists to fulfill her role as the patron and friend of artists."

A Meeting of Great Minds



The young Johann Wolfgang Goethe painted by his friend Angelica Kauffman.

Not long after Goethe's arrival in Weimar, Anna Amalia composed two Singspiels (opera with spoken dialogue) to texts by the young poet-novelist. Her setting of *Erwin und Elmire* with its folk-like character became a popular entertainment that has endured to the present day. As a composer, she was a proficient miniaturist who wrote songs and harpsichord sonatas and occasionally produced successful works in larger forms.

Despite her varied gifts and a growing respect among her peers for her musical achievements, Anna Amalia had no lofty ambitions beyond providing artists like Goethe with a "true home" and a "spiritual family." She was simply content to remain an amateur, a choice which left her ample time to pursue her own studies, collect art, discuss ideas and provide an avenue of enlightenment for others to follow.

In 1788, two years after Goethe had left Weimar, Anna Amalia decided to follow in his footsteps. His letters had painted irresistible word portraits of Venice, Naples, Rome, and an Italian landscape bathed in warm color and alive with scents and sounds. His accounts of friendships with poets, artists, musicians and scholars living and working in Rome intrigued the duchess.

The central figure among Goethe's new friends was the Swiss-born painter Angelica Kauffmann. Two years younger than the Duchess, Kauffmann had settled in Rome in 1782 with her husband Antonio Zucchi, also a painter.

As a child prodigy, she had traveled in Switzerland, Austria and Northern Italy with her father, a minor painter, assisting him in church decoration. She received her first portrait commission at the age of 11 and by her early twenties had been elected to membership in the prestigious Accademia di San Luca in Rome where she and her father lived for a brief period.

In addition to her gift as a painter, Kauffmann was also a fine musician who possessed a beautiful singing voice which forced her to choose between the two arts. After much debating, she finally rejected the "dubious" life of a singer and committed herself to painting.

Many years later in 1794 when she was 53, she recalled this difficult time in her life in a masterwork entitled *The Artist Hesitating Between the Arts of Music and Painting*.

Like Anna Amalia, Kauffmann was a highly original woman who influenced the lives and work of others. During the 15 years she lived in England (1766-1781), she charmed London society and became a leading

Pamela Blevins

A Meeting of Great Minds

painter whose portraits and historical canvases commanded large sums of money. Only a year after arriving in the city, "the poetess of the brush" was able to buy a house.

Eventually Kauffmann paid a high personal price for her success. Her popularity led to jealousy and discord among artists and opened her personal life to misrepresentation. The painter John Constable branded her "decadent."

Kauffmann married Zucchi in 1781 and left England for the Continent, staying first in Venice before moving on to Rome. Once settled in Rome, she was acknowledged as the most successful painter living in the city. Society revolved around her. Poets immortalized her in verse and people in the streets saluted her passing carriage.

As he had done in Weimar, Goethe attracted much attention in Rome. He was soon the favored companion of Angelica Kauffmann, accompanying her to museums, sitting for his portrait, reading his poems and plays to her. She designed the frontispiece for his play *Egmont* and painted a scene from *Iphigenie* which, he wrote, "shows both her delicate sensibility and her capacity to translate life into terms of her own medium." To Goethe, Angelica Kauffmann was "the inestimable lady."

When Anna Amalia announced plans for her own Italian journey in the autumn of 1789, Goethe devised a program for her visit that was "a masterpiece" of planning. Knowing that a strong artistic affinity existed between the Duchess and Kauffmann he ensured that they would meet and felt confident that a friendship would blossom. He found a beautiful house with a garden for Anna Amalia and arranged for her to spend her first month in Rome absorbing its art and antiquities primarily in the company of Angelica Kauffmann.

How rare it was for two gifted and celebrated women to meet as men met, freely and openly as equals sharing their passions for music and painting, discussing their ideas, their working methods, and their disappointments and achievements in their chosen arts. Angelica Kauffmann drew the Duchess into her world and made her welcome. They toured museums, attended grand dinners and concerts and undoubtedly Kauffmann introduced the Duchess to dealers who helped her locate and purchase books, music, coins, engravings of antiquities and paintings to add to Weimar's already fine Italian collections.

Anna Amalia journeyed beyond Rome in the company



A self-portrait by Angelica Kauffmann.

of others, visiting Naples and Pompeii where Wilhelm Tischbein painted her among the ruins. Upon returning to the city, the Duchess rented a villa near Kauffmann's home. The two women continued to meet frequently until Anna Amalia left the city in May 1789 to continue her Italian journey. She returned to Weimar in the summer of 1790, "well and contented as one is when one returns from paradise," Goethe wrote.

Angelica Kauffmann remained in Rome for the rest of her life. After the death of her husband in 1795, she became less active as an artist. The Napoleonic campaigns in Italy had ebbed the flow of visitors to Rome and Kauffmann's commissions declined. However, she had become a wealthy woman and was no longer dependent on her art for her income.

The two women did not meet again, but they did come together again in 1807 for Goethe who mourned the deaths of the two most influential women in his life. Anna Amalia, the Duchess of Saxe-Weimar died on April 10 and Angelica Kauffmann followed her seven months later when she died on November 5.

A Difficult Choice

Throughout the ages women have made great contributions to art, music and literature. Many, like Angelica Kauffmann, possessed more than one artistic gift and had to decide early in life which path to follow. Meet a few of the women who had to choose:

Maria Malibran (1808-1836), Spanish opera singer, was also a gifted artist who painted portraits seriously and drew caricatures to amuse herself. She was also an avid sportswoman and a highly accomplished equestrian.



Malibran



Viardot-Garcia

Pauline Viardot-Garcia (1821-1910), French-born Spanish opera singer, was the younger sister of Malibran. Throughout her long life she faced many dilemmas about her direction in the arts. She was a fine painter who could easily have made a success in that field but chose instead to follow the family tradition in opera. After she left the stage, she was encouraged to pursue a career as a virtuoso pianist (she had studied with Liszt) but preferred instead to compose music for family and friends and to teach. She was also a superb linguist.

Augusta Holmès (1847-1903), Irish-French composer, who had to choose between a career in music or painting. She chose music but eventually put her skills as an artist to good use to design costumes and scenery for her own stage works. She was also an accomplished poet and possessed a gift for languages.



Holmès



Voynich

Lady John Scott (Alica Anne Spottiswood), (1810-1900), Scottish composer of the famous "traditional" songs *Annie Laurie* and *Loch Lomand*, was also a poet, singer (she studied with the father of Malibran and Viardot-Garcia), harpist and artist (she studied watercolor with Peter DeWint). Her drawings were often used to illustrate articles which appeared in archaeology journals.

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), English composer and writer. After her hearing began to fade, she turned her creative energy to words and earned a reputation as a "writer of genius" producing travel books and memoirs.

Ethel (Boole) Voynich (1864-1960) was the youngest of five gifted daughters of the mathematician George Boole (inventor of Boolean Logic) and Mary Everest Boole, a mathematician and educator. Ethel was a pianist and composer who had studied music in Berlin. She lived a life of adventure as a revolutionary devoted to Russian causes. In 1898, her novel *The Gadfly* was published and remains in print today and is still popular in Russia, where she became a modern icon. Voynich was also a translator (Chopin's letters). She settled in New York City in the 1920s, where she composed and lectured.

Other women who possessed more than one artistic gift

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848), German composer and poet

Madeleine Dring (1923-1977), English composer and actress

Angiola Teresa Moratori (1662-1708), Italian composer and painter

Joyce Finzi (1907-1991) English musician, artist and poet

Julie Candeille (1767-1834) French composer, actress, singer and playwright

Emilie Mayer (1821-1883), German composer and sculptor

Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), French actress, painter, sculptor, playwright

Elizabeth Poston



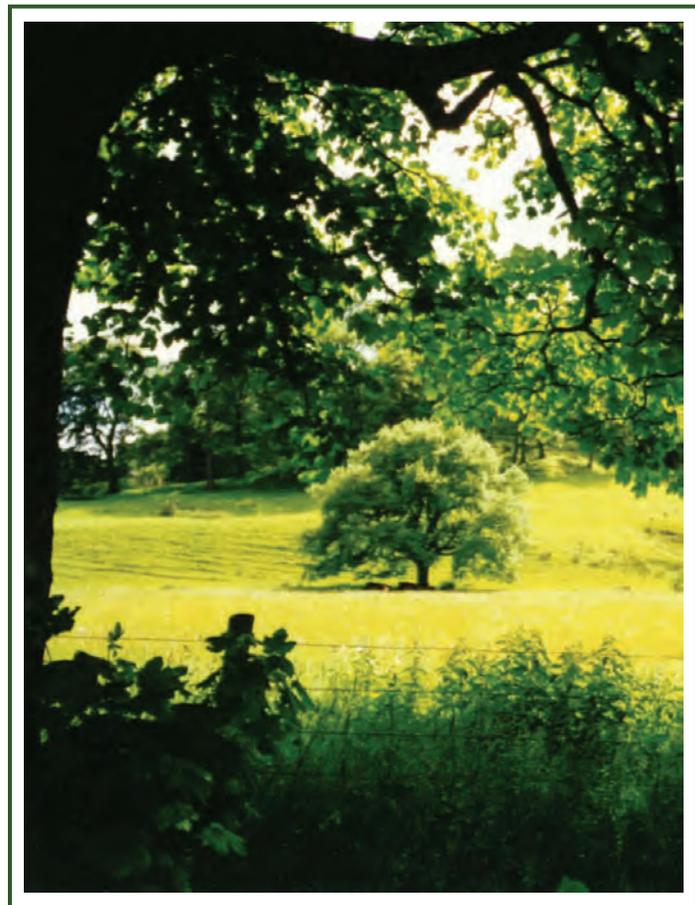
The Rhythms and Sounds of the Countryside

John S. Alabaster

Elizabeth Poston Tuning into Nature

Nurtured in rural Hertfordshire, Elizabeth loved the English countryside – its wildlife, its peace and beauty, and especially the views to the west of her home, Rooks Nest House, Stevenage. These views were equally beloved by her friend E. M. Forster, who lived in the house as a boy and wrote about them in his novel *Howards End* (1910), a book based upon the house and its inhabitants. Appropriately enough, when *Howards End* was televised by the BBC in 1970, it was Elizabeth who wrote the music for it.

In the copious writing that Elizabeth kept up all her life, there are many references to the rhythms and sounds of the countryside. She had a perceptive ear even for the cawing of resident rooks holding their parliaments on her lawn, the swish of steel scything through surrounding grassy meadows; and the rhythmic variations and “pail pitch” of hand milking from the farm nearby. She even claimed to have been able to hear earthworms moving through the soil, which to a country-lover who has disturbed worms at dawn would be natural enough. She relished too the lilt of the local country dialect; indeed, it was the music of words that guided Elizabeth in her choice of texts for her song arrangements. She was particularly concerned with maintaining a balance between words or solo line and accompaniment whether instrumental or vocal, as we can appreciate in the best known of her works, *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree*.



Pamela Blevins Photo

Elizabeth Poston loved the lilt of the local country dialect and the music of its words that guided her in her choice of texts for her song arrangements.

Compositions in the attic

That she is not better known for her other 300 compositions is largely attributable to most having been set aside in her attic, for she tended to lose interest once a work had been composed and performed – many commissioned and broadcast by the BBC. In any case, she developed distrust of music publishers after bad experiences with some in negotiating fair contracts and in receiving timely payment. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the recent trickle of newly published works prompted by the celebration in 2005 of the centenary of her birth will eventually swell into a discernable flow from the present copyright holder, Campion Press.¹

Elizabeth came from a privileged background – good private schooling (shared with members of the Royal Family), including lessons in violin, viola and piano, travel abroad in Italy and France (she became fluent in French as well as German) and study at the Royal College of Music. There she gained prizes in composition

“She had a perceptive ear even for... the swish of steel scything through surrounding grassy meadows.”

CONTINUED

John S. Alabaster



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Elizabeth Poston's home, Rooks Nest, Stevenage in Herefordshire, England, the former home of novelist E.M. Forster.

Elizabeth Poston

and was greatly influenced by Ralph Vaughan Williams, then Professor of Composition. As she said, “for most of my life he was to me friend, mentor and father in place of the father I lost too early.”

Elizabeth also made a point of meeting and becoming the closest of friends with Philip Heseltine (alias Peter Warlock) with whom she shared a strong interest in 16th and early 17th century poetry and music. She felt that he had been badly misjudged by Cecil Gray and sought to put the record straight, particularly in a definitive series of broadcasts including one titled *Dispelling the Jackalls* in 1964.² His death in 1930 some six years after they had met was a considerable shock. Her health at the time was poor but it seems she recovered her zest for life during a holiday with her mother in the Far East in 1934, enthusiastically about her impressions in copious correspondence.

Up to the outbreak of war in 1939, Elizabeth made several visits to her diplomat brother in the Near East and continued her exploration of Europe. Looking back on this period she wrote:

I worked for the British Council in the Near East and in archaeological and other jobs [she broadcast from Jerusalem, for example], in amanuensis and scoring. Everything impressed me except such as I learned to reject. I

was starting from scratch and it was like receiving the force of the whole ocean. As the music I heard ranged from the Vatican Choir and Opera in Paris, Bach in Germany, Mozart in Salzburg, Bedouin in the desert, to the folk music of Central Europe, it isn't possible to specify. This cosmopolitan artistic life was the air I breathed, a natural element. The fact that I had these chances was in itself an education. Through it, I learned to discriminate.³

Elizabeth's powers of discrimination were soon to be tested when she joined the BBC under Arthur Bliss, becoming responsible for the selection, rehearsal, recording and broadcasting of music and music-related topics. In March 1945 the BBC forwarded a letter sent from an appreciative widow in France who had also lost her only son in the war:

So I will thank you for your beautiful progress. Polish, Tchechoslovaque, Ukraine music – and English, all so well selected. And lately the delightful Portuguese songs and melodies!! Sometimes it makes me weep, but it is good to weep. [...] And once more: all my thanks for the in[de]fatigable voice coming from London – London the heart of the world for five years!⁴

CONTINUED

Elizabeth Poston

Elizabeth's huge workload was carried out under the most difficult of wartime conditions, including the bombing of BBC buildings, yet she still found time to perform at the piano. Furthermore, behind the scenes, she had had to keep in touch with resistance movements in Europe, regularly sending out crucial coded musical messages.⁵ The details of this secret work she would never divulge, but it proved to be a considerable strain on her health since the slightest mistake could have been fatal for so many.

Individual place and purpose

Elizabeth did not marry and in her pocket diary of 1942 declared: "I had never made any vow against marriage but I had long, long been persuaded it was a state for me of too much hazard, too little promise to draw free from my individual place and purpose." Much of that purpose arose from her special love of poetry and folksong, particularly English folksong, though she collected and arranged material from all over the world.⁶ She embarked upon her Italian songs, stemming from the time she lived in Italy, because she felt that they were less well known than those of Spain.⁷ She wanted to do for them what Maurice Ravel had done for the Greeks and Manuel de Falla had for the Spanish – "not to set the songs as they are sung unadorned, but to catch in the setting something of their atmosphere and background."

Most of Elizabeth's compositions are of choral works, together with solo songs, song arrangements, vocal collections and one crazy operetta (reflecting her wicked sense of humor). About a quarter of her output is comprised of incidental orchestral music and pieces for various solo or chamber groups.⁸ There are no symphonies or concertos, for Elizabeth liked small-scale, intimate, subtle composition.

During her wartime period at the BBC, Elizabeth became acquainted with a huge number of contacts. Many became close friends like the pianist and composer William Busch. He was very much on the same musical wavelength as Elizabeth, who arranged for his work to be broadcast. She corresponded with him frequently and at length over matters of mutual interest until his tragic, premature death in January 1945. These letters provide the greatest insight into her thoughts in general about music, music-making and musicians and, in particular, about William and his music.⁹ Like much of the rest of her voluminous correspondence, they reveal Elizabeth as a caring and true friend, engaging with a wide spectrum of society – her brother, gardeners, school-fellows, *au pairs* of varied nationality and their parents, aristocrats,



Photograph by Peter Boorman

Elizabeth Poston relaxing with her terriers Comfort and Pinkie.

*Elizabeth liked small-scale,
intimate, subtle composition*

CONTINUED

Elizabeth Poston

animal-owners, children, infirm servants, amateur musicians, budding song-writers, up and coming soloists, beekeepers, wind-mill enthusiasts. The list goes on.

North America

After the war Elizabeth took a well-deserved break in North America with her mother Clementine. There she met the Canadian composer Jean Coulthard, with whom she formed an enduring friendship. Jean often visited Elizabeth in England and traveled with her in Europe.

They had much in common, including their love of music and literature and of France and the French.¹⁰ As women composers in a man's world, they empathized with each other and found mutual support in their intense, intimate friendship. Living in an England impoverished by the Second World War, Elizabeth gained considerable consolation and material benefit from Jean's Canadian generosity. In 1951 Elizabeth wrote *A Garland of Laurel – In Praise of Women* for flute, strings and tenor. The work was commissioned by the Society of Women Composers of which she later became President. She dedicated *The Lullaby of a Lover* (George Gasgoine, 1575) to Jean. Clearly, Jean was a friend with whom she shared thoughts and feelings she would share with no one else.¹¹

Although Elizabeth had decided to be a freelance musician, working from home, she continued to be involved with the BBC. In 1946 she was asked through Douglas Cleverdon to spend a year to establish, with the help of an expert panel, a new BBC Third Programme of quality music and literature. She called it "that splendidly idealistic phoenix that was to arise from the jaws of hell.... We came to it, I and my contemporaries, as artists, amateurs of the medium: writers, painters, poets, designers, actors, musicians, an enormously divergent motley, humorously individual, united in one cause. As strange a company as ever came together. And yet it worked."¹² The BBC also commissioned much of her output of music which reached a peak in the 1950s. Subsequently the BBC engaged her as a special listener to report to its Music Advisory Panel on broadcast music. She carried out this latter task conscientiously from 1959 to 1974, filing perceptive and fair criticism of several hundred programmes and of thousands of performers.

Without salaried employment, however, Elizabeth's financial position was generally precarious, made more so by her determination to preserve Rooks Nest House for the nation. This would require not only its purchase, its expensive maintenance and its improvement but the

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Douglas Cleverdon, the BBC producer and book publisher, who asked Poston to help establish the BBC Third Programme of quality music and literature.



Poston with harpist David Watkins with whom she collaborated closely during the 1960s.

Copyright David Watkins

Elizabeth Poston

accumulation of enough capital to endow it. A potential obstacle to her purpose loomed in 1946 when Stevenage began to expand into a New Town, threatening to destroy both the house and the surrounding beloved countryside. This threat remained a continual, debilitating worry throughout her life and was held in bay only through the ready help of E. M. Forster, by international support and eventually the establishment of a local group, The Friends of the Forster Country.¹³

The problems of life

Elizabeth continued to cope with the problems of life at Rooks Nest House – those of the property, of her beloved mother’s deteriorating health and eventual painful death, of the ailing health of a faithful servant and finally of her own health. A fall at the age of 81 in October 1986 kept her in hospital for months with a broken shoulder and pelvis. Despite this accident she continued to compose.

The following March, she explained to her friend Gunnvor Stallybrass whose deceased husband Oliver had been responsible for editing the Abinger edition of *Howards End*: “I have somehow managed to get my Choral Setting [for massed voices of the Women’s Deca-centennial Day of Prayer] done for the Albert Hall do, now in rehearsal, & I am told, going well, and liked. I have called it *My Settled Rest*, a quotation from its words, a very beautiful 18C paraphrase of the *Twenty Third Psalm* which I have re-fashioned with harp on a lovely early tune. Perhaps it will reach Oliver.” Elizabeth loved the harp, making use of it in about half her compositions.

Elizabeth had also been working on a book of carols which was still only half finished when she died. Malcolm Williamson, Master of the Queen’s Music who had met her a few years earlier, readily and generously completed it, writing a comprehensive introductory essay and setting some thirty items, about half the total.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Elizabeth’s story has not yet been told in full, nor has all her music been published. But those who have known her or have read what she has written or seen what little has been written about her and heard her music are left with a deep impression of a truly remarkable person.

She was of undoubted talent as a musician (composer, performer, critic and broadcaster), demanding the highest standards of herself and others; a meticulous scholar; impressive behind the microphone; a great raconteur, given to a little spicy exaggeration; always elegant whether in evening gown or draped in her French shepherd’s woolly jacket over jeans; and, above all a person of great humanity, sympathetic to the interests and needs of others.



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Elizabeth Poston wearing a French shepherd’s old woolen jacket.

Elizabeth received a belated Civil List Award which carried a special pension, but she died before she could benefit from it. Her own “settled rest” had finally come on March 18, 1987. A small plaque commemorating the centenary of her birth has been placed next to the monument to E. M. Forster in the graveyard of St. Nicholas Church, Stevenage, where her parents are interred.

Notes:

¹ Elizabeth Poston’s newly published works are:

Fanfare for Hallé, for Brass Quintet (2005) written to celebrate the 70th birthday of her friend Sir John Barbirolli and formulated on the initials of himself, his wife, Evelyn Rothwell and the Hallé orchestra. She wrote, “the piece isn’t difficult: it requires on toes playing!”;

Blackberry Fold – Requiem for a Dog, for String Orchestra and Flute (2005), dedicated to A. W. Friese-Greene and written after she had buried her pet dog under a blackberry thicket in her

CONTINUED

Elizabeth Poston

garden. She explained: “The swaying 5/4 folk song figure, something in my system, was particularly and consciously there at the time – we had already been recording *The Nativity* and it was in my mind, so I let it be in the music, a private process of threads of thoughts over a spell of years”;

Harlow Concertante, for String Orchestra and String Quartet (2005), marking the 21st anniversary of Harlow New Town, first performed with the Alberni String Quartet, 1969, London Première 2006;

The Hosanna for Choir and Organ (2009), dedicated to King Edward VI Grammar School, Southampton for the 300th anniversary of the birth of a former pupil Isaac Watts, in 1974;

Sei Canzoni (Six Songs) for Mezzo-soprano, Clarinet, and Piano (2009) using poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82) in a

sequence about love – expressing its hopes, its tribulations, its maternal feelings and, finally, its loss.

An English Day-Book for Choir and Harp (2009), commissioned for the Farnham Festival in 1967 and given its first performance in Australia two years later, has been described by John Gardner as linking “together a sequence of sacred and profane poems in which the small-scale happenings of the day are symbolically identified with the procession of the seasons of the year and, by further augmentation, with the span of life itself.” Described as a neglected masterpiece, it received its first performance in Scotland on 17 April 2010 by the National Girls Choir of the National Youth Choir of Scotland and was recorded in May (with the *Symphony of Carols* by Benjamin Britten) for release by Signum Records in November.

² *Elizabeth Poston: Post-Centenary 2005 Appreciation*. Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 138 pp. (2007).

³ *Elizabeth Poston: Her Own Words*, Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 91 pp. (2008).

⁴ The letter, dated 2 March 1945 from Madame S. R. Peyronnet of Bures-Sur-Yvette, was found folded in Elizabeth’s pocket diary of that year.

⁵ *Elizabeth Poston Centenary, 2005: Contributed Articles and Personal Letters*. Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 129 pp. 2006.

⁶ See, for example, the scholarly *The Penguin Book of Christmas Carols* (1963), *The Penguin Book of American Folk Songs* (1965) with Alan Lomax, *The Second Penguin Book of Christmas Carols* (1970) and *The Faber Book of French Songs* (1972) with Paul Arma.

⁷ *Tuscan Songs* (1935) and *Sette Canzoni* (Seven Italian Folk Songs) for Soprano or Mezzo-soprano & piano (1945).

⁸ A list of Elizabeth Poston’s published music is given in *Elizabeth Poston, Composer: Her Life at Rooks Nest* by Margaret Ashby, The Friends of the Forster Country, 40 pp. (2004) and also in *Beyond the Apple Tree: The Published Music of Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)*, Doctorate Thesis by Jamie C. Bartlett, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 101 pp. (1996).

⁹ *Elizabeth Poston: Letters to William and Sheila Busch*. John S. Alabaster (Ed.) and Julia Busch, The Friends of the Forster Country, 144 pp. 2009.

¹⁰ Professor William Bruneau has highlighted what they had in common.

¹¹ *Elizabeth Poston: Post-Centenary 2005 Appreciation*. Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 138 pp. (2007); *Elizabeth Poston: Her Own Words*, Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 91 pp. (2008).

¹² *Elizabeth Poston Centenary, 2005: Contributed Articles and Personal Letters*. Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 129 pp. 2006,

¹³ *Elizabeth Poston: Her Own Words*, Ed., John S. Alabaster, The Friends of the Forster Country, 91 pp. (2008).

¹⁴ *A Book of Christmas Carols* by Elizabeth Poston & Malcolm Williamson. Simon & Schuster, London, 1988.



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Elizabeth Poston and Comfort in the drawing room at Rooks Nest in the 1980s.

Survey of the BBC Proms Reveals That Women Are Not Given Equal Opportunities

For some years Women in Music (United Kingdom) has been doing a survey of the numbers of women represented in the BBC PROMS season. The Proms is the largest music festival in the world, with up to 76 evening concerts, nearly all for full orchestra, as well as chamber music concerts and other related events. Audiences in the Royal Albert Hall are of many thousands, and all the concerts are broadcast, many on television.

The BBC generally has a good record with regard to women - for instance in their orchestras - so if the inclusion of women in the Proms seems low, one can take it that the story is probably worse in other festivals and concert seasons.

Indeed, WiM investigated some other festivals over several years and found that, with a few honourable exceptions, the Proms season was fairly typical. So it was decided to continue with Proms surveys.

The figures represent the number of women vs. men included in the programmes.

2010 Proms

Composers: 7/146 (4.1%) This has gone down from the last 2 years, which were 5% and 4.6%. Two of the women composers are from Proms programmes resurrected from past years (1910 & 1919). Of the 5 living women composers, only two are to be performed in evening concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, and one of these is a piece only 5 minutes long. The other 3 works by living women are for matinee concerts at a smaller venue. The figure for living composers is: 5/38.

Conductors: 1/63 - much like last year. Isabelle van Keulen will be directing from the leader's chair for only 2 items out of 5 in this concert.

Instrumental soloists: 13/61 (21%) - similar to the past few years.

Looking at BBC commissions and co-commissions, we find 3 out of 14 have been given to women composers. These are: Tansy Davies for a substantial evening orchestral work, Alissa Firsova for a 5 min work, and Thea Musgrave for a choral work scheduled for an afternoon matinee. With 11 BBC commissions going to male composers, one wonders how women will ever catch up!

PROMS SURVEY 1989 - 2010

It all began in 1989 when I was leafing through the Proms booklet and was struck by the contrast between the pages listing singers - half of whose photos were of women - gifted, famous, glamorous women - and the pages listing composers, instrumental soloists and conductors, most of whom were men. I have never heard anyone claim that women singers are inferior to men singers - in technique, in musicianship, in personality, ambition, dedication, drive, "seriousness", or any of the other qualities which might be needed for an international

career. Yet these are all reasons which are given to explain the imbalance in numbers between men and women who reach the top in other areas of music-making.

Clearly there are fewer women at the top in every field except singing. It is therefore even more important that our main music festivals should engage some of those outstanding women musicians who are available.

Here is a retrospective look at the figures WIM has been compiling since 1989:

Women in the Proms

1989

Composers: 1

Conductors: 1 out of 48

Instrumental soloists: 7 out of 45

1990

Composers: 1

Conductors: 0 / 43

Instrumental soloists: 13 / 47

1992

Composers: 1 / 103

Conductors 1 / 50

Instrumental soloists: 11 / 46

1993

Composers: 1 / 100

Conductors: 2 / 53

Instrumental soloists: 11 / 66

The 1994 Proms presented some better figures:

Composers: 5 / 118

Conductors: 2 / 50

Instrumental soloists: 13 / 42

CONTINUED

Survey of the BBC Proms

In 1900, a single Prom concert contained works by 2 women composers. As we approached 2000, an entire season without any women composers at all was hard to understand. Which century were we waiting for?

1997

Composers: 5 women (only one full-length work, plus 2 short pieces & 2 songs)

Conductors: 2 / 55

Instrumental soloists: 8 / 39

1998

Composers 5 / 111

Conductors 1 / 57

Instrumental soloists 4 / 27

1999

Composers: 6 / 144 (only 2 are included in the main concerts. The others are in late night or lunchtime concerts)

Conductors: 1 / 57

Instrumental soloists: not counted

2000

Composers: 3 / 113 (one is a BBC commission. The other 2 are in afternoon or lunchtime concerts)

Conductors: 3 (only one has a full evening concert)

Instrumental soloists: 12 / 47

As usual there were plenty of admirable women musicians who are singers - 54 of them - proving that women CAN get to the top provided they do it with their voices!

2001

Composers: 3 / 120 (2.5%) (all 3 included in evening concerts, and one a BBC commission)

Conductors: 0 / 56

Instrumental soloists: 15 / 66

2002

Composers: 3 / 126

Conductors: 0 / 56

Instrumental soloists 9 / 51

2003 Composers: 5 / 111 (4.5%) (There were 4 BBC Commissions and 3 BBC co-commissions, making 7 pieces by 5 composers. Several of these were in late night or lunchtime concerts)

Conductors: 2 / 64

Instrumental soloists: 4 / 45 (9%) (One of the lowest figures in these surveys)

2004

Composers: 2 / 123 (1.5%) (The worst year since 1996)

Conductors: 1 / 56

Instrumental soloists: 14 / 64 (22%) (The best result yet)

2005

Composers 4 / 112 (3.6%)

Conductors: 2 / 62

Instrumental soloists: 10 / 39 (25.6%) (Better still)

Among historical composers one might expect the record to be lacking in women, but what about living British composers being played in the Proms in 2005? Of 17 of them, 16 were men. There were 9 BBC commissions and co-commissions. All men.

2006

Composers 0/105 (this includes 27 living composers)

Conductors 0/52

Instrumental soloists: 9/65 (14%)

2007

Composers 5/118 (this includes 30 living composers).

Only one substantial work by a woman in the main evening concerts, whereas there were substantial works by 26 living men in the evening concerts.

Conductors 2/67 (2.9%)

Instrumental soloists 5/53 (9.4%). Much lower than usual.

2008

Composers 6/117 (5%). This is equal highest with 1999. The difference is that 5 of the women's works are in main evening concerts, and the other in a popular weekend afternoon concert. (In 1999 only 2 of the 6 women were played in evening concerts. Most of the other years the women's works were often in lunchtime concerts or late night concerts)

Living composers 4/28 (14%)

Conductors 1/55 (1.8%). Remains very low. At least this is in main evening concert. (But since it is a Glyndebourne Opera production, would have been a Glyndebourne choice of conductor.)

Instrumental soloists 11/62 (18%). Better than the last few years, although not as good as 2006 (22%) and 2005 (25.6%)

2009

Composers 6/128 (4.6%) All women composers are included in evening concerts, although 2 of the pieces are very short (5' & 8'). Same number as last year, but the percentage is less.

Living composers 6/39 (15%)

Conductors 1/64

Instrumental soloists 19/86 (22%)

2010 See first page.

Lest we forget...

Marion Scott writes on “British Women as Instrumentalists”

Editor’s Note: *In this feature we publish articles from the past about women in music that provide information not readily available now. Marion Scott was an influential and highly respected critic and musicologist. This piece appeared in the Chamber Music Supplement of The Music Student in February 1918.*

Purcell remarked quaintly in one of his prefaces that England “being farther from the sun, we are of later Growth than our Neighbour Countries, and must be content to shake off our Barbarity by degrees.” Certainly England has been slow to adopt the idea that women could play orchestral instruments, and to all intents and purposes women instrumentalists are a development of our own time, though we know that in Italy, two hundred years ago, admirable orchestras existed at the four great Conservatoires in Venice, composed entirely of women. Anyone who is interested in the subject can read the diverting accounts of these performances, given by Dr. Burney and others.¹

Women as Solo Players

But in England women were expected to let all instruments severely alone, with the exception of the organ, piano, and harp. Possibly the organ was considered respectable on account of St. Cecilia ; the piano—well, Queen Elizabeth set a good example by playing the virginals ; and the harp was calculated to display a well-turned arm. It is a fact that before 1838 no female students entered at the Royal Academy of Music in any subject save these three. There may have been sporadic violinists earlier elsewhere, but a few drops of rain don’t make a river, and it seems as if the real impetus towards instrumental work has come partly from the example of that great woman violinist, Wilhelmine Norman Neruda (born in Moravia, 1839), and partly from the general awakening connected with the Women’s Franchise movement.²

The violin was the first orchestral instrument to be much played by girls, and to this day it remains the favourite. In 1876 a violin scholarship at the R.A.M. was won by Julia Nolte, and by the eighties the “lady violinist” was an accepted, though still rather striking fact.³ That admirable teacher, Prosper Sainton, attracted some very gifted pupils to the R.A.M. ; while the opening of the

Royal College of Music, in 1883, provided another channel for the rising tide of music, and these two great institutions have continued to exert a profound and beneficent influence, the number of women students at both schools being far greater than that of men.⁴

Mention should also be made of the hundreds of women instrumentalists who have studied at such other foundations as the Guildhall School of Music, Trinity College of Music, Royal Manchester College of Music, Birmingham and Midland Institute, etc. But while these places have continued always with us, a large number of women violinists were drawn to complete their studies abroad under the great teachers who had a world-wide fame.

There have been three distinct phases. First that which centred round the Hochschule and the glorious art of Joachim in Berlin; then the Sevcik phase, in which pupils flocked to Prague, to amaze the world later by the marvelous technique attained under that distinguished teacher’s methods ; and third and last, the Leopold Auer era, when a number of our foremost women violinists completed their training with him in Russia.⁵ Then came the war, which cut a sharp line across all foreign influences, and threw British musicians back upon the resources of their own country, though not before such players as Marie Hall, May Harrison, her sister Beatrice Harrison, the ‘cellist, and others, had demonstrated to Europe and America how well British artists can hold their own with those of any country.⁶

Women as Ensemble Players

Not less interesting than the progress of women to the front rank as solo players has been their work in ensemble. The Shinner Quartet (led by Emily Shinner) was first in the field, and its fine example has been splendidly followed by such organizations as the Nora Clench, Edith Robinson, Langley-Mukle, Lucas and Egerton Quartets.⁷ Readers who are interested in this subject will find fuller details in my article on British Women’s Quartets, which appeared in the *Chamber Music Supplement to The Music Student*, for October, 1913.

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Lest we forget...

“British Women as Instrumentalists”

As soloists and ensemble players, women met with comparatively little opposition; -- they came, they played, they conquered; -- but in orchestral music the position has been different, for the prejudice against admitting them to first-class orchestral work has been strong. Women could get as good a training as men in the student orchestras of the R.A.M. and R.C.M. (though at the latter place Wind scholarships are still closed to women), but in subsequent professional life they were for long debarred from the full practice of their attainments. However, in the last decade of the 19th century, various excellent organisations sprang up, notably the English Ladies’ Orchestral Society (an orchestra where all the instruments were played by women), and that admirable string orchestra conducted by the Rev. E. H. Moberly, which flourished for a few seasons.⁸ It was not long before women formed the main body of string players in many amateur and scratch orchestras all over the country.

In London mention should be made of the London Diocesan Orchestra, which was not only composed of women, but also conducted by women—first by Miss Haweis, and later by Miss Amabel Marshall, daughter of that well-known woman conductor, Mrs. Julian Marshall.⁹ But among all women who have furthered the cause of orchestral music, probably the greatest things have been achieved by Miss Rosabel Watson and the Mukle family. Both as player and conductor, as a

musician herself and the inspiration and organizer of other women’s music, it is not too much to say that Miss Watson’s position is unique.¹⁰ She has kept faithfully to women, and one of her distinctions is that she and her band gave a first-rate performance of the *Siegfried Idyll*, at Roedean School, in October, 1914, played entirely by women musicians.

The Influence of the War

It was not till the war that the real powers of women as orchestral players were fully acknowledged. When the men were called up for military service, it was found their places must be filled by women, and few developments in musical England have been fraught with greater interest than this. Women harpists, it is true, had always been admitted to all orchestras, probably because few men played that instrument, but Sir Henry Wood set a fine precedent when he admitted women string players to the Queen’s Hall Orchestra, in 1916. The experiment was an instant success, and it is to be regretted that the Royal Philharmonic Society and one or two other big organizations have not seen fit to follow suit. But perhaps this is hardly surprising in the Philharmonic, which only tolerates women as Associates or Fellows,

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The Maud Powell Society

The Maud Powell Trio — Maud Powell, May Mukle and her mother Ann Ford Mukle. In addition to May, Mukle’s daughters Florence, Louise and Lilian were also musicians.

“British Women as Instrumentalists”



Audrey Salkeld

Gwynne Kimpton — conductor, violinist, violist.



The Maud Powell Society

Violinist Marie Hall.

denies them the privilege of membership, and so automatically excludes them from all share in the governance of the Society!

In theatrical music women have had a great success. The entire orchestras are composed of women at the Coliseum and London Opera House, also at the Chiswick, Shepherd's Bush, and Wood Green Empires, and women players are employed at many of the leading theatres, such as the Comedy, Globe, etc.

Nor is this movement confined to London. All over the country the same thing has been going on, and women are now included in the ranks of the Brighton Municipal Orchestra, and Brighton Hippodrome; Bournemouth Corporation, Harrogate Municipal, and Devonshire Park (Eastbourne) Orchestras; also in many other places such as Bexhill, Bridlington, etc.

Besides all this activity at home, women have done splendid work in concert parties touring at the Back-of-the-Front, or at Base Camps, in various war areas.

Some Notes on Leading Instrumentalists

The following brief notes may give some idea of the leading Women Instrumentalists, though their number is (fortunately for Britain), so large that a complete list is an impossibility here.

Violin

Amongst Joachim pupils one recalls Emily Shinner (Mrs. Liddle), who died all too young, with her pure classical style and great gifts as a quartet leader; Mary Cardew (Mrs. Douglass Scott) with her fine fire and dignity, particularly as a Bach player; Maud McCarthy (Mrs. Maud Mann), who made such a successful *début* as a prodigy, and afterwards grew into a fine and very individual artist; Nora Clench, who with her rich artistic gifts in many directions has the unique distinction of having been a pupil of Joachim for the violin and of Watts for painting; Editha Knocker, whose great powers as a teacher have been shown by her launching such splendid young artists as Sybil Eaton and Rhoda Backhouse, and who is in addition an experienced conductor.

Then among R.A.M. pupils are Winifred Robinson, Nettie Atkinson and Selina Cox, all admirable players; Cecilia Gates, artist to her finger tips; and Ethel Barns, her work marked by delicate thoughtfulness both as violinist and composer.¹¹

From the R.C.M. come Jessie Grimson, fine leader and ensemble player; May Harrison, that noble artist

CONTINUED

“British Women as Instrumentalists”

(who subsequently studied under Auer), and who has won international fame; Marie Motto, her playing full of temperament; Helen Egerton (afterwards a Sevcik pupil), whose style is full of gracious charm; Miram Lucas (who also went on to Sevcik), who is so capable a quartet leader; Amabel Marshall (Mrs. Ronald Carter), fine player and all round musician; Harriet Solly, who has done much to introduce modern French Chamber Music to English audiences; Dora Garland, a splendid Bach player, who was amongst the first women to be admitted to Queen’s Hall Orchestra; Evelyn Hunter, that cultivated artist; also Winifred Smith and Helen Gough, both afterwards pupils of Sevcik.

Other Sevcik pupils are Marie Hall, with her superb technique and meteoric success ; Marjorie Hayward, a most charming, capable artist; the late Dorothy Bridson; and Daisy Kennedy, with her wonderful power.

Kathleen Parlow and Isolde Menges are Auer pupils who have greatly distinguished themselves.¹²

Edith Robinson (of Manchester) is a splendid quartet leader; Beatrice Langley has great gifts as a soloist and ensemble player; Gwynne Kimpton has made her mark as violinist, viola player, conductor, and organiser; and Leila Doubleday, Marjory Bentwich, Mary Law, Marian Jay, Tessie Thomas and Annie Godfrey are all violinists who call for appreciative mention.

Viola

Cecilia Gates has already been referred to as a violinist, but must also be named here, for at the time when she specialized on the viola, she was considered the finest woman player of that instrument in England; Sybil Maturin and Maud Aldis have both had immense experience and well deserved success as ensemble and orchestral players; Frances Marshall is well known as a quartet player; and Rebecca Clarke is a fine player who has also strong gifts as a composer.

Violoncello

Florence Hemmings was probably the pioneer, and was ‘cellist in the Shinner Quartet; May Mukle studied entirely at the R.A.M., and her powerful personality and splendid abilities have bought her fame on both sides of the Atlantic; Beatrice Harrison, who studied partly at the R.C.M. and partly in Germany, is a superb artist who has met with unvarying success in England, America, and many European countries; Beatrice Eveline, Stella Fife,



The Maud Powell Society

Beatrice Harrison, cellist.



The Maud Powell Society

Isole Menges, violinist

CONTINUED

“British Women as Instrumentalists”

Alice Elieson, Margaret Izard, Adelina Leon, and Gwendolen Griffiths are all admirable musicians.

Double Bass

Rosabel Watson was the very first professional woman bass player to do work other than music hall turns or foreign cafés, and she is a fine artist; F. Mukle was the next ; and another member of the same family, Louise Mukle, is now a really first-class player.¹³ Mrs. Morton Stephenson played as an amateur.

Wood Wind

There were several women flautists doing solo work at music halls, etc., thirty years ago ; but Frances Thomas (clarinet) was the pioneer in real orchestral work, and she is still the best known clarinetist. Edith Penville (flute), trained at the R.A.M., is a very remarkable artist; Elsie Wild (flute) and May Woolhouse (piccolo) are well known; Leila Bull (oboe) was the pioneer in her department; Maude Melliar (Mrs. Jones), a fine oboist, won the first wind scholarship thrown open to women at the R.A.M. in 1901; and Lucy Vincent is also an oboist. Anne Mukle, Florence Mukle and Lucy Mumby are the only bassoon players at present. More recruits are wanted for this not too difficult instrument.

Brass

As a horn player, Rosabel Watson was again the pioneer, and she says she wishes she could induce more women to study this beautiful instrument. Clara Farrow

and Bessie Lucas both play the horn admirably. Lilian Mukle (trumpet) ranks very high in her profession, and Kate Lucas and Catherine Fidler are good artists. Constance Moss and Hope Johnson (trombone) are excellent players and musicians.

Timpani

There are many good players, two of the best being Miss Fulcher, now deputy-conductor at the Coliseum, and Miss Grafton Murray, a first-class all round drummer.

The above article makes no claim to be an exhaustive survey of women’s work as instrumentalists, a whole book being required for that, but it is hoped it will at least serve as a finger post to some fuller study of a fascinating subject. (MMS)

Notes by Pamela Blevins

¹ Dr. Charles Burney (1726-1814), English music historian and minor composer.

² Wilhelmina(Wilma) Norman-Neruda, later Lady Hallé (1839-1911), pioneering Moravian-born violinist. Scott, a violinist, who like others of her own age described Lady Hallé as ‘an inspiration to the generation then growing up’.

³ Julia Nolte was known as Julia de Nolte. I have not been able to trace additional information about her.

⁴ Prosper Sainton (1813-1890), French-born violinist, grandfather of composer Philip Sainton (1891-1967).

⁵ Joseph Joachim (1831-1907), Hungarian-born violinist, composer, conductor and teacher. Performed with Brahms and

CONTINUED



May Mukle and Rebecca in Hawaii.



Kathleen Parlow, rear, and singer Alma Gluck on tour.

Both Photos The Maud Powell Society

“British Women as Instrumentalists”



May Mukle, cellist and composer.

Clara Schumann, founded the Joachim String Quartet in 1869. Otakar Sevcik (1852-1934), Czech violinist, developed teaching methods for the violin. Leopold Auer (1845-1930), Hungarian composer, violinist and teacher. Kathleen Parlow, Elman, Heifetz and Milstein were among his pupils.

⁶ Marie Hall (1884-1956), English violinist. Ralph Vaughan Williams composed *The Lark Ascending* for her. There were four Harrison sisters, Beatrice (1892-1965), a cellist; May (1890-1959) and Margaret (ca. 1899 -?), both violinists, and Monica, a singer. Their mother Annie was trained as a singer but was forbidden by her parents to perform in public. She was determined that her children would not suffer the same fate.

⁷ Emily Shinner (1862-1901), founder of the first all-woman string quartet in 1887. The Shinner Quartet: Emily Shinner, violin/leader, Lucy Stone, second violin, Cecilia Gates, viola, Florence Hemmings, cello. The Norah Clench Quartet: Nora Clench, violin/leader, Lucy Stone, second violin, Cecilia Gates, viola, May Mukle, cello. The Edith Robinson Quartet (based in Manchester): Edith Robinson, violin/leader, Isabel McCullagh, second violin, Lily Simms, viola, Mary McCullagh, cello. The Langley-Mukle Quartet: Beatrice Langley, violin/leader, Marjorie Hayward, second violin, James Lockyer, viola, May Mukle, cello. The Helen Egerton Quartet: Helen Egerton, violin/leader, Helen Gough, second violin, Dorothy Jones, viola, Gwendolyn Griffiths, cello.

⁸ Rev. Edward Hugh Moberly (ca. 1850-1922), the son of George Moberly, Bishop of Salisbury, was a clergyman and well-known choral-orchestral conductor. He founded the Moberly Ladies' String Orchestra in 1891 with 90 'ladies' from Wiltshire and Hampshire. They began annual visits to London in 1892. Moberly and his 'ladies' met with acclaim and were hailed for the 'intelligence', 'spirit of industry' and 'welcome precision' that marked each performance.

⁹ Amabel Marshall (Carter) (1872-1951) was the daughter Julian Marshall (1836-1903), a writer, print collector and amateur musician, and Florence Ashton Marshall (1843-1922), a composer, conductor (South Hampstead Orchestra) and writer (Handel, *The Life and Letters of Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*).

¹⁰ Rosabel Grace Watson (1865-1959). She graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and embarked on a career as a music charity worker and philanthropist, conductor, organizer of concerts and theatrical productions, founder of the Aeolian Ladies' Orchestra. A talented musician, she played the violin, viola, double-bass and French horn. She encouraged women to defy restrictions against women and encouraged them to study wind instruments. For more on Watson see Paula Gillett, *Musical Woman in England, 1870-1914: Encroaching on Man's Privilege*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

¹¹ See Scott's July 22, 1919 review of an all-Barns concert.

¹² Kathleen Parlow (1890-1963) was a Canadian violin prodigy. Isolde Menges (1893-1976) taught at the Royal College of Music, formed her own quartet in 1931.

¹³ May Mukle (1880-1963) was one of five daughters born to Leopold, an inventor and organ builder, and Ann Ford Mukle, a pianist. The Mukle sisters played the violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, trumpet, coronet and timpani. A brother played the horn. May Mukle was one of the first British women to become a professional cellist. She often performed with composer-violist Rebecca Clarke. Mukle toured the world as a soloist and joined American violinist Maud Powell (1867-1920) on her pioneering tour of South Africa in 1905. Mukle and her mother were also members of the Maud Powell Trio. Mukle made her New York debut in 1907 with a black eye from injuries sustained before the concert. Powell played a major role in establishing Mukle's international reputation.

Marion Scott (1877-1953) was a champion of women and contemporary music in Britain. She was a pioneering music critic and musicologist and the founding force behind the Society of Women Musicians in 1911. She wrote criticism for the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph* and was a regular contributor to a number of publications including the *Musical Quarterly*, *Music and Letters*, the *Radio Times*, *The Listener*, the *Musical Times*. She was the author of the acclaimed metaphysical biography of *Beethoven* (1934).





Dr. John S. Alabaster

A retired environmental scientist, with several books and more than 100 papers to his name, John is an amateur musician (violin, viola, piano and recorder), and one-time beekeeper and woodworker. His latest passion is croquet.

He has published a biography, *A Closer Look at William Alabaster (1568-1640) Poet, Theologian, and Spy?* and written articles on book-binding techniques, the *Promus* of Sir Francis Bacon and the English text of “*Don Quixote*.”

John had the privilege of knowing Elizabeth Poston and some of her close friends and of being given access to her considerable archive of music and correspondence by her copyright holder and literary executor, Simon Campion.



Jennifer Fowler

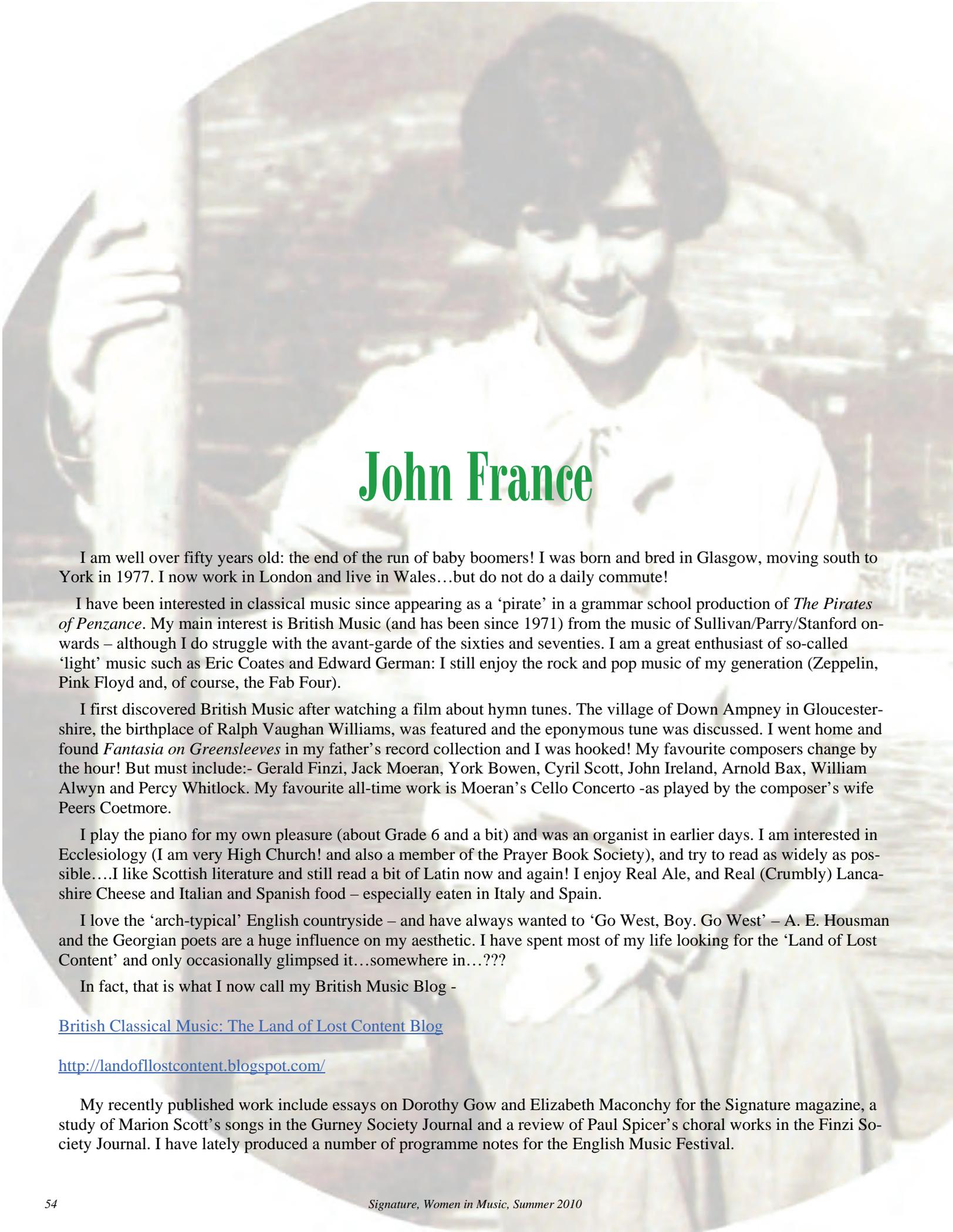
Jennifer Fowler (1939) studied at the University of Western Australia, where she won the University's Convocation Award for outstanding results. Since 1969, she has been living in London where she works as a free-lance composer.

She has won a number of international prizes for composition, including awards from the Academy of the Arts in Berlin; the Radcliffe Award of Great Britain; the GEDOK International Competition for Women Composers in Mannheim; the Paul Lowin Awards, Australia; the Miriam Gideon Prize; the Christopher Bodman Memorial Composers' Prize, UK; the International Sylvia Glickman Memorial Prize; and the Marin Goleminov International Composition Prize. These last two prizes were awarded in 2009.

Her music has been included in such prestigious international festivals as the ISCM World Music Days; the Gaudeamus Music Week, Holland; the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music, UK; and Women in Music festivals in USA, UK, Italy, Australia, and China.

She has had commissions from such organisations as the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Perth International Arts Festival, the Music Board of the Australia Council, the Song Company in Sydney, Donne in Musica, Italy, and Women in Music (UK).

Recent performances have been in Melbourne, Sydney, Beijing, Angouleme (France), Rome and Serbia.



John France

I am well over fifty years old: the end of the run of baby boomers! I was born and bred in Glasgow, moving south to York in 1977. I now work in London and live in Wales...but do not do a daily commute!

I have been interested in classical music since appearing as a 'pirate' in a grammar school production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. My main interest is British Music (and has been since 1971) from the music of Sullivan/Parry/Stanford onwards – although I do struggle with the avant-garde of the sixties and seventies. I am a great enthusiast of so-called 'light' music such as Eric Coates and Edward German: I still enjoy the rock and pop music of my generation (Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and, of course, the Fab Four).

I first discovered British Music after watching a film about hymn tunes. The village of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, the birthplace of Ralph Vaughan Williams, was featured and the eponymous tune was discussed. I went home and found *Fantasia on Greensleeves* in my father's record collection and I was hooked! My favourite composers change by the hour! But must include:- Gerald Finzi, Jack Moeran, York Bowen, Cyril Scott, John Ireland, Arnold Bax, William Alwyn and Percy Whitlock. My favourite all-time work is Moeran's Cello Concerto -as played by the composer's wife Peers Coetmore.

I play the piano for my own pleasure (about Grade 6 and a bit) and was an organist in earlier days. I am interested in Ecclesiology (I am very High Church! and also a member of the Prayer Book Society), and try to read as widely as possible....I like Scottish literature and still read a bit of Latin now and again! I enjoy Real Ale, and Real (Crumbly) Lancashire Cheese and Italian and Spanish food – especially eaten in Italy and Spain.

I love the 'arch-typical' English countryside – and have always wanted to 'Go West, Boy. Go West' – A. E. Housman and the Georgian poets are a huge influence on my aesthetic. I have spent most of my life looking for the 'Land of Lost Content' and only occasionally glimpsed it...somewhere in...???

In fact, that is what I now call my British Music Blog -

[British Classical Music: The Land of Lost Content Blog](#)

<http://landoflostcontent.blogspot.com/>

My recently published work include essays on Dorothy Gow and Elizabeth Maconchy for the Signature magazine, a study of Marion Scott's songs in the Gurney Society Journal and a review of Paul Spicer's choral works in the Finzi Society Journal. I have lately produced a number of programme notes for the English Music Festival.

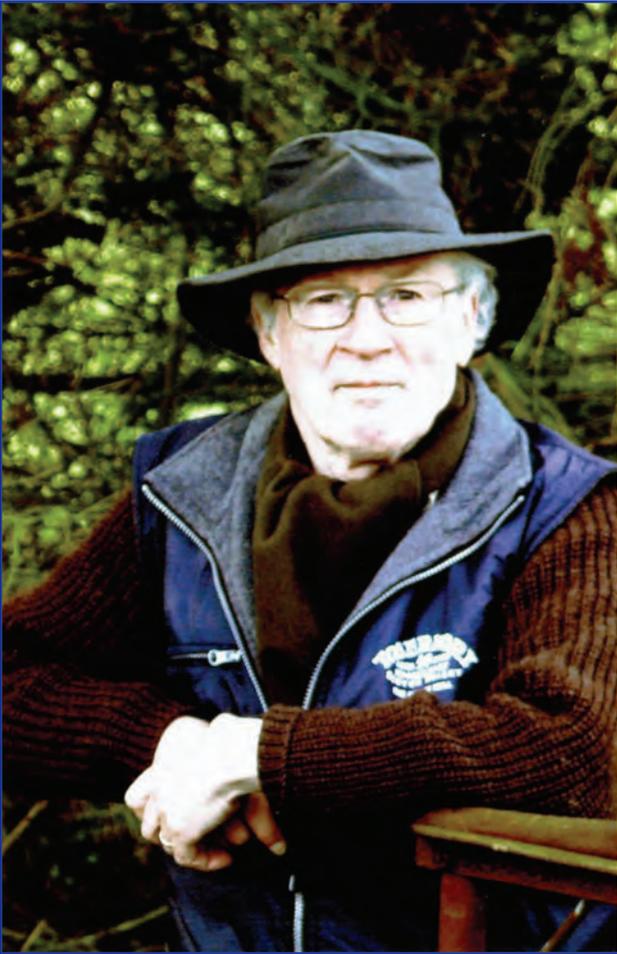
Photo by Mark Haskett



Christina L. Reitz

Christina L. Reitz is Assistant Professor of Music at Western Carolina University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in musicology and world music. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in musicology with external cognates in piano performance and women's studies. Previous degrees include an M.M. in Piano Pedagogy (University of Florida) and a B.M. in Piano Performance (Youngstown State University).

Her current research interests are female composers and performers with primary focus on the works of Jennifer Higdon. She has presented her findings at various conferences including College Music Society National Conference, Ninth Festival of Women Composers, the 19th Century Studies Association, Feminist Theory and Music 10 Conference, and has been published in the International Alliance for Women in Music Journal. At the present time, she is serving on the Board of Directors for the 19th Century Studies Association.



David Tolley

David Tolley is a retired accounts manager whose interests range from the environment, conservation and history to drama, music and films.

In the past he has written for the Thomas Hardy and Ralph Vaughan Williams societies in England and has been published in a variety of British journals and also in the Congressional Record.

David divides his visual interests between photography and painting, the latter reflecting his interest in literary and legendary themes. He lives in Northampton, England.