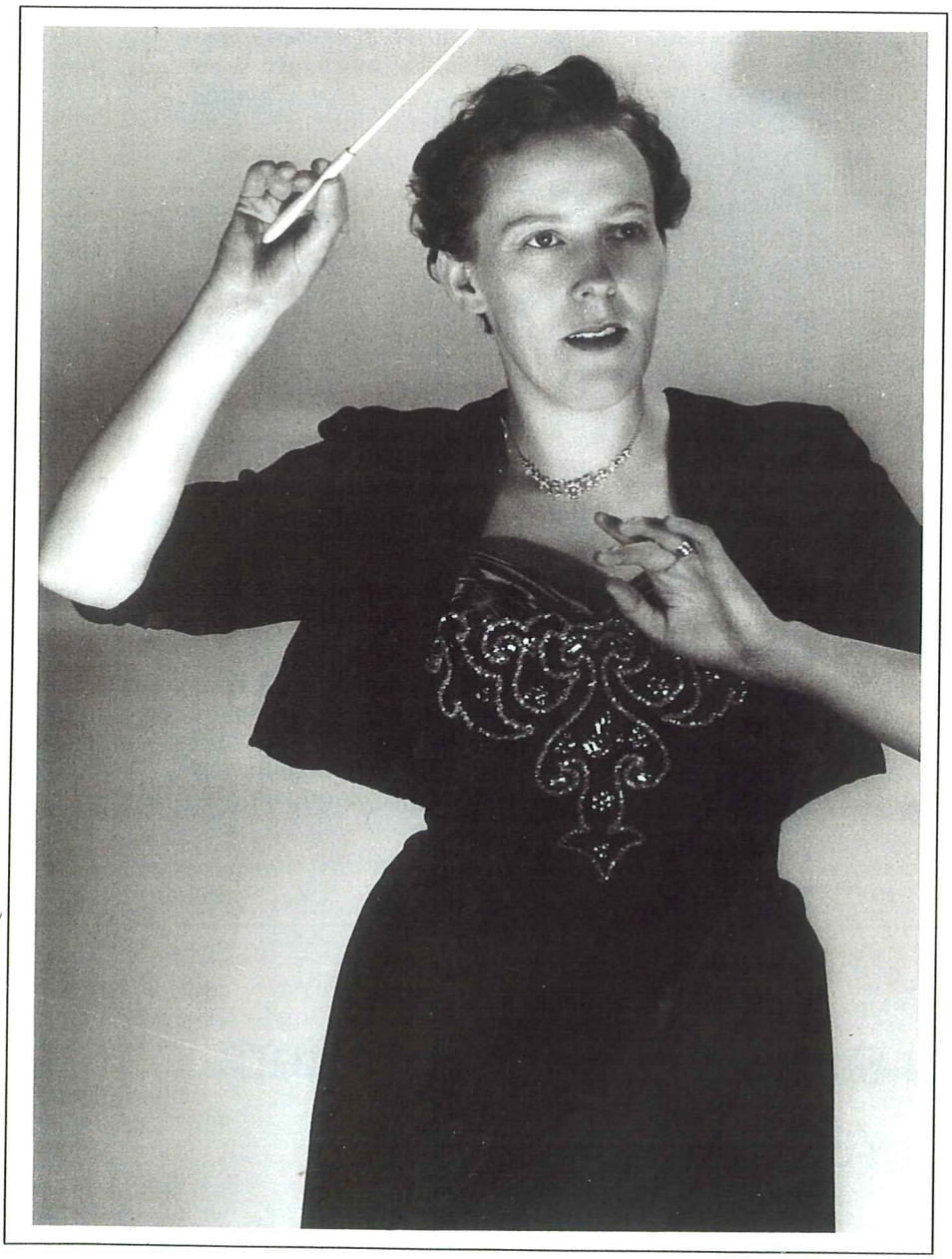
The Maud Powell

Signature

Women in Music



Ruth Gipps

Women and Orchestras, part I

Featuring:

Ruth Gipps

Gisèle Ben-Dor

Black Women and American Symphony Orchestras

Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?

16th Century Orchestra of Nuns

Winter 1996
Volume 1, Number 3

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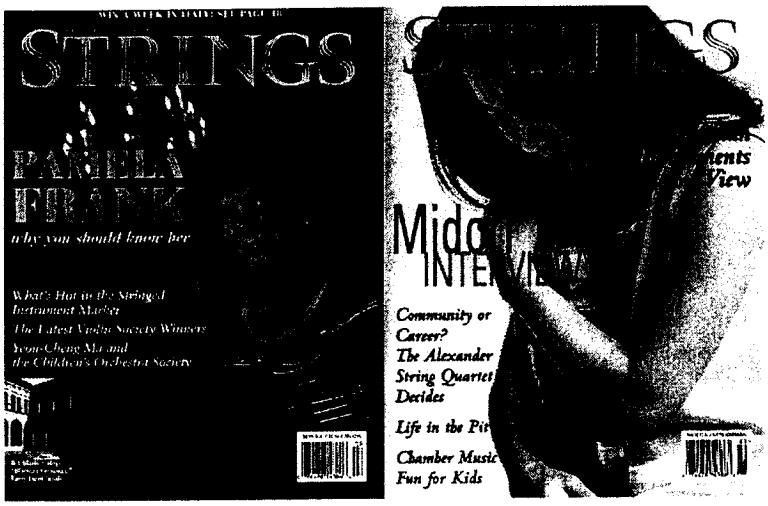

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❖ FROM THE DESK OF

JoAnn Falletta

ICM ARTISTS

I am honored to be a part of **The Maud Powell Signature** and very pleased to have an opportunity to share some thoughts with you. In June of 1996, I will be completing my ninth year as music director of the Women's Philharmonic, nine years that have been a time of joyful discovery and artistic growth for me. It is hard for me to believe (and more than a little embarrassing!) that the woman who took over the musical helm of that organization in 1987 (after completing three degrees in conducting) had never conducted a piece by a woman composer. Yet my training (at Mannes College of Music and Juilliard) was fairly typical of the course of any music student—intensive, competitive study of the "classic" repertoire—repertoire in which, at that time, women composers seemed to have no place. Imagine my sheer delight in discovering—through the Women's Philharmonic—the incredible richness and depth of music written by women, past and present.

I have had the wonderful opportunity of sharing that music with orchestras all over the world. Yet, the pleasure of introducing music by women is mixed with a feeling of real regret. Why must it be an "introduction"? Why do compositions by women account for less than one percent of the repertoire performed in our country? Why, out of a random sampling of American orchestras, do we find that out of 1,530 pieces programmed in 1995 only three of them are by women? I can give you my personal assurance of the high quality of hundreds of pieces by women. I can point to warm and enthusiastic audience response to and critical acclaim for pieces written by composers ranging from Fanny Mendelssohn to Amy Beach to Joan Tower. Obviously the repertoire — rich, varied and deep — is there. It remains for us as musicians and music lovers to become advocates of works that all of us deserve to hear, works that should and will greatly enhance the orchestral repertoire for now and for the future.

Doors have been opened, surely, but the work is certainly not finished. It will not be completed until all of us become heirs to a music as yet vastly unknown to most of us, a music that has the potential to define, affirm and enrich us all.

To the joy of discovery!

Warm wishes,

JoAnn Falletta

JoAnn Falletta is music director of the Women's Philharmonic, based in San Francisco.

❖ FROM THE EDITOR

Separate Until Equal

In the mid-70s one of my friends worked in the camera department of a large Boston store. Although she had an enviable sales record and possessed all the technical knowledge needed to explain the operation of any piece of photographic equipment on the shelves, her male supervisor felt that being a woman, she might "drop" one of the expensive cameras "and break it." Therefore, she was not allowed to hold or sell them.

Fortunately, this woman had a very strong sense of her own self-worth. She refused to let her employer humiliate her and deny her equal opportunity. In an era when women were still accepting the universal notion that we are somehow inferior to our male counterparts, this woman challenged her employer, made her point unequivocally and before long was the top salesperson in her department.

What does this have to do with music?

This little story mirrors a scene all too familiar to nearly every woman who has confronted barriers erected to keep her in her place, to control the degree of her contributions and ultimately to jeopardize her personal success. The situation described is not restricted to women in department store sales, but applies to women in any occupation or profession—music, painting, literature, medicine, science, law, business, politics, education, and religion. And the tragedy of it—and it is a tragedy—is that all this happened not very long ago.

Twenty years! Not a long time, is it? And it should serve as a stark reminder of just how recently women were locked in difficult, humiliating and often losing struggles to gain acceptance and independence in worlds traditionally closed to us.

While more opportunities are indeed available for women, they have only come about after hard-fought battles against an establishment that continues to demand so much of women for so little and which still keeps us separate from the mainstream of society.

For the younger generation, opportunities are better and discrimination is not as blatant. But this important change has come about only because women like my friend in camera sales—and others like her—had the courage to stand up against an establishment that attempted to insist on her inferiority and to diminish her drive and repress her talent.

When we were planning this issue of *Signature*, we did not tell our writers to go out and find degrading stories about women in orchestras so we could depict them as victims. We asked for an honest picture. If women emerge from these pages as victims, there is good reason for it. Our writers are only reporting the facts.

These facts are disturbing. For example, Pope Innocent XI's 1686 edict prohibiting women in convents from learning music and playing instruments was a vicious act which gave permission for others to adopt deliberately repressive attitudes toward women, ensuring that women be kept in their "proper place" in society.

Women in music have come a long way, particularly in the past 20 years, but we remain separate. If women were truly equal to their male counterparts in music, there would be no need to audition behind screens. If the contributions of women composers were really respected, JoAnn Falletta would not be relating dismal statistics to us. If women were truly equal in music, we would not be singled out as "woman composer," "woman conductor," or "woman tympanist."

But that is the hope and dream of the future. For now, we remain separate but equal among ourselves and that is a good start. Until gender is no longer attached to women's work in music, and women are acknowledged for their contributions solely on merit, we still have battles to fight and victories to win.

Pamela J. Blevins

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(Photo by Paul Tanqueray)

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❖ BY BETH MACLEOD

BETH MACLEOD COLLECTION

The Hardin College Orchestra (Missouri) in a 1909 photograph illustrates the divisions between men and women in the orchestra—all the women are string players while the strong men play the "heavy" brass instruments.

"Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?"

Women and Musical Instruments in America

MUSICAL FACILITY was one of the accomplishments encouraged and expected among nineteenth-century young ladies. Performance was considered most appropriate in the family parlor, but over the course of the century, women musicians moved from the private parlor to the public stage. Yet public performances were judged by a conservative view of what was "appropriate" for them. This was ironic in the context of music, given the widespread nineteenth-century perception of women as being primarily emotional and intuitive, and of music as being the "language of emotions."

When the young ladies of Madison Female College gave a concert in 1853, John Dwight of *Dwight's Journal of Music* was there to document the novel event. He took pianists, guitarists and harpists in stride, but expressed shock at "13 young lady violinists(!), 1 young lady violist(!!), 4 violoncellists(!!!) and 1 young lady contrabassist(!!!!)."[1]

As the rising chorus of exclamation marks shows, Dwight's tolerance was in inverse proportion to the size of the instrument. The fact that young ladies were playing music was not the problem. His discomfort arose because these women went beyond the narrow range of what was considered their proper musical place by playing instruments that contemporary audiences were unaccustomed to seeing played by women. Dwight's reaction was characteristic of his time.

Feminine decorum

When he wrote, only certain musical instruments were considered socially acceptable for women: keyboard instruments, the guitar, and the harp. Their volume was relatively soft and delicate sounding, and the melody was in a high range, corresponding to the soprano voice. The posture the lady assumed while playing was natural and graceful; she did not have to sit awkwardly or distort her features. She could usually remain seated while playing and perform adequately without much physical exertion. And since these instruments provided both a melody and harmony line, she could pursue music as a solitary pastime, without the need for an accompanist.

When women played other instruments, they made themselves vulnerable to sarcasm and ridicule. As one critic noted in *Musical America* in 1906, "For the sake of the veneration in which all women should be held it is to be hoped that none of them will...take to playing the trombone, the French horn, or the

gigantic Sousaphone for, as Byron once said: 'seeing the woman you love at table is apt to dispel all romance.' And seeing a woman get red in the face blowing into a brass instrument is just as likely to prove an unpleasant shock...."[2] It was important that women always appear delicate and decorative. To play a massive or "awkward" instrument challenged accepted notions of feminine decorum.

the most ... masculine of men, and Mrs. Bloomfield-Zeisler...is not only a woman all through, but seems tacitly to acknowledge and glory in it; she never attempts to ape virility.... "[5]

Music by other composers, most notably Chopin, was usually more delicate-sounding, and thus considered to express more feminine emotions. Reviewers did not comment in a similar way when a man performed a piece by Chopin.

"Only certain instruments were considered socially acceptable for women"

Not surprisingly, the piano was the first instrument to appear on the concert stage with a woman soloist. The sight of a woman playing a keyboard instrument was hardly startling. Reviewers, however, were unaccustomed to seeing a woman display the strength and mastery required of a soloist, and invariably compared the style and tone of the performance to that of a man.

"The little woman"

An 1898 review of pianist Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler, who received almost universally positive notices, stated: "The wonder of the little woman is that she can be both woman and man in the illustration of her art.... The marvel of her playing is that she commands so much virtuoso strength with such an abundance of feminine delicacy and subtlety of expression."[3]

Pianist Olga Samaroff, who concertized extensively in Europe and America from 1905 to 1925, observed: "During all the years of my career as a woman pianist at least 80 percent of my press reviews either stated that I played like a man, or alluded to my playing like a woman. When the critic said I played like a woman, it meant that he did not like me at all."[4]

Gender stereotyping extended to composers as well. Beethoven and Grieg, for example, impressed critics as being particularly masculine, and therefore more difficult for a woman to interpret. A typical reviewer in 1900 observed: "Last Saturday's performance of the [Grieg] Concerto by Mrs. Bloomfield-Zeisler was indeed a wonder! Strange too, in one way, for Grieg was one of

The other solo instrument that gradually became acceptable for women to perform publicly was the violin. In addition to its physical virtues—it was light in weight, had a high range, and did not require distortion of facial features—two other factors contributed to its emergence.

First, several young violin prodigies began performing in America and paved the way for female soloists. The most publicized was Camilla Urso, who toured parts of North America in 1853. Reviews of her performances were uniformly positive, and her visibility did much to alter the image of the "appropriateness" of the violin as an instrument for females.[6] Maud Powell said that she knew she wanted to be a violinist after she saw and heard Camilla Urso play.[7]

A second source of support for female violinists was the enlightened attitude of Julius Eichberg, founder of the Boston Conservatory of Music in 1867, where both sexes were allowed to study violin. The visibility of prodigies such as Urso and of the Boston Conservatory graduates who became performers and teachers, made it possible for the public to see violin performances by females.

Even so, some early reviews of female violinists did question the appropriateness of the instrument. An 1878 reviewer, for example, complained: "A violin seems an awkward instrument for a woman, whose well-formed chin was designed by nature for other purposes than to pinch down this instrument into position."[8]

As with accounts of piano performances, reviewers almost invariably used gender-related stereotypes to describe the performances, assuming strength, energy and dignity to be masculine virtues and expressing surprise to find them in a woman performer. Maud Powell's style was "full of masculine power and of superb spirit...her entire handling of

BETH MACLEOD COLLECTION

By the Twenties, women were excelling in all instruments...even the tuba.

the movement was devoid of anything tentative or timid..."[9] An early twentieth-century publicity poster for violinist Maud Powell announces: "The arm of a man; the heart of a woman; the head of an artist."[10] The successful woman performer was one who could play like a man—but not appear unfeminine.

As women violinists became more common, reviewers began to describe violin playing as not only an acceptable but even an appropriate and noble pursuit for women. Critics emphasized the emotive qualities of the instrument with the implication that females, as emotional creatures, might be among its finest interpreters: "The instrument [is] justly considered to be most preeminently suited to woman because [of] its lightness, its form, the natural grace required in its treatment, but, above all, because of the deep poetry of its tones, its emotional qualities and its sympathetic appeals."[11]

Playing side-saddle

Once the violin became acceptable, the door was open for other stringed instruments as well. At the turn of the century the cello was just beginning to evolve as a solo instrument in its own right and no longer merely the bass line for other melodic instruments.

Pablo Casals, who made his first tour of North America in 1901-02, demonstrated its technical and emotional capabilities. The obvious impediment to its acceptance for women was physical: anything held between the legs—whether horse, bicycle or cello—engendered discussion as to its suitability for women.

Before the mid-1800s, viols and cellos were held steady between the knees or calves. Around 1860, however, the end-pin became standard equipment on the cello. While this did not evolve in response to women's concerns, the result made the cello more acceptable for women, since by anchoring it to the floor a woman could play "side-saddle" and still maintain a decorous pose. One cello methods book, published in 1898, described the side-saddle position in great detail, but this restriction faded fairly quickly as more active pastimes became acceptable for women, as well as new styles of dress which allowed more freedom of movement.

Since the cello did not have a long history as a man's solo instrument, public acceptance of women soloists was almost immediate. Turn-of-the-century music periodicals describe the solo performances of a number of young women cellists. Leontine Gaertner, Elsa Ruegger, A. Laura Tolman, and others performed regularly for an appreciative public. There were occasional derisive references, such as a 1902 *Boston Eagle* review which described Elsa Reugger as "a winsome lass" who played with an artistic expression and grace "not often commanded by women who have to hold a baritone violin with their knees," but such comments were definitely the exception.[12]

Ugly contortions

Largely because of the absence of facial contortion, for a long time the flute was the only blown instrument considered socially acceptable for women. The flute embouchure allows the player to form a pout and blow much as one would make a sound by blowing into the mouth of a soft drink bottle. This is very different from the process of forcing air through the thin reed of the clarinet, oboe or bassoon, which results in tightly pursed lips and possibly a flushed face. It also differs significantly from blowing into the mouthpiece of a brass instrument, which necessitates pressing the cup-like mouthpiece directly against the partially open mouth.

As a reviewer in the *American Art Journal* commented approvingly in 1880, "The unusual sight of a lady playing such an instrument did not strike people as strange as we thought it would be. She...avoids the ugly contortions of the lips....Thus managed, the flute is decidedly not an unfeminine instrument."[13]

As with the violin, once women began to perform publicly on the flute, some observers found reasons to declare their superiority on the instrument. "On the flute," the American poet and musician Sidney Lanier wrote in 1898, "a certain combination of delicacy with the flexibility in the lips is absolutely necessary to bring fully out that passionate yet velvety tone...and many male players... will be forever debarred from attaining it by reason of the intractable, rough lips, which will give nothing but a correspondingly intractable, rough tone."[14]

If a woman somehow achieved prominence on another wind instrument, problems remained. Saxophonist Elisa Hall studied at the Paris Conservatory and was the first amateur to play

BETH MACLEOD COLLECTION

A young woman plays the French horn, once considered off-limits to women.

with the Boston Symphony. Hall commissioned Debussy to write a piece for her, but even though she had already paid him, he postponed writing it. According to one account, "he thought it ridiculous when he had seen her in a pink frock playing such an ungainly instrument, and he was not at all anxious that his work should provide a similar spectacle."[15] In a more contemporary context, Matt Groening, creator of the popular television program "The Simpsons," chose to have Lisa Simpson play the saxophone because he thought it would be funny for an 8-year-old girl to play the instrument.[16]

Sexual segregation

Relatively few musicians, male or female, could have careers as instrumental soloists. Ensemble playing was the obvious performing option. But female participation in most ensembles was unlikely because of the reluctance of men to allow women to join all-male groups. Patterns of sexual segregation already existed within most work settings. The issue of morality was a frequently-cited concern.

"Wherever the sexes work indiscriminately together," argued the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1911, "great laxity obtains." The intermingling of the sexes was "thought to threaten the virtue of even the most well-intentioned young women." [17] One observer expressed con-

cern that the mere presence of women [in orchestras] would be a distraction for the men: "you shouldn't expect a man to keep his eyes divided between the music on his stand and the stick of his conductor when his sweetheart is a member of the organization, and is seated somewhere across the room."[18]

Invariably, discussions of women's ability to function as orchestral musicians raised the issue of stamina. An article in an 1895 issue of *Scientific American* stated unequivocally that a woman did not have the stamina to be an orchestral musician: "Her physical incapacity to endure the strain of four or five hours a day rehearsal, followed by the prolonged tax of public performances, will bar her against possible competition with male performers."[19]

When critics and observers commented on the occasional woman member of a predominantly male ensemble, it was usually with snideness and innuendo. A 1935 editorial in the *New York Sun* responded to a reader who expressed "astonishment" that the reviewer of a Philadelphia Orchestra performance had not noted that "a woman was seen operating a cello at the last desk, which she faced in solitary devotion."

The music reviewer generously responded that he saw no good reason why women should not be employed in orchestras, but he proceeded to question the "soul" of the woman who takes up the timpani. "What is the outlook for the female bassoonist?" he continued. "Does anyone wish to see a woman playing a bass drum or an E flat tuba? ...And a forgiving heaven has often looked down on the puffings of the lady cornet soloist."[20]

Oddities and novelties

Women responded to exclusion from orchestras by forming their own, but even in this context, gender stereotypes affected both these orchestras' early instrumentation and the public perception of them as oddities and novelties.[21] Because women were less likely to have learned larger instruments or winds and brasses, many early women's orchestras had gaps in instrumentation.

The Vienna Lady Orchestra, which performed in New York in 1871, lacked horns, trumpets, trombones, clarinets, oboes and bassoons.[22] The Women's Philharmonic Society of New York, performing in 1899, had a double bass, several flutes, clarinets and cornets, but no "heavy brass." Reviewers sometimes expressed surprise. "The orchestra turns out to be only half an orchestra," declared an indignant reviewer of the Vienna group in the *New York Sun*.[23]

It would appear from comtemporary accounts that most audiences responded favorably to performances by women's orchestras. Reviewers, however, were simply not ready to accept without qualification a first-class performance by an orchestra of women. A description of Ethel Leginska's New York conducting debut with the National Women's Symphony Orchestra in 1932 declares, "Where Miss Leginska found them all can only be conjectured...[she] had eight double basses, all women, and evidently no novices. Only one of them used an Italian bow; the other seven went at it full-fisted....Where, when and why do women take up horn?...[Where] do you get a female tuba player? And whence comes the lady tympanist? No matter. There they all were...."[24]

continued on page 26

❖ BY LISA HANSEN

A Musician in Heart and Soul

A Conversation with Gisèle Ben-Dor

IT IS MONDAY, December 4th, and I have been asked to interview Gisèle Ben-Dor, current music director of the Santa Barbara Symphony, the Annapolis Symphony, and the Boston Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, and also in great demand as a guest conductor. I am intrigued yet nervous about this assignment for I am in reality a flutist, and have never officially sat in the interrogator's chair.

I am surprised by the neighborhood as I pull into her driveway in a pleasant, middle class suburb of New Jersey. The homes are spaced near one another on tidy lawns, and piles of leaves are neatly arranged on the street for pick-up amidst the quiet hush of an autumn afternoon. Her house is a modest, white clapboard raised ranch. It is not the glamorous residence I would have pictured for a rising conductor. This is a family's home, not a home for show.

She greets me in a voice that is firm and direct, colored by a Uruguayan accent with a slight raspiness, as if the intensity of her speech had tired the vocal chords. Ben-Dor appears shorter in person than on video, her light brown hair is also more closely cropped. She is dressed all in white, and her pants are tucked into short, dark boots. Her jewelry is striking—bold silver and gold earrings with a matching bracelet. Her presence is commanding and I feel slightly intimidated. It is only later when she warmly laughs, and her blue eyes alight, that I relax. We go into the living room, and she seats me on a white sofa, underneath a large painting done in soft pastel colors, which looks out onto a wide picture window facing the quiet street. A piano stands in the corner of the room and a smaller painting diagonally faces the couch.

I take out my prepared list of questions and toss out my first one, hoping to peer beyond the velvet curtain of glossy press materials, but as she answers in her voluble, energetic manner it quickly becomes apparent that I will not be able to control the flow of this conversation. This will not be a placid rowboat drifting serenely across the lake, but rather a speed boat hurtling forward. I must hang on

STEVE J. SHERMAN

Gisèle Ben-Dor grew up in Montivideo, Uruguay, where women held important positions as teachers, politicians and doctors. Not until she left Uruguay did she experience society's limited expectations of women.

STEVE J. SHERMAN

*"...this is a century of doubt...
previous centuries were centuries of faith."*

and eventually hope to steer so that it at least heads in the direction I wish to go.

A multi-cultural upbringing

Ben-Dor, who takes her name from her Israeli husband, Eli, an engineer, was born Gisèle Ivonne Buka in Montevideo, Uruguay. Her Polish parents emigrated to Uruguay just before the advent of World War II. The eldest of four children, her upbringing was old fashioned. Her father was warm yet wielded authority, and both parents instilled strong ethical values and high expectations in their willful daughter. Her mother was a homemaker, and her father an accountant, who taught his children the professional skills he utilized: to write memos, organize things by subjects, and to keep archival records. She now employs these skills managing three orchestras along with a family with two sons age four and thirteen.

"My parents gave me the tools to manage in life." she said. "My husband and I try to do that with our children."

Bordered by both Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay is similar in many respects to Argentina, except that it has three distinctive influences.

"I think the most interesting thing is, and it's very handy in this society, my multicultural upbringing," Ben-Dor observed. The Spanish who conquered Uruguay, and the Italians who soon followed, brought a Latin influence. From Brazil's side came the slaves who brought African traditions, and later an influx of Eastern European Jewish refugees settled there. "I grew up equally with Spanish jotas, Italian tarantellas, Brazilian bossa novas, and Jewish klezmer music."

The educational system in Uruguay was both comprehensive and demanding. She attended two schools: a public school, from 8 a.m. until noon, and a Jewish one from 2 to 5 p.m. She was taught French, Italian, Spanish, English and Hebrew. She was a member of the scouts, where she was a leader, and in the summertime she attended camp. By the time she was a teenager, she was up many evenings until midnight studying.

Ben-Dor's musical studies began at age four with piano lessons, and she later taught herself to play the guitar, upside down, because she is left-handed. She also learned the Paraguayan harp, the recorder, and the Italian accordion. All of her siblings were musical, as were her parents, and although there was no ex-

pectation that she would become a professional musician, she was encouraged to do whatever she was good at and liked.

"It was not the kind of training that some children of musical families have where they are put on some kind of track from the very beginning," she explained. "I was very much on my own."

Music made her the center of attention with her peers and when she played guitar the other children gathered around to sing along. By age 14 she had assumed the role of conductor and teacher of her schoolmates and was actually paid for doing so.

"I discovered the orchestra basically by myself," she said, "unlike my own children who have been attending concerts since before they were born."

She had already been conducting without knowing what a conductor officially did when she was given her first ticket to see a live orchestra concert at the age of twelve. She found the performance distressing, thinking the conductor looked ridiculous, bearing no relation to anything she wanted to do. But the music itself made an indelible mark —she loved it—and to this day remembers the pianist, Ann Schein, who performed Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Concerto.

"I thought when I was a teenager that good orchestras existed only on recordings."

Although the quality of the orchestras in Uruguay was not as high during her childhood as it had been earlier in the century, she had an extensive collection of records and was able to educate herself by listening to them. Her musical taste ranged from Bach to Stravinsky, and also included early music and opera. She loved the native folkloric music of South America and credits her fluent ease with the complex rhythms of such composers as Bartók and Stravinsky to this early exposure with its polyrhythmic structures.

As unusual as it seems for a teenage girl to have assumed, and been entrusted with such adult responsibilities, Ben-Dor shrugs off the notion that there were any role models after whom she might have patterned herself. She describes her upbringing as focusing on substance over style. However, her description of her two grandmothers gives a clue as to a possible influence.

"You could write books about my grandmothers—people with initiative. They manipulated everything around them in very clever ways...they would have been leaders but they were not raised to be. But as far as their temperaments—very intelligent women, strong willed, capable of implementing decisions...tough people, tough cookies."

We spoke about the transformation that many girls seem to undergo as they hit their early teens, and Ben-Dor feels that she did pull back in high school academically. She was aware that socially girls had to appear a bit dumb if they wanted to capture the attention of boys. Yet in spite of the famed machismo of Latin America, in Uruguay women held important positions as teachers, politicians, and doctors, and ironically it was not until Ben-Dor left that she got her first taste of society's limited expectations of women.

From Uruguay to Israel

When Ben-Dor was 18, her family emigrated to Israel when a military dictatorship took control in Uruguay. Although departing their home was a huge upheaval for the family of four children, parents and grandparents, her father looked at the rising anti-Semitism and saw no choice but to leave. Many people left for other Spanish-speaking countries, but he decided to go all the way to Israel as they had friends there, and Ben-Dor was already planning to move there to expand her own horizons. She first visited Israel at age 15, with one of her grandmothers, and had been so captivated that she had wanted to remain and live there but her parents refused. She did actually meet her future husband at the time, through the friendship of their two grandmothers.

Upon her arrival in Israel, Ben-Dor went to see Enrique Barenboim, father of famed pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim. She intended the meeting as a consultation about her desire to become a conductor, but he told her that it was not possible for a woman to be taken seriously in that role. He suggested if she made her mark as a pianist, she might be able to pursue conducting on the side. Ben-Dor did study piano with him privately, and eventually graduated from the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel-Aviv University, with a Master of Music degree as a conducting major. This achievement was followed by her move to the United States where she continued her conducting studies at Yale, earning a second Master's degree in 1982.

STEVE SHERMAN

"I feel I am playing in the orchestra...I don't feel like a time beater, I feel I am one with them."

After graduation Ben-Dor would return to Israel for her conducting debut in a televised public master class with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic, broadcast by the BBC of London. It was a difficult and exciting time. She was nine months pregnant and having finished her master's degree was excited by the prospect of embarking on both a new career and motherhood, yet depressed by the lack of conducting opportunities following graduation. Fortunately her debut went extremely well and she was not only invited back by the Israel Philharmonic, but was engaged by other Israeli orchestras.

In the next few years she began conducting in the United States, receiving conducting fellowships with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute and the Tanglewood Music Center, where she had the opportunity to work closely with such eminent conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Christoph Eschenbach, Leonard Slatkin, and Michael Tilson Thomas. Soon after, she won several prestigious awards, including the 1986 Bartók Prize of the Hungarian Television International Conductors' Competition, and in 1990 she was selected as a "Young Artist of the Year" by *Musical America*.

Her unusual debut prompted the inevitable question about combining the roles of motherhood and conductor. She

credits an unusually supportive husband for helping make possible her extensive travel and demanding schedule. "He has to put up with a lot. It's a lot of pressure on him too." Her older son Roy is proud of his mother's success, although the younger one, Gabriel, has a difficult time with her absences.

"The little one just doesn't want me to go. I'm trying to reorganize my engagements—I feel I'm gone too much." Although Roy studied piano for a time, it does not seem likely he will follow in his mother's footsteps professionally and Ben-Dor is relieved. "It would be a big responsibility and I would have to devote my life to it....I would not forgive myself if they didn't have what I think they should have."

A delicate balancing act

In addition to her three current conducting posts, Ben-Dor has a busy guest conducting schedule, appearing with orchestras throughout the United States, Europe, Israel, and South America. She is both sensitive and flexible when programming repertoire, viewing each community as unique, with its own particular tastes.

"All audiences are different. There are pieces I can do in Boston that I can't do in Santa Barbara. Because of the eclectic nature of my background I think I can find points of contact with the audience."

A music director of an orchestra faces a delicate balancing act between frequently warring parties: musicians, audiences, and the Board of Directors. Ben-Dor is pragmatic about contemporary music, committed to playing it, but employing a slight bit of subterfuge, best described as a sandwich approach.

"You play something they wouldn't miss for the world and then you play it ... You don't play it first so they come late. Zubin Mehta saw that half of an audience came late and then turned around and said: 'I can see that you didn't get to hear the first piece so we're going to play it again!' "

Ben-Dor has programmed a wide variety of works by American and Latin American composers including the Mexican Silvestre Revueltas; American composers Joan Tower and John Adams; and a fellow Uruguayan also from Monte-video, Beatriz Lockhardt. She mentioned the inherent danger of programming too much new music.

"The board immediately tells me, 'We're not selling as many tickets, we have to do more Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff,' and it's a lot of pressure on me — I try to compromise. I can't tell them, 'I don't care if you don't sell tickets and you go bankrupt.' At the same time you can't cater and say, 'Okay, okay we'll do more Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff.' You give and take ...."

Surprisingly, she mentioned Bartók as a 20th century composer she felt had been neglected. "In the comparison between Bartók and Stravinsky, Bartók is even less known...I just did the Bartók **Concerto for Orchestra**, and I know that some people before they even heard it said, 'I'm not looking forward to this.' They came to the concert because it's the opening of the season, and afterwards they loved it."

Ben-Dor recently released her first compact disk recordings, one featuring music of Béla Bartók, with The Sofia Soloists of Bulgaria; and the other, music of the great Argentinean composer, Alberto Ginastera, with the London Symphony. The beautiful, passionate playing she elicited from both orches-

continued on page 29

❖ BY D.C. CULBERTSON

The Convent of San Vito

A 16th-Century Orchestra of Nuns

MOST PEOPLE CONSIDER orchestras, or at least large instrumental ensembles, as a relatively modern invention. But in late 16th-century Italy there was a very famous 23-piece ensemble that played for dignitaries such as Pope Clement VIII and the Queens of Austria and Spain, was praised by some of the country's most esteemed composers, gave regular, well-attended public concerts, and whose director was the first on record to use a baton. And, even more incredibly, this orchestra was not made up of men attached to a particular court or chapel, but entirely of nuns!

This *concerto grande*, as the ensemble was known, was located at the Convent of San Vito in Ferrara, and the best description of it comes from theorist Hercule Bottregari, who apparently attended its concerts regularly. In his *Il Desiderio* (1594), Bottregari describes a typical performance:

When you watch them come in...to the place where a long table has been prepared, at one end of which is found a large clavicembalo, you would see them enter one by one, quietly bringing their instruments, either stringed or wind. They all enter quietly and approach the table without making the least noise and place themselves in their proper place, and some sit, who must do so in order to use their instruments, and others remain standing. Finally the Maestra of the concert sits down at one end of the table and with a long, slender and well-polished wand... and when all the other sisters clearly are ready, gives them without noise several signs to begin, and then continues by beating the measure of the time which they must obey in singing and playing...And you would certainly hear such harmony that it would seem to you either that you were carried off to Helicona or that Helicona together with all the chorus of the Muses singing and plucking had been transported to that place.[1]

He adds that the ensemble performed for "most solemn feasts of the Church, or to honor the Princes [of the city] or to gratify some famous professor or nobel amateur of music...or by the authority of their superiors."[2] A contemporary of Bottregari, Giovanni Maria Artusi, described the orchestra as consisting of "cornetti, trombones, violins, *viole bastarde*, double harps, lutes, cornamuses, recorders, harpsichords, and voices."[3]

C. D. CULBERTSON COLLECTION

The title page of **Sacrae Cantiones** by Raffaela Aleotti, published in 1593, was the first published collection of sacred music by a woman. Aleotti was the director of the orchestra of nuns at San Vito at Ferrara.

However, S. Vito's situation was not unique. Many convents throughout Italy were famous for their music, especially those in Milan, and public concerts by the women of these convents was not unusual. In fact, the concerts of singer/instrumentalist Claudia Sessa, who was at the convent of Maria Annunciata in Milan, were so popular that many attendees had to stand outside to hear the music. Nuns frequently performed "at court or in the homes of the wealthy."[4] And over half of the music published in Italy during this period was composed by nuns. This is doubtless due to the fact that many of the girls who entered convents at this time were highly educated, musically accomplished girls from upper-class families. Those in Ferrara had the advantage of living in one of Italy's biggest cultural centers, thanks largely to the patronage of its ruling Duke, Alfonso II D'Este.

Unfortunately, Bottregari does not tell us anything about the orchestra's repertoire, but it doubtless included works by its Maestra, Raffaela Aleotti, whose book of motets **Sacrae cantiones** (1593) was the first published collection of sacred music by a woman. Aleotti, the daughter of Giovanni Battista Aleotti, architect to Alfonso, studied harpsichord and composition with Alessandro Milleville and Ercole Pasquini. She entered S. Vito at a very young age and took her vows about 1590. Three years later, she became director of the *concerto grande* and later became prioress. (One of her sisters, Vittoria, also a composer, was also at S. Vito, although some scholars say Vittoria and Raffaela were the same person; documentation is too sketchy to know for sure.)

Unfortunately, only four years after Bottregari's glowing account, Alfonso died without an heir and Ferrara became a papal state. A year later, in 1599, Giovanni Fontana, bishop of Ferrara, issued a "substantial set of rules and ordinances regarding discipline in the convents of Ferrara" which prohibited nuns from playing any instruments except harpsichord or organ and forbid anyone to enter a convent to teach music.[5] By 1621, only two instrumentalists were known to have been active at S. Vito—Raffaela Aleotti and tenor violist Olimpia Leoni. Similar rules were passed in 1647 in Milan, and on May 4, 1686, Pope Innocent XI issued the following edict, later reinforced by his successor Clement XI, which sounded the death knell to music-making in convents:

Music is completely injurious to the modesty that is proper for the [female] sex,

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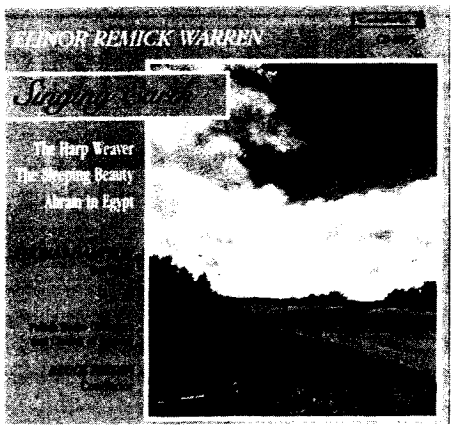
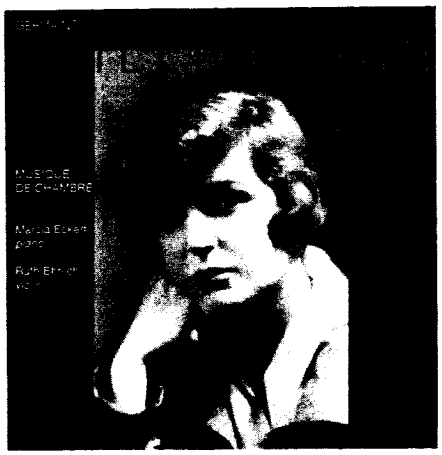


Singing Earth
Choral-Orchestral Works by
Elinor Remick Warren
Thomas Hampson, baritone



Chamber Music of Germaine Tailleferre
Marcia Eckert, piano
Ruth Ehrlich, violin

Lucille Field sings songs by
Seeger, Gideon, Klotzman,
Price, Rogers & Van de Vate

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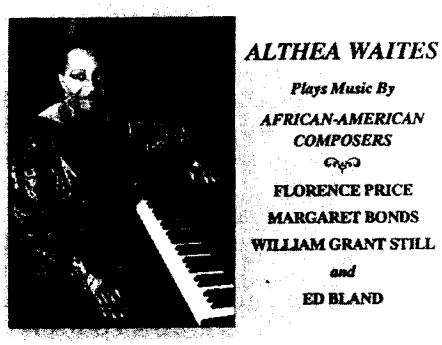

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❖ BY MARGARET CAMPBELL

Ruth Gipps

— *A Woman of Substance* —

WHEN I WAS about to contact the composer Ruth Gipps—soon to celebrate her 75th birthday—I was warned that she had recently been ill and might not be up to an interview. So I pictured a frail little lady reclining in her favorite armchair whom I must not tire.

My first surprise was a vibrant treble voice on the telephone which could have belonged to a woman half her age. When I arrived in Sussex at the charming tudor house where she lives with her husband, the clarinettist Robert Baker, I was greeted warmly by a tall upright woman looking years younger, with a strong-boned face, beautiful penetrating eyes and a mischievous smile. Perhaps the most remarkable discovery was that throughout our interview she exhibited a total recall of incidents in her life without a moment's hesitation.

This extraordinary musician has managed to work in so many fields that it is almost easier to name those in which she has not tilled. She has at some time been concert pianist, orchestral oboist, singer, composer, conductor, organist and teacher. After having heard some of her compositions, I fail to understand why she is not better known, especially in the UK where she was born and has lived all her life.

A great harvest

Ruth Gipps was born on 20 February 1921, at the Bexhill School of Music, in East Sussex where her mother, a pianist, was principal. Her father, Bryan Gipps—from an army background — had studied violin at the Frankfurt Conservatory where he met and married a fellow student, the Swiss Hélène Johner.

One of the first things I asked Ruth Gipps was why she was always called "Wid." She smiled broadly: "Just before I was born my mother had a dream about a woman reaping a great harvest. As she was a devout Christian Scientist

COURTESY RUTH GIPPS

For her performance of the Glazunov F minor piano concerto with the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Ruth wore a Victorian dress. In the same concert, conducted by George Weldon, she also played the cor anglais in the first performance of her own Symphony No. 1.

and very biblically inclined, when I turned out to be a daughter, she decided I must be 'Ruth.'"

It was probably the worst choice, for from early childhood, Ruth was a born rebel. It seems that as soon as she could talk she put her foot down and said, "I'm *not* Ruth. I'm Widdy." Nobody knows how this came about but she recalls that the dedication "To Widdy with love" was in a children's book given to her for Christmas 1922, when she was not even two years old. Later "Widdy" became "Wid" and to her friends, despite a formidable list of degrees and honors, she remains so today.

When Widdy was only four years old, she listened as her mother gave a lesson to a 12-year-old pupil on the Grieg **Waltz in A Minor**. While her mother saw the boy to the front door, Wid climbed onto the stool and played part of it from memory—perfectly. So began her first piano lessons, which naturally included the rest of the Grieg. Later that year she made her debut at a students' concert at the Grotrian Hall in London, playing the entire piece.

When she was eight, she performed her first composition, **The Fairy Shoemaker**, which, entered under a nom-de-plume in the Brighton Festival, won second prize. Forsyth, the publishers, bought it for a guinea and a half!

Wid had been a weekly boarder at Brickwall School for Girls in Northiam since she was seven. But she was not happy so she was transferred to "The Gables," a preparatory school for boys which would take girls, provided a brother had also attended. Her brother, Bryan, who later became a professional violinist, made this possible, and the young tomboy was in her element.

In March 1931, at ten, Wid made her orchestral debut playing the first movement of Haydn's **D major concerto** with the Hastings Municipal Orchestra conducted by Julius Harrison. Her mother, as secretary of the local branch of the Music Teachers' Association, arranged the auditions. Later that year, she performed the complete work, resulting in many concert engagements for this child prodigy. Meanwhile, she had been transferred to Bexhill County School, where she was desperately unhappy. She described it as "cold, with an autocratic headmistress who ruled by fear and where bullying went unchecked." Her health was so badly affected that she was removed at the age of 12. She was then given lessons with a tutor twice a week and passed the Oxford School Certificate at 15. Meanwhile she attended all the adult classes at her mother's music school.

Later the family moved to a larger house and for Christmas 1935, she was given her own baby grand piano by her brother, Bryan. She had already taken her final grade in the Associated Board Examinations with top marks and won an open concerto class in a North London Music Festival, playing the first movement of Beethoven's ***Emperor* concerto**. This was a great achievement in the prevailing musical climate as the establishment was prejudiced against youth, and in particular, females of any age.

A recurring menace

When Hélène Gipps put her daughter's name forward for another MTA concert in Hastings, Julius Harrison accused her of "organizing the concerts solely for Ruth's benefit"! Nonetheless, she captivated the judge with her playing of the Beethoven at the Hastings Festival and it so happened that at the public concert Harrison was indisposed so the deputy conductor took over.

This discrimination was to be a recurring menace in Ruth Gipps's career. When she was 14, she entered for the Performer's Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music (LRAM) and although she passed all the paperwork and aural tests, she failed the performer's. Twice within the same year the results were the same, each time with the same male examiner. Clearly she was not failed through inability but simply because of her age and sex. Her great disadvantage was that she was far too talented for a mere girl.

Undaunted, she tried for an Associate of the Royal College of Music (ARCM) (equivalent to the LRAM) and passed with flying colors at Christmas 1936. She was 15. The following month she entered the Royal College of Music where she was to win all the prizes during the 5-1/2 years she spent there. She confessed that she "loved every minute."

She was hoping to study piano with the legendary Solomon, but his fee of five guineas a lesson was beyond the family's means. However, at an audition she had found the great man very condescending and although she still admired his playing, she realized she would never have lasted long as his pupil.

Determination and confidence were her only weapons against the prejudice she encountered on every side. Many disliked her assertiveness, but few un-

ROBERT BAKER

Ruth Gipps in her 1968 Morgan.

derstood that it was purely a matter of self-defence against those who set out to put her down. Initially she took her piano studies with Herbert Fryer, but he treated her like a child. Angered and frustrated, she transferred to Arthur Alexander, where things were better.

She joined the choral classes conducted by Reginald Jacques (founder of the Jacques Orchestra, 1936-60), whose accompanist was an older student, later to become one of the leading British conductors, (Sir) Charles Groves, who incidentally was very aware of Ruth's talent. She remembers R.O. Morris, to whom she went for composition and theory, as very kind and understanding. "He made me play all the Bach Chorales so that I learned how to *see* the harmonies. It was invaluable."

Although she had now added the oboe to her studies, composing was still the most important musical activity for the young music student. She composed **Mazeppa's Ride**, Op. 1 for female chorus and orchestra, which Reginald Goodall agreed to perform with his ladies' choir at the College. But after only 15 minutes rehearsal, it was abandoned as being "too difficult" and has never since received a performance.

Malcolm Sargent was in charge of the College's first orchestra, and Gipps found him kind and helpful, not only when she was a student, but also later in her professional career. The leader was Cecil Aronowitz, whom she describes as "charming and unassuming" and much appreciative of her talent. He would go on to become one of Britain's great viola players and teachers.

In a performance of Bach's B minor Mass, she also recalled "a very clever, but cheeky 17-year-old trumpeter"—Malcolm Arnold—another who was later to achieve fame as one of Britain's most talented and successful composers. At this time, Gipps met Marion Brough, a piano student who also studied the oboe. They became lifelong friends and eventually formed a duo.

Ruth Gipps seized every opportunity for accompanying of any kind, thus gaining an invaluable insight into orchestration. Her understanding of the capabilities of every instrument is evidenced in her own works, especially her symphonies where her musicality and creative instinct provide some beautiful melodies and vivid orchestral colors. Her scoring of the brass and wind sections, in particular, is masterly.

In 1939, Gipps passed Parts 1 and 2 of her B.Mus and started lessons in composition with Gordon Jacob, an excellent and sympathetic teacher whom she respected greatly, not only because he was a first-class teacher but because he treated her as a person in her own right; and she blossomed. That same year she also met her future husband, the clarinettist Robert Baker. Gipps' piano studies continued with Kendall Taylor and in 1940 she won a Cobbett prize with her string quartet **Sabrina**, Op. 13.

It was also at this time that Gipps met the conductor George Weldon, with whom it was suggested she play a concerto at a concert in Bexhill. When she offered Brahms' **Piano Concerto No. 2**, he protested that it was too difficult for a girl of 19. She then offered to learn any concerto within a month, but Weldon took this as conceit and said if she persisted in such a way, she would get nowhere. Fortunately, Weldon soon recognized her talent and went on to become a close friend of both Gipps and her husband.

It so happened that subsequently she *did* play the Brahms No. 2 many times in her career and always had a good press. On one occasion, *The Shrewsbury Chronicle* wrote: "The rhythmic drive was compelling, and her whole interpretation was according to the best traditions in Brahms playing. Taking everything in her stride and making light of difficulties, she brought off a performance which must have been a revelation to every pianist in the audience."

Gipps also entered for the Caird Scholarship that year, submitting a wordless **Rhapsody**, Op. 18 for soprano and small orchestra. One of the examiners was the formidable Sir Edward Bairstow, celebrated organist and composer of church music. When he argued that there was no point in writing for the voice and not employing language, Gipps resisted the temptation to say that Debussy, Vaughan Williams and Rachmaninov had all done so. She won the scholarship, but as it was war time, she did not benefit from the award. Her only appointment from that time was as an Air Raid Prevention Warden.

Replaced by men

During and immediately after the Second World War, many organizations had been formed to stimulate public interest in the arts and also to provide entertainment for those working in facto-

COURTESY RUTH GIPPS

Eight-year-old Ruth with her cat Felix. Shortly before Ruth's birth, her mother had a dream about a woman reaping a great harvest.

COURTESY RUTH GIPPS

At the age of ten, Ruth made her piano debut playing the first movement of Haydn's D Major Concerto.

PAUL TANQUERAY

At the age of 33, Ruth Gipps suffered a setback which might have finished someone with less determination. An injury sustained in a bicycle accident ended her career as a pianist, and Gipps turned to conducting.

ries and hospitals all over the country. The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was founded by three women, Seymour Winyates, Gladys Crook, and Mary Glasgow, its first president.

CEMA auditioned artists and organized chamber music concerts, and during the war, these took place at all hours, some starting at midnight for workers on night shift in factories. They were very popular and did a wonderful job in boosting the morale of the work-force. For one-week's work in such a venture the pay was usually about £17 plus hotel accommodation. Ruth Gipps recalled that she once gave a recital with a then-unknown contralto, Kathleen Ferrier. Later, when CEMA was transformed into the Arts Council of Great Britain, the three women who had pioneered the scheme were immediately replaced by men.

Despite the bombs and the shortages of war, 1941 proved to be a satisfactory year. Gipps composed and submitted her **Quintet**, Op. 16, for oboe, clarinet and string trio for her final part of her B.Mus and had it accepted. Premiered at the Wigmore Hall in London, it was the first of her works to be performed before the general public. She was just 21. That summer she won another Cobbett prize with her piano quartet, **Brocade**, Op. 17.

Ruth Gipps' works now began receiving performances. Marion Brough played her **Oboe Concerto**, Op. 20; Kneale Kelly gave the premiere of **Variations on Byrd's *Non Nobis***, Op. 7.

She also saw the first performance of her **Knight in Armour**, Op. 8, with the RCM Second Orchestra conducted by Gordon Jacob with Malcolm Arnold playing the trumpet solo. The second performance took place under much more auspicious circumstances.

Sir Henry Wood, celebrated founder (in 1895) and conductor of the annual Promenade Concerts (known as the "Proms") was so keen to find the work of new composers that he made the rounds of the various publishing houses to see for himself. He liked Gipps' **Knight in Armour** on sight and conducted it with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 22 August 1942 at the Royal Albert Hall. By choosing the last night of the Proms, he ensured a capacity audience. It received excellent reviews and Wood, Sir Adrian Boult and Basil Cameron all registered their approval.

In March of 1941, Ruth Gipps had

married Robert Baker, now in the RAF. She also began piano studies with the legendary Tobias Matthay at his home in Haslemere, Surrey. He was 85 but had lost none of his abilities. This was an experience from which she received enormous benefit.

During that time at the RCM, she also won Grade V Composition Prize with her **Symphony 1 in F Minor**, Op. 22. One of the judges was Ralph Vaughan Williams, with whom Gipps had studied one term in 1940. But even then the RCM principal appeared loath to part with the meagre £7 prize.

By a stroke of luck, she was asked at short notice to deputize for the second oboe at a concert in Brighton and found herself next to Leon Goossens. They got along splendidly and she subsequently took some invaluable private lessons with him. Her playing improved to the extentthat she was approached by a number of leading conductors including Sir Malcolm Sargent, who engaged her to play the cor anglais in Sibelius's **The Swan of Tuonela** in Liverpool. A critic described her playing as "exquisite with marvellous breath control."

On another occasion, Sargent also asked her to play the obligato in *I would beside my Lord* in Bach's **St. Matthew Passion** and insisted she stand to be recognized. She always appreciated the fact that Sargent treated her as a musician in her own right, not as a woman or a youngster as was so often the case. Sir Arthur Bliss, then Head of Music at the BBC, who showed her great kindness, treated her with similar respect.

The wrong notes

Gipps' **Death on the Pale Horse**, Op. 25, a short tone poem inspired by the apocalyptic painting by William Blake, received its first performance in November 1943, at the Town Hall Birmingham by the City of Birmingham Orchestra under George Weldon. Short but striking, this work has some vivid orchestration with a final dynamic clash of a mystic theme accompanied by drumbeats. Her association with the CBO continued when she was appointed second oboe and she moved to the city in 1944. Once when pianist Kendall Taylor was delayed in traffic, Gipps deputised at short notice playing Beethoven's *Emperor* concerto.

On other occasions, Gipps stepped in for a number of other pianists and as a result Weldon was accused of favoritism. When in March 1945, she was the soloist in Glazunov's **Piano Concerto No. 1** and then proceeded to play the cor anglais in the first performance of her own **Symphony No. 1 in F minor**, Op. 22, the rumors began to circulate as to the exact nature of the relationship between Weldon and this young woman whose husband was away serving his country. The truth of the matter was that musically, Gipps was an accomplished and versatile all-rounder, able to step in for almost any emergency. Weldon was a confirmed bachelor.

Gipps' first symphony is dedicated to Weldon, who thought it "lovely music," but the jealousy was such that a member of the orchestra deliberately played wrong notes. It is well to remember that this symphony won a RCM composition prize and one of the judges was Vaughan Williams. Truly these were the days when the musical world was a male stronghold.

Sir Thomas Beecham was well known for his low opinion of women composers, but he was extremely courteous towards Bryan and Ruth Gipps when they played through her **Violin Concerto**, Op. 24. The first performance took place the following year with Bryan Gipps as the soloist with the Modern Symphony Orchestra conducted by Arthur Dennington. Critics said it was a work of "definite character...closely woven yet generously conceived."

Yet another work well worth a revival is Gipps' **Jane Grey Fantasy**, Op. 15 for viola and strings, dedicated to Nova Pilbeam, who acted the part in *Tudor Rose*. The music is in three sections, Jane as a girl, as a queen and on the scaffold. The first performance was given with Herbert Lumby as soloist.

Gipps was inspired into writing what is probably her first fully mature work while she and her husband were on holiday with George Weldon at Holywell Bay. The first performance of her **Symphony No. 2**, Op. 30 was given on 3 October 1946 in Birmingham with the CBO under Weldon. It has several sections but is a one-movement work, and it certainly is a memorable piece of writing.

Gipps has a gift for melody but also creates moods in a musically interesting way. David C. F. Wright, writing in *The British Musical Society Journal* in 1991, says: "The closing pages are outstanding for the way in which the composer displays her evident communicative skills at their best, and this, along with the obvious expertise in the orchestration,

ROBERT BAKER

With a small legacy, Gipps invested the money in founding the Chanticleer Orchestra.

are features of this fine work." Of the original performance one critic remarked that it "brims over with exultant youthful gaiety and, at times, reckless abandon."

Doctor and mother

In 1947 there were two very important events in Gipps' life. In March she passed the first part of her Music Doctorate at Durham University and two months later her son Lance was born. She tells how, when she was highly pregnant, the doctor advised her not to go to London. She chuckled: "I promised I would not. But he hadn't said anything about Durham [about five times as far away] so I went for my exams and all was well." For the final part of her Doctorate, she presented and had accepted the cantata **The Cat**, Op. 32 for contralto, baritone, chorus and orchestra.

To be a Doctor of Music at 26 was indeed an achievement, not only academically, but also personally in view of the hostility and jealousy shown to her by the establishment. It is interesting that despite Gipps' repeated requests over many years to have her qualifications placed against her entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, the request has been ignored.

The first performance of **The Cat** was given in Birmingham in 1952 with

the composer conducting. A Birmingham critic perceptively commented: "**The Cat** is a very beautiful piece of music born of a genuine and entirely unwhimsical devotion to the subject of cats. It is a truly fresh and likeable work, not in contemporary idiom and there is no complex vocal polyphony. There are some wonderful and tender moments, rich in effect. There is a skilful use of voices and orchestra and a conviction and warmth that may have been lacking in earlier works." In 1957 the work received its first London performance at the Royal Festival Hall with Marjorie Thomas, Jess Walters, the Goldsmiths' Choral Union and the Pro Arte Orchestra which Gipps conducted.

Meanwhile, Gipps took a period of intensive study in conducting with George Weldon, who gave her lessons every ten days and insisted that she should learn a different concerto from memory every time. Her tremendous capacity for work and her innate musicality and technical expertise made her equal to the demands made upon her. Despite the fact that Weldon was also her friend, he disapproved of women conductors, so she then started going to London for some lessons with Stanford Robinson, for whom she had played oboe in the BBC Theatre Orchestra.

One of Gipps' works which achieved an instant success was her **Piano Concerto**, Op. 34. Written for her mother, the concerto was first performed in 1949 with the composer as soloist with the CBO conducted by Weldon. The *Birmingham Post* was enthusiastic: "Given a chance, this work would prove acceptable to the Grieg-Tchaikovsky public. The war-horse first movement is followed by a truly delightful set of miniature variations and a playful playbox chinoiserie which mainly colours the finale. The work is strong and in a late-romantic style fortunately free from obvious cliches and padding and loose-jointedness. Its matter is alive; its orchestral and keyboard writing admirable; its appeal is immediate but none the worse for that."

David Wright went even further: "It is the best piano concerto written by a female composer and that is not a condescending remark; with the concertos by Searle, Aplvpor, Rawsthorne and the masterpiece by Bliss it stands its ground. A really fine work." I would readily endorse this comment myself, having heard a cassette of the 1972 broadcast in which Gipps conducted the BBC Northern Orchestra with pianist Eileen Broster as soloist. After a couple of hearings, the haunting melodies cling to the memory. Again, I must stress that I cannot imagine why this concerto is not played everywhere.

Birmingham

Having settled in Birmingham, Gipps went about her musical activities with a vengeance. It also gives an idea of how badly musicians were paid at the time. She became chorus master of the City of Birmingham Choir, for which she earned £120 per annum. She was also conductor of the Birmingham Co-op Amateur Orchestra which brought her a further annual £150. Then there were a number of concerto engagements for which she received 15 guineas a performance and she also wrote program notes at ten and sixpence a time. In addition, she had many unpaid tasks which included conducting the CBO Listeners' Club Ladies' Choir and editing the CBO magazine. Her husband, as principal clarinet in the CBO, also contributed, but even so, their finances were never more than adequate.

There were also problems in another direction. Throughout the time she was in Birmingham, Gipps was not allowed to broadcast and was totally ignored by the establishment. Anthony Lewis of Birmingham University and others never placed any work in her direction, and when there were important functions at the university, she was the only Doctor of Music not to be invited. This seems to be short-sighted in the extreme, not to take advantage of having such a competent and versatile musican at hand.

So, managing by the skin of their teeth, the young couple decided to take out their first mortgage, but then things started to go very wrong. George Weldon was sacked as conductor of the CBSO (now re-named the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) although the official statement was that he resigned. Sir John Barbirolli, understandably furious at the despicable treatment handed out to Weldon, immediately appointed him associate conductor to the Halle Orchestra.

Gipps was not even considered to succeed Weldon as the conductor of the City of Birmingham Choir as a woman conductor was at that time thought to be "indecent." So David Willcocks was given Weldon's job and certainly did not need a chorus master.

Undaunted, Gipps applied for a post with the BBC Midlands Orchestra but was told in her initial interview in no uncertain terms that she could not have the job because men would not and could not be expected to work for a woman. So she had to make do with some part-time lecture-recitals for Oxford Extra-Mural Delegacy in the North Midlands and Oxford areas which paid £4 a time, though this meant driving about 500 miles a week in her 1964 MU sports car which she had bought for £200. Incidentally, this was replaced in 1977 with a 1968 Morgan, which Ruth Gipps parted with only last summer.

In 1953, Gipps completed her **Goblin Market** to words by Christina Rossetti. The work is scored for two soprano soloists, three-part female choir and strings or piano. The piece is a warning to girls not to talk to strangers, even if they are fascinating goblins. Possessing a wonderful simplicity and innocence, the music could and should be taken up by professionals and amateurs alike. It was premiered at Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1956 and was published by Novello.

"To be a Doctor of Music at 26 was indeed an achievement...."

"Go-getter Ruth"

When she was 33, Gipps suffered a setback which might have finished someone with less determination. Suddenly her right hand completely gave way. Pain plagued her back and neck. After a thorough examination, she was told that an injury she had sustained in a bicycle accident when she was 12 had created a condition that would not improve.

For a pianist, this is the most dreaded nightmare. Gipps went through her share of pain and uncertainty but finally decided that if she had to abandon pi-

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❖ BY D. ANTOINETTE HANDY

Black Women and American Symphony Orchestras

Keyboardist Patricia Prattis Jennings, Pittsburgh Symphony.

Bassist Laura Snyder, Milwaukee Symphony.

ALL PHOTOS: COLLECTION OF DR. C. ANTOINETTE HANDY.

❖

"...the practice of race and sex discriination were firmly entrenched..."

Sir John Hawkins, British author of the first history of music in English (1776), defended his elimination of all American musical matters by referring to the nation's musical sounds as "barbaric in nature and therefore hideous and astonishing." Music journalist David Ewen wrote in his book *Music Comes to America* (1942): "There could be no denying that America in music above everything else, was innocent;...She was sublimely oblivious of any standards of artistic excellence."

As is often recalled, the first orchestra in America to be organized on a professional basis was The Philharmonic Society of New York (later renamed The New York Philharmonic), in 1842. But as Irving Soblosky reminded us: "It was essentially a club, ...organized on a cooperative basis, with only the conductor and the librarian receiving salaries....In their nadir season of 1876-77 each player netted eighteen dollars!"

The 1965 *Rockefeller Panel Report* indicated: "Of all existing professional activity in the performing arts, the longest established, most widely dispersed, and most stable is the symphony orchestra." Today, symphony orchestra budgets range from a few thousand dollars to about forty million and the quality of performance is perhaps the best in the world.

Though instrumental music making in the form of a symphony orchestra is not indigenously American, the practices of race and sex discrimination were firmly entrenched from the very genesis of operation.

The symphony orchestra being off-limits for women (and Blacks) resulted in the establishment of numerous All-Female/All-White ensembles beginning in the 1880s: Marian Osgood's Ladies Orchestra (1884), Boston Fadettes (1888), Orchestrelle Classique of New York, and Women's Symphony Orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, St. Louis and Minneapolis (1930s).

The plight of Elayne Jones

In addition to the numerous black brass bands, there were before the turn of the century such groups as the New Orleans Philharmonic Society (c. 1860), Philharmonic Society of New York (1876), and the Progressive Musical Union of Boston (c. 1875)—all black. Continuing into the 20th century, there existed the Philadelphia Concert Orchestra (1905), Boston's Victorian Concert Orchestra (1906), Orchestra Association of Philadelphia (1907), and the Baltimore City Colored Orchestra (1929). Black women, though few in number, often held membership.

In the not-too-distant past, the subject "Black Women in American Symphony Orchestras" was a challenging one for this writer. But with a desire to solicit support for the plight of **Elayne Jones**, tympanist, I elected to read a paper on the subject at the 60th Anniversary Meeting of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), October 1975, Atlanta, Georgia.

Before considering the case of **Elayne Jones**, I should mention a few of the other black orchestral women discussed in 1975. A photograph in *Musical America* (March 25, 1932) revealed the presence of five females in the string section and one in the woodwind section of The Baltimore City Colored Orchestra. There was violinist **Dorothy Smith**, a member of TheCleveland Women's Orchestra in the early 1940s, the group's "only colored member." The lone Black in the 1949-organized Brooklyn Symphony Orchestra (Herbert Zipper, conductor) was violinist **Sylvia Medford**. In early 1956, The Symphony of the Air (former NBC), Leonard Bernstein conducting, hired three Blacks—including two females (**Antoinette Handy**, flutist, and **Elayne**

Jones, tympanist). New York City's Orchestra of America (organized in 1959) had three black permanent members, including one black female flutist. Additional Blacks were hired from time to time, including two females — violinist **Sylvia Medford** and bassist **Lucille Dixon**.

In the early 1960s, cellist **Constance Kelley Smith** of Kansas City, Kansas, became a member of the Honolulu Symphony and violinist **Maurine Elise Moore Francisca**, the Oklahoma Symphony. When maestro Leopold Stokowski organized The American Symphony Orchestra in New York City (1962), **Elayne Jones** (as tympanist) was a charter member.

A most significant event took place on May 6, 1965, at which time The Symphony of the New World gave its debut concert at Carnegie Hall. The founding members were twelve Blacks and two non-Blacks, including females **Elayne Jones** and **Lucille Dixon**. The ensemble consisted of 36 Blacks and 52 non-Blacks and had as its founding purpose "righting the wrongs in hiring practices of major symphony orchestras and establishing a highly artistic musical aggregation that would bring great music to the regular concert audiences and to the communities as well, while concurrently programming the works of outstanding Black composers."

For the record, black women's names who appeared on the Symphony of the New World's roster were: violinists **Valerie Bynum**, **Gayle Dixon**, **Marie Hence**, **Sylvia Medford**, and **Harrietta Watkins**; violists **Marilyn Gates**, **Judith Graves**, **Betty Perry**, and **Maxine Roach**; cellists **Patricia Dixon**, **Carlotta Gary**, **Clarissa Howell**, **Esther Mellon**, **Edith Wint**, and **Ann Taylor**; bassists **Lucille Dixon** and **Melanie Punter**; flutist **Portia Smith** and **Rhina Cuevas**; clarinetist **Deborah Pittman**; trombonist **Janice Robinson**; tympanists **Elayne Jones** and **Barbara Burton**; and harpist **Sarah Lawrence**. Other symphony orchestras concerned with orchestral democracy (and including several black females) were The Angel Symphony (Los Angeles) and The New York (City) Housing Authority Orchestra.

Returning to **Elayne Jones**, in June 1972, she was selected as tympanist by one of America's major orchestras — the San Francisco Symphony, Seiji Ozawa, conductor. The New York City tympanist ranked first in a group of 40 auditioners, representing a major breakthrough for Blacks as well as members of the female sex. Her appointment represented the first assignment of a Black as a principal player in an American major orchestra.

However, the June 17, 1974, *Newsweek* reported: "Jones, the only black,...fired. In San Francisco players are hired by open auditions for a two-year probation and then come up for tenure before a seven-member players' committee elected by the orchestra. Disapproval by the committee is tantamount to dismissal from the orchestra....[S]ix out of eight applicants for tenure, all the them white, were approved by the committee; Jones [was] not. Why?"

Lengthy articles appeared in major publications throughout the country, all deploring the action of the players' committee. The "Support Committee for Elayne Jones, Tympanist" included such luminaries as Shirley Verrett, George Shirley, Leontyne Price, Leopold Stokowski, Billy Taylor, Maya Angelou, and United States Representative Ronald Dellums. In late December 1977, Jones wrote to her supporters: "My endeavor to expose racism has been thwarted." For more on the subject, see Donal Henahan's "About That Timpanist Who Got Drummed Out," *New York Times* (September 7, 1975) and "Elayne Jones," *Notable Black American Women, Bk. II*, Jessie Carney Smith, editor (1996).

Black women in orchestras

The above-referenced reading led to my own investigation of the subject and release of the book *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras* (1981). The finding included violinist **Bethany Harper Bernstein**, a Washington, D.C. native, then a member of the Wheeling, West Virginia, symphony orchestra. She was also coordinator of the Wheeling Training Ensemble and adjunct instructor of West Liberty State College, where she conducted the string orchestra. Also discovered was violinist **Charlotte Davis-Paramore**, a Columbus, Ohio, native. She joined the first violin section of the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.), where she currently works, in the late 1970s. Previously, she held membership in the Columbus (Ohio) Symphony Orchestra.

The search for black women affiliated with symphony orchestras led to

Timpanist Elayne Jones, formerly with the San Francisco Symphony.

Linda Kay Smith, a Kansas City, Kansas, native. A participant in the American Federation of Musicians' Congress of Strings, Smith joined the Atlanta Symphony in 1972 and remained for three seasons. During her tenure, she held membership in the Little Symphony Orchestra and during her final season, the orchestra's Symphony Quartet. She currently freelances in the Washington, D.C., area.

Cellist **Esther Louise Mellon** joined the Buffalo Philharmonic in 1976 and the Baltimore Symphony in 1977, where she remained. The Pittsburgh native had acquired excellent training and a wealth of experience prior to the Buffalo assignment: Symphony of the New World, Dance Theater of Harlem Orchestra, Springfield (Massachusetts) Symphony Orchestra, Royal Winnipeg Ballet Touring Orchestra, and the Spoleto (Italy) Festival Orchestra, to name but a few of her affiliations.

Whereas **Kay George Roberts**, a Nashville native, was included in the 1981 publication as a violinist, a more recent publication (1995) considers her as a conductor. She became the first woman and second Black to receive the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Yale University School of Music in 1986. Now under Shaw Management, she is a frequent guest conductor, including appearances with the Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Louisville, Nashville, and Chattanooga Symphony Orchestras, while maintaining the position of Professor of Music at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. As a violinist, Dr. Roberts served as a member of the Nashville and

New Haven Symphony Orchestras, as well as Arthur Fiedler's World Symphony Orchestra (1971) and the Festival Orchestra of Two Worlds (Spoleto, Italy).

While on the subject of conductors, we should mention the names of Chicago native **Margaret Harris** and Cuban native **Tania León**. It was as conductor of the Broadway musical *Hair* (1968) that **Harris** reached national prominence. This, of course, was only a beginning for an exciting conducting career that found the Curtis Institute and Juilliard School of Music graduate leading the Chicago, Detroit, Saint Louis, Minnesota, San Diego, Dayton, and American Symphony Orchestras, to name a few.

León is perhaps best known as a composer but has attracted favorable reactions as conductor of such orchestras as the Columbus, Phoenix, New World, and Pasadena Symphony Orchestras, The Dance Theater of Harlem Orchestra, as well as the Spoleto Festival Orchestras (Italy and Charleston, South Carolina). Most recent appearances have been as conductor of the RIAS Orchestra (Berlin), the Beethovenhalle Symphony Orchestra (Bonn) and the Biennale Festival Orchestra (Munich).

"My endeavor to expose racism has been thwarted." –Elayne Jones

Youth orchestras

For many years, youth orchestras (affiliated with senior organizations) have been the primary training ground for future professional players. Historically, there have been racial restrictions. In preparing for release of the book *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras*, I solicited responses from 137 "mainstream" organizations, all affiliated with the Youth Orchestra Division of the American Symphony Orchestra League (ASOL), 1978-79 season.

Seventy-six youth orchestras (55%) in 35 states responded, offering the following: Total number of players: 6,883; total number of Blacks: 269 (3.9%); total number of females: 3,495 (50.7%); and total number of black females: 134 (1.9%), representing 49.8% of the total number of Blacks and 3.8% of the total number of females. One suspects that these numbers have increased slightly over the last 17 years, though recent investigations of enrollees in music training institutions are not very encouraging.

Before leaving the subject of Blacks generally and black female participants specifically in the 76 youth orchestras referenced above, the orchestras with the most favorable numbers should be mentioned: Blacks represented 55.8% in the DC Youth Orchestra (black females, 29%); 54.5% in the Jackson (Mississippi) Symphony Youth Orchestra (now Mississippi Symphony Youth Orchestra) (black females, 24%); 18% in the Nashville (Tennessee) Youth Symphony (black females, 11%); and 23% in the Richmond (Virginia) Symphony Youth Orchestra (black females, 17%)—all below the Mason Dixon line.

The Music Assistance Fund was established in 1965 by the New York Philharmonic. The purpose was to "encourage and support gifted student musicians and young professionals of African-American heritage who wish to pursue careers in this country's symphony orchestras." The Fund sponsored a National Conference, September 16-18, 1988, at Arden House in Harriman, New York. The Conference's focus was "the current situation of black orchestral musicians, with the intent of formalizing a network for the identification and support of musicians who could pursue and attain inclusion in symphony orchestras."

Symphonium

More than 100 were in attendance—Music Assistance Fellows, past and present; black orchestra members from major symphony orchestras; and representatives from orchestra management, American Federation of Musicians, American Symphony Orchestra League, national Endowment for the Arts, and professional training institutions. One person in attendance was **Patricia Prattis Jennings**, keyboardist with the Pittsburgh Symphony since 1964. **Jennings** was so moved by the experience that shortly thereafter, she

Dr. C. Antoinette Handy, flutist and retired Director of the Music Program, National Endowment for the Arts.

singlehandedly began publishing *Symphonium*, a newsletter "for and about the professional African-American Musician." **Jennings** kept the publication going for six years, enlightening both the field and the general public, encouraging the young symphony aspirant, and offering interaction between African-American symphony musicians throughout the country.

Black women symphony musicians received their share of the recognition. For example, Vol. 6, #2 (Spring 1994) included a feature on **Charlene Clark**, St. Louis Symphony violinist. She joined the orchestra in 1968, is a member of the Amichi Quartet, and performs as a soloist throughout the St. Louis area. Featured was flutist **Judy Dines**, then in her third year as second flutist with the Houston Symphony. The DC native participated in the National Symphony Youth Symphony Fellowship Program for several years, won the orchestra's Young Soloist Competitionin 1991, and twice appeared as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra.

Another featured individual was **Laura Snyder**, then in her 24th season with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Snyder is also a talented singer, and as such, has appeared with the orchestra on several occasions. Included in Jennings's "Potpourri" was the name **Beverly Kane Baker**, principal violist of

the Virginia Symphony Orchestra since 1983. Upon learning of her recent two-page photo feature in the *Virginia Beach Beacon*, I recalled having covered (for the *Richmond Afro-American*) her marvelous solo appearance with the Richmond Symphony Youth Orchestra in 1973 at age 15.

Through *Symphonium*, **Jennings** kept us informed of the activities of violinist **Karen Lowry**, then a member of the Kennedy Center Opera Orchestra and formerly with the Louisville, Austin, Atlanta, North Carolina, and Grant Park Orchestras. She also alerted her readers to the fact that violinist **Robin Burwell** had been a member of the Austin Symphony since 1982. Burwell previously held membership in the Toledo (Ohio) Symphony.

Readers shared in the activities of **Ann Hobson Pilot**, a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 1969. Following a brief tenure with the National Symphony Orchestra, she joined the Boston as associate principal and became principal harpist in 1980. **Hobson Pilot** has appeared as soloist with both the Boston Symphony and the Boston Pops. She launched an impressive recording career in 1991.

Earlier issues were equally as informative. **Jennings** alerted her readers to the activities of conductor **Yvette Devereaux** (Vol. 5, #1), who was appointed director of the Southwest Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles, in the Fall of 1992. Other activities for the violinist/conductor included the position of concert mistress of the Torrance (California) Symphony and associate professor of music at Compton Community College. **Devereaux** was the first black woman to receive the M.Mus. in orchestral conducting from Peabody Conservatory.

Most interesting were the activities of violinist/conductor **Anne Lundy**, founder and director of the Scott Joplin Orchestra, an all-black community orchestra in Houston, TX. The Houston native is also founder of and violinist with the William Grant Still String Quartet. Committed to music of black composers, the groups' repertoire reflects this interest. Finally, the name **Lynne Richburg** appeared in the Winter 1990 issue of *Symphonium* (Vol.2, #1). She had recently been hired as principal violist with the Sacramento Symphony.

Before leaving the subject of *Symphonium*, it is appropriate for us to consider more fully the career of its editor, **Patricia Prattis Jennings**. As she recently wrote for *Symphony* (Jan./Feb. 1996) of Joseph Striplin, black violinist with the Detroit Symphony: "He has made his 'big-league' orchestra career in the city of his birth." The same can be said of Jennings.

Kay George Roberts conducting the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra.

She was the first black woman (and fifth black) to join the roster of a major orchestra. Her contract with the Pittsburgh Symphony began with the 1964-65 season, as the orchestra started on an 11-week State Department sponsored tour of Europe and the Middle East. Today, as keyboardist, and frequent orchestral soloist, she holds the Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin F. Jones, III Endowed Chair with the orchestra. A highly respected recitalist and chamber music performer, she is also a prize-winning songwriter.

The piano emerged as the instrument of choice, but it should be noted that during her high school and undergraduate years (Carnegie Mellon), **Jennings** was also a violinist. A violin career seemed less attractive following an appearance with the Pittsburgh Symphony at age 14, performing Mozart's *Coronation* Concerto. With all of Jennings's personal achievements in the music world, it is admirable that she decided to bring before an eager readership the achievements of other black orchestral musicians. (See "Patricia Prattis Jennings," in *Notable Black American Women, Bk. II*, Jessie Carney Smith, editor, 1996.)

Black women in orchestras

The American Symphony Orchestra League, which has handled the Music Assistance Fund since early 1994, released a very important survey and study in 1990, titled *The Participation of Blacks in Professional Orchestras*. Of the 123 listed, it appears as if 31 are women. *Violinists*: **Melanie Baker**, Queens Symphony; **Michelle Bluford**, Sioux City Symphony; **Charlene Clark**, Saint Louis Symphony; **Mary Corbett**, The Florida Orchestra; **Gayle Dixon**, Queens Symphony; **Diane Howard**, Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic; **Irenee Johnson**, Evansville Philharmonic; **Gwen Laster**, Flint Symphony; **Cheryl Lawhorn**, Columbus (Georgia) Symphony; **Audrey Lipsey**, Kalamazoo Symphony; **Karen Lowry**, Grant Park Symphony; **Amie McClasky**, Sacramento and Stockton Symphonies; **Rosalyn Story**, Fort Worth Symphony; **Karen Walker**, Midland-Odessa Symphony.

Violists: **Beverly Kane Baker**, The Virginia Symphony; **Nina Cottman**, Delaware Symphony; **Karen Elaine**, San Diego Symphony; **Michelle Walker Fine**, Memphis Symphony. *Cellists*: **Dawn Foster Dodson**, San José Symphony; **Carlotta Gary**, Long Island Philharmonic; **Esther Mellon**, Baltimore Symphony. *Bassists*: **Ida Bodin**, Cabrillo Music Festival; **Angela Jones**, Kalamazoo Symphony; **Jacqueline Pickett**, Columbus (Georgia) Symphony; **Melanie Punter**, Stamford Symphony; **Laura Snyder**, Milwaukee Symphony. *Clarinetist*: **Deborah Pittman**, Sacramento Symphony. *Harpist*: **Ann**

Hobson Pilot, Boston Symphony. *Keyboardists*: **Wanda Harris**, Dayton Philharmonic and **Patricia Prattis Jennings**, Pittsburgh Symphony. *Percussionist*: **Lovie Smith-Schenk**. Since the release of ASOL's survey and study, violinist **Kelley Hall** has joined the Springfield (Massachusetts) Symphony Orchestra.

The League established an Orchestra Management Fellowship Program in 1979. Fellows spend 15 weeks with two major orchestras and one regional orchestra, one week with a small budget orchestra, and a week at one of the League's Orchestra Management Seminars. Initially, Fellows spend two weeks at the League's DC office and one week at the League's National Conference. Thanks to the personal outreach efforts of Catherine French, CEO, and others, more and more persons of African descent have met the requirement and joined the ranks of ASOL Fellows. The list has included the following black females: **Angela Cowser**, current location unknown; **Alicia Mayfield Smallwood**, currently employed by the Peoria Symphony, and **Jennifer Jackson**, currently employed by "651" at the Majestic Theater in Brooklyn, New York.

Finally the Detroit Symphony Orchestra conducted an African-American Composers Forum for five years (1990-94). The Forum was created "to identify significant orchestral works by African-Americans and provide the opportunity for the composers and the public to hear their works performed by a professional orchestra." Several black women have represented themselves as finalists: **Joyce Solomon Moorman**, **Regina A. Harris Baiocchi**, and **Dolores White**. Of the 15 adjudicators, one was the established black woman composer **Dorothy Rudd Moore**. These women are following in a tradition launched by **Florence Price** (1888-1953) and **Julia Perry** (1924-1979).

The above is only representative of the activity of black women in the American symphonic orchestral mainstream. May the numbers continue to increase. Though we have certainly not reached a panacea in race relations in this country, I firmly believe that the opportunities are there, now, as never before.

D. Antoinette Handy recently retired as Director of the Music Program, National Endowment for the Arts. Dr. Handy has also distinguished herself as an orchestral and chamber music flutist, professor of music history, and author.

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Timpanist

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One of the principal reasons for the popularity of some early women's orchestras *was* their oddity, an oddity derived from the perceived incongruity of women playing instruments usually reserved for men.[25] Much of the heyday of the women's orchestras, from about 1880 to 1930, was also the height of the vaudeville era, and some early women's ensembles sought acceptance by embracing features of vaudeville—notably the effort of performers to appear unusual or otherwise distinctive.

Dressing the part

An early example of women in masculine musical roles was the popular vaudeville troupe known as the British Blondes, which toured the U.S. in 1868. "The assumption of masculinity permeated their performances...they did clog dances and played banjos and trumpets."[26] Many of the vaudeville acts that were popular between 1880 and 1930 featured women in stereotypically masculine roles—and lady cornetists, trombonists, and baritones performed as frequently as lady fencers, boxers, and strongwomen.[27]

Caroline Nichols' Fadettes Orchestra, formed in 1888 and performing regularly throughout the country until 1918, pursued a more sophisticated version of this strategy of playing upon mixed gender roles. The women musicians wore shimmery feminine gowns while playing the whole range of musical instruments.[28] This juxtaposition provided the kind of incongruity that vaudeville audiences found entertaining.

The clothing these women wore on stage may be seen as a clue to how they wanted to be perceived—entertainers or artists, musicians or women musicians. The Fadettes Orchestra wore shimmery gowns in the early 1900s, as did the Orchestrette Classique in 1937. The Women's Symphony Orchestra of New York, performing in 1935 under Antonia Brico, wore black dresses, as did most women's orchestras performing in the 1930s.[29]

Violinist Maud Powell felt that elegant gowns were essential for "maintaining the dignity and beauty expected of a female concert artist." Her husband and manager, knowing how much she disliked taking the time to choose gowns and have them fitted, tried to persuade her to adopt more of a concert uniform, but she remained unconvinced.[30] Ethel Leginska did adopt tailored concert attire for performing—a black skirt and jacket, and white blouse—which she said allowed her to forget her appearance and concentrate on her art.[31]

Women performers still differ on this issue. Rosalyn Tureck, a pianist performing in the mid-twentieth century, concertized in a plain black dress so as to provide no distraction from the music. Internationally acclaimed violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter favors fashionable, low-cut, off-the-shoulder designer gowns. "Never in my life would I go onstage in a dress which is not beautiful," she stated in a 1988 interview.[32]

Girls, teachers and bands

While performance remained problematic, one might assume that public school teaching—generally conceded to be a female domain—would have been

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one area in which women could excel as teachers of instrumental music. This was not the case. Before 1900, when music in the public schools was exclusively vocal, songs were taught and led by the classroom teacher, who was usually female. With the introduction of instrumental music, around 1900, the job of music instruction in the public schools grew larger. School officials now wanted a "music supervisor"—someone who could organize the program, teach the various instruments, and then conduct the school band and orchestra. This expectation that the music supervisor would have some ability to play the whole range of band instruments effectively barred women from the job.

Though girls did play a variety of instruments in school bands and orchestras, the extent of their participation in the marching band aroused particular male concern. Some band directors in the 1930s and 1940s responded by forming separate all-girl bands while others dealt with their discomfort by developing alternative ways for girls to perform on the playing field.

"When a critic said I played like a woman...he did not like me at all."

The director of the school band in Fort Stockton, Texas, extolled the virtues of the "Bugle-Lyra," a set of bells especially designed for marching which would substitute for the bugles normally used. This would counter any objections that the bugle would "alter the shape of the girls' lips....This new instrument is not heavy, has a very attractive appearance, and in every way fills a long-felt need."[33]

More common solutions abandoned musical performance altogether in favor of decorative display. During the 1930s and 1940s baton twirling grew increasingly popular, and "pretty girls with flashing batons" decorated the playing fields. "Flag-waving"—the swinging of decorative flags to music—was another alternative. To accompany the girls, the boys in the band usually played a familiar waltz, "the ideal type of music for flag twirling. The combination is most effective and beautiful."[34] Activities such as baton-twirling and flag-waving flourished because of the discomfort music educators felt with girls playing and marching with brass and wind instruments.

Even those who got to play a band instrument won approval as much for appearance as for performance. In school music magazines, captions on photographs of female instrumentalists almost invariably commented on physical attractiveness as well as performing ability. One high school director advised his colleagues who conducted all-girls bands: "Buy the members of such a band pretty uniforms and their appearance will even surpass that of the boys." Thus twentieth-century public education, while professedly egalitarian, was less so in practice.

Appearance vs. acceptability

In orchestras, meanwhile, official rhetoric declared that opportunities for women were increasing. In reality, however, unofficial restrictions on women's choice of instruments remained unchanged. In 1952 Raymond Paige, music director of the Radio City Music Hall orchestra, assured readers of *Etude Magazine*, the foremost publication for music teachers, that the girl who desired a position in a symphony orchestra would be judged on "musicianship and character and not at all the fact of her being a girl."

While he urged teachers to tell the girls to play whatever instrument they liked best, he also noted that "instruments requiring physical force are a dubious choice, partly because women lack the strength for them, partly because the spectacle of a girl engaging in such physical exertions is not attractive....In general, women who want orchestral work do better to avoid anything heavier than the cello, the clarinet and the French horn. On the other hand, their natural delicacy gives them an advantage with the violin, the viola, the flute and the oboe."[35] In other words, any instrument was all right, but appearance would ultimately determine acceptability.

Appearances continue to define the musical instruments women are likely to play. An examination of orchestral membership lists from the 1940s to the 1980s shows that the patterns Paige described in 1952 provide a fairly accurate picture of the instruments women have played and continue to play in American symphony orchestras.

Even in the 1980s, fewer than 15 percent of the orchestra members who played percussion instruments, the string bass, or the "heavier brasses" (any but the French horn) were women. In the woodwind sections, women substantially increased their representation as oboists, English horn players, and bassoonists between the 1940s and the 1980s. Female participation as violinists, violists, and cellists was already high and increased slightly.

And women continued to predominate in the traditional female specialties. Sixty-one percent of the flutists in these orchestras were women in the 1980s, as were 60 percent of the keyboard players and 90 percent of the harpists. Even "blind auditions"—most orchestral players audition behind a screen so the sex of the player is not known—have not yet altered the likelihood that women will play particular instruments.

The April 16, 1990 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine announced a performance of a piece for trombone and orchestra featuring solo trombonist Ava Ordman. The author felt obliged to add: "Those who find themselves a little startled by the prospect of a female trombone soloist may be assured that times are, however tardily, changing...."[36] In many ways they have not changed significantly since John Dwight expressed bemusement in 1853.

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Editor's Note: The full text of this article originally appeared in the Winter 1993 issue of the *Journal of Social History*.

[1] "A Monster Concert by Young Ladies," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 3 (August 6, 1853): 142. The phrase "monster concert" refers to the large number of instrumentalists on stage, not to the participants.

[2] "The New Woman in Music," *Musical America* 9 (April 28, 1906): 8.

[3] "Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler," *Musical Courier* 37 (December 28, 1898): 40.

[4] Olga Samaroff Stokowski, "Women in Music," *Music Clubs Magazine* 17 (September-October 1937): 7-9, 12.

[5] "Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler," *Musical Courier* 40 (January 3, 1900): 18.

[6] Tick, Judith. "Passed Away is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870-1900" in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, eds. Jane Bowers

and Judith Tick (Urbana, 1986), 328.
[7] Karen A. Shaffer and Neva Garner Greenwood, *Maud Powell: Pioneer American Violinist* (Ames, Iowa: ISU Press, 1988) 16.
[8] Raymond Morin, *The Worcester Music Festival, Its Background and History, 1855-1945* (Worcester, Mass.: Worcester County Music Association, 1946), 42-43. Quoted in Ammer, *Unsung*, 30.
[9] "The Symphony Society," *New York Times*, 20 January 1889, 3. Quoted in Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 113.
[10] Shaffer and Greenwood, *Maud Powell*, 148ff.
[11] T.L. Krebs, "Women as Musicians," *Sewanee Review* 2 (Nov. 1893): 80-81.
[12] "Elsa Reugger," *Musical Courier* 45 (November 12, 1902): 27.
[13] Judith Tick, *American Women Composers Before 1870* (Ann Arbor, 1983), 28.
[14] Sidney Lanier, *Music and Poetry: Essays Upon Some Aspects and Interrelations of the Two Arts* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898), 39.
[15] Leon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works* (New York: Dover, 1973), 162.
[16] James Barron. "A Sax Craze, Inspired By The Simpsons." *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1996, Sec. 4, p. 2.
[17] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 101-102.
[18] Ralph Korn, *How to Organize the Amateur Band and Orchestra* (New York: Greenberg, 1928), 42.
[19] "Orchestral Women," *Scientific American* 73 (November 23, 1895): 327.
[20] W.J. Henderson, "Music and Musicians," *New York Sun*, 16 November 1935, p. 9.
[21] Tick, "Passed Away," 332-333.
[22] "Vienna Lady Orchestra," *New York Times*, 13 September 1871, 5.
[23] Reprinted as "Vienna Lady Orchestra," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 31 (September 23, 1871): 104.
[24] "When Women Blow Horns," *Literary Digest* 113 (April 2, 1932): 19-20. There are two types of double bass bow. One is constructed like a modern cello bow and is held in an overhand position. The other is larger and grasped by the end, almost like a saw. "Bow" in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.*
[25] Tick, "Passed Away," 329; Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 103.
[26] Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 121-125.
[27] Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover, 1963), 395-410.
[28] Blanche Naylor, *The Anthology of the Fadettes* (Boston: Author, 1941?), 8, 18.
[29] "Women's Symphony Under Brico in Debut Before Invited Audience," *Musical America* 40 (Feb. 25, 1935): 11.
[30] Shaffer and Greenwood, *Maud Powell*, 204-206; Ammer, Unsung, 109.
[31] "Leginska, Ethel," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1980), 415-416.
[32] "Classically Modern," *Maclean's*, Dec. 5, 1988, p. 31.
[33] Joe Berryman, "The Bugle-Lyra in the Girls' Drum Corps," *School Musician* 8 (March, 1937): 18.
[34] "Pretty Girls With Flashing Batons," *School Musician* 12 (February 1941): 28; Ray W. Dutcher, "Eastside High School Augments its Band With Flag Twirlers," *School Musician* 12 (February 1941): 17.
[35] Raymond Paige, "Why Not Women in Orchestras?" *Etude* 70 (January 1952): 14-15.
[36] "Music," *New Yorker* 66 (April 16, 1990): 19.

CORRECTIONS

Reference to the Chaminade Club of New York in the Fall issue should have been to the Chaminade Club of Yonkers.

The Boston Athenaeum should have received credit for all photos appearing in **The Amazing Garcias** featured in the Fall issue of *Signature*. We apologize for this oversight.

Ed.

Ben-Dor

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tras suggests that she belongs to a select breed of young conductors who are creating a new paradigm of leadership and artistic vision, coupled with an abiding respect for their musical colleagues. As an example, when forced to deal with a recalcitrant player, she prefers a private meeting to an embarrassing confrontation in front of colleagues. "I will go a long way before I will flex muscle."

While viewing several videos of Ben-Dor's live concerts, I noticed that she rarely made direct eye contact with any of the musicians. Having spent many years in orchestras myself, under various conductors who did look directly at players, especially when they had solo passages, I was struck by this idiosyncratic detail since she obviously commanded their involvement.

"All I know is that I am 100% truthful when I am conducting." She described seeing the music in her mind as she conducts, constantly measuring what she imagines with what she is actually hearing. At the same time, she feels intrinsically linked with the orchestra.

"I feel I am playing in the orchestra.... I don't feel like a time beater, I feel like I am one with them, and that is the way I felt when I was a kid — it always carried me on."

In December 1993, she was asked on a few hours notice to fill in for Kurt Masur who had fallen ill, thus making her debut with the New York Philharmonic in a manner likened by critics to Leonard Bernstein's own similar debut with that orchestra 50 years ago. In spite of the orchestra's famed reputation for giving some conductors a hard time, she has been invited back and enjoys a smooth relationship with the musicians, likening the experience of conducting them to driving a Rolls Royce.

I asked her if she were given the opportunity to conduct any orchestra in the world she has not yet worked with, which would she choose. She was silent for a moment and I thought she would resist, not wanting to slight anyone. "Chicago Symphony," she said with a laugh. "I mean, why should I say somewhere like Vienna or Berlin, where I know they don't want me as a woman. Chicago...," she reiterated with a twinkle in her eye, "or maybe Boston."

Faith and doubt

Asked of which achievement she was most proud, Ben-Dor mentioned her recent recordings. "I'm super proud of them, this is really a beginning, something I always wanted to do. This is material I researched, a project I put together... in the design, the cover. This is an artist I recommended ... I supervised ... every aspect of this whole thing and the quality is very high...."

Like many people who are successful, Ben-Dor's publicity materials portray a steady ascent to her present position. She was reluctant to discuss disappointments saying: "I think it's too early for me to make a list of failures." Believing the true measure of a person's mettle lies in response to obstacles, I asked her if she ever lost faith in herself.

"You hurt. I don't think you ever lose faith in the long run. You see the funny thing about faith is, faith comes when there is doubt...one pushes the other, and one carries the other. You wouldn't need faith if you didn't have doubt. You would have knowledge... and actually when there is doubt, it strengthens the faith. So no, you don't lose it, and it has to be very strong. And you do learn from your failures...it would frighten me to think if it had been too easy."

Ben-Dor exudes the rare contentment of those fortunate enough to have achieved success in both their personal and professional lives. Indeed she described her goals over the next decade as similar to her present life except that she wants to spend less time traveling.

"Hopefully I'll be conducting the great orchestras in the world, running...only one orchestra, large enough for me to live there with my family. I will still have a teenage son who needs to be at home....I would hope that even sooner than that I don't have to travel so much."

* * *

Before concluding the interview I asked Ben-Dor how she reconciles the artist's urge to create and leave something behind, with the fleeting quality of music. In preparation for this article I found myself comparing the process of writing with playing music. Music is unique in that is the only art form where time is such an essential element. Musicians constantly count and everything is measured in increments of time. Schopenhauer deemed music the purest form of expression because it is a universal language. There is no restriction around the world. Musicians can reach directly into people's souls. Yet it is so ephemeral — as the most beautiful note is played it disappears. It has that special poignancy of life itself — the present is the future past. Musicians make recordings in an attempt to leave something behind, yet this creates another dilemma for there is always a layer of technology between the artist and the expression.

A very complicated age

"Colin Davis said that he thinks often about dying, and actually he compares his life to a performance, where you are anticipating the performance, then you perform, and then it's over," Ben Dor observed. "He says it's like a rehearsal of one's life....There was a very short period of time where I was afraid of performing ...because it's like your life — you can't go back, and it's always going to that one ending....I was a little bit neurotic about starting and knowing that I couldn't stop.... Now my thought is, is this going to be a good performance or not? There is no existential fear anymore, but it is this element of time that advances in this relentless way."

She compared music with art, gesturing towards the painting above her sofa: "I can look at it and it's there, but in my relation to it, it does not involve me...in that respect....This has this static, permanent quality to it — this doesn't change. I may change the way I look at it, which is always very nice, you always discover yourself, it's always there."

Looking at the painting led back to the issue of recording. "The one thing about recording, good and bad about it, is that it's always there ... if you want to be a purist you should never record. There are some very extreme people who will not do it. And there are some artists who have only played for recordings like Glenn Gould, or Horowitz, who, for a very long time, could not face the audience and the fact that they couldn't stop. So I wasn't alone in that thinking ... in the studio you can stop and they'll put it all together....You have control of time, of life — if you've made a mistake and you have to keep going, it's painful, but here you can fix it. And then it's beautiful, every time you hear it, like this picture. On the other hand you say: 'Where's the performance I did last week? Is it in the tape?' No, the tape doesn't include the way we felt the au-

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Ben-Dor

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dience, the energy... the performance is gone, it happened at that moment ... it was unique, there was never something like it, and there will never be something like it again. So you balance those two things...."

Despite this inherent paradox, Ben-Dor, like most musicians, loves to record, perhaps in response to her fears about the future of performances. "I don't know how long into the next century public concerts will go on....We are becoming more and more closed in our artifacts." She sees other forms of communal experiences existing. "There are town meetings, churches, even rock concerts ... all kinds of places where people get together and have an experience. It doesn't have to be this difficult music."

Once again the intertwining themes of faith and doubt emerged as core tenets of her personal philosophy.

"This is a very complicated age," Ben Dor said. "I think the reason why people are under such pressure right now to accomplish so many things, do everything faster, all the technology...is [that] this is a century of doubt. Previous centuries were centuries of faith. People have suddenly realized they're going to die and not...go somewhere else. They believe once it's over, it's finished. They realize this is all there is and there are so many possibilities. We are ambitious, that's why we built this world....So then you want to do everything, to have everything and to be everything. In the past people accepted limitations."

At the close of our conversation, I asked her to compose a line about herself as if written by her musical colleagues.

"I wish I would have prepared a little, and thought about it. By my musical colleagues? I don't know, it's so hard." She picked up her publicity brochure and pointed to a quote: "Somebody said it for me."

I read the line aloud, "A musician in heart and soul."

As I drive away, I leave fascinated by this intense, compact woman who seems to possess the stuff of which artistry is made — the capacity to look at the world with absolute, naked honesty; synthesized with the chimeric ability to graft her unique experience of living in vastly different parts of the world. Gisèle Ben-Dor is a woman who has learned the art of compromise, without having compromised herself.

The New York Times described **Lisa Hansen's** flute playing as "irresistibly lyrical" and having "considerable coloristic variety" while *Fanfare* wrote, "One might well prefer Hansen to Galway." Formerly principal flutist of the Mexico City Philharmonic, Ms. Hansen won critical acclaim for her EMI-Angel recording of Rodrigo's **Concierto Pastoral** with the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. A graduate of The Juilliard School, she was featured in the EMMY award-winning CBS-TV documentary, *Juilliard & Beyond - A Life in Music.* Ms. Hansen has concertized extensively in the United States, Europe and Latin America. She is a member of the chamber music trio *Serenata.*

Acknowledgements
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Gisèle Ben-Dor Select Discography

Bartok - *For Children, Divertimento and Romanian Folk Dances*, The Sofia Soloists (Centaur CRC 2239).

Alberto Ginastera - *Variaciones Concertantes, Glosses on Themes of Pablo Casals*, London Symphony Orchestra/Israel Chamber Orchestra (Koch International Classics 3-7149-2 H1).

Lisa Hansen Select Discography

Joaquin Rodrigo, *Concierto Pastoral* - for flute and orchestra, Lisa Hansen, flute, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (EMI Classic CZS 767452).

Suite de Ballet - English works for flute and piano, Lisa Hansen, flute; Alison Brewster, piano (Musical Heritage Society 312029 M).

Rodrigo, *Fantasia para un gentilhombre* - for flute and orchestra, Lisa Hansen, flute, State of Mexico Symphony (EMI) (to be released in 1996)

San Vito

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because they become distracted from the matters and occupations most proper for them. [Therefore], no unmarried woman, married woman, or widow of any rank, status, condition, even those who for reasons of education or anything else are living in convents or conservatories, under any pretext, even to learn music in order to practice it in those convents, may learn to sing from men, either laymen or clerics or regular clergy, no matter if they are in any way related to them, and to play any sort of musical instrument.[6]

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[1] Hercule Bottregari, *Il Desiderio*, trans. Carol MacClintock, New York: American Institute of Musicology, 1962, pp. 58-59.
[2] *Ibid.*, p.60.
[3] Jane Bowers, "The Emergence of Women Composers in Italy, 1566-1700," in Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (eds.), *Women Making Music*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 126.
[4] Karen Pendle, "Women in Music, ca. 1450-1600" in Karin Pendle (ed.), *Women & Music: A History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 45.
[5] Bowers and Tick, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

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Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980), Volume 6, pp. 486-489.

Ruth Gipps

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ano playing she would concentrate on conducting. Music was her chief joy in life and such a formidable natural gift as hers could not be abandoned. Indomitable as ever, she kept going. Composer Herbert Howells once described her as "Go-getter Ruth." Go-getter she might have been but her aims were never for self-aggrandizement. Many young musicians owe their debut concerts entirely to Gipps, and the list of others who have benefited from her encouragement, generosity and kindness is very long indeed.

Early that same year, Gipps received financial support from one of her colleagues, Jack Graty, an amateur viola player in the Co-op Orchestra. After a week's work with the Ballet Rambert, he handed over his entire wage packet of £12 in order to pay for a concert by the Co-op Orchestra conducted by Gipps. Her brother Bryan played her **Violin Concerto** and they did Vaughan Williams' **5th Symphony** (omitting the very difficult scherzo) and **String Interlude** by her friend and fellow composer Adrian Cruft. Everybody donated their services, including Cruft, also a professional double-bass player. This was the first occasion that she conducted a complete concert.

Later, Cruft took her out to lunch and insisted upon lending her £50 so that she could employ the Boyd Neel Orchestra, in which he was sub-principal double-bass, for a concert in which she would gain her first experience conducting fully-fledged professionals. This highly successful concert took place in the Birmingham Town Hall with an all-Mozart program: Symphonies 39 and 40, Piano Concerto No. 23 with a young pianist, Dola Harris, and Gipps' husband Robert Baker playing the beautiful Clarinet Concerto.

Ruth Gipps was adored by her students and young musicians alike. Whereas so many of the older generation envied her undoubted abilities, the young, free from all such prejudice, discovered in her a warm and unfailing friend whose judgments could be relied upon.

How she came about starting her first orchestra is a perfect example. She once asked some young orchestral players what facilities they lacked most. They were all of the same opinion. There were no opportunities for sight-reading or the study of repertoire.

So in 1955, Gipps founded the "One Rehearsal Orchestra," later the "London Repertoire Orchestra," a professional body making itself available in London and the provinces. Gipps gave debuts to performers who have now risen to the top of their profession such as Iona Brown, Julian Lloyd Webber, Alexander Baillie and Neil Jenkins. At every concert there was at least one work by a living composer, including, in 1972, the first London performance of Bliss's Cello Concerto — Julian Lloyd Webber's professional debut. In addition to the works of Elgar, Holst, Vaughan Williams, Bax and Ireland, other composers whose names are now forgotten were represented at these concerts—Colin Arenstein, William Bardwell, Alan Bullard, Gaze Cooper, Alfred Corum and many, many others.

❖

"...but the jealousy was such that a member of the orchestra deliberately played wrong notes."

A legacy and an orchestra

In 1961, Ruth Gipps founded the Chanticleer Orchestra. "My husband came into a legacy from an elderly relative and wanted me to have some of the government stocks amounting to about £2,300 in my name. I told him right away that if he gave it to me, I would spend it all on giving concerts so he'd better think twice. He insisted that I have them and so I invested it all in giving six symphony concerts at the St. Pancras Town Hall."

The orchestra was named after a quote from the play *Chanticleer* by the French dramatist and poet Edmond Rostand which is roughly: "If all the cocks crowed their best forever there would be no more night." Gipps smiled impishly, saying that if the same idea was concerned with music then there wouldn't be anyone who didn't appreciate good music, which, she added with a smile "is just about as feasible as there being no night."

The high standards of the orchestra's playing were acknowledged even by Gipps' sternest critics. "We had a wonderful atmosphere. The main body consisted of young professionals playing regularly in the London orchestras, and I was lucky in that I had people like Cecil Aronowitz as principal viola and Olga Hegedus as principal cellist. The older ones would show off a bit to the sub-principals who were all younger, with the result that they would aim at coming up to the standards of the principals and sometimes played just as well."

Bernard Shore was so impressed with the "perfect balance" she had achieved that he managed to obtain a Gulbenkian grant which enabled them to give two further concerts. "We always had two solos in every concert and also included performances of British contemporary music."

Their history from this point is the usual story of sporadic support by various patrons and authorities with the occasional refusal from some members of the musical establishment when they needed a little grace to pay outstanding bills. But, resourceful as ever, Gipps and her friends went out and sold some of their precious antiques so that the orchestra could survive. The Rondel Ensemble, a small group formed from the core of the orchestra, has made one CD and will be playing Ruth Gipps' **Sinfonietta** for ten winds and tam-tam, written for them, at the 75th Birthday concert and Reception on 14 March at the British Music Information Centre in London.

It seems quite extraordinary that regardless of all her other musical activities, Gipps always found time for composing. Her **Concerto for Violin, Viola and Small Orchestra**, Op. 49 was completed in 1957 and first performed by her brother Bryan and Cecil Aronowitz on 30 January 1962 at St. Pancras Town Hall with the Chanticleers conducted by the composer. This double concerto has had a checkered history for which the BBC is partly responsible. According to the Corporation, the work was placed in a category known as "passed if offered." Several attempts by the composer and other musicians to obtain a broadcast were of no avail. Colin Sauer and Keith Lovell with the Bristol Sinfonia under Sydney Sager duly offered it, but the BBC insisted that their request was invalid as it had to be offered by a staff conductor at the BBC. Yet the Bristol

Sinfonia had performed Paul Patterson's **Trumpet Concerto** without any problems, also a "passed if offered" work.

Sounds in her mind

At this point, I asked Ruth Gipps how she came about ideas for her compositions. "In the first instance, my job was to become so thoroughly trained that when I heard a sound in my mind, I knew which instrument was playing the solo and which were accompanying, and I knew what the harmonies were." She then gave me an example of how an idea can come from nowhere.

Her **Symphony No. 3**, Op. 57 dates from 1965 and is cast in four movements, lasting around 35 minutes. The *finale* begins without a break and contains a substantial rhythmic and brilliantly conceived fugue which, according to Gipps, was "quite accidental."

This "accident" occurred while she was teaching at Trinity College in London, where she was a professor from 1959-1966. "I would have my manuscript on the piano and in between lessons I would compose. I'd think of something, hold down a chord with the pedal whilst I wrote it down and then when the student arrived, I would put it away.

"On this occasion the *scherzo* ended on a sustained b-flat and the flute then picked up the b-flat and started playing a folksy tune in alternate bars of 3/4 and 5/4. Then the first violins played a little tune and I was about to develop it when a pupil came in and I had to shut it away. Next morning I was in the train, thought about it, and said to myself: 'That looks like a fugue subject.' I'd no intention of writing a fugue but asked myself, 'Does it do anything useful?'

"I then discovered it works in *stretto* at the 4th the right way up and it also works in a *stretto* at the octave if you reverse one of them. So it was an inversion. By this time, the form of the work was inevitable. I decided that altogether it was extraordinarily clever—by accident. If I'd done it on purpose it would have been very brainy, but I had no idea about this at the time."

It was fascinating to listen to the tape of this concerto and follow the musical development, and I wondered just how many other composers would not have taken the full credit for inventing such a brilliant idea.

In 1967 Ruth Gipps became Chair of the Composers' Guild, succeeding her friend Adrian Cruft. Cruft possessed business acumen, a rare gift in a composer, and during his time of office eliminated the Guild's debts of £3,000 and raised a Gulbenkian grant which enabled the British Music Information Centre (BMIC) to open in November 1967 in a ceremony conducted by Lord Goodman. The Composers' Guild had been formed shortly after the end of the war by a distinguished body which included Arthur Bliss, William Alwyn and Guy Warrack, with Vaughan Williams as their first president.

When the Guild invited Ruth Gipps to become a member, she accepted with alacrity, representing the Midlands with unremitting zeal. Guy Warrack initiated the idea of a British Music Information Centre after visiting such organizations in other countries and realizing their value. Warrack conducted the BBC Scottish Orchestra for many years, broadcasting a wide repertoire, as he was privileged with choosing his own programs. However, it should be noted that it was Ruth Gipps as Chair of the Composers' Guild and Elizabeth Yeoman as Secretary who originally brought about the opening of the BMIC. When a recent history of the organization was published, Cruft was mentioned but the names of the two women were omitted.

Gipps wrote her **Horn Concerto**, Op. 58 in 1968 for her son, Lance Baker, who gave the first performance with the composer conducting. The first broadcast was in 1982 with Frank Lloyd and the BBC Welsh Orchestra under George Tzipine. Once again this is a brilliant piece of writing which shows that the composer understands the capabilities of the instrument, calling for restrained mellowness and at the same time sensitivity and interpretative skills. Fortunately, this concerto is being recorded for a CD by Lyrita featuring hornist David Pyatt with Nicholas Braithwaite conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Other horn concertos on the same disc are by Malcolm Arnold, Gordon Jacob and York Bowen.

Gipps' **Symphony No. 4**, Op. 61, dating from 1972, is a masterpiece by anyone's standards. Its abundance of rhythmic interest needs a large orchestra. The premiere was given by the London Repertoire Orchestra conducted by Gipps at the Royal Festival Hall on 28 May 1973. Ten years later it was broadcast in a performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir John Pritchard.

Gipps' **Symphony No. 5**, Op. 64 (1982), dedicated to Sir William Walton, is scored for a large orchestra including quadruple woodwind, six horns and two harps.

Although her work in general has never achieved the recognition it deserves, it is patently clear that musicians of all ages with whom she has come into contact in her very active and productive musical life have appreciated what she has done for them. For her 60th birthday in 1981, all her orchestral players and soloists presented her with a holiday in India and Nepal, which she confesses was the holiday of her life. This touching and worthy tribute was one of the many expressions of the very high regard in which she is held.

But what she would prize above all would be to have her symphonies and major works performed professionally. Apart from her music she considers her life to be of little value to the world. She would dearly love to be remembered as someone whose music is appreciated by musicians.

She treasures the memories of her friendships with many who believed in what she was trying to achieve. When her friend, Adrian Cruft, born the same year, died on her birthday in 1987, she wrote a short orchestral work **Ambarvalia**, Op. 70 in his memory.

Ruth Gipps has, at times, been outspoken in her views which invariably turned out to be correct. Whether one agreed or disagreed with her, there could never be any doubt about her integrity. She has dealt competently with awesome individuals as if they were merely complicated orchestral scores. Her own music is always stylish and practicable and the fact that it is accessible without a great number of hearings is perhaps the highest compliment one can pay. Composers surely aim above all to communicate, not only to succeed.

A complete musician

Ruth Gipps is a complete musician—rarer than one is led to believe. She has a formidably distinguished academic record. After her professorship at Trinity College (1959-66), she spent the next ten years at the Royal College of Music, teaching the syllabus for both B.Mus and GRSM. In addition, workaholic that she was, she maintained her two orchestras, without fees, as there was no money to pay her. Between 1972

and 1979, she was a principal lecturer at Kingston Polytechnic. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and was made an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in 1981. But above all, she is a major composer despite being undervalued and ignored.

And what about Ruth Gipps, the human being? Perhaps the most revealing sidelight on the character of this amazing lady concerns an incident which happened when she was only 16 and had been at the RCM for just a term and a half.

She had failed to win a scholarship, so her mother, writing that they had no money, appealed for help from the Director, Sir Hugh Allen, a formidable man who never minced his words. The two were duly summoned to his office where he stormed at the teenager: "How can you expect us to pay for you when you're on the most expensive course in the college?"

The courses in question were first study, Piano, with an extra 20 minutes a week, Composition plus the paperwork for second study and Oboe as a third. He continued: "You'll have to give up some of your studies if we're going to have to pay for you. Which is it going to be?"

She answered in a flash: "None!" He used some pretty strong language and then said: "You'll have to give up piano." Once again she was adamant: "I am not giving up the piano. I've been playing in public since I was four!" Sir Hugh went on: "Composition, then?" The answer was clear: "I care about composition more than anything else in the world. No!" "Oboe then?" She stared him in the face and retorted: "How am I going to earn my living when I leave college?"

Sir Hugh turned to Mrs. Gipps and said: "Your daughter is a damned nuisance." After another 20 minutes of bullying, he conceded: "Your daughter is damned obstinate, and because she is so damned obstinate we shall have to find some money for her."

She was subsequently given an obscure scholarship for women composers and an Exhibition together with £30 a year from the Butterworth Trust. It all added up to about £110, £60 of which went in fees. Her parents had to provide just £1 a week towards her board.

Finally, I asked Ruth Gipps when she first thought about being a musician. "From the start I knew without a shadow of doubt that I should write music and that I should be a concert pianist, but I didn't know that the road led inevitably to conducting. I can't remember deciding to be a musician. One doesn't make decisions about plain necessities. I know that from one God comes music and all musical gifts. Some of us were composers from the beginning of our lives; we had no choice in the matter, only the life-long duty to make the most of a given talent. This talent may be large or small, but without it a person is not a composer."

Margaret Campbell is a member of *The Maud Powell Signature's* Editorial Advisory Board, author of *The Great Violinists* and *The Great Cellists*, and writes for *The Strad.*

For further information about Ruth Gipps' music, contact Pamela Blevins at *The MP Signature.*

The career of American composer Elinor Remick Warren spanned 75 years, beginning with the publication of *A Song of June* by G. Schirmer while she was a Los Angeles high school student. In her late teens, she went to New York where she studied accompaniment, piano and composition. She established herself as an accompanist for great singers of the day, including Richard Crooks, Florence Easton and Lawrence Tibbett. In the 1930s while still writing art songs and pieces for chorus and piano, she also turned her attention to composition in the larger forms. From 1932 until her death in 1991 she produced a substantial body of works for orchestra, chorus and orchestra, and orchestra and voice. Elinor Remick Warren never dwelled on the fact that she was a woman in a male-dominated field. She said, "I believe that music has no gender."

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