



A CELLO GALAXY OF BRITISH WOMEN COMPOSERS

CATHERINE
WILMERS, CELLO
JILL MORTON, PIANO

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Amy Elsie Horrocks (1867-1919)

Cello Sonata Op.7 (1899)*

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|----|----------------------------|------|
| 1. | I. Allegro con brio | 7:13 |
| 2. | II. Theme with Variations | 8:52 |
| 3. | III. Finale-Allegro vivace | 7:28 |

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

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|----|-----------------|------|
| 4. | Epilogue (1921) | 6:09 |
|----|-----------------|------|

Peggy Spencer Palmer (1900-1987)

- | | | |
|----|-------------|------|
| 5. | Legend* | 5:22 |
| 6. | Sarabande* | 2:42 |
| 7. | Bagatelle * | 2:44 |

Sarah Rodgers (b. 1953)

Mountain Airs (1999)* for Catherine Wilmers

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------|------|
| 8. | I. Alba | 3:06 |
| 9. | II. Apoteosis | 2:47 |
| 10. | III. Crepuscolo | 3:03 |
| 11. | IV. Fiesta | 2:45 |

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- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|
| Joan Trimble (1915-2000) | | |
| 12. | The Coolin' (1939)* | 3:08 |
| Dora Bright (1862-1951) | | |
| 13. | Das Fischermädchen (1934)* | 1:50 |
| Susan Spain-Dunk (1880-1962) | | |
| 14. | Winter Song (1935)* | 7:14 |
| Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987) | | |
| 15. | Mignonne, allons voir si la Rose * | 2:27 |
| 16. | L'Amour de moi* | 2:24 |
| 17. | Serenade* | 2:03 |
| Ethel Barns (1873-1948) | | |
| 18. | L'Escarpolette (Swing Song) | 2:06 |
| 19. | Idylle | 3:07 |
| 20. | Capricieuse* | 2:44 |
| Alice Verne Bredt (1864-1958) | | |
| 21. | Wiegenlied (Lullaby) | 2:16 |

Total Playing Time 81:41

*World Premier Recordings

INTRODUCTION

Women have consistently composed exceptional music, but much of it has been overlooked due to their limited professional opportunities, leading to fewer contributions by women compared to those by men. In 1994, Catherine collaborated with musicologist Robert Philip on a recital of women composers for the Open University, sparking her interest in researching forgotten works. She explored libraries and vintage music catalogues, and interviewed women composers, uncovering pristine, unused music in the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) library, as well as the insightful diaries of the wonderful cellist May Mukle. This research inspired her to begin recording this overlooked but rich musical heritage.

'I spent quarter of a century performing in the London Philharmonic', Catherine noted. 'Being the only woman cellist in 1979, I wondered why we had performed so few orchestral works by women. Aaron Cohen's *Encyclopaedia of Women Composers* (1987) documents 6200 women composers from 72 countries. There would have been plenty to choose from.'

The RAM's inclusion of women students from its foundation in 1823 shows a progressive stance for the time, but the challenges faced by women composers and musicians, even a century later, underline how opportunities and attitudes have lagged behind.

There have been some exceptions: Rebecca Clarke's achievements as a composer and violinist, including her groundbreaking participation in Sir Henry Wood's orchestra, are significant. Her inclusion in such a prominent ensemble reflects both her extraordinary talent and the slow breaking of gender barriers in the classical music world. However, the anecdotal parallel between Clarke's potential experiences in 1912 and Catherine's in the late 1970s — she was once told 'You play like a man and you have a nice bum' — reveals how deeply entrenched gendered perceptions in music were, and arguably, continue to be.

Fortunately the promotion of women composers has seen significant support from key figures and initiatives over time. The philanthropist William Cobbett inspired women by establishing a competition for 'phantasy' chamber music works, influencing four

composers on this album (Susan Spain-Dunk, Alice Verne-Bredt, Ethel Barns and Joan Trimble). Sir Dan Godfrey, conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, held a pioneering 1927 concert solely featuring women composers, including Susan Spain-Dunk and Dora Bright. The conductor August Manns put on works by women in his Crystal Palace Concerts, while Sir Henry Wood provided opportunities for women's world premières at the Proms. Women composers often organised their own concert series and joined the Society of Women Musicians (SWM), which supported and showcased their works from 1911 until its dissolution in 1972. To continue this legacy, the International Alliance of Women in Music (IAWM) was established in 1995. In 1999, Catherine premièred Sarah Rodgers' *Mountain Airs* at the IAWM conference, demonstrating the ongoing efforts to spotlight women composers.

As late as the 1920s music critic Cecil Gray paraphrased Dr Johnson by saying 'Sir, a woman's composing is like a dog walking on its hind legs; it is not done well but you are surprised to see it done at all.' 'It is this sort of comment that challenges one to find the fine music I am presenting on this CD,' says Catherine.

'I was lucky to have had the constant support of Graham Kingsley, my husband of forty years until his death in 2023', she notes. 'This album is called *A Cello Galaxy* as he was a member of the Cambridge Astronomical Society from 1959, and I told the grandchildren he had become a star in the sky. This has been a wonderful opportunity to unearth this strong, beautiful and sometimes poignant, unrecognised music. It is particularly exciting to have found the alluring full-length and previously unheard sonata by Amy Horrocks.



Manuscript for *Capricieuse* by Ethel Barns

THE COMPOSERS

By Catherine Wilmers

A. E. HORROCKS (1867-1919)

A student magazine in the 1890s recommended women composers to 'give the public only her surname and the initial letter of her Christian name. Then she will stand some chance of getting a certain amount of unbiased criticism - till she is found out.'

Amy Elise Horrocks was born in Brazil and studied at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) from 1882. Like Dora Bright (1884) and Ethel Barns (1890) she won the Potter Exhibition at the RAM in 1888. Amy studied piano and composition with Francis William Davenport, and was awarded the Sterndale Bennett Prize for piano in 1889. She taught piano in London and gave chamber concerts at the Prince's Hall in 1891, and was made a Fellow of the RAM in 1895. I discovered more about her when her great-grandson contacted me.

She composed *Variations for Piano Quartet* (1893), an *Elegy* for violin and piano (1899) and *The Lady of Shalott* for narrator and piano trio (1899). *The Times* on 2 December 1901 reported, 'Miss Ellen Bowick recited *The Lady of Shalott* with Miss Amy Horrock's beautiful accompaniment, played on violin, violoncello, and piano, by Mr Spencer Dyke, Miss May Mukle and Miss Elsie Horne.' Her dramatic cantata *Undine* was premièred in 1897 in an early Promenade concert, conducted by Henry Wood. She became well-known as a pianist and composer, and had several works performed at the later Henry Wood Proms. Her cantata *The Romaunt of the Page* was premièred in 1899, *Idle Poet* in 1900, and *The Bird and the Rose* for bass voice and orchestra in 1909.

She married aged 36, in England in 1903, and later the family moved to France with two children. By 1907 she felt she could not concentrate on composing and that it brought in very little money. Her song for peace, *Le Drapeau Bleu* (The Blue Flag), was composed late in life to commemorate the foundation of the League of Nations (forerunner of the United Nations, which had a blue flag).

The *Monthly Musical Record* recommended her song *Tragedy*: 'As Miss Horrock's music is graceful and melodious, the most sensitive person need not hesitate to invest threepence in a copy.'

The *Sonata Op. 7* for cello and piano of 1889 was dedicated to the illustrious cellist Alfredo Piatti. After a performance at the Prince's Hall in 1891 *The Musical Times* said 'It contains excellent workmanship and the theme and its five variations are ingeniously worked out. It was capitally played by Miss Horrocks at the piano and Mr Whitehouse at the cello and was cordially approved.' Catherine says 'I think this sonata is beautiful, well written and shows a great deal of creativity and is an excellent example of what could be achieved at this time with such limited chances.' It was published by Joseph Williams, as were her cello and piano pieces *Irish Melody* and *Country Dance*, recorded for ASV in 2000 by Catherine (CD QS6245).

REBECCA CLARKE (1886-1979)

In 1935 the critic for the Evening News reviewed a concert with new music by Lutyens, Maconchy and Williams: 'An interesting study of the young female mind of today. This organ, when it takes up musical composition, works in mysterious ways. No lip-stick, silk stocking, or saucily tilted hat adorns the music evolved from its recesses.'

Rebecca is a composer who I feel would be much better known had she written orchestral music, though she is widely respected for her chamber music and songs. Her father played the cello and pushed her to learn the violin. She studied at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) until, when she was 19, her professor proposed marriage, and her father then took her away. She later enrolled at the Royal College of Music (RCM) and became one of the earliest female students of Stanford, who had taught Holst, and of Vaughan Williams. He encouraged her to play the viola, so that she was 'right in the middle of the sound, and can tell how it's all done'. After two years, in 1910 Clarke's father abruptly barred her from home and cut her off financially. She had to leave the RCM, move in with friends and support herself. Sir Henry Wood hired her for his Queen's Hall Orchestra as one of the first professional women players.

As well as playing internationally as a viola player, she even performed as soloist in 1927 at a Henry Wood Prom. She played chamber music with Pablo Casals, her great friend cellist May Mukle, Artur Rubinstein, and Jacques Thibaud, amongst others.

As a composer her first big success was with *Morpheus*, for viola and piano. 'I gave a viola recital in New York and as viola pieces were so scarce I put in two or three of my

own,' she recalled. 'But I thought it would look silly to have my name on the programme too often so I invented the name "Anthony Trent" as composer of one of them. The next day I discovered that the critics were very much interested in Mr Trent, but had almost ignored the pieces by Rebecca Clarke. So a few years later, when my music was beginning to be published, I killed Anthony Trent officially and with no regrets, and I've never been bothered by him since!'

In 1919 she came second to Ernest Bloch in the Coolidge competition. 'You should have seen the faces of the jury when it was revealed the composer was a woman', said Mrs Coolidge. It was even thought that Clarke's *Sonata for viola and piano* had been written by Ravel. This triumph created a sensation, and she instantly became a celebrity. Cellist May Mukle and pianist Rae Robertson performed the Sonata at the Aeolian Hall in July 1922 with the blessing of Rebecca Clarke and a cello part was also published. The *Musical Times* wrote of her 1921 *Piano Trio* 'There is passionate music in every section - had it been the work of a man it would be called a virile effort.' Both are large scale works and now standard repertoire.

Only twenty of her works were published during her lifetime, many others remaining unpublished until recently, including some beautiful songs. She settled in America before the Second World War and married composer James Friskin in 1941. She later said she could only compose if it was the last thing she thought of at night and the first thing in the morning. Rebecca composed little in the 35 years after her marriage and gradually drifted out of the limelight. There was only a one-line entry in the 1980 *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, saying she was an English violist married to the composer James Friskin. He is now the forgotten composer!

The *Passacaglia* is an excellent work for cello and piano, recorded by Catherine on ASV (CD QS6245) in 2000. Rebecca wrote the *Epilogue* in 1921 shortly after her father died. It is poignant, painful and moving music. It was dedicated to Guilhermina Suggia, the cellist. Dame Thea King described this piece as 'exceptionally wonderful'.

FLORENCE MARY SPENCER PALMER (1900-1987)

In the eighteenth century the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said 'Women in general possess no artistic sensitivity nor genius. Their creations are as cold and as pretty as women. They have an abundance of spirit but lack soul.'

'Peggy' was born in Gloucestershire, the youngest of seven children. Her father ran a pharmacy in Thornbury and boasted that his shop was 'a high class up to date pharmacy and one of the largest and most completely stocked in the country'. He made his own cures. Peggy remembered a child who asked 'for Animated Pictures of Queen Anne which proved to be Ammoniated Tincture of Quinine.' She became an extremely talented musician at an early age. In 1915 the *Gazette* recorded that 'Peggy, as a pupil of Mabel G. Smith, has been successful in gaining a Senior Exhibition (value £9 9s) from Trinity College of Music in London.'

She later attended the Tobias Matthay Piano School in London, studying piano with Vivian Langrish, and composition with Benjamin Dale and Sir Ivor Atkins. She received her LRAM diploma and won the prestigious Chappell Gold Medal for her piano playing in 1923. A scholarship to London University was awarded to her and she took a B.Mus. Apparently she found it difficult to reconcile secular success with the kind of humble service she thought God wanted her to do. She became pianist and secretary to Mrs Catherine Booth-Clibborn (the daughter of Salvation Army founder William Booth) on her evangelistic tours. From 1929-48 she was Director of Music at Clarendon School in Malvern.

Later she taught piano in 1948-58 at Redland High School in Bristol, and at St Brandon's School in Clevedon in 1956-61. Three of her tunes were published in the Congregational Hymnbook, and she won the Horatio Lumb Competition for hymn tunes and anthems. She had piano works (*Burlesque, Three Festive Pieces and Variations on Barbara Allen*) and songs published, as well as a book, *Simplified Sightreading* (1970) and the *Pianists' Book of Chimes* (1953). The Head of Music at Redland School said 'Peggy had a great facility for harmony and added notes to chords to make them sound like bells.' Pupils at the school recall 'her improvisations at morning assembly. These were wonderful flights of fancy, intricate but always adhering to the initial subject matter and quite unique. I used to be in awe of the person with this much talent.' 'At morning prayers suitable piano music would be played by Miss Spencer Palmer, a middle aged matronly lady, hair arranged in a low bun. I recall her arrangement of *Enigma Variations* in particular. It was grand.' Peggy retired in 1958, aged 60.

Her three cello and piano pieces, *Legend in E minor*, *Sarabande in G minor* and *Bagatelle in G*, were published in 1924 by Augener Ltd., under the name P. Spencer-Palmer and were dedicated to B. J. Dale, Esq. Like Amy Horrocks, she used her initials and not her full name so that she would not be judged as a woman.

I bought one of her cello and piano pieces from a second-hand music catalogue and then phoned the publisher to get some more, but they had no record of her music at all. Then I discovered that the Royal Academy of Music library has two more of her cello pieces. I obtained permission from the publisher to make a copy, provided I sent them a copy! These are beautiful contrasting pieces, well written for both cello and piano.

SARAH RODGERS (b. 1953)

In the nineteenth century music was often regarded as an accomplishment for a well-bred woman, but not to be taken up professionally. Fanny Mendelssohn was told 'the profession might endanger the morals and character of a lady.'

Sarah can trace her lineage back to the family of Henry Purcell. As a child in Kent she studied piano and then bassoon, playing with the Kent Youth Orchestra. Her honours degree in Music and Archaeology at the University of Nottingham gave her the opportunity to be the first woman conductor of the University Opera, reviving Halevy's *La Juive*. She then joined Voluntary Service Overseas for two years, teaching music in Sierra Leone.

During this time composition became a fascination and a necessity, in the absence of music that her students could perform. Her time here also fostered a lifelong interest in the music of different cultures, seen for example in her *Saigyō*, a concerto grosso for Japanese shakuhachi and Indian bansuri commissioned for the City of London Sinfonia, which she also conducted, and in her music narrative piece *The Roaring Whirl* for clarinet, guitar, sitar and pakhavaj, recorded for the Metier label.

Her first major composition was a score for a film about the National Trust. Later she was commissioned to write for the Nottingham NOW Festival, the Choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the Coull Quartet and the BBC Concert Orchestra, amongst others. The *Spanish Sonata* which she wrote for her wife, clarinettist Geraldine Allen, is a listed work for the Associated Board diploma syllabus and was recently featured on a TED Talk about women achievers.

Another notable work is *The King of the Golden River*, a setting of Ruskin's fable, for tenor and string quartet, commissioned for the Ruskin centenary celebrations. This was recorded for the SOMM label and has been performed and broadcast many times both in Europe and the USA. *Resound* for clarinet, string quartet and piano was commissioned by the Five Churches Festival and received its première performance in July 2024. Her music is published by Oxford University Press, Stainer & Bell, Recital Music and Impulse Edition, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM.

Sarah was one of fifteen composers to receive a commission in the 2023 Proms season, which resulted in *Seascapes*, a world première performed by the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Alongside her composition, she has devoted time and energy to developing the UK composer community as chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain and of the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters, where she established the British Composer Awards (now known as the Ivors Classical Awards).

Sarah says of *Mountain Airs*, 'I like to compose with a clear picture of what has inspired me and who I am writing for. Encapsulating place and time in a new piece of music holds fast the memory of that inspiration, and entrusting the work to a performer, in this case, Catherine, is like releasing a child into the hands of a caring friend: safe and sound.'

Mountain Airs is dedicated to Catherine, who gave the first performance for the International Alliance of Women Composers in London in 1999. The four movements of the suite are: 'Alba', 'Apoteosis', 'Crepuscolo' and 'Fiesta'. Each recalls a different time of day; dawn (dawn breaks over the mountains), noon (portrays the heat of mid-day), dusk (listen out for goat bells at the start) and night (dancing and fun). They are reminiscent of time spent in the High Alpujarra mountain ranges of the Spanish Sierra Nevada. These vibrant and evocative pieces showcase a wide range of cello techniques and highlight the partnership with the piano.

JOAN TRIMBLE (1915-2000)

Axel Munthe's celebrated book The Story of San Michele (1929) claims that 'All better-class girls have been hard at work on their pianos, but I know of no first-class piece of music composed by a woman.'

Joan was born in Enniskellen, Ireland. Her mother arranged for music lessons in Dublin for Joan and her sister Valerie. She grew up in an atmosphere of music making and won scholarships in piano, violin and composition to Trinity College, University of Dublin. She studied music there, receiving a B. Mus in 1937. Afterwards she moved to the Royal College of Music (RCM) in London, studying composition with Herbert Howells and Ralph Vaughan-Williams.

Valerie was already studying there, and their piano professor Arthur Benjamin suggested forming a piano duo. He composed the well-known *Jamaican Rumba* for them, and 'suggested that I write two pieces so they could all go into a recital programme. The pieces were played to Leslie Boosey, who accepted them for publication, but asked for an extra one from me. Some hesitation on my part at this unexpected request made Benjamin really cross – "If a publisher actually asks you for a work - you write it." And I did.' Joan composed 24 works, including piano duets, songs, a *Phantasy Piano Trio* (which won a RCM Walter Cobbett prize) and a *Suite for Strings*.

'Kenneth Wright from the BBC brought Elizabeth Poston to hear some of my music. They were encouraging and enthusiastic and told me I must keep on writing. These two new friends were to help me for many years. Since the end of the War, I had a large house to run, a husband and children to look after - the minimum of help - and a busy professional career. It was getting harder than ever to find time or opportunity to write music.'

Joan quoted H. G. Wells saying that a woman would always find it harder to write than a man - 'No one expects him to deal with the next meal, or the child's measles.' *Blind Raftery* was commissioned in 1957 by the BBC as a television opera, the first from a female composer and her largest work. Composer Herbert Howells said 'The tunes are lovely and unforced.' Her setting for voice and orchestra, *How Dear to Me the Hour*, won the Radio Éireann Centenary Prize in 1953. Her piano duo took up a lot of her time and gave them an international career, with a weekly BBC programme 'Tuesday

Serenade', performances in the Proms and National Gallery wartime concerts.

The BBC broadcast a programme with her works to celebrate her 70th birthday. For her 75th birthday the Arts Council of North Ireland and the Belfast Wind Quintet commissioned a new piece, after a twenty-year gap in composing. It shows off her gift for writing music that is not sentimental and has an Irish flavour. Joan noted, 'I have always written music subject to neither schools nor period, I am free to be myself, regardless of fashion.' She made arrangements of Irish folksongs and liked to keep the accompaniments simple. *The Coolin* is a traditional Irish air which she arranged for cello and piano, published in 1939 by Boosey and Co.Ltd.

DORA ESTELLA BRIGHT (1862-1951)

The cleric Hugh Reginald Haweis wrote a work entitled Music and Morals, published in 1874, in which he observed that 'the emotional force in women is usually strong and always more delicate than in man. The woman's temperament is naturally artistic, not in a creative sense but in a receptive sense. A woman seldom writes good music, never great music'. The book went through 16 editions by the end of the nineteenth century.

Dora was born in Sheffield to a musical family. From 1881 she studied piano and composition at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM). She won the Potter Exhibition in 1884, and the Lady Goldsmid scholarship with free tuition for two years in 1886. She performed Sterndale Bennett's *Caprice* in front of Liszt, and he exclaimed 'Mademoiselle, vous jouez à merveille'. As the first woman to receive the prestigious Charles Lucas composition prize at the RAM in 1888 for her string quartet, she was appointed an Assistant Professor. She formed a group of student composers, including Edward German; they supported each other and attended every available orchestral concert and opera, calling themselves 'The Party'.

Leaving the RAM in 1889, she gave a pioneer series of piano recitals of British music. Her mother was an actress who continued her career after marriage, and used her maiden name. This gave Dora a strong role model to follow. Dora became well-known, travelling as a single woman by rail up and down the country, and even to Europe, aged only 23. August Manns conducted her *Piano Concerto in A Minor* at Crystal Palace after performances in 1889 in Cologne, Dresden and Leipzig with conductor Carl Reinecke.

George Bernard Shaw was most admiring when he wrote: ‘Her concerto is remarkable – apart from its undeniable prettiness – for its terse, business-like construction and its sustained animation.’

After a concert including Dora’s *Piano Concerto* at the Covent Garden Proms in 1891 the *Musical World* wrote, ‘The gifted and admirable pianist was her own interpreter but the recall with which she was honoured was less enthusiastic than one could have wished. We must not, however, expect an English audience to encourage English Art. Besides, ladies have no business to compose or indeed do anything intellectual!’

She was the first woman to be asked to compose for the notoriously conservative Royal Philharmonic Society. She herself was the soloist in her own *Fantasia in G Minor* in 1892, but had to insist on performing this new work and not a lighter piece more typical of women composers. Her proud teacher Walter Macfarren described this occasion as a ‘red-letter day’. She also performed this in Dresden and Cologne in 1890; sadly it is now lost.

She also wrote three operas, twelve ballets, orchestral suites, a piano quartet which remained in manuscript (described by *The Times* as ‘vigorous, melodious and interesting’), piano music and songs. She married Colonel Wyndham Knatchbull, about 30 years her senior, in 1892. Her wedding presents included a grand piano with a gold embroidered cover. Although a married woman she continued to perform, unlike many who stopped and relinquished their independence on getting married. She undertook a third tour of Germany but mainly concentrated on composing. Her husband died in 1900, leaving her in the fortunate and unusual position of being financially secure. She went into mourning for over a year as was the custom and withdrew from society.

In 1908 she performed Moritz Moszkowski’s *Piano Concerto* and then visited Paris to study with him for two years. Her *Variations for Piano and Orchestra* were composed there. Dora wrote a number of ballets for the great dancer Adeline Genée, including *The Dryad*, which was published by Elkin, and conducted in 1907 by Thomas Beecham. In 1917 her *Suite Bretonne* for flute and orchestra was given its world première at a Prom with the Queen’s Hall Orchestra and Henry Wood. Sir Dan Godfrey premièred *Vienna* in Bournemouth in 1927, and in 1935 her opera *The Waltz King* was performed. Dora died in 1951, aged 89. Sadly many of her works were destroyed or have been lost.

The *Fischermädchen* is a delightful song by Meyerbeer arranged by Dora Bright for cello and piano, published in 1934 by Elkin and Co. Ltd. She also wrote the beautifully

crafted *Polka à la Strauss* for cello and piano, recorded by Catherine in 'A Cello Century of British Women Composers' ASV (CD QS6245).

SUSAN SPAIN-DUNK (1880-1962)

In 1894 Havelock Ellis, the progressive intellectual and social reformer, wrote about women's creativity in music: 'There is no art in which they have shown themselves more helpless, and their lack of musical achievement is proof of their biological inferiority.'

Susan is the only woman in the delightful book *Some Folkestone Worthies* by C. H. Bishop, one of ten biographies of 'outstanding persons who have contributed to the life and development of old Folkestone'. A violinist and viola-player, she was brought up in a musical family, the third of four children. Their father was a house builder. In 1900, aged only 10, Susan played Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto* in Folkestone. Four years later she went to boarding school in Boulogne, which must have been difficult, but she continued her studies there for about three years.

She was later educated at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), studying violin with Alfred Gibson, the distinguished violinist, as well as composition. She won the Charles Mortimer Composition Prize and composed a tone poem for full orchestra whilst still a student. In 1908 Susan married Alfred Gibson's nephew Henry, a composer. She continued composing using her maiden name. Their only child, Alan, was born in 1911.

In 1907 she gained a prize in the Cobbett International Competition for her *Phantasy Trio in A Minor*, and in 1909 another prize for her *Violin and Piano Sonata*. She played viola in Cobbett's own string quartet. She composed a *Wind Quintet* and a *Phantasy Quartet for Strings in D Minor*. This was described by Cobbett himself as 'full of poetry and charm'. Later in life she became a professor at RAM, teaching harmony and composition, and was awarded a Fellowship.

In the 1924 Henry Wood Proms she conducted her *Suite for Strings*, an innovation as she was only the second woman to conduct there. A contemporary report noted that 'At the end Miss Spain-Dunk received an ovation, being recalled three times.' She used a thick baton with a broken top, which Wagner had used (and broken) in 1877. 'I am going to use it for luck' said Susan. 'It is much smaller than those used by modern conductors. It was acquired by an official of the Albert Hall and given to my husband

some years ago, and I confess that my first thought after it had been decided that I was to conduct at the Queen's Hall was that I would use it.'

In 1925 Henry Wood commissioned her *Idyll*, for strings, and *The Water Lily Pool*, for flute and strings. A year later the overture *Kentish Downs* was premiered, and in 1927 the symphonic poem after Tennyson, *Elaine*, was performed. The same year she conducted two of her compositions with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Some of her works were broadcast by the BBC, including *The Kentish Downs*, *Stonehenge* and the *Cantilena for Clarinet and Orchestra*. In 1930 the *Folkestone Herald* said 'She has earned the right to be considered one of the leading English composers of the day.' The overture *Andred's Weald* was broadcast in 1927, and was later conducted by her in the Royal Artillery Theatre, Woolwich, where she was apparently the first woman to conduct a military orchestra. Her last tone poem, *Malaya*, was written in 1958. Susan's instrumental pieces include works for violin and piano, *Two Pieces* for violin and viola, and the *Petite Serenade* for flute and piano. *Winter Song* for cello and piano was published in 1938 and is a strong and powerful work.

ELIZABETH POSTON (1905-1987)

The conductor Sir Thomas Beecham said in 1961 'There are no women composers, never have been and never will be.'

Elizabeth had a varied musical life. She composed one of her best known songs, *Sweet Suffolk Owl*, at the age of 17, before she had any formal composition classes. She entered the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in 1924, studying piano and composition. Some of her songs had already been published in 1925. Ralph Vaughan Williams became her mentor and lifelong friend. Her 300 compositions include a *Violin and Piano Sonata*, broadcast for the BBC in 1925, a *Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp* and the *Harlow Concertante* for string quartet and string orchestra. She put her music on hold in the 1930s after her great friend Peter Warlock died.

In the Second World War she worked with the BBC as Director of Music for the European Service, also working as a secret agent. She sent vital secretly coded messages, using gramophone records, to resistance groups in Nazi occupied countries across Europe. She also had to prevent the performance of works that might trigger a coded message, though the details of how this worked remain a secret. It was certainly a huge responsibility for her. The wrong piece might have resulted in many deaths.

In 1946 she was a regular performer at the National Gallery concerts. After the war she was one of the distinguished panel of experts who founded the BBC Third Programme. She herself received 65 BBC commissions, becoming the BBC's most sought-after composer of incidental music; these include some of her best orchestral writing. I asked John Alabaster, an expert on her work, about her difficulties as a woman composer. He said 'She certainly had her difficulties as an unmarried single woman composer, as in being paid fairly for her work, although her strong personality usually won out in the end! A *Garland of Laurel* for tenor and orchestra was commissioned for the Festival of Britain in 1951. From 1956-61 she was President of the Society of Women Musicians, all the more astonishing in the light of Sir Thomas Beecham's remark quoted above.

'Song was always my first and permanent love', said Elizabeth. Her piano accompaniments for many folksongs from different countries were published in the *Penguin Book of Carols*, the *Penguin Book of American Folksongs*, and the *Faber Book of French Folksongs* (with her own translations) amongst others. Her carol 'Jesus Christ the Apple Tree' is one of her better known works. Malcolm Williamson (Master of the Queen's Music 1975-2003) called it a 'jewel', and composer John Rutter said 'It is simply touched with genius of a very special kind.' Many of her songs remain unpublished, as she preferred to hold onto her own copyright.

Elizabeth Poston lived most of her life in E. M. Forster's former home in Stevenage. This house was the setting for his novel *Howards End*, and she composed the film score for the BBC television production in 1970. She was awarded Fellowship of the RAM and an MBE.

As well as song she loved the French language, though she sometimes felt that a song like 'Sleep' from *Semele* by Handel, was best expressed instrumentally – in this case, by the clarinet – and she felt the same about the *Two French Songs* that she arranged for cello. *Mignonne allons voir si la Rose* is a fourteenth-century tune and *L'Amour de moi* is from the sixteenth century (both were published in 1947). The third piece, *Serenade*, is the last song from *Chansons Gaillardes* by Poulenc, set to a seventeenth-century French text, and is a delightful arrangement by Elizabeth Poston, published in 1926, with the theme shared by the cello and piano.

ETHEL BARNES (1873-1948)

Hans von Bülow (1830-94), the famous German conductor, virtuoso pianist and composer, said 'Everything with a flavour of women's emancipation is utterly hateful to me. I consider ladies who compose far more objectionable than those who would like to be elected [parliamentary] deputies'.

Ethel played to the great violinist and conductor Joseph Joachim as a youngster and he wanted her to study in Berlin. Her parents would not allow that and instead she went to the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in 1887, aged 13, studying violin, piano and composition. Her *Romance* for violin was published when she was only 17 years old, and she was appointed sub-professor at the RAM in 1892, at the age of 19. She gave recitals with Mathilde Verne, the sister of composer Alice Verne-Bredt, and became well known as a violinist and composer.

In 1899 she married baritone Charles Phillips, keeping her name and her well-established career. Dora Bright and Ethel were both lucky to have supportive husbands. Ethel and Charles founded a series of concerts, the Barnes-Phillips Chamber Concerts at the Bechstein Hall, which ran for 18 years and gave her opportunities to perform her own music. Her *Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major Op.9* was performed by Joachim in Germany in 1903. *The Times* wrote 'It is decidedly strong to have come from a feminine pen.'

Her *Piano Trio in F Minor* of 1904 was reviewed by *The Musical Times*, which called it 'tuneful, well written and tersely developed'. Her *Violin Concerto No.2 in A Major* was premiered only nine days later with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra with Sir Dan Godfrey. She herself performed her *Concertstück* (Op. 19) for violin and orchestra, premiered at a Prom in 1907 conducted by Henry Wood. In March 1908 the *Guardian* wrote, 'Miss Ethel Barnes, both as a violinist and composer, shows a refined taste in everything she does. The music from her pen, (Op. 21 and Op. 23), had all the characteristics that we have learnt to look for in her; engaging melody, admirable lucidity and conciseness of construction, and a healthy avoidance of all strained and unnatural effects.'

In April 1910 the *Cremona* wrote of her *Suite for Pianoforte, Violin and Cello*, performed by Kathleen Bruckshaw, Ethel Barnes and May Mukle at a Barnes-Phillips concert: 'The themes have character and are joyously expressed. The idiom is unrestricted and the

writing generally of a breezy, free and independent nature. This is quite the best thing Miss Barns has hitherto given us.'

Her compositions include four violin and piano sonatas. The *Musical Times* in 1910 felt the *Violin Sonata No. 4 in G Minor* 'advanced Miss Barns's claim to be considered one of our best lady composers.' 1911 was the year in which W. W. Cobbett commissioned Barns on behalf of the Musicians' Company, resulting in the *Fantasie Trio for Two Violins and Piano*, which Barns premiered alongside her teacher, Émile Sauret.

She was a member of the Society of Women Musicians until 1914, and continued composing, publishing, and performing into the late 1920s. In 1927, she performed her final large scale work, the *Violin Sonata No. 5*. A year later, she published three more pieces for violin and piano. Her career was cut short by the break-up of her marriage, due to her husband's affairs with his students. After this scandal she was cut off from upper-class society. The outbreak of World War One also affected her.

The cellist May Mukle performed with Ethel in June 1914 in Ethel's *Suite for Piano Trio Op. 26*. The *Nottingham Daily Express* in January 1913 said 'Miss May Mukle made a capital impression by her 'cello playing, her pieces included an *Idylle* composed by Ethel Barns'. In February 1913 the *Folkestone Herald* said 'Miss Mukle concluded her performance amidst a furore of applause, to which she responded with *Idylle* (Ethel Barns) in an equally masterful manner.' The same concert was given at the Aeolian Hall a week later. The *Idylle* was published in 1913 by Schott; May's own copy of the work bears a handwritten dedication 'to May in great admiration'. It was recorded in 1915 by May Mukle and George Falkenstein.

Much of Ethel's music is no longer extant, so it was a joy to come across the *Capriceuse* as a manuscript in May's collection of music. *The Swing* (L'Escarpolette) was originally for violin and piano and was arranged for cello by cellist Herbert Withers. This is Barns's most famous composition, a short, simple salon piece, skilfully written for both instruments, with an attractive lilting melody.

ALICE VERNE BREDT (1864-1958)

George Bernard Shaw heard one of Dame Ethyl Smyth's compositions in 1892, and remarked, 'When E. M. Smyth's heroically brassy overture was finished and the composer called to the platform, it was observed with stupefaction that the tremendous noise had been made by a lady.'

Alice was born in Southampton, to a supportive musical family of German immigrants with ten children. They later moved to London. Her father was an instrumental teacher, and her mother was an able violinist. She was mostly taught by family members and did not go to a music college. As a small child she was a talented pianist and enjoyed extemporising. Her ambition was to be an opera singer but a bout of typhoid destroyed her voice. Mary Würm (the surname before it was anglicized), an elder sister, was a piano pupil of Clara Schumann and a composition student of Charles Villiers Stanford and Arthur Sullivan.

Alice had occasional piano lessons from Marie Schumann, Clara's eldest daughter, who wrote to Mathilde, 'For a girl who has never had lessons, Alice plays remarkably well and technique comes to her naturally.' Alice and her sister Mathilde taught their younger sister Adela Verne, who premièred both Brahms' piano concertos at the BBC Proms under Sir Henry Wood. Alice worked at the Mathilde Verne Music School and was innovative in her approach to music education. She founded a series of chamber music concerts and some of her own chamber music was performed at these 'Twelve o'Clock Concerts', at the Aeolian Hall in London. She performed her piano works including a *Polka* for piano and orchestra, and the *Valse Miniature* for two pianos.

In 1908 she won a supplementary prize in the Cobbett Competition for her *Phantasie Piano Trio in C Minor*, which was published by Schott in 1910, and bears the motto 'Under the light there is darkness.' The *Northampton Evening Telegraph* (16.10.1912) reported 'The opening item was one of considerable promise. It was a trio, phantasie, for piano, violin, and 'cello (Alice Verne Bredt) played by Mr Cecil Baumer, Mr Stanton Rees and Miss May Mukle, all of London repute. That they were very capable artistes was at once revealed, and the audience testified their feelings of approbation in an unmistakeable manner.' It also appeared at a Society of Women Musicians concert

in 1913. This is a typical ‘phantasy’ composition, cleverly designed in one movement with cyclical references to the different themes. The opening theme is imaginatively set in 5/4 time. It includes tempestuous stormy music and gentle, thoughtful beautiful tunes. I was delighted to come across this music and have the chance to perform it.

Alice married William Brett, an amateur conductor, in 1903, and combined their names for her professional use. Other compositions include a *Phantasy Piano Quintet* and a *Phantasy Piano Quartet*. This was performed by Mathilde Verne, Beatrice Langley, Celia Gates and May Mukle in 1907 at a ‘Twelve o’Clock’ concert at the Aeolian Hall, London.

Her *Wiegenlied (Lullaby)* is published by F. E. C. Leuckart, Leipzig in 1911 and was recorded on a 78 rpm record by cellist May Mukle and George Falkenstein for His Master’s Voice (Victor) in 1915. *‘Is innovation or length necessarily the measure of quality?’ Nicola Lefanu, composer and former Professor of Music at York University.* The Lullaby is a short but beautiful work.



CATHERINE WILMERS, CELLO

Catherine's album of lovely but neglected works for cello and piano, *A Cello Century of British Women Composers from 1894-1994*, was released worldwide by ASV in 2000. It received the rare gold award from the French recordings magazine *Diapason*, and was described as 'a remarkable disc' by the HMV website. She has performed works from it live on 'In Tune' for BBC Radio 3.

The Incorporated Society of Musicians awarded Catherine a Wigmore Hall debut recital and the Royal Academy of Music and the Kirckman Concert Society also presented her with Purcell Room Concerts, on the South Bank in London. She performed the first London performance of Andrzej Panufnik's piano trio at the Wigmore Hall and the first performance of John McCabe's oboe quartet while still a student at the Royal Academy of Music.

The great cellist Mstislav Rostropovich's approval and recommendation was instrumental in Catherine attaining the position of sub-principal cellist in the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and her skill was recognised by Sir Georg Solti, who invited her to teach cello to his daughter. She particularly enjoyed recording music with the LPO for *Lord of the Rings* and *Porgy and Bess*, as well as playing solo cello continuo in Monteverdi's *Ulysses*. Performing in concerts all over the world with Klaus Tennstedt and Bernard Haitink was also a highlight.

The University of Humboldt, California, interviewed her for a radio series on 'Women in Music', where she spoke about her experiences as the only female cellist in the LPO cello section in the 1970s. Her performance of *Come under my Plaid* by Imogen Holst was chosen to illustrate Composer of the Week Imogen Holst in January 2025 on BBC Radio 3. Dora Bright's *Polka à la Strauss* was chosen for the German Radio station West Deutsche Rundfunk 3, the cultural channel, and also broadcast on WNYC Radio, New York's flagship public radio station.



'Catherine is a strong and communicative player who looks as if she enjoys being on the platform.' *The Guardian*

'An eminently serious, musicianly artist of firmly projected tone, reliable intonation and positive attack.' *The Times*

visit www.cwilmers.co.uk

JILL MORTON, PIANO

Jill Morton is a distinguished pianist, educator, and chamber musician, recognised for both her dynamic performances and her dedication to piano pedagogy. A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Jill's studies there were generously supported by the Sir James Caird Trust and the Countess of Munster Musical Trust. As part of the Munster Trust's Recital Scheme, she performed regularly as a soloist and chamber musician for music societies across the UK. Subsequent to this, she was invited to be Pianist in Residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, Canada for one of their career development residencies. This experience firmly cemented her love for chamber music.

An accomplished performer, Jill has also appeared as a concerto soloist with orchestras throughout Britain and has been heard on BBC Radio's 'Friday Night is Music Night' as soloist with the BBC Concert Orchestra.

Beyond performance, Jill is a dedicated educator, serving as a Principal Tutor for the Piano Teachers' Course UK, the country's leading pedagogical programme, where she delivers lectures and mentors both aspiring and experienced piano teachers. Her expertise is widely sought after, and she is frequently invited to give masterclasses and adjudicate competitions. She is also a tutor at the Summer School for Pianists and Pianissimi.

Jill has a popular YouTube channel featuring repertoire from the ABRSM and Trinity graded music syllabuses, as well as other piano repertoire, and has currently received over 2.8 million views. Jill also teaches at the Perse School in Cambridge and is the founder of 'Encore! Concerts for All, Big and Small', a concert series designed to introduce preschool children and their carers to the excitement of live music.



'Morton's relationship with the piano was most striking; simultaneously she had total command of the instrument and yet remained intuitively aware of its intimidating prowess.' *The Herald*

visit www.jillmorton.com

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